Remembering Amalek: 9/11 and Generative Thinking

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Discipline and Disciples in Originary Thinking

It makes sense to think of the emergence of originary thinking as an event much like the one upon the retrieval of which it is predicated. In fact, it seems to me evident that its founder sees it in precisely this way: “The unique event in which the verticality of human language emerges from the horizontal world of appetite is a moment of liberation reenacted in every subsequent act of representation. We must *think* our uniqueness that until now only religion has articulated” (*Signs of Paradox*, Acknowledgements Page). From Gans’ contention in *The End of Culture* that the Human Sciences must now take the place occupied by high culture(1) to this endorsement of a scenic self-reflexivity the responsibility of Originary Thinking to participate in and facilitate the process it analyzes has been consistently asserted and adopted.

As a sign itself, originary thinking would in that case be a gesture of renunciation of the victimary stance Eric Gans posits as the center of the postmodern era.(2) What makes originary thinking possible, then, is precisely the mimetic crisis induced by victimary thought and it is such a gesture that simultaneously (as in the originary scene itself) enables originary thinking to signify the emergent theoretical and cultural practices that have been neglected by those for whom the victimary constitutes the horizon of thought: practices I would sum up under the title “generative,” to suggest the linking of self-reflexivity, internal relations, immanent growth and hypothesis posing in, to name just a few, evolutionary thought, pragmatism, AI, and even the internet phenomenon of “blogging.”

Of course, as Generative Anthropology knows well, such claims to originality make any discipline itself a target of resentment. It is only due to originary thinking’s marginality within the highly polemical realms of both academic and popular culture that such resentment has thus far been inconsequential.(3) So far, it is primarily

those genuinely interested in GA who have taken an interest in it. Part of the strength of originary thinking, of course, is that it is able to account for such resentment and turn responses to its own emergence into part of its object of inquiry, which is what makes it intrinsically disciplinary. By “discipline,” I don’t mean an organized, institutionalized site of inquiry, characterized by specific methods and rules of inquiry. Prior to that must be the community of inquirers itself, with a common focus on a single object, with no other concern than to progressively define that object and sharpen that focus, to devise a vocabulary capable of describing because drawn from the object, and to establish a history of the discipline whereby the deepening relationship to the object becomes a series of actions within the disciplinary space. To put it another way, a discipline is a scene of inquiry and a sign of the larger community; its ruthless inquiry into the very structures the community would prefer to ignore is motivated by the obligation to find within the community the means of preserving it in the face of some crisis.

I would suggest that such a conception of disciplinarity can be drawn from the range of world-historical disciplines available to us: from the Rabbinic sages who wrote the Talmud and the Athenian academy to the American founding fathers, and on to Marxist political parties, psychoanalysis, and the various modernist and postmodernist movements in the arts. In each case, the constitution of the discipline entails both a proliferation of signs within the discipline (as each theoretical stance signifies a particular articulation of the discipline) and the discipline itself becomes a sign of the broader society wherein the originary scene is simulated. “External” discourses are translated into “internal” ones; the very resistance of the outside world confirms the diagnosis constitutive of the discipline; and a politics of the discipline emerges involving solidarity with those social developments that render the world intelligible in terms of the discipline and thereby facilitate the discipline’s convergence with normative structures. Disciplines are radical thought-experiments brought into confrontation with events–that ongoing (and yet always renewable) confrontation is what accounts for their generativity.

Disciplines are, of course, also notorious for the pathologies of betrayal (“splits”), the persecution of “heretics,” the disintegration into cultism, and in those rare cases of the discipline in power (at least in modern society), the consequences are well known. Insofar as disciplines simulate and reenact the originary scene, the possibility that the discipline will reenact rather than resolve mimetic crises is of course perpetual. Generative Anthropology is exceptional in its awareness of such possibilities and hence in its capability to “immunize” itself against them–ultimately, one might say that the ability of the GA discipline to transcend the fate of previous disciplines is a kind of test of its central claim: the inexhaustibility of the originary scene. In this essay I will attempt to deepen GA’s confrontation with the post-

millennial founding event, 9/11. First, though, I will suggest a way of advancing such intra-disciplinary arguments. I will propose a single "amendment" to Eric Gans' conception of the originary scene: the emission of the originary sign, the gesture of renunciation enacted in the moment when mimetic crisis threatens the existence of the community itself in a generalized paroxysm of violence, is enacted by a *single individual* in midst of the crisis, and the other members of the proto-community in turn *imitate and thereby register and confirm that sign as a sign*. On its own terms, it seems to me that this sharpens precisely the elements of the originary scene that originary thinking puts to work, as I hope to show through a brief analysis of one description of the scene, this one from *Originary Thinking*:

. . . a circle of protohumans, possibly after a successful hunt, surround an appetitively attractive object, for example, the body of a large animal. Such an object is potentially a focus of conflict, since the appetites of all are directed to something that cannot belong to all… at the moment of crisis, the strength of the appetitive drive has been increased by appetitive mimesis, the propensity to imitate one's fellows in their choice of an object of appropriation, to such a point that the dominance hierarchy can no longer counteract the symmetry of the situation… Hence, in violation of the dominance hierarchy, all hands reach out for the object; but at the same time each is deterred from appropriating it by the sight of all the others reaching in the same direction. The 'fearful symmetry' of the situation makes it impossible for any one participant to defy the others and pursue the gesture to its conclusion. The center of the circle appears to possess a repellent, sacred force that prevents its occupation by the members of the group, that converts the gesture of appropriation into a gesture of designation, that is, into an ostensive sign. Thus the sign arises as an *aborted gesture of appropriation* that comes to designate the object rather than attempting to capture it. The sign is an economical substitute for its inaccessible referent. Things are scarce and consequently objects of potential contention; signs are abundant because they can be reproduced at will. (8-9)2

The equality or symmetry of the situation must be what enables each of the participants to imagine the consequences of pursuing the gesture to its conclusion: if I take hold of the object the one next to me will do the same (because that's what I will do if he grabs it first) and–even more important–at some point someone will not only grab along with me but actively and violently interfere with my attempt at appropriation because, again, that's precisely what I will do if in danger of being excluded from the circle. But we can't assign such foresight to the members of the group–obviously, the representational capacities for imagining such a scenario don't exist yet. But then what makes the symmetry fearful, if not that somewhere in the group the violence has already begun, that is, that the ostensive sign wards off a mimetic contagion in process? In this case the aborted gesture becomes a sign *in distinction from* this contagion. While the aborted gesture might conceivably be

made by several, even all of the participants, the necessary distinction from the process of contagion suggests that somewhere this distinction will be sharper, and that if the sign *qua* sign emerges someplace within the scene it is economical to assume that imitation of that singular gesture is more likely than a simultaneous discovery of its efficacy. And this need not violate the symmetry and reciprocity so central to the scene if we keep in mind, as I think is already implicit in Gans' account, that the originary sign is already a somewhat modified imitation of the not-yet-signs (the reaching hands) to which it is a response. I believe my amendment accentuates the form/content, or appetitive/representational distinction constitutive of the emergence of the sign by making the form itself part of the originary sign's efficacy: the distinction between the sign of renunciation and (what is now) the sign of contagion is what draws attention to the originary sign.

I want to stress that my aim is not to "correct" Gans' version. Rather, I am proposing a form for arguments within GA, suggesting that we assume that disagreements can ultimately traced back to hypothetical modifications of the originary scene, while maintaining the criterion of parsimoniouness. That is, it provides a vocabulary for intra-disciplinary disagreements: what will count as the sign capable of reversing tendencies toward mimetic contagion can only be determined after the event (as Gans often says, the fate of originary thinking must be left to the market) but of course, the act of singling out one type of sign as a "candidate" (like Raoul Eshelman's "performatism"(4)) is simultaneously a contribution to this determination, especially since it is itself necessarily an imitation of that mode of signifying.

More specifically, my amendment aims at framing a discussion of originary thinking as the privileged source of 9/11 thought, that is, thinking predicated on the designation of 9/11 as an epochal shift, rendering entire regions of accepted discourse irrelevant and requiring new modes of thought. I will unfold the implications of my amendment as I proceed, but I will begin by singling out one: the need not only to account for the permanence of evil in terms of the originary scene, but to account as well for the emergence of capacities to detect it. Hence, the rather provocative term "Amalek" in my title: Amalek being, of course, according to the Hebrew Bible, the eternal enemy of Israel, as well as the first to attack (from behind, singling out women and children) the Israelities in the desert following the exodus, and coming to signifying a kind of unmotivated, "pure" antagonism. We can account for "Amalek" not merely as unrestrained mimetic contagion, but as the concealment of mimetic contagion through the imitation of signs of renunciation (which is to say, every attack is a sneak attack). And I will finally suggest that insisting on the permanence of Amalek is in fact the best way to deter and defer it.(5)

It is, as Gans has argued, victimary thought that is the primary (ideological) “victim” of 9/11, and Gans’ analysis of terrorism (and the related question of Islamic anti-semitism) has been an inquiry into the bankruptcy of victimary thought–but also, of course, into the intensified circulation of resentments as a result of globalization. I will try to adhere to the rigorous standards Gans has laid down for such a discussion: we must “put ourselves in the place of those who want to kill us . . . to affirm through this encounter the unity of the human and the primacy of moral reciprocity” while recognizing that we are engaged in a war with an implacable enemy whose (not implausible) victory “would be a nightmare for all but a few of its few survivors” (*Chronicle* 293). Furthermore, “the unanimous rejection of terrorism need not imply an obsession with punishing its perpetrators. It can become the basis for a genuine, if minimal, global fraternity based on the understanding, at last explicitly realized in the public sphere, that the basic function of the exchange of representations that is human culture is the deferral of violence” (*Chronicle* 253).

Gans approaches the problem of global terrorism from both ends: the means chosen, and the significance of those means, as well as the strategic and political goal of the leadership of groups like al Qaeda. In his most recent analysis, Gans places the possibility of terrorism in the originary scene itself: “The human is founded on the deferral of satisfaction, that is, the suspension of life. Were we wholly immersed in the life-world, we would not be human. The various forms of sacrifice, including the jihadi’s self-sacrifice, pay homage to this originary configuration” (*Chronicle* 293). “The terrorist returns from exchange to sacrifice; from the marketplace, in which he is implicated insofar as he can act only from within the system he is attempting to destroy, to the originary deferral of desire that founds human culture. Death alone can guarantee the terrorist’s denial of exchange, and as a result of this denial, makes his action more effective, severing the final ties of shared self-interest between the killer and his potential victims.” The suicide terrorist represents a “renunciation without compensation of our most fundamental appetite–the “instinct of self-preservation”–in the service of transcendence: in a word, *theism*, in contrast with the deferral of appetite in the service of peaceful exchange: in a word, *humanism*.”

