

Student Resentment and Professorial Desire in Higher Education

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It will likely surprise few university or college teachers to be told that one finds reflected in the modern classroom, and at the heart of the project of education itself, what Eric Gans has recently reminded us is “the essential human ethical problem . . . posed by inequality.”⁽¹⁾ In a world increasingly structured as a market—where exchange between equals establishes value—those being educated can be expected not just to perceive inequality in an arrangement that seems to aspire to deliver value unidirectionally, but to experience with increasing urgency that “sentiment of exclusion from the center,” which Gans offers as a short definition of his key term, “resentment.”⁽²⁾ The analysis that follows focuses on the student-professor relationship and the evolving forms and intensifying consequences of the resentments—but also desires—provoked by its enduringly hierarchical character. We will grapple, that is, with a saliently contemporary form of a fundamental human paradox, and with its resultant pragmatic dilemmas. We will make, indeed, the paradoxical case that the resentment of professorial centrality cannot be eliminated by the abolition, replacement or ignoring of that center, but *can* be productively deferred and redirected by the professor’s modelling of his or her position as one not of power or achieved identity, but of vulnerability, the vulnerability inherent in genuine desire.

Generative Anthropology (or GA) and its mode of “originary thinking” provide the best available heuristic, the simplest, most precisely articulated categories for such a purpose.⁽³⁾ But we will apply these categories, of resentment, desire, centrality and exchange, to widely observed phenomena—as opposed to providing new observations or data. And we will try to remain at a fairly high level of abstraction. Assuming a rich store of experience and principled commitments in its presumptive readership, the argument will avoid the anecdotes, or the expressions of heartburn, to which the topic might lend itself. We know the struggles, and goals, we share.

The inquiry is, however, at least partially motivated by the sense—also frequently recorded, but which it can be no part of our purpose here to prove or quantify—that the attainments of students in higher education, if obviously various, are a frequent disappointment to all

concerned. Still, we have no ambition to contribute to the “university-in-ruins” sub-genre,(4) to lament prevailing norms or identify (and denounce) immediate causes. Instead, we will try to conceptualize the changes affecting university education on what we might call a slower or deeper time scale, while fully conceding the diversity of experience from, say, decade to decade, that other anthropological or historical accounts have typically and properly enough insisted upon.(5) (In the same way we will assume only a North American geographical and cultural locus, and allow others to detail the also substantial diversity therein.) We will thus explore and theorize a situation the inevitability of whose overall ethical character we accept, thereby allowing us to propose a few broadly pragmatic forms of response, contributions, that is, to an understanding of the ethical possibilities available and emergent in our own historical moment. Not for us any whiff of nostalgia for an *ancien regime* of unchallenged, indeed sacred pedagogical authority.

There were doubtless no undergraduates on the originary scene.(6) Even so, we will attempt in these ways to remain as loyal as possible to the minimalism of GA’s new way of thinking.

Resentment can express itself in many forms, as much by tuning out as by overtly rivalrous behaviours, in passive as well as active aggression. GA’s model of ethical development, however, suggests its most significant and indeed productive strategy: to attempt to resolve the impasse of desire in the confrontation with sacred inviolability by converting an asymmetrical relationship to a solitary, public centre into a sequence of individual and equal exchanges. Resentment, that is, aspires to divide centrality, make it plural, distributing its values and benefits through the more dynamic structure most simply referred to as a market. This, GA posits, is the historical trajectory of human culture, the current arc of which the modern student traverses.(7) With widely varying degrees of self-consciousness, he or she “embraces the market.”

Amongst the more common expressions of this embrace one may find the following implicit or explicit claims:

Education is not something public or culturally central—it is a private and particular acquirement for personal advancement.

A professor is a human being like me—and we will both need reminding of this whenever I feel he or she aspires to any more exalted status. I may thus rate-my-professor for his or her intelligence, sexiness, entertainment value, or indeed his or her diligence in responding to my desires.

Above all,

An education is something I purchase. I have a right to—and intend to—get my money's worth.

These claims are widely observed by educators. But other factors affecting the student's relationship to his or her education are often advanced as more significant, putatively having little or nothing to do with resentment, especially personal resentment.⁽⁸⁾ We might briefly survey some of these.

Modern students are lazy. (This can take many forms, and be attributed to various factors, individual or social.)

Is laziness an originary category, like resentment? It is certainly not a category of the non-human world. Does anyone at the origin fail to imitate the sign out of sloth? Or, perhaps more to the point, is the original emission of the sign itself, and its imitation, an indolent evasion of struggle over the object of desire? A failure, even, of what one might call pre-manly will? Is the birth of language and of the human, also the birth of laziness? Perhaps "laziness" is really another way of designating the efficiency of the new route to *sparagmos* and nutrition: ultimately, less energy, fewer calories, are expended.

William Wordsworth and the other Romantics who celebrated "wise passiveness" and indeed "majestic indolence" would probably have been quite receptive to an hypothesis of human origin based on a refusal of effort. They would be seconded by many a modern undergraduate—even those not consciously devoted to the cult of the Big Lebowski. But laziness in the face of mediated appetitive desire surely cannot be unmotivated, even or especially amongst the participants in the originary scene. Are we not obliged to understand it as an expression of resentment? I turn away from the object of desire in my resentment of its impenetrable centrality, and perhaps, but only later, also of those who celebrate their humanity in the sign and their goody-two-shoes suspension of appropriation. Those whose attention makes the object desirable. A pox on your sign and all its works; it's too much trouble; go ahead, dance, point, divide your kill, have your feast—I'm going off by myself to snuffle for roots and berries. When I find one, I'll just eat it.

Doubtless this is very generalized resentment. The case must still be built that its modern counterpart is provoked or can be mitigated by individual professors.

Students are distracted from their education by many other activities: jobs, drinking, sex, sports.

But, as we have noted, resentment of the originary single centre blossoms through history

into the proliferation of rival centres of desire. Any implicit or explicit refusal of a single focus of desire or meaning must be attributed to resentment, as GA uses the term, and the belief that the proliferation of multiple foci is somehow natural and unproblematic is of course a quite recent development of human ethical history. At any rate, since about the time of Dr. Johnson's *Rasselas* a growing minority of the world's young has been making, and demanding the right to make, a "choice of life."⁽⁹⁾ The expectation of a particular destiny awaiting them has over the same period been in steady retreat. And unlike destinies, choices are in principle revocable, if the chooser's desires are rebuffed. Desires for careers can be redirected at least as easily as those for lovers and creeds, from motivations that fit quite comfortably under the umbrella of the term resentment.

