

An Introduction to Disciplinarity

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In his 1968 “Introduction” to his study of *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias considers the question of why, regardless of its theoretical and empirical absurdity, the notion of a “monadic,” enclosed “self,” opposed to, and ontologically separate from, “society,” became the commonsense in the 19th and 20th century West. His answer is that the notion of an autonomous self, one that can be abstracted from everyday concerns, and counterposed to an “objective” external reality, was a necessary concomitant to the transformation in subjectivity involved in assimilating the shift from a human-centered, geocentric world-view to a more rigorous, heliocentric one. This transformation in subjectivity required, according to Elias, an ability to transcend immediate impulses and engage in sustained focus according to collectively established constraints—a transformation that was part of the development of “manners” in the Western world, a development that involved the learning and generational transmission of parallel restraints on exposing bodily functions, sex, and violence. The implication of Elias’s argument is that now that the revolution in science and manners has been brought to this point, it is possible to turn our attention to anthropological inquiry and thereby construct a more socially immersed understanding of the self—an understanding that his own study has set in motion.

I take Elias to be heralding the emergence of new “disciplinary order,” in which new modes of sustained attention, accreted gradually from the monotheistic revelation through the scientific revolutions in the West, take a new form in the shared and spread inquiry into human practices, including that inquiry itself. Elias shows how the development of manners from the late medieval period on was itself a kind of discipline, both in the sense that the proponents of manners sought to instill discipline in the publics they addressed and in the sense that doing so demanded a kind of comparative study of habits and the making explicit of what had been tacit. Even more, the emergence of manners itself opened new fields of inquiry, such as that of the “unconscious” and “pedagogy,” insofar as creating a mannered population introduced the sharp distinction between childhood and adulthood we now take for granted and, by generating new layers of indirectness so as to avoid

reference to now forbidden desires, made invisible, unspeakable and mysterious desires and activities that had once been completely open. Anthropological inquiry, in that case, must not only self-reflexively examine its own disciplinary conditions of possibility but also remain attentive to the sedimentations of previous processes of inquiry.

An equally profound implication of Elias's study is that, once we have (as Elias is doing) proceeded to broach all that is entailed by 19th century standards of decency (for Elias the height of the modes of formality and indirectness he associates with manners, to be followed by some relaxation from the mid-20th century on), those standards of decency and the religious and metaphysical assumptions in which they have been embedded can no longer be taken for granted. While asserting a strict neutrality regarding judgment, Elias shows those standards a respect that more recent demystifiers like Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault have not, but the result of turning the taken for granted into an object of inquiry is ultimately the same. What I will go on to argue here is that the replacement of those demystified religious and metaphysical views lies not in whatever cultural or political revolution or resistance Bourdieu and/or Foucault (along with many others) might have had in mind, but with the anthropological inquiry Elias himself foregrounds. It is possible to make this claim once we realize that the very social and cultural effect wrought by those metaphysical and religious beliefs are carried out by this inquiry as well—that is, the enhancement of “manners,” or the rendering increasingly distant of violence and the desires that tempt it. And this argument gains even more power if we follow up on Peter Sloterdijk's insistence, in his *You Must Change Your Life*, that the great religions and philosophies were themselves, ultimately, inquiries, and inquiries into the conditions of possibility of self-transcendence enabled by disciplinary advances.

A discipline is a space of shared attention, considered as a space of inquiry. We can thus distinguish it from the moral, ritual and esthetic modes of shared attention—those that Eric Gans has rooted in the originary scene. Morality enforces the equality of all in dividing the object. Ritual enacts and commemorates the originary scene. Esthetics involves the oscillation between the sign and object which, interestingly, seems to refer to something the other on the scene, rather than the “signifier,” would be doing (in other words, the one putting forth the sign is not producing the oscillation). In each case, we could, and, indeed, would have to, invoke “intuition” or tacit knowing to account for how “equality” is determined, fidelity to the scene established, and equipoise between sign and object maintained. At a certain point, in other words, we would have to say that all the participants on the scene know that they have all deferred appropriation because they know, and such knowledge can only be acquired “emically,” by what Michael Polanyi calls “indwelling” within the scene.

Now, we can take a step back into the “etic” and say that each participant is “laying a bet” within a prisoner’s dilemma-type game. This is a step back into the etic because the only way someone on the scene could even begin in frame the situation in this way is if they felt they were in danger of losing the bet, that is, if the scene was in danger of collapse. So, the “etic” is really “emic” too, but the emic in a state of at least potential disarray. The potential for disarray, though, inheres in every perceived discrepancy between sign and practice, and every practice must evince some discrepancy with the sign hallowing it. Within every scene, then, one could imagine the emergence of disagreements over the equality of portions, the conformity of ritual to the scene it iterates or, once esthetic intention becomes deliberate, how to make the sign an ever more compelling model of desire and its suspension. In such cases, or, better, from that aspect, inquiry enters into the equation. By inquiry, to use and extend Michael Polanyi’s terms, I mean the direction of attention *to* something we have been attending *from*. One has already, or already begun to, claim a portion, take up a role in the ritual, or give shape to a sign; feedback from others on the scene suggests an extension or curtailment of that claim, a clarification of some gesture pertinent to the role, a sharpening of the sign in some respect, is called for. This leads one to recursively review some tacit element in one’s act—to (using Eric Gans’s term, in *The Origin of Language*, describing the extension of the ostensive gesture to non-sacred objects among the earliest humans) “lower the threshold of significance.” Such a review measures the distance between the act carried out and one to be carried out in greater obedience to the object. The answer, then, is to be found in directing attention to some previously unconsidered mode of appearance of the object, which in turn implies the inexhaustibility of the object and its resistance to desire. Inquiry enables deferral by assuming a reality irreducible to desire—there is always more to see, and new ways of seeing, and therefore new ways of restructuring one’s actions so as to make the object accessible in new ways. Scaffolded over ritual, moral and esthetic actions, then, is at least a minimal study of those actions—a disciplinary space.

The disciplinary space is an engine of differentiations, turning the object into a generator of new signs. Determining which aspect of an object, in its sacral and appropriative relation to the community, is most worthy of attention (a determination that creates that aspect and expands the economy of attention, or lowers the threshold of significance) creates a minimal marketplace, with the more distinctive “aspectualizations” rewarded by the ultimate currency: attention itself. The marketization process is likely to be more advanced in the arenas Gans, in *Originary Thinking*, assigns to the ethical (involving “productive” action away from the sacred space), but innovations and a kind of entrepreneurship take place (however slowly and imperceptibly) in the sphere of ritual as well. New events, signaling new crises for communities that are transforming at whatever speed, need

to be incorporated into an existing institutional structure upon which they will be modeled, and which those incorporations will transform. That communities and institutions change in response to new events is obvious; that some degree of inquiry into the terms of those communities and institutions accompanies and, indeed, shapes those changes, is less so; even less obvious is that such inquiry consists of attending to the tacit as signs of an inexhaustible object or, as I would prefer to start saying, “reality,” in Charles Sanders Peirce’s sense of that which is what it is regardless of what I or anyone else think about it, or, defined in terms of unending and open ended disciplinary inquiry, “[t]he opinion that is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate,” even should “[o]ur perversity and that of others indefinitely postpone the settlement of opinion” (“How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” 133). The object, that is, becomes inexhaustible insofar as it anchors or sutures various degrees and modes of meaning through direct and indirect reference to the central object and the moral and ritual institutions organized to commemorate it; and once the object thereby becomes inexhaustible and irreducible to those moral and ritual institutions, we have “reality,” and a disciplinary space that opens onto reality. In other words, disciplinary spaces are always “about” something that is what it is regardless of what anyone thinks about it (and, it should be said, regardless of whether it exists—so, for example, we can explore God’s reality with complete indifference to any question of God’s existence) and participants in those spaces accede to the demand that we never stop thinking about it.

