

Generative Anthropology and the Mahabharata: Cognition, Narrative, Culture

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This paper will investigate connections amongst Eric Gans's theory of Generative Anthropology (GA), cognitive studies (most of all in the area of cognitive anthropology) and the Hindu mythological narratives of the *Mahabharata*. We will begin by identifying the *Mahabharata* as primarily a form of narration, a mode of verbal representation seemingly natural to human consciousness.[\[1\]](#) We will assume a referential concept of narrative compatible with Gans's idea of language as a representational system. GA concentrates on the beginnings of human language and culture and its application has been proven valid in many areas of the humanities, including analyses of literature, philosophy, art, and aesthetic and critical theory. To these the present article will add mythological systems of narrative, and in this instance, the *Mahabharata*.

From the point of view of GA, where language is the source of human identification, it is worth attending to a comment of Roland Barthes who, even as he disavows any relation between narrative and reality, tends nonetheless to support Gans's "generative" intuition. For Barthes, "What takes place in a *narrative* is from a referential (reality) point of view literally *nothing*; 'what happens' is language alone, the adventure of language, unceasing celebration of its coming."[\[2\]](#) Here, in his own way, Barthes anticipates Gans's scene of language origin, a scene of becoming through representation. And "any theory or logic of representation," including that proposed by GA, Gans stresses, even if it is subject to objective ideal laws,[\[3\]](#) is still "wholly dependent on the human *experience* of representation."[\[4\]](#)

In the present context we will suppose that mythological transfers should be considered as narrative and representational at the same time. Such a view will be taken with regard to the *Mahabharata*, one of the two main Hindu epic poems, a derivative secondary work created and collected for centuries, and traditionally categorized as *smriti*.[\[5\]](#) This term has multiple meanings, and may be presented as "that which is remembered," but also "remembrance, reminiscence, thinking of or upon, calling to mind," or simply "memory"[\[6\]](#)—all of which directly point us towards the cognitive sphere. Due to its function in the *smriti* tradition, the *Mahabharata* transmits or transfers sacred and culturally important human ideas

embodied in myths and may even be viewed as the source of a metaphysics of narrative communication.[\[7\]](#) GA, speaking about the source of the sign and the appearance of language, turns us to this dimension, as well. The sign, language, and narrative, which are indissolubly combined, in the end express something more than an easily explained reality. That is why the *Mahabharata* could be described as an attenuated form of the sacred, transcendence and meaning included in its various scenes of representation, whose metaphysical connotations are legible through GA. We may radically claim, then, that the transfers of this mythological narrative are “a sign of the power of metaphysical faith”[\[8\]](#) accumulated in such texts.

Narrative communication is fundamentally or firstly deferral, the central conceptual category of GA. At the same time, GA can be understood as an original human science which enables the analysis of diverse mythical transmissions,[\[9\]](#) whose cognitive dimension I have previously discussed.[\[10\]](#) Mythological narrative may be viewed as a form of representation which in the first place demonstrates a wide spectrum of differentiated human desires, the counterparts of natural appetites, which in the whole process of representation of multiple scenes of origin become a mechanism for the deferral of violence.[\[11\]](#)

Our point of reference will be both popular translations of *Mahabharata* from Sanskrit into English, and interpretations of its original Sanskrit songs in some selected analyses by Georges Dumézil. This is one way to extend the being of mythical narrative by taking it out of the shadow of the past and moving it into the present moment. We will perform an “interpretation,”[\[12\]](#) “transference” and “transposition” from one discursive dimension (as GA is) to another (cognition and mythology). We will try to find some convergences between GA and the cognition of *Mahabharata*’s civilization, not forgetting, however, that a narrative poem or epic from the distant past, as is the case for the *Mahabharata*, is always in a phase of continual creation, and that we are constituting a specific point of reference in choosing from the shortened, elaborated versions appearing today in a variety of publications.[\[13\]](#) These versions have transformed the old texts, expressing them in a banal interpretative mode, and combining with the hundreds of active commentaries on the *Mahabharata*’s stories that have mainly proliferated over the Internet.

Firstly we will apply the rule known as “Ockham’s razor,” which prefers to solve problems using the simplest or fewest explanatory assumptions. I am going to elaborate an idea of the *Mahabharata* as a narrative which responds to the concepts of GA, but in two dimensions. The first dimension would be to see the *Mahabharata* as what could be called an anthropological manifestation of “Writing Culture,”[\[14\]](#) which in this case means its transformed, perfected version of “Written Culture”

and a final consequence of the scene of origin. The second dimension involves what is called “Reading Culture,”[\[15\]](#) and uses GA as a method of analysing human thought. In this case, the mythical epic is understood as expressing human self-consciousness through language and narrative, and acting to ensure that violence is at least temporarily averted.

