The Object of Originary Violence and the Second Person of the Trinity

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Why must violence happen? When–exactly–does the originary violence of the sparagmos happen? It is absurd for us to ask these questions, since we are creatures who must eat. But let us insist, child-like and naive: why do we not at the origin continue to represent the object? Why is it that the sign may not be prolonged indefinitely? If human uniqueness in representation is *linked* to the uniqueness of human violence, as the fact that we are the only animals capable of enjoying the esthetic of torture rituals attests, then generative anthropology ought to have something to say about our being *so* linked to the inseparability of violence and representation–setting deferral itself aside. Why must we "harm" objects?

It is not coincidentally in the context of reflections on the Holocaust, in a subsection titled "Messianic Awaiting" (in the chapter "The 'Jewish Question'") that Eric Gans offers a textual passage particularly relevant to these questions. The context is a refinement of his contrast between the Mosaic and Christian revelations first elaborated in *Science and Faith: The Anthropology of Revelation*(1990). Here in *Signs of Paradox* (1997), Gans has made this suggestion: "[the] Passion demonstrates that the enunciation of the moral model of absolute reciprocity as an ethic sufficient for the conduct of everyday life . . . is destined to reanimate the originary resentment that led to the sparagmos" (155). Before mistaking the suggestion that the Passion reanimates resentment as a demotion of Christianity, notice its resemblance to Rene Girard's interpretation of Jesus' self-description as the one who brings not peace, but a sword. The famous revelation of the "scapegoat mechanism" makes it *more difficult, not less difficult* for humans to function peacefully in community. Violence after Jesus is no less than earlier violence; it is only more ashamed of its failure to renounce itself, and so more hidden. Individuals take their violence underground, into the unconscious: "Beware! Beware! / His flashing eyes, his floating hair!" (Coleridge 49-50). The contagious individuation and democratization of resentment is not its reduction. But let us continue: adapting the quotation to fit the minimalization of the event to the

originary triangle, the “return to Girard” (8) in *Signs of Paradox* , let us say: the absolute *moral* reciprocity of the two humans caught by mimetic incompatibility animates the resentment that leads to the violence of the sparagmos.

Gans continues: “making explicit the implicit moral configuration of the originary event undermines its original deferring effect” (155). In the originary event, the “original deferring effect” is the slightest of hesitations, the minimal act of good will constitutive of the-sign-as-imitation-of-the-object and the-object-as-imitated-by-the-sign. It is the “formal closure” of the sign that makes explicit the implicit difference between the sign-using humans and the object as not-sign. The formal closure of the sign reveals the mimetic enemy-partners as morally alike, as identical–morally *about* to do violence. When all the differences between the two humans disappear, the one difference between them and the object reappears in what we might call the self-revelation of the object as one “vulnerable” to disfiguration.

When–exactly–does the originary violence of the sparagmos occur? In the next paragraph, Gans hypothesises as follows:

At the origin, the sparagmos occurs once the sign has appropriated for its peripheral enunciators the formal closure of the central figure, so that it is no longer necessary for this closure [of the figure] to subsist in itself. As it comes to appear superfluous, the figure’s figurality becomes vulnerable to the resentment it generates and open to the defiguration of the sparagmos. (*Signs* 155)Sparagmatic defiguration: the violent destruction, tearing to pieces and eating of the object, unconsciously controlled anarchy. But this passage is obscure. In what sense can we speak of it having been “necessary” (prior to the sparagmos) for the “formal closure” of the “central figure” to “subsist in itself”? The “figure’s figurality” refers to the object-as-imitated-by-the-originary-sign, not the raw cosmological material.(1) But how are we to grasp the process of the “figure’s figurality” somehow coming to “appear superfluous” to the originary humans in the triangle of mimetic incompatibility? When would the superfluity become intolerable? When would the necessity of the formal closure of the central figure to “subsist in itself” cease?

