The prohibition of "graven images" in the Jewish scriptures seems to have no precedent in the ancient world. Surrounded by polytheistic religions populated with a multitude of religious images, the ancient Hebrews somehow divined that the one true God could not be figured, and that images were antithetical to his worship. It's true, of course, and significant, that every known culture has taboos regarding representations qua representations, often but not exclusively iconic figures. But only the Hebrews derived a prohibition on images from the recognition that God is both singular and essentially spiritual, hence resistant to material representation. In the ancient world, images were connected to the divine, either as the privileged route to god's presence, both dangerous and desirable; or as forbidden temptations to idolatry, the worship of "false gods," however defined. While the Hebrews, in principle, rejected the sacrality of images, they found them dangerous enough so as to make their destruction imperative. The paradox of the Jewish prohibition is that it is radically singular and at the same time based on shared, nigh universal assumptions about the relationship between images and the divine. This paradox raises the question of whether the emergence of Jewish iconoclasm is simply a matter of historical contingency or whether it constitutes an anthropological insight into the originary composition of material figures in human culture.

If iconoclasm were limited to the Jews, we might well conjecture that it is of only narrow historical significance. But Islam and Christianity have both incorporated the iconoclastic imperative in various ways. Medieval Christianity, of course, was full of imagery, but the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy exposed latent tensions which erupted again during the Protestant Reformation, when reformers revived a strict interpretation of the biblical second commandment. It's tempting to see the Protestant critique of religious images as merely a way to discredit Catholicism, but reformers could have chosen other grounds on which to challenge the Catholic Church. Furthermore, as I have argued elsewhere, Protestant iconoclasm had wide implications outside of religious practice, influencing the evolution of secular drama and art. The importance of the Reformation for the emergence of modernity is well-known: the assault on traditional religious authorities could not be narrowly limited, as reformers might have desired, and soon led into a larger critique of faith as such. The attack on idolatry was formative for the modern world.

Aside from the historical issues I've mentioned, the inherent difficulty of iconoclasm is the distinction between true worship and false worship or idolatry, a distinction unique to biblical monotheism. This judgment is what justifies the destruction of the icon or idol. During the Reformation, Christians of all persuasions agreed that the distinction between true and false worship was valid: the conflict was about where to draw the line between legitimate and illegitimate uses of images.

What I want to do here is to take a fresh look at iconoclasm by tracing its history from a Generative-Anthropological perspective, beginning with the originary scene. In performing an originary derivation, we begin with a preliminary, minimal description of the phenomenon that requires explanation. In the case of iconoclasm, we observe the physical destruction of a figural object with pretensions to sacrality. On the originary scene, we find a close analog to iconoclastic destruction with the sparagmos, by which the sacred object is torn apart and then physically obliterated by consumption. The question now becomes, what is the logic of the sparagmos, its function and purpose, and how does the sparagmos develop into what we observe during historical times?
First of all, we need to clarify the status of the central object on the originary scene. René Girard, in his originary hypothesis, claims that the body of the scapegoat victim is the first signifier from which all others derive (Things Hidden 102-3). Eric Gans, however, whom I follow in this analysis, insists that the central object is not a signifier, but rather the referent of the signifiers exchanged by the humans on the periphery of the scene.

The sign's function is precisely to be exchanged. But now we encounter a difficulty, because the objects destroyed by historical iconoclasm were often signifiers, figural representations of sacred persons or objects, or indexical tokens, such as the supposed bones or clothes of saints. How can we derive the destruction of signifiers from the destruction of a signified? This difference does not invalidate our originary analysis. What the targets of iconoclasm share is figurality, that is, significant form, as well as the pretension of sacrality. Furthermore, as Saussure has argued, signifier and signified are two sides of the same piece of paper, which is the sign (852-3). And while we can see that their relationship is conventional, on the originary scene, it would appear to be necessary, a connection which would give the sign its power. The central object's figural significance is inseparable from its re-presentation, and so its relationship to the signifier is not accidental but rather intrinsic (more on this below). After the originary event, humans create iconic figurations of the central object, religious artworks which are themselves centralized. This is a significant development but not immediately relevant to our originary analysis.

As per Gans's hypothesis, the import of the originary sign is the interdiction of the desired object to appropriation and consumption. If the object is truly taboo, we may ask, then why is it so quickly torn apart and consumed? What is the attitude of the human participants to the central object? The sacred inspires fear for the literally awe-full danger which its incarnations seem to emanate. The sacred object is too powerful and wonderful to appropriate; the originary sign is an act of worship. But the central object also inspires resentment for the same reasons; its centrality partakes of the scandal of the sacred; it arbitrarily forbids what is most desirable, inspiring alienation as well as wonder. The sacred is ambivalent, and our attitude toward it is contradictory.

Gans writes,

At the origin, the sparagmos occurs once the sign has appropriated for its peripheral enunciators the formal closure of the central figure, so that it is no longer necessary for this closure to subsist in itself. As it comes to appear superfluous, the figure's figurality becomes vulnerable to the resentment it generates and open to the defiguration of the sparagmos. (SP 155)

What is "the formal closure of the central figure" which is "appropriated for its peripheral enunciators" by means of the sign? The "central figure" finds closure when it is "closed" to consumption and formally distinguished from the rest of the world. This closure is "appropriated" in the sense of being understood, finding functional achievement of its purpose, and the meaning internalized.

But why should the central object's form or "figurality" inspire resentment, instead of simply its central, forbidden status? From an etic or anthropological perspective, what makes the central object sacred is the desires and resentments of the periphery, as mediated by the sign. So indeed the object's central, public status is highly relevant. The mediation of the periphery is foundational for the problem of idolatry. This becomes especially apparent in later history when a crafted, iconic representation of a sacred figure is centralized, such that its mediated status (i.e., created by another human) is made obvious to the spectator. But on the originary scene, the sacred object's figurality is inseparable from its centrality. For the nascent humans, form and significance are one thing, and their sensuous perception focuses on form. Figurality becomes scandalous when it appears "superfluous," that is, arbitrary and exclusive.

To put this issue another way, the problem here is that while it is the human signifier, as interdiction, that creates the resentment motivating the sparagmos, it is the figure of the sacred central object that suffers violence. As I've suggested, however, for the first humans, the connection of signifier to signified was not arbitrary, as we understand it today. They are tied ostensively, that is, magically, together. And their attention is to the signified, which is primary in their understanding as the origin of significance. To them, the object forbids itself, and their signs are a mimetic confirmation. The originary humans are focused on the central object, whose form appears divinely significant. So when the interdiction begins to appear arbitrary and superfluous, then it is the figure of the slain animal which becomes an object of resentment,
rather than the individuals on the periphery who were ultimately responsible for forbidding its appropriation. The resentment that motivates the sparagmos is overdetermined because mediated, more or less unconsciously. The sparagmos is deliberate, but not fully coherent in intention.

At the same time, the sparagmos is a cultural act, by which I mean that it is free and conscious, not merely an instinctual discharge of aggression or an irrepressible desire for consumption.(10) There is a cognitive dimension to sparagmos. And while the sparagmos is motivated by resentment and desire, there is an "epistemology of resentment," as Gans has always maintained. The resentment of the peripheral humans leads eventually to the recognition that the central object is inadequate "to bear the full weight of significance" (Gans, SP 105), and it is this recognition that qualifies the sparagmos as iconoclastic, that is, directed to the figural pretense of sacrality.

But, at the same time, on the originary scene, their resentment is not so much critical as it is envious of the figure's exclusive power. The sparagmos is not purely destructive in intention but equally filled with a profound yearning to appropriate the appetitive object's figural power. Contrary to Girard, the originary hypothesis claims that the central object (probably a large food animal) is already divinized when torn apart and consumed. They destroy their object of worship because they desire to incorporate and command its sacred power, its "mana," in Melanesian terms.(11) The primary motivation of the sparagmos is to eat the incarnation of the sacred, appropriate its power, and achieve the freedom of god from rivalry. From a modern perspective, we might say they commit a category error in attributing sacrality to a material figure. But only through a long history culminating in the Mosaic Revelation do humans learn that sacrality is essentially "spiritual."

The sparagmos is really only potentially iconoclastic, when it is directed to the demystification of the central figure's pretense to sacrality. But at our origin, I argue, the sparagmos is more accurately described as idolatrous in that it attributes magical power to the figure of the central object. Scholars have often observed that the iconoclast seemingly shares the assumption of the idolater that the idol is powerful; else why would the iconoclast be so concerned with its destruction? But the destruction of a sacred figure motivated by envy of its figural power is not properly iconoclastic but rather idolatrous, even if such an act sometimes poses as iconoclasm.

On the originary scene we find two distinct postures toward the sacred: initially, the humans submit themselves, collectively, in fear and trembling, to the sacred center, deferring their desire and resentment; but in the second movement, they attempt to appropriate that power for themselves, purging desire and resentment at the expense of the central figure. Most religions manage to incorporate both these postures in various ways; but the Bible and the Judeo-Christian tradition attempt to distinguish them as religion and magic. The distinction here corresponds to that between high and popular culture in the arts, or production and consumption in economics.

As I mentioned before, the sparagmos implies that the central object has become inadequate to the strict pretension of sacrality given by the sign—otherwise, the humans would hardly dare to consume it. But it's really not until after the sparagmos, in the period of reflection which follows, that this knowledge becomes explicit. Through ritual enactment and cultural memory of the originary event, this reflection is developed in various directions. Gans follows Girard in attributing great importance to post-sparagmos reflection. Girard, of course, places the origin of culture at this moment, but for Gans it provides for a crucial deepening of the import of the originary sign.(12)

The surprise of the sparagmos is that the central figure, by means of the sign, is retained in the memory, the private scene of representation, despite its physical destruction, and while this could be a pleasant surprise, it is also disturbing: the one we "killed" has returned after death. The attempt to obliterate the central object actually fails, and this has several important consequences.

Remember that the sparagmos opposes and disrupts the peace created by the sign. Although the sparagmos takes place within the horizon of culture, its violence poses an apparent threat to the existence of the new communal order, and Gans suggests that this violation of the sign's interdiction is the origin of evil, in which all individuals present participate (SP 134).
Humans feel guilty for destroying the worldly incarnation of the sacred, giving rise to moral reflection. The sparagmos poses a problem for reflection because it suggests that the initial deferral of violence has led only to further violence, calling into question the viability of the nascent human order (SP 134). Gans argues that such reflection leads on the one hand to Greek political philosophy, which critiques the sacrificial violence of the scene's periphery and theorizes "deritualized models of [political] organization" (SP 135). The ancient Hebrews, on the other hand, focus on the scenic center as the problem: "The second, 'Hebraic,' path is the iconoclastic critique of the esthetic or idolatrous element of the sacred exemplified by the Mosaic revelation" (Gans, SP 135).

After the sparagmos, the physical scene is empty while the sign is retained in the memory, thus revealing the "being" of the central locus, the transcendence of god. The originary humans attribute "being" to the central locus of the virtual scene simply because it persists. The scenic center, an element of the virtual structure of the scene, is independent of any worldly incarnation, and this insight is the basis of religion. Gans writes,

> The originary category of the sacred cannot differentiate between the central object and the being of the locus it occupies; religion proper begins when the feast is over, the object has disappeared, and the sign remains in the memory along with the image of the referent. (SP 140)

The sparagmos is revelatory of the distinction between the enduring being of the central locus and any particular content, thus allowing for new subjects of representation.

This distinction is central to iconoclasm, but it's not yet clear why religion and the esthetic should enter into conflict, as they do in the Mosaic revelation. What is "the esthetic or idolatrous element of the sacred" (Gans, SP 135) on the originary scene, to which iconoclasm is opposed?

Gans defines "esthetic experience . . . within the originary scene as the oscillation between the contemplation of the sign representing the central object and the contemplation of the object as referred to by the sign" (OT 117). The temporality of this experience allows for the metaphorical "drowning" of the spectator's resentment. The time of aesthetic deferral offers pleasures which substitute for appropriation. Aesthetic reception is fundamentally directed to the sensual form of the sign rather than simply its referential function; thus, Gans writes, "the first sign . . . must have been judged to be beautiful" (OT 119). (I don't think that Gans means that the originary humans had any developed concept of the "beautiful," but rather that we find the *germ* of the concept of the beautiful, as the experience of pleasing or significant form.) The aesthetic provides relief from resentment through our attention to the form of the sign and its relationship to the signified, whether real or imaginary.

Insofar as a sign has form, it has an aesthetic dimension, and so we can view any sign in aesthetic terms if we so choose. The aesthetic is properly understood as a mode of attention.

Our analysis so far suggests that the aesthetic is ethical in function, deferring violence. So what makes our attention to the sign "idolatrous," and what exactly constitutes idolatry? I suggested earlier that attributing supernatural power to figural objects constitutes a form of idolatry. Both the aesthetic and idolatry attribute power to sensuous form. Several Greek and Roman philosophers, including Heraclitus and Xenophanes, ridicule those who treat statues as possessing supernatural power, a critique made independently of monotheism (Janowitz 244-6). Along with the ancient Greek philosophers, other ancient religions were also arriving at the notion of god's transcendence, but without any concept of idolatry.(13) In the strict sense, idolatry exists only in opposition to biblical monotheism. At the same time, we must also recognize that the aesthetic is not distinguished from the sacred on the originary scene; this is properly an insight of monotheism and the Mosaic revelation. Gans notes, "The religious imagination is not immediately aware of the radical nature of this distinction" between the aesthetic and religion (SP 137). I think this is an understatement, since ritual practice throughout history relies quite heavily on figural images and carvings. Monotheistic religions, however, insist that images and figures, if permissible at all, are only supplemental for worship. (The distinction between the supplemental use of images and the idolatrous use, *dulia* and *latria*, becomes a key issue of controversy in Christian history.) Gans clarifies,
The biblical polemic against idolatry should not lead us to believe that the idol worshipper really believes that the physical object is the divinity. The divinity incarnates itself in the object, but its being remains separate from its incarnation, as ritual sacrifice demonstrates. (SP 137, my emphasis)

In other words, while the religious imagination doesn't immediately recognize the radical nature of the distinction between the material-aesthetic and the spiritual-religious, the distinction is in fact implicit in religious practice as such, even practices that the Jewish prophets call idolatry. I agree with Gans, but I would add that this is a fine point, since so much religion and magic invoke the power of material signs and images. The biblical polemic, within limits, makes a valid point. Furthermore, many cult objects, such as swords and rings, were understood to possess supernatural power which was inseparable from the physical object. The originary sparagmos, and the ritual sacrifice which follows, involve the attempt to share communally the power of the sacred by means of material figures.

Monotheism, in Gans's argument, derives not just from the singular origin of religion, but also from a concept of the deity as essentially transcendent, a concept which is widely accepted today, and, as Gans notes, is implicit even in polytheistic religious practice. The so-called idolater doesn't imagine that destroying the figural representation of a god would destroy the god (although the god might well be offended). The anthropological truth of the critique of idolatry is that the virtual "being" of the central locus and any concrete object which occupies that locus are simply two different things; moreover, they belong to two different classes of being: material and spiritual. We might think that the spiritual is merely subjective and therefore ephemeral, but its freedom from materiality makes it in fact indestructible. The spiritual, perhaps counterintuitively, proves to be more enduring, not to say eternal.

In anthropological terms, the "spiritual" in this context refers to existence on the internal scene of representation, but also to the virtual structure of the scene and its ethical function, which consists of human relationships rather than concrete objects. From the perspective of the iconoclast, any concrete figures detract from our attention to and memory of the one true God. The idolater attributes magical powers to a god or power which supposedly inhabits such figures, and the aesthete devotes himself to the beauty of such figures, both at the expense of true worship.

Summing up thus far, one of our central questions was why the hostility of the first humans should have been directed specifically to the figurality of the primal sacred object, a slain animal. Our analysis suggests, first, that at our origin, sacrality itself is understood in figural terms. Sacrality is first attributed to desirable objects, which generally have visual form. The second problem with figural objects is that they monopolize the public, scenic center, provoking our resentment and prohibiting our consumption of them. Later, through post-sparagmatic reflection, humans come to realize that the occupation of the central locus by any concrete figure is at least potentially incompatible with a recognition of the spiritual being of the central locus.

In our originary analysis, perhaps surprisingly, idolatry and iconoclasm can be said to spring from the same event, but they are distinguished by motivation. Moreover, the critique of idolatry is largely a product of post-sparagmos reflection; whether this critique results in the actual destruction of sacred figures is a historical question, as are the results of such destruction. The act of iconoclasm is ambiguous, since it seems to express a fear of sacred figures, a fear which may inadvertently align the iconoclast with the idolater.

Not only religion but also idolatry and magic are originary phenomena. Idolatry, on the model of the sparagmos, can be defined as attributing magical power to figural objects or representations, followed by the attempt to appropriate that power by the possession of such figures. The idolater is fixated on the material form of the sign at the expense of its spiritual content. In the post-sparagmos reflection, leading to the Mosaic revelation, even the aesthetic attention to figures can be considered idolatrous if such attention is given at the expense of true worship.

Our analysis also suggests that the problem of idolatry is tied up with language itself as a figural medium. The form of the primal signifier provokes resentment and finally proves inadequate to justify its veneration. By the logic of our hypothesis, then, any and all signs are subject to the iconoclastic critique, insofar as
significance is what social scientists call a "human construct"—human and not divine or objective.

The other problem with signs is that any particular sign is exclusive and more or less fixed by its utterance, while deferral is an ongoing process: dynamic, dialogic, and "spiritual." In the post-modern age, for example, as the result of our iconoclastic heritage, instead of submitting ourselves to a public, artistic masterpiece, we might prefer to exchange our individual creations with each other on blogs or forums for sharing, like a poetry slam. The democratic form of a poetry slam is a solution to the same underlying problem of idolatry; the monopoly of the public center.

I agree with Gans that on the synchronic level the aesthetic is incompatible with strict monotheism. They are integrated, however, by means of the process of sparagmos, which despite appearances follows a strict logic, as Gans has described. We should remember that the revelation of God's unfigurable being on the originary scene is essentially dialectical. It doesn't come through meditation or speculation, but by the physical destruction of the central object—a process which is necessarily figural. The physical destruction of figularity can well be figured. Strictly speaking, the sparagmos is necessary to reveal the spiritual being of the center. So, by the same token, the figure of the central object is also necessary. The status of the sacred figure is ambiguous: on the one hand, necessary, by means of its destruction, for the revelation of truth; but on the other hand, antithetical to the truth which is revealed, which concerns its incompatibility with non-figural being. Once this revelation has been made, then it might seem that there is no need to repeat it; hence the biblical prohibition of graven images.

But worship of the invisible God presents certain problems; if we restrict ourselves to intellectual concepts rather than concrete figures and ritual action, monotheism risks becoming a rather austere doctrine limited to an intellectual elite, certainly the case with negative theology today. And even the name of God has form, and therefore, in a sense, figurality; hence the prohibition on the spoken pronunciation of God's name in later Judaism. But Judaism has various ritual means which are in fact very effective for preserving itself as monotheistic religion, while adhering to the prohibition on graven images. And Christianity has various means for getting around this prohibition.

From Christian times until the present we find that art is vulnerable to the iconoclastic critique of figularity; and it responds, I argue, by becoming iconoclastic itself, on the model of the sparagmos. In other words, art can be internally dialectical: anticipating, and thus protecting itself from our resentments by incorporating them within itself. Art that negates its own images or form is legitimatized on this basis. In his Critique of Judgment, Kant associates the sublime with the biblical second commandment (135), and Longinus found the biblical account of creation, attributed to Moses, to be sublime (102). Considered aesthetically, the crucifixion of Christ can be considered the paradigm of art that is derived ultimately from the sparagmos—an image antithetical to conventional notions of beauty.(14) As the passion narrative suggests, the problem for such art is avoiding the sacrificial. Girard points out rightly that the passion narrative is essentially anti-sacrificial, making Christ's sufferings not merited or "fated," but rather the results of sinful men. The passion narrative thus opposes itself to the traditional tragic or mythic narrative, exemplified by Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, in which the suffering of the protagonist is fated and thus justified in this sense. An art that avoids the sacrificial thus avoids one traditional means of aesthetic pleasure, catharsis—although there are other forms of aesthetic pleasure. The passion narrative opposes traditional aesthetic reception, asking for repentance rather than giving aesthetic pleasure.

The sparagmos is the model for iconoclasm, but it is also the model for sacrifice and popular, sacrificial modes of art. The key difference is that iconoclastic art is self-conscious and negates itself rather than simply purging resentment by means of a convenient scapegoat. Such art can provide material for moral reflection, and it also leads into an intellectual aesthetic of difficulty.

Works Cited


Goldman - Originary Iconoclasm

Notes

1. On the widespread taboos regarding images, see René Girard, Violence and the Sacred; and Jack Goody, Representations and Contradictions. (back)

2. See Jan Assman for a persuasive account of the unique nature of biblical or "revolutionary" monotheism. (back)

3. To clarify, I use the words "figure" and "figural" as they are used in art history, to refer to "visually-recognizable forms" (Frazier, "Figure/figurative"). (back)

4. For the history of Reformation iconoclasm, see Margaret Aston, Carlos Eire, Michael O'Connell, and John Phillips. (back)

5. See "The Winter's Tale and Antitheatricalism" by Peter Goldman. (back)

6. For a brief introduction to Generative Anthropology and the hypothetical "originary scene," see "Why Generative Anthropology?" by Peter Goldman. (back)

7. Eric Gans included the "sparagmos" in the Originary Hypothesis in his 1997 book Signs of Paradox. (back)

8. For Gans's argument on this point, see his The Origin of Language, pp. 1-67. (back)

9. In Girardian terms, an arbitrarily-chosen central figure suffers the sacrificial, cathartic violence of the periphery; the central object is "blamed" and hence suffers the violence which originates with humans. The problem with the Girardian scenario is that, while it provides a useful description of scapegoating, it doesn't explain the origin of language. What distinguishes human scapegoating behavior from similar animal phenomena is precisely that it is mediated by a sign which designates the victim. To avoid the circularity of the Girardian hypothesis, we need to motivate the sign in other terms, as Gans does in his Originary Hypothesis. The characterization of the sparagmos as the origin of the sacrificial is correct but must be qualified by a recognition of its essentially cultural nature. On the morality of the sparagmos as a "necessary evil," see Andrew Bartlett. (back)

10. See Gans, Signs of Paradox, p. 143. (back)

11. Robertson Smith, in his Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, interprets the famous (perhaps mythical) Arabian camel sacrifice in similar terms (338-9), as does Jane Ellen Harrison in her account of the ancient Greek omophagia or sparagmos, which draws on Robertson: see Harrison's Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion, pp. 485-7. (back)

12. The relevant texts here are Girard's Things Hidden and Gans's Signs of Paradox. (back)

13. See Assman on the distinction between "evolutionary monotheism" and "revolutionary monotheism." (back)

14. On a related note, the incarnation is also highly relevant to the development of Western art. See Andrew McKenna on "Art and Incarnation," a reading of Western art history in terms of Jewish iconoclasm and Christian incarnation. (back)

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An Introduction to Disciplinarity

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In his 1968 "Introduction" to his study of The Civilizing Process, Norbert Elias considers the question of why, regardless of its theoretical and empirical absurdity, the notion of a "monadic," enclosed "self," opposed to, and ontologically separate from, "society," became the commonsense in the 19th and 20th century West. His answer is that the notion of an autonomous self, one that can be abstracted from everyday concerns, and counterposed to an "objective" external reality, was a necessary concomitant to the transformation in subjectivity involved in assimilating the shift from a human-centered, geocentric world-view to a more rigorous, heliocentric one. This transformation in subjectivity required, according to Elias, an ability to transcend immediate impulses and engage in sustained focus according to collectively established constraints—a transformation that was part of the development of "manners" in the Western world, a development that involved the learning and generational transmission of parallel restraints on exposing bodily functions, sex, and violence. The implication of Elias's argument is that now that the revolution in science and manners has been brought to this point, it is possible to turn our attention to anthropological inquiry and thereby construct a more socially immersed understanding of the self—an understanding that his own study has set in motion.

I take Elias to be heralding the emergence of new "disciplinary order," in which new modes of sustained attention, accreted gradually from the monotheistic revelation through the scientific revolutions in the West, take a new form in the shared and spread inquiry into human practices, including that inquiry itself. Elias shows how the development of manners from the late medieval period on was itself a kind of discipline, both in the sense that the proponents of manners sought to instill discipline in the publics they addressed and in the sense that doing so demanded a kind of comparative study of habits and the making explicit of what had been tacit. Even more, the emergence of manners itself opened new fields of inquiry, such as that of the "unconscious" and "pedagogy," insofar as creating a mannered population introduced the sharp distinction between childhood and adulthood we now take for granted and, by generating new layers of indirectness so as to avoid reference to now forbidden desires, made invisible, unspeakable and mysterious desires and activities that had once been completely open. Anthropological inquiry, in that case, must not only self-reflexively examine its own disciplinary conditions of possibility but also remain attentive to the sedimentations of previous processes of inquiry.

An equally profound implication of Elias's study is that, once we have (as Elias is doing) proceeded to broach all that is entailed by 19th century standards of decency (for Elias the height of the modes of formality and indirectness he associates with manners, to be followed by some relaxation from the mid-20th century on), those standards of decency and the religious and metaphysical assumptions in which they have been embedded can no longer be taken for granted. While asserting a strict neutrality regarding judgment, Elias shows those standards a respect that more recent demystifiers like Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault have not, but the result of turning the taken for granted into an object of inquiry is ultimately the same. What I will go on to argue here is that the replacement of those demystified religious and metaphysical views lies not in whatever cultural or political revolution or resistance Bourdieu and/or Foucault (along with many others) might have had in mind, but with the anthropological inquiry Elias himself foregrounds. It is possible to make this claim once we realize that the very social and cultural effect wrought by those metaphysical and religious beliefs are carried out by this inquiry as well—that is, the enhancement of
A discipline is a space of shared attention, considered as a space of inquiry. We can thus distinguish it from the moral, ritual and esthetic modes of shared attention—those that Eric Gans has rooted in the originary scene. Morality enforces the equality of all in dividing the object. Ritual enacts and commemorates the originary scene. Esthetics involves the oscillation between the sign and object which, interestingly, seems to refer to something the other on the scene, rather than the "signifier," would be doing (in other words, the one putting forth the sign is not producing the oscillation). In each case, we could, and, indeed, would have to, invoke "intuition" or tacit knowing to account for how "equality" is determined, fidelity to the scene established, and equipoise between sign and object maintained. At a certain point, in other words, we would have to say that all the participants on the scene know that they have all deferred appropriation because they know, and such knowledge can only be acquired "emically," by what Michael Polanyi calls "indwelling" within the scene.

Now, we can take a step back into the "etic" and say that each participant is "laying a bet" within a prisoner's dilemma-type game. This is a step back into the etic because the only way someone on the scene could even begin in frame the situation in this way is if they felt they were in danger of losing the bet, that is, if the scene was in danger of collapse. So, the "etic" is really "emic" too, but the emic in a state of at least potential disarray. The potential for disarray, though, inheres in every perceived discrepancy between sign and practice, and every practice must evince some discrepancy with the sign hallowing it. Within every scene, then, one could imagine the emergence of disagreements over the equality of portions, the conformity of ritual to the scene it iterates or, once esthetic intention becomes deliberate, how to make the scene accessible in new ways. Scaffolded over ritual, moral and esthetic actions, then, is at least a minimal study of those actions—a disciplinary space.

The disciplinary space is an engine of differentiations, turning the object into a generator of new signs. Determining which aspect of an object, in its sacral and appropriative relation to the community, is most worthy of attention (a determination that creates that aspect and expands the economy of attention, or lowers the threshold of significance) creates a minimal marketplace, with the more distinctive "aspectivalizations" rewarded by the ultimate currency: attention itself. The marketization process is likely to be more advanced in the arenas Gans, in Oriniginary Thinking, assigns to the ethical (involving "productive" action away from the sacred space), but innovations and a kind of entrepreneurship take place (however slowly and imperceptibly) in the sphere of ritual as well. New events, signaling new crises for communities that are transforming at whatever speed, need to be incorporated into an existing institutional structure upon which they will be modeled, and which those incorporations will transform. That communities and institutions change in response to new events is obvious; that some degree of inquiry into the terms of those communities and institutions accompanies and, indeed, shapes those changes, is less so; even less obvious is that such inquiry consists of attending to the tacit as signs of an inexhaustible object or, as I would prefer to start saying, "reality," in Charles Sanders Peirce's sense of that which is what it is regardless of what I or anyone else think about it, or, defined in terms of unending and open ended disciplinary inquiry, "[t]he opinion that is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate," even should "[o]ur
perversity and that of others indefinitely postpone the settlement of opinion" ("How to Make Our Ideas Clear," 133). The object, that is, becomes inexhaustible insofar as it anchors or sutures various degrees and modes of meaning through direct and indirect reference to the central object and the moral and ritual institutions organized to commemorate it; and once the object thereby becomes inexhaustible and irreducible to those moral and ritual institutions, we have "reality," and a disciplinary space that opens onto reality. In other words, disciplinary spaces are always "about" something that is what it is regardless of what anyone thinks about it (and, it should be said, regardless of whether it exists—so, for example, we can explore God's reality with complete indifference to any question of God's existence) and participants in those spaces accede to the demand that we never stop thinking about it.

Rather than attempting to devise rules for inquiry, then, it is more illuminating to follow inquiry along the boundaries it shares with ritual, morality and esthetics. Ritual is already a study in desire, its transcendence, and the representation of that relation between desire and transcendence. Desire is disruptive insofar as it creates asymmetry in any community; the means for restoring symmetry must lie both within and outside of the community; and the restoration of symmetry must re-name and assimilate the originally disruptive desire—and all this must be represented in a way intelligible to the community but also to some extent abstractly, insofar as the ritual must adumbrate its future narrative renderings and elaborations. That, at any rate, is how ritual looks from within a disciplinary space which is only a full disciplinary space to the extent it sees all forms of human meaning as disciplinary. Disciplines are likewise concerned with assimilating the anomalous to the normal practices of the community, and this will be done all the more effectively to the extent that the anomalous is displayed fully, in all its disruptive relation to the existing terms of inquiry.

Disciplines cannot survive without a rigorously applied egalitarian morality: anyone within the discipline can be heard as long as they follow the (often tacit) procedures of the discipline. By the same token, no attention at all need be paid to anyone outside of the discipline, or, for that matter, to any question or observation incommensurable with the discipline(1). The most urgent question for any discipline, then, is how to determine who belongs inside. As with tribal or cult membership, inclusion must ultimately involve a personal dimension: even with our vast educational apparatuses and impersonal credentialing mechanisms, someone, and usually at least several someones, who are already recognized members of the discipline, need to know you and your work and to vouch for you. And what needs to be known about you is analogous in each case: you know how to and are willing to play by the rules. I hope that it is clear that I am not being critical here; rather, I am asserting that it must be this way. The equal division of the object on the originary scene would be a negotiated solution—strength, aggressiveness, assumptions of merit, and other forces of inequality will, we can assume, be operative up until the point that those asserting those privileges do not so add to the cumulative resentments of the community as to render the originary sign null and void. But how could one know when that point is being approached? Even for those within the community, it will be at best a question of educated guesses and trial and error—but for outsiders, negotiating this terrain would be impossible without extensive training, which is to say without them becoming insiders. (The process of making outsiders insiders, that is, pedagogy, is itself the object of a disciplinary space.) Similarly, the rules of even the most objective scientific discipline—rules about how to carry out and formalize procedures, what counts as a violation of procedure, meta-rules regarding which...

The connection between the esthetic and inquiry is perhaps easiest to see. The spectator’s oscillation between sign and object might begin as an inchoate impasse between desire and the restraint formed by fear—a glance towards the object impels one forward while a glance at the sign compels a backward step, with the power of the sign then drawing one’s attention back to the object and so on. But insofar as the esthetic is to become a deliberate practice ("art" being its institutionalized recognized form), which is to say the one forming the sign learns to vary its form, to dial desire and fear up and down, to introduce new desires for hitherto undesirable objects, and so on, while the spectator learns to distinguish between manipulative attempts to intensify desire and fear from opportunities provided to examine those emotions, then we already have a space of inquiry. In fact, the complete separation of art from representations derived from the ritual-moral realm would leave art with no objects other than those constructed by the spectator, listener or reader, which is to make the "recipient" of the artwork a participant in it. The consequence of this, in turn, is to abolish art as a separate institution and turn it into an ongoing disciplinary
inquiry of everyday life within everyday life. The duck/rabbit image that so fascinated Wittgenstein provides a good model for this—the most minimal work of esthetic inquiry would simply be to make us see the duck when we are more likely to see the rabbit, and vice versa.