In this case, terrorism need not be–as Lee Harris argues–a means to some end: it might very well be an “end in itself.” Gans recognizes that today’s terrorism goes well beyond the more strategic terrorism, relying upon “white guilt,” an unwillingness to accept casualties, and a recognition that the stakes were very limited for the First World targets: “Terrorists no longer act in the service of a proto-state that awaits only decolonization to emerge. . . As the terrorist’s political aims become more nebulous, he focuses more on killing now than building later; the farther he gets from creating a state, the greater his interest in acquiring weapons ‘of mass destruction’ previously reserved for states–and the more crucial it

becomes to take preemptive action to keep these weapons out of his hands" (Chronicle 292). Finally, Gans briefly touches on another possibility (which his discussions of antisemitism also raise, implicitly)–that contemporary terrorism has a contagious character, capable of becoming a pole of attraction for dispersed "social movements highly antagonistic but bereft of an alternative to the market system: on the one hand, he mentions that "[a] terrorist International is in the process of forming, one that extends well beyond the Islamic limits of al Qaeda, drawn together by common resentment of the West and its market driven prosperity" (*Chronicle* 293); elsewhere, he alludes to the "farcical protest movement that has now turned its sights from the WTO to our anticipated 'racist war'" (*Chronicle* 247).

At the same time, interestingly, Gans attributes to the Islamicist terrorists not only a "coherent world view," but a less self-contradictory and utopian goal than Communism and Nazism: "The destruction of the world market system that the twin towers symbolized would return us to a pre-industrial world that the Islamicists would find far less threatening than ours and where they would stand a good chance of imposing their religious views. Providing we convert to Islam, we would all have a place in this world; unlike the Nazis, Islamicists are not racially exclusionary. Nor is their social ideal unrealizable: something like it exists in many places and it has many adherents around the world. . . If the whole world were reduced to their level and no such supplies were available, most would die, but those remaining might well find stability in something like a Taliban-ruled existence" (*Chronicle* 247).

3

I would like to try to distinguish these claims in terms of the necessity with which they follow from an originary analysis of the situation. First, Gans' situation of terrorism within the "theism" of the originary scene of course ranks "highest"–like any other human possibility, suicidal terrorism must derive from the elements of the scene. The most contingent of Gans' claims, meanwhile, is the goal he attributes to the Islamicists, which he asserts again in a very recent *Chronicle*: "Islamic terrorism does not seek to liberate 'indigenous forces' kept at bay by imperialist control in order to create a new society; its goal is to produce a chaos so violent that it can be tamed only by the imposition of the Sharia at the hands of Taliban-like gangs, not as a stricter way of regulating economic relations *but as a substitute for them*" *(Chronicle* 293). Clearly the key is in the final, italicized passage: Gans' claim here is consistent with the way in which he places Islamicist terrorism on the originary scene, as a radical appropriation of the sacrificial, transcendent, theistic elements of that scene against its humanist, worldly, "exchangist" elements. Still, Gans here is assuming a continuity along the chain of command which may not exist, which we couldn't prove (even based on explicit statements from the jihadists themselves) and which we might want to resist precisely in the name of affirming the unity of

the human: it is essential that we allow for some (even infinitesimal) mixture of the "humanist" into the process of selecting jihad as one's "vocation" or "destiny" in order to recognize that even the purest jihadist motivation is recirculated after the fact into the process of exchange (as celebrity, for example, in the Palestinian territories). Only in this way could one think of engaging the phenomenon in a way that respects the essential humanness of the motivations of its agents, even to the extent of taking this mixture of motivations as a reminder of the ultimate need to link the humanist to the theist in contemporary culture. In this way we can more scrupulously isolate the dimension of the sacred from other elements of jihadism that we can unreservedly deplore and attack.

In which case, originary thinking and generative anthropology gain far more, *as a discipline*, by examining and testing a full range of explanations of contemporary Islamic terrorism and the responses to it, of which I mention what seem to me to be the most productive models:

- Islamic terrorism is part of a struggle for power within the Islamic world: the purpose, in the wake of the stalling of the several decades long attempt to take power in Islamic countries, is to shift the terms of the game by provoking massive American retaliation which will in turn discredit pro-American regimes and facilitate the taking of power by Islamicists. On this account, the U.S. is first of all an actor within the Arab and Muslim worlds, involved in an intracivilizational civil war. (Between the Islamists and whom? "Moderate" pro-American governments? Proponents of liberal democracy?–which complicates things, of course, because this side doesn't quite exist, we must act on the faith that our actions will create it).
- Islamic terrorism is, most fundamentally, intrinsically parasitic upon civilization–it relies upon Western consumer items and lifestyles for its own means of destruction, the Western media and Western public opinion to confirm its existence, the volatility of Western political cycles to register its effects, etc.–that is, the cycle of terror and reprisal is an end in itself. In this case, the last thing the Islamicists want is actual power (which might explain–but so might stupidity–the fact that provoking the U.S. seems to have set back fairly promising efforts to take power incrementally and covertly in Saudi Arabia and especially Pakistan, in which latter case they could have had access to nuclear weapons). According to this model, the signs we emit–including in our public debates, certainly monitored closely by terrorists and pro-terror media outlets like al-Jazeera–are crucial. What the Islamicists want, then, is spectacular effects that affirm their centrality. From this standpoint, Islamic terrorism is practically a material representation of internal Western divisions and pathologies.
- Islamic terror is a pathological, "heretical" outgrowth of a process that needs

> to be assessed on its own terms: an Islamic revival, which can be understood by analogy to the birth of Protestantism as a renewal of Christianity and European civilization (and which also was accompanied by extremely violent apocalyptic movements). In political terms, this would imply that the goals of the terrorists are exactly what they at times claim: to reinstate transnational forms of medieval Islamic rule (the Caliphate), recover lost territory, etc. This explanation, more than the others, leads us to focus on Islam more specifically, and not only its "distortion" by the terrorists: the resources of Islam for instituting genuine distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate forms of Islam is at stake.(6)

Part of the problem here is that there is not really much point to disputing these accounts (in addition to Gans', also fairly widely shared), because they don't contradict each other. First of all, from *our perspective*, they are consistent insofar as they can be taken to point to different levels on which we might organize our efforts, and different metrics we might use to assess our progress. Their consistency lies in the extent to which, according to each of these interpretations, Islamicist terrorism signifies the tension between our ability (and desire) to imagine the world as a *single* society and the necessity (and demand) that we see it as a *plurality* of societies. In each of the explanations I have just proposed, the relation between "internal" and "external" effects, strategic and symbolic actions, is undecidable: the determination to "restore" the Caliphate may appear to be an internal matter, with outsiders viewed as enemies in the traditional sense, but this determination is, of course, defined in terms of a series of "losses" and "humiliations" that must be avenged, and if vengeance can proceed independently of the proposed reconquest, well, that leads us to the claim that Islamicism is merely parasitical. Islamic terrorism may simply be interested in spectacular displays of resentment, but if a coherent pattern of surrender on the part of its First World victims emerges, it will perhaps take up some kind of strategic perspective. But of course, such a strategic perspective would itself be completely based on its agents' calibration of psychological responses, which simply returns us to the spectacular display, which now becomes further proof of the imminence of the collapse of Western civilization, which leads. . . In other words, what makes these alternative explanations consistent from *their* perspective is that they all involve an assault on boundaries as such: it's therefore impossible to say what it would mean for them to "choose" one goal or another. To return to the consistency of these goals from our perspective, the implication is that victory would entail resolving this boundary crisis through a restoration of boundaries: moral and ethical boundaries, but as these are embedded in a range of others: national/global, law/politics, civilian/military, war/peace, and so on.

If we then look for yardsticks measuring progress in the war against terrorism we

can find them, simply, in the discovery of the relevant yardsticks themselves: that is, some kind of commensurability between culture and politics, in which, for example, the emergence of disputes within Islam would have some visible association with the emergence of new signs of movement within civil society, which would in turn have discernable links to changes in the behavior of states, etc. That we have no way of knowing what the terrorists "really" want, or whether Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are deadly enemies or dependable friends, or whether Iran is driven by traditional *realpolitik* considerations or fanatical Islamic ones; and furthermore, that all of these agents themselves may not be any more sure than we are; terrorism is both a symptom of these conditions and an attempt to maintain and exploit them. To this cul de sac of victimary discourse (escalating demands on the dominant coincide with an evacuation of responsibility of the "oppressed") must be opposed a way of constituting those boundaries that in a post-metaphysical culture can no longer be taken as given.

4

The resistance to this new form of terrorism already begins on that same day, in the midst of the event itself. I am referring, of course, to the revolt of the passengers aboard UA Flight 93, but far more is relevant here than simply their remarkable bravery and sense of responsibility–not only their willingness to give their lives (they didn't have any choice about that), but to find the resources for acting in their knowledge that their own "mission" must operate within the parameters of the suicidal one. First, it is precisely the most up-to-date products of market society (cell phones) that enabled the passengers on Flight 93 to gain the "intelligence" letting them know that this was no "normal" hijacking. Second, the passenger revolt represents a decisive break from the "normal" hijacking, in which the reasonable response is not to create any difficulties under the assumption that the hijackers themselves plan or at least hope to emerge alive. This sliver of a kind of social contract, predicated, more broadly, upon "white guilt" (the officially recommended attitude toward the "normal" hijacking is strikingly similar to the one adopted by the West toward terrorism pre-9/11–terrorism is a kind of "cost of production" of the expansion of the market), is thoroughly broken–which is why, incidentally, there is not the slightest chance that another 9/11 style attack could succeed, at least not in the U.S. The space the rebels generated through their actions suspended the passengers' immersion in the life world every bit as much as that of the terrorists and is therefore a sign of the cancellation of the theist/humanist binary from which terrorism draws its strength.

In the qualitative transformation of the hijacking carried out by the terrorists we can clearly see the complicity of victimary discourse in our vulnerability: the airplanes could only be turned into weapons on the assumption of a kind of *modus vivendi*

between terror and civilization guaranteed by the victimary. Likewise, it is in the break with victimary discourse–its cancellation–that we can locate the association between the passenger revolt and the originary scene. And the break with victimary discourse and its attendant white guilt represented here can be given a more specific historical designation. As Gans has often argued, the Holocaust is the "inaugural moment of the victimary era from which we are now emerging" (*Chronicle* 290). This is the case insofar as the reaction to the Holocaust led to a reading of all social relations in terms of relations between victims and perpetrators. But the reason the Holocaust came to be "applicable" in such strictly victimary terms is because, due to the highly advanced structure of German society, and its similarity to other Western societies, all of the putatively neutral institutions necessary for any advanced society were irredeemably contaminated: medicine and science, art, bureaucracy, education, mass media, and so on were all complicit and hence tainted. In other words, the power of the model deriving from "Auschwitz" is that it enables one to *detect* perpetrator-victim relationships in apparently innocuous and utterly familiar practices.