The question of jobs—one wishes to be able to say "*other jobs*" but even this student discourse does not tend to respect—is particularly vexed.⁽¹⁰⁾ Perhaps we need here to respond to the objection that outside employment is not so much an expression of resentment as a practical necessity. This may certainly be a more telling argument in some contexts than in others, and for some individual students in any context. But such "needs" are surely still always functions of desires—it may be just as urgent to go partying or to attend a sports tournament. Who is to say? We should certainly eschew easy judgements about the relative value of the desires hailing students from every quarter. The calculations involved are exceedingly difficult to assess from the outside—even a matter like the widely assumed rise in the cost of a university education is more difficult to establish than might be thought.⁽¹¹⁾ Harder still to parse is the disposition of available funds in a typical student budget. It is patently obvious, however, that for many students, at the very least, a more frugal (and studious) lifestyle is at least theoretically possible. But to say this is not in itself to criticise or advocate, nor to dismiss problems of student costs and indebtedness. It should simply be to remind ourselves that desire and thus history finally mediate all human behaviour—true "needs" operate only in the non-human realm. (One "needs" to breathe? But a human being may choose to die.) All putative human needs are qualified by their ends, are needs-in-order-to-attain particular desires. And all human desires are mediated through other human desires, as represented to us. Not, of course, that responding to—choosing between—competing desires or "needs" is easy. It can be exceedingly difficult, wrenching ... *agonising*. And ever more so, as desires proliferate and more and more objects thereof shift out of the prohibited center and into the exchangeable periphery. This is the very *agon* of market life.

Ultimately, higher education too must compete, which is to say, must model desire for its project, and concede to mechanisms beyond its immediate control the sorting of student priorities. And attempts to compete for student time, energy and attention—to induce more study (this quantity also widely reported as having declined)—risk undercutting themselves with too-hasty assumptions about financial hardship or other exigencies. As allowances are made, through a process as inexorable as the mediated nature of desire itself, more allowances are required.

Student regard and desire for the culture represented and provided to them by higher education is displaced by their attraction to other cultures in our diverse society, perhaps popular or “alternative” cultures.(12)

Popular culture GA has long recognised as a playground of resentment and imaginary sparagmatic satisfactions. Indeed, the distinction between the competing sources of socially valuable wisdom here resembles that between high and low art; university education, perhaps, requires the longer term of oscillating attention to remain upon the unconsumable sign(13)—a question to which we will return. The main point is that this distraction, like others, flatters the resentment of a rival upon which it nonetheless depends, offering the more immediate gratifications which are its claim to superiority, but occluding always its tributary character.

That said, it is perhaps merely as a matter of delimitation of our subject that we do not consider here the desires of those who have not presented themselves at the doors of the institution. Genuine rejection or indifference—and we may certainly presume they exist—manifest themselves in absence. Our analysis does not engage questions of recruitment. Thankfully, we may assume in the students who turn up in the classroom some degree of desire for something higher education may be hoped to provide, whatever the resentments and other disincentives that might interfere with the process.

Students turn away from or do not flourish in higher education because of bad or irrelevant teaching.

But this we must identify not simply as Cool Hand Luke’s “failure to communicate”(14) but as an alienation or shortfall of desire for the object putatively centralized, and thus subsume it into one or more of the categories just mentioned. This is not to dismiss it, though. Resentment knows certain things, has its own truths—failures of professorial modelling of desire may certainly be held to account. But qualitative distinctions *are* expressions thereof and are predicated upon the existence of another, rivalrous alternative. Only the concession of absolute perfection to the centre—religious adoration, even—completely constrains the resentment of those subjected, and no one’s faith is so strong now, if ever it was.

Students are inadequately prepared at home or in previous educational institutions and are simply unable to benefit from higher education.

The analysis we attempt here of the professor-student relationship, if valid, will surely be applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to other pedagogical relationships, including that of parent

and child. The problems, and any imaginable remedies, are in certain fundamental ways common. The force of the objection just listed is also not to be denied. But if resentment of the centralities of higher education, including that of the professor, is not a major factor in the struggles of inadequately prepared students, the imperfect management of resentment and desire in earlier educational processes clearly might be. For the purposes of limiting the present argument, we will address only the education of students in post-secondary institutions who are in principle capable of obtaining more of it than they currently are.

All these factors, in short, important as they unquestionably are, may be seen as features or expressions of student resentment of a structure which seems or attempts to centralize other human beings. Thankfully, though, murder of professors is now comparatively rare. Again, following the historical narrative GA has opened for us, the fundamental aspiration of such resentment in our era is merely to convert subjection into reciprocal exchange.[\(15\)](#)

Professors, we should quickly note, are frequent partners in this effort. Modes of deprecation, for them, both of self and of the broader project, are various. Open-neck shirts and jeans, an unthreateningly average command of language, the use of colloquialisms, are obvious examples of salves to or defences against anticipated resentment of the fact that one stands solitary at the front of the room, while the other groups in a range of seats before and below; that one grades what the other submits. Another, more explicit strategy of accommodation is for professors to enter into a resentment they assume is common to both groups. To express or demonstrate resentment of, for example, the university, the discipline, culture or other putative usurpers of centrality. Even professors whose self-understanding is as opponents of “the market” may assume this posture, whose widespread imitation in every form in fact *constitutes* the market. It is worth reminding ourselves, that is, that resentment is the market’s life-blood. Every exchange dethrones a tyranny, an erstwhile monopoly on desire.

Such professorial efforts might be critiqued as attempts to *be* students, to evade the opprobrium of power or responsibility in a victimary age.[\(16\)](#) But we must surely have some sympathy for a strategy that is everywhere adopted in the market world—and commercial advertising, for example, is generally much more abject. It must clearly respond to a genuine challenge. Such behaviours, taken broadly, can even be thought of as a form of politeness, itself a doubtless indispensable hedge against resentment. All politeness apologises for hierarchy—the emission of the first sign may even be thought of as the first act of politeness.[\(17\)](#) The question, really, in the current instance as ever, is only whether any of these tactics are *effective* responses to resentment—effectiveness here to be measured in terms of student educational success. And this may be doubted, given the outcomes we allude to above.