Rather than attempting to devise rules for inquiry, then, it is more illuminating to follow inquiry along the boundaries it shares with ritual, morality and aesthetics. Ritual is already a study in desire, its transcendence, and the representation of that relation between desire and transcendence. Desire is disruptive insofar as it creates asymmetry in any community; the means for restoring symmetry must lie both within and outside of the community; and the restoration of symmetry must re-name and assimilate the originally disruptive desire—and all this must be represented in a way intelligible to the community but also to some extent abstractly, insofar as the ritual must adumbrate its future narrative renderings and elaborations. That, at any rate, is how ritual looks from within a disciplinary space which is only a full disciplinary space to the extent it sees all forms of human meaning as disciplinary. Disciplines are likewise concerned with assimilating the anomalous to the normal practices of the community, and this will be done all the more effectively to the extent that the anomalous is displayed fully, in all its disruptive relation to the existing terms of inquiry.

Disciplines cannot survive without a rigorously applied egalitarian morality: anyone within the discipline can be heard as long as they follow the (often tacit) procedures of the discipline. By the same token, no attention at all need be paid to anyone

outside of the discipline, or, for that matter, to any question or observation incommensurable with the discipline(1). The most urgent question for any discipline, then, is how to determine who belongs inside. As with tribal or cult membership, inclusion must ultimately involve a personal dimension: even with our vast educational apparatuses and impersonal credentialing mechanisms, someone, and usually at least several someones, who are already recognized members of the discipline, need to know you and your work and to vouch for you. And what needs to be known about you is analogous in each case: you know how to and are willing to play by the rules. I hope that it is clear that I am not being critical here; rather, I am asserting that it must be this way. The equal division of the object on the ordinary scene would be a negotiated solution—strength, aggressiveness, assumptions of merit, and other forces of inequality will, we can assume, be operative up until the point that those asserting those privileges do not so add to the cumulative resentments of the community as to render the ordinary sign null and void. But how could one know when that point is being approached? Even for those within the community, it will be at best a question of educated guesses and trial and error—but for outsiders, negotiating this terrain would be impossible without extensive training, which is to say without them becoming insiders. (The process of making outsiders insiders, that is, pedagogy, is itself the object of a disciplinary space.) Similarly, the rules of even the most objective scientific discipline—rules about how to carry out and formalize procedures, what counts as a violation of procedure, meta-rules regarding which violations can be repatriated within the discipline, etc., are a question of further inquiry that both presupposes and revises the rough equality of the discipline.

The connection between the esthetic and inquiry is perhaps easiest to see. The spectator's oscillation between sign and object might begin as an inchoate impasse between desire and the restraint formed by fear—a glance towards the object impels one forward while a glance at the sign compels a backward step, with the power of the sign then drawing one's attention back to the object and so on. But insofar as the esthetic is to become a deliberate practice ("art" being its institutionalized recognized form), which is to say the one forming the sign learns to vary its form, to dial desire and fear up and down, to introduce new desires for hitherto undesirable objects, and so on, while the spectator learns to distinguish between manipulative attempts to intensify desire and fear from opportunities provided to examine those emotions, then we already have a space of inquiry. In fact, the complete separation of art from representations derived from the ritual-moral realm would leave art with no objects other than those constructed by the spectator, listener or reader, which is to make the "recipient" of the artwork a participant in it. The consequence of this, in turn, is to abolish art as a separate institution and turn it into an ongoing disciplinary inquiry of everyday life within everyday life. The duck/rabbit image that so fascinated Wittgenstein provides a

good model for this—the most minimal work of esthetic inquiry would simply be to make us see the duck when we are more likely to see the rabbit, and vice versa.

Remaining within a disciplinary space involves iterating the originary gesture of converting designations into constructions of reality. This entails converting given, tacitly acquired distinctions into constitutive distinctions. For example, in Durkheim's analysis of the relation between legality and criminality, he shows how the distinction transcends the particular acts one would designate as legal or illegal at a particular point in time in a particular culture. Rather, the distinction between legality and criminality is a permanent one, because the boundary between preferred and privileged acts, on the one hand, and disfavored acts, on the others, is permanent: any social order presupposes such a distinction, just as the very act of attention entails a preference for one object over another. In that case, even if by some miracle, individuals stopped murdering, robbing and raping their fellows, the threshold for unacceptable acts would simply be lowered, and acts that now fall well below that threshold, such as mere rudeness, would then fall above it. This doesn't necessarily mean that the death penalty or long prison sentences would then be imposed on the perpetrators of such acts, but it does mean that whatever penalties they were to incur would be as socially isolating, in their own way, as the penalties for those "genuine" crimes are today. In that case, "crime" is a constitutive element of social order or, as Durkheim puts it, "a factor in public health, an integrative element in any society" (98).

The tendency of any discipline is to make the founding concepts of the discipline reciprocally constitutive: to make crime a constituent of law abidingness, sickness a constituent of health, the anomaly a constituent of the normal, the ugly of the beautiful, the heretical of the sacred, and so on. The concepts are thereby relativized radically, but not abolished; in fact, the distinction between them is also radicalized. For example, that sickness and health are co-constitutive is self-evident: no one is perfectly healthy, everyone has the beginnings or the beginnings of the beginnings of cancer, heart disease, dementia, and myriad other disorders from birth, and health would more properly be defined in terms of the so far successful resistance to and delay of those disorders than their absence. The proper discipline of medicine, then, would focus on the boundaries where, with ever greater precision, we can mark the onset of and neutralization of those disorders. The living being would be nothing but the totality of those boundaries. Sickness, then, marks the boundary of the system of life, and also marks the contingency of that system, while health is life's deferral of decline and death. The boundary marking one system from another marks the limits of the relativization of the founding concepts, which is also to say that the purpose of relativization is to enable us to mark that boundary of the discipline.

