

Ostensive Dreams and Declarative Nightmares: Northrop Frye, Marshall McLuhan and George Grant

Amir Khan

LNU-MSU College of International Business
Liaoning Normal University
Dalian, China
amirazizkhan@missouristate.edu

Ostensive Dreams

To purport Generative Anthropology as a new way of thinking is to recognize, fundamentally, its stated break with metaphysics, or the philosophical obsession to get at the thing-in-itself. Many ontic systems before Generative Anthropology have come and gone (actually, are still around). Generative Anthropology's break with these systems comes in its attempt to situate what Eric Gans calls the "ostensive" utterance prior to a "propositional" one.

[T]he anthropologies of Marx and Freud are derived, or more precisely, retrodicted from the specific foci, respectively economic and psychological, of their analyses of the modern world. Freud's scene in *Totem and Taboo* of the murder of the father who has monopolized the women of the horde is an a posteriori justification of the Oedipus complex rather than a parsimonious hypothesis of human origin. There is no analogous Marxian scene of origin; for Marx the source of the human is *labor*, that is, interaction with objects, rather than the scenic interaction with other humans that gives rise to language.[\[1\]](#)

As ontic systems designed to explain human behavior, both Freudians and Marxists begin with certain "propositional" truths that can conceivably be verified in the external world. The evidence, as Gans notes above, for the existence of the Oedipus complex occurs a posteriori, meaning that as a hypothesis, it must be verified by lived experience, or what we observe somewhere in nature. Similarly, Marxism looks to material causes for its explanation of human behavior. Hypothesizing "labour" as the central focus of human relations allows us to see how and why human beings act the way they do.

The implicit assumption, then, within these and any “metaphysical” scheme that seeks to explain human behavior based on observable phenomena is that by isolating a certain criterion, we can, fundamentally, explain how human beings behave. The promise inherent in these metaphysical systems comes via their explanatory power as evidenced by the type of cultural work that follows and their ability to help us make sense of who we are.

Marx’s and Freud’s anthropologies provide means for interpreting cultural and religious phenomena and ultimately all the events of human history; the quantity and quality of the works they have inspired bear witness to their productivity. Yet, however persuasive may be the idea that production-relations are the motor of history or that the human psyche is determined by a complex of metapsychological forces, neither of these theories explain the emergence of the specifically human ability to create symbolic signs or *representations*. Marx, Freud, and their disciples emit propositions about the human-in-general without explaining how we came to acquire the faculty that allows us to emit these propositions. Thus, despite their pretensions of getting to the *thing itself*, both fall within the boundaries of the mode of thought, first elaborated by Plato, that has since come to be called, after the title of one of Aristotle’s treatises, *metaphysics*.^[2]

So what? If we choose to call all matter of human inquiry “metaphysical,” meaning that the validity of such human inquiry is to be found in the actual observable world via posterior verification, why such a dramatic call to break from this tendency, to instead follow a “new way of thinking” grounded in something intuitive, originary, and non-verifiable?

One reason might be that moving forward, propositional ontic systems help us explain the world, but moving backwards—to something like the origin of language—these metaphysical systems, which purport to explain the human, cannot adequately account for the most glaring trait that makes a human a human. This of course is neither an Oedipal complex nor labour, but language itself. How are we to imagine language emanating from the Oedipal complex, or from the fact that human relations are indeed heavily mediated by strictures and protocols of labour and production? We cannot, not adequately anyhow, so we can either look to *another* metaphysical, propositional schema to test against the observable world to try to account for language. Or we can, in a way, do away with metaphysics altogether, forgoing our ability to propositionally verify the origin of the human—that is, human *language* origin. The first case is the sort of never-ending trajectory of inquiry that the West has been on since the time of Plato and constitutes what I am characterizing in this paper as a series of “declarative nightmares.” The second case marks a break in this trajectory, has something to do

with linguistic “ostensives,” and is why Gans calls Generative Anthropology “a new way of thinking.”