Remaining within a disciplinary space involves iterating the originary gesture of converting designations into constructions of reality. This entails converting given, tacitly acquired distinctions into constitutive distinctions. For example, in Durkheim's analysis of the relation between legality and criminality, he shows how the distinction transcends the particular acts one would designate as legal or illegal at a particular point in time in a particular culture. Rather, the distinction between legality and criminality is a permanent one, because the boundary between preferred and privileged acts, on the one hand, and disfavored acts, on the others, is permanent: any social order presupposes such a distinction, just as the very act of attention entails a preference for one object over another. In that case, even if by some miracle, individuals stopped murdering, robbing and raping their fellows, the threshold for unacceptable acts would simply be lowered, and acts that now fall well below that threshold, such as mere rudeness, would then fall above it. This doesn't necessarily mean that the death penalty or long prison sentences would then be imposed on the perpetrators of such acts, but it does mean that whatever penalties they were to incur would be as socially isolating, in their own way, as the penalties for those "genuine" crimes are today. In that case, "crime" is a constitutive element of social order or, as Durkheim puts it, "a factor in public health, an integrative element in any society" (98).

The tendency of any discipline is to make the founding concepts of the discipline reciprocally constitutive: to make crime a constituent of law abidingness, sickness a constituent of health, the anomaly a constituent of the normal, the ugly of the beautiful, the heretical of the sacred, and so on. The concepts are thereby relativized radically, but not abolished; in fact, the distinction between them is also radicalized. For example, that sickness and health are co-constitutive is self-evident: no one is perfectly healthy, everyone has the beginnings or the beginnings of the beginnings of cancer, heart disease, dementia, and myriad other disorders from birth, and health would more properly be defined in terms of the so far successful resistance to and delay of those disorders than their absence. The proper discipline of medicine, then, would focus on the boundaries where, with ever greater precision, we can mark the onset of and neutralization of those disorders. The living being would be nothing but the totality of those boundaries. Sickness, then, marks the boundary of the system of life, and also marks the contingency of that system, while health is life's deferral of decline and death. The boundary marking one system from another marks the limits of the relativization of the founding concepts, which is also to say that the purpose of relativization is to enable us to mark that boundary of the discipline.

The relativizations I have been producing here, between morality and ethics, and between ritual, morality, esthetics and inquiry, also serve the purpose of marking the boundaries of the human community as discovered by and the disciplinary space constitutive of the originary hypothesis. To say that ritual, morality and esthetics contain a constitutive dimension of inquiry, learning and knowing (and that inquiry, learning and knowing have a ritual dimension, a morality and esthetics) is not to abolish or dilute these concepts. What remains is a hierarchy of boundaries within any activity or space, and hinges that open one space or activity onto others. There's no point, for example, to speaking of the moral function of art if art doesn't already have a moral dimension; but if art has a moral dimension it is not the same moral dimension as politics or ritual or family life might have, but one predicated on the creation of a community of those oscillating between sign and reality in tandem. This might include an oscillation regarding the moral quality of the work, for example, framed as follows: what would we see in the work differently were we to read it as either immoral or moral? Even better: demonically, depravedly immoral or supremely, sublimely moral? Who would we imagine to be on the scene opened by the work in either case, what would be the reality we would imagine the work to offer access to, and what in the work provides access to all on its scene or, contrarily, preclude access for some and preclude it for others? These inquiries could have an empirical component—what do we know of the audiences and historical conditions under which the art was created, the moral transitions prominent at the time, and so on—but most fundamentally it is a reading of the possibilities of the work itself and its own gesturing toward possible audiences, with the empirical inquiries, our interfacing with other disciplinary spaces, serving to enhance our sense of its possibilities. Indeed, the "empirical components"—historical, political, technological and other issues—are themselves simply markers of the ways other disciplinary spaces impinge upon the one opened by the work of art.
If the inquiry already intrinsic to morality, art and ritual results from the uncertainty also intrinsic to those spheres, then the growing uncertainty generated by the interaction of different moralities, esthetic criteria, and sacralities would make that inquiry an increasingly prominent element. Morality, sacrality and esthetics would, then, slide towards becoming the morality, sacrality and esthetics of inquiry. This may or may not have happened, or be happening—determining that would be itself the concern of a disciplinary space. But what we can say is that the alternative, once unavoidable uncertainty has been introduced, is a world divided between incommensurable and at least intermittently hostile faiths and moralities, on the one hand, and a world comprised of overlapping modes of inquiry, on the other. In this latter case, no one would need to concede any of his or her faith, insofar as that faith can generate a distinctive and sustainable mode of (at least anthropological) inquiry. Nor would those who commit to the disciplinary world need to denounce those who remain within more exclusive ritual and moral spaces as evil or enemies—rather, they would simply be treated as disciplinary spaces by addressing those aspects of their self-understanding where they would recognize themselves in those terms. If necessary, the problem of defending the disciplinary world against hostility from other ritual and moral spaces would itself generate new disciplinary spaces. The disciplinary world is post-moral to the extent that it is post-mimetic, and it is post-mimetic insofar as its members enable each other to imitate that dimension of reality they are jointly attending to, rather than the appropriative desires of other individuals. The knowledge of mimetic desire provided by Biblical, classical, modern and, more recently Girardian theory and GA is paradoxical: on the one hand, this is knowledge of the constitutive mode of human being; on the other hand, it is knowledge of the transcendence of this being, and if mimetic desire can never be abolished, it can be deferred; if it can be deferred for a split second, it can later be deferred for a minute, a year, a life time, generations, ages—and, we can learn to detect ever more minute, implicit and potential signs of mimetic desire and devise means of deferring them before they even produce effects. The contemporary "study" of "micro-aggressions" is, so far, a study in how to deploy the concept of "micro-aggression" in institutional skirmishes, but it could certainly be the foundation of a genuine disciplinary space—everyday manners, for example, are a veritable petri dish of micro-aggressions, along with their deferrals. At the same time, we could never conclusively deny that the perpetual distancing of mimetic desire is robbing us of forms of tacit knowledge that might be needed to sustain any social order, including a disciplinary one; nor that such distancing, which might require an ever greater reward at the end, is not merely the accumulation of resentments on an ultimately apocalyptic scale. These questions will themselves be major generators of disciplinary spaces within a disciplinary order that can never entirely disembrod from ritual, morality and esthetics, because any disciplinary space is a scene among scenes.

We can assume that the construction of a disciplinary space in the sense of a bounded space of inquiry will serve the same purpose as any scene—that of deferring violence. The more free and unthreatened by immediate violence a particular space is, which is to say the more the space itself generates mimetic desires in a form conducive to their satisfaction within the space, the more the violence that space is concerned with deferring is that of the social whole. As Eric Voegelin argued in his analysis of Plato's founding of philosophy, such autonomous disciplines situate themselves within a social crisis that they undertake to develop and disseminate the means of deferring. As Voegelin writes:

Philosophy . . . has its origin in the resistance of the soul to its destruction by society. Philosophy in this sense, as an act of resistance illuminated by conceptual understanding, has two functions for Plato. It is first, and most importantly, an act of salvation for himself and others, in that the evocation of right order and its reconstitution in his own soul becomes the substantive center of a new community which, by its existence, relieves the pressure of the surrounding corrupt society. (Order and History Vol. 3 123)

It would follow, then, that the notion of discipline in its more punitive and educational (for example, Foucauldian) senses, in other words as a rigorous set of practices, guided by theory and aimed at transforming habits, imposed upon others, follows from the understanding of a disciplinary space as recuperative and reparative in the face of social disorder. In particular, what Foucault understood to be a "disciplinary society" best makes sense as the emergence, in the modern era, of new disciplines aimed primarily at diagnosing and proposing cures for equally novel social ills. Just as it made sense to Plato that only those "guardians," who wished only to explore the good life, could be trusted to rule over others, so it makes sense that those who undertook to study, to take a few examples, the moral and intellectual needs and deficiencies of the burgeoning urban populations, the theories of punishment and penitential practices,
the health and sanitary living and working conditions of the new industrial working class, would be those asked to found modern school systems, reform prisons and police departments, manage factories and so on.

In other words, the notion of discipline is one: it is an extension of the concept of deferral, as the originary hypothesis understands it: a signifying of desire and resentment so as to delay the consequences of desire and resentment and make them conform in expression to the demands of a sacralized object of desire. A disciplinary scene is a withdrawal from social disorder and a renewal of deferral in some exemplary manner, so as to allow reality to become a means of enhancing self-discipline. Knowledge, then, is not an effect, reproduction, and legitimation of unequal power relations. Rather, power follows from that knowledge marked by the identification, diagnosis, and proposed amelioration or abolition of some source of social disorder. Nor is it simply the truthfulness or profundity of the knowledge on offer—the "clients" and "customers" are unequipped to judge the result of the discipline on its own terms, and the success or failure of their public enterprises can only be judged in an ad hoc manner, since there can be no "control" group. It is, I would say the "charisma," in Philip Rieff's sense, that is conferred upon those who have distanced themselves from the immediate, the obvious, the commonsensical in order to map out a normally invisible set of relations, that is the source of disciplinary power. While disciplinary power has in full measure its bullies, its frauds, its would-be dictators, none of it would be possible without those who first of all want to know what the truth is, how society holds together, how the mind works, and so on, or, to put it more precisely, to direct our attention in a new way because the old way is frayed and has lost its power of deferral—indeed, we can only measure the frauds and bullies against that standard (and against the intrinsic fallibility of social knowledge, especially the kinds created in response to pressing needs).

Michael Polanyi, upon whose understanding I have been drawing, sees inquiry as a concerted convergence of attention on the articulation of the particulars of a field (from the particulars to their articulation) of reality in ways that direct our attention to additional articulable particulars. Such collaborative spaces rely on the authority of previous and neighboring inquiries, and draw upon the contributions of individual inquirers, each of whom, in his/her very attempt to articulate the particulars thereby presupposes the existence of a broader, unseen, largely intuited reality. These inquiries rely upon the "principle of mutual control" (72) to sustain the shared attention comprising the discipline. In this way, an acceptance of authority and a restricted, even minute, field in which one makes responsible choices is combined with an intimation of a hierarchical and open-ended whole in which all the overlapping disciplines participate. While focusing on the natural scientists, Polanyi suggests that all fields of inquiry, including moral and esthetic, are governed in their internal and external interactions by the same logic. Polanyi calls a free and open social order predicated upon these disciplines a "society of explorers." While Polanyi does not push his argument this far, I will now go on to argue that Polanyi's society of explorers can encompass society as such—there are nothing but disciplines (a family constitutes a—or several—disciplinary spaces, as does a friendship, even a single meeting between strangers, and so on), and if all of these disciplines do not recognize each other, that is because they have not yet (and maybe never will be) brought into a relation of mutual control with each other.

The internal marketplace of the discipline produces results made available on the external market to those outside of the discipline. One doesn't need to understand a new medicine, or to know whether it could have been done better or cheaper, to be cured by it. But one discipline generates new ones: one, let's say the medical discipline, takes the curative property of the medicine on the authority of the disciplinary space within the pharmaceutical industry, but disciplines emerge that check that authority, interposing their own: those who test the medicine, those from the agency regulating it, or those "lay" agencies that monitor the medical profession and pharmaceutical industry. The producing side also generates new disciplines: a discipline of marketing, and a discipline of finance, to determine how research funds are to be acquired and allocated, and these disciplines in their own way overlap with the biological disciplines inventing the new medicines: certain problems of marketing will impinge upon the problems specific to biology. So, while the discipline of biology might seem distant from any social crisis and need for withdrawal and restoration, it is brought into proximity to such concerns by various disciplines dealing directly with urgent needs of private and social welfare, and which operate in mutual control with biology. (It also follows that inquiries into the moral and ethical implications of scientific innovations need to take this broader field of disciplines into account.)
Assuming a disciplinary order would lead us to frame discussions of the market in terms of overlapping disciplines: the shared space of interest and inquiry comes first, analytically, insofar as we see the final consumer as a participant in a discipline as well, one who at a very minimum distinguishes one product from another, and could have their attention redirected by means that can themselves be attended to and revised. Not all disciplines are equal—the individual trying to decide which medicine to take does not have the resources or knowledge of the chemical, biological and medical disciplines, and the mutual control disciplines exercise upon each other reflect these asymmetries (the medical profession can certainly subject "alternative medicines" to a kind of sustained, coherent and transparent scrutiny that could not be reciprocated) but this doesn’t change the fact that even a fringe, conspiracy theory-laden "alternative" discipline operates according to rules and generates shareable observations that would not have been available otherwise. The task of sorting out the relations between all these disciplines is itself a disciplinary one, in part a kind of expertise in debunking.

Jane Jacobs' analysis of the emergence of new work within an economy in her *The Economy of Cities* not only illustrates the disciplinary processes that make up the market but further suggests the interdependence of innovative thinking within the market and more theoretical reflection. Jacobs studies and categorizes a whole series of ways in which new work is added to an economic process—to take her first and simplest example, she mentions Ida Rosenthal, a custom seamstress who invented the bra by first using this new undergarment to improve the fit of the dresses she made for customers. Rosenthal then "became more interested in making brassieres than in making dresses" (51) and went into business manufacturing them; "bra-making now stood as an activity in its own right." From attending from the undergarments to their effect on the dress, this particular undergarment became a focus of attention in its own right.

Jacobs goes on to observe that "[o]nce one gets the hang of the process [i.e., of how new work is added to old] it is not only entertaining to track down the progressions of D [old division of labor] and A [added work] that have given us modern activities like magnetic-tape manufacturing, but also to speculate about the about the unknown progressions in the past" (57) which, as Jacobs goes on to remind her reader, she has just done in the previous chapter in advancing the startling thesis that urban life had in fact preceded rural life. (In brief, Jacobs focuses on the likelihood that nomads and hunters and gatherers would store their animals and grain; this storage would become "new work" that would lead to breeding animals, selling grain and so on, leading to a market around which a city would develop and upon which emergent surrounding rural areas would depend. Interestingly, new work invariably emerges out of some kind of delay in completing the old work.) In other words, analyzing the processes of new work leads to iteration of that new work in the theoretical sphere, generating hypotheses of origins real and possible. Insofar as any phenomenon must iterate in some distanced way the originary event, the analysis of any phenomenon into its constitutive elements and their categorical constitution must take an originary turn into the event responsible for the emergence of the categories.

The same analysis of all institutions as disciplinary spaces applies to institutions apparently distant from inquiry understood narrowly, such as political and military ones: first of all, there are those whose "new work" is to identify the possibility of preparing for certain internal and external threats, who study how to do so, including which capabilities and dispositions are best suited to this purpose, who winnow out those who are unfit to serve that function, and who offer up their services. In that case, we could see the full blown modern state as an articulation of disciplines, first of all subordinated to the discipline of maintaining social order, but, increasingly, characterized by ambiguous and shifting relations between various regulatory, police, and therapeutic disciplines.

Undesirable, disreputable and even evil activities might have a disciplinary component (as will virtually any human activity) but an understanding of disciplinarity makes clear their limits. So, for example, if we go to war, there is the possibility of entering a disciplinary space with one's enemy—a disciplinary space organized around various reciprocities regarding proportionate response and other legal issues, the use of specified weapons, treatment of prisoners, diplomatic engagements aimed at ending the war, and so on. The police, in their relation to criminals and other disciplines such as the judicial and penitential, ultimately invite the criminal to enter the discipline of policing, both by informing on their confederates and policing or disciplining themselves as they become law-abiding citizens. A criminal gang, to a certain extent, can be a discipline—figuring out how to rob a bank or claim the turf of a rival gang certainly involves a kind of inquiry (this is why movies and other forms of entertainment are able to engage our sympathies on the side of...
But only to a certain extent—the discipline cannot be an open one, which is to say it cannot submit itself to mutual control with other disciplines. Since it is predicated upon subversion of other disciplines, it must therefore conceal itself, and it must therefore privilege the loyalty of its members over their commitment to the inquiry; in privileging loyalty, the criminal gang is necessarily hierarchical, since someone must enforce loyalty and the loyalty of all to that enforcer must exceed his towards any of them.

Evil, then, can be known by the way it resists overlapping with neighboring disciplines: the teacher can want the student to become a fellow teacher, the doctor can want the patient to take control of his own health, the police officer can even want the criminal to not only go straight but become a model of reformed law-abiding leadership in his community—but a mugger cannot want his victims to mug him in return or compete with him for victims, a swindler cannot hope to have his victims join in his swindle (although an interesting mode of esthetic representation does test out these possibilities—for example, among child molesters—of victims being recruited into the criminal “project,” but part of the interest in such representations is in the limitations they reveal: maybe one, even a few victims can be recruited, but their must always remain a larger pool of potential victims who will never be admitted); and, at the extreme, the Nazi cannot want the Jew to join him in his study of the most expeditious way of exterminating unwanted racial groups.

If one accepts the model presented thus far of post-ritual social orders as comprised of overlapping and neighboring disciplines interrelated through mutual control, it follows that the real antagonist to disciplinary power comes from within. The modern discipline emerges within a market order, which itself becomes possible once the secrecy of the cult is progressively eroded and its inscrutable rites are replaced by practices of inquiry that can be learned and results that can be inspected. Even the former cults come to abide by these rules. The modern discipline, that is, is accountable to scrutiny from other disciplines regarding its practices and products, and accountability means bureaucracy, in the broadest sense of treating reality as always already a grid. David Olson, in his Psychological Theory and Education Reform: How School Remakes Mind and Society, shows how modern disciplines entail modern bureaucracies run by and for a literate population—indeed, modern literacy is essentially equivalent to familiarity with the workings and demands of bureaucracies, and the educational system is set up so as to produce those who can run them. Even more, we are all bureaucrats—the reason why teachers hate grading so much is that it is the most explicitly bureaucratic of our tasks, where we are most obviously doing nothing more than sorting students so as to determine their location in their next step on the bureaucratic ladder. As Olson argues,

In a modern bureaucratic world, knowledge, virtue and ability take on a new form. Institutions such as science preempt knowledge, justice systems preempt virtue, and functional roles preempt general cognitive ability. Thus, ability, knowledge and virtue are construed and pursued less in the form of private mental states and moral traits of individuals than in the form of competence in the roles, norms, and rules of the formal bureaucratic institutions in which they live and work. (288)

These value transformations result from the accountability of the discipline, or its self-representation before a public, which is to say other disciplines. The discipline adapts itself to and shapes the other disciplines so as to ensure the value of its services to them. Intrinsic interest must be translated into extrinsic benefits, potential beneficiaries and the benefits to them must be categorized, itemized, maximized and institutionalized, and the qualifications for entry into and continued participation in the discipline formalized. This accountability can generate more disciplinary spaces, but insofar as these means of normalization involve the collusion between established disciplinary spaces to interfere with emergent disciplinary spaces, the extrinsic readily supplants the intrinsic: procedures of approval through the application of established categories replace exploration of the possibilities of founding concepts, and issuing credentials substitutes for the ongoing, interested judgment of participants’ contributions. And struggles can then be waged over the revision of categories and the updating of credentials. Each disciplinary space tends to re-organize itself on the model of others upon which it is dependent, to that extent replacing inquiry with prefabricated criteria. Disciplines, then, in order to survive, must become spaces carved out of and in resistance to the very bureaucracies they have secreted.

Understanding the emergence of the bureaucratic out of the disciplinary and disciplinary resistance to bureaucratization requires that we relativize this boundary between the bureaucratic and the disciplinary. In
the most basic sense, there is nothing but disciplinarity: disciplinarity is co-extensive with the human: the originary scene was a discipline, even if that cannot be recognized until a critical mass of overlapping disciplines has emerged. Disciplinary attention, though, can be directed toward the means of preventing infiltration by other disciplinary spaces: this itself is a rich field of inquiry. Any disciplinary space can be threatened by competitors or those who see it as a threat; self-defense requires the assumption that the actually existing disciplinary space is the only possible instantiation of that mode of inquiry, prompting inquiry into the possibility of the impenetrability of the disciplinary space: so the inquiry into the human that lies at the origin of, say, a revolutionary movement is transformed into an inquiry into rooting out traitors to the revolution (in particular, the best hidden ones) and ultimately, perhaps, into the possibility of maintaining the barest remnants, even memories, of what was once a global movement. It is inquiry all the way up and down, but what has been refused bureaucratically is the reciprocity with other disciplines, which really means the desire for and encouragement of disciplinary spaces to complement and join one's own and hence the narrowing rather than expansion of reality. Still, despite the vanishing possibilities, one cannot exclude altogether the possibility that the tiniest space does have, and has been defending against great odds, the truth that will win out in the long run, which is to say will outlive and draw the attention of other disciplinary spaces. Bureaucracy is the study of the means of ensuring the impermeability of the disciplinary space, of making sure that what is discovered is intelligible in terms of what is already known, but that itself may only be known from within another disciplinary space that through its own bureaucratization mistakes a harnessing of resources to sustain a beleaguered truth for dogmatism and paranoia.

It is only through the creation of new disciplinary spaces that the distinction between discipline and bureaucracy can be determined. Indeed, modern esthetic developments, or at least one prominent line of them, can be seen in a new light once we consider them in terms of the dialectic of discipline and bureaucracy, and those developments can shed light on that dialectic. The para-science, "'pataphysics," invented by the 19th century French playwright and novelist Alfred Jarry as "the science of imaginary solutions and the laws governing exceptions," and the font of a wide range of 20th century artistic movements, including surrealism, the Oulipo, and conceptual art, responds, I would suggest, to the emergence and proliferation of bureaucratic discourse and the normalization processes they have been bound up with since the 19th century. The way in which practitioners of 'pataphysics exploit the reversibility of scientific and other authoritative modernizing discourses can be seen in Rene Daumal's parody/extension of the scientific revolution introduced by quantum physics:

The impartial observer of modern science will seize this opportunity to point out that modern science is, despite the unanimous belief of its friends and its enemies, an immaterialist science. I might add that for an impartial observer, a non-materialist science is no more absurd than a pacifist arms merchant or a vegetarian butcher. Modern science is based in the belief that thought, ideas and numbers are immaterial. And so to make a phenomenon conceivable, knowable, measurable, it deems it necessary to purge it of all materiality; and even the intractable residue left untouched by that reduction that could have been taken as the sign of the existence of some matter is an irreducible abstract, a mathematical indetermination. What's more, thanks to the Probabilities, the unintelligibility of the unintelligible has become intelligible. (80-1)

Just as, according to Olson, capacities and virtues become roles and rules within systems, a pacifist can take on the role of the arms merchant, the vegetarian that of the butcher, and this anomaly, only absurd for the bureaucratic observer, makes it possible to imagine that science has itself become the very thing it would set itself against—the immaterial; meanwhile, the very unintelligibility this paradox seems to drive us into becomes, through further advances in disciplinary inquiry, intelligible. 'Pataphysics, as the study of "laws governing exceptions," inhabits the anomalies of disciplinary/bureaucratic discourse, deconstructing the bureaucratization of language by returning to their constitutive condition the distinctions whose primacy bureaucracy makes synonymous with its own authority.

"The laws governing exceptions" makes sense in the light of the retrieval of the disciplinary out of the bureaucratic. Exceptions to, or anomalies of, bureaucratic rule, are the forms taken by disciplinary work: the "law governing" such work is the constitutive boundary between the disciplinary and the bureaucratic—the
boundary between "virtue" and "norm," for example. It might be further revealing to consider corporate, consumer and celebrity culture as a form of bureaucratic culture, insofar as political coercion, involving collusion between the security discipline (the state) and other disciplinary spaces in the market (and, secondarily, among those other spaces) raises barriers of entry to disciplinary spaces on the margins of the market. The resulting publicly inflected private entities study carefully how to ensure their impermeability by those emergent spaces. Consumption is in this way engineered and channeled and asymmetries that emerge in the market are converted into packaged and permanent icons ("celebrity" is a result of studies of iconization of contingent markers of desire). Resistance to consumerism and celebritization follows, but in what does this resistance consist if not in the semiotic resources any mode of deferral requires, in this case the discipline of what Tony Veale calls "educated insolence" that turns stereotyped (i.e., bureaucratic) language against itself and facilitates consumer power at least as effectively as the various serious consumerist disciplinary spaces, such as Consumer Reports? Without such power, the discipline of the consumer is at the mercy of the addictive power of any relatively monopolized product that targets desires in their more isolated, simplified, amplified and repeatable forms. While categorizing the workings of an albeit corporatized free market similarly to the more recognizable bureaucratic labyrinths such as, say, the IRS, may seem counter-intuitive, and while the pluralism of one differs considerably from the near-totalitarianism of the other, what the two share is the imperative (one that intensifies as it is obeyed) to make predictability and controllability ever more perfect at the expense of the anomalies and innovations that occur at the margins; to put it more theoretically, they both try to increase the probability of intended consequences to the point where such probability is decreased due to excessive interference and consequent uncertainty in the variables. The difference is where they lie on the continuum leading from disciplinarity to bureaucracy.

We can describe the kind of ‘pata-inquiry I am assigning to disciplinarity more precisely. Let’s grant that any social activity is rule-governed, at least tacitly. Under normal conditions, all players make moves corresponding to the shared rules. Abnormal conditions emerge not so much when one or more players cheat (cheating, like crime, is recognized and accounted for within the game) but when one or more of them leverages an anomaly within the rules. Broad social rules like “treat everyone equally” are replete with such anomalies, which have comprised the substance of politics for the past couple of centuries. Local bureaucratic rules are as well—the interpretation of any rule always depends upon a shared good will or faith in one another’s adherence to some common understanding of the rules (that is, a disciplinary space committed to studying the forms and implications of the rules). When such leveragings occur, one possible response is to restate and seek to enforce the rules precluding them—but, since what has occurred is a re-constitution of the rules, the solid ground on which such reinforcement could take place no longer exists. The ‘pata response would be to treat the anomaly as the legitimate rule and invent and enact (leverage) a complementary anomaly to it. The ultimate purpose of such counter-leveraging is to restore a new rule-governed setting that has incorporated the anomalies on all sides, even if the business (or discipline) of ‘pataphysics (denormalizing inquiry) is interested only in the creation of the complementary anomaly—another disciplinary space would have to take on the task of resettling the field that ‘pataphysics unsettles.

Disciplinary thinking, located on the boundary between the disciplinary and the bureaucratic, directs our attention, simultaneously, to the bureaucratic as seen by the disciplinary and the disciplinary as seen by the bureaucratic. Take the following mock description of a PhD thesis by Bart Plantenga in his novel, Spermatagonia: The Isle of Man:

During the course of my PhD I began to gravitate towards the Muzak-like qualities of laughter, beneficial sound that reflects society positively, confirms its values of family, work, religion, freedom within the parameters of consumerism.

I studied laughter’s coercive (cooptative) laughtrack strategies; how they trained people to laugh on certain cues and quips. Keep the funny bone sufficiently activated with no time to think. Its infectious laughter managing to obliterate the fact that these banal attempts at humor always failed. The laughtrack took up the slack. It has us laughing at things that are not funny. Put a laughtrack over a documentary of the Nazi Death Camps and people can be made to laugh. I know, I did the study, which was published in the Journal of Mass Psychiatry, vol. 16, no. 3. Took segments of Alain Resnais’ Night & Fog... and added some laughtrack I lifted from a failed sitcom. It was there, I have it on tape—cognitive, chuckling dissonance, man. Involuntary
Plantenga here brings out the inseparability of genuine inquiry and its bureaucratic deformation into a means of manipulation: laughtracks are there for a reason, and it would indeed be very interesting to explore the precise mechanics of the laughtrack and of different laughtracks—the particular form of laughter each induces, its effects on the viewer’s judgment of what is being viewed, and so on; such an inquiry would further turn into an inquiry into laughter itself. What, though, would distinguish this inquiry from service in the attempt to make laughtracks more effective, which is to say, to use the laughtrack to sidetrack inquiries into a range of possible responses to, say, a film on the Holocaust? Singling out the “involuntary” common to laughter and manslaughter marks the capability of the disciplinary self to attend to the implication of its own deliberately undertaken and initially free disciplinary inquiry into the involuntary behavior of the bureaucratically managed subject. Plantenga’s invocation of the Nazi death camps marks the moral inversion of the discipline into the bureaucracy, but the broader immorality he points to is the simulation of laughter in the hope that it will be contagious, and produce subjects who laugh when required—regardless of whether what is laughed at is funny. The disciplinary becomes bureaucratic when one no longer studies being funny, but rather supplants humor with a technological mechanism that will produce the effects of humor (laughter) sufficiently to maintain the audience needed for other, commercial purposes. Inquiry is required to invent and regulate that technological mechanism, but once it is controlled by the feedback from measurable effects (the regularized relation between laughter and ratings) not only has the discipline of comedy been displaced but so, also, has the disciplinary inquiry into various forms of inducing laughter.

We could imagine this distinction as follows: the audience could enter the discipline initiated by the comic by trying to figure out what makes a joke or routine funny, using it as a model for a joke or routine of one’s own, or noticing for the first time the breakdown in automaticity referenced by the joke; one could not enter into the study of one’s involuntary responses to a mechanism without disavowing and ultimately repudiating those responses. A broader implication for a specifically bureaucratic mode of thought follows. For the disciplinary inquirer, the contributions one enables others to make to the disciplinary space constitute one’s relation to others, to an audience which is implicitly invited into the disciplinary space; once one begins to study how to generate similar or analogous responses to those previously elicited, one institutes an impermeable boundary between inquirer and audience. I could show others how to construct a fictional scene that elicits a kind of canned laughter on the part of a "typical" audience (you can make people laugh by doing injury to a character who has already been "softened up" as a target, for example), but once you have shown them how it’s done they will no longer find it funny—they are now with you, targeting others or, more precisely, feeding their addiction (addiction being nothing more than an uncontrolled desire for the exact experience one is already familiar with). The articulation of inquiry and bureaucracy enables us to account for Heidegger’s framing "technology," or the "sleepwalking" McLuhan associates with immersion in a new medium, in which references and gestures enabled by a new relation to nature and the world are, unknown to those making the references and gestures, really references to the new mode of human organization constitutive of the relation to world and nature. The accumulation of mediations amongst humans and between humans and their objects of desire are both means and results of inquiry, which is to say of constitutive deferral and disciplines, and grids representing a "particle-ized" and already "gridded" human-in-nature. The bureaucratic mind wishes to be on an abstracted scene that the sign has always already completely mapped, down to the least possible gesture. What an originary account can add to those Heidegger and McLuhan is the location of "bureaucracy" on the originary scene, where the reciprocal "calibration" of their respective signings on the part of the scene’s participants involves a potentially total mapping of possible responses and respective mappings of self and others. The approach to that totality in the originary event closes the scene while leaving sufficient margin for error to notice further residues of representable desire. Bureaucracy seeks to eliminate that margin of error by ensuring the recipient fits the delivery and designing the delivery to match the prepared recipient.

Olson, as I suggested earlier, associates the emergence of bureaucratic culture with the spread of literacy. Olson and others have done extensive work on the transformations wrought by literacy on individual and collective consciousness, but rather than going over that terrain here, I will argue, more specifically, for viewing disciplinary thinking as a specific form of thinking within literate modes of thought but also within the aporias of those modes of thought.

Olson’s theory of writing in The World on Paper advances beyond the pathbreaking work of Eric Havelock
and others by reversing the relation between syntactic writing (writing that distinguishes, at least, between words within a sentence) and speech—rather than assuming that writing was an attempt to represent speech (that is, that the inventors of writing already saw language in terms of individual words and sentences which they then sought to represent), Olson argues that syntactic representation, coming from the emblems or tokens used to record inventory (so, the first syntactical writing comes when it becomes possible to write "3 goats" instead of "goat goat goat"), itself provides the model for language that writing proceeds to institutionalize:

Once a writing system has a syntax, the emblems or tokens can now be seen as words rather than as emblems and the constructions can be seen as a proposition rather than a list. The structures present in the script now provide the categories needed for introspecting the implicit structures of language. Such scripts are logographic in that the tokens now represent the major grammatical constituents of the language, namely, words. But, to repeat, it does not follow that the inventors of such a script already knew about words and then sought to represent them in the script. The opposite may be true. The scribal inventions dictated a kind of reading which allowed language to be seen as composed of words related by means of a syntax. Writing thereby provides the model for the production of speech (in reading) and for the introspective awareness of speech as composed of grammatical constituents, namely, words. (77, emphasis Olson's)

While the "invention" of the declarative sentence certainly precedes that of writing by many millennia, it is with the invention of writing that the declarative sentence can be singled out as such and treated as the primary linguistic form, the model for language as such. So, the development of alphabetic writing coincided with the development of metaphysics in Greece and monotheism in Israel—both are new modes of intelligibility predicated upon the primacy of the declarative sentence. As Olson points out, the understanding that words represent meanings rather than being embodied in the things they refer to "spells the death of 'word' magic or more precisely, 'name' magic" (75). It now becomes possible to argue about what "good" or "God" "really means"—it has some stable meaning, insofar as its permanence is evident in its written form, but it has no obvious or direct connection to any particular meaning.

