

Epistemology and Generative Theory: Derrida, Gans, and the Anthropological Subtext of Deconstruction

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1. Introduction

On the surface it may seem odd to bring together two such apparently opposed thinkers as Derrida and Gans. For are not the two precisely at loggerheads? Derrida, after all, we associate with the critique and deconstruction of origins, whereas Gans explicitly sets himself the task of theorizing origins in what he claims to be a positive and scientific sense. But in fact such an opposition, though pertinent, does not tell the whole story, for where Gans's and Derrida's paths cross is in their conception of language as speaking the definition of humankind. Certainly, this moment of contact on the question of language is brief and leads to widely divergent paths for both thinkers—Gans to generative anthropology, Derrida to epistemology critique and deconstruction—but the overlap is there, and thus deserves some attention.

In this paper, I will examine Gans's claim that the Derridean critique of a “metaphysics of presence,” economically illustrated by the neologism *différance*, is not merely an unrepresentable space that underwrites (and therefore deconstructs) all metaphysical—*i.e.*, ungrounded—ontological categories, but is indeed a historical event that initiates a continuous “genetic” chain of human culture. Whereas metaphysics begins in ahistorical ontological categories, generative anthropology presents a historical scene, which shows that the deferral Derrida finds animating the metaphysical hypostatization of presence is in fact the very structure of human difference itself—that is, humanity as the language-using animal. Derrida's discovery of the mechanism of linguistic deferral is given historical rigour by Gans in a hypothetical “scene of origin” that takes this mechanism as the epistemological

basis for its anthropology.

In many ways, generative anthropology is like the proverbial bad dream of the philosophical unconscious. For, like the Freudian unconscious which provides the foundations for the all-knowing, yet simultaneously unknowing rational ego, so too generative anthropology provides an extensive prehistory to classical philosophical foundations. Thus, just when the philosophical logos thought it had finally expelled its anthropological and sacred origins, they return to haunt the clean well-lighted place of “logocentric” (Platonic) rationality. Derrida’s deconstructive project is indeed an exposing of philosophy’s pre-logocentric origins, and as such it serves as a direct invitation to anthropology. Yet Derrida’s perspective, as we shall see, will not admit of a possible positive foundation prior to the philosophical one. Thus, Derrida concludes that foundation outside

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the philosophical logos is an impossibility, since all ontological gestures are “always-already” inscribed within the necessarily logocentric discourse we use. But this paradoxical situation between the language of the present and the language of the origin need not be carried thus to its epistemological absurdity. The unthematizable deconstructive aporia belongs most fundamentally to the origin of language, not in our contemporary discourse. The Derridean performative of *différance* must have been performed at the origin of humanity as the first historical moment. The attempt to recreate this experience within contemporary discourse is a belated ritualizing (as all rituals necessarily are) of an event that must have taken place in wholly more urgent circumstances—indeed, in circumstances that have decided the fate of human history ever since.

This radical inversion of the Derridean insight that representation, or more precisely “text,” surrounds human history ubiquitously is the product of Gans’s well-nigh single-handed attempt to found a human scientific program based on the assumption that humanity originated in a unique event, the resonances of which can be seen in a continuous “genetic” thread of subsequent cultural evolution. For Gans, the demise of metaphysics and the poststructuralist elevation of representation signal the beginning of human science construed as a systematic construction of the “scene of human origin.” Ultimately, all culture is concerned with recreating the originary scene, but it is only generative anthropology that proposes this scenic creation as a subject for methodological reconstruction. The originary scene is thus a hypothesis, that is, a heuristic, which serves to generate explanations of cultural phenomena. As such, the hypothesis possesses a privileged position within the theory compared with those cultural developments that are seen to stem from it. This privileging, however, is not simply matter of personal

preference. The scene itself must explain in a plausible fashion how language as the salient feature of the human originated to establish a collective scene of representation. Unlike the empirical sciences, human science must draw its evidence from the very same scene it is trying to describe. This is the paradox of human science which Derrida unveils as the unexplained Achilles' heel covertly present in metaphysics since Plato. Generative anthropology takes this paradox as its starting point. Thus, the scene of human origin is also the origin of its theorization. Gans's radicalization of traditional epistemology is not in the first place a question of ontological categories, but of hypothetical scenic construction, the very purpose of which is to explain the birth of the metaphysical, that is, the transcendental, that Derrida finds underpinning an entire ontotheological tradition as a "metaphysics of presence."

