Towards a New Cultural Studies

John O'Carroll and Chris Fleming

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

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

Introduction

Generative Anthropology is the most promising form of cultural studies today. Those who read *Anthropoetics* already know this, even if what they do travels under different disciplinary names. The contribution of Generative Anthropology to knowledge about culture as such–its varieties, its structures, its histories, its genesis–rivals that of Cultural Studies in its halcyon years (in the Anglo-American world, a period from about 1972-1985). The interrelationship between the two fields–Generative Anthropology and Cultural Studies–and the light they shed on each other's practices form the subject matter of this essay.

We cannot ignore the stark institutional differences in the way the two fields are situated. On the one hand, Generative Anthropology is a concentrated research network with highly motivated scholars from a variety of disciplines and nations. On the other, Cultural Studies is now a massive but diffuse "area" (often including further vagaries like "Media studies") sustained by strong institutional entrenchment. In consequence, Cultural Studies' proud boast of foundational "interdisciplinarity" has been undermined by its own institutional departmental status. If many people from outside the university now equate the humanities as a whole with Cultural Studies, we should not imagine that such *institutional* success is indicative of *intellectual* success in the usual terms of depth, value, or discovery. Cultural Studies is often criticized: some such attacks take aim at the apparent incoherence of the key theoretical precepts of Cultural Studies and from outside the university, pointed questions are now being asked about the worth of the entire field of the humanities–with Cultural Studies being taken as the example of what may have gone wrong.(1) Such

critiques have some value, but our approach will, for the most part, begin anew. We inquire, as if for the first time, into what it is that Cultural Studies *is*, and what it purports to *do*.

1. What is Cultural Studies?

Despite its institutional ubiquity, Cultural Studies has a readily apparent contradiction at its core. It is characterized by an inverse relationship of explicit definitional clarity on the one hand, and tacit adherence to strict protocols of textual practice on the other. These things may not always be stated clearly, but they are readily and widely discernible. For instance, Lawrence Grossberg, a leading Cultural Studies scholar, after telling us that Cultural Studies is inherently "embedded, descriptive, and historically and contextually specific," then states that there *are* concepts which constitute "a history of real achievements that is now part of the cultural studies tradition" (8).

Grossberg's is far from an isolated example of what might best be called *definitional reticence*. In its starkest form we find this taken to outlandish extremes. Here is Chris Barker in *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (2000):

I maintain that the term 'cultural studies' has no referent to which we can point. Rather, cultural studies is constituted by the language game of cultural studies. The theoretical terms developed and deployed by persons calling their work cultural studies is what cultural studies 'is.' (4)The comments are both breath-taking and hypocritical in the extreme. If we set aside Barker's position precisely because it is so extreme, we can nevertheless observe a certain cageyness in scholars with more serious theoretical pedigrees. Witness an even more recent work, by one of the field's leading intellectuals. The book is *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction* (2005). In it, Simon During tells us that Cultural Studies addresses all culture in the form of cultural "texts" (which can be anything at all), and that in place of the old disciplinary ways,

a more rewarding response would be to say that cultural studies is united . . . by dual impulses which are vaguer than a method: a will to interpret the culture within the protocols of academic knowledge . . . as well as a (potential) drive to connect with everyday life as lived outside the academy. (During 2005: 8-9)More *rewarding*? This is an economy of foundational intellectual rewards and penalties, of impulses, of drives, and perhaps, of will.(2) But then as During takes even stranger turns, we see the word "defined" brought into play:

2

the fallback position on defining cultural studies is nominalist: cultural studies is just what names itself as, and is recognised as, cultural studies. But we don't have to be so minimalist: I would point to two further features which help characterise the field. . . . The first characteristic feature of cultural studies is that it is an *engaged* field of study. . . . The

second ideal feature of cultural studies . . . is that it ought to be *self-reflective*. (9-10)(3)The first thing to note is that the "fallback" position, as phrased by During, is only vaguely "nominalist"; what is offered, rather, is a circular definition–akin to Barker's–in which Cultural Studies is whatever we happen to be doing at the moment. (It is only nominalist in the naïve sense that giving something a name actually constitutes its identity–a position, as far as we're aware, few serious nominalists would accept.) In any event, During *himself* does not appear to accept that this is how Cultural Studies should be defined. He says, rather, that Cultural Studies is characterized by engagement (in the sense of the *intellectuel engagé*) and self-reflectivity, in the tradition, presumably, of Cliffordian postmodern anthropology; though perhaps he refers to the endless quasi-theorisations of this kind concerning what Cultural Studies itself might be (cf. 14, where During calls it "obsessive"). After this, he notes the alignment between the enterprise university's desire to free up programs of study and Cultural Studies' desire for interdisciplinarity (14-16). Definitional reticence extends also to the index of the book where we note that the word "definition" is not used at all; instead, it has an entry called "characterization of" Cultural Studies.

But reticence of this kind is duplicitous. If we press further with this analysis, we find a field in which the equivalents of the intellectual wink-wink take the place of actual argument. During, almost despite himself, has offered two different kinds of definition. Both are problematic, corresponding as they do to the intensional and extensional moments of his "characterization" of Cultural Studies. To start with, it bears saying that in his quasi-intensional "characterization," During's "nominalism" possesses the virtue of helping us to avoid hypostatizing an abstract term like "Cultural Studies": figuring it as some kind of concrete object or substance. It is true, albeit banal, that there can be no "cultural studies" if it is not named and recognized as such. But to suggest that Cultural Studies (as Barker actually does) can simply be *equated* with self-appellation and recognition doesn't seem to possess much more intellectual merit than falsely hypostatizing it. Self-appellation and disciplinary recognition stand in relation to other forms of self-appellation and disciplinary recognition. In this respect, disciplines stand in certain relations to other disciplines and analysis always proceeds according to defined textual practices. Furthermore, for a discipline supposedly sensitive to power relations, During seems unaware that "naming" something Cultural Studies is not simply a performative act open to anyone. That is to say, like other performatives (such as pronouncing someone "husband and wife" or sentencing someone to life imprisonment), naming something "cultural studies" is predicated on a certain institutional privilege. Finally, During's quasi-intensionalist characterization of Cultural Studies quickly fails because of its vacuity. To suggest that cultural studies is simply a name for what cultural studiers do–perhaps even a kind of shorthand for the sum of all specific instances of Cultural Studies activity–at least possess merit insofar as it recognizes that there is no Cultural Studies apart from specific cases of intellectual activity; but neither can there be intellectual activity which is not a definite *kind* of activity.

In asking *what kind* of activity Cultural Studies might be, we encounter new issues. The

inadequacies of the During's characterization emerge in a new way. As we mentioned, During offers a couple of extensional characterizations of Cultural Studies. These concern the engaged nature of the field and its capacity for reflexivity. However, these "characterizations" are deeply inadequate to what they purport to describe. Indeed, given the vacuity of his original formulation, the extensional list–of just two features–verge on absurdity. One might just as well apply the two criteria (engagement and reflection) to the organisational processes of an Episcopal Cake Raffle, the annual meetings of the Fabian society, and serious training for a cricket final. The AGM of a major corporation seeking to address the social dimensions of its charter would also fit During's categories. Perhaps the most peculiar and yet characteristic problem of this book's approach–and the approach taken by other scholars in that field–is the apparent refusal to explicitly circumscribe the field. As Schwartz, a vehement critic of Cultural Studies, says, and as we must note in advance, our very demand will lead to the retort that "we just don't get it; that for reasons that we have no right to know, cultural studies is indefinable" (104).(4) We concur with Schwartz in his view–if not his tone. The Cultural Studies position is not sustainable; Schwartz obviously does not accept it, and neither do we.

The absence of proper definition is hardly acceptable. The name, of course, should supply a clue. Presumably, Cultural Studies would exist to develop hypotheses or knowledges about culture and the human, and then, to enhance understanding of particular cultures, including our own. Some might of course contend that Cultural Studies *does* do this. After all, Cultural Studies would be so-called to reflect the fact that it is a field of study that looks at cultures (hence the plural name). But in *Cultural Studies* (1993), yet another primer for luckless undergraduates, Fred Inglis writes that the plural is in the name, "cultural studies," because

"studies" are provisional, flexible, mobile. . . . Those who conduct and learn from "studies" are to have the attributes of mind and qualities of heart and temper to go with this. They honour the plurality of perspectives, relish the varieties of intellectual experience, acknowledge the location and uncertainty of old knowledge itself. (227)In this respect, we see all too blatantly what Schwartz means by his claim that contrary to the supposed non-definability of Cultural Studies, the "cultural studies doers themselves, for want of a better term, do have a relatively clear idea of what does and does not count as work in cultural studies . . . the very looseness of the discipline provides an invincible, yet ultimately question-begging defense against any criticism of the discipline's premises" (104-05). We also see in this account the residual claim that–in During's terms–there is a stance, or an order of engagement.