Once language can be broken down into words and sentences, two things happen: first, specific words and sentences can be preserved in an exact form, and that preservation can be insisted upon. That is, verbal commonplaces, formulas, ritual expressions, sacralized claims, inherited maxims, and so on, have an "original" and "authentic" form against which future iterations can be measured. Second, the verbal elements of sentences can be broken down, replaced, combined and rearranged deliberately, and for intended effects. (As has been noted many times, the first industrialized, mass production process was the printing press.) No doubt, oral communities must have insisted upon continuity and varied their uses of linguistic forms, but with the existence of an original form, new modes of thought and discourse, such as the distinctions between orthodoxy and heresy and word and intention, commentary, hermeneutical and allegorical reading strategies, grammatical, logical and other kinds of "correctness," parody and so on become possible. The possibility of iterating a specific linguistic form leads simultaneously towards reverence and mockery, or, for that matter, simple dispersal, with the provenance and attitude to be adopted toward the sentence left open. And these consequences of the ability to manipulate language introduced by writing—to pulverize and recombine it—are further intensified, as McLuhan noted, in the wake of the printing revolution in the early modern world.

I now propose processing this intellectual development through a distinction Michael Tomasello makes in his recent book, A Natural History of Human Thinking, between "joint intentionality" and "collective intentionality." Joint intentionality, for Tomasello, is the distinguishing marker of human thinking, represented by the gesture of pointing—when someone points something out to another, both know that they are looking at the "same" thing, and each knows that the other knows. In evolutionary terms, Tomasello associates the period of "joint intentionality" with the iconic signs (comprised of pointing and mimicry) constitutive of the earliest period of human language. Eventually, these iconic signs become more abstract—due both to the increase in the size of human communities and the grammaticalization of gestures (that is, their articulation into relations between signs, and ultimately sentences), until we get to the point of the "arbitrary" sign with no necessary connection to its meaning or referent. At this point, words have taken on meanings independent of any instance of their use, and rather than simply being able to understand
now, the emergence of collective intentionality certainly, like the declarative sentence, precedes the development of writing—I am arguing not for the simultaneity of these developments, but for the claim that the later developments seized upon, accentuated, and exaggerated within language the earlier developments: "collective intentionality" would have intensified the focus on the declarative sentence, and writing would have further intensified collective intentionality, marginalizing along the way earlier, iconic, modes of language. Singling out the declarative sentence as the primary linguistic unit would lead analysts to filter out everything in such utterances that are not specific to them—directing attention to the speaker, for example, or the audience, would minimize the differentiation of the declarative sentence from other speech acts, such as imperatives or promises. What is specific to the declarative sentence is the constitutive claim that words match reality in some way that anyone who hears the sentence could identify (and assess). In that case, the ideal declarative sentence is one that could be uttered felicitously by anyone, anywhere, at any time. And this is indeed the ideal for Western metaphysics and, however differently, Judaic monotheism, the name of whose God is, essentially, I am everywhere, always and no one (although it’s worth noting that the ideal sentence is simultaneously and paradoxically cancelled in the Jewish name of God, since no one could in fact felicitously say it without claiming to be that God).

The critique of Western metaphysics, shadowing it from the beginning, but becoming increasingly powerful over the past century and a half, can, then, be distilled into the following argument: Western metaphysics, in privileging collective intentionality as crystallized in the ideal declarative sentence, has elided the fact that joint intentionality persists within and, indeed, continues to constitute, collective intentionality. (Tomasello doesn’t address this issue either, which is anyway distant from his concerns, but his argument that children continue to learn language—as how could they not?—through joint attention can be taken to suggest that such tension must always exist.) Metaphysics, in answering the needs of emergent empires consequent upon its creation of a novel and enduring disciplinary space, thereby produces a meta-bureaucracy, predicated upon the imagination of a single world scene of which all other scenes are components. Joint intentionality persists in the form of idioms within collective intentionality and, to refer back to my previous discussion, bureaucratic thinking seeks to eliminate such idiomatic trace of joint attention while disciplinary thinking establishes sites of joint attention directed at the products of collective intentionality. If it is only within collective intentionality that words take on authoritative meanings (so that one could be right or wrong about what they mean), the joint intentionality of disciplinary thinking is aimed at the incommensurable idioms of which those meanings are composed (whatever remains anomalous in collective intentionality). The bureaucratized declarative strives to eliminate paradox from language, to make every sentence "clear," which is to say, refer to a reality that all readers (participants in an imagined collective intentionality) of the sentence would realize as that reality and as decomposable into equally discreet and unanimously recognized parts. Disciplinary idioms are no less invested in the declarative sentence, but work to draw out the generative paradoxicality of any sentence, its constitutive character for those jointly attending to the boundary between the possible realities deferred by the sentence and the reality it presents (like Durkheim’s reference, mentioned earlier, to crime as a "factor in public health"). Disciplinary idioms, at their most elemental, see where mockery might be appropriate where reverence is given, or reverence deserved where mockery is taken for granted—where, that is, a piece of signifying material might be iterated differently. In a bureaucratic age, those disciplinary idioms, or instances of joint attention toward collective intentionality, are most readily found in the greatest source of paradox: the bureaucratic desire to eliminate paradox by intensifying and enforcing the belonging of each element to its place within the structure. The simplest way of doing that is by sensationalizing and demonizing any deviation while sentimentalistizing the rediscovery of the element within its place.

Disciplines are invariably organized around founding, quasi-sacred texts (this is true of even the most informal disciplines, including those founded upon self-help books, do-it-yourself journals, women’s health websites, etc.)—if one is to make a claim in the discipline, one must be able to refer back to such a text and make one’s claim consistent with it. The implicit claim is that the text represents an achieved mode of collective intentionality, while one’s own claim represents an attempt to direct joint attention to something unsettled within the collective intentionality: more precisely, if the text is an achieved mode of collective intentionality, that is because it has achieved a higher level of discipline compared to some other bureaucratized mode of thought, and the joint attention directed at it is to preserve its centrality to the
discipline by preventing its bureaucratization in turn ("one might take K to simply be saying... but if we look at this passage we can see that he is really..."). The member of the discipline resists the text's re-absorption in the bureaucratic commonplaces it distinguishes itself from in two ways. First, by continuing the work of breaking up and reorganizing bureaucratic discourse initiated by the text: ordinary bureaucratic discourse transcended disciplinarity, as I suggested earlier, by taking binary distinctions assumed to reside empirically in the world (like legality and illegality) and to be further embedded in a series of other empirically based binaries (moral and immoral, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, etc.) and treat them as constitutive—reciprocally definitive and interdependent. Members of the discipline can continue to push this work forward, bringing the same binaries into new terrain, or deconstructing and re-aligning other binaries and making those binaries co-constitutive with the original ones. Or, they can go to work on the founding texts themselves, using their constitutive distinctions to similarly treat what those texts have taken for granted as merely empirical distinctions.

About a third of the way through his novel, Plantenga has his protagonist, after following the disciplinary course of reducing all human phenomena to their biological, chemical, physical and hence manipulable constituents and finding, as result, "I seemed to come undone" (53), embark on a "12-step Program for Disappearance—survival, after all, requires a kind of creative disappearance." The rest of the novel involves enacting this "program," which turns out to involve a perpetual inquiry, with direct consequences, of all the ways one appears in the contemporary world. The protagonist Kees removes all brand markers from his possessions and moves to a non-descript part of the city where life is something no one takes much notice of; he gradually withdraws from his connectedness to the media, using it, where connected, to further regulate his appearance and inner emotional and physiological responses so as to stand out less ("[t]he Golf Channel was better for me. Following the camera's eye following the ball trained my inner eye to focus, regulate blood pressure, made me appreciate fairways and greens as visual equivalents of the tranquil mind" [65]). He starts putting on black face, because "[b]eing black meant being nobody" and "I knew white reflected light, thus calling attention to its source. Let's just say it was a way of removing my face as bright orb from competing with other more worthy celestial bodies" (77). Disappearance involves not so much hiding away or disguising oneself as someone else, but an ongoing reciprocal modulation of oneself and one's environment, wherein there is always a new threshold of attention emerging in response to one's withdrawal of oneself from the world of attended to objects, which is to say from mimetic competition:

I began aligning every breath with sounds of external phenomena—a shout, the DINGLE-DANGLE of the passing ice cream truck, grumbling 18-wheelers, airplane overhead, the cicadic car alarms, the clack-clack-clack of late-for-work high heels. In this way my breath could hitch a furtive ride on other molecules of sound to ultimately dissolve in some greater ambience. Like my autobiography written in invisible ink. (90-1).

Kees' disciplined disappearance gets taken up by the same media systems he used to manipulate (and, in another period of his life, participate more directly in): "his disappearance had inaugurated a legacy—the more absent, the more famous" (135), with the novel ending with the speculations of the crime scene detectives over the actual cause of his demise and the philosophical and moral implications of suicide. He himself becomes part of the scene of discarded objects of contemporary civilization in which he had immersed himself. This is the end point of the disciplinary: to leave behind traces of signs of the same order as those that first drew one's attention to some act-become-sign as something that could draw others’ attention. The disciplinary, then, is also the end point of de-mimeticization: from the direct modeling of each others' actions in one's own actions through the transformation of deferred actions into signs of new scenes of possible actions, to the becoming a tissue of signs modeling the possibility of transforming any scene into a sign.

Works Cited


Notes

1. Polanyi tells of an essay published in the Proceedings of the Royal Society in 1947:

   It described some fairly simple experiments which proved, in the author’s opinion, that a hydrogen atom impinging on a metal wire could transmit to it energies ranging up to a hundred electron volts. Such an observation, if correct, would be far more revolutionary than the discovery of atomic fission by Otto Hahn in 1939. Yet when this paper appeared and I asked various physicists’ opinions about it, they only shrugged their shoulders. They could not find fault with the experiment, yet they not only did not believe its results, but did not even think it worth while to consider what was wrong with it, let alone check up on it. They just ignored it. About ten years later some experiments were brought to my notice which accidentally offered an explanation of Lord Rayleigh’s findings. His results were apparently due to some hidden factors of no great interest, but which he could have hardly identified at the time. He should have
ignored his observation, for he ought to have known that there must be something wrong with it. (65)

This intuitive sense that some claim just can't be right regardless of whether or not one knows why is constitutive of any disciplinary space. (back)
Victimary Thinking, Celebrity and the CCTV Building

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Introduction/Abstract

The growing influence of globalisation and its accompanying mobilities, both corporeal and remote, are particularly clearly portrayed in the context of the cityscape where the built environment contains evidence of contemporaneous developments in culture. This is in no small part because the global population is now primarily housed in cities, a shift that has occurred concurrently with the growing economic significance of cities that now compete with one another in a manner that exceeds national boundaries. An associated set of highly complex cultural dynamics and an emergent aesthetic sensibility have been identified by a growing number of scholars; one that is marked by a set of concerns that appear contradictory, at times paradoxical and ever ambivalent. Stark illustration of this both kinetic and unstable sensibility is offered through the buildings constructed based on the designs of celebrity architects, or “starchitects.” The figure of the starchitect is paradigmatic of how agency has been effected by the changes outlined here, which seem to indicate the emergence of phenomena on a global scale that move beyond the conditions of postmodernity. These demonstrations of prestige participate in cultural narratives associated with the historical relationship between high and popular culture, and by default, the market system and its culture. It is argued below that Eric Gans’s explanations of the epochal conditions that exceed postmodernity—and their cultural implications—under the label of “post-millennialism” offer a very fruitful means by which to explain the activity of the starchitect. The discussion takes as an explanatory case study the example of the CCTV building in Beijing, the headquarters of the Chinese public broadcaster designed by Rem Koolhaas. The building portrays his consciousness of the paradoxical doubling of our survival and demise, the ecology of which is emergent from both our capacity for symbolic representation and the exploitation of the material conditions that constitute these non-exigent ecological circumstances in the first instance.

I. Post-postmodernity and Originary Anthropology

Theory across all humanistic disciplines now attempts to grapple with the acceleration of globalization that has unfolded over recent decades as new forms of information technology, transportation, and communication underpin material conditions that allow unprecedented corporeal and non-corporeal mobility. Social structures thus complexly redefined by deterritorialization and marked by growing interconnectedness and speed have been mapped with increasing rigor, and in some cases, despair for their human effects (Castells 1996; Giddens 1990; Harvey 1989, 1996, 2011; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton 1999; Urry 2002; Virilio 1988, 2009). Terms that have been employed to describe these new conditions in sociology and anthropology include “hypermodernity” (Charles and Lipovetsky 2005), “supermodernity” (Augé 1995), “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000) and “late modernity” (Beck 1992, Giddens 1991, Lash 1990), where each in turn claims a new fluidity, growing anomie, and still greater transience than that present in earlier phases of modernity.[1]

As part of efforts to encompass the growing effects of globalization during what appears to be a post-postmodern epoch, theorists have begun to attempt to create points of departure rather than continue the pattern of reacting to a set of precedent epochal conditions that is implicit to the “post” gesture.[2] Some of these attempts focus on aesthetic modes of representation, leading to the emergence of terms such as “digimodernism” (Kirby 2009), “altermodernity” (Bourriard 1998, 2009), and “metamodernity” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2009). Each in turn asserts and describes the conditions of an alternative state of modernity to that associated with postmodernity, and maintains that these are not reactions to postmodernity; instead, they are aside from history. Digimodernism focuses upon the unprecedented presence of digital technology, whilst metamodernism asserts the emergence of conditions that permit a liminal mode of aesthetic representation and experience that takes the form of unresolved oscillation between modern and postmodern sensibilities. Lastly, Bourriard’s altermodernity has gained the most traction and is most attentive to formally aesthetic modes of representation, and serves as a useful example to précis in more detail here because of its correlations with Generative Anthropology.

Bourriard emphasizes the limiting effects of attaching current patterns in cultural production to their origins, suggesting that the potency in contemporaneous conditions of aesthetic experience is to be discovered in a liberating potential for the subject to transcend the limiting generativity implicit in such (originary) thinking. Here, networks created by digital communication technologies and corporeal mobility are considered to have allowed for scenes on which novel cultural emergences are feasible via relatively autonomous processes of creolisation. These emergences Bourriard sees as vital alternatives to the homogeneity created by global capitalism after the end of postmodernism[3]. As the originary thinker knows, history is intransigent, and detaching the present from its origins not so readily achieved. Bourriard’s argument is laudable in its desire to encourage the energy created by the elevated capacity of human networks underpinned by digital communication and broadly available corporeal mobility. However, cultural explanation does not simply yield a point of departure, and certainly not one capable of exceeding the centrality of origin. Simply put, the individual artist who participates in Bourriard’s network remains the inheritor of their cultural circumstances, and turning one’s focus from this fact does not liberate the artist from the generative influence of history.

The homogeneity Bourriard identifies is the result of increased production, distribution and consumption of culture where both the vertical and horizontal integration of networks operates on an unprecedented scale. The scalability of culture under such networked conditions permits a relatively uninhibited horizontal exchange of culture, and a level of access that leads some theorists to assert the conflicting narrative of a loss of history. This contradicts Bourriard, who celebrates such exchange as a potential that can be generative of invaluable aesthetic heterogeneity: an alterity that exceeds the controlling influence of history (as doxa). As architect and theorist Rem Koolhaas argues, “[w]e live in a very flat digital world in which everything is accessible but increasingly there is less and less memory. We are, you might say, condemned
to the perpetual present” (“Rem” 75). Such presentism is considered an attribute of a cultural setting in which attention is the watchword of cultural success. The reduction of memory is a trait of the horizontality in question, whereby the very fact of access is asserted to be the guarantor of the loss of memory. Ironic, since the relationship between the hardware that constitutes the network (the Internet) and the software that supersedes upon it (the world wide web) is governed by the growing depth of universally accessible computational “memory” capable of replacing the biological function of human memory vis a vis cultural memory. The latter relation is, of course, integral to history and our access to it. But here, the presence of history has been overcome by the super valency of an access culture underpinned by the ever-widening availability of the necessary hardware. This Adam Katz has described as leading to an attention-governed context in which celebrity plays an intensified role, such that:

The intensified culture of celebrity and publicity thereby generated most obviously privileges the transgressive over the continent, the brash and boastful over the modest—the invisibility of the virtues of manuscript culture is intensified by the demand that everything be made visible, literal and blatant. (“Mimetic”)

In this account, the depth in culture is contravened by the logic of publicity, whereby attention is the watchword and gaining it the primary motif of the network in which rapidly produced, radically presented content dominates. Access, therefore, is not simply access to the technology and that which it presents, but a culture that governs and is generative of an epoch in which a lack of depth replaces the motif of the network in which rapidly produced, radically presented content dominates. Access, therefore, is not simply access to the possibilities held in time. Temporality—as it is given over to asynchronicity and distal sublation—is the modality of this epoch, and the outcomes are visibly confronting, and surface-oriented.

The difficulty that accompanies attempts to synthesise the complexity of global phenomena is revealing. Imagining and representing “global” culture reminds us of the importance of having a historically grounded definition for the human. In this global context of culture, mobility is certainly of central importance to the discussion, and as will be discovered, it is not without its irony that a key element of the cultural narratives associated of what is asserted as a new sensibility is a normalizing of the acceptance of necessary decay, decline, or ruin. Here the discourse is freighted with baggage from postmodernity, where decay is considered an integral feature of knowing, and where questions outweigh solutions. James Clifford captured this in 2012 in the ambivalently millenarian/optimistic conclusion to his piece “Feeling Historical,” summing up the effect of the 25 years that had passed since he convened the influential collection, Writing Cultures, as follows:

"Globalization" is not, or not simply, "the capitalist world system." It is of course capitalist... and more. I hold on to the much-abused word as a sign of excess, a name for the evolving world of connectivities we can't represent. Globalization in this sense is obviously not the 1990s version—"the end of history," "the flat earth." ... Globalization, for me, is a place-holding name for an articulated, polycentric totality. Multiple zeitgeists. A bush, or tangle, of historicities. ... The vulnerability to political violence and economic insecurity that many of us feel today is intensified by ecological threats that can no longer be managed or exported. What happens when the supplies run out, when the resource wars get desperate? Of course this feeling of exposure is a version of what most people in the world have always known. The certainty of having lived in a "First World" bubble of security that is no more. Good riddance to that. And now? Twenty-five years after Writing Culture: the excitement, the fear, of being in the real. (425-6)

These final words are of course a nod toward the abandonment of certainty inherent to postmodernity, along with an expression of the fall out to this epoch, in retrospect, or as Clifford writes in his segue to these comments on globalization, “from my shaky perch in the new millennium.” Twenty-five years ago, Clifford's concern was with promoting reflexivity, and how ethnographic representation participates in determining "order, diversity, inclusion and exclusion" (“Partial” 2). Now, however, "good riddance," Clifford affirms, to the heady briminkanship and confounding complexity he describes, and the violence it may be generative of. Thus, the post-postmodern sensibility: a deliberately paradoxical result of history (here, human culture successfully becoming a threat to itself on the scale of the whole human community).

II. Post-millennialism and Pre-humiliation

As explanations of cultural emergences during an increasingly energized period of human history, the abovementioned attempts with their epochal bounding provide a lens to recent developments in theory, where such definitions rely on epochal thinking that ensures a coherent definition of the human is not adopted. Indeed, the paradoxical situation of theory associated of the sensibility generated through postmodernity and realized in post-structuralism is such that more than preventing the adoption of a coherent definition, this epoch became the scene for a genesis of discard: throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as it were, through the adoption of the (deliberately paradoxical) always already available symbolic, the centred subject and the polyvocal text.

Generative Anthropology has the capacity to address this absence and to supply a genuine point of departure from the pattern of epochal defined reflexivity that can explain both the aesthetic and structural shifts in focus here(4). In his discussions of such post-postmodern conditions, Eric Gans has employed the term "post-millennialism" to demonstrate this application, and addressed his desire for a new epoch during which the victimary mode of postmodernity declines in its capacity to defer violence (by preventing the build up of resentment) in favour of the elaboration of a true reciprocity(5). For Gans, the emergence of post-postmodern epochal conditions can be traced to the decline of the broader dialectical opposition/s generated through the postmodern conditions of global capitalism. Here, the “end of the fundamental opposition between the market system and its culture is a corollary of the disappearance of the system's political Other,” a situation that has led to a destabilising of the victimary mode of postmodernity (“Post-Millenial”). This new epoch “cannot afford the automatic validation of victimary credentials,” and as a result, the means by which deferral of resentment will be achieved is via “the establishment of the mode of reciprocity—the economic—that is the least culturally constraining” (“Post-Millenial”). In the information age, the means of conducting reciprocal exchange have been elevated as the networked transaction of the symbolic and intellectual are enhanced via the facility of the marketplace. The latter is the means by which the hardware (the Internet is the prime example) is established to permit the software—both public (computer) and private (the internal individual)—to stage the procedures by which exchange might be mediated. However, the post-millennial subject cannot escape the possibility of victimary resentment, since to do so would be to enter a utopic or dystopic state in which the subject has and knows their place. For Gans, this possibility must be deferred, since “[w]hat makes post-millennial victimary discourse effective is that it continues to circulate and transform itself rather than stagnating and fermenting into a monstrous ideology” (“Victimary”). This paradoxical lack of a stable centre of, or locus to, culture becomes the governing mechanism that guards against a building of resentment in any particular form and narrative, or what mightorrent the descent into violence as it adopts the coherence of an overarching cultural narrative to underpin a “monstrous ideology."
In his initial description of "post-millennialism," Gans indicated that the post-postmodernity that marks contemporaneity could be constituted by "non-victimary dialogue" that would act to inhibit resentment in general, and that the resentment of capitalism and liberal democracy postmodernity insists upon might also be reduced ("Thoughts"). He later adjusted this position via his thesis, "Victimary thinking is the post-millennial replacement for utopianism," and observed that rather than "leaving the victimary postmodern era and entering a 'post-millennial' era of non-victimary dialogue," it is more likely "we are leaving the acute form of the victimary for the chronic, the heroic for the banal" ("Victimary"). In keeping with this observation, Gans has explained the changing function of victimary thinking in terms of the isolated figure of the moral hero.

The hero, real or fictional, acts on behalf of the victim and must be relatively isolated, occupying the position of the "Girardian scapegoat" ("Moral Heroism"). By its nature, therefore, heroism is dangerous, and cannot be recognized as heroism in the immediate community, against which the hero takes a stand. After postmodernity the victim has become more difficult to discern as a result of the growing historical complexity outlined above, and as such, the hero is no longer a reliable figure, a situation that has led in popular culture to the ironic function of the celebrity. Gans argues,

"The modern solution to the danger of the sacred center is preemptively to desacralize its inhabitants, to 'prehumiliate' them, as Doug Collins puts it. The term 'celebrity' by which we designate our unheroic public figures reflects an increased proportion of resentment to adoration in our ever-ambivalent attitude toward the center. ("Moral Heroism")"

The celebrity is an adumbrated hero. Placed at the shifting centre, the celebrity is dangerous and sacred, adored and resented, represented in such a way that this is a subject who can't be taken seriously any longer. The "prehumiliated" figure of the celebrity Gans associates with a shift in the nature of the attention paid by the human community toward the centre, which despite remaining ambivalent is marked by growing resentment toward the centre. They move in and out of collective focus, at once disliked and admired, at once subject to and the authors of the dynamics of attention from which emerge publicly performed and communally experienced narratives of love and resentment. Here, the banal celebrity participates in the diffusion over time of attention from foci of a kind that involves direct influence over scenes of culture. By virtue of their lack of a capacity to enact any real (will to) power they remain free and clear of the violence their triviality shields them from.

III. Origins of the "Starchitect" and the "Bilbao Effect"

In a contemporaneous situation of culture that is marked by such growing resentment toward and declining adoration of those to whom attention is usually drawn, the creation of material culture frequently enacts the ambivalence that foreshadows and shapes said attention. This occurs in the context of a range of cultural formats, from high art through to the popular setting of such phenomena as film clips and advertisements, but one particularly compelling context is the built environment. Central to the creation of large structures that come to define our cityscapes is the architect, who intervenes in the construction of the built environment via the formal infrastructure of a discipline that is encoded in systems of law. The architect is a peculiar figure in that they straddle the position of artist and "practitioner," and are associated with a formal academic discipline that is at once interested in aesthetics and pragmatics.

The globalising of capital has led to a growing concentration of populations within, and rising competition between, cities. So called "world cities" like New York, London and Tokyo now compete as economic entities that transcend national boundaries. It is arguable that one effect of this has been the building of a number of landmark buildings, as it has become a de rigeur element of civic planning to appoint one of a growing number of "starchitects" (a portmanteau of celebrity and architect) to design, and in some cases oversee the construction of, iconic public buildings. These buildings are of course very expensive to build, and rely upon attracting the attention of an elite architect, who brings with them the presence and prestige that only a wealthy, economically vital and culturally significant city can hope to attain. These buildings are often associated with the high cultural paradigm of artistic practice and production, such as museums, galleries, and concert halls. This phenomenon has therefore bought new life and attention to formats of cultural production associated with a deep history, and simultaneously reinvested them in popular culture.

The pattern generated by this intersection between agency and practice is revealing, and has inspired Witold Rybczynski to describe what he calls the "Bilbao effect," after the cultural and economic impacts of the construction of Frank Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim (1997) inspired other cities to commission the construction of (what are intended to be) iconic buildings by high profile starchitects. Such buildings have certainly bought attention and contributed to the identity of cities for a lot longer than this, but the scene of origin for the generation of the "spare no expense" starchitect-constructed building would seem to be Bilbao. After Bilbao, a pattern has emerged in which the city in question constructs a public drama around the process of commissioning. The selection of an architect and a building is most commonly conducted via a competition that is mediated to the extent that the process itself generates the circumstances of attention. Starchitect is pitted against starchitect and their respective models, plans and rationale advertise the prestige of the city through a narrative of future-tense economic and cultural vigour. As Rybczynski describes it, this "charged atmosphere promotes flamboyance rather than careful thought, and favors the glib and obvious over the subtle and nuanced" (139). The Bilbao effect, therefore, describes a set of outcomes that are directly generated by a striking shift in the disciplinarity of the architect as it comes into contact with the distorting pull of the popular.

There is, of course, a very postmodern influence evident in Rybczynski's perspective. He is (intentionally or otherwise) riffing on Baudrillard's "Beaubourg Effect," described in Simulations and Simulacra as the paradoxical outcome of the decision to build the Pompidou Centre (1977) in the rundown Beaubourg area of Paris. For Baudrillard the arts centre is a kind of factory, whose machine aesthetic literally pumps the disaffected visitors (victims) of late capitalism through its tubes and pipes, reminding them of their position and serving as a paradoxical representation of the problem the presence of the building pretends to act against: "[h]ere cultural objects, as elsewhere the objects of consumption, have no other end than to maintain you in a state of mass integration, of transistorized flux, of a magnetized molecule" (67). Thus, the paradoxical situation of the interleaving of the marketplace and the machine aesthetic under the conditions of modernity are perceived to shape subjective agency toward a numb state of disaffection. Baudrillard's analysis typifies the context of early critical assessments of popular culture, where the latter is seen to invade parasitically the circumstances of a high cultural paradigm of art, as he participates in a history of intellectual resentment toward capitalism.

Rybczynski's complaint cannot be removed from this complex intersection of cultural narratives. This is apparent in his warning that the global pattern the Bilbao Effect describes involves attracting attention in a manner that is less informed by the history of thought as it might instruct the generation of material culture through the discipline of architecture, and more by the drive toward focussing shared attention upon a city with the (banal) goal of economic advantage. As he argues, "[g]reat architecture carries many messages, about society and individuals, about
our values and our dreams. It should have more to say to us than “Look at me”’ (142). The result Rybczynski fears is a shallow use of the symbolic potential of the built environment; one that might otherwise participate in progressing human society. The presupposition, therefore, behind his argument is once again that the depth in culture is contravened by the logic of publicity, and that attempts at attracting attention have the potential to strip the materiality of culture of its most valuable quality beyond meeting our basic needs (shelter etc.): symbolic representation. What is undermined into the bargain is the stability of the community, and if Rybczynski is resentful he is resentful of this shift away from valorising this sacred potential.

IV. Rem Koolhaas and the CCTV Building

An interesting case study is the headquarters for the Chinese public broadcaster in Beijing, known as the CCTV building, which was designed by starchitect Rem Koolhaas in collaboration with (lesser known) architect Ole Scheeren and the OMA team. In a spectacle that aligns with Rybczynski’s description, Koolhaas’ design won an international competition to deliver construction in time for the 2008 Olympics. The facade was completed and the building officially opened on the first of January in that year, though it was actually finished over four years later, in May 2012. It is a reimagining of the traditional tower form, which is broken at four points to be twisted into a loop that appears from different perspectives to be impenetrable and monolithic, and from others, about to tumble to earth under the weight of its own curious angles. The design is somewhat dogmatically described on the OMA website as a “truly three-dimensional” resolution to the “exhausted typology” of the “two-dimensional tower” with its isolated, singular aesthetic that competes “in the race for ultimate height and style” (“CCTV—Headquarters”). It is reinforced by the external presence of cross-hatched support so that:

The innovative structure of the building is the result of long term collaboration between European and Chinese engineers to achieve new possibilities for the high-rise. The structure of the CCTV Headquarters, and the forces at work within it, is visible on its façade: a web of diagonals that becomes dense in areas of greater stress, looser and more open in areas requiring less support. The façade itself becomes a visual manifestation of the building’s structure. (“CCTV—Headquarters”) The OMA rationale contains references to an intentionally poorly concealed commentary that presents China as a global “other,” and the CCTV headquarters as the material evidence of and symbolic portrayal of the nature of this alternate status. The “exhausted typology” and the pursuit of unconsidered height that carries a “two-dimensional” paradigm (towers are not two-dimensional, of course) toward its inevitable failure would seem to be a reference to a global-capitalism-inspired pattern of unfettered growth. The collaboration between China and Europe to generate a three-dimensional solution—one that has a horizontality the paradigm of the tower lacks—drives this home. Inferred is a doxa in which the fusion of communism and capitalism that China has adopted should be understood to be just so: purposed with a clear end, and one that involves greater horizontal integration of individual agency and more direct governance of the capitalistic system. The OMA rationale emphasises how it is that the facade with its external evidence of structure reflects the fluidity of the system of support. The structure provides support where needed, and opens up to reveal greater openness at other points. The “the forces at work within” the building are tantamount to this openness and support, which are made visible via the apparent structure. We might conclude that this suggests the hidden mechanisms of control that constrain the agency of the subjects of liberal democratic national states, where the state does little to govern capitalism and the wealthy hold great power. Perhaps Koolhaas and OMA mean to say, “at least you can see who’s in control here.”
The "Overhang" and structure of the CCTV Building, July 2009 _ Dmitry Fironov

Perhaps the last takes too greater licence, but it is certainly uncontroversial to state that the OMA rationale is a provocation, and in keeping with the provocative design of the building. What seems evident as we consider these details and the recent history of Koolhaas’ career is that this building is a study in the material conditions of post-millenialism, and the correlated shifting cultural agency of the celebrity as Gans portrays them. Here, the market system and its culture are no longer so clearly opposed, and capitalism’s last remaining political “other” has abandoned its pretension toward the utopic in favour of participation in global trade. But the result has not been the evaporation of victimary resentment. Instead, the function of celebrity has been integrated with the professional agency that comes to define the cityscape as part of a spectacle designed to draw a particular kind of attention. The prehumiliated condition of the celebrity is ameliorated by their status as architect, and since the latter is already an ambivalent figure (neither artist nor practitioner) the politics of the flamboyant designs created by the starchitect are a propos to the hypermediated post-millennial condition where attention is first, and quality second.