Even further: there is a third category that must be brought into any analysis of the Holocaust, as part of the triadic structure introduced, in particular, by Raul Hilberg (to whose analyses other canonical ones, such as Hannah Arendt's, were indebted): the *bystander*.(7) "White guilt" is the guilt of the bystander, who benefits from the structure of domination by neither actively or consciously participating in it nor resisting it. Of course, this provides a compelling theoretical justification for terrorism (more so, perhaps, for the Western terrorist groups like Baader-Meinhoff or the Weather Underground): the bystander's complicity is the support of the system and hence needs to be undermined; the bystander needs to be forced to take sides openly and explicitly. There is no innocent bystander. In that case, the revolt of Flight 93, *insofar as it is preserved as an event and articulated as a sign countering mimetic contagion*, dismantles the victim/perpetrator/bystander structure.

Terrorism might be defined, in originary terms, as the point at which the victimary becomes "contagious," a site of mimetic crisis. In that case, if we are no longer to be "guilty bystanders" but rather "officeholders" in civilization, we must articulate some mode of dispelling victimary discourses and mimetic contagion simultaneously. One way of framing this problem is to ask what would it look like to dismiss immediately and unconditionally all arguments bearing the implicit or explicit threat that one's actions will lead to, on the one hand, "instability" or "chaos," or on the other hand, increased "hostility" or "hatred." These are the types of arguments that are marked by the standard apologetics for the victimary and the penumbra of mimetic contagion. First of all, strictly speaking, such things as "chaos" and "instability" as such don't exist in human affairs. One should be highly

suspicious of an account of events that can't be saturated by a concrete array of social actors–loyalties and para-institutions external or inimical to the control of the state and civil society might gain strength, but this is not "chaos"; regimes might be overturned rapidly, but this is only "instability" (or even unpredictability) from the standpoint of a very narrow set of prejudices. And whether one's actions generate hostility and hatred rather than gratitude and emulation might be a commentary on those exhibiting such responses as much as on upon those actions themselves. Sometimes it is better that hostilities become apparent rather than remain latent, and that hatreds be made explicit and their possessors be compelled to "put their money where their mouth is."

When we are caught trying to weigh the effects of awakening sleeping enemies against the risk of encouraging other enemies who see our alarm at the very hint of such effects, we have been asking the wrong questions within the wrong time frame. It is more useful to convert the responses to and echoes of our actions into indicators of the qualities of our present allies and of the potential for the solicitation of new allies (could not our new enemies be making some enemies of their own?). Beyond the emptiness of such arguments and warnings, however, is their use to intimidate, or rather, the willingness of those who make them to count on others to supply the force of intimidation that will camouflage their unsubstantiality. This becomes a real alliance (say, between the media, anti-war activists, and terrorists) insofar as all involved have the incentive to maximize signs of "instability," "chaos," "hostility," and "hatred" and to undermine our ability to assess and exploit the strengths and weaknesses of our enemies, the only measure that gives any of these apparent effects any meaning. We have become immune to such viral discourses and behavior to the extent that we frame our actions so as to be predictable enough for our allies and too unpredictable for our enemies, in order to provide incentives for being the former and formulate criteria for identifying the latter. The more the effects of our actions provide useful feedback enabling us to articulate actions with ever more predictable effects, and the more we are able to identify "unpredictability" with specific enmities, the more we are on the "right track." In order to devise such a rigorous approach, though, we must find not only the suicide terrorist on the originary scene, but the resistance to him/her as well.

My amendment to the originary scene, then, enables us to see that we are faced today with precisely the kind of situation I describe there, where we must find the signs capable of detecting and countering emergent mimetic contagion. And it therefore follows that the war against terrorism must itself be such a sign, in order to be successful–or rather, a series, an array of such signs. What I will go on to do now is try to locate and produce some of these signs by discussing two post-victimary thinkers within the framework of the originary scene. I will be seeking out nodes of dialogue between generative anthropology and these other tendencies,

and in this way I will argue for the centrality of originary thinking in charting a course for high cultural seriousness and political responsibility in the wake of 9/11.

Forgetfulness and Ruthlessness

For Lee Harris, the lessons of 9/11 can be summed as follows: we have forgotten "that there has ever been a category of human experience called the enemy":

That, before 9/11, was what had happened to us. The very concept of the enemy had been banished from our moral and political vocabulary. An enemy was just a friend we hadn't done enough for yet. Or perhaps there had been a misunderstanding, or an oversight on our part–something that we could correct. (xii)5

I bring Harris into the discussion for several reasons. First, his analytical response to 9/11 and its consequences has been among the most innovative and widely discussed and in my view, one of the most profound. Second, his discussion meets GA on common ground: like Gans, Harris seeks the meaning of our political, moral and intellectual vocabulary in originary experiences and events, and makes constant use of thought-experiments aimed at reconstructing such experiences and events. And like Gans, Harris shows a strong interest in the efforts of Enlightenment thinkers (especially Hegel) to construct idealized versions of origins, implicitly denouncing the postmodern (victimary) proscription of the search for origins. Finally, Harris presents a strong challenge to generative anthropology: a question on which Gans often seems ambiguous or uncertain, that is, the limits, at any given moment (and hence the need for cultural resources to prepare us for those moments) on the extension of market relations (the conversion of asymmetries into formal symmetries which make negotiation possible) as a way of deferring violence.(8) Harris' view is clear and compelling on this point: not only will the "enemy" always be a relevant "category" of experience, but the very attempt to imagine otherwise–that is, to imagine we only need open new positions on the marketplace–strengthens and incites the enemies of civilization.

The first two chapters of Harris' *Civilization and its Enemies: The Next Stage of History*are based on what are probably his most widely read and provocative essays–"Al Qaeda's Fantasy Ideology" and "Our World Historical Gamble." In the first of these essays, Harris argues that the 9/11 attacks were not, strictly speaking, acts of war, at least not Clausewitzian war in which each side uses coercion to bend the other to their will, in which case each must make its identity and aims known to the other: "We are fighting an enemy who has no strategic purpose in anything he does, whose actions have significance only in terms of his own fantasy ideology" (17). By "fantasy ideology," Harris means symbolic action that takes place on a

public stage but whose meaning is only accessible to the actor and his/her chosen audience, while those outside of this circle serve only as *props*:

9/11 was not an act of Clausewitzian terror–that is to say, terror used as a strategic weapon for the sake of its psychologically debilitating effect on the American people. It was a symbolic drama, a great ritual demonstrating the power of Allah, a pageant designed to convey a message not to the American people but to the Arab world. Smaller-scale followup acts would have had no glamour, and it was glamour–and grandiosity–that Al-Qaeda was seeking in its targets. (15)Harris, though, does not address the source and power of this fantasy ideology in this chapter, except to suggest that it involves a “compensation” for “shortcomings” (6), and appeals to “certain groups [that] do not seem to have the knack for a realistic appraisal of themselves” (8)–and that it’s “absurd” to look for “root causes” in “poverty, lack of education, lack of democracy, and so forth” (15), or in our own actions or policies. These explanations, along with conclusions regarding an adequate response, come in the next chapter, “Our World Historical Gamble.”

Here, Harris contends that we are, in the post-9/11 world, confronted with a world-historical crisis, in which an “epoch in which all the relevant actors in an international conflict were playing by the same basic rules” (23) is being replaced. Our current concepts, such as “realpolitik,” “self-determination,” or “international law and institutions,” have become irrelevant–because one relevant side is no longer playing by the rules. Furthermore, “This collapse of the well-ordered liberal system has come about exclusively from the side of the Islamic world. No other party has contributed to it” (25).

This refusal of reality on the part of the Islamic world is a result of one factor intrinsic to the Islamic world and one embedded in the broader liberal internationalist system of sovereignty. Drawing upon Marx, and the connection he drew between the labor put into the production of the material basis of culture and the responsibility one is therefore led to take for that culture, Harris contends that the enormous petroleum wealth available to the Islamic world means that “If we look at the source of Arab wealth, we find nothing that the Arabs created for themselves. Wealth has come to them by magic, much as in a story from *The Arabian Nights*, and it allows them to live in a feudal fantasyland.” The unintended consequence, then, of the West’s policy of “not robbing other societies of their natural resources simply because it possessed the military might to do so,” has been “the prodigious funding of fantasists who are thereby enabled to pursue their demented agendas unencumbered by any realistic calculation of the risks or cost of their actions” (27).

From the perspective of broader international arrangements, meanwhile, Harris

points to another unintended consequence, this time resulting from the universalization of the system of sovereignty. While “classical sovereignty” required the actual ability to rule over a particular territory, the post-colonial concept of universal self-determination leads to a superficially similar but really radically different concept, “what might best be called the *honorific* concept of the state” (29): the state is now “an entity called into being by the formal recognition of the international community” (30). Such an honorific state no longer needs to be struggled for, built, and maintained, taking into account risks, necessary compromises, the constant threat of annihilation: as an a priori “right,” one can take any action in asserting one’s sovereignty with the assurance that, not only will its international recognition not be withdrawn, but counter-acts will be viewed as assaults on one’s rights. The connection between “fantasy ideology” and “honorific sovereignty” as two modalities of mimetic contagion is easy enough to see–not surprisingly Harris uses the Palestinians as an example here. And the response Harris proposes to counter the enormously destructive potential of this “fantasy ideology” wedded to “honorific sovereignty” is the assertion, on the part of the only power capable of asserting it, the United States, of “neo-sovereignty”: “America, in short, must use its power, unilaterally if need be, to destroy and remove any group of people who are deliberately and consciously following a policy of ruthlessness, whether this group is a state against another state, a state against its own people, or an Al-Qaeda-like organization” (108).

The introduction of the category of “ruthlessness” here brings us to the deeper anthropological foundations of Harris’ argument. According to Harris, it is precisely civilization’s transcendence of ruthlessness (that is, the willingness to kill and be killed for some “claim” one has “staked”) that makes it particularly vulnerable to it: in fact, the more civilized a society becomes, the more distant it is from its own ruthless origins, and the more likely to forget those origins, and therefore, paradoxically, the more vulnerable to the ruthless:

People who have been trained in the practice of civility, and who find it second nature, will be reluctant to challenge the conduct of another on the ground that he is lacking in civility. The ruthless party therefore knows that he will be able to push very far before a break point is openly acknowledged. Because once the break point is acknowledged, all bets are off and you can no longer be sure of the next step.Before the break point, the civil party thinks that the ruthless party can be accommodated to civilized standards by means of patience and forbearance, much in the same way that we might try to domesticate a feral animal. We are convinced that we will bring him around. We attribute his ruthlessness to some defect in his psychology. Perhaps he has an inferiority complex and is acting out with us. Perhaps we are an authority figure, and he is rebelling against us . . . We may blame ruthlessness on someone’s religion or culture or economic status. We never

dream of identifying it for what it is–a strategy that works. (66)

6

And Harris' conclusion is that "[t]here can never be an end to history. In a world in which everyone has accepted liberal values, the practice of ruthlessness will amply reward those who still practice it–so amply that it is sheer utopianism to expect no one to seize the opportunity when it offers itself" (67). And of course, the logic of Harris' argument is that the spread of liberal values, or in GA's terms, the ongoing secularization and de-ritualization of culture, offers more and more opportunities.