3

2. The Framing of Cultural Studies and of Generative Anthropology

An obvious aspect of research in any field is the narrative of its emergence in relation to

surrounding fields of study. Rather less obvious, though, is the fact that this story of emergence *itself* changes as the field reaches maturity–or indeed, in partial obsolescence, becomes in its turn the cornerstone of a subsequent kind of inquiry. Alasdair Macintyre has made this point in relation to entire blocks or paradigms of knowledge ("Epistemological Crises" 453-72). But it seems to be true on many levels. Just as the English "Lake" poets were subsequently situated within a much wider field of Romantic analysis, so too do fields of inquiry–even entire fields like psychology and phenomenology–undergo transformations in the way they are conceived, and in the way they are seen as having come about historically.

This does not mean that earlier versions of the history of a field were inaccurate, or untrue in their own terms. What it does entail, however, is seeing how we might gain from stepping back a little, and relating a given field to others, doing so in a way that makes sense of it in a new light. In this defined sense, then, we contend that both Generative Anthropology and Cultural Studies are movements that can very usefully be traced from intellectual traditions of the 1940s, and that both have appurtenances with much earlier ideas too. Even more remarkably, however, the origins of both movements lie outside the humanities as it was then conceived–and perhaps, as it is now conceived too. Put simply, *in terms of their views of culture*, both fields developed out of a fold between anthropology and communication. Cultural Studies, as we will see later, also laid claim to a "political" orientation, and in the next sections we will consider this claim in a little more detail.

Where Cultural Studies in its earliest (and finest, if not most characteristic) incarnation grew from the axis that joins linguistics (Jakobson, Hjelmslev) to anthropology (Lévi-Strauss), producing a third, the analysis of cultural myths (Barthes) in order to serve a political end then seen as inevitable (as we will trace below), Generative Anthropology's "prehistorical" axis is embodied by an anthropologist who was also a cyberneticist at the same time–Gregory Bateson. In Bateson, we find the double bind, the analysis of mimetic structures between groups (symmetrical Schismogenesis), and the idea of an "ecology of mind" which explored–among other things–the fact that not all causalities in the socio-cultural domain are linearly defined. Unlike Cultural Studies, Generative Anthropology came into existence in the absence of an overarching political set of ends, and existed as an intellectual pursuit devised entirely to make sense of what it means to be a human being.(5)

In the subsequent years, unlike the contorted formation that is now Cultural Studies (whose trajectory we now leave to the next section), Generative Anthropology has developed intellectual clarity and intensity since Bateson's essays began appearing in the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, we now must point out what we are quite sure some readers are already thinking: Bateson's temporal precedence *is only visible retrospectively*: his *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* only appeared in 1972, by which time the seminal works of René Girard on violence, the sacred, and the scapegoat had already independently appeared. If we emphasize–perhaps over-emphasize–the symmetry of Bateson's early works with aspects of

early Generative Anthropology, it's because Girard's place has been already well-acknowledged. In any case, the point here is not "who came first"; it is rather, the terms and conditions for an emerging field to make sense as it gathered force and support.

The key intuitions of Generative Anthropology were undoubtedly espoused in Girard's works, but often in a local and case-by-case way. Unlike Bateson's work, which ranged across a variety of preoccupations that did not always coexist easily with the field of what we now call Generative Anthropology, Girard's early literary work is a concentrated *oeuvre* that, from the 1960s onwards, offered sustained analysis of the logics of mimesis in a variety of cultural frameworks. To many who read them at the time, however, his case-work, though unusual, seemed to fit–initially at least–into existing paradigms of analysis (as in the famous exchange with Jacques Derrida on the relationship between representation and violence). In addition, in the form in which Girard presented them, they did not initially appear to open up a field of study beyond the signal insights concerning mimesis in particular situations, howsoever important these might be. Again, though, looking at how this field developed as a field–and telling this story in all its appropriate retrospectivity–Girard's work *has* subsequently inspired a range of scholars, from economics to psychology, from theology to literature–as, in a halting and piecemeal fashion, individuals extrapolated insights from Girard's work to create a framework for their own particular inquiries (Fleming 152-7).

In treating Girard, we have touched on the work of Jacques Derrida. He too has a role–although a strange one–in the foundation of Generative Anthropology. In this regard, it is the intersection of Husserlian phenomenology and Derrida's subsequent exploration of this to its very limits that takes him to the terrain of the generative anthropological commentary on origins. In brief, what Derrida devised as "deconstruction" is, in its most important sense, an extension of Edmund Husserl's transcendental reduction. When Derrida performed this task, his innovation was to turn it not only onto Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, but to do so in such a way as to inquire into the very terms of (the phenomenological) reduction itself. What he found was astonishing: the most originary conceptual operation was the delay or deferral that happened just at the point of closure, when the "system" was about to find its ground. Later, as Gans contends, in *Of Grammatology* Derrida applied this deconstructive logic to the idea of the origin–although he always held it to the accounts he was analyzing (in this case, most convincingly of a trio of writers, the work of Rousseau). But Gans remarks of this that "all the theory of writing, of the supplement, of deferral, is in effect a theory of the originary event" (1997: 7). Indeed, theorists of the "always already" like Derrida, Gans believes, "think they have found our thinking's fatal weakness, when in fact they have found the source of its strength. . . . man will ever remain the paradoxical animal, not least because today the very name of 'man' has become unsayable" (7-8). Elsewhere, he is even more blunt: the moment of originary deferral is the sign of the advent of the human, and is the originary event–and it is ultimately to Derrida's credit that he discovers this, even if he does so in reverse. Strangely then, in the list of founding moments of Generative Anthropology–at least in the dimension

of originary thinking that is so pervasive in it–Derrida plays as constructive a role as the Marxist thinkers, Louis Althusser and the Frankfurt School, did in the establishment of Cultural Studies. For anyone who doubts the generative anthropological argument about the points of greatest cultural irreducibility, they can as well turn to Derrida for orientation as to Generative Anthropology. The difference is that where Derrida sees it as proof that cultural origins cannot be arrived at, Gans (and we would argue, Girard himself) sees the crucial moment of deferral *itself* as the sign of the origin.

4

For this encounter to take place on the terms we have just described, however, a field had already to have taken shape–and so it had. This came with Gans's attempt to give form to Generative Anthropology's epistemological foundations, to situate (and to limit excessive reliance on) certain empirical (or rather, empiricist) assumptions, and to supply the entire apparatus with an overt and openly available hypothesizing structure. This has taken over twenty years, from the *Origin of Language* (1981) and the *End of Culture* (1985) onwards. Most importantly–and here we deliberately situate the achievement in relation to landmark essays by C. S. Peirce in his collected papers (semiotics) and the *Cours* written up by students of Ferdinand de Saussure (semiology)–Gans gave the nascent field a name, *generative anthropology*. Where semiotics took a half century to find a body of scholars willing to take up Saussure's quixotic challenge to construe a science that would "one day exist" and that indeed "deserved" to exist, Gans has not just performed the naming task, but has also done much of the epistemological groundwork needed for it to take shape.

Let us be very clear about this: just as semiotics could have been many things, the fact that Generative Anthropology has a name, an orientation, and a basis is a liberating fact, not one that restricts scholarship and dialogue. It is not just a matter of the hypotheses being open to challenge and amendment, it is rather that it models studies of culture *that each time must be constructed afresh*. Mimesis might be a general and generative principle, but its operation will be different in every cultural framework, and the varieties of study that may be conducted with the elegant postulates of Generative Anthropology are almost endless. We will demonstrate this nearer the end of the essay, by tracing a little of the exciting and burgeoning literature of generative culture study–but this brings us to the last of the things we wish to identify as features of Generative Anthropology.