However, the CCTV building does not necessarily bear out Rybchynski’s generalised fear of a loss of symbolic potential or considered application to history. For example, the building has a porthole at the meeting point of the elevated horizontal sections—known as the "Overhang"—that one can stand upon and look down into a garden designed by Koolhaas’ partner, Petra Blaisse. The garden is based on Piranesi’s famous etchings of Rome, in which the artist is renowned for making additions to the ruined elements of the city: imagined projections built up from the remains (of these architectural designs). Blaisse’s garden is divided into three-metre-diameter “pixels,” and when viewed from the height of the porthole these pixels come together to give both an impression of the striations in Piranesi’s etchings, and of Rome. Blaisse’s website claims that this digitalizing procedure presents a paradoxical synchronicity with the nearby cityscape because it “echoes the city tissue of older parts of Beijing and complements the clear character of the new buildings because of its intricacy” (“CCTV/TVCC site”). The meaning of this construction and rhetoric does not require full explication for us to conclude that the intent evident here is the creation of a text that compels reflection upon the scenicity of culture, upon the rise of empires, and upon the structure of representation; the implicitly digital quality of which is deeply imbedded in a history that is necessarily generated by a sequence of such scenes, each indebted to the last.

Koolhaas has been frequently questioned on his role in the political function of the building, and in no small part because OMA did not enter the competition to build at Ground Zero. In 2002 when both competitions were advertised, Koolhaas was disillusioned and resentful after many failed pitches in the US, so much so that he had recently moved the OMA headquarters from the US to the Netherlands. This seems to
be borne out in published material related to the building. In a 2011 interview with Der Spiegel, Koolhaas was questioned as to why he built a symbol of power in a dictatorship, and answered:

The only reason I chose not to take part in the Ground Zero competition was that the project's connection to the past was too clear for my taste. There is more willingness to experiment in China. So much is being built there—entire cities!—that greater risks have to be taken. There, failure is not a disaster. . . . Under neoliberalism, architecture lost its role as the decisive and fundamental articulation of a society ("Interview").

But if Koolhaas is energetic about the direction China is headed, he seems convinced of the decline ahead for the US. As he somewhat less diplomatically described the design in Wired magazine in 2004, "it was conceived at the same time that the design competition for Ground Zero took place—not in the backward-looking US, but in the parallel universe of China" (129). On the same page Koolhaas presents in juxtapose the destruction of the temple of the Philistines, the external weblike structure of his CCTV building, and the famous image of Ground Zero in which nothing but charred, prismatic metallic members remain. It is not a coincidence that the somewhat irrationally contorted format of the CCTV building participates in this narrative of ruin. Indeed, the strange shapes the building offers to the surrounding cityscape give the impression of impending collapse, a brinkmanship that Koolhaas clearly embraces in the aesthetic composition of his design.
TOWARD A NEW STABILITY

CCTV headquarters is an ambitious building. It was conceived at the same time that the design competition for Ground Zero took place – not in the backward-looking US, but in the parallel universe of China.

In communism, engineering has a high status, its laws resonating with Marxian wheels of history. To prove the stability of a structure that violates some of the most sincerely held convictions about logic and beauty, the engineering firm Arup had to dissect every detail of our design. The effort to reassure only reveals the scary aliveness of every structure – elasticity, creep, shrinkage, sagging, bending, buckling. Serving as a hypnotic window, the computer analyzes and exposes the shocking vividness of the mineral world with the tenacity of a pervert.

I heard one of Cecil Balmond's engineers at Arup describe, without irony or noticeable waverings, how two sloping steel structures in our design could be connected only at dawn. They would be exposed to different solar heat gain due to their relative positions on the ground and would be most likely to share the same temperature after cooling off overnight. I was elated and horrified by the sheer outrageousness of the problem we had set before them. Why do they never say no? ■ ■ ■

Wired 8, 2008, p128

Koolhaas' observations about the shifting subjective agency of the architect in the US under neoliberalism, and his will to intervene (even recklessly) in China and to subsequently escape a set of overly deterministic historical circumstances become very interesting when one
V. High vs. Popular and the Built Environment

Part of what makes the CCTV building so interesting is that unlike other starchitect commissions one might attribute to the "Bilbao effect," this is a building constructed for a public broadcaster. Here is a challenge to the pattern that associates the efforts of the starchitect with a kind of democratizing of high culture. The creation of the starchitect is intended to both facilitate a city's success in the global marketplace and to sell to a popular audience cultural formats that are traditionally elitist. Predictably enough, however, the success of the Bilbao "franchise" of the Guggenheim museums has been criticized for participating in a process of gentrification in that city. It follows that as the city becomes more economically successful, so too must its inhabitants. In other words, the market system and its culture are not under these conditions opposed, but with the popularising of the elite comes a concomitant paradox: the importation of wealth-based stratification to centres of consumption dedicated to the process of democratizing high culture. Similarly, the Beaubourg area of Paris has been radically affected by the construction of the highly successful Centre Georges Pompidou Baudrillard critiques in terms of the "Beaubourg effect"; and the Centre Pompidou is such a popular "brand" that it has been adapted to become a travelling exhibition that appears temporarily in other locations, and has been established in two provincial locations in France (e.g., Centre Pompidou-Metz), and other locations in Europe, Asia, and Central and South America. In other words, a high cultural paradigm of art is being "enfranchised" with the capacity to spread with the viral tenacity of global capitalistic growth.

The placement of the CCTV broadcasting facilities inside such an iconic starchitectural creation illustrates a set of emergent material conditions. There, visitors are taken on tours of the building in guided groups, are able to see the "TV Culture Hall" and the "Culture Corridor," which display in six-metre-high passageways the history of the CCTV and of Beijing respectively. They can then visit a large observation deck and eat in a rotating restaurant, before visiting a nearby man-made park where sea creatures wander quietly behind glassed enclosures. Transparency is the watchword, and it is played out as a kind of scopophilic attraction to the need to democratised access to this: China's state controlled consumption dedicated to the process of democratising high culture. Similarly, the Beaubourg area of Paris has been radically affected by the construction of the highly successful Centre Georges Pompidou Baudrillard critiques in terms of the "Beaubourg effect"; and the Centre Pompidou is such a popular "brand" that it has been adapted to become a travelling exhibition that appears temporarily in other locations, and has been established in two provincial locations in France (e.g., Centre Pompidou-Metz), and other locations in Europe, Asia, and Central and South America. In other words, a high cultural paradigm of art is being "enfranchised" with the capacity to spread with the viral tenacity of global capitalistic growth.

Under the conditions of Gans's moral taxonomy, the travellers who sojourn to Bilbao are certainly participating in a popular cultural phenomenon, especially considering that much of the contemporary art curated there is for Gans the shadow of high art that remains after high modernism. The corporeal mobility required to cast their tourist's gaze upon the contents of the Bilbao Guggenheim is paradigmatic of the discharge of desire "in imagined satisfaction" Gans describes. Let us explore this dialectic in the context of the starchitect whose buildings have become tantamount to artworks in the manner in which they operate against a history of high versus popular. The popular audience will usually encounter buildings independently of the architect's oeuvre or theoretical writings, and whilst an artwork in the high art tradition typically appears in the reified material conditions of a gallery or museum ("public" works notwithstanding), a building is part of the cityscape and participates in extant victimary narratives irrespective of the surrounds to the building-as-text. In the case of a starchitect, a popular audience has begun to gain some access to their subjective presence in larger cultural narratives, and so the division of the desired object-as-structure—elasticity, creep, shrinkage, sagging, bending, buckling. Serving as a hypnotic window, the computer analyzes and exposes the shocking vividness of the mineral world with the tenacity of a pervert. I heard one of Cecil Balmond's engineers at Arup describe, without irony or noticeable wavering, how two sloping steel structures in our design could be connected only at dawn. They would be exposed to different solar heat gain due to their relative positions on the ground and would be most likely to share the same temperature after cooling off overnight. I was elated and horrified by the sheer outrageousness of the problem we had set before them. Why do they never say no? ("Beijing" 129)

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The visceral quality of Koolhaas' dialogue with his own planning process is tantamount to self-mythologising here in the popular setting of Wired magazine, where the technophile is invited to fetishize digital technologies (again, in the scopophilic mode), as one can see from the layout and artwork. The reader is invited to imagine the collapse of the building as an erotic performance; his anthropomorphic presentation of the structure is described as a computer animated peep show, in a perverted bacchanalian festival of risk. Furthermore, there seems a
The results are difficult to predict. Locally it is most likely to facilitate a social context that is far less than transparent. More broadly, we must conclude that rather than reaffirm the social order with his dire warnings of ruin, Koolhaas simply indulges a popular desire to see it all torn down. What is certain is that the building is designed to become an iconic representation of a situation of culture, to startle and capture attention in the scopophilic mode: it is not surprising that Koolhaas worked hard to ensure its opening was staged to coincide with the "ancient" spectacle of the Olympic games in 2008 (it was not actually completed until 2012). There is no resolution to the resentment actualised through the attention gained via this brinkmanship and its portrayals of impending disaster, and the text does not stop here—it is paradoxical situation of his restless individual desire to get buildings built, and his ambivalent delivery and rhetoric is both obsequious and mobile. It has since been subject to the visual mechanisms that overarch and define how culture works in a global, networked way. For example, in the popular discourse around the building locally, a conversation has been had about its profanity, with one Chinese scholar claiming the CCTV and sister TVCC buildings are poised to begin copulating[11]. For celebrity Chinese artist and digital media performer Ai Weiwei who regularly posts photographs of the CCTV building to his very popular Instagram feed, it has recently become a litmus test for the smog in Beijing. Its relative visibility entering the ironically "filtered" context of Instagram as a commentary on pollution in China, the engine room of global capitalism.

Despite his concern with collapse, ecological disturbance does not seem to intervene in Koolhaas' desire to design and construct monolithic buildings that participate in what is soon to become the greatest human machine ever built, China.[12] In the scope of this discussion the focus has been maintained on the CCTV building and the discourse that surrounds it. The longer history of Koolhaas' own oeuvre of theoretical writings will make for an interesting parallel discussion of its own in the context of post-millennialism and pre-humiliation. One example is his essay of 2002, "Junkspace," written as he was competing to build the CCTV building as a stream-of-conscious style critique of how the built environment reveals the damaging influence of globalisation and modernisation:

"Junkspace" was published in anticipation of the design of the CCTV building. One year after the staged "opening" of the building in 2009 at the Harvard based "Ecological Urbanism: Alternative and Sustainable Cities of the Future" conference, Koolhaas's keynote seems to reflect on the pre-humiliation outlined above. In his—again, ambivalent—address he argues that progress, or "advancement," and anti-modern "apocalyptic" cultural narratives stand as dialectically opposed perspectives that now come to define how the built environment is composed. The result has been a lack of "depth" in architectural knowledge that has produced a skyline of icons showing, mercilessly, that an icon may be individually plausible, but that collectively they form an essentially counterproductive and self-canceling kind of landscape. So that is out. Unfortunately, the sum total of current architectural knowledge hasn't grown beyond this opposition. That is where the market economy and the evolution of architectural culture have been extremely irresponsible in letting knowledge simply disappear between the different preoccupations. ("Sustainability")

He concludes that ecological concerns mean the end of monolithic icons that collectively advertise the weight of modernity, and that in any case, the market economy and the discipline of architecture participate in a shared dynamic that has not attended to the knowledge required to overcome the paradoxical circumstances of overconsumption. These are such that progress relies on the marketplace; but that market exchange demands growth and is so complex in its operation that governing growth has proved near impossible. As Koolhaas argues with ambivalent clarity, the mimetic desire for iconic buildings demonstrates this "mercilessly," and in our collective history "[w]e have all of these images of buildings that do not perform correctly, but our answers are not necessarily very deep. I don't exclude myself from any of these comments, as I hope you realize." ("Sustainability"). Koolhaas argues for his own agency as an active participant in a mutual resentment toward and desire for participation in the structures and constructions that constrain and liberate his own ruinous will-to-power.

These recent cultural emergences incorporate ancient ethical divisions whilst reflecting the effects of contemporaneous conditions of culture, in which the intersection of subjectivities brings us to the issue of whether we are seeing evidence here of a novel—or what Gans has called post-millennial—function for celebrity. On a global stage Ai Weiwei may be considered to exceed the usual circumstances of celebrity in that his heroic status is, from some perspectives, placed beyond question—he has really suffered for his cause—but the starchitect has not. The starchitect is not a wholly separate kind of celebrity, since they seem to possess a quality of expertise associated of the artist or author, and this tends to be identifiable with a particular aesthetic, as in the context of the silver clad Frank Gehry buildings that generate large scale ritual visitation. But the celebrity architect intervenes in the cityscape, demonstrating a will-to-power that celebrities do not have. All celebrity is "popular," for as soon as the figure in question is claimed in this public way, they are subject to the kind of pre-humiliation Gans discusses,
whether they are possessed of some particular genius or not. This is, a self-ironized version of what classical culture called fame. Heroes are not celebrities, and we rarely treat them as such; the aura of celebrity exceeds the recognition due to merit, making the resentment it generates both more virulent and more superficial. "Humanizing" celebrities contributes to their pre-humiliation: the trivia of their lives makes them comparable to ourselves, undecidably objects of greater sympathy and greater resentment. At the same time, the achievements for which we celebrate them help reconcile us to our anonymity. Actors are everyone who centralize our everyday problems; sports figures possess rare talents, but in areas peripheral to the needs of the modern world; and the abilities of entertainers like Michael Jackson are expended in performing our resentments as a sacrificial ceremony. ("The Last Celebrity")

The starchitect straddles fame and celebrity, because on the one hand, Gehry and Koolhaas' buildings are, inevitably, subject to the resentment associated of the aura of celebrity. Gaining credibility in a community of architecture students will demand that you are past expressing wonder at the work of a starchitect, just as an art student will need to know who to raise to exceed the baseline of a conversation that celebrates Picasso's pastiche. Gehry is, in some ways, the hero of Bilbao, and in each city to which they lend their prestige the starchitect is both denigrated and celebrated. We celebrate them for their achievements and we cannot wholly disarm them as one can the celebrity by focusing on the triviality of their lives (actors), their peculiar expertise (sportstars) or performance (performers).

Starchitects participate in acts of creation that some consider to possess unnecessary flamboyance; a largesse designed to advertise the wealth of the city. As we have seen, discourse around Rybczynski's influential notion of a "Bilbao effect" describes such displays as decadent, and the product of a profane influence that corrodes the integrity of culture, adumbrating the symbolic richness of its representative force. This force is assumed to be ireneric, and generative of the sacred stability of the human community that dwells in the city. The built environment performs a crucial role in the symbolic order of the city, which is part of a network of cities, and the hub of surrounding human networks that under the conditions of globalisation become the nexus for a system of interlocking communities of all sizes. In attempting to explain the real and imagined dimensions of the effects that might be traced back to the originary scene in Bilboa, it is useful to recall that generative anthropology asserts that across the intricately scalable spectrum of human collaboration, culture is scenic. Gans argues that in modern, secular society the sacred centre to this scenicity is implicit, and the effect of this can be observed in sociality that lies outside the ritual formality imposed by institutions like the concert hall or university. Specifically, as individuals gather in groups of two or more attention is garnered by participants in these scenes by force of purpose or virtue. As such, individuals are subject to resentment should they monopolise attention beyond these scenes by force of purpose or virtue. Indeed, for Gans the "degree of this implicitness may be said to measure the community's secularity, which even in the most extreme case allows us to distinguish between ritual or simply cultural phenomena and the interactions of daily life" (The Last Celebrity). The celebrity, however, moves through the everyday via the convention of the institutions that generate attention, such that they come to be surrounded by an imaginary aura of sacrality. The celebrity is entrapped by an "implicit public, institutionalized, distributed narratives" to transform ordinary people, "a supplement of sacred presence" understood as a supplementary scene of interaction rather than an integrated phenomenon. As such, when we encounter a celebrity in the flesh, we experience this separation directly as an auratic removal. It is this secular "supplement of sacred presence" that the starchitect supplies, or institutionalizes, in the cityscape to calibrate the global situation of the city. To the residents of the city, then, the building is generative of the conditions for a scene of culture that acts as a reminder of their own status ("you are a part of/ outside of this scene of privilege") in relation to the city, and thereby, in relation to the starchitect who is an extension of the buildings they create. This is why the view of the CCTV building from the suburbs is so compelling, and why Ai Weiwei photographs the building. It is a product of the culture it generates, and a comment upon it: it is both inside the scene and supplementary to it. Here is the paradox of the starchitect and of culture in general, which sets out to represent individual subjective and community (city), and to be a model for it, since the building is meant to generate status, and to draw the city and its people closer to the centre of a global culture.

Thus, the starchitect is possessed of subjective agency that does not stem from excess wealth, and a peculiar capacity to mediate this agency in a fashion that is very much like the celebrity. The latter Gans compares to the secular function of the ancient figure of the shaman, with whom the celebrity shares an aesthetic and spiritual function, rather than an economic one ("The Last Celebrity"). The starchitect refracts this legacy in a more kinetic mode, and is engaged to create a sacred centre to the city—and each city dares to place itself close to the centre of the world—in a manner that is anything but in keeping with Gans's description of the celebrity functioning to "reconcile us to our anonymity" by virtue of their quotient domains of activity. Indeed, starchitecture is formally tasked to stage the extravagance of agency that exceeds the usual boundaries created by civic planning and architectural disciplinarity. This is the flamboyance Rybczynski decries, highlighting for us that in exercising their so recently endowed agency individual starchitects attract to themselves attention on a protean scale, and with it the style of resentment discourse surrounding analyses of the generative influence of Bilboa is so freighted with. The starchitect plays a role in constructing centres of secular worship, or scenes for the performance of sacred high cultural paradigm activities. We might consider these to be arbitrarily synthesized stages for the performance of ritual behaviours: I travel to Bilbao to photograph the Guggenheim and preserve my memories of sacrality. The post-millennial pilgrimage is one conducted by the wealthy minority to attend sites of secular cultural significance; after all, does one really go on a sacred pilgrimage (along with millions of other adherents) to visit the Bilbao Guggenheim, or to take a tour of the memorabilia that festoons the halls of the CCTV building? Rare, to put it mildly, is the occasion on which a Muslim pilgrim, having travelled the many miles to Mecca to perform the Hajj, pauses to take a selfie amid the throng that surrounds the Masjid al-Haram. Gans's description of the relation of the marketplace to popular culture captures this secular imaginary as follows: "popular culture remains utopian as ever, reconstituting originary deferral in myriad ways, but this utopian closure is accepted as entertainment, as a kind of (soft or hard) spiritual pornography, rather than as defining the goal of our moral existence" ("Post-Millenial Age"). Here the individual is governed by the popular to the extent that the popular guides subjectivity toward continuous restaging of the event of deferral, and is invited to identify with this directly. That, as they say, is entertainment; the imaginary, mimetic participation in and satisfaction that is derived from dramatic formats of representation that direct attention and focus desire upon the suddenness of the popular. Perhaps this is why the secular pilgrim is compelled to continuously adopt the pose of narcissus; futilely attempting through the virtualising procedure of creating digitally mediated and horizontally distributed narratives to gather and surround themselves with the supplementary sacred status that is generative of the aura that surrounds the celebrity we might happen across in the directness of everyday life.

VI. Conclusion

The secular ritual of return, then, to a sacred scene, or scene of origin, is entangled with a global imaginary generated through refracted memories of sacrality. The post-millennial pilgrimage is one conducted by the wealthy minority to attend sites of secular cultural significance; after all, does one really go on a sacred pilgrimage (along with millions of other adherents) to visit the Bilbao Guggenheim, or to take a tour of the memorabilia that festoons the halls of the CCTV building? Rare, to put it mildly, is the occasion on which a Muslim pilgrim, having travelled the many miles to Mecca to perform the Hajj, pauses to take a selfie amid the throng that surrounds the Masjid al-Haram. Gans's description of the relation of the marketplace to popular culture captures this secular imaginary as follows: "popular culture remains utopian as ever, reconstituting originary deferral in myriad ways, but this utopian closure is accepted as entertainment, as a kind of (soft or hard) spiritual pornography, rather than as defining the goal of our moral existence" ("Post-Millenial Age"). Here the individual is governed by the popular to the extent that the popular guides subjectivity toward continuous restaging of the event of deferral, and is invited to identify with this directly. That, as they say, is entertainment; the imaginary, mimetic participation in and satisfaction that is derived from dramatic formats of representation that direct attention and focus desire upon the suddenness of the popular. Perhaps this is why the secular pilgrim is compelled to continuously adopt the pose of narcissus; futilely attempting through the virtualising procedure of creating digitally mediated and horizontally distributed narratives to gather and surround themselves with the supplementary sacred status that is generative of the aura that surrounds the celebrity we might happen across in the directness of everyday life.
The secular pilgrim may fail to imprison themselves with the celebrity on a supplementary scene of culture, but they will succeed in and gain satisfaction through a suspension of parallel kind via the measure of history, deliberate as they are in the performance of such narcissistic rituals. To be entranced by the self at the expense of the world, and only able to experience being there simultaneously with being elsewhere (digitally present), certainly appears to be just so: a refraction of popular culture. It does not seem extravagant to consider that these practices of self-representation might be products of ongoing engagement with spiritual pornography, particularly given that such ritual behaviour is evidently narcissistic and conducted in the scopophilic mode (think now, if you will, of the endless parade of celebrities whose home made pornography and nude selfies "leak" into digital networks of exchange). In any case, the post-postmodern—or post-millennial—sensibility, it seems, is one marked by such representations of paradoxicality. This sensibility is shot through with a formalised paradigm of ambivalence, as is so ably captured by James Clifford's declaration of "good riddance" to the loss of a previously imagined security 25 years after Writing Cultures. Recall from section one of this discussion that Clifford describes a paradoxical desire for the ruinous collapse of the "First World" bubble that has provided the security and stability that permits him to adopt this reflective, academic pose in the first instance. This is less a form of nihilism though, than the release of unbelief, and an ecstasy of visceral immersion in unmediated reality, in his words: (as quoted above) "the excitement, the fear, of being in the real." Clifford's position is certainly a guilty one, and one in which nature has been the victim of his earlier, privileged perspective and all the bias that came with being exterior to the "exposure" he now purports to feel, which he describes as "a version of what most people in the world have always known." But is it really? Or is it a performance driven by a victimary mindset that leads him to imagine boundaries that have now been somehow transgressed? Clifford, after all, is still speaking from the "bubble." His is a secular, clustered perspective that participates in an ambivalently framed attempt to claim something other than the guilty position of the wealthy persecutor of victims that include the global poor, and nature itself.

For Koolhaas, the built environment is continuous with the lack of reflexivity Clifford now feels he has transcended, particularly in large buildings where air conditioning has contorted buildings into "junkspace" that "is sealed, held together not by structure but by skin, like a bubble" (176). The bubble is metonymic with the illusion of control that is substantive of progress in the logic of late modernity, and the celebrity architect is tantamount to the loud one in the conversation; attracting the resentment of the group, and as Gans argues, is certainly at risk of becoming "a Girardian scapegoat as soon as his centrality no longer appears indispensable" ("The Last Celebrity"). While the celebrity does not play a central functional role in society and therefore does not usually become the victim of direct violence, the psychological pressure of being subject to collective desire and resentment is profound. In some important ways this is exactly what is represented in the context of the CCTV building, which is a performance of a collapse, and where Koolhaas has constructed the building to appear as though it is tumbling to earth. This effect is a common one in his architecture and connects to a growing pressure for his designs to succeed, and the larger context of his resentment toward the US. The central position of the anthropomorphized latter means that it too is at risk of becoming "a Girardian scapegoat as soon as his centrality no longer appears indispensable" ("The Last Celebrity").

This is less a form of nihilism though, than the release of unbelief, and an ecstasy of visceral immersion in unmediated reality, in his words: "'First World' bubble" that has provided the security and stability that permits him to adopt this reflective, academic pose in the first instance. A parody of its own destruction, and a demonstration of the mode of culture—where culture generates itself even as it represents. It is no coincidence that his reflexive resentment toward an anticipated removal from Ground Zero inspired Koolhaas to distort the vertical into a prism exposed to the kind of schadenfreude that effects Koolhaas' design, where the centre of the centre is distorted into a looped version of itself, a psychological pressure of being subject to collective desire and resentment is profound. In some important ways this is exactly what is represented in the context of the CCTV building, which is a performance of a collapse, and where Koolhaas has constructed the building to appear as though it is tumbling to earth. This effect is a common one in his architecture and connects to a growing pressure for his designs to succeed, and the larger context of his resentment toward the US. The central position of the anthropomorphized latter means that it too is at risk of becoming "a Girardian scapegoat as soon as his centrality no longer appears indispensable" ("The Last Celebrity"). While the celebrity does not play a central functional role in society and therefore does not usually become the victim of direct violence, the psychological pressure of being subject to collective desire and resentment is profound. In some important ways this is exactly what is represented in the context of the CCTV building, which is a performance of a collapse, and where Koolhaas has constructed the building to appear as though it is tumbling to earth. This effect is a common one in his architecture and connects to a growing pressure for his designs to succeed, and the larger context of his resentment toward the US. The central position of the anthropomorphized latter means that it too is at risk of becoming "a Girardian scapegoat as soon as his centrality no longer appears indispensable" ("The Last Celebrity").


Works Cited


Notes

1. Latour’s critique of structure via the concept of the “network” is an important point of departure. He attempts to map subjectivity based on a critique of the plastic modernist platform, famously claiming, "we have never been modern" and highlighting the misleading effect of dualisms such as nature/culture, and subject/object (Latour, 1991). However, Latour does not offer a tangible alternative to the dualisms of modernity and despite his protests, the "Prince of Networks" has become the regent presiding over the relativist, and curiously structured actant network research methodologies that have found great traction in the inchoate and apparently "nonmodern" discipline of public relations. (back)

2. Elided from this list for the purpose of brevity are a range of movements in theory and philosophy that attempt to move beyond the human, and into a state and approach now commonly known as "posthuman." Here the goal is to adopt emergent, ontologically unstable precepts that
exceed the genealogy of influence inspired by linguistic analysis by adopting nonhuman agents as their vehicle such as animate and inanimate natural entities and technologies. Key concepts in this shift are derived from the later work of Deleuze and Guattari, and on concepts developed by Latour and Stengers. Much of the formally identified posthumanist criticism is inspired by Donna Haraway’s “cyborg,” whilst more recent examples in philosophy include the “flat ontology” and “assemblage” of Manuel DeLanda (the latter a Deleuzean concept), the “hyperobjects” of Timothy Morton and the object oriented ontology of Graham Harman. See the following texts for further reading: DeLanda’s *A new philosophy of society: Assemblage theory and social complexity*, Haraway’s *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Harman’s *The Quadruple Object*, and Morton’s *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World.* (back)

3. Bourriaud’s most recent published discussion on the topic is *The Radicant* (2009). (back)

4. A notable exclusion from this discussion is the “performatism” of Raoul Eshelman. Eshelman takes up Gans’s originary conception of the ostensive in order to argue that we are entering an era marked by a reaction to poststructuralism and postmodernism, “in which the stylization of ostensivity qua performance is becoming the unavoidable mode of aesthetic expression” (“Performatism in Architecture”). Eshelman confines himself to aesthetic experience in describing what he considers to be monistic performances that require an “out-of-the-ordinary act” in which “subject sign and thing” come together to create “aesthetic experience out of transcendency” (“Performatism in Architecture”). He has applied this approach to the context of architecture in post-wall Berlin. Whilst his analysis of Berlin architecture is apropos to this discussion, it does not fit within the scope here. Eshelman identifies nine devices of performatist architecture, including “impendency,” of which he writes “[b]uildings of this kind are architectonically so dynamic that they seem to be on the verge of collapse; they work, as it were, by putting fear of the Lord and awe of the architect into the viewer at the same time.” Impendency would seem to be very relevant to the CCTV building, and in particular, a number of other unbuilt designs as mentioned at footnote ten below. (back)

5. Gans’s discussions of post-millennialism are conducted across several of his *Chronicles of Love and Resentment*, including nos. 209, 224, 230, 237 and 377. (back)

6. Douglas Collins employs the term *prehumiliation* as an explanatory mechanism in three discussions published in *Anthropoetics* (3.1, 5.2, 8.2), but does not directly explain its meaning. Eric Gans, similarly, employs the term in several discussions in his *Chronicles of Love of Resentment*, and observed that prehumiliation is “a concept of his that I found very useful for talking about popular culture” (email communication with the author). (back)

7. CCTV is the acronym adopted by the Chinese public broadcasting service, and stands for Chinese Central Television. (back)

8. OMA is described on their website as "a leading international partnership practicing architecture, urbanism, and cultural analysis" (quote taken from http://www.oma.eu/oma, visited 15/10/14). (back)

9. There are some correlatives with Guy Debord’s attention and arguments in the *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1983) with the use of spectacle in this essay; this is not the intended use here. (back)

10. See the *Smithsonian.com* article “The Unbuilt High-rise Designs of Rem Koolhaas and OMA” for a discussion of these, including images at http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-unbuilt-high-rise-designs-of-rem-koolhaas-and-oma-31406521/ (visited 6/6/13). (back)

11. Xiao Mo, a retired professor of architecture from Tsinghua University published a vehemently critical article to the Tecn academic web portal entitled "The Structural Similarity of the CCTV Headquarters and Hindquarters." He cited a series of pornographic images in the OMA periodical publication *Content*, arguing that Koolhaas had deliberately designed the CCTV to resemble a naked woman on hands and knees. It has since been removed from the web, but republished in English translation on a number of websites. See, for example http://www.danwei.org/architecture/rem_koolhaas_and_cctv_porn.php (visited 5/6/2013). (back)

12. Koolhaas and OMA won a competition to design the Shenzhen Stock Exchange in 2006. The building was completed in October 2013, and carries a similar set of ambivalent symbolic gestures as those evident in the context of the CCTV building. It is described on the OMA website as follows: "The essence of the stock market is speculation: it is based on capital, not material. The Shenzhen Stock Exchange is conceived as a physical materialization of the virtual stock market: it is a building with a floating base, representing the stock market - more than physically accommodating it" (http://www.oma.eu/projects/2013/shenzhen-stock-exchange-hq/, visited 27/09/14). (back)
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Shared Guilt for the Ambush at Roncevaux

Robert Rois

In our analysis we address first the dreams of Charlemagne, which reveal the pathetic plight of the King in terms of the choices he makes and those he fails to make. We then shall expose the poetic framework in terms of a quadrangular family relationship central to plot motivation in The Song of Roland. Both, the monarch’s dreams and the family relations combine in the narrative of the poem to drive Ganelon into the role of scapegoat at the end.

Charlemagne’s Dreams

The dreams play an important role in the plot. We find textual evidence of antagonism between Ganelon and Roland, yet the actual reason for Ganelon’s betrayal in the Chanson is a difficult issue to address directly. Enmity toward Roland definitely translates into a breach of loyalty against the King. On the other hand, the dreams of Charlemagne show a glaring premonition in the text upon which the Emperor refuses to act. Roland himself is too bent on destruction of the enemy to cherish the idea of returning to France. The discord between the three main characters of the Chanson remains an issue to be resolved. We contend that their mutual enmity condemns the rearguard to destruction.

The dreams occur in two pairs, before the separation of the rearguard, and after the French host’s revenge against Marsile. The crucial decisions: a) to separate from the vanguard, turned rearguard, and b) for the host to turn around and head for France, both shall prove fatal. Since neither decision had been made before the first dream sequence, the content of the dreams reveal their premonitory quality. Aware of the King’s failure to act at a crucial moment in the plot, Erich Auerbach ascribes to Charles a somnambulistic paralysis. In the Emperor’s first dream of the early sequence, the Count who named Roland to the guard is identified as the King’s attacker, who breaks the spear in his grasp:

Clasped in his hands he holds the ash wood spear:  
Count Ganelon wrenches it from his grasp,  
With raging strength shatters and breaks the wood,  
And sends the splinters flying against the sky.

Entre ses poinz teneit sa hanste fraisnine;  
Guenes li quens l’ad sur lui saisie;
Par tel aïr l’at estrussee e brandie
Qu’envers le cel en volent les escicles. [720-723]

Evidently Ganelon exerts a virulent hold on Charles. The imagery of the forceful grab which sends splinters flying is unforgettable. The physical attack is a clear affront to the King’s safety and supreme authority. The crucial issue is the open identity of Ganelon as aggressor.

In the second dream of the first sequence Charlemagne dreams he is at home, where a beast bites his right arm.

After that dream another vision came:
He was in France, in his chapel at Aix.
A vicious beast was biting his right arm.
Out of the forest he sees a leopard run,
And he himself it cruelly attacks.
From his great hill a boarhound rushes out
And comes to Charles, running with leaps and bounds,
Seizes the beast, biting off its right ear.