The educational institutions themselves also strategically accommodate resentment’s aspirations—here we are on ground so familiar that we should perhaps vacate it quickly,

despite the temptation to bolster our own solidarity through a resentful critique of university administrations or their governmental and private sponsors. To restrict ourselves for the moment, though, to the student-professor relationship, such accommodation proceeds by communicating to both parties the adoption of a principle of exchange. This is done through such devices as student evaluation questionnaires, which ask, for example, “how well the instructor conveys the material.”(18) Such questions can be mocked as invoking a kind of industrial operation involving hatches, belts and a central spout, but its underlying point is that higher education is now exchange, its effectiveness to be measured and its values established through market processes. Indeed, the very provision of teaching evaluations aspires primarily to accommodate, soothe or flatter resentment and only secondarily—and distantly so—to improve pedagogical practice or detect professorial malfeasance. If we can grade you, *you* can grade us. How effectively the practice achieves either goal is, again, another matter.

Let us say then that we have, taken together, what we might call a posture, involving, for all participants, the expression, recognition and even facilitation of student resentment. Adopting this posture, we may add, is the truest or most basic sense in which higher education adapts itself to the market. For all that it must meet some evolving requirement of our situation, however, there are a number of problems with this response, and these too have been widely noted.

Tuition, for example, does not generally pay for all of an education.(19) The exchange is by no means reciprocal, at least in the ways it is hopefully imagined or resentfully required to be. Taxpayers who themselves, or whose children will never attend the university help fund it, as do donors. Indeed, the funding of higher education conforms much more closely to the system of the gift as Marcel Mauss describes it.(20) It is a delayed and distributed reciprocity, not a direct exchange. Furthermore, public resentment of students treating their gift *as* an exchange or purchase is an active factor here, helping to lead, for example, to the raising of tuition rates, which in turn has the perverse effect of pushing students more fully into the *de facto* market, drawing still more of their time and energy away from study. Admittedly, this is a complex situation, with many variables and interlocking factors, as well as considerable differences amongst institutions and jurisdictions. Suffice it to say, for present purposes, that a student in the present day in North America does not exchange value his or her own for an education entirely paid for by such contributions, at least not in the same way that he or she might later purchase a house or a car or a vacation.

Another problem is that the good the student arguably most needs to obtain, ostensibly through exchange, is precisely the ability to judge whether the exchange is indeed good or worthwhile. This leads to premature assessments of the process, often truncating essential further efforts. An educated judgement is required to judge an education.

But perhaps the most signal difficulty is that the resentments fostered by the market create

various kinds of static or feedback which interfere with education, even with the transfer of inert “material,” urging upon students a prioritization of difference over and above emulative adoption of the means to knowledge. Difference, identity, is at stake with every answer given, every expression ventured. Anger or diminished motivation and energy is experienced by students whose efforts and opinions are not treated with the respect their presumptive equality warrants.(21) Grades like this professor gives are no way to treat a customer. Or an equal. What often follows is the kind of cynical passivity which dully and repeatedly asks “what the professor wants,” as this is the price to be paid—but which is of course not at all the same as actually wanting what the professor wants.(22) Certain kinds of hard but uninspired and ultimately unproductive work, indeed, can even be seen as a form of passive aggression, that the historian of undergraduate life Helen Horowitz does not hesitate to attribute explicitly to “resentment.” (23)

Another way to put all this might be to suggest that the market model can tend to foster a premature or over-intense desire for identity, a supposed “need,”(24) compromising the openness required for learning. We might here recall René Girard’s perilously zero-sum conceptualization of the model-subject relationship. The problem could be expressed thus: one must be a subject to learn, but only models prosper in the market. Identity, as achieved desire, is the enemy of desire, of desire for knowledge, among other things. Identity, if it might be put it this way, can be a form of the very ignorance which education seeks to discomfit or disrupt—and the market alluringly offers and purveys and then requires identity above all.

Identity is what models possess and subjects desire. Or, it is a form of “firstness,” in the sense proposed by Adam Katz,(25) at least as experienced by the subject, whose subjection must feel like a kind of inchoateness, or incoherence, a fearful condition when surrounded by the apparently achieved identities that beckon mimetically on all sides. Beckon, challenge ... even mock. Student resentment may in particular focus on the apparently full and achieved identity of the professor, not least in that he or she has that paramount attribute of market identity, a job, and then spill over into a corollary contempt for the hapless lower order of adjuncts, part-timers and TAs. *These* people, already so very little different, have the effrontery to demand I defer my aspiration to have what they have, to be what they are!

Educators sometimes respond to such challenges by suggesting that students are indeed being offered an identity, the identity of the educated person. But students, once caught up in the toils of rivalry, are quick to see that this is in fact only a *future* identity, and a doubtful one at that. We are back to the logic of the gift, which the market urges students to reject in favour of more immediate and verifiable exchange. It is an “identity” of *becoming*, not of being. And I am (or need to be) someone already! And indeed, other aspects of my culture constantly reinforce and insist upon this claim.(26)

One can well imagine such difficulties becoming more intractable the more “student-centred” education becomes—indeed, this slogan is another good example of the kind of reinforcement referred to above. We will return to it. The institution and then the professor risk the losing gambit of trying to distinguish and accommodate identities which are various, unformed, and almost by definition shifting and unsatisfiable—above all, which respond to overt attempts to identify or fix them by proliferating their differences.(27) The strategy, that is, falls into the feedback loop of desires and resentments, or what Girard calls mimetic rivalry. For the professor, the danger is obviously of self-consciousness, a term we may define as the distracting awareness or fear that our desires are subjecting us, that our model does not in fact derive them from us, or even share them naturally. Indeed, its paradoxical essence is a consciousness of others over and above the self, rather than vice-versa as the term might suggest. It is a preoccupying consciousness (justified or not) of the disconcertingly unaffected gaze of the other.(28) Unselfconscious desires even if always mediated are not experienced as such, or at any rate operate in that relation of defined distance from the model which Girard calls “external” mediation. (Don Quixote’s desire to be like Amadis de Gaul, in Girard’s famous example, is unselfconscious in this latter sense. He does not feel Amadis—or, really, anyone else—gazing at him. Hence the charm of such desire, its pleasing naivety.) The professor who might unselfconsciously desire, say, knowledge, or the improvement of society through education, when too much centred upon the student falls under pressure to abandon such desires in order to preserve cool, to protect him- or herself from subjection to a classroom full of other human beings with whom he or she has deliberately—we may even say perversely—entered into rivalry, into Girard’s “internal” mediation.(29)

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Not of course that professors are entirely without means of mitigating all these problems, which many are to different degrees successful at doing—means often involving techniques to deceive or redirect resentment into pursuing ends which resentment did not itself originate. But, again, current outcomes, even with the use of such tactics, are still, and are generally felt to be, inconsistent and far from fully satisfactory.