The most remarkable thing that has emerged over the period we have identified as that of the emergence of Generative Anthropology is what we have been calling *breadth*. By this word, we mean the wealth of writings that cover all aspects of social, political, and cultural history. Few in the 1970s would have imagined that a few ideas–that cultures have origins, and all human culture has an origin, that mimesis is an observable aspect of humans today, and, in different ways and logics, always has been, that narratives and myths are amenable to analysis in ways that can unlock the things they conceal, even many years later–could

furnish such an extraordinary array of writings. We by no means claim that all, or even most, of these writers thought of themselves as generative anthropologists. What we are attempting, again, is a kind of retrospective genetics of a field; others would, of course, see things differently. Even so, let us illustrate rather what has become possible in critical analysis in the last two decades by noting the diversity of work by Michel Serres (where Girardian insights into cause and effect, into narrative and myth, and into mimesis in general play a major, if unstated role), Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Stephen Gardner (both of whom trace the terrifying logics of crowd-mimesis, but Gardner's *Myths of Freedom* also reveals the limits to our understanding of "freedom" itself), and more recently, Pierre Saint-Amand's devastating critique of Enlightenment self-conceptions in *The Laws of Hostility: Politics, Violence, and the Enlightenment*. Interestingly too, we find forays into the terrain that is often associated with Cultural Studies, this time by the leading figures in the field: Gans on the aesthetic of piercing ("The Body Sacrificial," 2000) and Girard's musings on terrorism and on anorexia nervosa.

3. Re-reading the Foundations of Cultural Studies

We have noted already that Cultural Studies is unwilling to define its terrain, its methods and leading concepts, or even the significance of its findings. In commencing our own account, then, we are fully aware that we are doing something that Cultural Studies scholars are either unwilling–or unable–to do: that is, to locate the field in a disciplinary sense. To locate Cultural Studies in a disciplinary sense, we intend mainly to rely upon Georg von Wright's *Explanation and Understanding* (1971), a work written, so far as we know, without any interest one way or the other in Cultural Studies. Von Wright argued that there were two axes along which research knowledge is arranged. Along one axis, the *Erklären* tradition, we find emphasis on empirical work that seeks to *explain* data. This he called a Galilean impulse, although he dates it from antiquity (2). Along the other axis, the *Verstehen* tradition, he aligns hermeneutic and teleological work that sought to *understand* what things meant. This he called the Aristotelian impulse, although again, it is not *confined* to antiquity (2-3). The semiotician, Alec McHoul(6) has suggested that the core of this opposition can be further divided–so that as well as having an opposition between explanation of empirical data and the hermeneutic work of understanding them, we can cross-map onto this an opposition between kinds of research that seek laws (nomothetic work) and those kinds that explore particulars (idiographic work). It is certainly true that there is a traditional association between nomothetics and explanation on the one hand, and idiographic research and understanding on the other. But the dual axis allows us to chart Cultural Studies even more precisely than a simple opposition does.

Nomothetic

	Propp (folk myth)
	Todorov (narratology)
Hermeneutic	Structural linguistics; “semiology”
Theologies	Chomsky t/f Grammar
	Marx
	(& the “political” impulse/
	motivation of Cultural Studies
	today) Myth (Barthes–“Detergents”)
Understanding	**Explanation**
(*Verstehen*)	Girard (*Things Hidden*)
Romantic lit/criticism	(*Erklären*)
“Content/method” of Cultural	Myth (Barthes-*Paris Match* analysis)
Studies Today	

Idiographic

(Axes based on McHoul’s rendering of Von Wright) (see note 6).

When we look at Cultural Studies in this way, we find that much contemporary work in the field, even that which looks at programmes that run on national television, is locatable at the extreme idiographic/*Verstehen* end of the picture. Yet when it comes to work grounded in linguistics, as in the semiotics of social messages, the nomothetic/*Erklären* aspect is much more prominent. But there are further motivating aspects to Cultural Studies texts. In Schwartz’s somewhat bitter words, there seems to be a need for a “critical leftist rhetoric of ‘progressivism’, ‘activism’, and ‘intervention’ . . . [all of which] is a clearly a necessary and perhaps even a sufficient condition for having one’s work accepted as work in cultural studies” (104).(7) This *motivating* structure becomes very problematic in recent Cultural Studies, precisely because it is to be found in work which is otherwise at the *Verstehen*/idiographic end of the spectrum; this in turn requires that the explaining/nomothetic “laws” that impel certain sorts of readings have to be concealed by increasingly elaborate protocols of writing. These concern the imperative that During and others still identify as characterizing the field–the “engaged” aspect of Cultural Studies.

One of the more extraordinary histories of institutional change has been the progressive incorporation of the activist stance of Marxism into otherwise quite pedestrian analysis. This seemed to happen in stages. Part of the history was French–the critique of Sartre was foundational in the work of Roland Barthes; less oppositional though was the role of Louis Althusser, whose emphasis on Marx’s “last instance” created the space of deferral needed for there to arise a strong interest in cultural practices. A key idea here was the exploration of the way subjects are interpellated or “hailed” by texts (something Derrida was to explore

rather more rigorously later in his own works). Althusser also offered new topographies for critical analysis–with his theory of ideological state apparatuses and their relationship to what he called repressive state apparatuses. At this time too, the works of the Frankfurt School were at first absorbed and then, in the transition to the British version of Cultural Studies, critiqued. Adorno and Horkheimer's furious attack on mass culture in the US was then stood on its head, and the analysis of "everyday life" (a term poorly but widely appropriated from Michel de Certeau) and popular culture came to take its place. The rhetoric of change, agency, and political rebellion was retained. Sometimes, as in the nascent feminist and postcolonial analyses then emerging, this stance could be justified. But more commonly, the activist rhetoric was just that–rhetoric. On the above map, we see Cultural Studies migrating from general cultural analysis in the direction of interpretative/idiographic analysis. But also, we see the attempt to inflect both kinds of analysis with an effort to code the work "politically." Hence, it seems, the contortions of contemporary Cultural Studies, as idiographic analysts work to general rules that have progressively been submerged under the layer of protocols. This explains the exasperation of those like Schwartz who smell a rat in the refusal of the Cultural Studies intellectual to name his or her precepts.

The notion of deferral is usually associated with the work of Jacques Derrida. Yet in the history of Cultural Studies, it was the "last instance" manoeuvre by Louis Althusser which opened the space for a writing practice that was at once avowedly engaged (to return to that key word of Simon During's), and yet was never engaged in anything more than its own writing. From a generative anthropological point of view, however, there was at root a sound intuition at work: if the class (etc.) war could be postponed, then actual conflict need never break out. The fact that the writing-work conducted during the postponement never actually contributed to anything could be read as seeing it as having done very little harm. Nonetheless, there would surely be value in the attempt to grasp all the meaning of all those attempts to impose deferral-as-a-way-of-life on the entire humanities. In France, of course, beyond the works of Althusser and of Derrida, we had the absurdities of claims to ever more minutely local analysis–as epitomized by the attacks of Jean-François Lyotard on the putative terrors of totalizing theory, Frankfurt School style.

6

Meanwhile, Cultural Studies began its migration across the channel and, eventually, the Atlantic. We need to pay attention to this geographical shift–from a defensible Barthesian semiotics in the direction of a rather less defensible Birmingham school project, the one that founded Cultural Studies as such. For reasons of space, we have limited ourselves to three key areas of past strength that need to be considered: its object, its depth, its interdisciplinary range.

First, whatever its current form may display (with all the distortions of government grants,

mass dissemination in humanities departments, and the accompanying entrenchment of a Cultural Studies ceiling on what can and cannot be counted as work in the humanities), early Cultural Studies did once direct its energies upon the thing its title implies: *the study of culture*. This happened in three phases. Let us begin with a moment that precedes its emergence as a field–the linguistic study of literary texts (such as was practised by Prague School linguists Roman Jakobson and Jan Mukarovsky) on the one hand, and the analysis of the conditions of culture from an economic perspective, as conducted by Marxists like Althusser of course, but also, the Frankfurt School writers, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Walter Benjamin. When literary scholars with anthropological ambitions like Roland Barthes reinvented semiology, the first and most important moment of Cultural Studies came into being. It was not, it is true, *called* Cultural Studies in those days, but from the late 1940s to the mid 1960s, this tradition developed powerful analyses of myth, of narrative, and of culture. But by the end of the 1960s, French poststructuralism had emerged, and again it was Roland Barthes who, with customary panache, lent it the promise of style in his bizarrely beautiful analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine* in the supposedly post-structural and even post-metatextual work, *S/Z*. Barthes, of course, did this work well after the work of Derrida and Foucault had begun appearing. This work on its own represented a breaking free of the strictures of Marxism, but these re-emerged in another form when Cultural Studies gained both its name and a discourse of self-foundation in Birmingham. Graeme Turner remarks of this situation that