To current, especially postmodern anthropology, which rejects all theoretical truths, propositions and theses about the completeness of culture studies,[\[16\]](#) the *Mahabharata* as an interpretative challenge for GA is surely problematic. Nevertheless, this text is full of deeper meanings, many dimensions, different layers and “undetermined places,”[\[17\]](#) which we might hope to demonstrate will respond to GA’s explanatory apparatus.

I want to argue that the wide spectrum of GA and especially its concept of the scene of origin and its elaboration of that scene’s appearance and effect is, to use Leibnitz’ expression, an *alphabetum cogitationum humanorum*,[\[18\]](#) a companion to cognitive anthropology. GA’s scene of origin, understood as a singular episode and a precondition of culture, is replicated as well in the text of the *Mahabharata*’s myths.[\[19\]](#) Gans says that “the function of any hypothesis of the origin of man, including those that are traditionally called myths, is not to transform into a fictitious event something that was necessarily a gradual process, but, on the contrary, to present a plausible reconstruction of what must have occurred as an event.”[\[20\]](#) Gans sees the relation between origin and myth as what I read as a fundamental knowledge about the world, a knowledge also coded into the Hindu epic and based on something parallel to what we might call cognitive or mental files.[\[21\]](#)

Traditionally, cognitive anthropology has placed itself in the realm of the social sciences, but like semantics, it is essentially a search for the meaning manifested in the presence of language and culture.[\[22\]](#) It deals with questions about the sense of other people’s cultural representations, sometimes collected in a shape of great narratives, whose common denominator is constituted in their existence as meanings. What I apply myself to in this paper, using GA, is the question of the deep layer of sense in the *Mahabharata*, indeed its extended and its continuous representation of meaning, not only a simple, multi-year narrative but also a huge meta-narration, a linked and unlimited sequence of micro-narrations. It is necessary to presume that without a narration in the form of linguistic, pictorial or sound signs the human world was not and is not able to manifest its being: being in the already existing state but also being in the process of constant expression of oneself.

And so also the *Mahabharata* as a narration constitutes a project continually under construction, something already made and being made at present, through a

constant process of inscription.[\[23\]](#) Let us then read the *Mahabharata* as a process of narrative textualization, which most of all is embodying culture as written, less locatable in space and time,[\[24\]](#) but nonetheless stable in its generative, grammatical being,[\[25\]](#) understood as epistemological and ontological at the same time.[\[26\]](#) Thus the *Mahabharata*, as epistemological evidence, a form of culture in the shape of large Hindu epic, could be understood as:

1. a self-protective, instinctive narration representing a cognition of the human world that could be decoded by means of Generative Anthropology, and which simultaneously constitutes
2. the evocation of a possible world or reality already known to us[\[27\]](#) from the past.

It may be useful for us in this context to consider the understanding of cognitive anthropology developed by Ward Goodenough, who sees culture mainly as ideas, concepts, and knowledge, but also beliefs and values, which exist in the minds of individuals in society. This concept of culture relates to the order of reality or the reality of the ideational, where culture (amongst its other purposes) is used to support social orientation processes. Culture of course also involves the formulation of ideas, classifications, and interpretations of social behavior, and establishes certain patterns for behavior and indeed a veritable "grammar of social behavior,"[\[28\]](#) all of which we find in mythological writings in almost limitless supply. Goodenough also sees culture as a source of guidance for appropriate behavior as well as an interpreter of the behavior of others in the society it governs.[\[29\]](#) At the core of culture is an accumulation of human knowledge,[\[30\]](#) and in particular knowledge concerning social conduct. Such knowledge becomes, that is, a control mechanism for human behavior. Coming back to GA, we may suppose that a parallel function is coeval with the appearance of the scene of origin. In the originary scene, through the emission of a memorable sign to avoid or defer impending human violence, the first cultural activity also responds to human social nature, and also becomes an expression and means of preservation of human knowledge for the purposes of protecting the social body. So the human knowledge which effects the creation of the sign could be called a generative knowledge, which facilitates the peaceful ongoing existence of human society. We find many examples of such knowledge being transferred through time in the *Mahabharata*, whose narrations build and represent social cognition about potential human violence. Indeed, a theory of deferral itself, in the sense that GA means it, is arguably embodied in the text of the *Mahabharata*.