Harris traces the transcendence of ruthlessness (but also, in Hegelian terms, its "sublation," and in perhaps Heideggerian terms, our forgetfulness of it) in civilization to ancient Sparta. According to Harris, "Sparta was the place where men first cured themselves of their addiction to lethal violence *within* their own community" (81). Focusing on their brutality, arbitrariness, and self-consciously unnatural forms of child rearing and discipline, Harris contends that Sparta was the first society to transcend forms of loyalty dependent upon biology. And it did so by transforming the only spontaneously emerging mode of loyalty other than the family, the *boy's gang*, into the *team principle*. The boy's gang, grounded in a ruthlessness inimical to any form of social order, was liberated from the family and made into "a permanent and self-reproducing organism" (87) by harnessing its ruthlessness for use against the community's enemies, "while controlling it in such a way that it would pose no danger to the society itself. The mechanism by which this was done was the invention of the team" (87).

Going back even further, and drawing upon Hegel and his narrative of the struggle for recognition, Harris finds the same structure in the invention of property, even though "[w]e must be careful in using the word property, for in fact what we are really talking about, when a group makes a claim to territory, is something on the order of the gang's turf, or the Greek *polis*, or the Roman *patria . . .* a team has staked its claim to this piece of territory and . . . is prepared to defend it against any who would challenge this claim. Here, also, in embryo, is that principle of civic freedom–the freedom of the team not to live as the servants or slaves of someone else–that is the first and most fundamental of all senses of freedom" (173). All that distinguishes the "team" from the "gang," what makes the one the foundation and the other the enemy of civilization, is that the former directs its ruthlessness to external enemies (and revises its notion of freedom and its code of honor accordingly) while the latter directs its ruthlessness toward the subversion of the internal order. It is easy enough to see why civilized people would want to forget this, and why Harris considers such forgetting our worst mistake today. And the reason, aside from its predominant power, Harris considers the U.S. the only

counter to terroristic ruthlessness (the ruthlessness of the boy's gang gone global) is that in its capitalistic and Protestant origins, the U.S. represents the "team spirit" in an exemplary manner (this in fact explains its overwhelming power). (I will mention briefly the important modifications introduced into the "team principle" by the Romans: first, the reconciliation of the team principle with that of the family; second, a team "cosmopolitanism"–which Harris contrasts to contemporary liberal cosmopolitanism–which involves the universalization of the team principle. For Harris, these modifications give the team principle a stability and endurance it never attained with the Greeks.)

Harris, of course, offers no account of the origins of religion, much less of language–in a word, no account of the transcendent. That need not prevent us from placing him in the originary scene, though. For starters, for Harris, the team might be seen as supplanting the "Big Man" Gans discusses in *The End of Culture* and appropriating the sacred, unchanging object at the center. But what is by now a familiar story–the (until very recently) rare but crucial historical instances in which freedom successfully counter-posed itself to tyranny–takes on another dimension here. The same is true for another well known fact–the association of Greek democracy and Roman republicanism with belligerence and imperialism. Harris' analysis, reframed in originary terms, suggests that the team's redirection of internal to external aggression might plausibly lead to the *internal* faculty that enables any community to compare itself with or measure itself against *other* communities–in other words, the institution of mimetic relations *between* communities that would be a source of dynamism for those communities that institutionalize the "team" (and of course, of the globalization of the market and resentment). So, the spread of the team concept in the modern world intensifies mimetic rivalry between societies, which might in turn account both for the conflicts implicit in the emergent assumption that global society is singular, and for that assumption itself.

At the same time, all of this seems to distance the team from the originary scene, where the main concern is the transcendence of internal violence. Here I would return to my "amendment," now functioning as a dialogic node, which suggests a dialectical relationship between mimetic contagion and the peace giving sign in the originary scene. If we could see the emergence of the team principle as a response to a later crisis that threatens, in some specific community, the work of signification and culture, the resources for such a response must already be available. We can then see the struggle between civilization and its enemies as a re-enactment of the originary scene insofar as the originary scene must include a "first among equals," a primary signifier who *places himself* between the group and the object–in other words, the primary signifier makes himself into a security for the community against a threat that can be later become a model for representations of external enemies.

And this primary signifier must become (instantaneously) a more compelling object of imitation than any in the amorphous contagion. The reason it would become more compelling, finally, is that it draws its power from the central object, thereby introducing a boundary (center/margin) and a form that promises to outlast the de-formative and de-toured rush to appropriation. The conversion of the gang into the team is, then, implicit in the initial "rollback" of mimetic contagion that becomes part of the capacity for signification without even being remembered or marked. Even more, the "team" is an exemplary form of the process by which the mimetic becomes generative: each member must act in strict conformity with the others while expanding the range of possibilities open to them; each member becomes increasingly predictable precisely by making unprecedented moves.

Finally, for an account asserting the centrality of the United States, Harris has very little to say about the market, and its current developments, including the rise of consumerism. One might conclude that he sees such developments as elements of the forgetfulness that has made us so vulnerable–consumerism certainly distances us significantly (and this of course is a major stake claimed by GA) from any need to stake a claim. At the very least, Harris would have to insist that the team, and all the virtues associated with it, and in particular those institutions still characterized by a controlling team spirit or code of honor must in turn be honored and protected in the name of a liberal order. And we might say that the relation between such a claim and the process of market expansion and the proliferation of an aesthetics of simulation constitutes a rather important research program for generative anthropology.

I am using Harris, in part, as a sign of a range of generative trends in post 9/11 thought, trends represented, to mention, just a few names, by Victor Davis Hanson's analyses of the "Western way of war" and his application of these analyses to the U.S. war on terrorism, columnists like Ralph Peters and Mark Steyn, and bloggers such as "Belmont Club" and "USS Clueless." Such thinkers are supportive of an aggressive and unapologetic approach to the war on terror and can be characterized, very broadly, as neo-conservative, in the sense of recovering a mimetic anthropological understanding against liberal utopianism: mimetic in the sense of understanding human activity as signs that reciprocally and in aggregate constitute a scene. Actions are best described as setting up and responding to incentives, reframing a situation in order to explore alternate paths, re-directing the rules and exploiting the antinomies governing the situation out of which the actions emerge, restoring and modeling boundaries that have been undermined by contagion, and so on. There is something "classical" in this approach: we have not and will not transcend the "low" motivations of humankind (greed, envy, intimidation of the weaker, the willingness to be a "free rider," etc.), demanding eternal vigilance in protecting and expanding the dominion of the "high" (civility,

virtue, high culture, patriotism, personal responsibility, historical continuity, discipline, military strength, etc.)

7

They are pragmatic in the sense of viewing actions as embodied hypotheses to be tested, and their mimeticism and pragmatism involves an implicit, universalistic ethic: the criteria for judging practices and cultures is the extent to which those practices and cultures embed discovery procedures, the means by which the assumptions underlying practices can be rendered visible and inspected. They view the contemporary West as divided between innovative risk takers and the increasingly risk averse, with the former, under contemporary conditions, being those shaping reality and the latter inevitably seeking to evade it. And they all, implicitly at least, adopt an “ironic” representation of evil. What I mean by this can be explained by returning to Harris, in whose discussion we can detect the suggestion that an unconditional readiness on the part of agents of civilization to employ ruthless means is precisely what will make it least likely that they will be necessary (but then, in turn, that the need will be forgotten again). Assuming the ineradicability of evil makes it more likely that evil will appear only in traces that redirect us back to the originary scene, an originary scene in which the first-among-equals sign neutralizes emergent mimetic contagion.

Of course, the legitimate fear here, and one which lends a great deal of power to victimary logics, is that the distinction between the “gang” and the “team” can become indeterminate, especially under conditions where mimetic models of action reach their limits. Mutually Assured Destruction, or nuclear deterrence, was such a situation, in which a hyper-mimetic model could only (and was only meant to) paralyze everyone involved. What difference would it make if a nuclear war were initiated in the “team” or “gang” spirit? One could plausibly understand the Bush administration’s insistence on its rights to preemption as a determination to prevent the emergence of such conditions again: in other words, the maintenance of conditions for a mimetic understanding of reality is itself an ethical imperative in the post-9/11 world. And the obverse would be that while the condition of hyper-mimeticism that led to the stigmatizing of any even implicitly aggressive stance toward tyrannical regimes was ideal for the emergence of anti-colonial terrorism, the failure to restore (and the absence of any visible attempt at or interest in restoring) mimetic conditions has been ideal for the new Islamic terrorism.

The legitimate concern behind much anti-Americanism, though, is that the enormous discrepancy between American power and any conceivable rival, or even combination of rivals, is so vast that the assertion of that power will itself undermine the conditions for rendering relationships increasingly mimetic. A

mimetic thought which is simultaneously generative (and mimetic thought which considers its own possibility as a result of an inexhaustible event, i.e., which doesn't simply take its own scenic conditions as given, is necessarily generative) can transform this into a productive hypothesis that neutralizes resentment, however. Legitimate "checks and balances" on American power would embed American actions in a series of visible and measurably incentives, revisable but predictable rules, reasonably clearly marked boundaries, carefully calibrated responses and consequences, discovery procedures. This can't be done in an a priori manner, however, through the establishment of international institutions whose authoritativeness we must essentially take at their own word. In fact, at this point, such institutions cannot be anything more than expressions of resentment toward American power, deferring action and insisting upon moral equivalences in direct proportion to America's willingness to act upon moral claims. Instead, smaller scale, molar actions that rigorously mimic, anticipate and reframe American actions should be developed. For example, why did no Western liberals or leftists, during the (lengthy) lead up to Operation Iraqi Freedom, think to publicize the names of as many Iraqi dissident individuals and groups as possible? Such an initiative would challenge the Saddam Hussein government to "preempt" the American preemption by allowing such individuals and groups (with international inspectors provided access) to emerge from hiding, organize openly, and publish freely. Such a move would, in effect, transform American military preparations into the instrument of a human rights oriented policy. Or failing that (as, of course, would most likely be the case), it would legitimate such groups and/or individuals as "watchdogs" holding the U.S. to its promise of democratic transformation in Iraq.

Reciprocal Transparency

As a guide to thinking through such an practice, which is just as necessary for the U.S. as the rest of the world, I will propose David Brin's *The Transparent Society*. Brin's book can be seen as an extended thought experiment based on the (very strong) possibility that global society will become increasingly transparent in the simple sense that as a consequence of enhanced surveillance and informational technologies it will become possible to know just about anything about anyone; or conversely, it will become impossible to prevent anyone from knowing anything they want about you. Brin explicitly counters the multitude of technophilic and technophobic screeds available, though, in his explicit and sustained interest in the basic anthropological issues at stake and his method of re-formulating metaphysical binaries as paradoxes with (paradoxically) pragmatic resolutions.