As this is a version, however, of the largest human problem, “the unending moral problem ... of hierarchy,”(30) let us see if we can approach it as GA approaches the latter. How, for example, might Katz’s concept of “firstness” be applied to the pedagogical situation?

We do this not merely for a justification of the centrality of the professor, a tactical ethical appeal to the longer strategies of morality. We also seek pragmatic ways in which such a conceptualization of the relationship might help sway hearts, minds and practices of both students and professors in order to further improve short- and long-term outcomes for all, in the interest of the greatest of reciprocities, a human flourishing beyond the mortal welfare of any of the immediate participants.

The hierarchical structure of the professor-student relationship, then, let us designate an example of firstness, whose functionality is predicated on its eventual dissolution into enhanced equality—and indeed, as such outcomes go, sooner rather than later. Not for our students the millennia that Gans posits between the originary scene and the full adoption by women of the powers of language.(31) Students in the fraction of a single lifetime may themselves become professors, and may certainly out-earn them in any case.

Even so, our first observation must be that *all* firstness will now be promptly and openly tested by resentment. We must eschew any response which merely deplores this fundamental feature of modernity: again, no nostalgia, no protests of the “is-nothing-sacred?” variety. As the present author has argued elsewhere,(32) resentment at bottom is, or at least poses, a question: why you and not me? Culture’s job is the provision of at least temporarily adequate answers, an adequacy verified only by their efficacy with the resentful questioner(s). Only, that is, by history. Higher education must participate in history. GA, we might also note, in the train of democracy, emerges historically as the human self-consciousness which could frame the relationship of resenter and resented in such terms. Self-consciousness, in this collective sense, means an awareness that our desires and resentments are indeed subjected to a centrality which they have themselves created—which I take to be the core chastening that the erstwhile Romantic, humanity, must derive from GA. At any rate, both democracy and GA should make outmoded such categories as heresy or even duty, and mandate responses—intelligible, respectful, implicitly egalitarian *answers*—rather than various forms of denial or suppression. The only heresies ought now to be those postures which attract no attention and yield no centrality, the only duties those whose performance is exchanged for some form of compensation—calls for self-sacrifice, generalized appeals to a sacred centre, theological, national, or of whatever provenance, are to be greeted with skepticism. We *do* ask what our country can do for us. “Values” are an attribute of identity, and thus not to be imposed. We resent any such attempt. We must be *persuaded*, heart and mind, shown *why*. We may be fooled some of the time, but not all of us, not all of the time.

One of the most significant corollaries of GA is surely that *other* means of managing or supposedly stifling resentment, of the varieties grimly foreseen by modern pessimists—Orwellian, Stalinist or Maoist, Nationalist, Corporatist, and so forth, from the control of minds to the punishment of bodies—are to be viewed with a skepticism anchored in the unity of the human, the universality of resentment, and the long human history of firstness bearing the fruits of eventual reciprocity. Still, it must be granted that nothing in the originary hypothesis *requires* this history to continue indefinitely. The human project remains contingent,(33) which of course gives efforts like the current paper their point.

Those who go first, it might also be useful here to remind ourselves, do not necessarily do so—and indeed it would impractical to require them to do so—out of any deliberate altruism or superiority of effort for the common good. Nor is all centrality associated with a

productive firstness. Maybe the Big Man did work harder than everyone else ... for a while. But maybe his son didn't. And his lazy grandsons got out the whips. Resentment sees how centrality corrupts, sees this through its own angry longings. Sometimes only resentment-fuelled challenge, even violent challenge, eventually permits a firstness to produce a higher form of equality. We might hope that if GA permeated our culture's understanding a certain consciousness of how the process works would moderate some of its fury. But the Big Men of modernity, those going first, whatever their motivations and degree of self-awareness, would still need to get ever better at explaining *why* they should be permitted their interval of centrality. At answering the questions of resentment. And answering them well—as duplicitous fobbing-off or self-righteous just-so stories will buy less and less respite from resentment and its various threats.

An understanding of such modern realities must inform any attempt to transcend the impasse of resentment in higher education. Reading a lecture on the benefits to students of their submission for the time being to hierarchy—of self-stifling their resentments—will not do. This is not the sort of answer required, not indeed the real answer. One of GA's debts to mimetic theory is the idea of the potent trend towards what Girard called metaphysical desire, the drift of desire away from the object and towards the model. While professors of good faith will strive to shift desire back toward objects—to “abolish” their firstness in a “collective equality” (34) of shared desire for some external good—they will deceive themselves if they think this can be managed by mere patience of explanation or intelligibility of instruction, important as these are.

This is only to say that modelling is as ineluctable as desire is mimetic, and that education is fundamentally the mobilization of desire after particular human models. The particularity is really the only issue worth speaking of. Without desire, nothing is possible for students—the single most important factor in their failure, when they do fail and to the degree they do, is a shortfall of usefully focussed desire. (35) Broadly speaking, we claim here the primary importance of professors modelling a desire for specific kinds of knowledge over and above other kinds of goods in the market. Admittedly, to say this does not take us very far—it is, indeed, close to platitude, the widely shared goal of most educators. We must bear in mind Gans's recent reminder that GA cannot “comport a value system,” (36) and note that the present argument only asks how better to realize objectives upon which a consensus already exists. It does not invent them—another reason why it makes sense to limit our focus here to the professor-student relationship, as a means of achieving established objectives. Students participate in forming this consensus, of course. Their voluntary presence in the classroom we again take as indicating at least tacit acceptance of the same objectives, even where their acceptance is only expressed in the paradoxical homage of resentment or *soi-disant* “subversion” or “re-purposing.”

Originary analysis, however, may help us understand our shared goals better. We may begin, again, with the Girardian formulation. Higher education, thus conceived, requires the

resistance to, the beating back of metaphysical desire. Girard calls this *askesis*, a renunciation of rivalry with the model, a retreat indeed from internal to external mediation, the abandonment of any aspiration to the model's position. Clearly, some form of renunciation is what we are attempting to imagine in our chosen context.