But again, so what? Perhaps it was never in the purview of Freudianism and Marxism to explain precisely where language came from. Rather, Marx and Freud were interested in explaining human behavior. Is one of necessity tied to the other? The unabashed answer Generative Anthropology gives us is yes, so that to lack one is to fundamentally lack, or have something lacking in, the other. Moreover, we cannot assume that labour or the Oedipus complex came first, spawning the human ability of representation. In such a scenario, we are forced to conclude that there existed a time when proto-humans were either Oedipally charged or exploited by the forces of production *prior to* representation. Generative Anthropology puts forward the radical idea that only *subsequent to* the human ability of representation could we perceive, initiate, or be aware of anything like Oedipal resentment or exploitative labour practices. Such resentments do not cause language; rather, they are the effect of humankind’s language-making capability.

Part of the promise of such thinking, as I will attempt to argue in this paper, is in the ethical work such an understanding of a common, hypothetical origin (unverified and unverifiable) might engender. Stepping out of, or beyond, an ability to propositionally verify our existence has the potential to make us more humane. *Prima facie*, it seems that relying on observable phenomena to make claims about the human, rather than relying on originary intuitions and subsequent hypotheses, is a claim to a certain brand of intellectual seriousness and responsibility. It seems reckless to forgo truths capable of being verified in the observable world. If reality cannot corroborate our version of reality, what business have we to believe it real in the first place?

Yet the value of this “new way of thinking” cannot be known beforehand. We posit a hypothetical origin. So what? The value of doing so cannot come, moreover, after corroboration via some future laboratory experiment but by what such a position allows us to conceive of and how it allows us to conceive ourselves. Gans is confident that this new heuristic, once accepted, will entail equally productive work as any previous (metaphysical) system. But to step out of the metaphysical quest for verification requires establishing the logical necessity (rather than necessary verification) of a more fundamental linguistic unit: the ostensive.

In our hypothetical originary scene, the role of language is reduced to its strict minimum: the momentary hesitation between the (chaotic) beginning and the (minimally ordered) end of an act of collective appropriation. The minimal linguistic act is the re-presentation of an already-present object by means of an ostensive sign that will preserve the memory of the object after its

disappearance. The ostensive word is not yet a concept; it is the name of an object-in-situation, a phenomenon that we can no doubt better understand as the “name of God.” It is by means of the ostensive that we teach words to children; they subsequently learn to use these words as imperatives to make-appear objects designated in their absence, and finally to construct “complete sentences,” that is, declaratives.[\[3\]](#)

An ostensive is the re-presentation of an “already-present” object, meaning that language is not (at least not initially) uttered in the absence of its referent, but precisely in its presence. To say further that the ostensive is “the name of an object-in-situation” is to recognize that language begins not simply as a means of cataloguing objects in the external world. It is the simultaneous recognition by all members present on a scene of representation of an object immediately before all of them. Temporally speaking, an ostensive utterance marks one’s participation in the present. The seeming redundancy of calling attention to an object immediately present anyhow makes the ostensive of “little interest for linguists

[Ostensives] fail to provide a context-free linguistic model for the knowledge the love of which constitutes philosophy.”[\[4\]](#) Ostensives, much like metaphors, cannot be verified as true or false. They simply are, and philosophy’s business is not, strictly speaking, to ascertain the “cultural” conditions that make language, say, “felicitous.” Philosophy should tell us where and how these conditions arose by appealing to “context-free” criteria, for example, those arguably described by cognitive science, evolutionary biology, or ordinary language philosophy. Yet refusing to pose a hypothetical at the origin of language will ensure that we continue to look, ultimately unfruitfully, to the outside world to verify how language came to be—an intellectual red herring.

In the more mature phase of language operation, the ostensive is eclipsed by the declarative, that is, the proposition.