The answer may be something like this. The originary human intuition of the sign’s self-completion in its formal closure as the-sign-imitating-the-object *is one and the same with* the originary intuition of its unreality as an inadequate material substitute for the object-as-imitated-by-the-sign. The instant of absolute moral reciprocity occurs when the instant at which the subject-rival and model-obstacle caught in paradox are *equally* satisfied with the “formal closure” of their signs. The originary humans’ perfect equality in attention to the formal closure of their signs alone is *also* the instant of their equality as two, symmetrically opposed to the one

central object. Thus, their “seeing” of the signs alone–with the object having dropped out of sight–is the minimal model of total cultural indifferentiation. Alike, the humans both oppose its brute cosmological difference (as object of *appetite*) and oppose its figural otherness (as *significant* object).

The now-initiated “amoral” horror of the return to animality *against* the object is proportionate to the just-completed “moral” purity of good will in sign-mediated hesitation. The instant of the sign’s self-completion and formal coherence *is itself* the instant of the appearing-superfluous of the figure’s figurality. Only when the sign-as-imitation-of-the-object appears to be complete in itself *as a substitute for the object* may we speak of the sign as having–“appropriated for its peripheral enunciators the formal closure of the central figure.” It is as if the peripheral enunciators’ sense of the perfection of the sign-as-imitation-of-the-object has permitted a minimal *forgetting* of the appetitive object. Appetite returns “with a vengeance,” human violence added to animal aggression to compensate for the deprivation in that forgetting. This originary forgetting we may take as the minimal model of the later forgetting of communal order threatened by the private criminal imaginary in real sparagmatic violence, the almost-forgetting of the shared whole figure in the individuated consumption of fragments.(2)

In the somewhat surprising next paragraph of Gans’ discussion, the central figure is briefly but fancifully personified as an agent speaking to the originary humans. Let us continue to reduce the circular “communal” version of the event to its minimal triangular version, to emphasise the theme of paradox foregrounded in *Signs of Paradox*. Keep in mind that the central figure is the one that just prior to the sparagmos has become “vulnerable to the resentment it [itself] generates.”

But what this central figure “says” to the periphery in the originary event is the substance of what Jesus would articulate as morality: “You are all equal, because you all imitate me.” This message of peace is in effect a call to war; the central figure affirms its difference from its peripheral imitators in the act of denying it. There is no escaping from this impasse any more than from any other variant of the foundational human paradox. (155)Let us consider this passage first by following the hint and imagining without embarrassment, in the originary event, the object as a food object–represented and now about-to-be-violently-appropriated–“speaking” to the two symmetrical humans at the other corners of the mimetic triangle. What would this figured food object be “saying” to them? Consider “you are all equal, because you all imitate me.” We might transpose the address as follows: “You are equal to *each other*, because you *both* imitate me.” This transposition reminds us of the anesthetic paradox of mere incompatibility. Their resentments of the center are equally intense but equally unsatisfiable. What the object “says” to the originary humans is: “You are perfectly similar to one another because your signs-as-

imitations-of-me are equally perfect imitations. You are moral equals in hesitation of appropriation and deference to each other." A third-person description from "outside" would likewise emphasise that the formal closure of one sign is the formal closure of the other; there is no telling them apart. But here is the paradoxical necessity: that perfect moral equality of the two sign-actions generates the one difference between the central figure and the signs. From this paradox emerges the Draconian solution of the revelation of the object's originary vulnerability.

Let us notice that Gans has asked us to imagine the about-to-be-victimized central figure in "the act of denying" its own central "difference from its peripheral imitators." But what *is* the difference from the imitators that is being "denied"? How can the object hidden by the central figure "deny" its difference? Let us re-try our formulation: the instant of the sign's self-completion is the instant of the appearing-superfluous of the figure's figurality. When the sign-as-imitation-of-the-object appears to be complete in itself as a substitute for the object, then the two originary humans "hear" the food object speak "in the act of denying" its ontological difference *from the sign*. It's helpful to imagine the personified object making this denial because we can imagine its trying to prolong its *in*vulnerability to the violence of the two humans held at bay. Only as long as the sign "lasts" does the vulnerable object subsist; it is about to be torn to bits. The originary object of violence is "sacred" only for an instant of hesitation. It's the eternal instant–of the origin of language, the origin of God, the origin of the human.