In his cognitive anthropology, Goodenough conceptualizes the order of phenomena and the order of ideals.[\[31\]](#) The latter we may discover in the principle of the

deferral of violence dramatized in the *Mahabharata*'s extended narrative sequences. This ideological order is the basic norm of humanity, identical with the constant language-culture domination whose "defending" function against ubiquitous violence is primordial. The phenomenal order, in turn, is visible in the mass of individual episodes collected in the epic, including those in elaborated and transformed versions.

The *Mahabharata*'s past, present and ongoing narrative meta-transmission and meta-transition of the events, and figures and patterns of human behaviour, seen in the light of postmodern intellectual trends, should modify our view of the classical epics, especially if we recall Jean-François Lyotard's cautionary view of "grand narratives" or "master narratives."[\[32\]](#) The *Mahabharata*, however, even equipped as we have been arguing with knowledge about the nature of the world, could instead be called a "huge, mythical story," containing in turn an array of privileged, so-called "small stories." Here we may take an approach that has already been abandoned in the ostensible "forefront" and "cutting edge" of anthropological research. This is to see the *Mahabharata* as a collection of mimetic micro and macro transfers, which represent human culture and its cognition in a long series of causes and effects that can be seen from the perspective provided by GA.

Both GA as a theory and the *Mahabharata* as an epic, traditionally regarded by Hindus as a text about moral law and a history,[\[33\]](#) contain a collection of components of universal and global significance. Early Indologists generally failed to find a coherent structure in the epic. Herman Oldenberg, for example, despite crediting the original poem with an immense "tragic force," judged the full text to be a "horrible chaos."[\[34\]](#) Moritz Winternitz imagined that "only unpoetical theologists and clumsy scribes" could have lumped the parts of disparate origin into such an "unordered whole."[\[35\]](#) This view continues to prevail in our times. Essentially the *Mahabharata*—a long-lasting narrative discourse, mainly created and elaborated several thousand years ago—is ever being continued in permanently new translations, commentaries and discussions, all being different formulations of what I will try to demonstrate is the same originary hypothesis.[\[36\]](#) The contemporary presence of the *Mahabharata* on the internet may still be thought of as a realm of Hindu culture, but its components are universal and perform a sequence of "never-ending" cultural narratives, developed by different authors, telling different tales. Taken together, this constitutes a cultural phenomenon that, using Gans's words, requires explanation.[\[37\]](#) We may paraphrase radically Jacques Derrida's formulation "There is nothing outside the text,"[\[38\]](#) saying that on the level of understanding, "there is nothing of GA outside of the *Mahabharata*." We may also go further and say that Gans, who redirected the theory of language and culture from surface descriptions to a generative and transformational basis, gives the explanation that can be combined with Paul Ricoeur's statement that myth "has

meaning as a narrative of origins,"[\[39\]](#) which in our case means a narrative of a specific scene of origin.

The *Mahabharata* as "written culture" consists of texts understood, again using Ricoeur's words, as "a set of utterances fixed by writing,"[\[40\]](#) but it mainly describes actions where the "reading" of that action reminds its reader of the reading of a text.[\[41\]](#) As a text inscribed in the Hindu *smriti* tradition, it could be also understood as a hypertext linked to other texts, rooted in the older *shruti* tradition.[\[42\]](#) In a broader sense, the *smriti* tradition includes, among others, the *Vedangas*, the *puranas*, and the metrical *dharmasastras*[\[43\]](#) and could hardly be disconnected from the past: it correlates and follows its predecessor, the *shruti* tradition.

All this means that *shruti* and *smriti* texts are determined by the same cognitive system of which they form a part. This united tradition creates a sphere of intertextuality which also existed in the past,[\[44\]](#) where, however it was expressed by different technical means, corresponding to and meeting the needs of the epoch. An intertextual tradition has been continued in sequences of ever-emerging stories, up to the present day. This tradition is of constant commentary on and commemoration of both texture and episodes, and may be thought of as an aspect of the process of absorbing the world through consciousness-creating cultural cognition. This way the *Mahabharata* as an effect which we have today, may be viewed as a huge narrative inter-text, a hyper-text and a hyper-narration, which represents a hyper-cognition of the culture it is related to.