The relativizations I have been producing here, between morality and ethics, and between ritual, morality, esthetics and inquiry, also serve the purpose of marking the boundaries of the human community as discovered by and the disciplinary space constitutive of the originary hypothesis. To say that ritual, morality and esthetics contain a constitutive dimension of inquiry, learning and knowing (and that inquiry, learning and knowing have a ritual dimension, a morality and esthetics) is not to abolish or dilute these concepts. What remains is a hierarchy of boundaries within any activity or space, and hinges that open one space or activity onto others. There's no point, for example, to speaking of the moral function of art if art doesn't already have a moral dimension; but if art has a moral dimension it is not the same moral dimension as politics or ritual or family life might have, but one predicated on the creation of a community of those oscillating between sign and reality in tandem. This might include an oscillation regarding the moral quality of the work, for example, framed as follows: what would we see in the work differently were we to read it as either immoral or moral? Even better: demonically, depravedly immoral or supremely, sublimely moral? Who would we imagine to be on the scene opened by the work in either case, what would be the reality we would imagine the work to offer access to, and what in the work provides access to all on its scene or, contrarily, privilege access for some and preclude it for others? These inquiries could have an empirical component—what do we know of the audiences and historical conditions under which the art was created, the moral transitions prominent at the time, and so on—but most fundamentally it is a reading of the possibilities of the work itself and its own gesturing toward possible audiences, with the empirical inquiries, our interfacing with other disciplinary spaces, serving to enhance our sense of its possibilities. Indeed, the “empirical components”—historical, political, technological and other issues—are themselves simply markers of the ways other disciplinary spaces impinge upon the one opened by the work of art.

If the inquiry already intrinsic to morality, art and ritual results from the uncertainty also intrinsic to those spheres, then the growing uncertainty generated by the interaction of different moralities, esthetic criteria, and sacralities would make that inquiry an increasingly prominent element. Morality, sacrality and esthetics would, then, slide towards becoming the morality, sacrality and esthetics of inquiry. This may or may not have happened, or be happening—determining that would be itself the concern of a disciplinary space. But what we can say is that the alternative, once unavoidable uncertainty has been introduced, is a world divided between incommensurable and at least intermittently hostile faiths and moralities, on the one hand, and a world comprised of overlapping modes of inquiry, on the other. In this latter case, no one would need to concede any of his or her faith, insofar as that faith can generate a distinctive and sustainable mode of (at least anthropological) inquiry. Nor would those who commit to the disciplinary world need to denounce

those who remain within more exclusive ritual and moral spaces as evil or enemies—rather, they would simply be treated as disciplinary spaces by addressing those aspects of their self-understanding where they would recognize themselves in those terms. If necessary, the problem of defending the disciplinary world against hostility from other ritual and moral spaces would itself generate new disciplinary spaces. The disciplinary world is post-moral to the extent that it is post-mimetic, and it is post-mimetic insofar as its members enable each other to imitate that dimension of reality they are jointly attending to, rather than the appropriative desires of other individuals. The knowledge of mimetic desire provided by Biblical, classical, modern and, more recently Girardian theory and GA is paradoxical: on the one hand, this is knowledge of the constitutive mode of human being; on the other hand, it is knowledge of the transcendence of this being, and if mimetic desire can never be abolished, it can be deferred; if it can be deferred for a split second, it can later be deferred for a minute, a year, a life time, generations, ages—and, we can learn to detect ever more minute, implicit and potential signs of mimetic desire and devise means of deferring them before they even produce effects. The contemporary “study” of “micro-aggressions” is, so far, a study in how to deploy the concept of “micro-aggression” in institutional skirmishes, but it could certainly be the foundation of a genuine disciplinary space—everyday manners, for example, are a veritable petri dish of micro-aggressions, along with their deferrals. At the same time, we could never conclusively deny that the perpetual distancing of mimetic desire is robbing us of forms of tacit knowledge that might be needed to sustain any social order, including a disciplinary one; nor that such distancing, which might require an ever greater reward at the end, is not merely the accumulation of resentments on an ultimately apocalyptic scale. These questions will themselves be major generators of disciplinary spaces within a disciplinary order that can never entirely disembody from ritual, morality and esthetics, because any disciplinary space is a scene among scenes.

We can assume that the construction of a disciplinary space in the sense of a bounded space of inquiry will serve the same purpose as any scene—that of deferring violence. The more free and unthreatened by immediate violence a particular space is, which is to say the more the space itself generates mimetic desires in a form conducive to their satisfaction within the space, the more the violence that space is concerned with deferring is that of the social whole. As Eric Voegelin argued in his analysis of Plato’s founding of philosophy, such autonomous disciplines situate themselves within a social crisis that they undertake to develop and disseminate the means of deferring. As Voegelin writes:

Philosophy . . . has its origin in the resistance of the soul to its destruction by society. Philosophy in this sense, as an act of resistance illuminated by conceptual understanding, has two functions for Plato. It is first, and most

importantly, an act of salvation for himself and others, in that the evocation of right order and its reconstitution in his own soul becomes the substantive center of a new community which, by its existence, relieves the pressure of the surrounding corrupt society. (*Order and History* Vol. 3 123)

It would follow, then, that the notion of discipline in its more punitive and educational (for example, Foucauldian) senses, in other words as a rigorous set of practices, guided by theory and aimed at transforming habits, imposed upon others, follows from the understanding of a disciplinary space as recuperative and reparative in the face of social disorder. In particular, what Foucault understood to be a “disciplinary society” best makes sense as the emergence, in the modern era, of new disciplines aimed primarily at diagnosing and proposing cures for equally novel social ills. Just as it made sense to Plato that only those “guardians,” who wished only to explore the good life, could be trusted to rule over others, so it makes sense that those who undertook to study, to take a few examples, the moral and intellectual needs and deficiencies of the burgeoning urban populations, the theories of punishment and penitential practices, the health and sanitary living and working conditions of the new industrial working class, would be those asked to found modern school systems, reform prisons and police departments, manage factories and so on.

In other words, the notion of discipline is one: it is an extension of the concept of deferral, as the originary hypothesis understands it: a signifying of desire and resentment so as to delay the consequences of desire and resentment and make them conform in expression to the demands of a sacralized object of desire. A disciplinary scene is a withdrawal from social disorder and a renewal of deferral in some exemplary manner, so as to allow reality to become a means of enhancing self-discipline. Knowledge, then, is not an effect, reproduction, and legitimation of unequal power relations. Rather, power follows from that knowledge marked by the identification, diagnosis, and proposed amelioration or abolition of some source of social disorder. Nor is it simply the truthfulness or profundity of the knowledge on offer—the “clients” and “customers” are unequipped to judge the result of the discipline on its own terms, and the success or failure of their public enterprises can only be judged in an ad hoc manner, since there can be no “control” group. It is, I would say the “charisma,” in Philip Rieff’s sense, that is conferred upon those who have distanced themselves from the immediate, the obvious, the commonsensical in order to map out a normally invisible set of relations, that is the source of disciplinary power. While disciplinary power has in full measure its bullies, its frauds, its would-be dictators, none of it would be possible without those who first of all want to know what the truth is, how society holds together, how the mind works, and so on, or, to put it more precisely, to direct our attention in a new way because the old way is frayed and has lost its power of deferral—indeed, we can only

measure the frauds and bullies against that standard (and against the intrinsic fallibility of social knowledge, especially the kinds created in response to pressing needs).