> the benefits of structuralism and semiotics were taken up. . . . They were particularly influential, for instance, in film and television studies in Britain. . . . Nowhere were these approaches more enthusiastically taken up than in the developing British tradition of 'cultural studies' in the 1970s. To a great extent, the protocols that we now make use of within media textual analysis were derived from this tradition. Cultural studies is usually identified with the work of Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) from the mid-1960s. . . . This definition has been dominated by two main interests over the years: the analysis of the cultural production of 'everyday life'–the inquiry into the processes, practices and pleasures of popular culture–and the analysis of the media's role in the cultural construction of everyday life. (222)This was the heyday of Cultural Studies, but in retrospect, it was also the time when it lost its way entirely. By the early 1980s, the two patterns Turner identified had indeed taken hold, but under the influence of what Charles Taylor, in a hallmark essay on varieties of equality, has rightly called a "politics of recognition." This was the third and terminal phase of Cultural Studies, in which the problematisation of everyday life gave way to what might best be called a "politics of personal identity." The contradictions underpinning the field now became apparent to anyone who cared to look. In this respect, these emerge most strongly in the terrain of what became known as "identity politics." Both words are problematic, and the phrase, as Charles Taylor ably points out, denotes a variety of liberatory politics that is linked to Hegelian notions of the subject–and of recognition. The Cultural Studies scholars proceeded blithely to contend a quite extreme version of this

"politics," so that membership groups were seen as incommensurable. But at the same time, by the very act of their own analyses, they posited a shared common ground (see Ricoeur 56). The contradiction was that "political" Cultural Studies severed itself for the first time from *concrete politics*; unlike the (Marxist) radical politics that preceded it, identity politics insisted on the radical incommensurability of different conceptions of knowledge–including notions of "justice"–knowledge which is invariably assumed/required in order to mobilize political claims in concrete historico-political domains. For a time, the energy of new voices (psychoanalytic, postcolonial, post-feminist) on the one hand, and the work of establishing protocols for what was emerging as a major draw-card for undergraduate degree programs in media and Cultural Studies on the other, helped keep the field alive. But ossification had set in by the later 1980s, and today the field is still largely in the form it took twenty years ago. Where in each of its three phases, it contributed something to the study of culture, its attenuated twilight yields little of value beyond essays and books wondering what can be done–or increasingly as we are doing here–when or how it will be subsumed by another field.

The second powerful aspect of Cultural Studies is that it once had genuine historical *range*. We need not be detained long by this, as we have covered the key foundational aspects of Cultural Studies already. But it bears emphasizing that we have disregarded the official narratives of Cultural Studies in favour of our own. For instance, we have treated the Frankfurt School as one of the founding aspects of Cultural Studies. While their critique of culture-as-industry is often attacked in what we see as ritual fashion in Cultural Studies analysis, these attacks themselves rely on Adorno and Horkheimer's contention that culture be examined structurally and in terms of social and economic import rather than merely in terms of taste. What is true of the Frankfurt School is true elsewhere too: Cultural Studies has depth by the fact that its cornerstones have such historical range: beyond the Frankfurt School, there was semiotics of course, but also the interpretative skills, however disavowed, of F.R. Leavis, the symptomatologies of psychoanalytic traditions of neo-Freudians like Lacan, and so on.

Third, Cultural Studies really was once *interdisciplinary and international*. As we have seen, the early stages of this began with work in France in linguistics, literature, and anthropology. But the work of communications and media studies in the US and England, and even the input of scholars in German literary hermeneutics like Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser lent particular projects a context–and in so doing, made of the context of Cultural Studies a rich, if at times bewildering, weave. Like gantries round a rocket, however, these things have fallen away one by one. Now Cultural Studies is an enclosed department, and it is practised in the academy in ways that suggest anything but innovation or interest. The once international contributions were carried a little further by postcolonial writings, but this too has dried up as people saw through a Western autocritique. As we remarked elsewhere, this revealed the self-serving chivalry of practices where white or Western critics embark on the rescue of the others not so much for the others' sakes, but

rather, in order that they might themselves be rescued. The upshot of all this is that Cultural Studies has returned, in a disciplinary sense, to what we have seen as the bolt-hole of only the most limited form of humanities research: from times when Cultural Studies embarked on adventurous–and at times foolhardy–empirical or nomothetic research, we now find it for the most part snugly tucked up in the idiographic and *Verstehen* burrow in which particular "popular" texts are examined according to protocols that, in their complexity, would not be out of place in a medieval royal court.

7

4. Generative Anthropology

What lessons, if any, can generative anthropologists *learn* from all this? And is there *anything* at all worth appropriating from the moribund hulk that casts its shadow across the entire humanities shoreline? A brief set of comparative observations will suffice to clarify the picture.

Like Cultural Studies, Generative Anthropology does not adhere to traditional disciplinary forms. Unlike Cultural Studies, though, it is its own discipline–or perhaps, demands a certain kind of discipline. Part of this is due to the happy fact that the wealth of work generated by René Girard has been re-situated by Eric Gans in a clearly defined set of epistemological frames. The overt rendering of founding hypotheses, even if they were subsequently to be modified, has marked the field in such a way that to step entirely outside them would be simply to be doing something else (which, we hasten to add, is not in itself a problem: Generative Anthropology, unlike Cultural Studies, is not a jealous god). Perhaps the only indispensable hypothesis of Generative Anthropology is that there has to be one. In other words, where the interdisiplinarity of Cultural Studies gave way to what one of our colleagues amusingly termed a "megadiscipline" (in which we can also hear the echo of that other carnivorous word–monodiscipline), the paradox of Generative Anthropology is quite different: its writers come from a variety of disciplines, but in order to participate in this dialogue, we all subscribe to a few shared hypotheses–to a discipline, in other words. The discipline itself is heuristic–it is only deployed because of what it yields in analysis, in propositions, and in value. And these propositions can, of course, be questioned. In other words, Generative Anthropology is less interdiscipline than it is a new discipline that traverses existing fields of research.

Perhaps Cultural Studies collapsed because of the failure of Marxism not just as a programme of social change (that collapsed in the 1920s), but as a worthwhile critique and critical programme. Even in the scintillating works of Barthes, where one variety of deterministic Marxism is brushed aside, we see it implicit as a usurping third level behind myth. In the now unread texts of the Birmingham school, where so much ink was spilt on subtle capitalist manipulation of truth and knowledge, Marxism is again the often overt

foundation. In this respect, Generative Anthropology has no such intellectual baggage to jettison. We hope that in importing back into the field its hidden appurtenances (Bateson, for instance) we have shown how singular and strong the basis of study is. Even were we, if we went back far enough, to track studies into the origin of language in nineteenth century philology, we would find there the questions, but not the methods, of modern Generative Anthropology. In other words, where the works of Derrida and Foucault eventually rendered Cultural Studies incoherent because of the inability of the field to deal with the challenge they posed, Gans's response to Derrida has strengthened the foundation of Generative Anthropology, not blurred or confused it. In addition, even before responding to Derrida, Gans had already drawn the requisite lesson from the failure of numerous grand projects of foundation in the nineteenth century. Unlike Cultural Studies, whose response to such failure is to say "let us not really say anything about anyone else, or even eventually ourselves," Gans was to argue for the *small empirical footprint*, so that what is said is a) ventured with a small chance of being overturned and b) is proposed as a *positive*, but c) *vulnerable* body of knowledge.

5. New Fields of Cultural Research in the Humanities

We have, thus far, been working to a topography that is familiar to Cultural Studies scholarship. It is time now, though, to map Generative Anthropology in terms of a redefined field of humanities. Generative Anthropology throws a profound new light on the shape of all the humanities, and on their place in wider social inquiry. So let us begin with a schematic outline of what this might look like, before renewing our comparative analysis of Generative Anthropology with Cultural Studies (albeit, this time, in a more applied sense). We can simply list these domains as follows:

Generative anthropology is a form of "first" humanities. It is so in the sense that it inquires into the foundations of human culture, and the horizon of the human itself.

a. *The origin of language*. This field is not specific to the humanities, but within the humanities in the last half-century, the most important scholarship in this area has come from Generative Anthropology.

b. *The origin of culture*. Generative Anthropology makes the claim that this is coeval with the origin of language, and the horizon of the human.

c. *The nature of the human horizon*. By seeking to specify what the original of human culture might look like, Generative Anthropology proposes hypotheses about the nature of the human in general. This aspect might hold, strangely, even if the first two sections needed further qualification–since the evidential aspect of Generative Anthropology is *a posteriori* in nature.