In the declarative sentence, language achieves its mature capacity to create imaginary models on the “other scene” of representation. We may then give a preliminary definition of the concept as the word/noun understood as necessarily an element of a declarative sentence, cut off from the original act of naming. Metaphysics, by denying the existence of an utterance-form more primitive than the declarative, incarnates the refusal to think the origin of language as an event.[\[5\]](#)

This refusal, I am making the case, has ethical consequences. In lacking a specific ethical lacuna, all metaphysical systems replace an ethics of presence with an ethics of deferral. Important to note here is that in Gans’s taxonomy of speech-acts, the ostensive proper is followed by the ostensive-imperative, which is a “make-

appear" utterance, so that the inability to "make-appear" marks a "failed" ostensive. No doubt, the value of human language is precisely that we can talk about objects in their absence. I can say "Ferrari" without expecting it to appear. Moreover, I can say "God" without expecting it to appear. But in the case of God, if we want to insist on its existence despite its non-appearance, we can either demand that it appear via ritual ostensive, or delay its appearance via the declarative, that is, the temporal prolongation of its eventual return. Alternatively, if one wants to do away with both the ritualistic ostensive fetishization of an event, and the idea that God will reappear at some point in the future, one must fetishize the *concept itself* and deny the existence or importance of the immanent thing.

Put simply: the good-as-thing is the ostensive. The ostensive utterance points to a *thing* (like the carcass of a bison) which is not easily divisible. The good-as-word, or concept, is the declarative. The word, as substitute for the thing in its absence, is equally and infinitely sharable. So the ostensive/finite world is not *derivative* of the infinite declarative word (something akin to a "fall" in language); rather, the idea of God and infinity are drawn from, derived from, an original idea of scarcity and finitude. The idea of perpetual, lasting, and holy peace is derived from the initial possibility of violence. Violent thoughts are not, therefore, indicative of a "fall from" a previously irenic existence. The reverse is true. The threat of violence breeds an understanding of peace.

But if the concept itself does the deferring (in a more "mature" phase of language), if the declarative concept is infinitely sharable, promoting the perpetual peace, why is Gans (correctly, in my view) suspicious of the lack of ethical content in the philosophical declarative utterance? If conceiving of the origin of language as an event brings to the fore not the infinite sharability of the sign, but the finite non-sharability of the thing, why should we mistrust metaphysics or the declarative at all? It is the ostensive, or its possible failure, that ought to initiate nightmares. Declaratives mean we can keep on dreaming.

Let us keep in mind three things. First, the declarative does a *type* of ethical work. Second, the move from ostensive to declarative language mirrors Northrop Frye's move from metaphorical to metonymic language. And third, Plato/Socrates himself makes a tripartite distinction between the appetitive, the rational, and the spiritual.

I touch on Frye because he is both a writer who takes religion seriously and one who promotes the ethical value of metaphysics. Frye makes a distinction between metaphoric language to metonymic language, which, in a loose way mirrors, I think, what Gans is talking about when he says ostensive and declarative respectively. A metaphor means "this is that." Metonymy, as Frye discusses it, is a loosened metaphor, something like: "this is put for that" (roughly, a part stands for the

whole). And Frye notes further that the rise of metonymic language (language as “put fors”) occurs in the time of Plato’s *Republic*.

In metaphorical language the central conception which unifies human thought and imagination is the conception of a plurality of gods, or embodiments of the identity of personality and nature. In metonymic language this unifying conception becomes a monotheistic “God,” a transcendent reality or perfect being that all verbal analogy points to. Such conceptions as the Form of the Good in Plato or the unmoved Mover in Aristotle are not difficult to absorb into this idea of God.[\[6\]](#)

So the ethical content of metonymic language that Frye notes (the ethical content of the declarative utterance) is the ability for it to rescue us from the immediacy of the metaphor/ostensive. Ostensives, say, have the ability to call up immediate human passions and energies thought to be mirrored in the natural world.

Each phase of language has its characteristic virtues as well as limitations. In the first [metaphorical/ostensive/ritualistic] phase, language can be used with an immediacy and vitality, such as we find in Homer, that later ages never consistently recapture. Yet this use of language is restricted by an identity with nature from which metonymic dialectic has freed itself.[\[7\]](#)

According to Frye, this marks a revolution in language, and has been similarly articulated by Gans (in moving from the ostensive to the declarative) as introducing into human affairs an ethics of linguistic deferral. Yet the primary difference between this declarative deferral and an ostensive one is that while the ostensive defers the eventual distribution of some immediate thing that can be conceivably pointed to or at, the declarative refuses to point at anything at all. If anything is given primacy, it is the concept itself, subsequently fetishized.