Michael Polanyi, upon whose understanding I have been drawing, sees inquiry as a concerted convergence of attention on the articulation of the particulars of a field (*from the particulars to their articulation*) of reality in ways that direct our attention to additional articulable particulars. Such collaborative spaces rely on the authority of previous and neighboring inquiries, and draw upon the contributions of individual inquirers, each of whom, in his/her very attempt to articulate the particulars thereby presupposes the existence of a broader, unseen, largely intuited reality. These inquiries rely upon the “principle of mutual control” (72) to sustain the shared attention comprising the discipline. In this way, an acceptance of authority and a restricted, even minute, field in which one makes responsible choices is combined with an intimation of a hierarchical and open-ended whole in which all the overlapping disciplines participate. While focusing on the natural scientists, Polanyi suggests that all fields of inquiry, including moral and esthetic, are governed in their internal and external interactions by the same logic. Polanyi calls a free and open social order predicated upon these disciplines a “society of explorers.” While Polanyi does not push his argument this far, I will now go on to argue that Polanyi’s society of explorers can encompass society as such—there are nothing but disciplines (a family constitutes a—or several—disciplinary spaces, as does a friendship, even a single meeting between strangers, and so on), and if all of these disciplines do not recognize each other, that is because they have not yet (and maybe never will be) brought into a relation of mutual control with each other.

The internal marketplace of the discipline produces results made available on the external market to those outside of the discipline. One doesn’t need to understand a new medicine, or to know whether it could have been done better or cheaper, to be cured by it. But one discipline generates new ones: one, let’s say the medical discipline, takes the curative property of the medicine on the authority of the disciplinary space within the pharmaceutical industry, but disciplines emerge that check that authority, interposing their own: those who test the medicine, those from the agency regulating it, or those “lay” agencies that monitor the medical profession and pharmaceutical industry. The producing side also generates new disciplines: a discipline of marketing, and a discipline of finance, to determine how research funds are to be acquired and allocated, and these disciplines in their own way overlap with the biological disciplines inventing the new medicines: certain problems of marketing will impinge upon the problems specific to biology. So, while the discipline of biology might seem distant from any social crisis and need for withdrawal and restoration, it is brought into proximity to such concerns by various disciplines dealing directly with urgent needs of private and social welfare, and

which operate in mutual control with biology. (It also follows that inquiries into the moral and ethical implications of scientific innovations need to take this broader field of disciplines into account.)

Assuming a disciplinary order would lead us to frame discussions of the market in terms of overlapping disciplines: the shared space of interest and inquiry comes first, analytically, insofar as we see the final consumer as a participant in a discipline as well, one who at a very minimum distinguishes one product from another, and could have their attention redirected by means that can themselves be attended to and revised. Not all disciplines are equal—the individual trying to decide which medicine to take does not have the resources or knowledge of the chemical, biological and medical disciplines, and the mutual control disciplines exercise upon each other reflect these asymmetries (the medical profession can certainly subject “alternative medicines” to a kind of sustained, coherent and transparent scrutiny that could not be reciprocated) but this doesn’t change the fact that even a fringe, conspiracy theory-laden “alternative” discipline operates according to rules and generates shareable observations that would not have been available otherwise. The task of sorting out the relations between all these disciplines is itself a disciplinary one, in part a kind of expertise in debunking.

Jane Jacobs’ analysis of the emergence of new work within an economy in her *The Economy of Cities* not only illustrates the disciplinary processes that make up the market but further suggests the interdependence of innovative thinking within the market and more theoretical reflection. Jacobs studies and categorizes a whole series of ways in which new work is added to an economic process—to take her first and simplest example, she mentions Ida Rosenthal, a custom seamstress who invented the bra by first using this new undergarment to improve the fit of the dresses she made for customers. Rosenthal then “became more interested in making brassieres than in making dresses” (51) and went into business manufacturing them; “bra-making now stood as an activity in its own right.” From attending from the undergarments to their effect on the dress, this particular undergarment became a focus of attention in its own right.

Jacobs goes on to observe that “[o]nce one gets the hang of the process [i.e., of how new work is added to old] it is not only entertaining to track down the progressions of D [old division of labor] and A [added work] that have given us modern activities like magnetic-tape manufacturing, but also to speculate about the about the unknown progressions in the past” (57) which, as Jacobs goes on to remind her reader, she has just done in the previous chapter in advancing the startling thesis that urban life had in fact preceded rural life. (In brief, Jacobs focuses on the likelihood that nomads and hunters and gatherers would store their animals and grain; this storage would become “new work” that would lead to

breeding animals, selling grain and so on, leading to a market around which a city would develop and upon which emergent surrounding rural areas would depend. Interestingly, new work invariably emerges out of some kind of delay in completing the old work.) In other words, analyzing the processes of new work leads to iteration of that new work in the theoretical sphere, generating hypotheses of origins real and possible. Insofar as any phenomenon must iterate in some distanced way the originary event, the analysis of any phenomenon into its constitutive elements and their categorical constitution must take an originary turn into the event responsible for the emergence of the categories.

The same analysis of all institutions as disciplinary spaces applies to institutions apparently distant from inquiry understood narrowly, such as political and military ones: first of all, there are those whose “new work” is to identify the possibility of preparing for certain internal and external threats, who study how to do so, including which capabilities and dispositions are best suited to this purpose, who winnow out those who are unfit to serve that function, and who offer up their services. In that case, we could see the full blown modern state as an articulation of disciplines, first of all subordinated to the discipline of maintaining social order, but, increasingly, characterized by ambiguous and shifting relations between various regulatory, police, and therapeutic disciplines.

Undesirable, disreputable and even evil activities might have a disciplinary component (as will virtually any human activity) but an understanding of disciplinarity makes clear their limits. So, for example, if we go to war, there is the possibility of entering a disciplinary space with one’s enemy—a disciplinary space organized around various reciprocities regarding proportionate response and other legal issues, the use of specified weapons, treatment of prisoners, diplomatic engagements aimed at ending the war, and so on. The police, in their relation to criminals and other disciplines such as the judicial and penitential, ultimately invite the criminal to enter the discipline of policing, both by informing on their confederates and policing or disciplining themselves as they become law-abiding citizens. A criminal gang, to a certain extent, can be a discipline—figuring out how to rob a bank or claim the turf of a rival gang certainly involves a kind of inquiry (this is why movies and other forms of entertainment are able to engage our sympathies on the side of criminals). But only to a certain extent—the discipline cannot be an open one, which is to say it cannot submit itself to mutual control with other disciplines. Since it is predicated upon subversion of other disciplines, it must therefore conceal itself, and it must therefore privilege the loyalty of its members over their commitment to the inquiry; in privileging loyalty, the criminal gang is necessarily hierarchical, since someone must enforce loyalty and the loyalty of all to that enforcer must exceed his towards any of them.