This exposure of vulnerability is only one side of the flippable coin, however. For the object is also caught in the act of "affirm[ing] its difference from its peripheral imitators," inviting violence. Humans have appetites; we must eat. The object's denial of its real otherness is suspected and flipped to a confession of its objective difference from the sign: "I am real food, not a sign of it." This self-revelation of the significant food object as food, not merely as significant, is the central figure's "affirmation of its difference from its peripheral imitators." The revelation of the object's reality is paradoxically generated by the sign's *seeming* sufficiency as substitute for food. The instant of seeming sufficiency of the sign is the instant of the appearing-superfluous of the figure's figurality. The otherness of the reality of the object as not-sign returns. This is the object's revelation of its "objective" difference from the inadequate sign.

Perhaps allowing a quasi-cartoon version of this speaking central figure of the food object is not inappropriate. Imagine the moment of denial at which the central figure says, "Don't eat me; eat your sign-imitations of me instead." That's the moment at which we originary humans recognize the impossibility of obeying such an order. We realize anew our *hunger;* and we take our violent revenge on the object for having trapped us in such a paradox. Nor does it change anything in the

poor food object's favour that it gives us this command only *in our imaginations*–that, in reality, it has "said" nothing of the kind, has said nothing at all. Human representation changes the real; it makes out of the real a vulnerable object of real imagination. More essentially, notice that "Don't eat me as the-object-as-imitated-by-your-signs" has *presupposed* that we are sufficiently conscious of our sign-imitations that we might indeed think of eating *them* instead. There, in the absurd eating of signs, imaginable despite its absurdity, is a cartoon version of our intuition of the otherness of the real object as insufficiently represented by the sign, itself a material object but no substitute for the real thing. There–is the absurdity of eating scrolls, of kissing pictures, of dancing with mannequins, and conversing earnestly with statues.

Therefore, the centrally-figured food object saying "Don't eat me; eat your signs of me instead" certainly makes the "call to peace" that's in effect a "call to war." For its denial reveals the anthropological truth that we just *know*: our sign-imitations complete in their formal closure reveal their incompleteness as objects of appetite. To become fully conscious of the sign as such is to become newly conscious of its object as other to the sign. Our willed defiance of the "don't eat me" command marks the primordial separation between word and thing, the fall from representation into violence. But both the representation and violence now must be owned as human. We have no choice but to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Let's get the meaning of *eating knowledge:* knowing, taking into ourselves the truth, that our representations (as good as they are in themselves) are never good enough to eat. That's one truth we have known from the origin; we share it now with our earliest ancestors then. There *shouldn't* be any hint of shame in our needing to eat ("we're only animals"). But because we are the only animal that *knows something of the memorability of its violence in the act of eating*–the only one that intuits the human violence appropriate to human eating–there will always remain a little such shame ("we're only human"–it's only a human shame). "Don't eat me; eat your signs instead," says the food object. Even that we are able to share the food object as representation with these words at this conference table (now) doesn't cancel our sense of the laughable inappropriateness of the command. Such a food object is as unsatisfactory as it is imaginable. The call to perfect asceticism is the call to perfect satiation. The call to peace, a call to war. It is outrageous that we should be asked to eat words, not food.(3) Conversely, no human creatures know their hunger more than those who have nothing to eat but words.(4)