Although metaphysics is a fundamentally anti-religious mode of thought . . . it has its own conceptions of God. It is not certain whether the metaphysical divinity was the God of Socrates but it was certainly that of Plato [F]rom its earliest formulations, Platonic religion is essentially delocalized.[\[8\]](#)

Platonic religion is delocalized, meaning it is made “universal,” in a way, bereft of any embarrassing “local” (read ritual) ostensives, put in motion, dialecticized, propositionalized, initiating an ethics of spiritual deferral—which is what I take Gans to be talking about, and to be dismayed by, when he expresses concerns about the Western obsession with metaphysics, particularly of that obsession lacking real ethical content.

But how to escape the declarative, or, in a sense, regain the ethical content of an

event that we can no longer see or point to? We may have survived the barbarities of certain “declarative” nightmares that presuppose an ethics of deferral, whether Plato’s stable notion of the “good” or “justice,” the second-coming of Christ, or the Communist Utopia. None of these endgames, for instance, can be pointed to, or at. Hence the ethical content in all of these structures of ideology remain elusive, and perhaps *it is the fact or continual discovery of their elusiveness*, hence the ultimate ineptitude of our declarative utterances, that drives us to commit further acts of barbarity. Taken this way, the act of deferral itself entails a type of barbarity, but not the sort that occurs in an immediate exchange between you and me but which occurs in the aggregate, over time—that is, in our *willing* to bring something forth or into existence, something indeed that we cannot exactly point to. And it is of no use nowadays to pretend, with the benefit of Gans’ revelatory work on how ostensive utterances work, that because we are armed with a suitable conceptual heuristic (GA), we can sidestep any future declarative nightmares to come. Rather, we must ask ourselves what current declarative nightmares we are currently in to wonder if GA can help us in any way get out.

Declarative Nightmares

I can name two conceptual, declarative myths, hence nightmares, that we are caught in right off the bat: the myth of “progress” and the myth of “technology.” Set aside the fact, for now, that both “technology” and “progress” are difficult things to point at or to exactly, we certainly know that progress is something we all like to believe is “being made,” every day and that it leads somewhere. And, further, though we all understand that technology has the potential to be used against us, we still believe that this will only occur if technology falls into the wrong, dastardly hands; but as long as we *will* or even *intend* technology to do good, it will almost of necessity do nothing but good (i.e., make our lives easier, with new gizmos and gadgets), and moreover, help us make “progress” to boot. So the story of humans and human beings becomes, in suitable declarative fashion, the story of our collective “progress” as a species, technological and all. Gans says that philosophy (metaphysics, in particular) has an “eventless” ethic. I want to say that “progress” and “technology,” the pursuit of which organizes our collective lives together in the West, are similarly “eventless.”

This critique of metaphysics has appeared in Canadian letters as a critique of technology, most notably through what is known as the “Toronto School of Communication Theory.” The most prominent luminaries in this “school of thought” are Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis, but I don’t think it impertinent to include the thinking of Northrop Frye and also George Grant, the latter of whom especially devoted considerable energy to critiquing, for example, technology in a “mass age.”[\[9\]](#)

But let's begin with McLuhan. I am not making the claim that McLuhan's works ought to be "reappraised," or that lessons exist in McLuhan's oeuvre which must be rehashed necessarily for our benefit. Rather, I am interested in the failure of his philosophical project—not because he himself is a failure or a fraud. But because, in the marketplace of ideas, even intellectual ones, everyone has a shelf-life. In our gusto to maintain a metaphysical, declarative edge over ourselves, in order not to face the finitude of our existence, we are always looking to tell a story—in the case of McLuhan, an intellectual story about how technology is leading us somewhere. I'll note briefly here that McLuhan, unlike Grant and perhaps Frye, was optimistic about technology. Just as the materialists chided the humanists for being unable to "point at" anything to establish some manner of objective criteria to ground their claims, McLuhan was equally derisive of the materialists. Here is Arthur Kroker discussing McLuhan's legacy (and note here the move from one declarative nightmare (of some economic utopia) to another (a technological utopia):