Evil, then, can be known by the way it resists overlapping with neighboring disciplines: the teacher can want the student to become a fellow teacher, the doctor can want the patient to take control of his own health, the policeman can even want the criminal to not only go straight but become a model of reformed law-abiding leadership in his community—but a mugger cannot want his victims to mug him in return or compete with him for victims, a swindler cannot hope to have his victims join in his swindle (although an interesting mode of esthetic representation does test out these possibilities—for example, among child molesters—of victims being recruited into the criminal “project,” but part of the interest in such representations is in the limitations they reveal: maybe one, even a few victims can be recruited, but their must always remain a larger pool of potential victims who will never be admitted); and, at the extreme, the Nazi cannot want the Jew to join him in his study of the most expeditious way of exterminating unwanted racial groups.

If one accepts the model presented thus far of post-ritual social orders as comprised of overlapping and neighboring disciplines interrelated through mutual control, it follows that the real antagonist to disciplinary power comes from within. The modern discipline emerges within a market order, which itself becomes possible once the secrecy of the cult is progressively eroded and its inscrutable rites are replaced by practices of inquiry that can be learned and results that can be inspected. Even the former cults come to abide by these rules. The modern discipline, that is, is accountable to scrutiny from other disciplines regarding its practices and products, and accountability means bureaucracy, in the broadest sense of treating reality as always already a grid. David Olson, in his *Psychological Theory and Education Reform: How School Remakes Mind and Society*, shows how modern disciplines entail modern bureaucracies run by and for a literate population—indeed, modern literacy is essentially equivalent to familiarity with the workings and demands of bureaucracies, and the educational system is set up so as to produce those who can run them. Even more, we are all bureaucrats—the reason why teachers hate grading so much is that it is the most explicitly bureaucratic of our tasks, where we are most obviously doing nothing more than sorting students so as to determine their location in their next step on the bureaucratic ladder. As Olson argues,

In a modern bureaucratic world, knowledge, virtue and ability take on a new form. Institutions such as science preempt knowledge, justice systems preempt virtue, and functional roles preempt general cognitive ability. Thus, ability, knowledge and virtue are construed and pursued less in the form of private mental states and moral traits of individuals than in the form of competence in the roles, norms, and rules of the formal bureaucratic institutions in which they live and work. (288)

These value transformations result from the accountability of the discipline, or its self-representation before a public, which is to say other disciplines. The discipline adapts itself to and shapes the other disciplines so as to ensure the value of its services to them. Intrinsic interest must be translated into extrinsic benefits, potential beneficiaries and the benefits to them must be categorized, itemized, maximized and institutionalized, and the qualifications for entry into and continued participation in the discipline formalized. This accountability can generate more disciplinary spaces, but insofar as these means of normalization involve the collusion between established disciplinary spaces to interfere with emergent disciplinary spaces, the extrinsic readily supplants the intrinsic: procedures of approval through the application of established categories replace exploration of the possibilities of founding concepts, and issuing credentials substitutes for the ongoing, interested judgment of participants' contributions. And struggles can then be waged over the revision of categories and the updating of credentials. Each disciplinary space tends to re-organize itself on the model of others upon which it is dependent, to that extent replacing inquiry with prefabricated criteria. Disciplines, then, in order to survive, must become spaces carved out of and in resistance to the very bureaucracies they have secreted.

Understanding the emergence of the bureaucratic out of the disciplinary and disciplinary resistance to bureaucratization requires that we relativize this boundary between the bureaucratic and the disciplinary. In the most basic sense, there is nothing but disciplinarity: disciplinarity is co-extensive with the human: the originary scene was a discipline, even if that cannot be recognized until a critical mass of overlapping disciplines has emerged. Disciplinary attention, though, can be directed toward the means of preventing infiltration by other disciplinary spaces: this itself is a rich field of inquiry. Any disciplinary space can be threatened by competitors or those who see it as a threat; self-defense requires the assumption that the actually existing disciplinary space is the only possible instantiation of that mode of inquiry, prompting inquiry into the possibility of the impenetrability of the disciplinary space: so the inquiry into the human that lies at the origin of, say, a revolutionary movement is transformed into an inquiry into rooting out traitors to the revolution (in particular, the best hidden ones) and ultimately, perhaps, into the possibility of maintaining the barest remnants, even memories, of what was once a global movement. It is inquiry all the way up and down, but what has been refused bureaucratically is the reciprocity with other disciplines, which really means the desire for and encouragement of disciplinary spaces to complement and join one's own and hence the narrowing rather than expansion of reality. Still, despite the vanishing possibilities, one cannot exclude altogether the possibility that the tiniest space does have, and has been defending against great odds, the truth that will win out in the long run, which is to say will outlive and draw the attention of other disciplinary spaces. Bureaucracy is the study of the means of ensuring the

impermeability of the disciplinary space, of making sure that what is discovered is intelligible in terms of what is already known, but that itself may only be known from within another disciplinary space that through its own bureaucratization mistakes a harnessing of resources to sustain a beleaguered truth for dogmatism and paranoia.

It is only through the creation of new disciplinary spaces that the distinction between discipline and bureaucracy can be determined. Indeed, modern esthetic developments, or at least one prominent line of them, can be seen in a new light once we consider them in terms of the dialectic of discipline and bureaucracy, and those developments can shed light on that dialectic. The para-science, “pataphysics,” invented by the 19th century French playwright and novelist Alfred Jarry as “the science of imaginary solutions and the laws governing exceptions,” and the font of a wide range of 20th century artistic movements, including surrealism, the Oulipo, and conceptual art, responds, I would suggest, to the emergence and proliferation of bureaucratic discourse and the normalization processes they have been bound up with since the 19th century. The way in which practitioners of ‘pataphysics exploit the reversibility of scientific and other authoritative modernizing discourses can be seen in Rene Daumal’s parody/extension of the scientific revolution introduced by quantum physics:

The impartial observer of modern science will seize this opportunity to point out that modern science is, despite the unanimous belief of its friends and its enemies, an immaterialist science. I might add that for an impartial observer, a non-materialist science is no more absurd than a pacifist arms merchant or a vegetarian butcher. Modern science is based in the belief that thought, ideas and numbers are immaterial. And so to make a phenomenon conceivable, knowable, measurable, it deems it necessary to purge it of all materiality; and even the intractable residue left untouched by that reduction that could have been taken as the sign of the existence of some matter is an irreducible abstract, a mathematical indetermination. What’s more, thanks to the Probabilities, the unintelligibility of the unintelligible has become intelligible. (80-1)

Just as, according to Olson, capacities and virtues become roles and rules within systems, a pacifist can take on the role of the arms merchant, the vegetarian that of the butcher, and this anomaly, only absurd for the bureaucratic observer, makes it possible to imagine that science has itself become the very thing it would set itself against—the immaterial; meanwhile, the very unintelligibility this paradox seems to drive us into becomes, through further advances in disciplinary inquiry, intelligible. ‘Pataphysics, as the study of “laws governing exceptions,” inhabits the anomalies of disciplinary/bureaucratic discourse, deconstructing the

bureaucratization of language by returning to their constitutive condition the distinctions whose primacy bureaucracy makes synonymous with its own authority.