Unlike Girard, however, because our pragmatic is institutional rather than individual, we are not here initially oriented towards the subject. That is, we can hardly expect such a renunciation to begin with our students, and it does little good merely to call for it. It is more likely a hoped-for product of their education, than a plausible pre-requisite. Can we realistically ask of the model, the professor, then, such heroic self-sacrifice? To eschew, even undermine any tendency to offer him- or herself up *as* a model of achieved identity, in favour of presenting the spectacle of one deeply desirous, not desirable, him- or herself? Can we ask for this kind of firstness?

If, indeed, desire is the enemy of identity and identity the freedom from desire, the professor it must surely be who first sacrifices the personal stability of identity to the desire he or she models for students. It is the professor who must model the heroic endurance of uncertainties, of incompleteness, so opposite from what the neophyte participant in the market craves. It might even be conceptualized as a kind of blowing or losing or recklessly throwing away of one's cool. A professor who is hot rather than cool, one might hope, offers a very different model from others in the market. So we might put it, in these rather McLuhanesque terms—though not, of course, much in the way McLuhan himself used them.

If the professor does betray what we might call an altruistic vulnerability-in-desire and abandons the zero-sum struggle for identity, we might say he or she does so in testimony to and repetition of the originary and fundamental acknowledgement of human vulnerability, which in like fashion abandons the struggle for dominance in favour of the peace granted by the sign. And does it first, before any form of appropriation, and ahead of any of the attendant circle of warily hungering students. Because that peace must come first. Peace makes possible the *sparagmos* and its satisfactions, including, at length, the creation of identity. The human difference from the animal world, we would thus remind ourselves, is this priority, this sequence. Here we begin to apply the characteristic GA enhancement of Girard. The professor who models this vulnerability, this incompleteness, rather than the coolness or freedom from desire that the *sparagmos* itself offers, performs what we might think of as education because he or she models, teaches, the all-enabling deferral, the posture of contemplation of the sign above that of consumption of the object. [\(37\)](#)

From this perspective, the professorial function is to foster student responsiveness to the desires that are inherent *in* knowledge—knowledge itself, which must be represented, being the immortal form of otherwise evanescent human desire. Knowledge, professors must demonstrate, is really the *sign*, even if students *think* it is the object designated and the stuff of the feast. Even to “obtain” knowledge is ultimately to imitate and continue the

desires of others, even if such knowledge is initially experienced as a personal possession, a conquest. The way, perhaps, even the originary sign initially was. It is, though, a *virtual* possession, and only has value because of the desires of others. It cannot finally be consumed or appropriated—only shared or imitated. This is to say, perhaps, to put it back into Girardian terms, and as Gans has in other contexts pointed out, that the human relationship to the sign is “externally mediated.” Higher education, we hardly need add, is of course rife with internal mediation and rivalry—but these are rivalries amongst persons. There cannot be rivalry with the sign any more than there can truly be with God, and the collective sign or knowledge is education’s god. The professor’s priestly function is to try to direct attention back toward higher things.

He or she does this primarily by directing his or her own attention thither, to the exclusion of other, more immediately beckoning rewards. The authenticity of this attentiveness is perhaps not most reliably witnessed through protestations of love and desire, however, but through attained knowledge, the eloquent, unselfconscious testimony of long devotion. Here, too, is one often-acceptable answer to the question of resentment. Why are you at the centre and not me? Because I know things that you don’t.

Still, even great knowledge can be worn in different ways. If *some* knowledge is not the spur to attaining *more* it falls back into the attributes of an identity, an object for consumption, not the evidence of an ongoing desire. Such modelling, that is, can only be effective when adopted in perfect sincerity—no tactically adopted posture will be proof against the heightened alertness to desire in the market world, and amongst those, the young, most intensely and continuously concerned with distinguishing the faked from the genuine. The rigours of this requirement might render it rare enough in practice. But even where one could imagine it, surely no individual professor’s modelling of desire can be expected to be determinant for very many students, no matter how intense, sincere or openly betrayed. Saints are perhaps a necessary but insufficient component of any faith—and by a similar measure, while some smaller group of students may be the truly converted, the relative improvement of the broader mass must still be aimed for. The perfect must be made the *ally* of the good, or at least, of the better.

Somewhat less demanding ascetic practices, more likely to be required of and adopted by the professoriate generally, might yet be only roughly of the kind just described, and still be valuable. More of this anon. The broad goal of any such practices, though, would always be to tune down the static of resentment sufficiently to allow the desirability of the object to swim back into view, or not be entirely displaced in the first place. Because, again, *this* putatively distinct object—knowledge—contains within it, or channels, a vast reservoir of human desire. To be educated is to be energized, moved, by this great power, to be shifted from one trajectory into another by the gravitational pull of its immense mass.

The power to move is also in the market, of course. But the market, like exchange itself, is a

phenomenon of a given moment, even if it operates now across considerable global space, whereas human knowledge extends through both space and time. So perhaps, to continue the religious analogy a moment longer, the goal of higher education for the many can be thought of as merely to encourage what is humbly called “longer-term thinking.” And if this risks reducing its methodology to dangling a crude promise of an eventually superior capacity to appropriate, on the model of pie in the sky when you die, doubtless this is better than the model of an exchange of tuition fees for an immediately deployable credential to be redeemed forthwith in the job market. And, again, we can’t all be saints.

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Our analysis, then, surely suggests that professors must respect students as participants in the market, must remain unshocked by this, and not underestimate the potency of the rival powers pulling them towards other orbits. It is anthropologically naive to think students ought, by themselves, to understand their predicament in these terms, or to know better. To strive to educate them more effectively is not at bottom to “resist the market” but to compete more effectively within it.

But in attempting to win this competition it is unhelpful for professors to flatter resentment at the expense of the higher value of the peace brought by knowledge. To avoid doing this, they need as much as possible to ignore or be insulated from the feedback, not be drawn into a struggle over identity. Professorial modelling should not be of a persona, we might say. It should be of a desire for knowledge, whose productivity can and indeed must be displayed through a demonstrated accumulation of it—professors should know things. Not just different things than their students know. More and more valuable things. By attending first and above all to the signs that *are* knowledge, they should model the beauty of those things, not the coolness of knowing them.