2. Epistemology and Generativity

What then is this prehistory—this unconscious nightmare—which lies anterior to the philosophical logos? We can approach this question most efficiently from the point of view of language, taking as our point of reference Gans's genetic scheme of

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linguistic evolution outlined comprehensively in his book *The Origin of Language*. For Gans, language defines humankind, thus separating our species from the higher mammals, whose communication systems operate non-scenically and hence can give rise to no internal ethic. But to juxtapose ethics and language together in this manner is already to suggest the need to articulate our understanding of language in more concrete terms, for clearly there is more at foot in the linguistic act than the mere communication of "bits" of information. Thus, Gans proposes a concrete historical scene as a model or prototype which includes within it all the fundamental elements of culture. Yet care must be taken in constructing this scene. For simply to select by way of example an arbitrary cultural "scene" from a presumably infinite array of such scenes (be they aesthetic, religious, or more particularly political or economical) would condemn our analysis to incompleteness, there being no criteria whereby we could thus justify our "arbitrary" selection. This is in fact the perennial problem with all theories of culture, and it serves to point out the epistemological question we are here addressing. The problem is ultimately a problem of distinguishing what is truly original, from what is supplemental. The term "arbitrariness," as its ancestry in synchronic linguistics suggests, is thus seen to be the sacrifice of the genetic question for the relative peace of mind of the structuralist, detemporalized whole, where each supplement may exist equally as part of a differential system. But this "scientific" egalitarianism does not solve the problem of origins—it simply ignores it.[\(1\)](#)

The cultural problem of origins is one of theorizing cultural continuity, that is, of presenting a narrative. The question of arbitrariness reflects the inability to motivate a decision between competing supplementary structures which influence the course of the theoretical narrative we seek. But this hesitation before adding another link in the chain of history constitutes itself an awareness of history as narrative. The theoretical moment of our time-postmodernity-suggests a certain self-reflexivity which hesitates before the traditional eschatological and teleological understandings of cultural history. Our problem with the arbitrary scene held up as an ideal model reflects this. For by thus leaping “into the middle of things” we would simply be contributing to culture in the narrow sense, that is, as a mere extension of previous cultural products. As such, our analysis could not claim any authority over those other “scenic” instances of culture, and any “metaphysical” claims we would seek to make would be condemned to the “always-already” argument of Derridean deconstruction. But it is precisely the rigour of Derrida’s critique that forces us to address the “question of culture” at the scene of cultural origin and not *in medias res* where culture has already diversified into an always supplemental manifestation of its originary moment.

Thus Gans argues for the postulation of an originary hypothesis or scene of origin that, following the scientific principle of minimality (Ockham’s razor), seeks to explain the transition from nature to culture as a unique event, the occurrence of which provides the first moment of representation and initiates the human-cultural adventure.

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The originary hypothesis describes the creation of the fundamental scene of representation to which all subsequent cultural scenes refer. By reconstructing this initial scene, we are given a general model which integrates the essential features of culture, and thus serves as a heuristic for understanding subsequent cultural developments. For Gans, this is indeed the only basis upon which human science can claim to be a science at all.

To comprehend the epistemological radicality of Gans’s program, we need to grasp the centrality of language and, more broadly, of representation for generative anthropology. To do this requires a fresh perspective on the function of language that goes beyond the metaphysical understanding of representation as a convenient tool for signifying a reality absent from the scene it appears on. It is indeed only after a painstaking evolution of linguistic form itself that such a “metaphysical” understanding of language could thus be conceived.

What, then, constitutes language as a uniquely human phenomenon? Whereas

animal experience is motivated primarily by appetite-animal cognition reflecting the fundamental difference between a perceiving consciousness and appetitive objects-human experience remains mediated by a common scene-language-which is nothing other than the institution of a barrier of representation, dividing the (prehuman) appetitively motivated subjectivity from the desirable object. For Gans, the first moment of specifically human experience occurs when protohominid society reaches a critical level of intraspecific violence and its existing social structure (based on a complex and strict pecking order decided by one-on-one contests of dominance and submission) no longer provides the community with unifying power. Thus, violence typically breaks out over objects attractive to instinctual appetite. The originary hypothesis proposes that the salient feature of human society-language-must have originated as a mechanism for deferring violence. Thus, the first sign is an “aborted gesture of appropriation” which defers animal appetite through the institution of communal representation. This gesture takes place on a communal scene where the participants surround an object attractive to animal appetite which all seek to appropriate but, for fear of mutual reprisal, are forced instead merely to equally designate. This moment of suspension opens up a linguistic space between the designating individuals and the attractive central object, thus providing the characteristic centre-and-periphery configuration which will be reflected in all recreations of the scene. The “aborted gesture” becomes the first sign and instigates a mechanism for communal interaction far more efficient than the genetically programmed forms of communication inherited from the animal past.