Aprés iceste altre avisijun sunjat,
Qu’il ert en France, a sa capele ad Ais.
El destre braz li morst uns vers si mals;
Devers Ardene vit venir uns leuparz,
Sun cors demenie mult fierement asalt.
D’enz de sale uns veltres avalat.
Qui vint a Carles lé galops e les salz;
La destre oreille al premer ver trenchat. [725-732]

The forested Ardenne region is the land of Ganelon’s relatives; but the dark woods also harbor the dreadful mystery of the unknown. Together, the contrast evokes the vicinity of home mingled with a sensation of dread. We tend to identify domesticated animals with the good, and exotic beasts with an enemy. Despite the apparent premonitory nature of this vision, Charles remains impervious to danger, and the ambush at Roncevaux unfolds in the narrative. The bear attacks the King’s right arm, and a leopard’s lunge follows. According to Joseph Bédier: "the bear who bites Charlemagne’s arm is Ganelon, the leopard is Pinabel, who shall affront the King as Ganelon’s champion, the hound is Thierry, who shall face Pinabel on Charlemagne’s behalf." The bear is definitely Ganelon, but the leopard could also represent Marsile; and the vicious dog is perhaps a figure of Roland, who heads a smaller contingent. Joseph Duggan remarks: "Critics have been divided over the meaning of Charlemagne’s second dream, which some see as foreshadowing Roncevaux, others the Trial of Ganelon." The dreams may be taken to represent: 1) Ganelon’s betrayal, 2) the battle at Roncevaux, 3) the Baligant encounter, and 4) the trial at the end, respectively. Such symbolism seems sensible enough, except that the second dream also encloses possible reference to the trial by combat. Although the reference to Roncevaux is appealing, there is no reason to believe that adopting one interpretation over the other is misleading or contradictory, due to the ambiguous nature of actual dreams. We may consider neither interpretation for the second dream to be mutually exclusive of the other if we focus on the essential gist: the dream may forecast simultaneously an assault against the French forces at Roncevaux and against royal supremacy at Aix. In either case, we should agree that the nightmarish quality of the dreams is relevant to the moral question about filial sacrifice. The difference in interpretation simply points to the temporal span of the King’s premonition regarding different assaults against royal authority in the narrative, early or late in the plot. Such an explanation does not resolve the controversy, but should establish contextual relevance despite the ambiguity.

The second pair of dream visions occurs after the ambush and obliteration of the rearguard; that is, after the King’s Army wreaks havoc against the Saracen forces to avenge the loss of the rearguard, and just before confrontation with the forces of Baligant, the emir who brings Saracen reinforcements from abroad. In the King’s second sequence of dream visions, we see an expansion of the threat to Charles. Reinforcements...
from abroad come to avenge Marsile. Baligant’s forces become a great number of monstrous enemies attacking Charles’ men:

   With great dismay Charles sees his knights attacked
   By vicious beasts—by leopards and by bears,
   Serpents and vipers, dragons and devils too,
   And there are griffons, thirty thousand and more,
   All of them leaping, charging against the Franks.

---

En grant dulor i viet ses chevalers.
Urs e leuparz les voelent puis manger,
Serpenz e guivres, dragun e averser;
Gripons i ad, plus de trente millers:
N’en i ad cel a Francais ne s’agiet. [2541-2545]

Dragons, leopards, vipers, and bears attack the Franks. Threats multiply as a consequence of Ganelon’s betrayal.

The King’s reciprocal concern for the Army is heightened. Powerless, the sleeping monarch despairs in the nightmare as he regards his men: “The Franks who cry, ‘Charlemagne, help us now!’” [2546] (14) This cry for help takes the place of the attack against the King that leaves him unarmèd in the first dream of the earlier sequence, for in both cases the monarch’s impotence is evident. The inability of the King to run to their aid intensifies the attack against Charles:

   And overwhelmed by pity and by grief,
   He starts out toward them, but something interferes:
   A mighty lion springs at him from a wood,
   Fearful to look at, raging and proud and bold;
   He leaps, attacking the person of the king.
   Grappling each other they wrestle violently:
   But who will rise a victor, who will fall?

---

Li reis en ad e dulur e pitet;
Aler i volt, mais il ad desturber:
Devers un gualt uns granz leons li vient,
Mult par e rt pesmes e orguillus e fiers,
Sun cors meïsmes i asalt e requert
E prenent sei a braz ambesdous por loiter;
Mais ço ne set liquels abat ne quels chiet. [2547-2553]

The King wants to aid his men but is restrained by a lion. There is a threat against Charlemagne, and the King, unable to delegate his defense to anyone, must withstand the personal attack against himself directly. This blow to the monarch’s safety and authority is seen in the uncertain outcome of the ensuing struggle, for Charles’ powerlessness reflects the vulnerability of his men in facing Baligant’s forces. The expression for an indecisive victory which had provided closure for the second dream of the first sequence is repeated in altered form:

   They don’t know which side will win the fight.

   But who will rise a victor, who will fall?

   But he could not see which one of them would lose.

---

Il ne sevent liquels d’els la veintrat. [735]

Mais ço ne set liquels abat ne quels chiet. [2553]
Mais ço ne set liquels veint ne quels nun. [2567]

The adversative conjunction *mais,* "but," introduces a negative hypothesis; this formulaic expression caps both dreams of the second sequence. Noticing the subject of the main verb in line 735, *ils* > modern French *ils*, we realize that it was the Army that pondered over the outcome while contemplating the fight. The phase of the attack against royal authority at that time was in the planning stages of a mishandled diplomatic tangle. After the first sequence of dream visions, we have the nomination of Roland triggering the actions heralded by the return of Ganelon from the enemy camp in the scene preceding description of the sleeping Charles. The action is still in an embryonic stage, and the ambush of Roland had not yet taken place. After the second dream sequence, however, Marsile is on the run, bleeding to death due to the injury inflicted by Roland [2574]. (15) Through bitter reminiscence of the **right arm** metaphor, the effects of Roland’s death are again brought to the foreground, for Charles’ vulnerability against Baligant is parallel to the danger his nephew faced in the ambush at Roncevaux. The king subconsciously suspects further trouble.

The second vision of this final dream sequence also sets the stage again, more along the lines of a diplomatic issue than as a strictly military encounter, reflecting the ambiguity we saw in the second dream of the earlier sequence:

Later that night he had another dream:
He was in Aix; on a dais he stood,
Holding a bear bound tight with double chains.
Thirty more bears came out of the Ardennes,
Each of them speaking exactly like a man.
They said to Charles, "Sire, give him back to us!
It isn't right for you to keep him here;
We cannot choose but bring our kinsman help."
Out of the palace there came a hunting dog
Who then attacked the largest of the bears;
On the green grass apart from all the rest,
While the king watched, they fought a dreadful fight.
But he could not see which one of them would lose.

Après icel li vien un'altre avisuion,
Qu'il ert en France, ad Ais, a un perrun,
En dous chaeines si teneit un brohun.
Devers Ardene veeit venir XXX. urs,
Cascun parolet altresi cume hum.
Diseient li: "Sire, rendez le nus!
Il nen est dreiz que il set mais od vos;
Nostre parent devum estre a sucurs."
De sun paleis uns veltres i acurt;
Entre les altres asaillit le greignur
Sur l'erbe verte, utele ses cumpaignuns.
La vit li reis si merveillus estur;
Mais ço ne set liqueuls veint ne quels nun. [2555-2567]

The second dream in both series of double visions is introduced in similar fashion by a formulaic expression, which sets the sleeping monarch at home [cf. 724-726; 2555-2556]. But the semiotic content of the vision suffers alterations that parallel the events at Ganelon’s future trial. For instance, the bear that had bitten Charles’ right arm is in chains, and from Ardenne thirty bears come to aid their relative. The benevolence of the King is in question because the thirty bears appear to be in quest of deliverance; but Charles’ policy does not gain any benefit from liberal magnanimity. As previously mentioned, the earlier series of double visions had moved from Ganelon’s treason in the first dream to suggestions in the second dream of the battle at Roncevaux, or Pinabel’s challenge at Ganelon’s trial and the subsequent duel. This later dream sequence unveils the King’s inability to aid his men, who are attacked by countless foes, and the future assault against royal authority at Ganelon’s trial. We go from a very cruel physical reality to the ideological
ramifications foreseeable in the future as its result. The King’s concern in both visions escalates due to worsening conditions; hence the implications lean toward a marked greater need for prevention. There must be an appropriate reaction to a crisis in order to quell future crises. The hunting dog charges on, engaging the biggest of the bears; and again the outcome seems ambivalent [2567]. The single bear could represent Pinabel, but the focus on the thirty relatives turns our attention more toward the direct parliamentary challenge against the King’s authority rather than to the trial by combat. The duel itself is not as much in the foreground as is the royal authority that is being contested and challenged. A careful reader notices that, while the first sequence of dream visions shows a crisis, which turns from the diplomatic inception of Ganelon’s treason to military implementation of the ambush at Roncevaux, the second series progresses in symbolic representation from the suggestion for direct military confrontation toward reference to the need to arrive at judiciary adjudication; that is to say, from Baligant’s confrontation and the Pinabel/Thierry duel we move on toward a need to achieve resolution for any ensuing legal friction occasioned by antagonism similar to the obstinacy displayed by the thirty relatives and the barons who favor Ganelon at court. Differentiation between friend and foe must be clearly established.(16)

To end ambivalence in dispensation of justice, Ganelon’s guarantors must be chastised by the court. At the trial Charles rises to the occasion because suffering strengthens the figure of the King. Consequently, the audience is drawn to a more mature Charlemagne.

Quadrangular Relationship

In her *Matriarchy, Patriarchy, and Imperial Security in Africa*, Marsha R. Robinson explains:

Many of the Celts, Cantabrians, Picts and Teutons had laws by which property, especially land, was inherited from one’s mother and her brother. If a foreigner were to marry into such a family, say a soldier to a local woman, he could not inherit the land. It would be controlled by the bride and the bride’s male kin. A foreign husband was indebted to his brother-in-law who controlled the center of wealth accumulation. A foreign soldier could not transfer his wife’s inheritance to the empire that he served. Wealth remained within the bride’s family. This is called matrilineal inheritance. (17)

Glorification of the nephew can be seen as one of the main features of a system which establishes matrilineal inheritance. W.O. Farnsworth in his study *Uncle and Nephew in the Old French Chansons de Geste* insists that in a primitive state of civilization matrilineal descent is important in tracing heritage. (18) Farnsworth argues that the matrilineal tracing of descent goes back to an earlier time, preceding the patriarchal trends prevalent in the Roman Empire: "The introduction of Christianity and of Roman influence among the tribes of the north must have been the most important factor in the transition to paternal authority." (19)

Nephew-right emerges from the earlier Teutonic tradition of kinship established through the maternal uncle. Farnsworth starts his study by explaining:

Our modern conception of the family as consisting of father, mother, children would at first thought seem to go back in an unbroken line to Roman laws, so that it is puzzling to discover that French literature of the Middle Ages, in its delineation of certain aspects of family life, shows markedly the influence of the earliest state of human society about which we have information. As a matter of fact the Old French *Chansons de Geste* show plainly that there existed in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, in the form of tradition at least, a survival of an earlier condition in which the family was based upon the matriarchal principle." (20)

The term *matriarchal* seems to be a misnomer since the inferior position of the medieval woman is apparent. (21) Yet the uncle-nephew relationship reveals the importance of matrilineal descent in the continuation of family tradition. For this reason Farnsworth considers the prevalence of nephew-right in the *Chansons de Geste* to have sentimental and not legal roots.(22) Survival of the belief in matrilineal inheritance is not based on female supremacy as such, but rather on the fact that in very ancient times the
physiological basis for paternity was relatively unknown. (23) At the advent of civilization, an offspring was a sure possession of the woman, and, to be certain of preserving lineage, property and power were not transmitted from father to son, but from a man to his sister's son. The looser the bond between husband and wife, the closer the tie between a wife's brother to her as sister, and, hence, the closer a relative a maternal uncle could become to his nephew. The uncle-nephew relationship between Charlemagne and the hero leads the King to feel extreme responsibility for his safety. Before and after the ambush at Roncevaux, the attempt to justify his nephew's death torments Charlemagne.(24)

Roland's predicament affects the pathology of Charlemagne. Since Charles is reluctant to justify the loss of Roland, he avoids consciously viewing his dream visions as indicative of a need to restore order in the realm. Yet when Count Naimon begs for an explanation for the King's downcast demeanor, Charles discloses contents of the vision to his noble liege. A premonition of disaster is already evident to Charles in the first dream of the early sequence, as he soon thereafter discloses to Naimon:

'I can't keep silent the sorrow that I feel,
For Ganelon will be the doom of France.
Last night an angel sent me a warning dream:
I held a spear—he broke it in my grasp,
That count who named my nephew to the guard.'

………………………………………………

'\textit{Si grant doel ai ne puis muer nel pleigne.}
\textit{Par Guenelun serat destruite France.}
\textit{Enoit m'avint un avisiun d'angele,}
\textit{Que entre mes puinz me depeçout ma hanste;}
\textit{Chi ad juget mis nés a rereguaerde!}'\cite{834-838}

The treason of Ganelon and death of Roland become the anguish of Charlemagne.

Any truce or delay in the fighting is temporary. We recall that the \textit{Chanson} begins with the format "Assembly-Embassy/Assembly-Embassy." The Assembly at the Saracen camp brings out the need for a stratagem to send Charlemagne's Army back to France. The Assembly at the French camp results in a confrontation in which friction between Ganelon and Roland becomes obvious, stepfather to stepson. In her translation of \textit{The Song of Roland} Patricia Terry remarks that in medieval society the \textit{parrastre/fillastre} relationship was viewed unfavorably by both parties. (25) In the context of the Assembly, Roland recalls that previous efforts to reason with Marsile resulted in death for the ambassadors, Basan and Basile. Obeying precedent, Roland reasons as a warrior, "Finish the fight" \cite{210}, "To Saragossa lead on" \cite{211}, and "Avenge those men" \cite{213}. (26) The language is appropriate for wartime. Roland wishes to advance onward and take over Saragossa. Charlemagne's Army should not turn back. Here is the main point of contention between the monarch and his nephew. Precedent belies the wisdom of sending another embassy to Marsile, or trusting his word in any way. Yet, understandably, Charlemagne's friction with his nephew is sheltered in the subconscious mind. The King does not adjudicate through the wisdom of precedent. As we have seen, only in a dream sequence can Charles face his guilt. After the perturbed monarch awakens from the first series of dream visions, he asks the leaders among his men who shall guard the narrow pass to cover his retreat. Ganelon tells the King to appoint Roland \cite{743}. Subconsciously aware of intense risk, Charlemagne exclaims "Vile demon that you are!!" \cite{746}; (27) nevertheless, Roland stays behind. The King's unwitting trust of a seemingly treacherous enemy assigns to him the role of rival in relation to his own nephew.

Roland's leading role, urging war in the Assembly at the French camp following the Saracen Embassy, is similar to the aggressive Blancandin's role in the enemy camp. Blancandin is ready to sacrifice hostages, even his son, in order to advance a military goal \cite{149}. Roland is always prepared to undertake personal risk in the service of a perennial vow to defend King and Country to the death. On the other hand, Ganelon, with resentment due to injured pride, presents an idiosyncratic distinction in heroic roles which has military implications in a warring society. The resentful Ganelon seizes the opportunity treason affords to become a figure central to plot development during the Embassy at Marsile's camp.

As surrogate father figure to Roland, and as King of France, Charlemagne must safeguard posterity, whatever sacrifice this longing may entail. The readiness to implement filial sacrifice links Ganelon and the
Saracens, for they have decided to intentionally send their sons, and a portion of their wealth, as guarantors for a truce based on a false oath, all in order to get Charlemagne to turn back and leave Roland exposed to treacherous attack [40-45]. Leaving behind the rearguard involves a difficult personal decision for the King; yet assigning duty to Roland as head of the rearguard is a move justifiable in terms of military strategy. Charles ponders over who shall take the vanguard duty once Roland is in the rear guard: "And in the vanguard—who'll have the leader's place?" [748] (28) Since Roland's forces ride point on the war trail, the frontward flank switches roles in order to provide protection for retreat. Charlemagne's column, on the other hand, turns around in formation while the Army simply shifts course, now headed by Ogier of Denmark [749]. The change in direction of the Carolingian host, their about face, dramatizes the separation. (29) The irreplaceable young hero remains facing the enemy willingly in order to protect the monarch. Indirectly, and however reluctantly at the conscious level, Charles compromises his nephew's safety.

This intricate family romance appears to revolve around a secret rivalry. An image of wife, sister, and mother emerges as structural principle. The text of Gui de Bourgogne, another medieval chanson de geste, mentions Dame Gile, identified as duchess and Charles’ sister. (30) Farnsworth collects two passages from Gui de Bourgogne in Appendix A of his book. (31) Dame Gile is identified twice as sister of Charlemagne, wife of Ganelon, and mother of Roland:

And the king Gui immediately summoned dame Gile:
She was the sister of Charlemagne, king of Saint Denis,
And wife of Ganelon, whose body God damned,
And was mother of Roland of the courageous heart.

Et li rois Guis tantost fait mander dame Gile:
Cele ert suer Karlemaine, le roi de Saint Denise,
Et fame Ganelon, qui le cors Dieu maudie,
Et ert mere Rollant à la chiere hardie. [1589-1592]

It's Gile the duchess, honored with a gentle heart,
Who is sister of Charlemagne, the strong crowned king,
And wife of Ganelon, the astute peer,
And she is mother of Roland, the renowned knight.

C'est Gile la duchoise, au gent cors onoré,
Qui suer rest Karlemaine, le fort roi keronné,
Et fame Ganelon, le compagnon hardré,
Et est mere Rollant, le chevalier menbré. [2920-2923] (32)

Dame Gile's son, and the King's nephew, is appropriately a Count, yet Ganelon, her second husband, is not a Duke, as was Roland's late father, Milon d'Anglers, Duke of Brittany, never mentioned in the Chanson. (33) She is not in the story because relationships take precedence over actual names in the chansons de geste. (34) We know that the rivalry between stepfather and stepson exists. Charlemagne's dreams are a point of reference for an unconscious rivalry toward his nephew which he cannot express. The emperor feels guilt but does nothing. He must support Roland and oppose Ganelon, yet he treats both in a symmetrical fashion. Roland suggests Ganelon go on the Embassy to the enemy camp, and Ganelon nominates Roland for the rearguard; they both suffer death as a result of their actions within the quadrangular relationship. Charlemagne fails to reconcile the two characters. We sense the impossibility for Charles, Ganelon, and Roland to display a proper relationship to each other due to an uncontrollable hidden jealousy.

The importance of the Duchess, absent from the text, was probably better known to the jongleur's medieval audience than it is to the modern reader of the Chanson. To recapture the original experience of the tale we resort to extrinsic literary analysis; we dare pose her relevance as a structural principle in The Song of Roland to achieve a greater psychological insight into plot motivation. In the mechanics of mimetic desire the subject is torn between two passions: a) love for the object, and b) hate for the rival. Girard remarks about mimetic desire that: "Our first task is to define the rival’s position within the system to
which he belongs, in relation to both subject and object. The rival desires the same object as the subject, and to assert the primacy of the rival can lead to only one conclusion." (35) Since subjects concentrate on each other, desire becomes displaced; eventually the object of desire is lost in the squabble. Charlemagne loves Roland but does not protect him as he should. The ensuing violence caused by conflicting desire is a shared guilt. In *The Song of Roland* enmity eventually converges against Ganelon, stepfather to Roland and husband of Charles’ sister. The unmentioned Dame Gile becomes a place holder in the quadrangular scene of mimetic desire.

Charles must champion political ideals of reciprocal brotherhood. Unquestionably, the personal realm extends into the public arena when commanding an army. The final conversion of Bramimonde, Marsile’s wife, pleases the King, who finally rests peacefully [3989-3992]. The womanizing tendencies of the historic Charlemagne are recorded. Charles had eighteen children with eight of his ten wives or concubines (four wives, six concubines). (36) Farnsworth remarks that a scandalous legend arose after the death of the historic Charlemagne, attributing incestuous intercourse between the King and his sister, before her marriage to Milon, and the birth of Roland soon thereafter. (37) Farnsworth refers to the *Histoire Poétique* by Gaston Paris. (38) In this text the author mentions how in the *Karlamagnus-Saga* Egidius, while celebrating Holy Mass, is said to have had an apparition by Saint Gabriel, who gave the priest a letter; in the letter the priest was ordered to marry the King’s sister to Milon d’Angles. The priest complies and the King confers upon Milon the Duchy of Brittany. The son born seven months after the marriage was believed to have been begotten by Charles. (39) Further on Paris quotes from a XIVth century poem, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, where a sin attributed to Charlemagne is considered too grave to mention. (40) Farnsworth also remarks that the despicable legend eventually became too distant from reality to be true, citing the last page of the Italian chronicle *Li Reali di Francia*: “it was commonly held that Roland was son of Charles, which was contrary to reality; the king loved him for his virtue and because he saw him courageous of body and soul.” (41) Apparently, we may surmise that in the course of history the closeness of Charles to Roland had to be explained beyond the context of nephew-right. Although the paternity issue remains an exaggeration, the King’s closeness to his sister is an aspect of the legend we may preserve without compromise. Robinson proffers an explanation for this exaggeration:

> William Farnsworth pressed for indigenous matriarchy in Western Europe. He did so in his study of the French *Chansons de Geste*. . . . His search was possibly influenced by nineteenth century hegemonic identification with the ancient Roman Empire. . . . The Roman father-son model has been implanted to the point that Charlemagne is recast as the incestuous father of Roland, whose mother was either Gile or Bert, both sisters of Charlemagne. Farnsworth sees an imposed heroic connection with patriarchal incest. Farnsworth writes almost at the same time that Freud consigns a daughter’s claims of parental rape to hysteria. In Farnsworth’s writings, incest seems to be a heroic prize for converting to patriarchy. (42)

Farnsworth’s critic concedes that the Roman patriarchal system "diminished in strength as the Empire weakened." (43) She seems sympathetic to Farnsworth’s suggestion that there is a "hegemonic shift in the poems toward the end of the time period" (XIth to XIIth centuries). (44) Both writers agree that "European matriarchal values survived in literature like *Beowulf* and the *Chansons de Geste." (45) Farnsworth also refers in passing to *Beowulf*, and mentions the fact that King Hygelac was the hero’s maternal uncle. (46) We may grant validity to the arguments expressed by both writers if we acknowledge that: a) the oral epic goes back to an earlier, more primitive age, and that b) comments on the decaying tradition should be updated since they reveal outmoded anthropological views. The central argument can be applied to our *Chanson* thusly: a) desire for Gile means matrilineal descent prevails; whereas b) pushing incest toward the paternity issue means the patriarchal perspective prevails. Assuming Charles’ closeness to Gile is enough for our argument. We acknowledge that Robinson could be right in asserting that Farnsworth goes too far by suggesting incest, since such a notion goes beyond the native oral tradition prevalent in the Middle Ages, and makes ancient Teutonic custom subservient, through Freudian theory, to a "re-invigorated Roman empire," pervasive before the XIth and after the XIIth century, what she calls *Rome 2.* (47)

In history and in the poem Charles’ virility is eminent. In our *Chanson*, after the execution of Ganelon, Charlemagne is eager to bring baptism to Marsile’s wife, Bramimonde; she becomes the new Julianna [3978-3987]. As final symbolism of the epic poem, the sacramental rebirth of Bramimonde through baptism...
serves as consolation for the death of Aude, Roland’s betrothed. The Christian conversion of Marsile’s widow leaves us with the feeling of successful ritual. In dramatic terms, the power of the Saracens against Charlemagne has been barely enough to retain Saragossa; they lose in the end to a superior force, whose advantage is not just military but cultural as well, and which persistently wages war, albeit handicapped by an assault against royal authority at home. The Christian doctrine of regeneration through death and resurrection never aggrandizes Charles’ forces much beyond the goal of future self-righteous struggle, as seen in the ending, when St. Gabriel assigns a new mission to the tired King [3993-3998]. Resolution of the authority crisis is geared toward prevention of future loss in the realm. The Christian spirit identifies with Christ’s sacrifice by not losing hope in the long run, for His death brought redemption. In the literary context, we are left with the feeling that the war is far from over; through the open ending, our sympathy for Charlemagne is extended beyond the text. Moreover, although Charles may seem an invader, he is claiming back lands which were not originally "heathen." The present must link the past and the future because the welfare of the realm is at stake.

Ganelon as Scapegoat

Extra-textual motivation for Ganelon’s treason, central to the plot in Roland, may ensue from his precarious position in a patriarchy as estranged second husband to our hero’s mother and the Emperor’s widowed sister. His treachery leads to Roland’s martyrdom. Like the Biblical Judas, the villain becomes a crucial figure in a Christian plot. Once we rise in comprehension beyond the overt confrontation of Christians against Saracens in The Song of Roland we should focus on the internal antagonism prevalent within the family unit which heads the French camp. Unlike Sigmund Freud’s Oedipus complex, the real father does not serve as model here; nevertheless, every relation in this patriarchy has paternal and filial coloring.(48)

In the narrative Ganelon absorbs all the blame. At his trial, in his defense, the famed traitor attempts to assign to Roland complete responsibility for the risky plight he found himself in at the enemy camp:

‘His nephew Roland, hating me in his heart, Had me condemned to torment and sure death: I was to bring Charles’ message to Marsile - I had the wit and wisdom to survive. I faced Count Roland and challenged him aloud, And Oliver, and all the other peers. Charlemagne heard me, so did these noble lords: I am avenged, but not by treachery.’

‘Rollant sis niés me coillit en haür, Si me jugat a mort e a dulur. Message fui al rei Marsilïun; Par mun saveir vinc jo a guarisun. J o desfiai Rollant le poigneor, E Oliver e tuiz lur cumpaignun; Carles l’oïd e si noble baron. Venget m’en sui, mais n’i ad traïsun.’ [3771-3778]

Paramount in the Count’s remarks is Roland’s relationship to the King. Since Charles’ nephew had nominated him as emissary on the Embassy, Ganelon is resentful enough to assign ill will to his stepson. Yet it was not all Roland’s doing. The verb jugat [3772] denotes in meaning the nomination of someone for specific duties. Both protagonists are rivals. Even if Ganelon’s resentment should account for personal vengeance, it could not justify rationally, nevertheless, military high treason. Blind to consequences, Ganelon never mentions the twenty thousand dead at Roncevaux beside Roland. Ganelon assumes that, since there was a boast in the presence of the King [326], vengeance through treason should explain, and even justify, the great dishonor of suffering a challenge to his own paternal authority. The dreadful plot unravels itself within the family circle.

Blame against Ganelon pours on irremissibly. At the traitor’s trial, Pinabel’s intercession already indirectly
suggests the execution to follow. The champion addresses the ill-fated Count:

‘If any Frenchman decides that you should hang,
The Emperor Charles must have that judgment tried:
My sword shall prove these accusations lies.’

‘N’i ad Frances ki vos juget a pendre,
U l’emperere les noz douz cors en assemble,
Al brant d’hacer que jo ne l’en desmente.’ [3789-3791]

The term *juget*, as Pinabel uses it, can only mean to convict or condemn. There should not arise anyone brave enough to condemn Ganelon to be hung; yet, although the challenge is in the form of negative understatement, the unabashed suggestion is boastfully put forward that death would be forthcoming to whoever steps up in support of a stance against Ganelon. Pinabel, as champion, strikes great impact at court. The barons fear him: "They speak more softly because of Pinabel" [3797]. (49) Ganelon’s ally fearlessly proclaims that: a) since Roland’s death is absolute, b) no remedy can bring him back, and c) hence Ganelon should be acquitted [3803-3804]. Such faulty logic fails to take into account that the tragedy at Roncevaux was horrendous, hence no legal nor rational excuse as such is available for having caused it. The assertion constitutes an insult to the memory of the martyred Roland. Ganelon and his party have made a poor use of precedent in the course of the story. Even his earlier suggestion that the French send the Embassy to Marsile had not followed the proper use of precedent [222-227]; Roland is the one who recalls the ill-fated Basan and Basile [207-209]. Now the judges [3799-3804] and the barons [3807-3810] are the ones who insist at trial that Ganelon be acquitted. For them the loss of Ganelon could be insurmountable [3811-3813]. They suggest that his execution could equal Roland’s sacrifice. Evidently, the challenge to Charlemagne’s authority at court has reached its highest point.

Since the drive for *glory* pervades practice of the heroic code, the obvious need for transparent loyalty acquires ethical value. To forsake the need for basic loyalty destroys the social fiber; for this reason courage remains subservient to social norm. Once bound by his position in the patriarchy, Ganelon’s resentment could not be stopped, nor its effects avoided. In the epic plot, which includes motivation, courage attains fearlessness. After all, Ganelon is competing with Roland, who sets a high bar for courage. Yet, Ganelon’s assertion at his trial that he lost status through Roland’s nomination of him as ambassador to the Saracen camp, a risky assignment, does not justify treason [3757-3760]. To view vengeance as restitution for breach of honor means to confuse civil with criminal liability. Ganelon overstepped his role, blinded by passion generated through mimetic rivalry.

Corruption in the realm can only be resolved if there is a perfect hero. When all fails, the exception to the rule gains distinction. No one answers the challenge of Pinabel except for Thierry: "They all approve; no one will disagree/ But Geoffroy’s brother, the chevalier Thierry" [3805-3806]. (50) As brother to the Duke of Anjou, Charles’ standard bearer, Thierry defends Roland’s memory and protects the King’s sovereignty when he strikes down Pinabel. The outcome of a trial by combat represents God’s decision; therefore, the Army does not hesitate to sentence Ganelon and the thirty relatives who had provided surety to the King during the duel [3852]:

The Frenchmen shout, ‘A holy miracle!
Justice demands that Ganelon must die,
With all the kinsmen who came and took his side.’

Escrient Franc: ‘Deus i ad fait vertut!
Asez est dreit que Guenes seilt pendut
E si parent, ki plaidet unt pur lui.’ [3931-3933]

The King asks for an official verdict and the Army reiterates the sentence, for the thirty barons have become the enemies of Charlemagne. He had addressed the barons saying: "You are traitors, every one!" [3814] (51) Justice against noblemen is dispensed by the King backed by the community at large, for the former acts on behalf of the latter and vice-versa.
The roles of Charles, as a mother’s brother, and Roland, as a sister’s son, delineate thematic concerns that take us to the conclusion of the martial struggle. Roland as child stayed at the maternal uncle’s fold. The hero, while dying at Roncevaux, recalls in his last breath the King who brought him up since infancy, “who raised him in his house” [2380]. (52) The adolescent warrior received Durendal, his indestructible sword, directly from Charles, possibly in the knighthood ceremony, “The king himself presented it to me” [1121]. (53) The sentimental bond of nephew right becomes a way to seek stability in the realm. Farnsworth explains:

Since motherhood is in any state of society the strongest of all ties, little wonder that the mother’s clan assumed such importance in the life of the children, when Exogamy was so generally rendered necessary on account of the strict laws of Totemism. In primitive tribes of today members of the same totem are forbidden to intermarry, the children are of the same clan as the mother, and thus the practice of tracing descent through the mother’s totem is a natural outgrowth of marriage outside the clan. It is not surprising to find a hint of this practice of marrying outside the clan surviving in mediaeval literature. (54)

The individual may depend on being part of a family system in order to safeguard his true lineage through the mother’s clan. (55) In the Chanson, feudal solidarity is expressed through numerous kin. Allied to avenge dishonor, Ganelon’s thirty relatives bond in his defense and meet their doom. Nephew right is not the only form of allegiance, although it emerges as most central to epic plot and true heroic prowess in The Song of Roland.

The praise for the warrior spirit takes on symbolic as well as semantic turns. Thierry is the exceptional knight, and the early phrase at the beginning of the poem, Fors Sarraguce, "Except for Saragossa" [6], parallels Fors sul Tierri, "But for Thierry" [3806], with metrical stress in the first two measures of the line. The familiar ring reminds us of the credit that goes to Charlemagne as conqueror, for instead of the defiant city on a hilltop, the exceptional soldier stands high above the rest as the King’s champion. We have a clear sense now of who is in charge and the superior worth of Charlemagne is achieved by further emphasis on the concept of restriction and exception. Charles orders the executioner: "If one escapes, you’re dead and put to shame" [3955]. (56) This command, framed in hypothetical syntax, recalls the jongleur’s statement about Charles’s previous edict against infidels who refuse conversion: "If there are any who still resist King Charles,/ He has them hanged, or killed by fire or sword" [3669-3670]. (57) The warrior king has support of his clan. And the heroic code at the end of the Chanson promotes loyalty through fear of the consequences ensuing from treason. Twice the jongleur reminds the reader:

So one man’s evil draws others in its wake.

