

Introduction to the GASC 2010 Special Issue

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This special conference issue of *Anthropoetics* includes several papers from the Fourth Annual Generative Anthropology (GA) Summer Conference, which was notable on several counts. The first Utah GA conference was co-hosted by Westminster College in Salt Lake City and Brigham Young University in Provo, and co-organized by the editors of this volume, Peter Goldman of Westminster and Robert Hudson from BYU. In accordance with a new tradition founded by Ian Dennis last year in Ottawa, there was considerable local and undergraduate participation: four Westminster College students made fine presentations which were well received, and we were pleased to welcome presentations by professors from the University of Utah, BYU, Westminster, and Salt Lake Community College. Our conference theme for GASC 2010 was “The Anthropology of Modernity,” and featured two keynote lectures, from Eric Gans and Vincent Pecora, addressed to the controversial problem of secularization. On the final day of the conference, Dr. Gans and Dr. Pecora engaged in a lively and enjoyable roundtable discussion on “Secularization and Modernity.” GA is clearly developing substantial momentum and mass: yearly conferences with enthusiastic participation from international scholars, our own dedicated journal *Anthropoetics* in addition to publications in other journals, many books on GA and related topics, a substantial web presence, and increased visibility and recognition. Perhaps most important, The Generative Anthropology Society and Conference (GASC) was founded this year (June 24th) by (current president) Andrew Bartlett, Ian Dennis, Eric Gans, Peter Goldman, Robert J. Hudson, Adam Katz, Stacey Meeker, Matthew Schneider, and Richard van Oort. This is a great milestone for all of us who have worked with GA over the years, promising continuing support and development of GA’s research project. While GA has been around now for 30 years, it is still amazingly fresh, and there remain vast territories of human culture and history to explore from this perspective.

The great variety of topics, approaches, and insights produced by scholars at the conference testifies to Generative Anthropology’s scope and power. GA’s openness to all kinds of perspectives and the truly new and original understanding it offers, unhampered by any ideological agenda, represent its strength—as manifest by the presentations at our conferences and the articles in *Anthropoetics*, which are as broad and inclusive as culture itself.

Ian Dennis, organizer of GASC 2009 in Ottawa, ventures here a pioneering “definition and deployment” of Romantic joy from the perspective of Generative Anthropology, tracing Wordsworthian joy back to its ethical function on the Originary Scene. Ian also looks at how the Romantics and their modern heirs have deployed the concept and representation of joy in relation to the natural landscape. His essay offers a valuable contribution to Romanticism studies as well as to current debates on environmental protection.

Adam Katz, long-time Anthropoetics contributor, argues persuasively that the seemingly primitive category of defilement continues to have relevance for us today in its modern guise of White Guilt. Defilement can occur without any intention to defile, and a simple mistake can incur its stigma. Any use of language, Adam argues, implies the possibility of mistakes; and in this sense, mistakeness is an originary category. But while mistakes are often perceived as violations of sacred norms, Adam shows how they can also be productive of new social forms. A reformation in our attitude about mistakes is thus called for, with potential benefits for arenas from the composition classroom to the public sphere.

Matthew Schneider, a consistently original and productive GA scholar, shows how the resistance to Generative Anthropology is really a fear of GA’s power, a fear rooted in the ambivalence about power after Auschwitz. Tracing power back to the originary scene, he analyzes how the invention of language transformed both the ends and means of, literally, brute force in the animal world, deferring and transforming animal violence into culturally-powerful forms. The increasing complexity of language during our history reflects its transformative power. Schneider offers an incisive reading of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to illustrate the relationship between physical force and cultural complexity. The totalitarian rulers in that novel reduce language to simplistic slogans in order to make resistance literally unthinkable. The explanatory power of Generative Anthropology offers the best opposition to such reductionism, by bringing out the true complexity and variety of human cultural forms.

By way of announcement and testament to GA’s continued momentum, Matthew Schneider and High Point University in North Carolina have generously agreed to host next year’s conference. We certainly look forward to seeing everyone again in 2011.