In the scene of origin, the first sign-the aborted gesture of appropriation-is an ostensive. This minimal definition of language is all that is needed to institute the scene of representation. In designating the central object, all the participants reveal their desire for the object, but at the same time they prohibit any one individual from fulfilling that desire through the appropriation of the appetitive object. In thus deferring their desire, they transform

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the perception of the object from being merely attractive to animal appetite, to a transcendental plane where it is represented as universally significant to all the individuals on the periphery. This creation of a shared scene of universal significance is nothing other than the collective scene of linguistic presence upon which all representational (*i.e.*,cultural) productions are subsequently dependent.

Now it is important to see that this construction of the scene is dependent upon a dichotomy lying at the heart of the originary event. This dichotomy is none other than the paradoxical bifurcation between inside and outside that so animates

Derrida's analyses. From our point of view it can be formulated most succinctly as the division between the peripheral designators and the central object. This difference is in turn founded upon the primal (*i.e.*, anterior) difference between organism and appetitive object which motivated the scene in the first place. But what the act of designation achieves is precisely a deferral of this primal difference, thereby establishing in the temporal space thus created a unique moment of human presence where each individual becomes aware, through the signifying gestures of the others, of his/her own presence amidst a community of others, that is, of linguistic presence in the anthropological sense we are giving it here. Now it is evident that our construction of the hypothesis is dependent upon an outside vantage point which the original participants naturally did not enjoy, but it is precisely because these original participants were able to designate—*i.e.*, represent—the central object that the possibility for our own theoretical position is thus justified. That is to say, our own moment of theoretical reflection on the entire scene is in formal structure fundamentally the same as the original act of representation. All that was necessary was that this identical scene be established. The originary hypothesis shares with the participants at the origin the representational structure that saw a scene established upon which otherworldly—*i.e.*, linguistic—models could be conceived. This paradox is indeed the anthropological correlate of Derrida's ungrounded aporia.

To the participants at the origin, their own act of signification would appear maximally alienated from the central object being represented. That is, their experience, though a conscious one, does not provide for any thematization of either the linguistic designations of the individuals or the object thus being designated. All that the originary scene provides is the minimal criterion for defining humanity. This minimal criterion is simply the establishment of a scene of linguistic presence that mediates between the object as appetitively perceived and the object as forbidden by the mutual designations of the individuals. The construction of this barrier of representation suspends momentarily the appetitively motivated act of appropriation. But once this scene has been established, it does not simply disintegrate but is remembered by each individual. To the individual, the scene appears as the gift of the central object which appears to forbid appropriation. Hence, the object is sacralized, later to become the central focus of ritual repetition that seeks to recreate the miraculous experience of the originary event in order to defer violence and

recreate communal order. But that ritual and its mythical discursive inheritors are always a supplement to the originary event is the lesson of Derrida's relentless critique of all efforts to recreate the moment of undeferred linguistic presence. This

goes for the originary hypothesis itself, which as a hypothesis makes precisely a more open claim than its religious and aesthetic precursors: namely, that of reversibility through analysis and revision. This is indeed the founding methodological criterion for generative anthropology which seeks to provide rigour to previous-mythical-attempts of “originary thinking.”

3. The Anthropological Roots of Metaphysical Presence

We have shown the category of presence to be synonymous with the originary act of designation. But how does this differ epistemologically from the metaphysical category of presence? If we examine Gans's prefatory remarks to *The Origin of Language*, we find explicit acknowledgement to Derrida's work as paving the way for the program of generative anthropology. This acknowledgement is significant because it points to an epistemological problematic that ultimately sets the whole project of generative anthropology on its course.