Let no man’s treason give comfort to his pride.

Ki hume traïst sei ocit e altroi. [3959]

Hom ki traïst alter, nen est dreiz qu’il s’en vant. [3974]

Not simple deterrence, execution is the condition precedent to an established order.

To achieve a proper interpretation for the Chanson the reader should be alerted to the way in which the narrative sacrifices Ganelon at the end. Charlemagne asks for a verdict at the final trial: "Give me your judgment concerning Ganelon" [3751]. (58) Apparently, collective resonance of persecution is a measure intended to restore political differentiation. (59) With Ganelon as scapegoat, Charles’ guilt stays in the realm of bad dreams, while the great hero attains martyrdom by refusing to blow the oliphant in time. The fact that Ganelon is characterized early on in the narrative as traitor shows that the jongleur was reciting a tale everyone knew beforehand as part of an epic oral tradition; before the Embassy to the enemy camp, the villain appears in central stage, "Ganelon came by whom they were betrayed" [178]. (60) Regardless of oral legend, what sparks the actual event of Ganelon’s betrayal in the Chanson is Roland’s nomination of his stepfather for a deadly mission. (61) Here is the sole textual motivation for treason in The Song of Roland. Ganelon immediately in the text puts forth the oath: "If God should grant that I come home again,/ I won’t
forget—and you’ll face such a feud/ That it will last as long as you’re alive" [289-291]. (62) His public persona seems tarnished beyond repair. Suffering from a breach of honor, he turns into a deadly enemy. The Count seeks "a little trick to play" [300]. (63) Although Ganelon’s involvement in the plot is sly and non-heroic, Roland is overtly responsible for placing his stepfather in an estranged position.

Ganelon’s relationship to Charles and Roland allows us to cast further light on the rationale for treason. Through warped logic, the hero’s stepfather hopes to return safely home from the Embassy with two problems in the patriarchy resolved: a) Roland is removed as obstacle to patrimonial inheritance for Baldwin, Ganelon’s son and the hero’s half-brother; and b) the Count avoids feeling shame over a failed paternal role. Before his departure to the Saracen camp as Charles’s emissary, Ganelon names Baldwin as his sole heir, should he die on the risky mission [313-315]. Charles answers with the famous line: "You have too soft a heart." ‘Trop avez tender coeur.’ [317]

Roland retains his role as heir through matrilineal descent after his death. Taking up the warrior role to avenge his slain nephew, Charles faces his monster double in the encounter with Baligant. The execution of Ganelon, after the trial by combat between the victorious Thierry and Pinabel, establishes the King’s dominance with the image of Roland looming overhead. Roland, Charles, and Thierry are morally victorious. Roland’s exceptional heroism, Charlemagne’s willing trust despite warning visions, and Ganelon’s treason reveal a shared guilt. In the epic context we sense a drive toward patriarchal supremacy and attainment of glory. Not only at Roncevaux [2415], but also during Pinabel’s confrontation at the end, the Army weeps for Roland [3870-3871]. These are parallel sentiments of grief expressed in the ambiguous symbolism evident in the second dream of the first sequence. In The Song of Roland, the retreating Army represents an absence of participation in military violence at a crucial moment in the plot. The Frankish host displays a weak role. The Army must share the blame for not being at Roncevaux to aid the rearguard.

We find a strange counterpoint to Christian guilt in the Saracen destruction of their idols [2587-2588]. Bramimonde goes as far as to accuse the pagan gods of treason: "We are betrayed, abandoned by our gods" [2600]. (64) Abandoning faith in her gods is a positive sign, since the conversion of Marsile’s wife represents the acting out of unconditional surrender. Besides overcoming Saracen forces, Charles emerges triumphant in mimetic rivalry against Marsile, with Bramimonde as object of desire. Repeatedly, a shared object of desire affects relations among multiple characters, both friends and foes, in the Chanson.

We marvel that a primitive scheme of suppressed desire should permanently influence our epic genre and extend into a cultural norm for sacrificial ritual. To impose his socially acquired patriarchal ties, heedless of military bondage, Ganelon goes to the enemy, and pays with his life for Roland’s death. Kinsmen through matrilineal descent, Charles and Roland do not succumb to such lack of differentiation, mindful of their allegiance to a matrilineal patrimony.

Our conceptual analysis discloses a crisis caused by rivalry originating in an absent figure of sister, wife, and mother extrinsic to the text. Charlemagne, Ganelon, and Roland are tormented by the need to protect posterity and end war; yet we perceive that in plot development they are responsible for the escalation of violence. All three heroes share guilt for the ambush at Roncevaux; yet, irrespective of consequences, battles rage on and war is not over. In The Song of Roland the treason of Ganelon, the death of Roland, and the dreams of Charlemagne reveal a quadrangular family drama of epic proportion due to the tortured pathology of embittered heroes.

Works Cited


Notes

1. "Pagans are wrong, the Christian cause is right." Painen unt tort e chrestiens unt dreit [1015]. And again: "Their cause is evil, and we are in the right." ‘Nos avum dreit, mais cist glutun unt tort’ [1212]. Translations into English are from the Patricia Terry translation, which I have modified slightly, in order to suit context, twice, (cf. lines 735, 2567). Terry 41, 48. Quotes in the original French are from the Gérard Moignet edition. Moignet 92, 104. (back)
2. Ensurquetut si ai jo vostre soer. [312] (back)

3. Auerbach 101. (back)

4. Flying splinters from lances held by knights is a repeated motif during violent jousting in The Nibelungenlied. Edwards 121, 125, 170. (back)

5. The bear who bites Charlemagne's right arm is identified as Ganelon due to the furs he wears. He rises at the Assembly, "Casting aside his cloak of marten furs." De sun col getet ses grandes pels de martre [281]. First mention of the right arm metaphor occurs at the Embassy in the Saracen camp, where Ganelon proclaims that, through attack, the French could lose "the Emperor's right arm." Dunc perdreit Carles le destre braz del cors [597]. In this same speech at the enemy camp Ganelon equates the loss to future stability for both sides, since the Army would then return to France, leaving Marsile to reign calmly over Saragossa: "'All of his Empire would be restored to peace.'" Tere Major remendreit en repos.' [600] Thus, the treason seems erroneously motivated by a quest for peace. Such naive ignorance adds charm to Ganelon's role as villain. (back)

6. "From Ardenne, Devers Ardenne, carries . . . a specific sense: in poetic terms because Ardenne is, in the poetry of the Middle Ages, the forest of marvels; and in terms of geography because it extended up to Vesdre, three or four leagues to the south of Aix-la Chapelle." Bédier 108. Translation mine. (back)

7. Benjamin M. Semple says: "While they (scholars) debate over the figures represented by the leopard—is it Marsile? Pinabel?—or over the figures symbolized by the greyhound—is it Roland? Thierry?—they instinctively sense that the greyhound is a good figure and the leopard is a bad one. I know of no scholar who has suggested that the leopard is Roland or Thierry, or that the greyhound is Ganelon or Marsile." Semple 29. (back)


9. C. M. Bowra mentions how the beast and the leopard may represent Marsile and Baligant, adding: "there is no need to be too precise about this." Bowra 296. Excessive precision could be misleading. W. G. Emden comments on the view Karl-Josef Steinmeyer presents in his book on the dreams of Charlemagne. Steinmeyer 40-41. "Steinmeyer makes much of the argument that, while Ganelon's trial is foretold twice according to the traditional view, the battle of Roncevaux receives no mention if laisse LVII is held to be the trial." Van Emden 262. T. Atkinson Jenkins, in his edition of the Chanson, also explains the second dream as symbolic of the battle at Roncevaux. Jenkins 60. (back)

10. Duggan 79. (back)

11. Van Emden 260. (back)

12. Whitehead 189. Owen 201. Braet 12-13. Herman Braet says: "More often than not, however, both interpretations seem possible to maintain, and the text can be read in two levels." Braet 15. Translation mine. (back)

13. Semple 27-29. (back)

14. E Franceis crient: 'Carlemagne, aidez!'[2546] (back)

15. "Marsile's right hand was cut completely off." La destre main ad perdue trestute. [2574] (back)

16. In his Violence and the Sacred, René Girard remarks how failure to differentiate leads to lack of social order. Violence 124-125, 146, 245. (back)

17. Robinson 24. (back)

18. Farnsworth 1, 157-158, 198, 212, 229, 239. (back)
24. If the maternal uncle has the cultural importance Claude Lévi-Strauss assigns to the relationship in his *Structural Anthropology* (32, 39-41, 322), then the patriarchal competition between Charles and Ganelon could escalate to a higher level. Ganelon’s role as stepfather of the hero becomes subordinate to the position held by Roland’s maternal uncle, the King of France. The monarch may have an immeasurably greater responsibility for the safety of his nephew. 

25. "Ganelon is indeed Roland’s stepfather, but the word used here, *parrastre*,[277] is an insulting one; similarly *fillastre* in line 743." Terry 14. 

26. ‘*Faites la guerre*,’[210]; ‘*Metez le sege*,’[211]; ‘*Si vengez*.’[213] 

27. ‘*Vos estes vifs diables*.’[746] 

28. ‘*E ki serat devant mei en l’ansgarde?*’[748] A few lines before, the King had asked who would be at the rearguard, and Ganelon had nominated Roland for the fateful post [742-743]. Charles appoints Roland, "While in his eyes unwilling tears appear." *Ne poet muer que des oilz ne plurt.* [773] 

29. As the old vanguard turns rear guard, with simultaneous selection of a new vanguard, the *jongleur* exclaims sententiously: "You have no baron who will dispute that now." *N’avez baron ki jamais la remut.* [779] 

30. Farnsworth 213. 

31. Farnsworth 244. 

32. Guessard 49, 89. Translations are mine. In this charming *chanson de geste*, Charles has been away for twenty seven years, so back in France the sons of veterans away fighting with Charlemagne want a new king at home. They elect Gui de Bourgogne, son of Sanson de Bourgogne, and one of Charles’ nephews. Blindly loyal to Charlemagne, and aware of his new role as king, he orders the thousands of men he can muster to go with him to aid Charles. The women complain that Charles took their husbands, now they cannot lose their sons too, so the ladies go along. Gui’s sworn duty is to conquer lands for Charles, and to meet up with him at *Luiserne*, where Charlemagne awaits patiently the fall of the city he has had under siege for four years. Meanwhile, Gui conquers *Casaude*. He also conquers *Montorgueil*, on his way to aid Charles. Eventually, after further conquests, Gui meets up with Charles. He offers the King his sword, helps him win over *Luiserne*, and draws as fief for himself Spain. The sons are finally allowed to greet their parents. Bertrand and his father, Duke Naimon, hug and kiss, as do Gui and Sanson. The ladies are overjoyed. Dame Gile comes forward first, followed by Aude [4000-4001]. The epic closes as Charles grants eight days of rest to his troops so they can be with their families. Roland gets together with Aude. Charles insists that all the ladies go back to France as he and his Army, now swollen with provisions and reinforcements, make their way to Roncevaux. 

33. Farnsworth 201, 244. Paris 378. 

34. Farnsworth 163. 

35. Violence 145. 

48. Girard mentions how feelings of "imitation, admiration, and veneration" may change, through the mimetic nature of desire, into the negative sentiments of "despair, guilt, and resentment." Violence 182, 188. (back)

49. Pur Pinabel se cuntienent plus quei. [3797] (back)

50. Nen ad celoi nel grant e otreit,/ Fors sul Tierri, le frere dam Geifreit.’ [3805-3806] (back)

51. Ço dist li reis: ‘Vos estes mi felun.’ [3814] (back)

52. De Carlemagne, sun seignor, kil nurrit [2380]. Farnsworth 44. (back)

53. ‘Ma bonne espee, que li reis me dunat’ [1121]. Farnsworth 48,54. (back)

54. Farnsworth 240-241. (back)

55. Farnsworth 242. (back)

56. ‘Se uns escapet, morz ies e cunfunduz’ [3955]. (back)

57. S’or i ad cel qui Carle cuntredie,/ Il le fait prendre o ardeir ou ocire [3669-3670]. (back)

58. ‘De Guenelun car me jugez le dreit!’ [3751] (back)

59. Scapegoat 12. (back)

60. Guenes i vint, ki la traïsun fist. [178] (back)

61. "I name,’ says Roland, ‘Stepfather Ganelon.’” Ço dist Rollant: ‘Ço ert Guenes, mis parastre.’ [277] (back)

62. ‘Se Deus ço dunet que jo de la repaire/ Jo t’en muvra un si grant contraire/ Ki durerat a tresst tun edage’ [289-291]. Terry wonders: "Just why Ganelon so hates Roland is not known to us; it may have been to the poet’s contemporaries. . . . A heroic stepson might well inspire a particularly virulent jealousy, all the more acute in that it would have to be, in the case of Charlemagne’s nephew, quite well
concealed." Terry 11, 14. (back)

63. *Einz i fri un poi de legerie.* [300] (back)

64. *Li nostre deu i unt fait felonie.* [2600] (back)
The Ends of Deferral

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The issue is motivation. As Eric Gans demonstrated in his 1981 essay "Differences," it is motivation, or rather the lack thereof, that compromised Derridean deconstruction from the start.(1) For, while Derrida sought to re-historicize language by turning away from the temporally impoverished sameness of speech toward the temporally rich différance of writing, his insistence that différance itself remain "absolutely arbitrary" kept his account from becoming truly historical. As a principle that was "already valid," Derridean différance often verged on an a priori truth, assuming precisely the metaphysical properties that Derrida had sought to avoid. The refinement of Generative Anthropology [GA] over the past three decades has to a large extent been dedicated to correcting this, deconstruction's structural(ist) flaw.

The crux of this corrective endeavor is the "originary hypothesis," GA's account of the first sign. Adapted from René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, the originary hypothesis supplements Derrida's project by providing différance an anthropological motivation, namely the deferral of the appetitive violence that is incited by the presence of the referent. By identifying the aborted gesture of appropriation as the first sign, the originary hypothesis allows GA to anchor différance in an historical event—indeed, in the first historical event from which all culture is derived—thereby freeing deconstruction from the last vestiges of the metaphysical tradition and fulfilling the historical ambition that Derrida himself prematurely abandoned.

And yet, as compelling as the originary hypothesis is, the mechanism of deferral that drives it has remained something of a stumbling block. The problem is, in my view, narratological and raises again the issue of motivation which, for all the elegance of the originary hypothesis, remains one of GA's more complex features. The complexity is due to the fact that in the originary hypothesis not one but two sources of motivation are implied: the animal desire for the appropriation of the referent and the human desire for the cultivation of the sign. The failure to attend adequately to the distinction between these two sources of motivation and to the decisiveness of the transition from the first to the second continues to trouble GA, most of all in discussions of deferral, for it is during the interval of deferral that that transition is made.

We get some sense of this from the pathos that informs Gans's 2011 assurance that "the deferral of action is not a mere postponement."(2) That this bears repeating some thirty years after GA's initial formulation suggests that something in our thinking about deferral is out of joint. That something is, I think, the lingering assumption that the interval of deferral is suspended evenly between animal and human sources of motivation, tending toward neither. Indeed, only such an assumption could leave open the possibility that the appropriation of the referent could still be at least as desirable as the cultivation of the sign, a possibility that is necessary for the suspicion that deferral could be likened to anything resembling postponement. Although much of GA refutes this assumption, it nevertheless recurs,(3) perhaps most notably in GA's claims to scientific rigor. Here too the issue is motivation, for as Charles Taylor has explained, scientific rigor is defined by its being limited to "weak evaluations" in which the constitutive role of motivation is denied rather than "strong evaluations" in which that role is admitted.(4) Whereas weak evaluations are concerned merely with outcomes, strong evaluations are concerned with what Taylor calls the "worth of different desires." That GA deals in strong rather than weak evaluations is clear, for it is precisely the recognition of the greater worth of the desire for the sign that not only constitutes GA's object of study (man), but also furnishes the means by which GA and all other cultural undertakings are pursued (language).

Now, while some theoretical projects are able to continue unaffected by their conviction that they deal in weak rather than strong evaluations GA is not among them. As we saw a moment ago, failure to attend adequately to the distinctions between animal and human motivations (read "desires") and to the decisiveness of the transition from one to the other poses a problem particularly when it comes to deferral. The problem becomes still more apparent when we zoom out and consider GA as a whole. For, whereas in the case of deferral the suspension between animal and human motivation leaves open the possibility of mere postponement, a possibility to which we can respond with arguments as needed, the suspension of GA itself between weak and strong evaluations, that is, between the natural and the human sciences, deprives us of the ability to recommend GA as an interpretive approach—that is to say, it deprives us of the ability to treat it as not only a descriptive but also as a prescriptive part of our disciplinary repertoire. For, once the fundamentals of the originary hypothesis have been established and culture has been shown to be the outcome of the originary scene, the rhetorical reserves of weak evaluation are at that point exhausted leaving GA in its current guise little with which to pursue its role as a protagonist in the ongoing story of culture, a story to which it claims to scientific rigor. Here too the issue is motivation, for as Charles Taylor has explained, scientific rigor is defined by its being limited to "weak evaluations" in which the constitutive role of motivation is denied rather than "strong evaluations" in which that role is admitted.(4) Whereas weak evaluations are concerned merely with outcomes, strong evaluations are concerned with what Taylor calls the "worth of different desires." That GA deals in strong rather than weak evaluations is clear, for it is precisely the recognition of the greater worth of the desire for the sign that not only constitutes GA's object of study (man), but also furnishes the means by which GA and all other cultural undertakings are pursued (language).

Here we arrive at what I suggested a moment ago was the narratological root of the problem of deferral. By narratological I mean simply having to do with that species of motivation peculiar to narrative: what Frank Kermode called "the sense of an ending"—that is, the sense of narrative orientation or directedness that allows actions to become emplaced either implicitly or explicitly in something like a schema of rising action, climax and denouement.(5) While deferral serves well enough as a beginning of culture, it has proved less well suited as an end for culture in Kermode's sense, because, as we have seen, it leaves open the possibility of postponement. In Kermode's terms, when offered as an end for culture, deferral as it stands now in the literature on GA allows what are in fact two ends—the appropriation of the referent and the cultivation of the sign—to vie with one another, sapping GA's narrative strength.

The task, then, seems to me to be to narratively re-charge the interval of deferral by reframing it unambiguously as tending toward one and only one end: the cultivation of the sign. This will require our being able to consider the cultivation of the sign as a punctual moment analogous (but opposed) to the appropriation of the referent, for in order for deferral to serve as a narrative end for culture we must posit a narrative end in deferral.
I'll spend the remainder of this paper trying to do just that. As I am an art historian and deal in pictures, I'll do so by sketching a (needless to say, abridged and episodic) history of viewing in the Western tradition, one which I will set in the long-durée of deferral while nevertheless giving it the directed-ness proper to narrative, framing it as tending away from a concern with the appropriation of the referent and toward a concern with the cultivation of the sign whose status as an end punctuating the actual experience of looking I will signal using the neologism "aspect acquisition." In true modernist fashion, that narrative will play out on either side of the picture surface, with the momentum of attention shifting from a fixation on referents felt to be behind the plane to aspects felt to be in front of it.

To anticipate things considerably and to wear my strong evaluations on my sleeve I'll take this opportunity to introduce one of if not the end toward which I myself will be tending: Cy Twombly's Untitled from 1967. White rectangles paired with the odd notation rendered in wax crayon and oil posing as chalk on slate, the work is a veritable master class in the Derridean trace, a site of pure différance without presence.(6) More importantly for my purposes, it serves as something like a hermeneutic proof, demonstrating how the cultivation of the sign is intuitively regarded as an end punctuating the interval of deferral which here becomes coterminous with the interval of viewing, allowing it to be experienced narratively. While the painting begins as a series of rectangles haphazardly placed, immanent to the picture surface and compositionally undifferentiated, a ripple soon courses through it announcing the start of an optical drama. On the painting's middle-right edge the largest rectangle sheds its derivative association with the painting's frame as it comes into focus as the nearest face of a three-dimensional prism the other faces of which are formed by newly recruited rectangles above and to the right. Or again, on the painting's top-left corner a stray line is joined to an abutting strip to form a passage of staggering richness and subtlety as one volumetric bar seems to slip backward almost cinematically, in this case fracturing again into planes as if it were casting off rather than taking on dimensionality before finally achieving the sheer flatness of the square behind. If, encouraged by these instances we then expand our field of vision to take in the composition as a whole we notice still more varieties of visual incident like its lilting arc or its triple-banded layering.

What is crucial in all of this is that each time our attention comes to rest on this or that facet we acquire an aspect of the painting—that is, we notice something about it that is of interest to us despite its having nothing to do with reference of any kind. The volumetric prisms, lilting arcs and triple-layers are, after all, synthesized by us and strictly speaking belong neither to the painting itself nor to any other object for that matter. Moreover, and more importantly, in each case we experience the moment of aspect acquisition as one that is narratively satisfying, that is to say, one that brings to a conclusion—to an end—a stretch of viewing that in retrospect would have been infuriating had it continued indefinitely (the sound of the narrative irresolution that is caused by the failure to acquire an aspect is familiar enough—indeed, it can be heard ringing in the echo-chambers of that are today's galleries and museums: the exasperated sigh "I just don't get it" that marks not so much the end of a particular stretch of viewing but rather the paired admission that that stretch will, at least for a time, go end-less).

The success of Twombly's painting in supplying aspects as ends—or, perhaps more specifically, the success of the mode of viewing that we exercise while standing in front of it, accepting the acquisition of aspects as an end—should not be taken for granted. Although we are able to look at pictures as opportunities for aspect acquisition, and although that ability belongs, as GA has shown, to our deepest anthropological inheritance, the history of viewing in the West overflows with works the narrative ends of which remain, in one form or another not the acquisition of aspects but rather the appropriation of referents. Examples might include John Constable's Cottage in a Cornfield from circa 1833, or Giovanni Tiepolo's Apotheosis of the Spanish Monarchy from 1764. What is remarkable about these works is how keenly we feel distance in them, how keenly we feel that the cottage in the landscape is "a ways away," that the attendants of Maria Amalia look at us "from afar." The result is a mode of viewing very different from that which we experienced a moment ago with Untitled. Standing before these works, time is no longer studdied by the satisfactions of aspect acquisition. Appreciation of the handling of paint or the novelty of palette does not make up for the fact that we are interrupted by the gate that blocks our path, jealous of the putti who, unlike us, are free to kiss the attendants' necks. I'll call this time un-studded by the end of aspect acquisition "bad deferral," deferral motivated by the desire to appropriate the referent, deferral as postponement, deferral without end.
Before delving into the history I promised—the narrative dimension of which will, I hope, offer some relief from this bad deferral by swapping out the end of referent appropriation and swapping in the end of aspect acquisition—I’ll pause here to define my terms beginning with "referent." In addition to the conventional semiotic understanding of the referent as that to which the sign points, I follow proponents of GA in recognizing the referent as being the focus of an appetitive desire that was originally directed toward a material object in the real world. For those of us raised in the Western tradition of pictorial illusionism, this understanding of the referent has unique consequences insofar as we, our claims to specular sophistication aside, nevertheless see depicted referents when "realistically represented" as somehow coupled to their painted doubles. It is this credulity that allows distance to be felt so keenly in the Constable and the Tiepolo.

The second term I need to define is "aspect." I choose to speak of "aspects" rather than of "signs" not only because the former term lends itself more readily to visual analysis, but also because I think it captures more accurately the dynamics of abortive appropriation that are at the heart of GA. After all, aspects are more efficient than signs in carrying out symbolically the crucial distributive rite of sparagmos since they, unlike signs, are inherently partitive. As Wittgenstein pointed out in his famous discussions of the "duck-rabbit" illusion, we can see the duck or the rabbit, but never the duck and the rabbit. In other words, we have signs for things but aspects of things. Moreover, if it is necessary, as I think it is, that we posit an end in deferral that is analogous but opposed to the appropriation of the referent, the aspect seems most up to the task. While one can possess an aspect as if it were a referent, feeling the full degree of satisfaction such possession assumes, one cannot possess a sign in quite the same way. Promising at most substitutability for the referent, the sign will always be shadowed by its twin, the object to which it refers but which it is not. For these reasons I suspect that in the originary scene it was the satisfaction of aspect acquisition that marked (indeed allowed) the abortion of appropriation. It was not only fear of reprisal that coursed through the body of the first man as his fingers flexed (or, perhaps, slackened) in ostension. A new species of satiation was also felt, one that must have occurred the instant before ostension when the first aspect dawned on him. Now, on to history.

I.

We begin in medias res, that is to say, amidst the things strewn about the foreground of Veronese's 1563 Marriage at Cana. The painting is absolutely filled with figures pouring wine, playing instruments and pulling cloaks. While the scene depicted is a story—the story of Jesus's first miracle, recounted in the second chapter of the Gospel of John—it is not the story depicted in the painting that concerns me but rather that of the history to which the painting belongs. As I promised to frame that history narratively, and as every good narrative deserves a villain, I'll introduce one now: the figure in orange standing there at the balustrade gazing at us contemptuously over his shoulder, his hand gripping the nearby jug. What makes him a villain is his conspiratorial role in the painting's logic, a logic driven by the appropriation of referents rather than by the acquisition of aspects. His villainy can be summed up by the fact that despite the proliferation of goods miraculously produced by Christ that line the tables—water turned into wine, loaf turned into loaves—not to mention the proliferation of painterly incident that Veronese everywhere puts on breathtaking display, the figure still operates according to conditions of scarcity proper to the animal desire for the referent in the originary sense. Indeed, once we have locked eyes with him we too are tempted to look past the bounty in the foreground toward something further off, something just behind the balustrade on which he leans which suddenly becomes synonymous with the picture surface itself. For a brief but excruciating moment the specter of postponement returns again to haunt the interval of deferral as the ability of sheer viewing to satisfy is thrown into question. Standing before Marriage at Cana, in the ochre light of high culture, we somehow seem on the verge of relapsing into animality.
If we want to know how this temptation to look past the picture surface developed such that the prospect of relapse could linger on and more importantly how we might condition our analytic and descriptive efforts such that that relapse might be avoided, we must turn our attention from Veronese and the figure in orange to a point some two thousand years earlier in the fifth century B.C.E. when the fork in the road split for the Western tradition, breaking off into two paths, one leading to a mode of viewing oriented toward referents and the other to a mode of viewing oriented toward aspects. The two paths correspond to two early Greek genres, skenographia and skiagraphia, and depart from the picture surface, the one leading to the space of referents behind it, the other the space of aspects in front of it.\(^8\)

Skenographia, a mature example of which can be found in the so-called "Room of the Masks" at the House of Augustus, is derived from the Greek skene, which translates most accurately as "tent" but which also has broader associations surviving in our words "scene" and "scenario." As a painterly genre it likely emerged sometime in the fifth century B.C.E. when it was used to render the backdrops of tragic plays illusionistically as a series of receding planes. In the "Room of the Masks," for example, there appear to be nearly a dozen planes, beginning with the faux-plaster ledge then leading on to further planes of marble, wooden architecture, more plaster, and finally a trompe l’oeil curtain decorated with a pastoral scene behind which, it is suggested, the recession may or may not continue. Crucially, the receding planes created by skenographia give way to a space on the far side of the picture surface—a space which, as the mask-filled niches suggest, we feel is capable of accommodating referents.
With *skiagraphia*, things are reversed. From the Greek *skia* or "shadow," this painterly genre, which also emerged sometime in the fifth century B.C.E., created a space on the near side of the picture surface that was devoted not to referents but to aspects. A mature example can be found in a mosaic from a comedic cycle by Dioscurides of Samos now known as "Street Musicians." Here, rather than a succession of receding planes a single white ground is established as flush with picture surface. Against this figures cast their shadows as if they were projecting into our space. Even where a concession to recessive illusionism must be made in order to provide a ground plane on which the figures might stand, this is immediately converted into what we might call projective illusionism as the knee, thigh, torso, arm and drum held by the rightmost figure are shown to be further forward than his right foot, the toes of which hang ever so slightly over the lower ledge. Here, action takes place on the near side of the picture surface rather than on the far side as before. We do not desire to breach that surface. Instead we are content to imagine—to project—the tones of the pipes and symbols, to take pleasure in the play of light as it dances across the folds of the fabric.\(^9\)

And so our narrative begins to takes shape with good and evil, hero and villain, assigned their respective territories on either side of the picture surface. On one side, a space of aspectival plenty, on the other, of referential scarcity. The interval of deferral also begins to take shape as the end of aspect acquisition comes into view.
Nevertheless, following the early Greek moment of parity, the balance shifted and villains ruled the day. The coup was Renaissance perspective. First demonstrated around 1413 by Filippo Brunelleschi, so-called "single-point" perspective was a means of systematically rendering pictorial space such that the objects depicted appeared to recede with geometric regularity away from a single viewing point toward a single vanishing point along a sight line extending from one to the other. Brunelleschi conducted his demonstration at the Piazza del Duomo, painting the Florentine Baptistery on the reverse side of a wooden panel through which he drilled a hole. Holding the panel up to his or her face, a viewer would look through that hole at a mirror held in the other hand, seeing the reflection of the painting as if it were the Baptistery itself glimpsed from the precise spot where Brunelleschi had stood, complete with that day's sky reflected against a ground of burnished silver.\(^{(10)}\)

What is remarkable about Brunelleschi's demonstration is the degree to which it sought to deny pictoriality. Instead of a fictional landscape, it represented a real piazza, one with which all Florentines would have been familiar. What was seen, the panel claimed, was the thing itself, the baptistery on that very day, at that very moment, flecked by rain or lit by sun as the case may be. Moreover, given the posture required by the demonstration which called for the viewer to hold the mirror at arm's length, that thing was no longer within walking distance but was now tantalizingly, infuriatingly, within reach\(^{(11)}\)—a sensation that was not lost on Antonio Manetti, Brunelleschi's contemporary and biographer, who concluded his recounting of the demonstration by stating, "...it seemed as if the real thing was seen: and I have had it in my hand \(e\ i o l' h o a v u t o i n\) mano...\(^{(12)}\) That these two convictions—that of seeming and of holding—cancel each other out suggests the cruelty of Renaissance perspective as a mode of viewing motivated by referent appropriation.\(^{(13)}\) While within reach, gripped in both hands, the baptistery remains forever on the far side of an interval of endless deferral, the object of a promised possession that is, per force, never fulfilled.

The extent of this cruelty is further suggested by the work of another of Brunelleschi's contemporaries, the painter Paolo Uccello. Perhaps best known for an anecdote recorded by Giorgio Vasari in which he responded to his wife's pleading that he return to bed by exclaiming, "Oh, what a lovely thing perspective is!," Uccello was even more driven by Renaissance perspective's promise of possession, leading to such unsettling works as *The Hunt in the Forest* (1470).\(^{(14)}\)
As pitched as Uccello's picture is, the sense that a referent lurked somewhere behind the picture surface grew only more acute as the Renaissance progressed. For example, when Leon Battista Alberti published his treatise *Della pittura* in which he further systematized single-point perspective, he likened the picture surface to a velo or veil hanging between viewer and referent. In a woodcut from his 1538 "Handbook for Draughtsmen" Albrecht Dürer literalized the metaphor, stationing buxom reclining women on one side of the reticulated net, a transfixed draughtsman on the other.

This, then, is the pre-history of Veronese's picture. The balustrade is the velo, the figure in orange the ammonitore, another of Alberti's theoretical inventions, this one tasked with warning us of infringing on whatever lies behind, "either beckon[ing] [us] with his hand to look, or with ferocious expression and forbidding glance, challeng[ing] us not to come near"—a model-rival of which Girard would be proud. Momentum seems to have shifted once and for all in favor of the figure in orange. The narrative seems to be fixed in its orientation toward the end of referent appropriation, fated to play out during an interminable stretch of bad deferral.

But that is not our narrative, not our end. The aesthetic pleasure we experience standing before works like Twombly's *Untitled* proves as much. And Twombly knew it. In his 1970 painting *Treatise on the Veil (Second Version)* he takes issue with the entire tradition I've just recounted. Beginning with its title, which I take to be among other things a jab at Albertian theory, the work undoes patiently and with easy elegance the temporal armatures of referent appropriation, replacing them with the pleasures of aspect acquisition that are proper to speculative art making and viewing. The interval of deferral is now studded with new ends, ends that have nothing to do with material possession, ends that are...
instead marked by the drafting of "treatises" and the iteration of "versions." We no longer seek to breach the picture surface but are instead content to drift laterally along it, following the narrow rectangles as they disappear from view, slipping not behind the work's panels but rather off their edges into the half-optical, half-notional space of aspecativity.