Generative anthropology is a field of exemplary methodological inquiry. Working with

analytic philosophical idioms, it nevertheless hypothesizes on concrete human moments of genesis, offering thereby a series of heuristic tools that are themselves able to be scrutinized and questioned.

d. *Foundational hypothesizing* is new to the modern humanities, although as we have seen, it has antecedents in past philosophies of language and culture.

e. *Generative anthropology makes provisional claims.* Responding to poststructural questioning of the status of grand systems, generative anthropologists put the hypothesis in question rather than avoiding large questions that the humanities could–and should–address.

Generative anthropology is a true anthropology. Generative Anthropology develops exemplary analyses of the human which reveal insights into general human processes.

f. *Humans are mimetic.* The idea that human culture is founded on mimetic behaviours is not merely a hypothesis with consequences for origins, but also an insight into human anthropology today.

g. *Myths do bear signs of the origin of cultural formations.* Myths of foundation have been ably explored by René Girard in particular to show structural patterns of culture.

Generative anthropology offers a field of secondary hypothesizing. This can, and has, made contributions to a number of specific fields that relate to those of Cultural Studies (though scholars in the latter fields, so far as we can tell, remain unaware of them).

a. *The history of western culture can be described in terms of generative analysis*. Gans's analyses of the stages of the West (classical, neo-classical, Romantic, modern) are one example of how history can be analysed in anthropological terms.

b. *The modern world can be analysed using the tools of generative anthropology*. The phenomena of anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, and even the significance of the Holocaust have been widely analysed in all fields of modern inquiry. Yet some of the profoundest insights into such "political" questions–as well as questions of terrorism and jihad–have come from Generative Anthropology because it alone reveals the anthropological dimensions of the supposedly purely political or economic or religious question at hand. *Modern culture is replete not just with a posteriori evidence for founding hypotheses, but with popular cultural questions*. Generative anthropologists have tackled questions as diverse as anorexia and body piercing–and while other fields have also shed light on these areas (this is, after all, the stamping ground of Cultural Studies), the potential of this field is only now just beginning to be realized.

We do not have the space to outline the relationship of all these fields to the greater body of Cultural Studies legacy. We have explored some of the methodological and foundational questions elsewhere.(8) Instead, we confine ourselves, for illustrative purposes, to a comparison of the more shriveled practices of Cultural Studies scholarship today with the first forays of Generative Anthropology into what might be called the same terrain. This is what we have identified as the domain of the secondary hypothesis.

6. Secondary Hypotheses and a New Cultural Studies

Within the field of Generative Anthropology, for reasons that we will touch on when we conclude the present essay, the originary event and the scene that frames it have been much discussed in this journal. Indeed, as our earlier work makes plain, we regard this as what marks this field off from others. But the area of obvious overlap with Cultural Studies, one that is a significant field of research in its own right is the arena of the secondary hypothesis. Secondary hypotheses are an inevitable consequence of the hypothesizing method of Generative Anthropology: as we have seen, the originary hypothesis itself works with *a posteriori* evidence; it does not take much of a leap to apply the same *kind* of process of hypothesizing to cultural formations whose origins can be postulated with even more certainty as a result of the existence of a considerable historical record.

Let us speak plainly. We hold that the secondary hypothesis (above) is the basis of a new Cultural Studies, and as sketched in the previous section (under heading 4, but consistent with the other three sections) that it is so on the very terrains of extant Cultural Studies in *at least* these three ways: a) by using the new versions of the mimetic theorem; b) just as the "human" arose in its totality as an originary event, the same thing is true of other cultural formations and types, and; c) anthropoetics, as an ensemble of ideas, is very well placed to make observations on contemporary cultural practices. Let us make a few observations on each of these aspects.

First, then, if we recall that what defines the human is used to explain the originary horizon of culture, it can be turned to further account in more "local" cultural analysis too. That is, the mimetic intuitions of Bateson and Girard (indeed, of Aristotle and Plato, or of modern psychology) can be used to make *ad hoc* (or better) analyses at a variety of levels of human behavior. Girard's intuitions about the relationship of myth and narrative also have methodological force at this level.

Second, all cultural formations have points of genesis. Unlike the moment of foundation of the entire horizon of the human, there is a wealth of empirical data for many of these structures. Yet as useful as this is, Gans's work allows us to formulate ideas along the same lines as the originary hypotheses: to create a small empirical footprint, and to provide the

maximum explanatory power from it. His *Origin of Language* is, in its explorations of the history of the West, just such a project.

Third, Generative Anthropology can, even if not credited or charged with the role, carry out the work that Cultural Studies now fails to do. It can analyze culture. This new form of culture-study can take over many of the areas once handled by Cultural Studies (the aspect we wish to trace in more detail in the rest of this essay).

But before we do this, we should offer a few words on the loss some might feel ensues if the "political" brief of Cultural Studies is utterly abandoned. Many people within Cultural Studies feel that scholarship should engage itself with issues that are critical in the world of politics and culture. What, they might ask, does Gans's work have to do with the world of political relationships (or, in the next section, with that of popular culture)? As Generative Anthropology is only a nascent field, it is difficult for us to frame a full response to this line of inquiry. The first and most obvious point to make is the one that Marshall McLuhan made all those years ago in the course of an interpretation of Julian Benda's *Trahison des clercs*. Wrongly attributing to Benda the view that the role of the scribe is to be rebellious, he then made the entirely valid point that today's "angry young man" is tomorrow's authority figure. Cultural Studies may once have been a "politically" challenging enterprise (though we do not ourselves accept this view); it is anything but an "interrogation" of modern social values. Indeed, generative anthropologists could, with little effort, show how the practices of Cultural Studies are dominated by the same mimetic patterns of disavowal of the centre as in all fields that actually *do* have power. Second, though, cultural studies' derision of figures like F. R. Leavis and Matthew Arnold for presuming to instruct in moral values proved premature: nowhere indeed could the instruction in values be more strident than in that proselytizing field–it is just that the values were different from those that went before. What, after all, would "political" or "resistant" mean if it were *not* to do with values?

Perhaps the best way to grasp the promise of Generative Anthropology in the field of cultural analysis is to take up some actual examples of works done by Gans and others in this field. In this regard, at least two varieties of work that already exist are powerfully suggestive of where Generative Anthropology might progress in coming years. The first body of work concerns the question of Israel and Judaism; the second the nature of popular culture.

7. The Meaning of Anti-Semitism: A Two-fold Excursion

Gans's approach to Judaism and the West are closely related. This is especially true if we take account of his observations on America itself. But we cannot make sense of any of these analyses if we do not first consider his analysis of the importance of the Holocaust for both cultural formations.

If we bear in mind that Gans's work–like that of Girard–is based on an inquiry into mimetic appropriation on the one hand, and mechanisms of victimage on the other, then it is not surprising that the Holocaust plays a large–if at times unstated–role in Gans's analyses. Gans analyses the significance of the Holocaust, to understand it not merely as a historical event, but as something that has profound *anthropological* significance. The Holocaust in this respect has two important temporally determined dimensions.

9

First, *at the time*, the Holocaust in itself might be the exemplary case of victim-creation and scapegoating, but it is so in such a way that the very limits of representation themselves are transgressed. The consequences are profound indeed. In a move with which we very much concur, Gans makes the Holocaust foundational of the "postmodern" cultural idiom we now inhabit. As he puts it in *Signs of Paradox*,

the Holocaust is about a human violence that exceeds and discredits the scene of culture. So long as the scene of representation wholly contains the violence that is perpetrated upon it, we remain within the domain of the esthetic. Evil . . . follows the model of the sparagmos in its destruction of the worldly correlate of the scene of representation; it is the irreversible de-figuration of the figure. We may then understand absolute evil as an evil so great that it has no figure whatsoever. (163)Later in the same work, in seeking to grasp what it is that makes the concentration camp so horrific, he suggests that they represent an order of "scenelessness" for the "first time in history" (164). Crucially, the mass murder was not intended to be exemplary, let alone sacrificial, in its operation; rather, it was an attempt at utter purgation (164). Gans remarks–perhaps somewhat hopefully–that we should see the Holocaust as a warning against utopias of all kinds.