What is this epistemological problematic? Briefly, Derrida's position, as is well-known, affirms the irreducibly metaphysical character of logocentric discourse. Less well-known, and contrary to popular conceptions of deconstruction, Derrida does not deny referentiality or scapegoat metaphysics. Rather he engages preeminently in what one might call transcendental critique. This involves the close examination of philosophical texts that claim to be based on an ontological ground—“a metaphysics of presence”—which stands free of the deferring structure of differentiation, but which upon closer analysis ultimately reveals that the very concept of origin is fissured by the difference philosophy hoped to expel in the beginning. Thus Derrida concludes that what lies at the origin is not “presence” per se, but rather *différance*, that is, the undecidable double crossing between absence and presence, the very non-originary origin of difference itself. Now it is important to realise that Derrida does not affirm a substitute non-metaphysical structure by which to replace the canonical texts of the Western philosophical tradition, because for Derrida such a belief in an outside to metaphysics, to traditional ontology, is at the limit impossible. Indeed, as far as conclusions or agendas go, Derrida remains conspicuously reticent, preferring to engage in his own performative staging of *différance* than in the constative affirmation of a clearly defined ontological program.

Thus, for Derrida, metaphysics as a foundational project is continually undermined by its own effort to ground itself in a moment of undeferred presence. Derrida proposes in the place of a metaphysics of presence a “scene” of deferred presence, the term “scene” providing the dramatic connotations of an “always-already” secondary, represented temporality that permeates classical notions of absolute and self-contained presence. In his commentary on Freud entitled “Freud and the

Scene of Writing," Derrida explicitly highlights the originary but at the same time unrepresentable status of this deferred scene:

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No doubt life protects itself by repetition, trace, *différance* (deferral). But we must be wary of this formulation: there is no life present at first which would then come to protect, postpone, or reserve itself in *différance*. The latter constitutes the essence of life. . . . It is thus the delay which is in the beginning. Without which, *différance* would be the lapse which a consciousness, a self-presence of the present, accords itself. To defer (*différer*) thus cannot mean to retard a present possibility, to postpone an act, to put off a perception already now possible. That possibility is possible only through a *différance* which must be conceived of in other terms than those of a calculus or mechanics of decision. To say that *différance* is originary is simultaneously to erase the myth of present origin. Which is why "originary" must be understood as having been crossed out, without which *différance* would be derived from an original plenitude. It is a non-origin which is originary. (*Writing and Difference* 203)

Responding to Freud's effort to theorize the origin of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Derrida reveals how the binary between life and death, pleasure and destruction, must itself be clefted by *différance*. For Derrida, however, *différance* itself remains beyond representation, being "neither a word nor a concept" (*Margins* 7), and as such it can never itself become a foundation firm enough to build on. In other words, as the condition of possibility for a metaphysics of presence, *différance* is also the condition of possibility for the deconstruction of that presence.

But let us pause for a moment and examine Derrida's understanding of presence. For Derrida, the ideal of presence underwrites any search for a stable ground or origin that may serve as a foundation to structurality in general. In Freud's case, the pleasure principle was first postulated as the absolute ground of human instinctive action. But some puzzling observations that contradicted the pleasure principle led Freud to postulate an aggressive instinct or death drive which he attempted to graft onto the pleasure principle. Derrida gives this tension in Freud's theory extreme importance, for it thereby demonstrates the tacit deconstruction of a foundation which would privilege a certain term (here, the pleasure principle) but ends up including its excluded opposite (the death drive). Thus presence can be privileged to neither term of the binary, but rather must cross incessantly back and forth like

an electron spinning madly from one subatomic orbit to another. This double crossing or invagination, as it is often called, provides us with the deconstruction of the binary, thus preventing a privileging of either term. Since this process moves across boundaries, it is patently uncategorizable. Hence Derrida's insistence on the nonconceptualizability of *différance* which enacts this unthematizable, unrepresentable double movement.

But is it fair to understand presence as merely the opposite of absence? Does not this understanding itself depend upon a continuation of the binaries which Derrida is precisely trying to argue against? Without such binarism, would not deconstruction become significantly redundant? And do we indeed think always in terms of binaries?

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These questions suggest the indebtedness of deconstruction to its structuralist-linguistic precursors. This structuralist inheritance orients Derrida's understanding of language—and thereby also his general critique of metaphysics—to a particular view of presence that fails to grasp its anthropological roots. By radicalizing Saussure's understanding of language as a system of differences without positive terms, Derrida indeed exposes the "metaphysics of presence" underlying the structuralist privileging of *langue* as a transcendental synchronic structure, but only to show that it is absence that founds presence, and that the metaphysical privileging of presence is "always-already" supplemented itself by its opposite—i.e., by absence. Thus, difference is also deferral; (structuralist) synchrony is diachronized. The conclusion thus reached is that presence itself cannot stand alone as the ideal point of reference. But neither can absence become the term of privilege. Rather, we must remain undecidably suspended between the two. Thus, even though Derrida can say that *différance* is the condition of possibility for presence, he will not permit this term to be recuperated and thence become the site of origin itself. "To say that *différance* is originary," Derrida declares, "is simultaneously to erase the myth of a present origin."