Significantly, Brin's first move is to challenge victimary articulations of the (somewhat disingenuous) question he poses in his subtitle: "Will Technology Force Us to Choose Between Privacy and Freedom?" He identifies "two opposing traits

that appear in countless other modern privacy disputes:

> One party believes that another group is inherently dangerous, and that its potential to do harm is exacerbated by secrecy. Therefore, accountability must be forced upon that group through enhanced flow of information.
>
> The other party argues that some good will be threatened by heightened candor, and hence wants the proposed data flow shut down. (19)

Or more broadly: “Whenever a conflict arises between privacy and accountability, people demand the former for themselves and the latter for everyone else” (12). When it comes to powerful institutions (such as governments for the right, or corporations for the left) or suspect individuals, people demand openness and free-flowing information; when it comes to themselves, people demand an ever expanding zone of privacy, or more precisely, *secrecy*.

As opposed to the constant generation of hyper-mimetic scenarios wherein “they are far more powerful than me and therefore all means must be used to restrain them even if, due to their enormous power, I can never count on any means being enough (or them even being *my* means and not *theirs*), therefore leading to the need for more means…”; Brin proposes reciprocal transparency. This proposal, simple enough, involves finding in the conditions conducive to paranoid scenarios (decentralized and enhanced technological capacities which produce, in columnist Thomas Friedman’s term, “super-empowered individuals” who are likely to see existing institutions as existing to thwart them) the means to combat them. So, for example, if one is worried about the possibility that the police will place cameras in public places, trace one’s activities over the Internet, gather potentially compromising information with increasing ease, and so on, the answer is not to call for arcane and complicated, and ultimately unenforceable regulations to prevent all this. Rather the answer is to turn the spotlight back in the other direction: why not cameras in prisons, in police interrogation rooms, with a hook-up to the Internet, why not work to increase information flow from the “watchers” as well? This might, according to Brin, also give those super-empowered individuals whom he refers to as “social T-cells” (“independent-minded persons… driven by pumped-up egos to the point where their most devout goal is to find and reveal some terrible mistake or nefarious scheme” [135]) a vocation that will serve to recirculate resentment back into the system.

Brin's arguments would clearly have the effect of accelerating tendencies towards virtualization in contemporary culture: the more we are looking at each other the more we take for granted that we are being looked at and therefore the more we self-consciously represent ourselves within frames, genres, narratives… that already have well-known effects; and the more we do that, the more we become functions circulating through such sign systems. Aside from overwhelmingly stressing the positive aspects of each of us presenting ourselves as a sign, which he insists will lead us to emphasize differences and uniqueness, Brin argues that tendencies toward virtuality, precisely because they make various kinds of falsification possible, even easy, almost irresistible, will lead us to focus more carefully on basic elements of human interaction, such as trust, reliability, and reputation: if you have no way of knowing if a photograph has been doctored or a data trail fabricated, all you really have is the trust you are able to place in the person who published or disseminated the information, the trust she is able to place in the person who submitted it, that he is able to place in the person who first recorded it, and so on.

In other words, the emergence of transparency clarifies and turns into an immediate, pragmatic issue what have emerged as anthropological universals. One such universal, which I would argue can be traced back to the relation between the sign and the appetitive on the originary scene, is the relation between *virtuality* and what we can call, drawing upon the American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, "*indexicality*"–a sign signifying through direct connection to its referent, literally pointing to something, the ultimate form of verification. Both sides of the equation draw upon increases in individual power and autonomy–we are able to see and directly inspect more than ever, and our implication in a diverse range of fabricated scenarios becomes denser than ever–while transparency also enhances the possibilities of articulating the two sides.

Another such universal is Brin's articulation of *power* and *accountability*. Of course, power comes before accountability, which Brin sees as a device of the neo-West in its emergence in the struggle against tyranny. However, an understanding of accountability as a restoration of the equality and reciprocity of the originary scene complicates this apparent temporal order and enables us to see the relation between power and accountability as generative. So, instead of viewing power as something to be restrained, and accountability as the means of doing so, Brin proposes a dialectic relation between them: we need to attach accountability to power in order to correct, redirect and ultimately enhance it, while devising the means for holding individuals and various power centers accountable itself generates new modes of power, which in turn need to have accountability "attached," etc. To return to my "amendment" of the originary scene, the hypothesis we might take from Brin's discussion is that the originary scene finally

“takes” or “works” precisely when the confrontation between the first individual (the primary, first-among-equals signifier) to present his gesture and the emergent mimetic contagion is converted into a “staggered” chain of imitations of that gesture which is only complete when that first individual *repeats* it (in a slightly modified form), hence accomplishing the following: its stabilization as a sign with a determinate form; the re-integration of that individual back into the scene as just one more member imitating the sign; while the precedent of transparency is the need for each person to inspect all the others and present their sign clearly in return. In effect, visibly inspecting everyone else’s gesture is itself part of the gesture.

It should already be clear from my account that Brin’s account is an optimistic, forward-looking one: he is a cultural evolutionist, viewing the contemporary “neo-West” as the heir to the most advanced and successful cultural accomplishments and capacities of human history. For Brin, the “neo-West,” while on one level corresponding to “all the world’s constitutional democracies” (336) on another, more important level, refers to “a shared cultural outlook based on individualism, eccentricity, and suspicion of authority,” which operates in “fluid zones” not necessarily conforming to national boundaries. He also tends to view the “neo-West” in predominantly political terms, as freedom, tracing a thread connecting the neo-West to “a few other brief oases of relative liberty–the Icelandic Althing, some Italian city-states, the Iroquois Confederacy, and perhaps a couple of bright moments during the Roman Republic, or the Baghdad Caliphate–surrounded by vast eras when the social pyramid in every land was dominated by conspiracies of privilege” (17–I should mention that Athenian democracy, conspicuously absent from this list, has already been–prominently–mentioned by Brin).

The emergence of the “neo” West is now breaking down the last remaining “conspiracies of privilege,” understood, again, in consistently non-victimary terms (*i.e.,*it is not the victim’s standpoint that is privileged, but the standpoint that emerges from a competing power center). What interests Brin the most is not power reversals, real and imaginary, but the loss of authority of what we might call cultural “middle-men”: publishers, educational institutions, the media, bureaucracies, in favor of “a century of aficionados,” self-taught experts in every field under the sun, self-authorizing reporters and investigators into political and corporate malfeasance, new sites for the dissemination of information (the phenomenon of blogging, which came about years after Brin’s book, is a perfect example):

A few decades from now there will be ten billion people on the planet, and computers as sophisticated as today’s mainframes will be cheaper than transistor radios. If this combination does not lead to war and chaos, then it will surely result

in a world where countless men and women swarm the dataways in search of something special to do–some pursuit outside the normal range, to make each one feel just a little bit extraordinary. Through the Internet, we may be seeing the start of a great exploration aimed outward in every conceivable direction of interest or curiosity. An expedition to the limits of what we are, and what we might become. (49)*If this combination does not lead to war and chaos*–if we revise this so that it reads *in order to prevent this combination from leading to war and chaos*, we can see that Brin is working with anthropological presuppositions readily integrated into originary thinking: the circulation of signs is no longer enough, we must each of us *become* signs, signifiers of difference that generate more differences rather than claiming a new center.(9)

I have stressed Brin's political focus in order to continue developing a line of questioning for originary thinking that I raised in a previous essay in *Anthropoetics(10)* and in my discussion of Harris: how, within the framework of generative anthropology do we take into account the reality of collective obligations and loyalties, and public actions, insofar as these are not reducible to the unfolding of originary ethic of universal reciprocity on a *aesthetic* level? How do we account for politics other than as a branch of the market? Part of what I am suggesting is a rejection, on Gans's part, of the need to or possibility of thinking politics in terms of the originary scene is due, I think, to the fact that there is something irreducibly ritualistic in politics. Or to be more precise, the terrain of politics is always ritualistic. Even the most democratic polities require their citizens to follow ritualistic scripts (and allow for the revision of those scripts only in accord with another meta-script). Certain elements of the founding scene of the polity remain intact. This is irreducibly so due to the fact that part of the purpose of politics is to defend the boundary between inside and outside: if such boundaries are necessary and (to put the same question in another way) there are intrinsic limits to de-ritualization (insofar as articulations of power and accountability require indexicality, precedents, an a priori frame rendering action meaningful in specific ways) then a specific field of politics must be defined.(11) An originary or generative politics, in that case, would be one in which the founding scene of the polity is maintained in its integrity but as a *sign* of the originary scene–as opposed to *either* a resentful, idolizing negation of the originary scene *or* an equally resentful pseudo-universalism that rejects all scenes as "particularistic."

9

Politics, to put it differently, is the explicit recognition of the contingency, indeed fragility, of the originary scene. Unlike the formal, infinitely transferable and recyclable sign, politics requires that if a founding scene is to be replaced, it must be exchanged for one equally "dense," or rich in indices. Unlike ritual, though,

founding scenes *can* be deliberately replaced. It is precisely in such interregna, then, that openings for mimetic contagion, ruthlessness, tyranny, and so on, proliferate: in the interregnum, it is very difficult to tell whether widely accepted, innocuous, even essential concepts (like “sovereignty,” “human rights,” “international law,” “stability,” etc.) are covers for agencies of calculating resentment. Indeed, what else but such a crisis could instigate retrievals of the originary sign? Under such conditions, the articulation of boundaries that distinguish and relate the originary scene and the founding event of a given community become the occasion for re-constituting the boundaries articulating power and accountability, virtuality and indexicality, and others that necessarily follow. The very rarity of self-consciously free institutions, as opposed to the kind of long-term continuity and visible evolution of exchange relations, has perhaps helped to make the political so marginal to originary thinking (except for when it can be assimilated to exchange). But insofar as, at least, certain dramatic leaps in cultural evolution require that we account for those internal agencies within any community that stand as security for the boundary between inside and outside, we must account for the political in ways that enhance our understanding of the originary scene and the ultimate derivation of all enduring cultural categories from it.

Brin’s approach, uniting the paradoxical and pragmatic at each stage, furthermore addresses the more individualized process of making distinctions within culture. His political framework leads Brin to privilege, unequivocally, freedom over privacy: freedom is the privileged concept because if we lose our freedom we will have no way of protecting our privacy anyway, while as long as we have our freedom we might be able to devise some collective means for preserving a zone of privacy. What this would entail, within the framework of “mutually assured surveillance,” is the evolution, this time deliberately and openly, of cultural norms regarding leaving one another alone–even more, this will engage all of us in anthropological inquiries regarding the central and essential as opposed to apparent and secondary “goods” of privacy (and other categories): what human need, exactly, does our desire for privacy meet? Without a political framework, though, such distinctions would become far more arbitrary, and it would prove impossible to formulate the virtuality/indexicality or power/accountability nexuses that transform metaphysical binaries into resolvable pragmatic paradoxes.