“The laws governing exceptions” makes sense in the light of the retrieval of the disciplinary out of the bureaucratic. Exceptions to, or anomalies of, bureaucratic rule, are the forms taken by disciplinary work: the “law governing” such work is the constitutive boundary between the disciplinary and the bureaucratic—the boundary between “virtue” and “norm,” for example. It might be further revealing to consider corporate, consumer and celebrity culture as a form of bureaucratic culture, insofar as political coercion, involving collusion between the security discipline (the state) and other disciplinary spaces in the market (and, secondarily, among those other spaces) raises barriers of entry to disciplinary spaces on the margins of the market. The resulting publicly inflected private entities study carefully how to ensure their impermeability by those emergent spaces. Consumption is in this way engineered and channeled and asymmetries that emerge in the market are converted into packaged and permanent icons (“celebrity” is a result of studies of iconization of contingent markers of desire). Resistance to consumerism and celebritization follows, but in what does this resistance consist if not in the semiotic resources any mode of deferral requires, in this case the discipline of what Tony Veale calls “educated insolence” that turns stereotyped (i.e., bureaucratic) language against itself and facilitates consumer power at least as effectively as the various serious consumerist disciplinary spaces, such as *Consumer Reports*? Without such power, the discipline of the consumer is at the mercy of the addictive power of any relatively monopolized product that targets desires in their more isolated, simplified, amplified and repeatable forms. While categorizing the workings of an albeit corporatized free market similarly to the more recognizable bureaucratic labyrinths such as, say, the IRS, may seem counter-intuitive, and while the pluralism of one differs considerably from the near-totalitarianism of the other, what the two share is the imperative (one that intensifies as it is obeyed) to make predictability and controllability ever more perfect at the expense of the anomalies and innovations that occur at the margins; to put it more theoretically, they both try to increase the probability of intended consequences to the point where such probability is decreased due to excessive interference and consequent uncertainty in the variables. The difference is where they lie on the continuum leading from disciplinarity to bureaucracy.

We can describe the kind of ‘pata-inquiry I am assigning to disciplinarity more precisely. Let’s grant that any social activity is rule-governed, at least tacitly. Under normal conditions, all players make moves corresponding to the shared rules. Abnormal conditions emerge not so much when one or more players cheat (cheating, like crime, is recognized and accounted for within the game) but when one or more of them leverages an anomaly within the rules. Broad social rules like

“treat everyone equally” are replete with such anomalies, which have comprised the substance of politics for the past couple of centuries. Local bureaucratic rules are as well—the interpretation of any rule always depends upon a shared good will or faith in one another’s adherence to some common understanding of the rules (that is, a disciplinary space committed to studying the forms and implications of the rules). When such leveragings occur, one possible response is to restate and seek to enforce the rules precluding them—but, since what has occurred is a re-constitution of the rules, the solid ground on which such reinforcement could take place no longer exists. The ‘pata response would be to treat the anomaly as the legitimate rule and invent and enact (leverage) a complementary anomaly to it. The ultimate purpose of such counter-leveraging is to restore a new rule-governed setting that has incorporated the anomalies on all sides, even if the business (or discipline) of ‘pataphysics (denormalizing inquiry) is interested only in the creation of the complementary anomaly—another disciplinary space would have to take on the task of resettling the field that ‘pataphysics unsettles.

Disciplinary thinking, located on the boundary between the disciplinary and the bureaucratic, directs our attention, simultaneously, to the bureaucratic as seen by the disciplinary and the disciplinary as seen by the bureaucratic. Take the following mock description of a PhD thesis by Bart Plantenga in his novel, *Spermatagonia: The Isle of Man*:

During the course of my PhD I began to gravitate towards the Muzak-like qualities of laughter, beneficial sound that reflects society positively, confirms its values of family, work, religion, freedom within the parameters of consumerism.

I studied laughter’s coercive (cooptative) laughtrack strategies; how they trained people to laugh on certain cues and quips. Keep the funny bone sufficiently activated with no time to think. Its infectious laughter managing to obliterate the fact that these banal attempts at humor always failed. The laughtrack took up the slack. It has us laughing at things that are not funny. Put a laughtrack over a documentary of the Nazi Death Camps and people can be made to laugh. I know, I did the study, which was published in the *Journal of Mass Psychiatry*, vol. 16, no. 3. Took segments of Alain Resnais’ *Night & Fog...* and added some laughtrack I lifted from a failed sitcom. It was there, I have it on tape—cognitive, chuckling dissonance, man. Involuntary laughter, involuntary manslaughter—NOT totally opposing ideas. (12-13)

Plantenga here brings out the inseparability of genuine inquiry and its bureaucratic deformation into a means of manipulation: laughtracks are there for a reason, and it would indeed be very interesting to explore the precise mechanics of the laughtrack

and of different laughtracks—the particular form of laughter each induces, its effects on the viewer’s judgment of what is being viewed, and so on; such an inquiry would further turn into an inquiry into laughter itself. What, though, would distinguish this inquiry from service in the attempt to make laughtracks more effective, which is to say, to use the laughtrack to sidetrack inquiries into a range of possible responses to, say, a film on the Holocaust? Singling out the “involuntary” common to laughter and manslaughter marks the capability of the disciplinary self to attend to the implication of its own deliberately undertaken and initially free disciplinary inquiry into the involuntary behavior of the bureaucratically managed subject. Plantenga’s invocation of the Nazi death camps marks the moral inversion of the discipline into the bureaucracy, but the broader immorality he points to is the simulation of laughter in the hope that it will be contagious, and produce subjects who laugh when required—regardless of whether what is laughed at is funny. The disciplinary becomes bureaucratic when one no longer studies being funny, but rather supplants humor with a technological mechanism that will produce the effects of humor (laughter) sufficiently to maintain the audience needed for other, commercial purposes. Inquiry is required to invent and regulate that technological mechanism, but once it is controlled by the feedback from measurable effects (the regularized relation between laughter and ratings) not only has the discipline of comedy been displaced but so, also, has the disciplinary inquiry into various forms of inducing laughter.