He is quick to point out, however, that our interpretation of the Holocaust is still inadequate. Second, then, the *aftermath* of the Holocaust has witnessed an extraordinary–perhaps unprecedented–form of victimary resurgence:

The effect of this one-sided model of persecution has been to precipitate a postmodern victimary revolution in which stigmatized ethnic, sexual, and social groups of all kinds have denounced their victimization at the hands of the dominant majority. Colonial peoples and American blacks have been followed by women, homosexuals, the handicapped, even the "angry white male." Groups are granted victimary status to the extent that they can plausibly claim to have served as discriminatory *figures* (165)In his essay devoted entirely to this topic, "The Holocaust and the Victimary Revolution," Gans puts it in language that is so stark that it defamiliarises the ways in which such things are usually discussed. Contending that anti-Semitism is still a strong motivating force of Western culture, he then says

No, the Jews have not shortchanged the world; through the Holocaust they have given it something that compensates for the temporary guarantee they have received against anti-

Semitism. I will call this compensation “the victimary.” It took Jews thousands of years of persecution to attain the level of victimization that would reveal the cultural centrality of the victim’s role. What Jesus began as an individual, the Jews finally accomplished en masse. (125)In this passage, Gans stands the usual ways of speaking about the matter on their head: the Holocaust becomes not just a Nazi crime (which it also was), but also, an event that has had profound anthropological reverberations that are rarely specified.

Once we understand the role of the Holocaust in Gans’s conception of culture, we are then in a position to evaluate his approach to Judaism and the US today. This he has detailed in a carefully written Chronicle of Love and Resentment under the heading of “Antisemitism and Anti-Americanism.” As in the earlier works, he remarks of the Jews’ “paradoxical” historical situation that

the Jews’ humility before God cannot but be experienced by others as a transcendental arrogance. The New Testament and the Koran stand in an unavoidably mimetic relation to the Hebrew *Tanach* . . . the Jews’ continued presence is an eternal reminder that all monotheism derives from, and therefore still is, worship of *their* God. (2003)Hence, he goes on to argue, the violence that can result from such mimetic crises–either to be rid of the Jews (as in the Nazi “final solution”) or by converting them. In naming these obnoxious alternatives, Gans also challenges the “philosemitic solution”–instead, he contends, a Christian (and presumably, a Muslim) should “master his resentment of the Jews” (2003).

At this point, Gans’s argument again takes the generative anthropological analytic to the question of place and nation. Citing Marx’s obvious distaste for Jewish capitalism, he remarks that Jewish nomadism is not pure chance, but rather “the essence of their rootless national existence; their economic values, like their Torah, exist in the form of portable signs” (2003). That Marx’s “solution” was no more effective (never mind ethical) than Nietzsche’s (or for that matter Luther’s attempt at conversion or the Nazis’ attempt at extermination) says much not just of the Jewish culture and religion, but of modernity itself.

In this respect, Gans asks, are not the situations of the Jews and the Americans alike? As he puts it,

The Jews have long been hated as the first nation; today the United States is hated as the ultimate nation. To proclaim the one God is to proclaim the equality under God of all humanity, yet at the same time to foreclose all others from making the unique asymmetrical gesture that establishes this universal symmetry. The position of the USA as the hegemon of the global marketplace engenders a similar paradox; how can I be an equal world-citizen if one country alone exemplifies world-citizenship? (2003)The resentment the positions these two peoples engender is undeniable. We have elsewhere explored the autocritical dimensions of such hatred. But it would be a mistake to avoid the observation that some of the hatred for the US and for Jewish people comes from outside–and it does so precisely

because of the success of the two “universal” systems (the US the universal nation, Judaism, the transcendent God). Resentment and mimetic rivalry are again the keys that explain the anthropological dimensions of this logic. In this sense, whatever the failures of policy (and the hardships of economics and so on), these do not explain the depths of hatred for these two literally universal systems.

10

8. Girard and Gans: Popular Culture Excursions

Why do people starve themselves? Why do they pierce their bodies? Why do they spray messages on walls of public buildings and trains? These are all questions that Cultural Studies has sought to address. The form of address is well known–these are seen as transgressive behaviours, as acts of resistance, resisting perhaps the hegemony (to use that term popularized by the work of Antonio Gramsci). And as we saw earlier, in the reductive sketch we drew of the texts of Cultural Studies, resistance tends to be valued as a cultural good. To put it bluntly, in cases of obviously compliant popular culture in the range from Christine Aguilera to soap operas and Hollywood movies, even these utterly mainstream cultural products are cast by obscure methods of textual analysis as some sort of challenge to orthodoxy or authority (we tend to find in such cases that meanings are “negotiated” or “constructed”). An example is superfluous, but for those who are unfamiliar with the idiom, witness this analysis of soap from a feminist point of view:

While recognizing the patriarchal discourse contained in soaps, soap audiences are, if they choose to be, empowered through their association with other soap viewers, usually of the same soap. (Brown 7)The soaps convey a patriarchal discourse, so why do women watch them? The writer’s question, in this sense, *is* a reasonable question. However, the protocol of argument in this and other such essays seems designed to avoid finding out any answers. Even in the above-cited sentence, questions arise: *do* these viewers recognise the “patriarchal discourse”” If they do, *why* do they watch? Later, Brown will remark that it is not a matter of literary identification (that, apparently is a matter of the “dominant ideology” and of individualism) (18). Instead she, suggests, it is a multiple formation (which “refuses . . . fixed subject identification”) (19); and that because women “gossip *about* soaps” this “operates as a threat to dominant representational systems” and “defies” patriarchal representational systems (22). Such is an example of what Cultural Studies would have us believe about the way culture works. All we can say of it is that if you believe that, you’ll believe anything.

Soaps hold few mysteries for generative anthropologists. In them are to be found theatres of postmodern anthropoetics: rivalrous competition among rich and powerful women makes attractive visual sport, the characters themselves provoke desires and resentments not just in the stories, but also, in the viewers. Mediating desires of the most basic mimetic

appropriation, the soap defers despair by offering vicarious satiation. And so on. Far from resisting anything, the soap actually assuages need, and in the secondary cultural echo that Brown alludes to as audiences read about the stars and discuss them with each other, we see the enforcement and enjoyment of the current ironised postmodern order of Gansian citational culture.

More recently, under the influence, it is sometimes claimed, of Michel Foucault, Cultural Studies has sought to claim the terrain of the body (and its aesthetic) as a field of emphasis. This has enabled some works of occasional interest to emerge. But unlike Foucault, whose interest led to some insightful moments (be it in *Discipline and Punish* or the later works in the *History of Sexuality*), mere talk about talk of bodily practices does not lead to necessary insights. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of such work has been the long-standing recourse to psychoanalysis–a move that at least allows analysis of motives and structures.

Cultural Studies raises these important questions on the aesthetics of the media and the body, but seems unwilling (or unable) to answer them. We have seen that Generative Anthropology has made comment on a variety of fields ranging from the Holocaust to terrorism. But we believe that both the above fields deserve more attention than they have been getting from Generative Anthropology. Introducing a book of essays that gathered together some of the finest generative anthropologists in the world, Tobin Siebers argues for a study of a "body aesthetic" on the basis that there can be no aesthetic without the body (1-4). His eloquent essay on the "body aesthetic" contends then that "Aesthetics is the body's augury of its own self-consciousness" (10), and that embedded in this are a number of contradictory, and even painful, realities. This leads him to examine the idea of actual bodies themselves: after all, direct action on the body is "more simple and economical than the creations valued by fine arts" (9). In this respect, commenting on the question of beauty (another terrain claimed by Cultural Studies scholars), he remarks

The laws of beauty are not always about pleasure, however, and there may be ample reason to argue that pain and suffering play the greater role in aesthetics. This point pertains to the differences between the reception and subject matter of art to some degree. For example, aesthetic pleasure often arises in the perception of an artwork, and yet the subject matter of the work may be painful. Part of the difficulty of aesthetics as a discipline is to explain why we may take pleasure in pain…The desire to be beautiful is a specific form of the general human desire to transform oneself, but it has come to epitomize human desire as such…no matter how beautiful one becomes, one can never be beautiful enough. (11-12)This is the basis of the collection, and we wish to make brief observations on two of the essays in that collection.