Not surprisingly, Brin responded to 9/11 with a commentary both pragmatic and inspiring, both patriotic and universalistic. Applying one of his central arguments in *The Transparent Society*, debunking the assumption that there must be a tradeoff between security and freedom, and one of his privileged icons, the engaged “aficionado” or “social T-cell,” Brin focuses on the fact that common people “armed” with the inventions and values characteristic of our civilization performed far better than hierarchical official institutions or “experts”:

- Most of the video we saw on 9/11 was taken by private citizens, a potentially crucial element in future emergencies.
- Private cell phones spread the word quicker than official media.
- Swarms of volunteers descended on the disaster sites. Overwhelmed local officials quickly dropped their everyday concerns about liability or professional status, in order to use all willing hands.
- As rumors, hoaxes and conspiracy theories spread, the role of debunking falsehoods fell almost entirely on private web sites.
- Most important of all–the sole actions taken that day to effectively thwart terror were achieved by individuals aboard United Airlines Flight 93, armed with intelligence and communication tools–and a mandate–completely outside official channels.
- …
- Am I suggesting that common citizens take over the harsh job of retribution from the Armed Forces? Or the role of intelligence agencies in ferreting out terrorist cells? Or the responsibility of government and corporations to act in order to keep people safe? Of course not!
- What I *am* saying is that events on 9/11 point to a trend of ever-enhancing roles for citizens in 21st Century society–the exact opposite tendency from what we observed for the last few generations, during which professionals took over the management of great swathes of daily life, especially the reduction of danger.

(http://www.futurist.com/portal/future_trends/david_brin_empowerment.htm)Now this account, of course, explicitly leaves out the application of Brin's principles in those areas where traditional hierarchies and norms of secrecy might be central to the "harsh job of retribution." And this might be a rather large exception to concede. But let's use Brin's approach to speculate regarding an issue that bridges the gap between the reign of the victimary and the post-millennial: racial or ethnic profiling. Civil rights activists in the U.S. moved seamlessly (and preemptively) from their objections to the racial profiling of African Americans to placing the ethnic(?)/religious(?) profiling of Arabs and Muslims under the same taboo (from "Driving while Black" to "Flying while Arab"). Leaving aside the appropriateness of the analogy, the problem here is real: the application of social-scientific knowledge to crime or terrorism prevention (which must involve reaching probabilistic conclusions regarding the association of certain categories of people with certain classes of activities) does at least have the potential to infringe upon assumptions of universal equality and the presumption of innocence.

The obvious response, though, is that it is not only thoroughly irresponsible to refuse to use any knowledge that can enhance public safety, but that it's *impossible* to do so: even without statistics, "profiling" is part of making judgments and

decisions on a commonsensical level. The victimary clearly reaches its limits at the point where, to be scrupulous, a police officer would have to erase from their mind the memory of having responded to a dozen robberies in one neighborhood as opposed to one or two in another. And objections become even more absurd once we realize that part of the increase in transparency is the use of such profiling everywhere (as anyone who has brought a book on amazon.com, and then received suggestions regarding “other books you might like” knows–and this example further suggests that, rather than contradicting individualizing tendencies, profiling is part of them). What Brin enables us to see, though, is that this double-bind need not be zero-sum game. It can just as easily lead to new forms of (inevitably asymmetric) dialogue, as public disclosure leads to further transparency (self-examination, debate) *within* communities; the use of mechanisms of transparency to enforce the boundary between surveillance and questioning, on the one hand, and unnecessary harassment and unjust arrest and prosecution on the other; and the ongoing probing of the necessarily fallible “categories” themselves, often, most likely, to be initiated by those they single out. In other words, “profiling” is just one part of the larger process, burdensome as well as liberating, of everyone becoming a sign.

Also, if we draw upon Harris’ argument, Brin’s approach enables us to formulate a strategy and a demand in confrontation with our enemies: we are trying to make them transparent (their money flows, their political links to various states and intelligence services, the gradations between ideological expressions of sympathy, more or less subtle, and the actual conspirators and actors, etc.) and we insist, as a definition of victory, that the societies from which Islamic terrorism emerges render themselves transparent. In other words, Brin enables us to formulate demands for democratic transformation and support for civilizing tendencies in pragmatic terms: the biggest problem with societies that, in Harris’ terms, remain addicted to internal violence, is that there is no way for outsiders to make reasonable guesses about what they might do next.

10

An Excursus on Charles Sanders Peirce

I have already identified the trends represented by the writers I am discussing as pragmatic, suggesting that this deepens their commonality with GA–and I have already started making use of Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotics. I would like to make this connection more rigorously and provide a basis for concluding my discussion by briefly arguing for making Peirce more “canonical” within originary thinking. Gans compares Peirce and Saussure from the standpoint of GA in *Signs of Paradox*, finding that Peirce is only able to grasp the horizontal (sign-referent relations) while Saussure “sees in the sign nothing but verticality” (14). Their

limitations are in that case complementary but it seems to me that we can see, and for very good reasons (above all that verticality is what is really distinctive to the sign), a strong preference on Gans's part for Saussure. But I would like to make a case for appropriating Peirce's semiotics more forcefully, for a couple of reasons: first, Peirce's semiotics is much more amenable to a scenic understanding of language than Saussure's and second, Peirce's icon/index/symbol ternary might be made to correspond rather closely to Gans's tracing of the development of language from the ostensive, to the imperative and finally the declarative.(12) On the face of it, the icon, a sign that represents through its resemblance to its object, is very different from the ostensive gesture: "resemblance" must come at a much later stage of development. If we align Peirce's semiotic ternary with his distinction of three modes of being, Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness, though, new possibilities emerge.

Firstness is direct feeling, sheer presence of some quality before it can be separated from the thing or event experienced: "a state, which is in its entirety in every moment of time as long as it endures" (82); Secondness, a relation, or collision, between two separate objects, the element of change, struggle, "vicissitude" (88); and Thirdness is the regulated interchange between mind and world, or one might say, the generation of new and expanded Firstness/Secondness relationships and relationships between relationships. Now, it's clear enough that indexicality is aligned with secondness, and the symbol with Thirdness (since the symbol, *i.e.*, the conventional sign, takes on its meaning through its predictability and repeatability in new relationships), but the alignment of icon, which seems to presuppose two separate objects, one of which resembles the other, with Firstness, seems less clear. But if we consider that Firstness and Secondness can only be retroactively and hypothetically distinguished from within the symbolic, and must be simultaneously present as implicit preconditions of any signification, then the iconic sign is simply the way Firstness *appears to another* (and therefore oneself as other, as "spectator" of one's own experience) in the *only way* that it can appear to another–as *indexed* by the individual experiencing Firstness: in exactly the same way as any person emitting the ostensive gesture *both* has an unprecedented relationship to the object *and* represents that relationship to the others (with the representation ultimately *being* the relationship). The first person, the primary signifier, emitting the sign is, then, the first iconic sign, "resembling" a particular relationship to the object (renunciation). There are two implications that follow, both, in my view, highly productive for originary thinking: first, the emitter of any sign is simultaneously an iconic sign, in its indexical relationship to both object and audience, lending consistency to the sign actually emitted. In other words, the first sign, and *any* sign, only "works," or "holds together," because the individual emitting it is "backing" it: in addition to the meaning of any sign is signified the "trustworthiness" of the person emitting it. Second, this "recruitment" of Peirce

enables us to strengthen the claim that any sign is intrinsically hypothetical, since the iconic sign for Peirce is the source of hypotheses.(13)

I am working my way to the conclusion, first, that originary thinking's lesson for 9/11 thought is that the process of rendering every individual's activity self-reflexively iconic must be deepened and accelerated; and second, that a properly generative theory of politics lies in conceptualizing specifically public modes of iconic activity or more precisely, iconic activity indexed by power/accountability articulations. In order to work my way there, and then to a more directly political conclusion, I would first like to address a necessarily post-sacrificial dimension to 9/11 thought: we must, that is, have the conceptual resources to see enemies as enemies, to focus, when necessary (and to know when it is necessary) on precisely that quality that makes them enemies; we must devise thought experiments regarding which "stake" claimed by another would make them 100% irreconcilable, "Amalek," which further requires presupposing that the enemy is, as Harris argues, a permanent category of human experience. And at the same time–*as a result* of that uncompromising designation–we must devise ways of acting *as if*, or representing the possibility that, the enemy we confront today might be the last one ever, ultimately both a source of anthropological knowledge and self-knowledge and at the same time a narrowly technical problem. Imposing this double-bind upon ourselves requires that we resist signs of unity that measure the value of actions according to the accumulation of sanctified victims. And this requires a secular sacrality, which itself must be the foundation of a mimetic ethics that is capable, ethically and epistemologically, of detecting and resisting evidence of what I have been calling a hyper-mimeticism: mimetic crisis under contemporary conditions, where the strict adherence to a mimetic ethics can result in the *incommensurability* of virtuality and indexicality, power and accountability, because the technological capabilities for responding antagonistically to the other outstrip the temporal frame needed to assess feedback regarding the effects of previous responses, so that actions and counter-actions can only be "modeled" in the absence of "indices." The most obvious example, of course, is deterrence, or the Mutually Assured Destruction policy that maintained the cold War equilibrium. Under such conditions principles such as proportionality of response become a bad joke: once the first move is made all the following moves are essentially arbitrary. I am suggesting that U.S. preeminence provides us with the unique opportunity to prevent the emergence of the symmetry between great powers that leads inexorably to hyper-mimeticism. And these conditions in turn provide an "umbrella" under which genuine international norms might emerge on the ground.

The Sacred in a Post-Sacrificial Era

Let's return to Gans's claim regarding the *theistic* underpinnings of the suicide

bomber, suggesting that we might, in particular in the interests of confronting even (or especially) such phenomena in the light of human reciprocity, view such acts as a mode of resistance to the prevailing *humanism* of a fully developed market society. My response was, essentially, that we then must take this a step further. First of all, suicide bombing can plausibly be viewed as a *reduction* of the humanistic to the theistic, but nevertheless as an *articulation* of the two: the suicide bomber is a *sign* of such resistance and as such eminently exchangeable. The example I gave earlier was the transformation of suicide bombers into celebrities in the Palestinian territories; one could just as easily mention Osama Bin Laden t-shirts, or the slick sensationalistic techniques of al-Jazeera. Part of my purpose here is to suggest how "normal" much of the process of production of suicide bombers is: in it we see very familiar elements such as peer pressure, concern over one's family's financial situation, a desire for revenge, to be idolized, and so on. Certainly, GA as much as any other mode of thought makes us skeptical of claims to absolutely resist the market, and ready to see such claims as a mode of preparation for participation in the market.(14)

Clearly, though, such preparation is *not* what is happening here–this articulation of the theistic and the humanistic has to be understood differently. The theistic *is* genuinely privileged here, but in a way that is inseparable from a parasitic, destructive relationship to the humanistic. The point is not to remove oneself from exchange, or even to open up spaces where such removal would be possible, or even to engage the circuits of exchange in a minimal manner indispensable to the carrying out of practical projects; rather, it is to demonstrate that the means and products of the exchange system can be diverted to purposes inimical to that system. This is to introduce doubt into every act of exchange and signification, and without iconic representatives backing signs it is difficult to see what the limits to the vulnerability of the exchange system might be. So, to take Gans's point yet further, shouldn't we take from this insight into our own system provided by global terrorism the suggestion that perhaps another way of articulating the theistic and the humanistic must be the antidote–one in which the theistic, the *vertical*, is openly made generative through the *horizontal*, the proliferation of signs?