In McLuhan's lexicon, the privileging of the "economic" relationship belonged to an obsolete era: the now superseded age of specialism, fragmentation, and segmentation of work of the industrial revolution. McLuhan viewed himself as living on the other side, the far side, of technological history: the coming age of "cosmic man" typified by "mythic or iconic awareness" and by the substitution of the "multi-faceted for the point-of-view." What was capitalism? It was the obsolescent content of the new era of the electronic simulation of consciousness. For McLuhan, economy had also gone electronic and thus even the corporate world, with its "magic" of advertisements and its plenitude of computers, could be subsumed into the more general project of surfacing the reason in technological society. Consequently, it might be said that McLuhan's blindspot on the question of economy was due not so much to a strain of "technological determinism" in his thought . . . but due rather to his, transparently Catholic expectation that if the electronic economy of the corporate world was not an "agent intellect" in the creation of a new technological horizon, it was, at least, a necessary catalyst in setting the conditions for "cosmic man." McLuhan was a "missionary" to the power centres of the technological experience; and he could so faithfully, and guilelessly, discuss the civilizing moment in technology because there never was any incompatibility between the Catholic foundations of his communication theory and the will to empire.[\[10\]](#)

I will get to this idea of "willing" in a moment but notice here the curious and fortuitous phrasing. Kroker says of McLuhan that when he "so faithfully, and guilelessly discuss[ed] the civilizing *moment* in technology, there never was any incompatibility between the Catholic foundations of his communication theory and the will to empire." So set aside for now that in Kroker's estimation, McLuhan

replaces one metaphysical dream (or nightmare) with another: that of a Roman Catholic mission of “civilization” or “civilizing” with a “communication theory” that posits or puts forward an equally redemptive notion, or metaphysical quest, of “civilizing” via “technology” and “the will to empire.” Part of McLuhan’s prerogative was to see in the proliferation of technology a type of technological humanism, or God’s work—and while we may have suffered the horrors of something like the Spanish Inquisition in the past, it is quite possible that the metaphysical nightmare underway right now has something to do with this “civilizing will” of “technology” that lacks an “agent intellect”—in a word, that lacks an ethic. Where or what exactly is the civilizing *moment* (originary moment) in technology? Like any metaphysic (or like a Christianity that lines up Paradise (the declarative) before the Fall (the ostensive)—essentially backwards), this metaphysic of a technological humanism is philosophical—that is to say, *eventless*.

Which brings me to another great Canadian thinker, George Grant, whose critique of technology was far less redemptive than McLuhan’s. Where McLuhan’s critique was somewhat apolitical (i.e., a critique that transcended old ideologies, even capitalism itself), Grant’s critique of technology had a sharper political edge. Here is Jordan A. Todd explaining how Grant tied the twin declarative nightmares of “progress” and “technology” to the political imperatives of *both* Marxism and American Liberalism.

Grant understood the modern world as one that has been secularized. However, he didn’t mean this in a strict sense, that is, without religious or spiritual basis. Rather, he saw a transition from a Western Christian cosmology to one which embodied the relentless pursuit of technology. This marks the most recent ‘great western schism’—essentially the split between liberalism and Christianity. Grant defined religion as any, “system of belief (whether true or false) which binds together the life of individuals and gives to those lives whatever consistency of purpose they may have.” Based on this definition, he described liberal humanism and Marxism as religion. This transition away from Christianity was not limited to the West. Recognizing that Marx had established what would become the most powerful modern humanism, Grant saw Marxism as bringing the western spirit of progress to the East. Marx was an important subsequent thinker of Kant in a process that had secularized the teachings of Western Religion (Judaism and Christianity) repackaging them more appropriately for the modern world, in the form of ideology. This places liberal humanism (more specifically American Liberalism) and Marxism in the same bed—as the religions of progress. As mentioned previously, liberalism was initially founded on Christian cosmology, but then unbeknownst to those who adhered to liberalism, cosmology shifted to that of technology and progress.[\[11\]](#)