After our cartoon, it might seem impossible to make anthropological contact between the food object-as-imitated-by-the-sign subject to originary violence and the second Person of the Christian Trinity. But we might regain our bearings by remembering Gans' efforts to give the Christian revelation, in *Science and Faith* but

elsewhere as well, its full due. For Gans, there is no softening of the figurality of Jesus as the object of a universal human violence. On the contrary, originary thinking presents the figure of the Crucified as the very image of the anthropological idea of God–God Incarnate as Person. Jesus is the *human* figure of the One we "*must have*" in the sense of "must have obliterated and rendered objectively inaccessible only to hold in subjective memory as infinitely valuable." The Crucified is the sacred food object on which we depend for our bodily survival, incarnate in *human* form. The basis of figurality incarnate is not so much that of consumption, hence a scandalous cannibalism (eating Jesus). The basis is more that of the incarnation of victimization, of the marks of violence, of what has been done to the object *prior* to its consumption. Of all the many figures of violence done to a single human, Jesus has endured: his memorability and his victimization are not identical, but they are inseparable. He is remembered as the Divine human victim, the man-God (a scandalous paradox for all).(5)

Jesus was and is the victim of a necessary evil. The victims of *necessary* evil are the most horrifying, for they are the ones for whom we cannot deny responsibility without smothering our intuition of the scene of representation. The horror of the figure of human sacrifice as the Divine Incarnate victimized is its seeming inseparability from the historicity of the human scene itself. The crucifixion seems as necessary to modernity, given the victimary gestures of the romantic self and its descendants, as the violence done to the originary object seems necessary to humanity itself.(6) Witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus is one with the hypocrisy of our attempts to believe that we can disavow responsibility for having crucified him. This is to recall the formula "to know Jesus is to have participated in the crucifixion" (*Science and Faith*). We might even posit an analogy between knowledge of the Divine person Incarnate, with its necessitation of the revelation of our having participated in the crucifixion, and the knowledge of natural objects and the revelation of the "violence" we must do to them before consuming them.(7)

But let us return to the puzzling "substance of what Jesus would articulate as morality: 'You are all equal to me, because you all imitate me'"(*Signs* 155). We may try to imagine what it is that Jesus is saying to the two humans in the paradox of originary mimesis at that impossible instant when the object-as-imitated-by-the-sign "calls" those performing the sign into violence. The most desacralizing translation would be to imagine Jesus (crucified or anticipating his crucifixion) saying something to this effect: "You are all trying to be martyrs as I am now; in your equally vain attempts to imitate me as exemplar of absolute nonviolence, you are all equally condemned to failure, for I am here on the cross first." Such a translation takes us to the limit of cynicism toward the historical figure of Jesus, making him less a victim of paradoxically necessary evil than a self-contradicting monster of a certain bizarre egotism. It ought to be rejected.(8)

Let us return and retry: the “substance of what Jesus would articulate as morality: ‘You are all equal to me, because you all imitate me'” (*Signs* 155). We seek to blend this into what the originary object of violence as the second Person of the Trinity there at the origin of the human “says” to the human subjects caught in the paradox of mimesis. We seek what it is that God as the Divine Incarnate (not in the first person of the Mosaic afigural Other) is saying at the beginning to them (and to us) at that instant when the sign generates the violence done to the object. The two humans “listening” may hear instead something like the following: “Your signs-as-imitations-of-me have generated within each of you a sacred centrality equivalent to my own. You are now humans equally vulnerable as possessors of the sign. I am the Divine Person Incarnate who withstands the insufficiency of those signs. You will learn your own vulnerability by remembering the violence you have done to me.”

This may be (something like) what the central figure “says” at the instant of hesitation before the sparagmos. It is also what we might imagine Jesus as the Divine object subject to human violence “saying” at the moment of the crucifixion. Our signs of peace, our promises of peace, do not suffice. Under the necessity of their difference from the object, the object will suffer real violence. There is no way out of this originary paradox, human violence inseparable from although contained by representation. Let’s remember Saul on the road to Damascus, who heard the voice of God as Jesus only *after* having persecuted him, aimed for his obliteration. The revelation to Saul–his *remembering* having participated in the crucifixion–is the maximal model of the minimal “significant memory” that endures through the originary sparagmos. Jesus speaks to us in the voice of the originary object of violence as Jesus spoke to Saul. To know Jesus is to know having torn apart the object of human violence in its Divine otherness. The first person of the Trinity says “I am who I am.” The second person says something like: “I am the Divine Object incarnate, torn apart by your violence. You lie to yourselves if you believe you did not wish to hurt me. For I have given myself to reveal to you *your own human, sacred* subjective vulnerability. Remember me–for the violence you can do to each other (as sacred human centers) you must have done to an object such as me first.” These formulas venture to capture the “humanization” of the object-victim in the Christian revelation.