If, however, professorial firstness is thus ultimately to be embraced and not abandoned or apologised for, it must also be constantly leavened with an explicit humility. *This* firstness, its posture must make clear, is itself actually a “secondness.” After the originary scene, all human sign-creation is secondary, a repetition, gesturing to that which has already taken precedence. While it may be that all goods traded in the market—from cars and foods to houses and holidays—are to be thought of as signs, the difference with education, and knowledge, is in this explicitness. Knowledge really is *only* signs—and the askesis modelled by the professor should remind students of this.

Or, let us say again, the transaction between professor and student more closely resembles a Maussian gift than it does a market exchange.[\(38\)](#) It is the first phase of a delayed reciprocity. The professor gives, not just knowledge, but the modelled means of desiring and receiving it, as a gift whose anticipated return is distributed outward across space and generational time.

This latter formulation does evoke the parallel situation of parent and child. The relation between professor and student, however, must be to a crucial degree more impersonal—as measured by the primacy of the professor’s commitment to the external good of knowledge. The professorial posture is thus not, in this sense, student-centred,⁽³⁹⁾ and indeed, students are unlikely truly to want it to be. In seeking identities in the market, students for the most part aspire to an emancipation from this kind of attention, which they rightly sense is at bottom not egalitarian. They want no more parents—or, rather, they now typically want parents to merge into the continuum of friends and rivals, partners in exchange. But with parents, as perhaps ideally with professors, the most basic feature of the ongoing relationship is latent, only overlaid by such superficial transformations. We speak here, again, of deferral: the gift does eventually establish a relationship of equality, but does so through the requirement it contains.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Only when that requirement is fulfilled, is equality realised.

Practical corollaries of these points might be gathered together under the alternate slogan “knowledge-centred education.”⁽⁴¹⁾ They might include an emphasis on the continued professional coupling of research and teaching both in preparation for and during a teaching career, the clear subordination of student evaluation and the resultant Faculty of Education style “training” for professors to primary research achievement as criteria for measuring performance, and a willingness to countenance measurements of student success along broader and longer-term scales of human possibility, as opposed to the tactical shorter-term measurements of market exchange. Indeed, ultimately, students and professors should be evaluated by the same criteria, for the same kind of achievements.

Beyond this the present exploration should perhaps not go, except to note that all such emphases prioritize the sign—and take this as an invitation to return to, and conclude with, originary analysis. Evidently enough, to value deferral is to direct attention to the sign as opposed to the appetitive object which it designates. The most significant of all our corollaries probably has to do with the specific character of the attentiveness our recommended pedagogy may seek to foster. That the classroom is a very particular “scene of joint attention”⁽⁴²⁾ seems obvious. And that its kind of attention is purchased through a deferral of appropriation would appear equally fundamental—a restatement of venerable educational principles in originary terms. But what may perhaps be usefully added now is the way the kind of analysis attempted here makes higher education proximate to what GA has conceptualized as the aesthetic. That is, to the extended or privileged attention to the sign, in the oscillation between sign and object. We touched briefly on the beauty of knowledge above. But, to take a final and perhaps more troubling step further, to the extent we speak of or aspire to a “higher” education we also align our goals and procedures with those of “high culture,” as against those of popular culture.

This distinction, for GA, is of course only one of degree, or of emphasis. In the oscillatory aesthetic experience “the moment of [high] art looks back to the renunciation of appetite

implicit in the sign, whereas that of entertainment looks forward to the appetitive satisfaction of the communal feast which will follow.”(43) Both phases are integral to any aesthetic experience, but the longer or more intensely such an experience looks “back” or “forward,” attends to the formal qualities of the sign or imagines the consummation of the desires that sign awakens, the more clearly we may speak of high or popular art. This is far from an isolated insight, and is to be found in different forms in many other commentators—one might cite Frank Kermode’s well-known distinction between “spiritual and carnal reading.”(44)

While higher education rightly assumes that everything can and should be studied, very much including popular culture, the mode of attention it requires remains that characteristic of high culture. To acknowledge this is, of course, to risk reawakening venerable resentments of the privileges associated with that culture. But to answer *these* resentments the case must be made—to professors as well as to students of any discipline—that the core value to be preserved from that culture is a specific kind of attentiveness. This, high art and higher education are best positioned to model. The objective is reducible, even, to the idea of *lengthening* attention span, as the fundamental action education performs. Humanity itself, an originary re-statement of the same principle might claim, is the product of education. Indeed, of one “lesson” above all, repeated in an infinite variety of modes and forms. The attention suddenly shared between the object of desire and its sign—the lengthening of that attention over the crucial original interval of deferral—taught the profound lesson of the *sparagmos*.(45) This is still the good exchanged, the benefit purchased, the gift bestowed, less through the payment of tuition fees than in the energy and time and labour expended by students, and modelled to them by true teachers.

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A coda.

To lengthen attention span is very certainly also to strengthen *memory*—a dangerously eroding faculty amongst students now entering institutions of higher education. The originary scene’s repetition as ritual introduced and made revolutionary use of the faculty of memory. As one might also phrase it, the temporal dimension of the scene—the moment of contemplation of the sign—allowed a vertical escape from the hitherto tyrannous horizontality of time.

Thus memory, in a paradox perhaps Wordsworth most famously explored in English, enables what that poet called intimations of immortality, of futurity, of potentiality. If knowledge is not an object but the sign of desire, to pursue it is by definition to defer satisfaction, in the name of something greater and more fundamental to the fullness of human life. As he put it in a famous passage,

Our destiny, our being's heart and home
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.
Under such banners militant, the soul
Seeks for no trophies, struggles for no spoils
That may attest her prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward,
Strong in herself, and in beatitude
That hides her, like the mighty flood of Nile
Poured from his fount of Abyssinian clouds
To fertilize the whole Egyptian plain.(46)

Notes

1. "Abraham's Three Firsts," *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* no. 435, December 30, 2012, <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw435.htm>. (back)
2. "The Market and Resentment (1)," *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* no. 286, June 28, 2003, <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw286.htm>. (back)
3. We will also make some use of GA's important progenitor, the "mimetic theory" of René Girard, which we for convenience subsume here. (back)
4. After a prominent contribution to the species, Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). (back)
5. Amongst others, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1987) provides a particularly rich narrative. Still, for all that changes, she concedes that, for example, "Anger" has been "the characteristic mode of college professors" in response to their students from the late eighteenth century to her own present day (xi)—and no doubt been fulsomely returned. Pedagogical theory, we might say, has yet to find a means of educating without centrality, or inoculating that centrality against resentment. (back)
6. For a description of the GA concept of the originary scene and other basic features of the hypothesis, see <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/gaintro.htm>. Very briefly, on the foundational human scene, a gesture of appropriation is aborted and converted to a sign, which is then imitated. This happens once, at the moment of human origin, and is then repeated in ritual form. Not that more secular re-enactments haven't been attempted. In bygone days, for

example, engineering students annually “sacrificed a virgin” before Henry Moore’s modernist sculpture of “The Archer” in Toronto’s Nathan Phillips Square. Supposing that he or she *was* a virgin, this did perhaps approximate some kind of deferral of appropriation on the part of these aspiring proto-humans. Perhaps, as Stacey Meeker has suggested to the author, there were *only* undergraduates on the scene. ([back](#))