It is the same space of aspecativity to which we were earlier introduced in Untitled, a work that if anything renounces referent appropriation even more emphatically by reversing the relationship between volume and plane, its prisms bulging on the near rather than the far side of the picture surface. But if the choice of aspects over referents was clear for Twombly, it was by no means idle. In the 1960's, at the height of American modernism's supposed sophistication, a relapse to reference was occurring, making the choice divisive and stark.

In a series of essays begun in 1960, for example, the critic and historian Michael Fried was forced to reestablish the category of the artistic medium so as to ensure that artworks themselves would not be confused for referents. All artworks, Fried argued, begin as neutral "shapes" and become either "mediums" or "objects" depending on the degree to which they are able to address and overcome their sheer materiality, becoming what he calls "conventions" capable of compelling "conviction." An artwork that failed to do so and that threatened to establish what Fried considered to be a dangerous precedent was Tony Smith's Die (1962). Not only did that work make no claim to be anything other than six cubic feet of steel, more importantly it laid an enormous temporal burden on the viewer. Whereas works-as-objects transcended materiality, producing the sensation of what Fried called "presentness" in which the totality of culture as such seemed available to be experienced, works-as-objects languished in a "presence" that Fried describes as "endless" in that it disallowed any meaning beyond the sheer mass of the work while ensuring that that mass could be possessed by neither eye nor hand. All referent, no aspect, we are only ever able to see a fraction of Die at any given moment and as a result are left circling a work that, though lifeless, is never dead.

It is in this context that Twombly chose aspect over referent. He did so by demonstrating time and again the pleasures that aspect acquisition affords. In his 1966 painting Night Watch, for example, a cube not unlike Smith's is rendered using a handful of spindly lines. Regardless of its fragility, the cube nevertheless seems to bulge as it projects out toward us, as if it were wrapped around a swelling mass. And yet, just as this prospect occurs to us—a prospect altogether unprecedented in Twombly's oeuvre—we notice again the right angle formed by the dense layer of planes to the left. Suddenly the cube is punctured. As it begins to deflate we abandon it and shift our attention to that layer of planes now delighting in its volume—not the literal volume of a singular referent, but rather the figurative volume of limitless aspects.

But Twombly was not content to let each experience of aspect acquisition stand as an isolated event. He wanted instead to ground them in a revised art history that tended away from reference and toward aspecativity, an art history in which they would be cast as triumphs over reference—the art history I've been sketching in these last few pages. Hence the title Night Watch, which alludes to Rembrandt's 1642 work. It is not surprising that Rembrandt should be given a pivotal role for it is he who more than any other seventeenth-century artist broke with the referential conventions of the Renaissance, ushering in the era of non-referential Baroque vision. Consider, for example, his 1632 etching The Raising of Lazarus. Here we as viewers survey the scene from what is surely the least propitious position. Of the four groups of viewers, not only are we farthest away from the action, we are also least able to see Christ, whose face remains hidden from us. And yet, remarkably, we do not suffer for it. We do not envy the views of the others. Although Rembrandt renders the miracle as if seen by four distinct groups, we have no desire to consolidate these vantages. They are partitive aspects of a scene which we have no desire to recompose or make whole.
Night Watch distills all this in the beautifully rendered hand of Frans Banning Cocq. Not only does the shadow cast by that hand mount a defense on behalf of partitive aspects by doubling that hand, transforming it into a gesture of aspective generosity, it also marks the picture surface, stating unequivocally that—as in Twombly’s painting—no referent lurks behind the canvas. The action is taking place on the near side of the picture surface, somewhere between the viewer and the wall.

By seizing Rembrandt’s victory over reference as a point of departure, Twombly reinvigorates the interval of deferral, reimagining it as the interval of art history as such, an interval into which we are ourselves thrown. When looking at his paintings we get the impression that we are cycling back and forth between two temporalities, traveling between two chronotopes—one immediate, all pigment and cotton, the other more diffuse but no less dense, human on the grandest scale. It is for this reason that the lines of Night Watch seem, as is so often the case in Twombly’s work, to be once tactile and tactful, as if they know both less and more than other lines.

This all comes with its share of anxiety. Twombly is asking a lot of us. Most of all, he’s asking us to keep the interval of deferral going. The
longer we look, the more convinced we are that Rembrandt's victory was a fragile one and that Twombly's watch is, if anything, the more vigilant of the two. That vigilance plays itself out in Twombly's emphasis on practice. If Twombly's *Night Watch* can be said to be a painting of something it is one of "night watch-ing"—that is, of a certain way of looking, a certain practice of vision. And of course it is a painting of something. After all, it is nothing if not mimetic, only what it mimics is not some object out there but the very practice of first pulling chalk (and, indeed, fingers) across a smooth and slightly damp piece of slate and of then standing back to take in the results. That chalk is really wax and that slate is really paint does not bother us because what is on offer is the practice depicted, a practice that Twombly, by mimetically showing it to us, allows us to fully grasp, if only for as long we stand there looking.

It is for this reason that Twombly strikes me as a painter who managed somehow to have gotten at the anthropological root of things, for in his paintings aspect acquisition assumes something like the full dimensions of a referent, a punctual end studding the interval of deferral. When we look at his paintings we aren't haunted by the specter of postponement the way we were with Constable's or Tiepolo's. In them deferral becomes satisfying. In them deferral becomes good.

IV.

But this is a recent development and one that—as I said at the outset—should not be taken for granted. If the narrative I've been sketching has gained shape as the centuries have piled up, it has also become more charged. Indeed, with Twombly we've come not so much to a stop as to a teetering pause. That, to me, is how it should be. After all, the issue is motivation and motivation is a precarious thing, for to admit motivation is to entertain the prospect of failure. And so, as I began amid things I'll end it there too, but not among things to have but rather things to do.

While our consideration of Twombly has given some indication of how the interval of deferral can be narratively recharged through the introduction of the moment of aspect acquisition as an end in deferral, his work does little to suggest how urgent that narrative recharging in fact is. Here, a few words on the work of his colleagues Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns might help.

Both Rauschenberg and Johns were, perhaps even more so than Twombly, convinced of the poverty of reference as a motivation for viewing. Indeed, in his *Factum I* from 1957, Rauschenberg short-circuits reference as such. Adopting the gestural repertoire of Abstract Expressionism, which the previous generation of New York painters had cast as being semiotically without remainder, each confessional stroke achieving—it was claimed—a perfect consubstantiality of signifier and signified, he painted Pollock-eque drips over sheets of newsprint and photographs. Though taken from here and there, these seem, when collected on the canvas, to be pulled gravitationally into the orbit of some referent—stars circling some hidden idea, some interpretive key, perhaps known only to Rauschenberg himself. But this tendency toward reference is promptly—and deservedly—ridiculed by *Factum II* as naïve and, well, boring. Now, what had been so full of referential promise is not only shown to be iterative but is also exposed as laughable—a lark. While viewers of the pendant works still hung up on reference will leave (or worse, stay) disappointed, those among us unencumbered by reference are free to delight in a cleverness in which we too share. In true scenic fashion, we're in on it.

This is also the case in Johns's *False Start* from 1959, where both reference and bad deferral are lampooned. Here the Ab-Ex stroke's claim to semiotic hermeticism is reduced to all but the lowest level of absurdity, made the equivalent of the matching of the word "red" to its corresponding color swatch. I say all but the lowest level because that level is reserved for those who, noticing that word and swatch do not in fact match, wish that they did. Johns's painting seems to challenge us to leave them to it. With the wind of modernism at our backs, the painting seems to suggest that we leave them to the false starts and perpetual postponements of bad deferral while we get on with the urgent task of aspect acquisition.
And that task is urgent. For, as I said in my introduction, one of the lingering paradoxes of GA is that, while the animal appetite for the referent can neither be satisfied nor strictly speaking even pursued, a condition which when recalled throws into relief the staggering degree to which the human appetite for the sign—i.e., for the aspect—has been the source of the satisfactions that we do experience, the two appetites nevertheless continue to be confused, not only in GA but also and to a far larger extent in our own sign-saturated commodity culture. Indeed, the commodity itself is the principal site where this confusion occurs. Though an abstraction, as Marx argued, the commodity is alas not nearly abstract enough.\\footnote{A can of Ballantine Ale, for example, satisfies both an animal appetite (it has use value) and a human appetite (it has symbolic value). That the satisfaction of the animal appetite requires the continued production and consumption of can after can while the satisfaction of the human appetite can continue, sustained or even enriched by bronzing just two, is a distinction that is either lost or repressed in our commodity culture, resulting in the social political and environmental jeopardy in which we find ourselves today.\\footnote{If GA wants to be truly generative as a theoretical project, if it wants to participate in the story of culture to which it is so obviously committed, it might strengthen its strong evaluations by stating its motivations more firmly and allocating some of its considerable interpretive power to clearing up this confusion of appetites. On the societal level that would require a retrieval of the foundations of liberalism similar to that attempted by C. B. Macpherson or Isaiah Berlin.\\footnote{After all, it was Berlin who noted that perhaps the sole consolation offered by the reckless adventurism of the twentieth century was the knowledge, gained at terrible expense, that "ends are made, not discovered."}}\\footnote{On the textual level it would require, as I have been arguing, our narratively re-charging the interval of deferral by introducing into it ends toward which it might tend, ends which would clearly state and re-state the virtue of choosing signs over referents. That recharging is necessary, for though our becoming human may have occurred in an instant, it seems that our staying human will require more persistence.}

\textbf{Notes}


3. Gans comes close to an explicit refutation of the equal desirability of the referent and the sign in the chapter on "The Origin of Fiction" in Originary Thinking: Elements of a Generative Anthropology (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), where he distinguishes between the
referential conventions of imperative and declarative sentences. Whereas imperative sentences like "Hammer!" require only that we imagine the referent "hammer" without giving any thought to its scenic qualities—its temporal and spatial surroundings—declarative sentences like "Hammer—no!" imply a cognitive shift as the scenic dimensions of space and time become vital concerns. Instead of simply imagining the referent "hammer," we respond to declarative sentences like "Hammer—no!" by imaging its absence, an absence that is mitigated by the newly apparent sign "hammer" that now circulates among the community of language users that make up the scene. No longer simply a stand-in for the referent "hammer," the word "hammer" now exists as a distinct entity in and of itself. As Gans explains, it is the ability of declarative sentences to cause this shift to scenic thinking that makes them the originary sites of fiction, for unlike imperative sentences which are instantly verifiable, declarative sentences are verifiable only after a delay in which the newly founded community of language users turn from sign to referent, assessing the relationship between the two. It is this delay, Gans argues, that is the origin of narrative time and, insofar as it provides respite from appetitive violence, of human history as such. And yet, while the distinction between imperative and declarative sentences hints that the scales of desire have tipped decisively toward the sign, they tip back toward the referent when Gans describes the more plausible as the result of the description of its divine agent. Description intensifies the desire for presence through deferral of the essential movement toward presence [emphasis added]" (p. 98). It is this "intensification of the desire for presence through deferral"—this intensification of the desire to once again tether sign to referent even in what we would expect to be the referent-transcending realm of fiction—that betrays GA's ambivalent motivations.


8. On skenographia and skiagrapheia see David Summers, Vision, Reflection and Desire in Western Painting (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), pp. 16-42. Many of my comments in this section are indebted to Summers's insightful account of these terms. (back)

9. As E.H. Gombrich notes in "The Heritage of Apelles" in The Heritage of Apelles: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 3-18, this play of light has more to do with the position of the viewer than with the properties of the robe. As Gombrich explains, viewer-dependent light came to be known as "splendor" and was distinguished from non-viewer dependent light, which came to be known as "lumens." The suggestion of richness that survives in our own casual use of the word "splendor" offers, perhaps, some sense of the specular satisfaction early Roman viewers may have experienced when standing before works like "Street Musicians." Being viewer-dependent that satisfaction is aspectival rather than referential. (back)

10. For a summary of Brunelleschi's invention, see Martin Kemp, Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 9-53. (back)

11. As John White notes, this distance was extended in Brunelleschi's later study of the Palazzo Vecchio, which required both a larger panel and a larger mirror. See John White, The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 116-117. (back)

12. For the English passage of this translation, see White, p. 116. For the original Italian, see Antonio Manetti, Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi; edizione critica di Domenico De Robertis (Milano: Il polifilo, 1976), p.59. (back)

13. Should my description of Renaissance perspective as "crue" seem unjustified, consider Manetti's own tragi-comic novella "The Fat Woodcarver" in An Italian Renaissance Sextet: Six Tales in Historical Context, Luigi Ballerini & Massimo Cavolella, ed. and trans. Murtha Baca (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1994), the plot of which turns on the protagonist's being deceived by an elaborate perspectival scheme orchestrated by Brunelleschi himself. Although the story can be read as chastising those viewers who are naïve enough to take Renaissance perspective's promise of referential fidelity seriously, that reading would still admit that referential fidelity was aimed at, if only to then be ridiculed by initiates. (back)

14. Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the Artists: A Selection, Vol. I, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 104. It should also be noted that it was Uccello's c. 1432 painting The Battle of San Romano that Michael Baxandall used as an example of what he argued was a habit among Renaissance merchants of using perspectival paintings as opportunities to exercise their ability to accurately gauge three-dimensional volumes, a skill that was essential for trade. A merchant-viewer's ability to quickly gauge the volume of the hexagonal hat in Uccello's painting, for example, was in essence the same as his ability to gauge of the amount of grain or spice contained in an oddly shaped barrel as it came off a newly docked ship laden with goods. Needless to say, the plausibility of Baxandall's argument only confirms my suspicion that early modern vision was steeped in conventions of reference. See Painting & Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 89-91. (back)

15. Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 77-78. For an insightful account of Alberti's aesthetic system, see Joan Gadol, Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago, 1969). For an account of the velo and other compositional devices used by early modern draftsmen, see Kemp, pp. 163-221. Oddly, in his Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, JacobBurckhardt speaks of the Renaissance as a moment when the "veil" of the Middle Ages was torn away, writing: "In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness—that which was turned within and that which was turned without..." (back)
—lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion and childish prepossessions, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation—only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the State and of all the things of this world became possible." See Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London and New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 9. Of course, from the vantage adopted in this essay, the Renaissance claim that a "veil" separated the viewer from the referent and Burckhardt's later claim that only once the "veil" of Medieval illusion had been torn away could the referent be seen clearly differ only in a manner of degree. (back)

16. Alberti, p. 77. (back)

17. The notion that Twombly's painting deals with a physical veil is rendered suspicious by the crossing-out of a photograph of a woman's veil in a "study" for Treatise on the Veil (Second Version), now at the Menil Collection in Houston. Though not impossible, the linking of Twombly's painting to a physical veil strikes me as uninteresting, especially given this intervention by Twombly himself. (back)


19. My thinking in this section about Night Watch and The Raising of Lazarus have benefited from Michael Podro's discussion of both works in his Depiction (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 61-87. Heinrich Wölflin's famous description of Baroque vision as "optical" rather than "haptic" may be read as signaling the degree to which aspects became satisfying ends for viewing in the 17th century. As Wölflin noticed, the 17th-century pursuit of a pure optical space in which atmospheric conditions and the play of light and shadow were allowed to obscure the objects depicted nevertheless introduced a set of new tactile values as viewers began to delight in the surface appearance of things which they largely synthesized themselves, imaginatively conjuring not only individual objects but also whole scenes from out thick pools of brown and black paint. See Heinrich Wölflin, Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art, trans. M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover Publications, 1950). The new tactile values that Wölflin describes strike me as distinctly aspectival, occurring as they do often at the expense of reference. (back)

20. The notion that the gestural repertoire of Abstract Expressionism strove to be semiotically without remainder is nicely summed up by Rosalind Krauss's description of Pollock and de Kooning's marks as executed in a moment of "pure instantaneity...pure release." Rosalind Krauss, The Optical Unconscious (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p. 7. (back)


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"Education is an admirable thing," said Oscar Wilde in *The Critic as Artist*, the 1891 dialogue that presents the most extensive exposition of his philosophy of art, "but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught" (*Intentions* 124). Teachers of language and literature in today's academy scarcely need Wilde's reminder of how difficult and fruitless their task can be in an age when a college degree is increasingly viewed as a right, not a privilege. As Ian Dennis observes in "Student Resentment and Professorial Desire in Higher Education," today's professors frequently complain that their students are at best indifferent, and at worst hostile to the educational experiences we create in order to share with them what Matthew Arnold called "the best which has been thought and said in the world" (*Culture and Anarchy* viii). Seasoned college teachers have long known what Wilde hints at, that university education is a matter of soul craft, not training, with subtle effects that may not show themselves for decades, if at all. In recent years, however, academia has grown impatient with slow and indeterminate intellectual growth. The spread of the learning outcomes assessment movement has resulted in academic departments being required to enumerate precise educational objectives, lists of exactly what our students will know and be able to do at the end of a 15-week course on, say, British Romanticism or the Russian realist novel.

Despite its ubiquity, learning outcomes assessment remains controversial, particularly in the humanities, where Wilde's skepticism about the teachability of things worth knowing defines one pole of what is known in the assessment literature as "the ineffability debate."(1) Since learning outcomes assessment emerged in the mid 1980s, many objections, both pragmatic and philosophical, have been raised in response to what assessment's proponents see as a long overdue emphasis on measurement of, and consequent instructor accountability for, what and how much students learn. As might be expected, the ineffability objection arises more frequently in less mathematically based disciplines. Assessment of student learning in chemistry and physics is less problematic than in history, philosophy, and literature: students either know the atomic number of xenon or that the slope of a line is rise over run, or they do not. But as mathematical certainty diminishes, the possibility of accurate measurement of what students have learned becomes more contested. Critics complain that the input/output model of thinking on which assessment is based is incapable of representing the complexity and unpredictability—the freedom—of textual discovery, and thus, by viewing teaching and learning as a closed circuit, overlooks the unquantifiable cognitive and intellectual transformations that deep engagement with texts can inspire.

But despite these epistemological qualms, it is difficult to find a humanities department today that does not publish a set of learning outcomes for its courses and major programs. In literature and language departments, these outcomes are usually oriented toward helping students acquire the skills and willingness "to read, analyze, interpret, and write about texts from a wide range of genres, historical eras, theoretical paradigms, and cultural contexts," and "to write with clarity, grace, economy of expression, and persuasiveness."(2) In adopting outcomes like these, today's humanists—no doubt unwittingly—follow in the footsteps of Oscar Wilde's Victorian foe, the poet, critic, and educational theorist Matthew Arnold, who famously defined the intellectual tenor of mid-nineteenth century Europe as "a critical effort; the endeavor, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is" (*On Translating Homer* 64). The assessment movement uncritically accepts Arnold's essentialist epistemology: namely, that things are, in themselves, something, and that these essential somethings can...
be discerned, described, and taught—that is, transmitted from one mind to another. While assessment purports only to measure the efficacy of the transmission, such measurements would not be possible if the essential natures of things were not fixed. Whether they know it or not, today's proponents of assessment implicitly endorse Arnold's mid-nineteenth-century positivism. The two sides of the ineffability debate therefore fall into venerable and familiar critical camps: classic vs. romantic, or, in M.H. Abrams' famous formulation, the mirror and the lamp, with the pro-assessment side seeing education as the transmission of quanta of information, which students retain and are able to reproduce (like mirrors) in essays and on tests. The ineffability objection, on the other hand, views education not as the corpuscular transfer of knowledge particles, but as a wave of inspiration. Wilde's art pour l'art offers a supercharged Romantic vitalism to counter the high Victorian age's pressure on the arts—especially literature—to bring about ethical, political, and social improvement through careful and accurate mimesis of life's material conditions. Art for art's sake calls nineteenth-century assumptions about the nature and instrumentality of art radically into question, just as the anti-assessment side of the ineffability debate today expresses a thoroughgoing skepticism that the elements of aesthetic experience can be described, much less measured. Today's skepticism can come either from Wildean Romanticism or postmodern epistemological anti-essentialism, illustrating how anti-assessment politics makes strange bedfellows.

There was no love lost between Wilde and Arnold, so it should come as no surprise that on the surface, Wilde's aesthetics are about as opposite from Arnold's essentialism as possible. Both "The Decay of Lying" and "The Critic as Artist" critique Arnold's dictum of seeing the object as in itself if really is. But Wilde does not merely gainsay Arnold with a Romantic counter-dictum of the ineffable sublimity of thought and aesthetic response. A close examination of Wilde's arguments reveals instead that Wilde sees the essential functions of art through the lens of an unexpectedly anthropological conception of mimesis. In light of the quip with which this essay opens, it seems that if Wilde were around today, he would land squarely in the "literature is ineffable" anti-assessment camp. But Wilde's idiosyncratic approach to aesthetics, conditioned as it is by an intuition of the mimetic origins of art, emerges as more tolerant of assessment than we might expect from a devotee of art for art's sake, and offers a way to break through the impasse of today's ineffability debate.

The aesthetics Wilde expounds in his two dialogic essays pushes Kantianism to its farthest logical extreme. In the Critique of Judgment, Kant concluded that the beautiful pleases "universally without a concept" (40). Equating Kant's "concept" with "purpose," Wilde famously declared in the Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray that "All art is quite useless" (6), and, in "The Decay of Lying" and "The Critic as Artist," explored how Kant's demonstration (in Eric Gans's paraphrase) of "our ability as free beings to grasp purposiveness in itself rather than merely as subordinate to a system of categories" ("Originary and/or Kantian Aesthetics" 339) can be used to expel Victorian moralizing from the arts. For Wilde, the less purpose or representational fidelity a given work of art possesses, the more beautiful it becomes. In both essays, but particularly in "The Decay of Lying," Wilde mercilessly ridicules his age for trying to enlist the arts in schemes of social, political, and moral improvement. "The only beautiful things, as someone once said, are the things that do not concern us" (Intentions 62), he writes. "As long as a thing is useful or necessary to us, or affects us in any way, either for pain or for pleasure, or appeals strongly to our sympathies, or is a vital part of the environment in which we live, it is outside the proper sphere of art" (Intentions 24). "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book," declares Wilde in the preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray. "Books are either well written, or poorly written. That is all" (5). These principles form the basis for Wilde's bitchy dismissiveness when surveying the literary giants of nineteenth-century realism. "Mr. Henry James," he says in "The Decay of Lying," though possessed of a "neat literary style" and capable of "swift and caustic satire," nevertheless "writes fiction as if it were a painful duty" (Intentions 15). Wilde agrees with Ruskin's opinion that George Eliot's characters are "like the sweepings of a Pentonville omnibus" (Intentions 18). And though he concedes that L'Assommoir and Germinal are not "without power," Wilde nevertheless complains that Zola's characters have their dreary vices, and their drearer virtues. The record of their lives is absolutely without interest. Who cares what happens to them? In literature we require distinction, charm, beauty, and imaginative power. We don't want to be harrowed and disgusted with an account of the doings of the lower orders (Intentions 18).

According to Wilde, literature has reached this sorry state by trading its glorious imaginative birthright for a
"mess of facts" (Intentions 25). Artistic renewal will come, therefore, not from a return to nature, but from poets and artists embracing their ancient role as tellers of beautiful lies. Pushed by his interlocutor to follow the logical drift of his principles, Wilde's spokesman in "The Decay of Lying" moves from denouncing realism to announcing the bold paradox that underlies his aesthetics, and which would seem at first glance to undercut fatally the assessment's movement's essentially Arnoldian faith in knowledge as a mirror of nature: "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life":

> Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows? To whom, if not to them and their master, do we owe the lovely silver mists that brood over our river, and turn to faint forms of fading grace curved bridge and swaying barge? The extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to this particular school of Art. . . . For what is Nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. . . . One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence. At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say they were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till Art had invented them" (Intentions 48)

As for nature, so also for humanity. "Schopenhauer," observes Wilde, "has analyzed the pessimism that characterizes modern thought, but Hamlet invented it. The world has become sad because a puppet was once melancholy. The Nihilist, that strange martyr who has no faith, who goes to the stake without enthusiasm, and dies for what he does not believe in, is purely a literary product. He was invented by Turgenev, and completed by Dostoevsky. Robespierre came out of the pages of Rousseau as surely as the People's Palace rose out of the debris of a novel. Literature always anticipates life" (Intentions 40-41).

In Wilde, paradoxes giddily multiply: since it is a disinterested critical awareness—rather than an imaginative leap—which is capable of discerning this proper relationship between life and art, Wilde elevates the critical faculty above the creative, proposing that this new conception of art requires us to rename the artist the "aesthetic critic." The aesthetic critic's Kantian disinterestedness will enable him to reject "those obvious modes of art that have but one message to deliver, and having delivered it become dumb and sterile" in favor of "such modes as suggest reverie and mood, and by their imaginative beauty make all interpretations true and no interpretation final" (Intentions 164). Though Wilde mostly refrains from making the educational implications of his ideas explicit, at this juncture he cannot help imagining "the smile that would illuminate the glossy face of the Philistine if one ventured to suggest to him that the true aim of education was the love of beauty, and that the methods by which education should work were the development of the temperament, the cultivation of taste, and the creation of the critical spirit" (Intentions 214).

All right, so life imitates art—but why? asks Wilde's interlocutor in "The Decay of Lying." Here Wilde's thinking takes what must have been to his late Victorian contemporaries an startling anthropological turn, one that reveals a middle way between the mysticism or anti-essentialism of the ineffability proponents and the reductionist essentialism of the assessment mavens. Life is art's best, and only pupil, says Wilde, because humanity possesses a "keen imitative instinct," an impulse that propels all human action, from the blows of Michelangelo's hammer and chisel to the criminal's mayhem:

> The most obvious and the vulgarest form in which this is shown is in the case of the silly boys who, after reading the adventures of Jack Sheppard or Dick Turpin, pillage the stalls of unfortunate apple-women, break into sweet-shops at night, and alarm old gentlemen who are returning home from the city by leaping out on them in suburban lanes, with black masks and unloaded revolvers. This interesting phenomenon, which always occurs after the appearance of a new edition of either of the books I have alluded to, is usually attributed to the influence of literature on the imagination. But this is a mistake. The imagination is essentially creative and always seeks for a new form. The boy-burglar is simply the inevitable result of life's imitative instinct. He is Fact, occupied as Fact usually is
with trying to reproduce Fiction, and what we see in him is repeated on an extended scale throughout the whole of life (Intentions 40).

Wilde follows this with several anecdotes in which acquaintances of his found their lives conforming to various works of fiction, including Thackeray's Vanity Fair and Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," offered to illustrate his proposition that in living our lives, "We are merely carrying out, with footnotes and unnecessary additions, the whim or fancy or creative vision of a great novelist" (Intentions 40). In the final analysis, Life holds the mirror up to Art, and either reproduces some strange type imagined by painter or sculptor, or realizes in fact what has been dreamed in fiction. Scientifically speaking, the basis of life—the energy of life, as Aristotle would call it—is simply the desire for expression, and Art is always presenting various forms through which this expression can be attained. Life seizes on them and uses them, even if they be to her own hurt. Young men have committed suicide because Rolla did so, have died by their own hand because by his own hand Werther died. Think what we owe to the imitation of Christ, of what we owe to the imitation of Caesar (Intentions 46).

This complex paragraph is worth unpacking, for doing so enables us to see how Wilde's ultimately mimetic understanding of the origins, function, and communicability of artistic expression are not as ineffable as his glib statement that "nothing worth knowing can be taught" might lead us to believe. For Wilde, the "energy of life" is the "desire for expression," a desire fulfilled instinctively both by the boy-burglar's antics and the aesthetic critic's "love of beauty." The difference between the boy burglar and the aesthetic critic lies in the degree to which the latter controls, rather than is controlled by, the ultimately mimetic desire for expression. But in both cases, the "energy" moves via the "keen imitative faculty" which is at once the original impetus for artistic creation and the means by which the "desire for expression" is continuously manifested, whether for good or ill: "Think what we owe to the imitation of Christ, of what we owe to the imitation of Caesar."

In common—unexpectedly, perhaps—with Aristotle before him and Kenneth Burke and René Girard after him—Wilde bases his aesthetics on an essentially mimetic conception of the human. Aristotle observed that the human is "the most imitative of living creatures," and posited that poetry arose from the confluence of an imitative instinct and "an instinct for 'harmony' and rhythm" (Poetics 55-56). But if humanity is distinguished from other animals by the heightened degree of its imitative faculty, and that faculty can be controlled or even cultivated, is it really the case that nothing worth knowing can be taught? If that were the case, what would be the point of deriving educational aims and methods—"the love of beauty" and "the development of the temperament" and the "cultivation of taste" from the characteristics of the aesthetic critic? The educational scheme with which Wilde hopes to scandalize the Philistine would hardly stand a chance of succeeding were it not to acknowledge, and channel towards its pedagogic ends, humanity's imitative instinct. Perhaps things worth knowing can be taught after all.

Wilde's intuition of the fundamentally mimetic nature of artistic expression not only undermines his dismissal of education, it also serves to clarify the real issue at stake in today's assessment wars, especially in the humanities, where both the possibility and efficacy of setting and measuring student attainment of learning objectives are so bitterly disputed. Humanists who reject the very idea of identifying qualitative outcomes for courses in literature, history, or philosophy under the belief that doing so is somehow antithetical to human freedom would do well to be reminded by Wilde that humans are imitative beings and that imitation is an instinct that can be conceptualized and subjected to conscious control. At their best, learning outcomes are ideas toward which the recurring events of the classroom—as a communally constituted scene of modeling and imitation—are oriented. In the humanities classroom, that direction will always be less fixed and reliably foreknown than in the engineering, mathematical, or scientific classroom; but it is a mistake to equate "less certain" with "unknowable."

As W. Robert Connor has argued, Late Antiquity's concept of sublimity served as both an aesthetic characteristic and an educational objective. Longinus's sublime, writes Connor, "is not 'ineffable'; it can be recognized and analyzed, and perhaps even given expression, using the techniques illustrated in" On the Sublime (97). In practice, of course, today's departments of language and literature—under the sway of
political or ideological commitments, or perhaps held back by an understandable reluctance to pledge more than they think themselves capable of delivering—stop well short in their mission statements and lists of educational goals of trying to cultivate in their students an appreciation for the Longinian sublime: a "certain loftiness and excellence of language, which takes the reader out of himself" (2). Searching for achievable and readily demonstrable outcomes, today's academic departments aim low, promising to teach our students to write with clarity and economy of expression, and to analyze "a wide range of texts" rather than feel literature's (in Longinus's words) "imperious and irresistible force" (2). Though identifying, and then measuring students' attainment of outcomes originated, as Michael Holquist has argued, as a well-meant effort toward educational reform, in practice it has created a slide toward standardization, which is "a constantly lurking danger in any assessment program" (77). A powerful means of guarding against the chilling effects on educational discovery of such standardization, however, lies in Wilde's statement that the true aim of education ought to be "the development of the temperament, the cultivation of taste, and the creation of the critical spirit." However difficult—or even impossible—it might be to convert temperament, taste, and spirit into the information quanta with which assessment conventionally works, these characteristics are nevertheless capable of being imitated and recognized. And anything that can be recognized can be assessed.

The humanist's answer to calls for identifying and measuring what we think our students will know and be able to as a result of our courses should not, therefore, be an outraged claim that such knowledge is impossible. Instead, we should take a page from Wilde's book and assert that students' souls will be exalted by their encounters with aesthetic greatness, and that exalted souls have certain characteristics by which they can be recognized. We humanists should shake off the timidity that has prompted us to proffer puny objectives like "effective communication" and "historical awareness" when we should, as Wilde implies, use our understanding of the mimetic bases of education to demonstrate to our students the paradoxical fact that imitation is a path to innovation, and to model for them the benefits of striving for sublimity. As Longinus points out—in terms that uncannily anticipate Wilde's exposition of the mimetic origins of all representation—one of the surest ways to the sublime lies through imitation:

We may learn from this author [Plato], if we would but observe his example, that there is yet another path besides those mentioned which leads to sublime heights. What path do I mean? The emulous imitation of the great poets and prose-writers of the past. On this mark, dear friend, let us keep our eyes ever steadfastly fixed. Many gather the divine impulse from another's spirit, just as we are told that the Pythian priestess, when she takes her seat on the tripod, where there is said to be a rent in the ground breathing upwards a heavenly emanation, straightway conceives from that source the godlike gift of prophecy, and utters her inspired oracles; so likewise from the mighty genius of the great writers of antiquity there is carried into the souls of their rivals, as from a fount of inspiration, an effluence which breathes upon them until, even though their natural temper be but cold, they share the sublime enthusiasm of others (29).