The *Mahabharata*'s texts comprise a suite of events, tracing the adventures of heroes and gods and explaining their problems,[\[45\]](#) but most of all comprising a global story of the *Bhārata* dynasty, containing numerous series of actions in multi-faceted forms. Thus the epic becomes a manifest of knowledge about the nature of the human world or even more, as Hayden White claims, a way to impart sense to the world and life.[\[46\]](#) We may moreover see the *Mahabharata* as what F.W. Schelling in his *Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation* calls a "mythological consciousness," which we may suppose corresponds most of all to what GA calls "originary thinking" about consciousness and representation.

From the point of view of contemporary anthropology, which divides its history into material and mental periods, the perspective described above recalls in fact the "first cognitive revolution" and the transition from "behaviourism" to "mentalism."[\[47\]](#) In my understanding, the unity of these two dimensions constitutes the basis of Generative Anthropology. Applied to mythical epics, GA has the potential to unite behavioural and semantic analyses and rediscover the relation between the contents of the epics describing human behaviour and their more

fundamental meanings. In other words, the content of the epic allows it to demonstrate rudimentary forms of the kinds of behavioural rules which could be explained by GA. Among those behavioural rules we find the human capacity for the sudden “production” of a sign, as an expression of the cognitive comprehension of the means of deferring and avoiding violence. This we could term an example of the epic’s generative cognition.

This last statement leads us directly to Gans’s theory of myth in the origin of cultural representation,[\[48\]](#) as it develops from the human scene of origin.[\[49\]](#) The *Mahabharata*’s mythical narrations contain their own dramatic scenes, their own dramatic structure, their own mythical scenarios passed on for ages from one generation to another, in long-term transfers of generative scenes. These transfers carry an idea of the deferral of violence, a message for all societies of all times, as a “heads-up” of a possible destruction of the world. The scene of origin in the epic thus attracts a reverent attention and manifests mythical consciousness. It is worth recalling Ricoeur’s idea that the mythical consciousness in primary civilizations is almost the same everywhere[\[50\]](#) and represents “traditional narration” by which man “understands himself in this world.”[\[51\]](#)

This form of myth as a traditional narration is present in the *Mahabharata*. Again, such a text could be understood as reflecting a universal mental state and as a cultural code defining the most basic actions of human beings,[\[52\]](#) and thus as a dual-functioned instrument which simultaneously describes and creates reality.

Let us now move to the *Mahabharata* itself and demonstrate how some of its micro-stories exemplify references to the narrative scene of origin. These stories tend to confirm Gans’s interpretation of human culture in a generative spectrum, which could also have invaluable meaning for contemporary human experience and maybe even for futurist studies, to the extent that such studies concern themselves with peaceful human co-existence.[\[53\]](#) Already in the first sentences of the Book One, *Adi Parva* (“Book of the Beginning”) Section I, we find accumulated legends concerning the hypothetical but traditionally recognized author (Vyas) and also a first legendary recitation of the poem, which begins as follows:

Om! Having bowed down to Narayana and Nara, the most exalted male being, and also to the goddess Saraswati, must the word *Jaya* be uttered.[\[54\]](#)

I would like to draw attention to some components of this first part of the *Mahabharata*, where its very first sentence starts with the famous sound “Om,” the mystical religious sacred syllable. This sound we may take as a precondition of the sign, which according to Gans’s explanation may represent an ostensive,

"intentional act of signification which calls attention to the presence, in principle verifiable, of their referent."[\[55\]](#) In other words, it may be understood as an articulated, intentional sign, establishing human presence and signifying or performing "deferral" in what Gans terms an "intersubjective communication situation."[\[56\]](#) The second sentence confirms the production of intersubjective communication by the utterance of the word *Jaya*, which initiates the narration.

The next lines of *Adi Parva* give us the following scene:

Ugrasrava, the son of Lomaharshana, surnamed Sauti, well-versed in the *Puranas*, bending with humility, one day approached the great sages of rigid vows, sitting at their ease, who had attended the twelve years' sacrifice of Saunaka, surnamed Kulapati, in the forest of Naimisha. Those ascetics, wishing to hear his wonderful narrations, presently began to address him who had thus arrived at that recluse abode of the inhabitants of the forest of Naimisha. Having been entertained with due respect by those holy men, he saluted those Munis (sages) with joined palms, even all of them, and inquired about the progress of their asceticism. Then all the ascetics being again seated, the son of Lomaharshana humbly occupied the seat that was assigned to him. Seeing that he was comfortably seated, and recovered from fatigue, one of the Rishis beginning the conversation, asked him, 'Whence comest thou, O lotus-eyed Sauti, and where hast thou spent the time? Tell me, who ask thee, in detail.' Accomplished in speech, Sauti, thus questioned, gave in the midst of that big assemblage of contemplative Munis a full and proper answer in words consonant with their mode of life.[\[57\]](#)