We could imagine this distinction as follows: the audience could enter the discipline initiated by the comic by trying to figure out what makes a joke or routine funny, using it as a model for a joke or routine of one’s own, or noticing for the first time the breakdown in automaticity referenced by the joke; one could not enter into the study of one’s involuntary responses to a mechanism without disavowing and ultimately repudiating those responses. A broader implication for a specifically bureaucratic mode of thought follows. For the disciplinary inquirer, the contributions one enables others to make to the disciplinary space constitute one’s relation to others, to an audience which is implicitly invited into the disciplinary space; once one begins to study how to generate similar or analogous responses to those previously elicited, one institutes an impermeable boundary between inquirer and audience. I could show others how to construct a fictional scene that elicits a kind of canned laughter on the part of a “typical” audience (you can make people laugh by doing injury to a character who has already been “softened up” as a target, for example), but once you have shown them how it’s done they will no longer find it funny—they are now with you, targeting others or, more precisely, feeding their addiction (addiction being nothing more than an uncontrolled desire for the exact experience one is already familiar with). The articulation of inquiry and bureaucracy enables us to account for Heidegger’s framing “technology,” or the “sleepwalking” McLuhan associates with immersion in a new medium, in which references and

gestures enabled by a new relation to nature and the world are, unknown to those making the references and gestures, really references to the new mode of human organization constitutive of the relation to world and nature. The accumulation of mediations amongst humans and between humans and their objects of desire are both means and results of inquiry, which is to say of constitutive deferral and disciplines, and grids representing a “particle-ized” and already “gridded” human-in-nature. The bureaucratic mind wishes to be on an abstracted scene that the sign has always already completely mapped, down to the least possible gesture. What an originary account can add to those Heidegger and McLuhan is the location of “bureaucracy” on the originary scene, where the reciprocal “calibration” of their respective signings on the part of the scene’s participants involves a potentially total mapping of possible responses and respective mappings of self and others. The approach to that totality in the originary event closes the scene while leaving sufficient margin for error to notice further residues of representable desire. Bureaucracy seeks to eliminate that margin of error by ensuring the recipient fits the delivery and designing the delivery to match the prepared recipient.

Olson, as I suggested earlier, associates the emergence of bureaucratic culture with the spread of literacy. Olson and others have done extensive work on the transformations wrought by literacy on individual and collective consciousness, but rather than going over that terrain here, I will argue, more specifically, for viewing disciplinary thinking as a specific form of thinking within literate modes of thought but also within the aporias of those modes of thought.

Olson’s theory of writing in *The World on Paper* advances beyond the pathbreaking work of Eric Havelock and others by reversing the relation between syntactic writing (writing that distinguishes, at least, between words within a sentence) and speech—rather than assuming that writing was an attempt to represent speech (that is, that the inventors of writing already saw language in terms of individual words and sentences which they then sought to represent), Olson argues that syntactic representation, coming from the emblems or tokens used to record inventory (so, the first syntactical writing comes when it becomes possible to write “3 goats” instead of “goat goat goat”), itself provides the model for language that writing proceeds to institutionalize:

Once a writing system has a syntax, the emblems or tokens can now be seen as words rather than as emblems and the constructions can be seen as a proposition rather than a list. The structures present in the *script* now provide the categories needed for introspecting the implicit structures of language. Such scripts are logographic in that the tokens now represent the major grammatical constituents of the language, namely, words. But, to repeat, it does not follow that the inventors of such a script already knew about words and then sought to

represent them in the script. The opposite may be true. The scribal inventions dictated a kind of reading which *allowed language to be seen as composed of words related by means of a syntax*. Writing thereby provides the model for the production of speech (in reading) and for the introspective awareness of speech as composed of grammatical constituents, namely, words. (77, emphasis Olson's)

While the “invention” of the declarative sentence certainly precedes that of writing by many millennia, it is with the invention of writing that the declarative sentence can be singled out as such and treated as the primary linguistic form, the model for language as such. So, the development of alphabetic writing coincided with the development of metaphysics in Greece and monotheism in Israel—both are new modes of intelligibility predicated upon the primacy of the declarative sentence. As Olson points out, the understanding that words represent meanings rather than being embodied in the things they refer to “spells the death of ‘word’ magic or more precisely, ‘name’ magic” (75). It now becomes possible to argue about what “good” or “God” “really means”—it has some stable meaning, insofar as its permanence is evident in its written form, but it has no obvious or direct connection to any particular meaning.

Once language can be broken down into words and sentences, two things happen: first, specific words and sentences can be preserved in an exact form, and that preservation can be insisted upon. That is, verbal commonplaces, formulas, ritual expressions, sacralized claims, inherited maxims, and so on, have an “original” and “authentic” form against which future iterations can be measured. Second, the verbal elements of sentences can be broken down, replaced, combined and rearranged deliberately, and for intended effects. (As has been noted many times, the first industrialized, mass production process was the printing press.) No doubt, oral communities must have insisted upon continuity and varied their uses of linguistic forms, but with the existence of an original form, new modes of thought and discourse, such as the distinctions between orthodoxy and heresy and word and intention, commentary, hermeneutical and allegorical reading strategies, grammatical, logical and other kinds of “correctness,” parody and so on become possible. The possibility of iterating a specific linguistic form leads simultaneously towards reverence and mockery, or, for that matter, simple dispersal, with the provenance and attitude to be adopted toward the sentence left open. And these consequences of the ability to manipulate language introduced by writing—to pulverize and recombine it—are further intensified, as McLuhan noted, in the wake of the printing revolution in the early modern world.

I now propose processing this intellectual development through a distinction Michael Tomasello makes in his recent book, *A Natural History of Human Thinking*,

between “joint intentionality” and “collective intentionality.” Joint intentionality, for Tomasello, is the distinguishing marker of human thinking, represented by the gesture of pointing—when someone points something out to another, both know that they are looking at the “same” thing, and each knows that the other knows. In evolutionary terms, Tomasello associates the period of “joint intentionality” with the iconic signs (comprised of pointing and mimicry) constitutive of the earliest period of human language. Eventually, these iconic signs become more abstract—due both to the increase in the size of human communities and the grammaticalization of gestures (that is, their articulation into relations between signs, and ultimately sentences), until we get to the point of the “arbitrary” sign with no necessary connection to its meaning or referent. At this point, words have taken on meanings independent of any instance of their use, and rather than simply being able to understand another’s mind we are able and, indeed, compelled, to conform to the edicts of the “objectivity” comprising a “collective intentionality.”

Now, the emergence of collective intentionality certainly, like the declarative sentence, precedes the development of writing—I am arguing not for the simultaneity of these developments, but for the claim that the later developments seized upon, accentuated, and exaggerated within language use the earlier developments: “collective intentionality” would have intensified the focus on the declarative sentence, and writing would have further intensified collective intentionality, marginalizing along the way earlier, iconic, modes of language. Singling out the declarative sentence as the primary linguistic unit would lead analysts to filter out everything in such utterances that are not specific to them—directing attention to the speaker, for example, or the audience, would minimize the differentiation of the declarative sentence from other speech acts, such as imperatives or promises. What is specific to the declarative sentence is the constitutive claim that words match reality in some way that anyone who hears the sentence could identify (and assess). In that case, the ideal declarative sentence is one that could be uttered felicitously by anyone, anywhere, at any time. And this is indeed the ideal for Western metaphysics and, however differently, Judaic monotheism, the name of whose God is, essentially, I am everywhere, always and no one (although it’s worth noting that the ideal sentence is simultaneously and paradoxically cancelled in the Jewish name of God, since no one could in fact felicitously say it without claiming to be that God).