To close, let us try reflecting briefly on the paradox of the inimitability of moral perfection that our analysis may have left implicit, for it too is a part of what Gans is after. In suggesting that Jesus as the incipient victim of originary violence says, “You are all equal, because you all imitate me,” Gans acknowledges the hard truth of the *inimitability of the uniqueness* of Jesus’ (seeming) moral perfection. Much is at stake in our naming of the quality of that perfection. The paradox of any exemplary human figure of self-giving conduct and pacifist righteousness consists in the guaranteed capacity of such self-effacing perfection to bring out the worst in

the very people whose violent natures are to be improved by their following the example. (*We* are the “very people.”) Jesus himself, insofar as he is a type of the morally perfect “pacifist” teetering eternally on the brink of human self-righteousness, does represent that paradox. To say that his goodness “brought out the worst” in those who crucified him is only a hair’s breadth away from saying Jesus “asked for it.” But Jesus can only be *mist*aken as a figure of self-righteousness. He was human; he knew resentment; his perfection is expressed in the originarity of his historical Jewish Person, not in a moralistic accounting that would prove he never broke any rules, nor in a metaphysical description that could persuade us that he possessed certain attributes.

Meanwhile, another test of the paradox of the inimitability of moral perfection is available. Ask yourself whether the morally perfect person does not necessarily arouse your resentment, for the very reason that such a person “reveals” your own moral imperfection to you. What would you prefer: to be a castaway on a desert island with a perfect saint, or with an ordinary sinner? The human who denies being an ordinary sinner is one who denies his humanity, who starves his common desire for the sacred vulnerable subjectivity of the victim of necessary evil alone. By contrast, to indulge a desire to present oneself in the victimary mode–subject to *fancied* persecution in a false imitation of Jesus crucified–is to wish to be a victim of *unnecessary* evil. In fact, self-righteousness creates and courts unnecessary evil according to the paradox of pacifist exemplarity above. The more we suspect Jesus of courting martyrdom, the more we make him vulnerable to the accusation of self-righteousness and having “asked for it” in the grotesque victimary mode.

True righteousness opposing human violence is destroyed only by *necessary* human evil, just as the originary object-victim of the sparagmos was necessarily destroyed as the prerequisite of self-knowledge. The difference in Jesus’ case is that his moral “perfection” is one with his “personable,” that is, revealed only in and as a person, forgiveness of the most spectacular and horrific human imperfections. The Jesus who reveals himself to Saul has already forgiven Saul–or he would not be revealing himself to him. Divine forgiveness is revealed in one and the same instant that we recognize what our violence has done to the Divine Image. To know Jesus is to have participated in the crucifixion; to become human is to know having done violence to the Divine object. But to know Jesus is also to know Divine forgiveness. The human is the species given to scenic representation. It is the species that self-knowingly does violence to creation. Thus the human needs to be forgiven (eternally) for the violence it has done to the sacred objects that its receives on its scene, as created, as revealed, as having been given by the Divine Other.