Gans's own contribution consists of a cyber-ethnography (to use a phrase coined, so far as we know by Steven Maras in the mid 1990s). His topic is piercing, especially extreme piercings, and his approach is simply to look at the self-account of those who practise it. He

begins by noting the obvious links with Romantic alienation, and then offers a sketch of what he saw when he went through the accounts of piercing on websites. He notices that the similarity of some accounts "is so striking that one imagines at first that they were written by the same person" (162). A pattern emerges: the "young women define themselves exclusively by which pierces they had and in which order" (162).

For those going through adolescence, the actual piercings become a "living record of one's personal history" (163).

11

At this point, Gans reconnects this local pattern with wider significance. Noting that unlike the public monument in classical times which is created effectively "in compensation for its owner's death,"

piercing [is] an exemplary case of postmodern market society's drive to generate significance. The use of the body as a surface on which to inscribe one's history responds to the problem raised by the proliferation of humanity intent on displaying information about itself. Clothing and other details of bodily appearance–hairstyles, nails–are too impermanent to be fully individualized. Because these signs of individuality are personae, masks that can be removed at will, they tend to advertise their producers rather than their wearers. (164)The pierced body is also–as a Cultural Studies scholar would also contend–an erotic body. It's just that Gans tells us from the outset that the "impulse to castration is the same as it was in the time of Origen" (165), and that it leads to "spiritual freedom" as the "nonpierced is drawn to the pierced as a possessor of Being" (169); all the while agreeing with the Derridean notion that this works as a "supplement to a lack" (169-70). When this erotic body is analysed "politically," unlike the Cultural Studies scholar, Gans finds

The more the energy of participants in what used to be called the "counterculture" is devoted to such activities as body modification, the less they have left for political matters. This substitution of the cultural for the political reflects a hidden complicity between the market system and its detractors. (173).Lest one think that this means that Gans ends by being "conservative," we point out that his analysis is not resentful in that way. To the contrary indeed, he remarks,

The ideological content of adolescent revolt has become less political since the end of the cold war. But I find it a sign of progress that the energy of this revolt has largely been transferred to the creation of personal identity. In contrast with the sterility of the old slogans about the environment and the establishment, acts of bodily modification add real information to the world. (173-74).Hence, he shows the value of traveling beyond cheering for one side or the other, in the direction of asking just what these conditions of our time actually designate.

The other essay we wish to look at a little more briefly concerns a topic that has also been covered in Cultural Studies literature. It is the troubling spectre of anorexia nervosa. Girard has written simply and compellingly about this. His opening story of a "pretty young cousin of mine" who was "dieting furiously" is not a recent memory, but one from prior to the second world war. Then, as now, the power of peers and media modeling was paramount:

The message is always the same: we have to get thinner, regardless of the cost. The compulsive dieters really want to be thin, and most of us are secretly aware of this because most of us also want to be thin. All our convoluted systems of explanation, based on sexuality, social class, power, the tyranny of male over female, and *tutti quando* are floundering (181)Like some others, Girard links anorexia and bulimia (180): the "bulimics are would-be anorexics" (182); like the bulimic, the anorexic has a very strong "appetite"–she "wants to eat just as much as we do and much more, because she is hungrier than we are. . . . Through superhuman effort they have triumphed over their normal instinct" (182). Indeed, as is well known, anorexia "strikes the best and the brightest" (and Girard includes the spectacle of "fattish professors . . . with perspiration streaming down their faces" in the account, suggesting thereby that we are all affected by the challenge, and mere intellect is not enough alone) (184).

How then, does it work? Girard argues that it stems from the spectre of mimetic rivalry. And in the face of this power, modern theories seem inadequate:

Both modernism and postmodernism are helpless when confronted with the intensification of mimetic rivalry that necessarily accompanies the dissolving of all prohibitions. Like those insects that go on building their nests when their eggs are long gone, our modernist and postmodernist teachers will keep blaming the dead prohibitions [church, class, gender, etc.] until doomsday, but their students, some day, should finally question this dogma. (185)In a two-pronged analysis, Girard traces a quick history of anorexia in terms of competitiveness from the time of Elizabeth of Austria ("Sissi") and Empress Eugénie (the wife of Napoleon III). Triggering mimetic rivalry among the upper class, the tendency increased in the twentieth century. From this history, we get the other strand of the Girardian analytic: a structure. In this sense, he remarks simply that "The rivalry intensifies as the number of imitators increases. The reason for our reluctance to perceive the escalation is that we hate to acknowledge our own mimetic fads as much as we love to acknowledge the mimesis of others" (191). The distortion of our view of anorexia is at least partly historical:

In order not to see what is going on, we manage to fool ourselves regarding the past, leaning upon various half-truths or downright lies which, like all propagandists we keep repeating ad nauseam. One of these consists in attributing to the entire European past an inordinate predilection for fat women, rooted, we claim, in an obsession with food resulting from the state of semistarvation that was normal in those days. Both historically and esthetically, this theory is illiterate. . . . The idea that semistarvation was a more or less

permanent feature of life in preindustrial Europe is a gross falsification of the evidence . . . the fatness imperative we impose on the past is a crude projection of our own obsession with food. (192-93)12

Historically, then, we deceive ourselves. But this is–as should now be obvious–a structural feature of the disorder that strikes far more widely than those few who are able to impose upon themselves the discipline of food-refusal.

Mimetic rivalry is at stake, but it is rivalry of a strange kind. Borrowing the language of Veblen who speaks of "conspicuous consumption" as one of a number of features that motivate the demand curve, Girard talks of the "conspicuous nonconsumption" that dominates current mimetic fashions–clothes ("torn blue jeans"). Crucially, this is *ostentatious* non-consumption. But the most powerful illustration of all is the one he uses for his title–the notion of the "Hunger artist," an idea developed by a French poet whose analysis of Kafka's story explains both the interest of crowds in the spectacles of emaciated freak shows and–at a certain point–the loss of that interest. Drawing a parallel between the way a metaphor of emaciation could become an awful reality (double time: the Nazi death camps, anorexia), Girard remarks that "like our princesses, our intellectuals and artists are reaching the bulimic stage of modernity" (197).

While we find the last of the above claims excessive, we believe he shows us how the bulimic victim is part of our cultural symbolic repertoire. In the process, almost incidentally, his analysis shows up the inadequacy of the Cultural Studies accounts of the same topic, because he can actually *make sense* of it in terms of rivalrous marketplace modeling of emaciation. Girard rightly says that we take pleasure in the most awful "gesticulating cadavers" and he goes a long way to explaining both the reasons for this, and the history of emergence of those reasons. In the meantime, our culture struggles with ever increasing desperation and futility–for all our public programs on obesity, on health, for all our Cultural Studies intellectualism concerning the body–with the image of the body. And each time we look into the deep well of the latest advertised product promising a good bodyline, we know it is yet another thing we can again *fail to achieve*.

9. Promises

Like all scholars who feel themselves to play a part, howsoever small, in the design of a new field of inquiry, we find the promise of Generative Anthropology to be profound and exciting.

The originary hypothesis is the signal achievement of Generative Anthropology (and this journal). It is built on a characteristically small empirical footprint, and it deploys the deep intuition that humanity is a species whose chief logics are driven by mimesis. In so doing, it lets us meditate on the problems of the present time in very different ways from those prevalent in the often delusionally difference-oriented cultural analyses of our time. It is a

kind of first humanities because it lets us ponder everyday problems (such as the mimetic frenzy of sales days to cultures of guilt and resentment in political life) in a way that goes to the heart of what it means to be *human*. It addresses itself to those kinds of questions that are asked in aftermath: the saddened observer of violent war who asks why it happened, the reporter on the scene of looting and rioting that looks (but is not) senseless, the sociologists who admit and then struggle to explain the uniformity of the graffiti tag's protests of uniqueness.

Mimesis is not an easily accepted thesis, despite its ubiquity. We allow ourselves snatches of it, especially (as both Gans and Girard realize) in the arts. It is even there usually only fleetingly portrayed. Perhaps the idea was captured iconically for a generation of British people by the celebrated line in the *Life of Brian* when the film, as the exasperated "Jesus" figure cries out "we are all individuals" only to have the crowd all shout that back at him, cuts to one lone figure in the crowd muttering, "But I'm not…" At this point, though, another tantalizing possibility emerges: Generative Anthropology makes observations about the mechanisms of human interaction, and about the genesis of the human. It even makes comment on the rise of particular cultural formations.