11

I am not referring to a religious revival (to the further instrumentalization of religion). To return once again to my "amendment" to the originary scene, if the scene is only complete once the sign returns to the primary signifier who imitates it and thereby certifies its repeatability, that is, if the scene is marked by its contingency, then we have a model of the scene's problematic emergence *through* the becoming-(iconic) sign of the primary signifier *and* that signifier's re-immersion in the community. This articulation of the scene, however, implies that mimetic

contagion has an opening to deploy apparently innocuous signs before anyone could tell the difference. It is precisely in this moment–what becomes, in the completed sign, borrowing from Peirce, an “infinitesimal instant”–*between* “emission” and “re-immersion” that the sign is vulnerable to “ruthless” appropriations claiming to represent the community as an aggregate of resentments.

As I suggested earlier in my discussion of Peirce, the iconic sign can be seen as an iteration of the ostensive. This is the case insofar as it represents the simultaneous existence of the sign for all of its users. One way in which we might understand this is by representing the iconic primary signifier as erasing, with common consent, the infinitesimal instant between emission and re-immersion: in other words, an implicit assertion that the emergent confrontation with mimetic contagion never happened, everyone gestured at *exactly* the same time. I would go so far as to suggest that it is impossible to avoid this way of representing the scene altogether–under normal conditions, such a representation would serve the same purpose as the originary sign itself, so condemning its “hypocrisy” is obviously beside the point.

The other way of representing the iconic sign’s iteration of the ostensive, however, is as simultaneously representing the *gap* between emitter and receiver, producer and consumer. This would involve an overtly self-reflexive dimension that also explicitly calls upon the receiver to summon up the faith necessary to retrieve, preserve, and enhance that sign: to be converted into an iconic sign oneself. This is a secular form of sacrality to which, in my experience at least, certain postmodern and innovative fiction writers have borne the most effective testimony.(15) And it provides us with a criterion for maintaining, if not separate *domains*, at least (and in my view, better) a distinction between high cultural and popular cultural *elements*. If historically, as Gans has said, while popular culture allows us to identify with the lynch mob high culture allies us with the victims and hence installs a universal mode of reciprocity, we could perhaps, within a post-sacrificial frame, “amend” that as follows: popular culture reminds us that we all participated in the originary scene, while high culture reminds us that the scene has not yet quite been completed and it’s up to us.

What I will call the “flattened” originary scene (we all signified, literally, at the exact same moment) is true enough and good enough for the vast majority of social encounters. What we might call the “rippled” scene (staggered imitation and “return to the sender” of the not-yet-just-becoming sign), which I will identify, perhaps not surprisingly, with the disciplinary scene, becomes prominent under more critical circumstances. Only the rippled scene has a mechanism of transformation that can feed off of and feed back into everyday “flat” exchanges. Even more, at this point in history there is no reason why we can’t successfully

promote friendly relations between inhabitants of the two scenes (and of course, all of us reside, at different times, on both scenes). Rather than a critical, "demystifying," missionary approach to the flattened scene, we can operate under the faith that from even the flattest sign traces of the sacred origins of signification can be recovered and articulated.

Still, that operation must actually be carried out, and in consciousness of the fact that the flattened scene has forgotten what is remembered by the ruthless–the originary confrontation with mimetic contagion. And for this we need an generative theory of *judgment*: judgment both in the sense that we need to be capable of making the distinction between mimetic contagion and the flattened scene that has forgotten it, and in the broader prudential sense that it's not always equally urgent to insist upon the distinction. If the flattened scene is true enough and good enough most of the time, it is obviously in those cases where it is not true enough or good enough where something is at stake. An iconic reading of cultural phenomena–reading everything *as if* it were an exemplary and self-aware re-enactment of the originary scene–will be gently satirical in ways that in a postmodern culture actually enhance and re-circulate in the harmless flattened scene, while at the same time functioning as a ruthless exposure of disguised attempts to implode such scenes. Highlighting the way in which jihadism has generated a mode of cultural circulation that has further debased beyond recognition even the worst elements of American popular culture enables us to dismantle uncompromisingly its theistic claims while confronting them forcefully with our own claim to the sacred.

I began this essay expressing a hope to contribute to originary thinking as a discipline and have arrived at a central tenet of 9/11 thought: represent oneself and everyone else iconically, and help to create the conditions under which individuals can circulate *qua*, and texts, practices and institutions can be indexed *by*, iconic signs. This involves a restoration of the mimetic scene as an organizing principle of civilization but without external (*i.e.*, metaphysical) representations of that scene: rather, representations of any scene are themselves constitutive of another scene: a disciplinary scene interested in the playful contemplation of signs which is simultaneously the deliberate retrieval of their scene of production. And it precisely on that disciplinary scene, the highest development of the originary scene, because it emerges out of mimetic crisis, and the need of the community for signs that are simultaneously truthful and conciliatory, when signs become "problematic," that everyone appears immediately as a sign.

I am, that is, suggesting the interdependency of two types of civilizing activity: the enhanced capability to take a "disinterested interest" in signs–of any kind, because the interest anyway transforms them–with an attentiveness to signs of mimetic

contagion, and a willingness to ruthlessly present oneself as an icon of civilization in confronting them. What this implies on a more practical level is an explicit recognition that it is precisely the spread and networking of unsanctioned ("amateurish") activities carried out, ultimately, for the sheer love of inventiveness, improvisation, self-display, experimentation, discovery… that are the greatest source of economic, political, and military power deployed against our enemies (and perhaps, the greatest source of impatience with victimary discourses). And what might help tie together all the new ways of producing, transmitting, inhabiting, and articulating signs is what we could call the "scenic imagination": constituting one scene is a way of testing a hypothesis generated on a previous scene, while the description of one's action on that scene becomes a sign around which a new scene constellates, with that scene generating a new hypothesis…

Such a mode of thought directly confronts the main ally of today's leading agents of mimetic contagion, what I will call the "human rights world picture." This is the world picture painted by those embedded in the perpetrator/victim/bystander model of social relations: epistemological privilege is guaranteed to the serial victims of the normal. I mean, here, "normal" in both its senses: as the stabilized result of the vast interplay of mimetic interactions that ultimately narrow down plausible stances to a limited few, and as the valorization of such results (that is, the usually implicit insistence that it's not simply a statistical average) as an ethical standard. The enormously successful project of post-WWII victimary discourse has been (as we can see in the demonized portrayals of "the 50s" or "suburbia" in virtually any Hollywood movie) to portray the normal as an array of hidden (and therefore all the more violent) assaults on "difference." Of course, as Brin argues, this has been a necessary project insofar as it "indoctrinates" us with the very productive idea that we can only be individuals insofar as we are unique and suspicious of authority.

12

And we should also acknowledge that the human rights world picture is plausible insofar as we accept what was itself plausible under the "hyper-mimetic" conditions of the Cold War: that the vast destructive capacity of nuclear weapons meant that mimeticism itself (modeling one's actions on one's rival) would inevitably lead to unspeakable violence and hence needed to be "pre-empted." We can, that is, locate the victimary on the originary scene as well, with its aim being to make permanent the "emergency" that instigates the originary gesture–that is, to make the gesture, with all its riskiness and generativity, unnecessary, and hence (insofar as it is after all presented) itself complicit in the violence it simply renders more "invisible." The problem, of course, is that the "picture" (like any state of perpetual emergency) is completely circular and inherently unfalsifiable and parasitical: according to its antinomic logic, the more egalitarian assumptions on race, gender, sexuality…

prevail on the “surface,” the more deeply hidden and hence dangerous the violence must be. (Or in what is essentially an inverted version of the same logic, only by maintaining and intensifying “resistance” can these gains be protected against the McCarthyist hordes just waiting for their opportunity to squash all differences). Meanwhile, it needs to be said that the deferral of violence may look like, but is actually quite different from, the paralysis of representative institutions. And it is only in the form of such a paralysis (taken to its logical conclusion, every word or gesture would have to be cleansed of its victimary consequences prior to being expressed, but that would in turn require an impermeable set of rules governing such cleanliness, and rules that assure us of the spotlessness of the rules, etc.) that victimary discourses could actually be institutionalized.

And the more hidden and insidious the normative, the more pervasive and unmoored the inevitable “resistances” must be as well, which is why the human rights world picture is a perfect ally of agencies of mimetic contagion: such agencies *must* exist, after all, and perversely, the more arbitrary the better. Demands coming from some assignable source that might be adjudicated in some transparent manner would only lead the “resistance” to justify, against its will, the “status quo”: demands would be limited, therefore assuming that the system is basically legitimate after all. Hence we have the parodic scenario of enemies who almost seem to want to go out of their way to prove themselves evil, even in the most hackneyed, Saturday morning cartoon sense, along with “dissidents” in our own society who must airbrush ever larger portions of reality in order to avoid denouncing them unequivocally. The hyperbolic extremism of even liberal anti-war partisans is clear on this point–it is not enough to say Bush has made mistakes, has gone too far, or has been deceptive (all of which would leave open the question of whether he did some things right, was less deceitful on certain points, etc.): he must be the “worst” President ever, incapable of uttering an honest sentence, conducting “the most disastrous foreign policy in 200 years,” “trampling on civil rights,” “destroying the Constitution,” and so on. Such language is necessary to avoid facing the fact (paradoxically for the proponents of difference) that there are others out there, with their own interests and reasons, and they are also shaping the reality which we are also responding to–these others are not mere props for staging a postmodern critique.