This has been a rough reduction of what I think might be the strain of “Christian” thinking in originary thinking.(9)

Notes

1. The central “figure” is not wholly identical in ontological terms to the central “object” as the thing of appetite, the cosmological raw material. Obviously, the object in its cosmological otherness as something “outside” the scene of human representation subsists in itself; it would be absurd to speak of the necessity of its material being ceasing. Rather, the central object-as-imitated-by-the-sign is the one already inside the context of transfiguring human representation. (back)

2. Gans, *Signs of Paradox*, 149-151. For example: “In the sparagmos, the sign, as the expression of renunciation, is ‘forgotten’; with the destruction of its original referent, it passes out of consciousness into the unconscious of collective mediation wherein its guarantee resides. The forgetting of the sign defers the moral model with respect to which the participants in the sparagmos would be condemned for their act” (151). I am suggesting a model for the first minimal instant of this forgetting, the instant that itself initiates the sparagmos in the “revelation” of the paradoxical incompatibility of sign-as-imitation-of-the-object and object-as-imitation-of-the-sign. (back)

3. That man can not live on bread alone does not entail that bread is not necessary for man. (back)

4. We might continue with the polemical point that for originary thinking the *real* “victim” is always another *human victim,* a human being deprived of objects altogether, not the objects consumed. The planet earth never has been nor will be our “victim,” except by analogy with the violence done to humans by humans–including the violence of depriving others of food. The sooner environmental thinking grasps this, the sooner its politics will become anthropologically appealing rather than pantheistically counter-intuitive. To put the point more bluntly, it is not terribly helpful to aim toward maximizing human shame at consumption as such. We on the scene of representation have consumed objects from the beginning (the same ones we have represented, just as we learned to represent them). It is mostly in the privileged West that the privileges of consumption are *despised* as wrong (not without a certain hypocrisy, one might add). Originary thinking would submit the notion that we become conscious of “nature” not so much by stopping our consumption of it but more by becoming conscious of consumption itself. Consciousness of “nature” in itself grows only in proportion to consciousness of *human consumption of* nature. (back)

5. We would be wise to interpret the global fame of Jesus as evidence of the revelation of an anthropological truth. His fame is not an accident. It is not the product of the propaganda of American televangelists or the Vatican. Nor is it

another vestige of Western cultural imperialism. (back)

6. If we can imagine having done otherwise to a violently destroyed figure, then we have not experienced the *necessity* of the violence we have in fact done. The horror of the Holocaust seems intimately related but seems different: we would not wish to categorize it as a *necessary* evil in that we would wish to "learn" from it never to let it happen again. The uniqueness of its horror derives from the fact the Nazis *tried* to remove this sacrificial violence outside of representation as historical commemoration: "The horror of the camps is their scenelessness; for the first time in history, a central policy of violence is deliberately excluded from the scenic structure of culture"; "Thus, what makes the Holocaust exemplary of a newly radical category of evil is not the multiplicity of its victims, but their lack of esthetic exemplarity. The victim of the sparagmos is a figure; the victims of the Holocaust were chiffres, abstractions" (*Signs of Paradox* 164). But inasmuch as the crucifixion of Jesus as historical figure, and its aftermath as historical revelation, is something that could only have happened once, it does not make sense to speak of it as something we wish not to have happen again. The crucifixion is the figure of a violence which we must have done in the first place but from which we can learn only that it was we who did it (and we can learn that only after the fact): that is why it so closely resembles, and evokes, originary violence against the object. The Holocaust is similarly a unique, irreversible historical revelation. But the effects of it as revelation are not universally internalizable in the same way: they are inseparable from specific group identities and collective memory rather than available through esthetic intuition. By contrast, if there is anything to be "learned" from the Holocaust, then perhaps it would be the value of an attitude toward it based on a somewhat similar knowledge: it was *we* who sent the victims to the camps, not the evil Nazis from whom we (smugly?) differ. The more we mechanically blame the Nazis from whom we trust we differ, the less we are prepared to sharpen our self-knowledge and grow in consciousness of our own potential for evil. Meanwhile, the Jewish person is one who does not have to ask himself the questions on the Holocaust that the "Christian" person is morally bound to ask and try to answer. The Christian is (paradoxically) one eternally bound to remember that Jesus himself was a Jew (not a Christian). The hesitation-inspiring strange obviousness of that fact never vanishes from the consciousness of the Christian. Jesus himself experienced God without needing the mediation that the Christian himself or herself by definition must have from Jesus alone. (back)