But despite the orientations of Gans and Girard, and despite the fact that both make statements about ethical systems, this emerges as a question without a framework in the absence of a field of metaphysical inquiry today. The generative anthropologist does ask why we behave as we do (but gives an explanatory rather than hermeneutic answer to this kind of inquiry); the generative anthropologist does ask "why" the human arose (but does so hypothetically, as a basis to an analysis of the structure of culture and the human).

In addition, in rendering the world in anthropoetic terms, many taken-for-granted domains are challenged. Quite apart from the applied domains we have traced above, one of the most important challenges Gans has raised is to the way we understand aesthetics. The name of this very journal–*Anthropoetics*–carries within it the seed of the promise. A poetics of culture inquires into the *poetics* of the human horizon. The term, poetics, as a host of writers have pointed out, means many things–socio-aesthetic-structures (as in the title of Jonathon Culler's book, *Structural Poetics*), aspects of the productive process (as in Hans Robert Jauss's rather adventurous detailing of a "poietic" horizon of aesthetic knowing, and in its primary and most obvious sense, aesthetics in general. Gans has written on this in an occasional way himself: in his essay, Aesthetics and Cultural Criticism," he has asked why it is that we devote ourselves to the interpretation of aesthetic works. Interpretation and criticism itself here defined as repetitions that would "like to teach that lesson independently of the sacrificial experience of the artwork, by dint of pure reasoning" (73). If deconstruction correctly diagnoses a problem in this, it is because criticism cannot do what it claims because "it has always already admitted defeat in taking the aesthetic narrative as its point of departure" (73).

The domain of aesthetics, evacuated supposedly utterly by those most equipped to do it–namely the literary critics who chose to become Cultural Studies scholars–*is* problematic. Gans teases out the different "solutions" that the West has tried from the outset: the Greek tragedy makes "us turn away from the centre by making us experience the sacrificial form from within"; the Euripidean tragicomedy advanced on this by reducing sacrifice to "initiation" (74); the rich and varied texts of eighteenth century France and England witnessed the exhaustion of the form, epitomized by no one more than the extraordinary achievement of *Tristram Shandy*, in which the very frame is shaken by that most incidental and "whimsical" of narratives in a text whose very innovation lies in its extinction of old relations (75); the still familiar Romantic idiom in which the suffering victim is now also a hero insofar precisely *as* he (and later, she) suffers (76); the modern retreat to primitivism as a route to a "natural" order of existence (82-83). The postmodern aesthetic is, as Fredric Jameson noticed, superficial and conceptual (Jameson's example of Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* is excellent). Indeed, like Jameson, Gans dwells on the cerebral, ironic, and citational nature of postmodernity, and he also analyses what he sees as the ongoing marketplace relationship to this aesthetic ("Aesthetics and Cultural Criticism" 83-84). He would not take exception to the notion of a "late capitalist" form of postmodernity. But the difference lies in their resolutions–Jameson, as part of a morally discredited and intellectually antiquated and moribund Marxism flickers between Frankfurt School style lament and postmodernist celebration; Gans on the other hand calls for a "more powerful critical aesthetic–a more powerful anthropology" (85). Gans also contends that while the heroic impulse of art, and culture as a whole that dates from the time of the Greeks has been destroyed, postmodernity poses no challenge to the basic sacrificial and narrative dimensions of the human. Perhaps what he means by this fusion is most clearly discernible in an essay we cited earlier on the significance of the Holocaust:

The Holocaust, in opening our eyes to the victimary, has blinded us to what the old high aesthetic culture saw so well: that in the last analysis, victim and persecutor are one. We can only realize the unity of the human race if we can grasp, in all its horror, the truth of this ultimate equivalence. Now that we have lost our taste for witnessing it as an aesthetic spectacle, it is all the more urgent that we learn to think it. As someone said not long ago, "We're all stuck here for a while" (139).In these works, we see what it means when Gans says that the aesthetic is a foundational dimension of the horizon of the human. We see this not just as an abstract claim about a point of origin far in the past, but also, as something that lives on today: the "end of culture" that Gans describes (one of the dimensions, or "names" for postmodernity) is not without cause, and it is certainly not without effect. The fact that criticism now comes into vision as part of the problem being treated does not mean we should disregard it, or even stop doing it–it is rather a sign of what our culture is *and does*. We look away at our peril.

References

[revised October 1, 2007]

Barker, Chris. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: Sage, 2000.

Bateson, Gregory. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. San Francisco: Chandler, 1972.

Brown, Mary Ellen. "The Politics of Soaps: Pleasure and Feminine Empowerment." *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* 4.2 (1987): 1-25

During, Simon. *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Fleming, Chris. *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis*. Cambridge: Polity, 2004.

Fleming, Chris and John O'Carroll. "Notes on Generative Anthropology: Towards an Ethics of the Hypothesis." *Anthropoetics* 8(2) (2003) <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0802/fleming.htm>

—. "Understanding Anti-Americanism." *Anthropoetics* 9(2) (Fall 2003 / Winter 2004) <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0902/antiamerican.htm>

—. "In Memoriam: Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)." *Anthropological Quarterly* 78.1 (2005): 137-150.

Gans, Eric. "Antisemitism and Anti-Americanism." *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* 279 (2003).

—-. "The Body Sacrificial." *The Body Aesthetic: From Fine Art to Body Modification*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000, 159-78.

—-. *Signs of Paradox: Irony, Resentment, and other Mimetic Structures*. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1997.

Girard, René. "Anorexia." *The Body Aesthetic: From Fine Art to Body Modification*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000.

Grossberg, Lawrence, C. Nelson, and P. Treichler. "Cultural Studies: An Introduction." In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. Treichler (eds) *Cultural Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies.” In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. Treichler (eds) *Cultural Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

Husserl, Edmund. “The Origin of Geometry.” In *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*. By J. Derrida. Trans. J.P. Leavey. New York: Hays, 1978.

Inglis, Fred, *Cultural Studies*. Oxford ; Cambridge, Mass. : Blackwell, 1993.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. “Epistemological crises, dramatic narrative, and the philosophy of science.” *Monist* 60 (1977): 453-72.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction*. Cambridge: Polity, 1998.

Taylor, Charles “The Politics of Recognition” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann. Princeton University Press, 1994.

Schwartz, Stephen Adam, “Everyman an *Ubermensch*: The Culture of Cultural Studies,” *SubStance* 29, 1 (2000): 104-138.

Siebers, Tobin. Introd. *The Body Aesthetic: From Fine Art to Body Modification*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000.

Turner, Graeme. “Media Test and Messages.” *The Media in Australia. Industries, Texts, Audiences*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993. 205-66.

Wright, Georg Henrik von. *Explanation and Understanding*. London: Routledge, 1971.

Notes

1. In a recent essay in *Anthropoetics*, we find a critique that attempts to do perhaps a little of both. And while we cannot endorse Amir Khan’s selective attack on Foucault (rather more is needed to sustain the claims made), we can certainly endorse his effective salvo on, *and apt selection of*, David McNally’s bizarre, yet all too typical, *Bodies of Meaning* (2001). (back)

2. During’s language here is interesting–situated somewhere between German Romanticism, including psychoanalysis, and perhaps the Darwin of *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*: between wills, drives, and instincts. (back)

3. Of note here in this putative characterisation is an odd mix of the descriptive and normative: Cultural Studies *is* engaged and it *should be* self-reflexive. We also see here an

explicit declaration of a metaphysical stance–nominalism: one possible solution to the philosophical problem of "universals." But we get a solution without any "working out." (back)

4. There is something here which suggests the "cool" of Cultural Studies and recalls Louis Armstrong's famous answer when asked to define jazz: "Lady, if you have to ask, you'll never know." Part of the image of Cultural Studies constructed by During's language of "drives" and "impulses" supports this notion of the intangibility of Cultural Studies, which helps makes it a kind of *haute couture* that cannot be critically examined–as Cultural Studies is somehow "happening" somewhere under the level of verbalised consciousness. (back)

5. While true, the ethico-political dimensions of Generative Anthropology are becoming harder to ignore; but we will leave a discussion of this point to a later section. (back))

6. Personal communication with John O'Carroll, January 1994. (back)

7. For an example of what Schwartz is talking about, see Hall. (back)

8. Our forthcoming chapter in a book on Gans's work deals explicitly with the methodological aspects of Generative Anthropology. Our essays, "Notes on the ethics of the hypothesis" (on the relationship to poststructuralism and anthropology), "Understanding Anti-Americanism" (on kingship and history), and "Romanticism" (on the history of the West), have all been published in this journal. See our bibliography for further references by other writers in this journal on related topics. (back)