Todd shows how Grant seamlessly ties Western liberalism to Christian cosmology, itself “metaphysical” in origin (i.e., in its emphasis of future redemption rather than past, “event-like” sacrifice). From there, Kroker shows us how McLuhan then seamlessly, if somewhat unknowingly, extends this same metaphysic to the American capitalists:

It was McLuhan’s special ability . . . to transfigure the grubby leadership of the American business world, and then of a good part of the new class of technocrats in the West, into the dizzying heights of a greater historical destiny, that made him such a favoured courtesan of the technological empire McLuhan dangled that most precious of gifts: a sense of historical purpose (the age of communications as “cosmic consciousness”); and an intellectual justification (the technological imperative as both necessary *and* good).[\[12\]](#)

But Grant understood that McLuhan’s flattery of said business classes and technocrats was itself a metaphysical cover for something much more sinister. And this was the act of willing itself, human willing, without ethical content emanating from a past historical event that could conceivably be pointed to or at, but *willing towards* some future ungrounded in any conceivable originary event.

These are those who understand that they can know nothing about what is good to will. Because of the historical sense, they know that all values are relative and man-made; the highest values of the past have devalued themselves But because men are wills, the strong cannot give up willingly. Men would rather will nothing than have nothing to will.[\[13\]](#)

Kroker adds this bit of commentary:

With this profound understanding of technological society as directed, in the end, by the “creative” who would “rather will nothing” than not will at all, Grant achieves an almost luminous insight into the psychology of modern life. For what can motivate last men and nihilists other than, as Nietzsche has already said, the loosing of a “howling spirit of revenge.”[\[14\]](#)

I’ll contrast the previous quotation—which highlights the sinister “willing” of human beings, say the “metaphysical” willing, an eventless, ethic-less willing—with more fortuitous phrasing from Gans describing the nature of a “philosophical” deity or divinity:

The philosophical divinity [as opposed to a religious divinity] covers over a profound contradiction: he is a person-subject possessed of a will, yet this will, like the content of the Platonic concept, never reveals itself in any specific time or place. It is by means of this construction that metaphysics conjures away the

paradoxicality of its “declarative” sacred.[\[15\]](#)

A will to sacrality with no sacred event—this is the paradox and the fundamental *non-thing* that lurks behind any declarative nightmare.

So can this metaphysical belief in a non-thing be somehow ostensified, made apparent in a way that would conjure into existence some sort of ethical content? Or, by virtue of its *non-thingness*, are we doomed to nihilistic willing not exactly in our commitment to something like the unfolding of technology, but say, our non-committal attitude to its unfolding, as though wherever it leads us we must indubitably follow?

Indeed, how can we ever hope to point to the historicity of something like “technology” and “progress” when these things are “eventless”? As Gans reminds us, these are types of Platonic concepts, or philosophical divinities that never reveal themselves at any specific time or place.

Moreover, that an ethical, ostensive, originary event has a “history” does not mean that it happened in time *per se*, or must needs happen again in time. Rather, the event’s historicity acts precisely to conflate our understanding of the past with the present—to make them one and the same, to offer a “frozen” metaphor (i.e., an understanding that this, what we do now, is, somehow and despite our historical distance from it, exactly, precisely, *that*—not an indication of progress, but its intimate and necessary *negation*) some understanding of which I think is necessary to put a stop to excessive, endless, and ultimately nihilistic willing purported by Nietzsche’s last men.

So back to my original question: can (or should) this understanding or comprehension of willing move beyond the strictly metaphysical? Can we find post-facto ostensive ethical currency behind human willing? I’ll end with a quotation from Frye and some more questions.

