

# Introduction to the GASC 2009 Special Issue

**Ian Dennis**

The third Generative Anthropology Summer Conference, which took place in Ottawa in June of 2009, is the main source of the articles presented in this number of *Anthropoetics*. GASC 2009 aspired to an expansion in size and visibility, and the issue will follow suit by presenting eight pieces, a larger-than-normal offering. The conference organizers were conscious of—wrestled with—the paradox of ambition common to all those whose proud marginality, cultivated or thrust-upon as the case may be, at length brings them, if not to the center itself (where is it?), but into its undeniable if relative proximity. Badges of validated identity—large-scale funding, hired help, catered muffins, parallel sessions—paid for with missed papers, rushed schedules, crowded foyers, unfamiliar faces. Was this really us?

A birder, I idly accumulate of-a-feather collectives: skein of geese, exaltation of larks, murmuration of starlings. What then for intellectual loners, for Bronx Romantics? A “transcendence” thereof? Or maybe we just hope it, uneasily enough.

Another conference unfolds next year, at a higher elevation. That surely betokens eternal life! Or nearly so. Anyway, may Peter and Bob prosper, go beyond. Finally, though, as they might agree, the question must be answered in print, not person. Is there a theme, a commonality, a coherent *thing* that enacts the process inquired into by the 2009 conference title? Is there a future? The essays collected here proffer some grounds for deciding.

Raoul Eshelman builds upon his remarkable work on “the newly arising epoch of performatism” with a suggestive exploration of Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Here GA’s vision of the victimary comes to grips with postmodern and performatist ideas of human disability and its potential for transcendence, with fascinating results.

Chris Fleming and John O’Carroll in their turn perform elephant-in-the-room ostensivity, pointing out the large mammalian matter of desire around the rotundities of which economics attempts, futilely, to conduct a rational-sounding conversation. In the process they startlingly reposition the ostensibly tributary domain of advertising to the front and center of any serious analysis of market society—as good an example as one could wish of the power of originary thinking.

Raphael Foshay incisively engages both Gans and Girard on their positions in the 2400-year long discussion initiated by Plato's *Republic*, reminding us of the "complex ostensivity of [its] dialogue form" and of the implications of that form for any anthropologically inflected critique of Plato's metaphysics.

Robert J. Hudson, one of next year's conference organizers, brings a sophisticated anthropological methodology to bear on famed filmmaker Robert Bresson's 1967 masterpiece *Mouchette*, asking how preconceptions of Bresson's religious orientation may have obscured the film's entirely un-dogmatic realization of scapegoating and sacrifice.

Marina Ludwigs returns to *Anthropoetics* with an originary analysis of the idea of group destiny and nationalism in George Eliot's powerful but enigmatic 1876 novel *Daniel Deronda*. Her provocative discussion explores a Zionism that "possesses the indispensable characteristics of scenicity, authorial voice, and ethical renunciation that, at the same time, establish a territorial claim."

Sylvie Nelson, who strove to attend the conference in Ottawa but was prevented by material contingencies, gives us a voice not before heard in the journal. Subjecting the institution of literary criticism to a rigorously originary analysis, she demonstrates yet again the flexibility and productivity of GA as an heuristic, even as she comes to new conclusions on a subject of central importance to many of us.

Matthew Schneider's immensely engaging excursus on "Generative Anthroponomastics" vividly recalls what's in a name, especially the name of Mohammed Ali as backed up by that champion's incomparable combinations. Here nominalism, indeed postmodernism itself, is confronted with a commitment to the ostensive with which it would be, and demonstrably *was*, unwise to quarrel.

And another *Anthropoetics* veteran, Richard van Oort, continues his wide-ranging survey of thinkers with whom the ostensibly black sheep of GA share significant commonalities. Here it is the twentieth-century philosopher and anthropologist Ernest Gellner, whose focus on the necessities and complexities of "transcendence in a secular age" provides a sharp and revealing counterpoint to and reinforcement of the mimetic theory he did not himself deploy.

Of course, many worthy presenters in Ottawa are not here. All told, there were almost forty talks at the conference—too many for publication in one or several issues. We are hoping, however, that our next issue will offer several more, including a few more new voices.