7. “Human history may be described as the never-completable transition from the ritual system of distribution ... to the market system, where no central authority is necessary to mediate between human beings beyond the universal human order of representation through signs.” Eric Gans, “The Free Market,” *Chronicles of Love and Resentment*, no. 34, March 16, 1996, <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw34>. ([back](#))

8. Rebekah Nathan, in her illuminating account of a year spent doing anthropological field work amongst undergraduates at a twenty-first-century university, makes this point. She sees little value, for example, in increasing contact time between professors and students, citing her own observations and surveys of student opinion that rated the “faculty” as of low importance generally to the student experience. This is doubtless a useful chastening—we must ask why she might have obtained such results, and whether and how professors might gain or regain some purchase on the desires of their students. *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 140. ([back](#))

9. *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, 1759. The great English critic and moralist concluded his early account of the modern career search with a rejection of the enterprise and an affirmation of the superior value of the “choice of eternity.” This aspect of the work has not caught on so well. ([back](#))

10. “School,” must generally now be made to accommodate, to work *around* “my job.” ([back](#))

11. Costs, and rewards, have clearly risen above the rate of inflation for professional degrees. Whereas, at least in the Canadian context, it is far from self-evident that a degree in the Humanities costs more in constant dollars in the 2010s than it did in, say, the 1960s. What count as necessary expenses while pursuing the degree has obviously also changed. ([back](#))

12. This, clearly enough, is the problem of “relevance,” in one of its forms. Relevance can only ever be established, it might be worth remembering here, by asking and answering the question, “whose desires”? And remembering that desires are mimetic. ([back](#))

13. In the originary scene, to continue a brief introduction for those not versed in GA, human attention “oscillates” between the sign and the object of desire it designates, between the “vertical” axis of transcendence and the “horizontal” one of appropriation. The aesthetic effect is that part of oscillating attention which is devoted to the sign, and this in

turn may oscillate between attention to the formal qualities of the sign and the imagined gratifications of appropriation, the *sparagmos* or feast which concludes the scene. The distinction then, between high and popular art, is one of the duration or intensity of attention devoted to the two poles, with high art more devoted to the form of the sign and popular art to the imaginary consummation. See Eric Gans, *Originary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 171ff. ([back](#))

14. The climactic line of the 1967 film classic of the same name. The bitterly anti-authoritarian ironies of the cinematic context may certainly be allowed here. ([back](#))

15. From laziness—which resentfully strikes a personally chosen “deal” with the providers of presumptively empty benefits concerning the level of energies the student in question is prepared to exert in order to obtain them—to the most frenetic devotion to other, competing gods whose promised returns seem sweeter, the operations are finally all of the same basic character. ([back](#))

16. For an introduction to “Victimary Culture,” see *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* no. 40, April 27, 1996, <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/view40.htm>. ([back](#))

17. I am sorry, implies the first sign, to have presumed I might be the first to eat this, *this*, this *very* desirable morsel. That I am impelled to this archaic form of humility out of the fear that the rest of you will tear me apart does not change its fundamental character. ([back](#))

18. This is from the author’s own institution, the University of Ottawa. ([back](#))

19. The proportion clearly varies, but in Canada, for example, although it has risen in recent decades, the percentage of the cost of educating a student provided by his or her tuition never exceeds about 45%. <http://www.ousa.ca/dev/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Tuition.pdf> The for-profit, online universities are doubtless an exception to this principle, but their current share of the market remains very small. ([back](#))

20. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, 1924. Trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Norton, 1990). ([back](#))

21. The promise of equality is made, in GA’s hypothesis, on the originary scene, in the sharing of the significance of the first sign. All subsequent arrogation of centrality, from the “firstness” of the individual to emit that sign, through the long train of hierarchical social arrangements thrown up by the ethical development of humanity, is ultimately a usurpation, which must be justified to resentment. GA’s conception of the never-to-be-complete transition from ritual to market social structure implies, again, an intensification of that resentment and the concomitant pressure on those in the center, very much including professors, either to justify or abandon their claim to it. ([back](#))

22. Anthropologist Michael Moffat interestingly reflects on what he calls “Undergraduate Cynical,” noting how it is “just as mandatory and just as coercive as other forms of discourse” but that for this very reason must be assumed, “performed” by students amongst their peers. This might remind us of the contingent and malleable character of the desires for which professors compete, and of the uncertain territory we enter when we attempt to know and adjust ourselves to these desires, rather than more or less obliviously model the desires we ourselves feel. Moffat gestures to, if he does not really accept, the parallel difficulty with using any sort of empirical approach to measure or even really detect the sincerity of student resentment. *Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 90-91. ([back](#))

23. Horowitz identifies the first appearance of the phenomenon of “grinding.... Confronted with the awesome weight of faculty power, early-nineteenth century collegians turned from open rebellion to the covert war of the classroom. The New Outsiders [of the late twentieth century] merely retreat to a deeper cover. Blocked from a frontal or even side attack, they do an end run. They create the culture of grinding.... They must check any signs of open rebellion, even to the point of not allowing themselves to feel it.” *Campus Life*, 269. ([back](#))

24. As we note above, the category, for human beings, must be treated with skepticism. The wholesale conversion of desires into “needs” in pursuit of various kinds of market benefit is, however, too large a story to do more than gesture to here. ([back](#))

25. See “Remembering Amalek: 9/11 and Generative Thinking” and many other references. <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1002/amalek.htm>. ([back](#))