The critique of Western metaphysics, shadowing it from the beginning, but becoming increasingly powerful over the past century and a half, can, then, be distilled into the following argument: Western metaphysics, in privileging collective intentionality as crystallized in the ideal declarative sentence, has elided the fact that joint intentionality persists within and, indeed, continues to constitute, collective intentionality. (Tomasello doesn’t address this issue either, which is anyway distant

from his concerns, but his argument that children continue to learn language—as how could they not?—through joint attention can be taken to suggest that such tension must always exist.) Metaphysics, in answering the needs of emergent empires consequent upon its creation of a novel and enduring disciplinary space, thereby produces a meta-bureaucracy, predicated upon the imagination of a single world scene of which all other scenes are components. Joint intentionality persists in the form of idioms within collective intentionality and, to refer back to my previous discussion, bureaucratic thinking seeks to eliminate such idiomatic trace of joint attention while disciplinary thinking establishes sites of joint attention directed at the products of collective intentionality. If it is only within collective intentionality that words take on authoritative meanings (so that one could be right or wrong about what they mean), the joint intentionality of disciplinary thinking is aimed at the incommensurable idioms of which those meanings are composed (whatever remains anomalous in collective intentionality). The bureaucratized declarative strives to eliminate paradox from language, to make every sentence “clear,” which is to say, refer to a reality that all readers (participants in an imagined collective intentionality) of the sentence would realize as that reality and as decomposable into equally discreet and unanimously recognized parts. Disciplinary idioms are no less invested in the declarative sentence, but work to draw out the generative paradoxicality of any sentence, its constitutive character for those jointly attending to the boundary between the possible realities deferred by the sentence and the reality it presents (like Durkheim’s reference, mentioned earlier, to crime as a “factor in public health”). Disciplinary idioms, at their most elemental, see where mockery might be appropriate where reverence is given, or reverence deserved where mockery is taken for granted—where, that is, a piece of signifying material might be iterated differently. In a bureaucratic age, those disciplinary idioms, or instances of joint attention toward collective intentionality, are most readily found in the greatest source of paradox: the bureaucratic desire to eliminate paradox by intensifying and enforcing the belonging of each element to its place within the structure. The simplest way of doing that is by sensationalizing and demonizing any deviation while sentimentalizing the rediscovery of the element within its place.

Disciplines are invariably organized around founding, quasi-sacred texts (this is true of even the most informal disciplines, including those founded upon self-help books, do-it-yourself journals, women’s health websites, etc.)—if one is to make a claim in the discipline, one must be able to refer back to such a text and make one’s claim consistent with it. The implicit claim is that the text represents an achieved mode of collective intentionality, while one’s own claim represents an attempt to direct joint attention to something unsettled within the collective intentionality: more precisely, if the text is an achieved mode of collective intentionality, that is because it has achieved a higher level of discipline compared to some other bureaucratized mode of thought, and the joint attention directed at it is to preserve its centrality to the

discipline by preventing its bureaucratization in turn (“one might take K to simply be saying... but if we look at this passage we can see that he is really...”). The member of the discipline resists the text’s re-absorption in the bureaucratic commonplaces it distinguishes itself from in two ways. First, by continuing the work of breaking up and reorganizing bureaucratic discourse initiated by the text: ordinary bureaucratic discourse transcended disciplinarity, as I suggested earlier, by taking binary distinctions assumed to reside empirically in the world (like legality and illegality) and to be further embedded in a series of other empirically based binaries (moral and immoral, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, etc.) and treat them as constitutive—reciprocally definitive and interdependent. Members of the discipline can continue to push this work forward, bringing the same binaries into new terrain, or deconstructing and re-aligning other binaries and making those binaries co-constitutive with the original ones. Or, they can go to work on the founding texts themselves, using their constitutive distinctions to similarly treat what those texts have taken for granted as merely empirical distinctions.

About a third of the way through his novel, Plantenga has his protagonist, after following the disciplinary course of reducing all human phenomena to their biological, chemical, physical and hence manipulable constituents and finding, as result, “I seemed to come undone” (53), embark on a “12-step Program for Disappearance—survival, after all, requires a kind of creative disappearance.” The rest of the novel involves enacting this “program,” which turns out to involve a perpetual inquiry, with direct consequences, of all the ways one appears in the contemporary world. The protagonist Kees removes all brand markers from his possessions and moves to a non-descript part of the city where life is something no one takes much notice of; he gradually withdraws from his connectedness to the media, using it, where connected, to further regulate his appearance and inner emotional and physiological responses so as to stand out less (“[t]he Golf Channel was better for me. Following the camera’s eye following the ball trained my inner eye to focus, regulate blood pressure, made me appreciate fairways and greens as visual equivalents of the tranquil mind” [65]). He starts putting on black face, because “[b]eing black meant being nobody” and “I knew white reflected light, thus calling attention to its source. Let’s just say it was a way of removing my face as bright orb from competing with other more worthy celestial bodies” (77). Disappearance involves not so much hiding away or disguising oneself as someone else, but an ongoing reciprocal modulation of oneself and one’s environment, wherein there is always a new threshold of attention emerging in response to one’s withdrawal of oneself from the world of attended to objects, which is to say from mimetic competition:

I began aligning every breath with sounds of external phenomena—a shout, the DINGLE-DANGLE of the passing ice cream truck, grumbling 18-wheelers,

airplane overhead, the cicadic car alarms, the clack-clack-clack of late-for-work high heels. In this way my breath could hitch a furtive ride on other molecules of sound to ultimately dissolve in some greater ambience. Like my autobiography written in invisible ink. (90-1).

Kees' disciplined disappearance gets taken up by the same media systems he used to manipulate (and, in another period of his life, participate more directly in): "his disappearance had inaugurated a legacy—the more absent, the more famous" (135), with the novel ending with the speculations of the crime scene detectives over the actual cause of his demise and the philosophical and moral implications of suicide. He himself becomes part of the scene of discarded objects of contemporary civilization in which he had immersed himself. This is the end point of the disciplinary: to leave behind traces of signs of the same order as those that first drew one's attention to some act-become-sign as something that could draw others' attention. The disciplinary, then, is also the end point of de-mimeticization: from the direct modeling of each others' actions in one's own actions through the transformation of deferred actions into signs of new scenes of possible actions, to the becoming a tissue of signs modeling the possibility of transforming any scene into a sign.

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Notes

1. Polanyi tells of an essay published in the Proceedings of the Royal Society in 1947:

It described some fairly simple experiments which proved, in the author's opinion, that a hydrogen atom impinging on a metal wire could transmit

to it energies ranging up to a hundred electron volts. Such an observation, if correct, would be far more revolutionary than the discovery of atomic fission by Otto Hahn in 1939. Yet when this paper appeared and I asked various physicists' opinions about it, they only shrugged their shoulders. They could not find fault with the experiment, yet they not only did not believe its results, but did not even think it worth while to consider what was wrong with it, let alone check up on it. They just ignored it. About ten years later some experiments were brought to my notice which accidentally offered an explanation of Lord Rayleigh's findings. His results were apparently due to some hidden factors of no great interest, but which he could have hardly identified at the time. He should have ignored his observation, for he ought to have known that there must be something wrong with it. (65)

This intuitive sense that some claim just can't be right regardless of whether or not one knows why is constitutive of any disciplinary space. ([back](#))