But this polarization between presence and difference need not be mutually exclusive, as Derrida believes it must. "Difference," Gans argues, "'always already' exists in a form that Derrida refuses to recognize." This "original difference," Gans continues, "is precisely that of life itself, which from its own problematic origin has distinguished structurally, if not conceptually, between the organism and its appetitive objects" ("Differences" 803-4). Gans's counter-argument does not seek to reaffirm the "metaphysics of presence" that Derrida deconstructs (for in this aim, Gans's project may also be called a "deconstruction"). Rather, it seeks to anthropologize the notion of presence itself, that is, to reestablish, on a

nonmetaphysical basis, the understanding of presence as a uniquely human phenomenon arising not from the hands of a mythical deity, nor from an ontological category of abstract ideal forms, but from a mimetic scene of conflict rooted in empirical appetite. Hence presence is here understood as the presence provided by the linguistic scene. In aborting their appropriative gestures, the individuals of the originary event understand that the object is being designated and not appropriated. This deferral of appetitive desire creates the first moment of linguistic designation, which is simply the shared awareness that the object will not be seized by any one individual. The aborted gesture is the indication of this deferred appropriation, which thus becomes not merely an animal gesture but precisely a sign representing the forbidden status of the central object to each of the individuals. Derrida's concept of presence admits of no historicizing precisely because he understands presence as a concept (and thus as an ontological category) and not as a historically realized event. But Gans reveals that before presence can be thus hypostasized as a metaphysical category, it must first be experienced as the mutual presence of the original interlocutors of the originary scene.

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This assertion is not ontological but hypothetical. That is to say, the only explanation we can give for our common experience of linguistic presence is a hypothetical one. Thus "presence" becomes not a given metaphysical premise, but precisely the object of explanation itself. That is, the hypothesis seeks to explain the category of presence before it can itself take on the ontological status of a metaphysical concept. Generative anthropology, Gans states, in contrast to metaphysics "must at the very least recognize the hypothetical rather than absolute nature of its fundamental concepts" (*Origin* 38). If traditional metaphysics treats presence covertly as an ideal to be striven towards, and thence as the ungrounded term upon which to pin its ontological system, the originary scene takes presence itself as the object of analysis, deriving its status as human linguistic presence from its appetitive precursor in the differentiation between "the organism and its appetitive objects" ("Differences" 804). "The fundamental importance of presence," Gans claims, "can be gauged from the fact that the whole point of the hypothesis is to provide a plausible context for its origin" (*Origin* 38). The detachment of sign (designation) and presence from their originary anthropological context dehistoricizes them and thus leads to their fetishisation as metaphysical categories:

Designation and presence are thus the fundamental concepts of language. Their "fetishisation," that is, their detachment from the

historical context of their origin and assimilation to-what comes in the end to the same thing-divine or “natural”phenomena, defines the “metaphysical” basis of classical philosophy and of all the forms of thought which even today fail to respect their anthropological origin. (38)

The detachment of presence and sign from its anthropological context stems from a metaphysical faith in the originarity of the concept, that is, the belief that the declarative sentence constitutes the elementary linguistic form. Concepts require declarative sentences. But in the originary scene, the first sign is an ostensive which is clearly incapable of a conceptualization of the central object. Thus, Gans claims that in the originary scene, it “is deferral that produces presence in the uniquely human sense—the presence of the community to itself and of each member to the others” (“Differences” 804). This understanding of presence is founded upon the belief that appetitive deferral opens up a unique space between the subject and the attractive object that is precisely a linguistic space where the object is re-presented. The ostensive sign accomplishes this “re-presenting of the present,” but simultaneously it “creates the category of the present—that is, as present-to-me and present-to-others at the same time” (*Originary Thinking* 64). Presence in this “uniquely human sense” (“Differences” 804) must not be confused with prehuman appetitive perception of the present object. The latter, as an example of the “primal difference” (804) between eater and object-to-be-eaten, understands

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itself only in relation to what can be appropriated and ingested. But what in the original scene cuts this primordial animal desire short is the imposition of a collective prohibition which defers individual appetite via the mutually designating signs of the fearful participants.