In this context, I would like to conclude on a cruder political level, with a defense of the invasion of Iraq and the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime as an act calculated to restore the proper relations between the mimetic and the generative. (At the very least, it can and should be supported and its logic extended on these grounds.) In contrast with the grotesque caricatures of the anti-war movement (which still, as Michael Moore’s botched “Fahrenheit 9/11” demonstrates, hasn’t arrived at, and perhaps doesn’t really want, a coherent narrative), the problem with

Operation Iraqi Freedom is precisely that it is *too* multi-layered and multi-purposed (which is why the tendency–exaggerated, but real–on the part of the Administration to reduce it to "WMD" was such a mistake). In fact, the unquestioned assumption (itself an indicator of the power of the human rights world picture) that war can only be justified *either* in terms of direct, immediate self-defense (the enemy at the shores) *or* as an exceptional, "prosecutorial" exercise with unqualified transnational backing has rendered us completely unequipped to even discuss war in the necessary terms. Operation Iraqi Freedom completed the first Gulf War and *also* intervened progressively on the side of the forces representing a decent future for the Arab and Muslim worlds. It removed a primary grievance of the terrorists (the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia) by adopting an offensive stance toward jihadist forces. It represented a step forward in humanitarian warfare by demonstrating the possibility of targeting the central agencies of a tyrannical regime and largely sparing the civilian population *and* refuted the assertion (a recruitment draw of Islamic terrorists, and in fact, a core point in their analysis of their enemy) that Americans can only fight "from above." It retrieves the age-old distinction between republics and tyrannies (a crucial element in a mimetic culture) by placing the burden of proof on the tyrannical (and secretive) Iraqi state while re-establishing the civilian/military distinction undermined by "total war," anti-colonial wars, nuclear deterrence, and now global terrorism. It has widened the scope of the war on terrorism beyond the narrowly legalistic by making our victory reliant upon the freely chosen solidarity of the peoples of the region. Finally, it has presented the adherents of the human rights world picture with a rock solid reality that comes as close as possible to giving their assumptions a testable quality: the "picture" would maintain some epistemological and ethical viability if its adherents could find a way to sincerely support the construction of a stable, democratic Iraq consistent with their denunciation of the illegitimacy of American actions. (So far, I haven't even seen the attempt made.) Overall, the invasion of Iraq substitutes real scenes (with dramatis personae whose interactions can be charted, measured, placed within a narrative) for virtual ones (the Jew-neo-conservative controlled imperialist Halliburtonian U.S. against… who, exactly?). As Lee Harris suggests, and to use Peircean language, it introduces "actuality" into the situation: "A two-sided consciousness of effort and resistance" (Buchler 76).(16)

The missing link in Bush Administration policy has been the failure to incorporate the icon I discussed early on (and this was in fact a failure to trust what was apparently Bush's own original intuition, which led him to make "let's roll" his initial catch-phrase for the war he announced), and on which Brin focuses his discussion: the heroism of Flight 93, and its implications regarding a more self-reflexive and self-reliant citizenry that can itself be integrated as factor into the war, and whose ongoing transformation is in fact part of the war. But the work of universalizing modes of *iconic self-reflexivity programmed to be allergic to mimetic contagion* is

the work of culture as much as politics. A 9/11 thought must aim at facilitating readings of contemporary texts and institutions that find in them (or expose them as lacking) secularized traces of the originary sign: a sacrality that is simultaneously generative, that turns the retrieval of the originary sign into new centers around which new scenes will constellate. And my contribution to such a thought, I hope, has been a commentary on (or in) originary thinking that strengthens its core assumptions by showing them to be indispensable to post-9/11 disciplinary spaces. I have tried, in this commentary, to introduce the following questions, and to some extent perhaps disagreements, into originary thinking:

- as a question of method, the need to "inflect" by retroactively positing a subordinate process of differentiation within (culminating in the homogeneity of) the originary scene in order to articulate a testable thesis *within* generative anthropology;
- an attempt to raise the "profile" of politics, as iconic actions indexing power/accountability and virtuality/indexicality articulations, as an authentic element of the scene of representation
- to help render, as Gans suggests in *The End of Culture*, the human sciences genuinely effective as the new "high culture" by formulating the question of generative anthropology's disciplinarity, and to do so in terms derivable from the originary scene.

13

Notes

1. "Ethical conceptions have occupied a central position in the systems of representation of all previous societies, albeit in an esthetic (ritual or secular) rather than a theoretical form. Today, only theory can elaborate such a conception, and theory is therefore called upon to situate itself at the center of our culture. Human science must become, on this hypothesis, the 'high culture' of our age. But this can be accomplished only if it accepts the burden of considering its own culture with high seriousness" (97). (back)

2. I don't mean to dispute Gans's own accounts of the historical conditions of emergence of originary thinking, which usually single out the universalization of the market system and postmodernism's discovery of the primacy of language (the two are obviously connected). Rather, I am hypothesizing on the possible forceful emergence of generative anthropology on the scene of contemporary theory. (back)

3. See a very recent Chronicle (305, "The 'Supernatural'") for a similar account: "Perhaps the most convincing proof that Generative Anthropology constitutes a

radical advance in human thought is that it encounters not simply resistance but indifference." Part of the purpose of my essay is to help provoke productive resistance–the kind that can be transformed into a field of inquiry for GA. (back)

4. See Eshelman's "Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism," and "Performatism in Architecture: On Framing and the Spatial Realization of Ostensivity," in *Anthropoetics* VI, no. 2 (Fall 200/Winter 2001) and VII no. 2 (Fall 2001/Winter 2002), respectively.(back)

5. Yoram *Hazony's The Dawn: The Political Teachings of the Book of Esther*, provides a helpful discussion of Amalek in the Jewish tradition. Hazony reads Amalek as the rejection of all moral boundaries. The irony, or really, paradox, that Hazony points out will also be relevant to my discussion: "God's promise to to annihilate the memory of Amalek from the earth is to no small degree undermined by his promise to war against Amalek for untold generations" (102).

Let me also situate my discussion in terms of Gans' analysis of the problem of evil in *Signs of Paradox*. Gans here also insists, in a sense, on the ineradicability of evil, insofar as it has a (subordinate) place on the originary scene. Of course, good must be prior to evil, and hence evil is only intelligible in relation to good: "The finite concept of evil that alone is of anthropological significance is possible only once the good, the moral foundation of the human, has been established" (144). Nevertheless, evil "is a necessary component of the universe of human virtuality created by the sign" (145). The key passage is the following: "This *passage à l'acte* [the sparagmos, or distribution and consumption of the sacred object] provides the model for the crucial realization of evil intent, which would otherwise remain the purely imaginary object of esthetic catharsis. There is no need to postulate an internal differentiation of the community that would violate the equalitarian morality of the sign. The sparagmos, in which the exercise of violence toward the sacred center is accompanied by the denial of individual responsibility for this violence, is the model for all acts of evil, both collective and individual" (145).

As will become clear, I postulate an internal differentiation of the community that does *not* violate the equalitarian morality of the sign. The concept of evil I will be advancing here, as Gans suggests, is first of all directed at the "non-human center" (145) rather than others on the periphery. I will be suggesting that it is an evil that "remembers" the instant before the sign was emitted and this "memory," following the emission of the sign, is a resentment towards the scene as such and which aims at eviscerating the signs constituting it in the knowledge that it is only via such signs that its "project" can be advanced. (back)

6. For the notion of an Islamic revivial, see Michael Vlahos, "The Muslim *Renovatio*

and U.S. Strategy.” (back)

7. See his *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders*, and of course, Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. (back)

8. I am making a very broad assertion here, and it would take a lot of space to adequately defend it. My point is that Gans adopts a perfectly legitimate strategy in potentially violent conflicts in the “post-millenial,” that of deferral: “The abandonment of victimary thinking is the universal commitment to abide peacefully within not only egalitarian but also asymmetric relationships, in the faith that even the latter are preferable to violence–and that, in a world of market exchange, they will tend in the long run to mitigate the asymmetry *(Chronicle* 253, “Post-Millennial Thoughts”). My argument is in complete agreement with this, especially since Gans clearly takes into account (in *Chronicle* 247–“Holding Up Our End of History”–and 248–“Window of Opportunity”–written soon after 9/11, just to mention a couple of places) that an affirmative and potentially costly defense of civilization might very well be necessary, and is of course clear that we might never be able to cease addressing violent resentment on the part of those who reject this principle. So, again, my aim is not refutation or correction, but rather an employment of the resources of originary thinking to inquire into the short term, in which confronting those for whom “no demonstration of the fairness of a given social order will persuade” (*Chronicle* 248) makes negotiation not only irrelevant but a habit benefiting the ruthless. In such cases, certain asymmetries must be enhanced, at least temporarily, and a logic other than the market (*not* against the market) must account for that. (back)

9. I am suggesting that we can read Brin as proposing one way of implementing the project Gans suggests at the end of *Originary Thinking*:

The historical movement of desacralization operates neither through the endless deconstruction of the originary center nor through its definitive rejection but through its omnicentric multiplication. Even “decentralization” is a dangerous term; what is required is rather the universal proliferation of centers–every human being being a center. (219) (back)10. See Katz, 2001/2002 (back)

11. Gans stresses the primacy and superiority of the sign over ritual in the iteration of the originary scene in the development of culture most insistently in *The End of Culture*, but of course this priority is bound up with Gans’s insistence that the modern market (involving de-ritualization and secularization) is the telos of the originary scene. My argument, of course, is in complete agreement with all this–I am suggesting that there are simultaneously conditions of the market, and in particular ways of addressing threats to the market which are not intrinsic to the

market itself, and can even be obscured (in the short run–but the “short run” might derail the long run) by the market, taken alone. In short, the market can’t defend itself. In *Signs of Paradox*, Gans returns to the issue of ritual in a sustained way, discussing it primarily in terms of sacrificial practices and the “sparagmos,” and it seems to me here that here there may be some sense of the limits of de-ritualization. (back)

12. Peirce is more amenable to a scenic understanding because of his assumption that signs should always be interpreted as constitutive of a scene of inquiry: the study of signs involves “reach[ing] conclusions as to what would be true of signs in all cases, so long as the intelligence using them was scientific” (“Logic as Semiotic–The Theory of Signs,” in Buchler 98). This is tantamount to viewing signs as if they were products of a disciplinary scene, accentuating their hypothetical character. For Gans’ discussion of the evolution of linguistic forms, see *The Origin of Language*, Chapters 3-5, and *Originary Thinking*, Chapter 4. (back)

13. The icon is selected through what Peirce calls “abduction,” which is the mode of analysis that, as opposed to induction and deduction, is “the only process by which a new element can be introduced into thought” (224) For Peirce, “[a]n abduction is a method of forming a general prediction without any positive assurance that it will succeed . . . its justification being that it is the only hope of regulating our future conduct rationally” (299). The occasion of abduction “is a *surprise* . . . some belief, active or passive, formulated or unformulated, has just been broken up” (287). It comes to us “like a flash,” and is an “act of insight,” albeit “extremely fallible” (227). Finally, in abduction, “the facts [suggest] the hypothesis by resemblance,” *i.e.*, iconically, even “shading into perceptual judgments” (227). Interestingly, in his “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” Peirce describes abduction as dependent upon a state of “Musement” or “Pure Play,” in which an undisciplined contemplation of the increasingly intricate and complex relations between the three modes of being leads not only to hypotheses but to a belief in the reality of God due to the ever more evident principle of growth underlying reality that such musement must reveal to us. (back)

14. To mention just one example, see the analyses of Romanticism and Modernism in *Originary Thinking*. (back)

15. For me, the best example is the innovative fiction of Ronald Sukenick, whose aesthetic project I would read as an ongoing attempt to retrieve the originary sign from within the proliferating, horizontal, resentful representations of contemporary culture. I hope to write on this for *Anthropoetics* in the near future. Even a much

better known writer like John Barth, though, can be understood in a similar way: the most sophisticated meta-fictional constructions always aim at arriving at and re-circulating an originary narrative form that has lasted because it signifies the suspension of resentment, or love. (back)

16. Here is Harris on Western liberalism's indulgence of the Arab producer and consumers of fantasy ideologies: "we have robbed them of that indispensable sense of realism that can only be earned by head-on collisions with the immovable object called the real world" (34). (back)

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