Like the nineteenth-century realist novel Wilde critiques in the "The Decay of Lying," humanities education in the age of learning outcomes assessment appears to have sold its sublime birthright for a mess of facts. Knowing how ideologically and theoretically contested the once-stable concepts of inspiration and the sublime have become, many literary educators have thrown their lot in with mystics and Romantics in asserting the ineffability of aesthetic outcomes. They need not have done so, however. Acknowledging the anthropologically mimetic bases of representation enables us both to do assessment and urge our students toward sublimity. We need not pursue one at the expense of the other. If we embrace sublimity (as Wilde does), and at the same time make our peace with the perhaps uncomfortable fact that our students' imitative faculty is the natural impulse we, as teachers, can use to coax them toward sublimity, if we bring all our wisdom and anthropological insights to bear on creating scenes of educational mimesis that reasonably lead to transmitting the knowledge, skills, and attributes we value—even if nothing worth knowing can be taught, many things worth knowing can be caught.

References


**Notes**


2. From the High Point University English Department's web page (http://www.highpoint.edu/english/). [back]

Introduction

Where Eric Gans's hypothesis of the origin of the human reconstructs a scenic event oriented around an aborted gesture of appropriation, Mircea Eliade's work can be seen as endorsing the applicability—even universality—of certain elements of Gans's hypothesis through the comparative study of archaic, classical, and world religions. Through a close analysis of *Signs of Paradox* by generative anthropologist Eric Gans and *Rights and Symbols of Initiation, Images and Symbols* and *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* by religious scholar Mircea Eliade, I will contrast and compare the two thinkers by focusing on Gans's conceptualisation of the "sacred centre" and "paradox," and Eliade's study of the plethora of cultures found throughout the world, whose participants attempt to access, I argue, a kind of Gansian sacred centre.

At first glance, we see two entirely separate modes of theoretical discourse. On the one hand we have a historian of primitive, classical, and world mythico-rituals of religion, and on the other, an interdisciplinary intellectual who proposes a minimalist approach to the origin of humanity and consciousness. Despite the apparent differences, a recurring theme found throughout the works of both thinkers is the paradoxical necessity of the sacred centre and the emergence of the profane periphery. Why is it necessary? And in what sense? By utilising Gans's "originary scene" as the central theme of this article, I will compare the most general and explicit similarities and differences found in the works of Eliade and Gans: the sacred centre, the opposition of the sacred and profane, the necessary paradox of the sign, and the perpetuation of religious ritual re-enacting the sacred event of the emergence of language and consciousness. These themes are explicitly tied to the notion of the sacred. One theorist proposes a hypothesis, while the other sets up a comparative reflection on the supposed universal religious revelations that lead Eliade to give early humanity the title *homo religiosus*. I contend that Eliade's way of viewing the world is a form of originary analysis.

First, an in-depth analysis of Gans's hypothesis of the originary event, in which he seeks to offer an explanation of the origin of the human. I will explain in the simplest theoretical terms the main ideas found in the originary hypothesis. From here, I will move on to consider the role "paradox" plays in Gans's hypothesis when dealing with the nature of language. Furthermore, through a close reading of Gans's notions of the sacred centre and the profane periphery, I will demonstrate how the paradoxical nature of the sacred works to feed into the emerging field of generative anthropology (GA). Moving on, I will closely analyse three carefully selected texts by Eliade dealing with the sign, the image, myth, and the description and function of ritual: *Rights and Symbols of Initiation, Images and Symbols*, and *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. From the analysis of these three texts, I will outline the main tenets of Eliade's work: the interpretation of the function of "myth," "ritual," and the "sacred/profane" opposition. Lastly, after dealing with these two thinkers separately, I will attempt to synthesise where possible the main contributions of both Gans and Eliade. Gans tells us that "the purpose of originary thinking is not to supplant other modes of thought, but to provide a common point of departure that persists as a link between
them."(1) Like Gans, then, I will accommodate Mircea Eliade's ideas as accompanying Gans's formulations, and also, point toward Gans's notion that "all thinking is originary analysis."(2)

**Part One: Eric Gans**

**The Originary Hypothesis**

Perhaps language is the most definitive yet elusive human characteristic of all, setting us apart from all our known biological counterparts. We can talk and think about it, yet, we can rarely rise above it, or understand it from an external, transcendent reference point. So, what is language? Where did it come from? Does it have a primary function or singular purpose? Was the rise of language-based consciousness an instantaneous moment of noetic-linguistic, sign emitting lightning? Did language evolve in the gradualist, Darwinian bio-evolutionary sense proposed by Stephen Pinker in *The Language Instinct*? Perhaps we might endorse Noam Chomsky's idea of the genetic blueprint of Universal Grammar (UG), already hardwired into the brain at birth. Should we even bother to confront such an elusive intellectual riddle? Are we just clever animals—as many of us believe—who have invented knowledge, and after our star grows cold we will have to die? Nietzsche's implications suggest that knowledge is even more limited than Kant expected, and reflections on origins are seemingly valueless.

Stemming from the French literary and cultural critic, René Girard, whose work on mimetic desire and the "scapegoat mechanism" were formative to his thinking, Eric Gans, Emeritus Distinguished Professor of French and Francophone Studies at UCLA, has pursued a line of non-metaphysical philosophical thought he calls "generative anthropology." Flying against the predilections of academe—at least in the humanities—Gans has proposed a "minimal hypothesis" that attempts to answer fundamental questions about human consciousness and language by placing the ostensive sign at the very centre of human origins, of the origin of the human as (a) human. "Generative anthropology" essentially attempts to figure the human in the most elementary terms possible.

For Gans, the origin of language begins with a scene—a desired object, a scenic centre. We might say that the original scenic centre begins with the fresh meat of a dead, non-human animal. As a preliminary example—although it matters little to speculate on the exact details of what the first scene was, as long as it was a scene—several members of a hominid group are standing around the animal carcass, where all members of the group share the same triangulated mimetic desire for food. Since not all of the members of the group can acquire the same animal at the same time all at once, an outbreak of violence would inevitably occur. At this instant begins what Gans calls the "aborted gesture of appropriation." One member of the group emits a sign or signal that re-presents the central object of desire through a symbol that at once points to the scenic event and at the same time defers mimetic desire for the object. That is, then, an aborted gesture of appropriation that functions to defer violence, and forms its own referent. The first sign is an imitation of an object but paradoxically becomes its own object in the instance of its emergence. This, Gans claims, is the event of the emergence of human consciousness. Once mimetic desire has reached a critical mass of the first symbolic representation, Gans claims, no "alpha" animal can possibly attain the hierarchical model of violent, physical control or dominate the group's desire for the central object. The alpha male can no longer dictate who receives the first form of subsistence simply because: this first sign, or gesture of appropriation, does not, and cannot intend directly its referent. Rather, for Gans, the sign is an imitation and symbolic re-presentation of the central object of desire. It is intangible, and so becomes a paradoxical, sacred mystery. From "horizontal" mimetic violence comes the "verticality" of the sign. Gans writes:

The gesture of appropriation is an act that directly intends a worldly result; its temporality is that of the practical world. In contrast, the sign does not intend its referent directly, but through mimesis of its formal closure. The sign is an object, a product, a whole imitating another whole. The sign points to its referent, but in order to do so, it must be cut off from the possibility of attaining it, must mimic the object's closure in its own. What is new about the human sign as opposed to the most complex animal signals is that it is the product of a formal consciousness. The sign is a form in that it turns back on itself in order not to appear to be pursued as a gesture of appropriation.(3)
Indeed, through the aborted gesture of appropriation, violence becomes temporarily deferred, as long as the sign refers to its sacred referent. The sole cause and paradoxical function of the original gesture/sign is to defer violence through ever-new, reciprocal emissions of itself. And, rightly so, Gans exclaims: "The gesture is aborted as appropriation but pursued as representation."(4) What we have here is a sign that becomes an object on its own, existing of itself while pointing to its referent at the centre. Our proto-human ancestors, through the emission of a sign, have managed to temporarily defer violence, and in the act separated themselves from exclusive dependence on biological ancestrality. The following points, I argue, are the most basic elements that constitute the originary hypothesis: (1) There was an original event of some sort, comprising more than one proto-human; (2) This original event was catalysed, or triggered by a mimetic crisis at a critical moment/instant; (3) The outbreak of violence was deferred through an aborted gesture of appropriation; (4) The first sign and the signs that followed were rapidly disseminated among the first language users.

Because we are so unused to origin models, it becomes extremely difficult to imagine this first gesture, sign, signal, or grunt—just as confounding as the contemplation of the possibility of the moment of cosmic creation. Yet, the hypothetical postulates proposed by Gans are logical and convincing—they cannot be ignored. Gans talks of the first truly human thought: "The thought that gives rise to language is the thought-not-to-appropriate the object."(5) The sign is paradoxically removed from the object of desire while at the same time attempting to give the object life by emitting the first anthropocentric metaphor, and, in so doing, creating an intangible sacred centre where "the object has now become the centre of a scene."(6) This is why Gans designates the first sign to be the sign of God. The first gesture is in and of itself unreachable; it points to an object of desire as a sacred centre and yet has no physical properties of its own; its function is to defer violence (ethics); it is a thought. The proto-humans have now successfully become separated from their primate cousins by diverting mimetic action into mimetic thought. Gans writes: "What is done in this circumstance is no longer to behave, but to produce a sign."(7) This is a fundamental idea in generative anthropology. We diverge from evolutionary patterns of behaviour and sign our way into deferred meaning. Again, Gans attests: "Unlike even the most stylised of animal behaviours, the sign is intended to make present a referent other than itself."(8) As far as we know, what lies specifically in the human arena, inaccessible to non-human animals, is the re-presentation of an object, perhaps failing to reflect the platonic perfection of the "object," the Idea, but to defer its true essence. Gans tells us that: "the freedom of signing as an act of representation distinguishes it from imitation as a new, human variety of mimesis. To imitate is not to represent."(9) And so, the act of representation transcends mere animal imitation through the emission of a sign whose paradoxical function is both to defer potential communal violence caused by the mimetic desire of the object, and at the same time, to immediately consecrate the object as a "sacred centre" that is impossible to grasp except through the material intangibility of the first sign. As Gans argues, this is the birth of God—the inaccessible sign.

**Signs of Paradox**

Moving on from the basic apparatus of Gans's originary hypothesis, it is important to briefly consider the way Gans looks to paradox when deciphering the birth of language, consciousness, and the first (cogitative) humans. Gans considers the notion of paradox to be complicit, in fact, absolutely necessary, for language to "work." In fact, language cannot purposefully function without its structural foundations based upon paradox. For instance, Gans tells us: "Paradox is a structure of language; it cannot be conceived without the sign. But neither can the sign be conceived without paradox . . . The sign that is in the world represents the world it is in; the sign that stands above the world remains within the world of the sign."(10) For Gans, paradox precedes language itself by maintaining itself in a perpetually deferred form. One might consider the following statement as Gans's first definition of paradox in the terms of the hypothesis:

Paradox itself is paradoxical; that is what makes it paradox. It cannot be reduced to lowest terms, only deferred. But neither is it ever present before our eyes; it is always in a state of deferral.(11)

If language is the vehicle that spins on endlessly as deferral, then paradox is the engine that allows it to do so. For Gans, paradox is "older than language itself."(12) Without paradox, Gans argues, the "openness" of language would not be possible. Instead of an enclosed system of finite symbols, paradox allows language
to stem out into an infinite combination and recombination of symbols of perpetual deferral. Gans confirms this by stating: "The paradoxical foundation of our systems of representation is a sign not of failure but of openness."(13) The linguistic efficacy of mimetic paradox is its ability to perpetually defer, and in the process, recreate the original sign. For Gans, paradox is the machinery that has churned out every facet of human thought since the creation of language. He indicates that: "Because mimetic paradox presides at the creation of the vertical human sign from the horizontal continuum of worldly experience, it stands at the centre of a constellation of categories—irony, comedy, tragedy, evil, and so on—that are conceivable only in a universe of speakers of (human) language."(14) It appears that these categories do not exist outside the realm of human language. Paradox, through its paradoxical nature, has generated the entire gambit of human endeavours and conceptions.

For the purpose of this article, it is important to have a brief understanding of Gans’s notion of paradox—although we will return to this issue again, later. For Mircea Eliade offers a galaxy of examples pertaining to the central importance paradox holds within the cosmic myths and religious rituals found across world history from a large selection of disparate cultural groups. According to Gans, all machinations of revelation and religious crisis emanate from the paradoxical nature of the sign. In fact, according to Gans, all truth is in nature paradoxical.

The Sacred and the Periphery

The fact that the sacred is scenic has been observed by many different writers.

The sociologist Émile Durkheim is considered among the first to seriously recognise the distinction and philosophical implications of the dichotomy between the sacred and profane. Later, thinkers such as Rudolf Otto, and into the twentieth century, René Girard and Mircea Eliade began a series of investigations on mythological development between the sacred and the profane. However, the use to which Eric Gans puts the distinction is of note and requires citing for the purpose of distinguishing between Eliade’s and his own musings.

To begin, how does one conceptualise the phenomena of the sacred? One might argue that the only foreseeable way is to posit that the sacred might exist in the total absence of the profane. Nevertheless, to understand the basic relationship between the sacred centre/profane periphery requires a geometric exercise. Consider a circle. The closer we get to the centre of this circle, the closer to the sacred we seem to get. Naturally, the further out we travel toward its never-ending circumference—itself periphery—the less sacred and more profane we become. Take for example the Pascalian idea: "an infinite sphere, the centre of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere."(15) Within this infinite sphere, for Gans at least, the sacred and the profane simply represent to be and to do. This definition is not one that mirrors pre-modern, monotheistic distinctions of the sacred. Instead, Gans contends that: "To be is to be in the centre, at the locus of significance; to do is to act on the periphery."(16) One could deduce that the sacred for Gans, then, is the luminous central object that is pointed to through the emission of the intangible sign. At the origin of the re-presentation of a central object, the originary scene, we have the emergence of a sacred centre, and, consequently, a periphery.

According to Gans, since the emergence of the centre, there has always existed an intractable tension between centre and periphery. Accordingly, Gans sets as the goal of thinking itself to reduce the tension between the sacred centre and profane periphery. He posits that "the aim of thinking is not to reproduce the originary unity that obtained during the emission of the sign, but rather to reconstruct it in such a way as to reduce the tension between periphery and centre, subject and object. Thinking deconstructs the figures by means of which the sacred centre defers the establishment of reciprocal relations with the profane periphery."(17) So how does one describe the machinery that mediates between the tensions that exist within this dichotomous phenomenon? Gans claims that the sacred only emerges as a consequence of its function of deferring mimetic conflict over the central object. Nevertheless, without some form of fearful reverence or intangible, mysterious power produced by the emission of the sign, the central object loses its sacredness. Gans tells us: "The central object is sacred only insofar as its inaccessibility defers mimetic conflict, but this deferral is effective only because the quality of the sacred is attributed to the object rather than to the peripheral humans whose mutually repelling desires render it inaccessible."(18) So, essentially,
we can posit that the sacred is found as the source of the emission of the sign. The strange phenomena of the emergence of the sign, then, will produce the causal effect by which violence is temporarily averted—this is what defines the sacred. For Gans, the sign creates the central scene in which the sacred becomes possible. However, the sign itself is not sacred, rather, for Gans, it appears that the instant unison between an appearing object and the emission of the transparent sign is what creates the re-presentation of the central scene. Consider the following passage from Signs of Paradox:

In the originary scene, the referent is ontologically primary; the sign is merely a transparent means of indicating what is already there. But once we put aside the transparent sign, we discover that there is no object there for us to be with, that our real desire was not for the referent at all but for the centre of the scene of representation that the sign brought into existence. The referent vanishes, to be restored through the renewed mediation of the sign. (19)

Therefore, once the central object has ceased to appear as the referent of the sign, the central locus calls forth the mediation of a new sign. The sacred is the forever-lost original scenic centre (the mediated object of desire appropriated through an abortive gesture), only surviving in the memory of the forever mediating sign. This is precisely what Gans means when he refers to the sacred in the following way: "Sacredness is experienced as really inherent in its incarnation; the return from the latter to the sign is experienced as the effect, not of the paradoxical sign-referent relation of signification—in which the referent is always already inhabited by the signing relation—but of the obstacle of sacred presence." (20) Again, the sacred is the experience of the ethereal, intangible object at the instant when the sign has been emitted. The sacred is the central, always present central scenic object. Gans contends that to contemplate the esthetic qualities of the sign in the presence of the sacred is a "complement of the sign's desiring prolongation toward the centre." (21) This, then, brings us to the work of Eliade.

Part Two: Mircea Eliade

The Sacred and Profane

Religious scholar Mircea Eliade approaches the origin of the human, not through a rigid hypothesis based on a putative originary scene, but rather, through the close study of the vast collection of origin myths, rituals, and religions developed throughout the world over the course of history. According to Eliade, the early human was explicitly a religious animal (homo religiosus). For him, the primary goal of homo religiosus is to stay as close to sacred space as possible, at all times, through myth, mediated by ritualised events. It might be said that Eric Gans's hypothesis can be 'tested' through the reading of the mythologies, cosmologies, and belief systems of a multiplicity of religious complexes, rigorously cross-examined in Eliade's literature.

In The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, Eliade tells us that: "The first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane." (22) There is a lineage of scholars who have proposed this before him. But, for Eliade, designating the act of attempting to manifest the sacred, he uses the term hierophany. He argues that using this term "expresses no more than is implicit in its etymological content, i.e., that something sacred shows itself to us." (23) Throughout this text Eliade cites a far-reaching range of examples, from the most elementary hierophanies—i.e., manifestations of the sacred in some inanimate object—to what Eliade deems 'supreme' hierophany—for example, the incarnation of the monotheistic God in Christ for Christians, or a shaman in trance. In any case, what the sacred—or, the absence of the profane—reveals to us is "the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural profane world." (24) For homo religiosus, once the sacred has manifested itself in any object, the object becomes something entirely different. For Eliade, much like Gans, the sacred centre has a real world function, that is, the invocation of the centre provides a fixed point of reference, and all other events stem from this central point. Consider the following statement from The Sacred and Profane. Eliade writes:

It is not a matter of theoretical speculation, but of a primary religious experience that precedes all reflection on the world. For it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation. When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of
space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse. The manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world. [my emphasis] (25)

So, instead of an aborted gesture of appropriation—that is, the emission of the sign to defer violence and represent the sacred—Eliade uses the term hierophany to designate a fundamental religious experience (mysterium tremendum) that consecrates the human world around an invented centre, momentarily forming and obliterating the profane periphery, creating what Eliade deems an "absolute reality." The Hierophany, for Eliade, is the analogue to paradox in Gans's understanding of the term. It is the recognition of the essential opposition between the sacred and profane, or the real and unreal, or sacred time and profane time that concerns Eliade in his mission to find common ground among every archaic culture under his examination. He tells us that "the polarity sacred-profane is often expressed as an opposition between real and unreal or pseudoreal." (26) One could attribute the profane to a historical time as opposed to a sacred cosmic time in Eliade's literature: "that is, a primordial time, not to be found in the historical past, an original time, in the sense that it came into existence all at once, that it was not preceded by another time, because no time could exist before the appearance of the reality narrated in the myth." (27) For Eliade, the hierophany is symptomatic of the appearance of the sacred space whose consequence is the rupture between sacred and profane, and at the same time, the emergence of an origin myth. It is the mythicoritual, Eliade argues, that reflects and re-enacts the originary event of the first hierophany.

Reactualising Origins

Eliade argues that the phenomena of mythico-rituals, found across every documented archaic society he examined (of which there were hundreds), share a common, fundamental theme in the sense that they carry out the "reactualisation of cosmogonic act(s) shown both by rituals and in the formulas" that are recited during ceremonies. (28) This is based on the supposition that the power of something lies in its origin. In fact, Eliade contended that the archaic mind considered the origin of any object was what contained its true source of power. In other words, the way a thing was created gives understanding and insight into the true nature of the object. Few academics have challenged Eliade's view of the connection between the sacred and origins.

Eliade's primary theory of the myth-ritual suggests that when a hierophany is experienced—whether collectively or independently—it is what is considered to be the reliving of the origin of a community's religion; it is a harkening back to the initial point of reference—a sacred centre. After the originary event, the myth is then played out in ritualised acts, in order to attain what Eliade has coined an "Eternal Return" to the sacred: to keep as close to the sacred as possible, and away from the profane. This is not to be confused with Nietzsche's thought experiment of the Eternal Return, which posits the hypothetical question of the heaviest burden, but rather, a return to the original primordial Time where the sacred and profane split through the original hierophany. As an example, we have the widespread shamanic rituals of Tungusic peoples where the shaman attempts to attain the original hierophany itself in order to renew the cultural myths of the community. Eliade had proposed a separation of two realities, that of the sacred centre and the profane periphery. The profane is considered the everyday mundane, but, for Eliade, the sacred centre "is at once an image of the world (imago mundi) and a world sanctified by the presence of the Divine Being." (29) To give one example of many, I will briefly cite Eliade's final observation of the Australian aboriginal myth ritual of Kunapipi in Arnhem Land, a mother goddess who gave birth to the first, original humans. He writes: "To perform this ritual is to reactualise the primordial Time, to become contemporary with the Dreaming Period, the novices participate in the mystery, and on this occasion the entire community and its cosmic milieu are bathed in the atmosphere of the Dreaming Period; the cosmos and society emerge regenerated." (30) This idea of the regeneration of cultural values and myths through a hierophany (again, that is, a total absorption into the sacred centre through hallucination inciting the onset of the mysterium tremendum) is complementary to Gans's originary hypothesis. It is the perpetual deferral of meaning through the sign toward the sacred centre that allows for creativity; thus the lack of stagnation found throughout cultures as Eliade contends. Ultimately, Eliade claims that for the initiate "the meaning is always religious, for the change of existential status in the novice is produced by a religious experience." (31)

Furthermore, Eliade even goes so far as to claim that the mentality of homo religiosus (that is the driving
force of human existence, to recreate, re-present, re-enact the centre) is to take action and thought into everything as if it were the first time—a beckoning, or invocation back to the original event. He remarks on "the belief that a state cannot be changed without first being annihilated—in the present instance, without a child dying to childhood. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this obsession with the absolute beginning, the cosmogony. For a thing to be done, it must be done as it was done the first time."(32) Thus, we see the saturation of the originary myth in ritualised events, ubiquitous among archaic, classical, and in many instances, world religions. He justifies this claim by stating: "This discovery that man is part and parcel of a sacred history which can be communicated only to initiates constitutes the point of departure for a long-continued flowering of religious forms."(33) For Eliade, the sacred becomes the premonition and fall into human history.

Yet, not only in myth rituals is the originary event invoked, but also through initiation rituals. Again, through the rigorous comparative study of a large number of geographically disparate societies, Eliade observes that, in fact, it is a fundamental need observed in the archaic religious attitude to perpetually re-create or return to the sacred in order to denounce the more mundane aspects of profane life. However, it is not only in the archaic mind where we can observe the desire to abolish the profane, but all the way up to the present day. He writes:

It is the case of the religious need for periodical abolition of the norms that govern profane life—in other words, of the need to suspend the law that lies like a dead weight on customs, and to re-create the state of absolute spontaneity. The fact that cases of such ritual behaviour have been preserved down to the twentieth century among peoples long since Christianised proves, I believe, that we are here dealing with an extremely archaic religious experience.(34)

We find in Eliade's literature the incessant repetition of the importance of the origin, or absolute beginnings widespread across cultures, particularly archaic ones. He also reflects on the cognitive value of the religious attitude toward myth rituals that incite the temporary abolition of profane life. In Gansian terms, we might situate Eliade's claims toward ritual, and religious practices in general, as the minimal requirement to defer conflict through a repetition of the originary event. In other words, for Eliade, the ritual is a re-actualisation or re-enactment of the original, scenic event. It is the recitation, habitual reliving, or re-enactment of the myth, for Eliade, that leads us directly to the sacred—the human. He writes:

To show something ceremonially—a sign, an object, an animal, a man—is to declare a sacred presence, to acclaim the miracle of a hierophany. This rite, which is so simple in itself, denotes a religious behaviour that is archaic . . . solemnly showing an object signified that it was regarded as exceptional, singular, mysterious, sacred.(35)

Eliade remains consistent with Gans's originary hypothesis by focusing on the objects that are consumed and communally signified through ritual scenes. Eliade, much like Gans, also contends that we can only really know natural objects by inventing them as significant, scenic (sacred) centres. He acknowledges that the myth ritual, particularly in archaic societies, is the representation of a shared, immaterial centre.

Part Three: Return to the Sacred

The study of the sacred is ambitious, but it remains an ambition necessary for us to realize. The French sociologist Roger Caillois is to be credited for writing:

[W]ith regard to the sacred in general, the only thing that can be validly asserted is contained in the very definition of the term—that it is opposed to the profane. As soon as one attempts to specify the nature and conditions of this opposition, one comes up against serious obstacles. Elementary as it may be, no formula is applicable to the labyrinthine complexity of the facts. Examined in a certain perspective, the sacred finds itself rudely contradicted by a mass of facts arranged in baffling sequence. Should one begin with a multitude of monographs on the relationship of the sacred to the profane in each society? This would be the work of several lifetimes, if the research includes a sufficient number of cases.(36)

In just two lifetimes, Gans and Eliade have illuminated the mysterious, necessary paradox between the
sacred and profane. Gans's hypothesis on the origin of language, the opposition between the sacred and periphrery, and an examination of the human in its most minimal terms, offers nothing short of a new anthropology. Eliade's comparative study of homo religiosus in archaic societies, all the way up to the modern age, I argue, works to bolster (even endorse) Gans hypothesis: that is, the religious rites and mythico-rituals performed almost ubiquitously among disparate cultures function to consolidate the reverence of the mystery of the intangible sacred centre, mediated through language. We might argue that the only thing missing from Eliade's originary analysis—if we can call it that—is his failure to place religion in relation to what Gans calls the "basis of representation," language. After all, language is the arbiter, gatekeeper, paradox, and origin of the sacred. As Gans notes: "As I have claimed, and I see no reason to retract this claim, we can and in principle must be able to situate in our hypothetical scene of origin all the essential characteristics of the human: ethics, art, religion, and of course, language." (37)

Although Eliade never explicitly places emphasis on the origin of language and the sacred, he does make passing comments, such as the following:

Attempts have been made to explain the origin of symbols by sensory impressions, made directly upon the cerebral cortex, by the great cosmic rhythms (the path of the Sun, for instance). It is not our business to discuss that hypothesis. But the problem of the origin seems to us to be, in itself, a problem badly stated. Symbols cannot be reflections of cosmic rhythms as natural phenomena, for a symbol always reveals something more than the aspect of cosmic life it is thought to represent. (38)

Eliade somehow anticipates Gans's originary thinking through designating the symbol as revealing a "whole reality" that cannot be accessible by any other means of knowledge. He also describes the symbol as designating the human:

the symbol arises, from the beginning, as a creation of the psyche. This becomes still more evident when we remember that the function of a symbol is precisely that of revealing a whole reality, inaccessible to other means of knowledge: the coincidence of opposites, for instance, which is so abundantly and simply expressed by symbols, in not given anywhere in the Cosmos, nor is it accessible to man's immediate experience, nor to discursive thinking. (39)

Although Eliade places emphasis on the Jungian "psyche," he fails to designate the origin of the psyche itself, and so falls just short of Gans's hypothesis. Nevertheless, both intellects reflect a theory of the origin of the human; both formulate models that accommodate and encompass all cultures available and that attempt to conceptually universalize humanity back to our origins. Ultimately, however, Eliade's comparative study on religions reveals that aesthetic techniques, whether they be from the domain of art, dance, or music and song, allow, through the dissemination of myths and rituals, for the aesthetic contemplation of the original aborted gesture. This makes possible the contemplation of the sacred, however minimal, even today.

Thus the meaning of the first sign that was established in the originary scene serves in both Gans's hypothesis and Eliade's study of what he deems homo religiosus to invoke and embody the originary moment through stylized mythico-rituals. It is then the act of deferring mimetic violence through the re-presentation of the originary scene that is always invoked to dissolve profane existence and return to the sacred, the emission of the sign, the source of all things human. The human, therefore, for both Gans and Eliade exists through the scenic re-presentation—through symbolic ritual—of an object of desire inevitably transformed into the sacred, through the emission of the aborted gesture of appropriation. Language, then, is our primary form of intelligence, which is arguably discharged culturally rather than biologically. And, as we have seen from both Gans and Eliade, language stems from the paradoxical nature of the contemplation of the origin. The paradox, then, at the very least, is that the only way we can know an "object" is to infer, modify, and observe it through the mediation of language.

In many respects Gans and Eliade make universalist claims. To say the word 'universality' invites suspicion; yet, for Gans and Eliade, it is quite a useful tool in generating the minimal elements required to trace out the origins of the human. A largely desacralised West crowing scientific materialism and the emerging green "religions" reflects the human need for the sacred, myths, and origin stories, not just to explain the human,
but to give a reference point—a kind of "universal" anthropology. All other things left aside, we can safely say that both Eliade and Gans have deemed the "sacred," at the very least, a product of some memorable, original, human event. If Gans provided the hypothetical structure of the human, Eliade minimally observes the rituals that reflect the originary scene. He writes: "For any culture is limited by its manifestation in the structures and styles conditioned by history. But the Images which precede and inform cultures remain eternally alive and universally accessible."(40) These are above all two separate reflections on the same object of desire. On the one hand, we have Eliade reflecting on the desire to re-enact the originary scene. On the other, we have Gans expressing the explicit importance of the origin as a structural agent and minimal hypothesis to understanding the human. For Eliade, the sentiments of homo religiosus lead him to imagine a mythical origin. For Gans, it is not some deus ex machina, but rather, a formal closure produced by a sign to defer what would otherwise be a crisis charged by mimetic desire. It is the communal expression and collective understanding of the sign that creates the sacred centre. Eliade, then, offers useful analogical terminology for Gans’s hypothesis. The latter’s hypothesis, I argue, might be considered the imago mundi, or what Eliade conceived of as the original human centre, spreading out into the periphery—the source of ‘all things.’

Originary thinking, or generative anthropology (GA), is not a form of social contract theory, but rather a heuristic tool. Gans affirms this; he writes: "Generative anthropology, which is originary thinking founded on hypothesis rather than revelation, explicitly locates the deconstruction of the object of thought within the minimal configuration of the originary scene. It thereby comes qualitatively closer than its predecessors to the unreachable ideal of intellectual self-generation: to be a way of thinking that includes paradoxically within itself the content of any conceivable metathinking about it."(41)

Our understanding of the sacred, what it is, transcendence, sacrificial violence, or some otherworldly phenomenon, is based on the scene of representation. For Gans, this is the primary goal of generative anthropology: to think minimally in terms of an originary scene. For Eliade, the universal mythico-rituals of seemingly disparate cultures rely on the sacred through representation. Both Gans and Eliade think in hypothetical, scenic terms—of origins. In the words of Gans himself, these thinkers bear the mark of a “critique of phenomenological immediacy.”(42) Without a point of origin, without an immediate sacred centre, we have no point of reference to re-present the scene. In some ways, the scenic centre promotes a human ontology for both the social sciences and humanities. The first principle of generative anthropology is the definitive scenic origin as the source of all human activity. Gans writes: "originary thinking—practiced throughout most of history exclusively in the religious sphere—privileges the ostensivity of central Being, its presence. Generative anthropology is a new way of thinking, but only in the sense that it thematises an activity that has gone on since the origin."(43)

**Notes**

2. Ibid. Gans, E. p. 98. [back]
4. Ibid. Gans, E. p. 98. [back]
5. Ibid. Gans, E. p. 98. [back]
7. Ibid. Gans, E. p. 20. [back]
10. Ibid. Gans, E. p. 35. (back)
11. Ibid. Gans, E. p. 35. (back)
12. Ibid. Gans, E. p. 38. (back)
13. Ibid. Gans, E. p. 46. (back)
17. Ibid. Gans, E. p. 96. (back)
18. Ibid. Gans, E. pp. 92 - 93. (back)
21. Ibid. Gans, E. p. 27. (back)
23. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 11 (back)
24. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 11 (back)
25. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 21. (back)
27. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 72. (back)
28. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 77. (back)
29. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 6. (back)
30. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 48. (back)
31. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 1. (back)
33. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 20. (back)
34. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 46. (back)
35. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 43. (back)
37. Ibid. Gans, E. No. 440. (back)
38. Ibid. Eliade, M. pp. 176-177.  (back)
39. Ibid. Eliade, M. p. 177. (back)

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