Derrida’s understanding of representation as structured by *différance* is a profound probing from within the metaphysical tradition of Gans’s explicitly anthropologized concept of originary deferral and linguistic presence. Gans indeed credits Derrida’s critique of metaphysics as identifying the “hypostasized presence” of the metaphysical conceptualizing of linguistic deferral, but he criticizes him for believing that “deferral and presence [are] incompatible” (“Differences” 805). In *The Origin of Language*, Gans reiterates the point:

Derrida indeed attacks the ‘metaphysical’ ground of original presence as a myth, that is, as content, while opposing it with his own critically de-conceptualized mechanism of ‘*différance*’ or deferral as the true ground of communication. This critique fails to remark that presence and deferral,

far from opposing each other as (spurious) plenitude and (real) absence, are merely different terms for the same phenomenon, the original presence being precisely a deferral of appropriative action (73).

Bearing Gans's criticisms of metaphysical presence in mind, let us return to our question of the anthropological and linguistic prehistory which underpins philosophy and the metaphysical logos. In *Originary Thinking*, Gans suggests that "[m]etaphysics may be defined as thought based on the (usually tacit) principle that the declarative sentence—in philosophical terminology, the proposition—is the fundamental linguistic form" (63). However, contrary to this metaphysical faith in the declarative sentence, generative anthropology claims that "the proposition, which is the fundamental or atomic element of logic, is not, anthropologically speaking, an elementary form" (*End of Culture* 66). To begin with the proposition as an originary model upon which to base a metaphysics is to begin *in medias res*. That is, it is to exclude its linguistic prehistory which is also its anthropological basis. Thus, philosophy is founded upon a hypostatization of an abstract world of form (the Platonic *eidos*) that acts as the ground for its theory of representation. Such an abstracting of the idea as separate from its worldly articulation is only possible once declarative sentences have evolved, but the declarative sentence is not a fundamental linguistic form. The minimal definition of language, as articulated within the originary scene, is the act of designation of a centrally significant object. This gesture cannot engage in conceptualization, that is, in abstract thought; it merely indicates to all the participants in the originary scene that the central object is significant to all—significant because forbidden. As such, this sign is simply an ostensive sign. That is, it is wholly dependent upon the "presence" of its worldly referent (the central object) for meaning to take place.

This linking of mature discursive structures (such as metaphysics) to their linguistic roots is a characteristic move for Gans. And it is easy to see

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why. Since all systems of representation are genetically related, the most economical explanation of their functioning will occur at the moment of their origin, namely, in the originary hypothesis. Philosophy takes as its ontological ground the primacy of the concept. Thus Plato's world of ideal forms is dependent upon the articulation of an abstract world entirely removed from worldly reality. But, in terms of our genetic theory of representational form, such an articulation is dependent upon declarative sentences. The precise uniqueness of the declarative is that it can provide a linguistic scene—i.e., can conceptualize a state of affairs—separate from the worldly scene upon which it is articulated. This is indeed the substance of all truth

claims, which require a wholly other linguistic scene upon which a model may be constructed that can subsequently become the object of verification when compared to worldly reality. The logico-scientific use of language is obviously dependent upon this other-worldly scene.

Yet, as we have seen, language is not primordially a question of truth statements and constative propositions, but an ostensive act which designates a scene of absolute significance. Language here involves, not a system of differences, but simply the establishment of linguistic presence, that is, the understanding that the interlocutors are designating the central object rather than appropriating it. Deferral and presence are here synonymous terms for the same phenomenon—the creation of a linguistic scene. Derrida's critique of presence as a metaphysical category uncovers its hypostatization in the declarative but it fails to note the anterior category of presence as a product of the ostensive sign upon which metaphysical abstraction is ultimately based. The originary hypothesis is an attempt to inject rigour into previous philosophical conceptions of the metaphysical by postulating a more minimal scene of language-use than that presupposed by the tacit philosophical faith in the declarative sentence.

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Notes

1. Derrida indeed exposes the ideal conception of presence lying at the heart of the structuralist project. Thus, Lévi-Strauss's rejection of the genetic—i.e., the historic—in favour of the "scientific" structure hinges on an ungrounded acceptance of the ideality of the structural present, which, as Derrida points out, can only arise out of

“the history of metaphysics” itself (291). See “Structure, Sign, and Play” in *Writing and Difference*, 278-93. [\(back\)](#)