26. “You gotta be who you gotta be!” exclaims a poster, directed at the young. Its authors clearly imagine their slogan to be emancipatory, beckoning towards freedom from desire in a paradise of achieved and embraced difference. But it surely communicates even more strongly the entirely unfree imperative to secure, defend and impose upon others such difference. You “gotta” do this, indeed. This also from Canada, part of an endless series of government campaigns to improve popular behaviour, following the diagnoses of our shortcomings and theories for their remedy current in the social sciences. Others are aimed at alcohol consumption, domestic violence, and so forth. This one, with surely rather exceptional naivety, imagines it can induce the young to follow their own clean-living natural urges and reject the insidious and artificial modelling of drug-use and other vices. Somewhere in its ancestry is David Riesman’s discovery that the great problem with modern society is that its people are “other-directed.” *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950. ([back](#))

27. We do not, of course, imagine by this to be able to return to thinking of students as “blank slates” upon which anything may be written, by professors—to deny the existence, as it were, of DNA. But the post-modern valuation of difference, with its concomitant claims of

social, economic and historical victimhood, has surely understated the malleability of the human individual in the interest of a political program. Implicitly denying the power of mimetic desire, this is one of the romantic illusions denounced by Girard. ([back](#))

28. One result of this problem is the adoption by the professor of various routines or practices which release him or her from the discomfort by imposing a persona upon students. For example, as Peter Schwenger reminds us, professors become skilled “performers” who practise an “erotics of instruction... in which the more my energies ... expand, the more those of my students contract into an appreciative but ultimately passive spectatorship.” “Chili Pepper Pedagogy” *English Studies in Canada* 31.4 (December 2005), 30-31. This a very clear description of the rivalry over identity, in which the professor emerges as a clear victor, and education loses. ([back](#))

29. A shameful instance insists upon itself—perhaps we may excuse it because it is an anecdote about a professor, not a student. Said professor—and mind you, this was in Europe and in the previous century—returned a mathematics test in which no errors were noted, with a grade substantially below 100%. The student, understandably, was curious to know why this might be, if everything was right. “This grade,” she was told, “represents how much you know, by comparison to what I know.” ([back](#))

30. Eric Gans, “Originary Ethics II - Firstness and Hierarchy,” *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* no. 432, September 22, 2012, <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw432.htm>. ([back](#))

31. “Originary Feminism,” *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* no. 419, February 11, 2012, <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw419.htm>. ([back](#))

32. *Lord Byron and the History of Desire* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 138. ([back](#))

33. A perspective which also informs Gans’ “Originary Ethics II,” cited above. ([back](#))

34. “Originary Ethics II,” cited above. ([back](#))

35. The techniques of transferring material are then less to the point: once one has desire, and the attention span and memory it fosters, one can perhaps get material anywhere, including online. This might lead one to wonder at the high drop-out rates and the lack of truly notable success thus far experienced by online course offerings in higher education. The question certainly needs further study, but might it be speculated that the lack of the immediate bodily presence of the professor mutes his or her capacity to model desire? Mind you, screen images, in cinema, have exerted a powerful capacity to attract desire, to say the least. ([back](#))

36. “Originary Ethics II,” cited above. [\(back\)](#)

37. This posture is perhaps not easily distinguished—but one must—from uncertainty and wavering self-confidence, which of course are very poor modelling devices. Perhaps what would be ideal is the model who could have been cool, but isn’t. Who, like Socrates in his profession of knowing only his ignorance, demonstrates every qualification for a superiority he or she is nonetheless compelled not fully to exploit, subjected as he or she is to yet other models and other desires. An identity which risks identity. [\(back\)](#)

38. Not every element of Mauss’s formulation pertains, and certainly the donor’s ability to exert the control Mauss saw in “archaic” societies has weakened. Even parental gifts, of care and other legacies, may now quite easily go unreciprocated, for all that memoirists and novelists speak darkly of the lingering power of their progenitors, their capacity for inducing sentiments of culpability and so forth, the blindingly obvious change of modernity is in its elders’ now feeble hold on their own and others’ young. [\(back\)](#)

39. The phrase can of course mean many things. Discussion at GASC VII for example connected it with a pedagogical practice which stressed the acceptance of student efforts—however flawed by relation to established norms—as foundational of further achievement. Such an approach is certainly to be lauded when effective. But we might say that the professor taking it models an enthusiasm for the development of new knowledge, a desiring openness for it. What the technique presumably does not say is that *because* the student produced something, it is of value—any more than it says it is for the same reason worthless. In this sense, might the better phrasing be “education-centered”? [\(back\)](#)

40. “What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?” *The Gift*, 3. [\(back\)](#)

41. This phrase has also been used by Roger Scruton, with whose formulation the present argument shares some perspectives, but from which it also differs in signal ways. “True teachers do not provide knowledge as a benefit to their pupils; they treat their pupils as a benefit to knowledge. Of course they love their pupils, but they love knowledge more. And their over-riding concern is to pass on that knowledge by lodging it in brains that will last longer than their own. Their methods are not ‘child-centered’ but ‘knowledge-centered’....” *Culture Counts: Faith and Feeling in a World Besieged* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007), 29. The present argument does not require so instrumental an approach, for example, and its analysis and proposals hopefully do tend directly toward the betterment of students. Our GA-inflected understanding of knowledge as desire-in-the-sign means that the pedagogy we promote aims not at transmission of something fixed in character, but at fostering a capacity to respond to that desire. [\(back\)](#)

42. The phrase is that of Michael Tomasello. See Richard van Oort, “Imitation and Human Ontogeny: Michael Tomasello and the Scene of Joint Attention.” *Anthropoetics* 13.1

(Spring/Summer 2007). <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1301/1301vano.htm> ([back](#))

43. Eric Gans, *Originary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 171. Other parts of this discussion are pertinent to our argument. For example, that “the high esthetic accomplishes the deferral of resentment through the sublimation of appetite in the sign” while the popular aesthetic “denies the askesis of the sign by anticipating the alimentary satisfaction that follows its emission in the originary event” (173). ([back](#))

44. “Carnal readings,” Kermode adds, “are much the same. Spiritual readings are all different.” Indeed, in the communal *sparagmos* we eat the same food, the same way. But each of us contemplates the sign in our individual solitude of desiring consciousness. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 9. ([back](#))

45. I must thank Adam Katz for alerting me to the directness of this application, at GASC VII at UCLA. It might be apropos here to distinguish attention span, the time a student is able to genuinely spend focussed on one thing, from its polar opposite, the much-celebrated “time management,” that form of juggling which insists upon the measured, and brief, interval of flight allowed any given object of consciousness before it is caught and tossed again. ([back](#))

46. *The Prelude* (1850) 6.604-16. ([back](#))