When the mind takes over from the body, it holds the body quiet, in study or in concentration. Sense perception is directed and controlled. Some programmes of experience, such as yoga, assume a spirit-mind relationship parallel to the mind-body one. They say that the spirit is the real self, but can’t emerge until the mind is kept quiet.[\[16\]](#)

Let us equate here for a moment mind with concepts, and spirit, say, with ethics, or originary being. Generative Anthropology provides us a conceptual understanding of how ostensives function and the ethical work they engender by virtue of being *scenic* and event-oriented. And what I am claiming has occurred, in the Western metaphysical quest to get at the thing-in-itself, a trajectory of knowledge pursuit

that continues to this day under the guise of “technology” and “progress,” is a degradation or denial of the ethical work that only ostensive language can allow us to reclaim—that is, a claim to community, or something communal, scenic, local. And to what end? To an end of *non-willing*, as though our reach for declarative criteria and imaginary scenes of representations is wreaking havoc on the earth.

To eliminate the ostensive is to expunge the local historicity of the deferral of collective violence by means of the sign. The originary opposition between center and periphery that founds and is founded by language is the source and model of all the great philosophical dichotomies: word and thing, form and content, Idea and copy, ontological and ontic. But if all these oppositions are already latent in the sign as such, it is only from the time of the declarative sentence that they can be thematically expressed. To understand a declarative sentence, one situates it on an “other scene” that is not a simple prolongation of the present scene but a mental scene inhabited by imaginary objects.[\[17\]](#)

Can a conceptual understanding of ostensives save us from the unfolding of history in time, a history intimately pegged to ideas of progress and technology? Can we access the atemporal stillness of the originary event by telling an originary narrative that begins with the ostensive? We all know GA provides us with suitable concepts. But then, is there access to Being *without* concepts?—which is to ask if all concepts nowadays, somehow, presuppose a metaphysics. All concepts tell a story in time; or, put another way: concepts are never *metaphorically* knowable (if we say, nowadays, that this is that, we know that this is not *really* that, hence not really an ostensive); concepts are only metonymically, or declaratively knowable (this can be verified in time as a suitable *put-for* that). How to step out of that story, away from mind-made quests for more knowledge or verification in time or progress or technology or what have you to the atemporal realm of spirit? We may have a linear trajectory or anthropology, even, of revelation, but does such an anthropology presuppose that we are, or should be, getting somewhere—indicative, I think, of an eventless metaphysic—or is the movement backwards toward the originary event a reminder that with the ostensive we are not so far removed from our originary ancestors, a reminder not of where we are going (i.e., somewhere), but that we are, and always have been, *here*—that the true lesson of being human, or being ethical or having an ethic at all, comes with an understanding that we are, in a sense, going *nowhere*.

Notes

[\[1\]](#). Eric Gans, “Generative Anthropology: A New Way of Thinking?” *Anthropoetics* 13.2 (Fall 2007): <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1302/1302gans/>.

[2]. Ibid., his emphasis.

[3]. Eric Gans, "Plato and the Birth of Conceptual Thought." *Anthropoetics* 2.2 (Fall/Winter 1996/97): <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0202/plato/>.

[4]. Ibid.

[5]. Ibid.

[6]. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 9.

[7]. Ibid., 20.

[8]. Gans, "Plato."

[9]. George Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1960).

[10]. Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1985), 81-82.

[11]. Jordan A. Todd, "This Essay is 'Not My Own.' A Summary Essay Regarding George Grant: Metaphysics and Modernity," *The Owl: George Grant Journal* (Sept. 6, 2012): <http://theowlgeorgegrant.blogspot.de/2012/09/this-essay-is-not-my-own-summary-essay.html>.

[12]. Kroker, 84.

[13]. George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corp., 1969), 92

[14]. Grant qtd. In Kroker, 48.

[15]. Gans, "Plato."

[16]. Northrop Frye qtd. in B.W. Powe, *Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye: Apocalypse and Alchemy* (Toronto: U of T Press, 2014), 185.

[17]. Gans, "Plato."