7. We might wonder whether all objects to which we do "violence" in our biological quest to survive, but toward which we feel a sacred debt of gratitude–sacred animals, plants, sources of water and food and heat–may not properly be considered tokens of the Divine person incarnate in His originary self-giving. This is neither a pantheism nor a promiscuous personification, but a merely *grateful*

personalization of attitude toward the things that we consume. Cf. Gans: “But the primal experience of Being is that of mourning; the mystical intuition of an ineffable essence recalls the loss of its originary incarnation. The central figure that originally attracted the group’s appetites has been de-figured by those who henceforth depend on it all the more as their cultural model” (*Signs of Paradox*143). To take one small step toward an anthropological theology of creation inflected by originary thinking, we might suggest that a reverent sense of primal mourning for the Divine Incarnate offers an approach to conceive of God as the “creator” of the universe without having to resort to the contortions of intelligent design. We come to know God as creator of the world, specifically as the creator of the “world” or “universe” *of objects that we knowing and gratefully consume as sacred provisions*. God Incarnate gives himself in pieces, as objects, for an instant. The Divine body destroyed must be remembered as the Word that recalls its own scene of having-been-there-for-the-ritual-taking. If it is the scene where we have had our food, it is a scene worthy of memory indeed. Gratitude for God having given us the “objects” we must consume for survival matches gratitude for the particularization of Divine self-revelation in concretely imaginable and memorable acts of self-giving. The second person of the Trinity would be arguably the most powerful Incarnation of such concrete, historical, real-world flesh-and-blood self-giving in human form. (back)

8. On the one hand, a fully self-conscious desire for the status of absolute martyr able to exclude all other humans henceforth from the possibility of meaningful acts of self-sacrifice, when and as such acts become historically necessary, would require the attribution to the historical Jesus of an overpowering egocentricity. This is not to mention the massive evidence in the Gospels that would incline us against such a reading. At the same time, such an “I was here first” reading would make Jesus (ironically) believe himself not unique on the cross but equal as a competitor in a terrible competition with potential human equals in historical victimization, which equality (“you are all equal, because you all imitate me”) is betrayed by his injunction to exclude others in advance from acts of self-sacrifice. In this implied competition for martyrdom, the translation casts Jesus as “just another martyr” like every other martyr-of-any-cause-whatsoever in human history, only a strange egotist for having decided to go there first.

This cynical translation of Gans’ enigmatic formulation must be rejected not least because it presupposes that Jesus (and his imitators) *desire* more than anything to suffer on the cross. It contradicts (for example) the abundant evidence in the gospels that Jesus loved life. But we do not require this historical appeal to the gospel texts to justify our rejection; we can found our rejection on a fundamental anthropological intuition. Let us imagine Jesus as the originary object speaking to the two subjects of originary mimetic paradox: “Now that your signs have similarly

completed their representation of me, both of you are aware of your equality in having only your signs but not having me. Now come destroy me." In having to attribute to Jesus and to historical victims comparable to him a fundamental masochism ("now come destroy me"), to attribute to them a desire for violent death so gigantic that it is matched only by the intensity of their contempt for their own flesh-and-blood life-in-the-world, such a translation takes a perspective inhumane in its cynicism toward even the most unhappily misguided (spiritually proud) forms of human self-sacrifice. It is so cynical as to imply in its speaker an amorality that forgets what the sign does: the sign transfigures the object, simultaneously giving it more objective weight (out there) and deepening our internalized imaginative sympathy with it (in here). This translation does not give us confidence that we have heard the object "speak." It is the type of cynicism that would reserve to itself the "freedom" to hear in the cries of a victim of torture perhaps only a desire for more pain. We trust (I trust you agree) our originary intuition not to go there. (back)

9. This paper was presented at GASC 2009, the second Generative Anthropology Summer Conference, held at Chapman University, Orange, California, June 26-27, 2008. It is a condensed and revised version of one section of a much longer review essay on the six books that constitute Gans' founding texts of Generative Anthropology. That review essay is forthcoming in *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture.* (back)

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