This part of *Adi Parva* demonstrates the expectation of the great sages to hear Ugrasrava, a main character of this episode, describe his life experiences. The scene, after presenting the name and surname of Lomaharshana's son, starts by informing us that he is proficient in the *Puranas*, a source of narratives basic to the *Mahabharata*. The particular *Puranas* mentioned in this text demonstrate the line of transmission of traditional *smriti* narration into the *Mahabharata*, which prolonged and continued it. However, the center of the scene is the wait for the words of Lomaharshana's son, in courtesy and respect, by the elders of the Rishis, as tradition demands. Great sages, sitting in a circle, are waiting for something very important, for that which will happen soon. They await the narration, which will commence with Ugrasrava's words. The whole assembly is focused on a narrative moment, on a narrative scene, on a scene of origin, a central generative event expressed in Ugrasrava's answer in words comprehensible to the Rishis.

The events from the first book of the *Mahabharata* happen simultaneously on the

human or terrestrial, and the divine or eternal levels. These levels co-relate, and influence each other. From the text we learn that gods and demons are in a state of eternal struggle; however, they need each other to obtain an elixir of immortality, even though the demons are mostly preoccupied with the lust of material goods and power. Still, the demons take part in religious observances, even as they aim to win power over the world and satisfy their “insatiable appetites.” Gans says that “in myth, each element of the story realizes desire that explains some aspect of social reality.”^[58] Desire and its possible consequence—violence in various forms—are the *Mahabharata*’s dominant themes. Separate episodes show the power of destruction of human kingdoms through the uncontrolled lust of their kings. But there also appears a process of control: religious rituals and a path of law, understood as a way of *dharma*, which demands the renunciation and relinquishment—to use Gans’s terms—of those objects of desire,^[59] “the chief battleground of modern thought,”^[60] and indeed, of human existence.

As do all great mythical narratives, the *Mahabharata*, even in its earliest sections, moves to memories of this eschatological war, an event, like many others, changed into a recited story where we find the originary scene. There, violence typically takes its prime position, most of all in the recollection of war, but it is preceded by a series of smaller but equally violent episodes, in micro-mythical stories, including a story about a dog, the son of Sarama, a bitch that is a messenger of Indra, the king of gods. We read that the son of the bitch dog was beaten brutally by three brothers of King Janamejaya and that the dog was beaten even though it hadn’t approached the sacrificial animal.^[61] Then the dog’s mother Sarama says: my son was beaten, even though he hasn’t approached the sacrificial animal, or even licked it yet.

This event constitutes the first example of violence in the first part of the epic. But the nature of this presence is special. Violence hasn’t appeared as a result of resentment or as a result of the violation of a ban, in this case the ban on touching or eating a sacrificial animal. It is said that the dog hasn’t even licked it. So the dog didn’t break the law or commit a crime; however, the violence has already appeared. The threat of violence, a cognition of violence, appear first, before anything else happened and appear indeed at the origin of the whole story, in the very first part, in its first lines. But let us note what happens afterward. Sarama says “Oh king! You allowed my son to be beaten, though he didn’t do anything wrong, so let a blow happen to you for no reason.”^[62] This means that the dog’s mother, angry Sarama, puts a curse on King Janamejaya, making a gesture of resentment. Her words constitute an overt expression of violent resentment, yet their deep mental sense refers not to violence but to its deferral. Making a curse is to substitute speech for violence, to prevent an act of violence by speech, a version of the fundamental event of the scene of origin.

We may evoke here Gans's scene of origin in its classical / modeled version, from *The Origin of Language* and *The End of Culture* and further developed in *The Scenic Imagination*. The *Mahabharata*'s first, deeply significant story is told during a sacrificial ritual of King Janamejaja, a descendent of the Pandava line, who survived the apocalyptic war thanks to Krishna. As we already know, from the mimetic theory of René Girard and Gans's Generative Anthropology, a sacrificial ritual substitutes for the shared feast or *sparagmos* and is central to human culture. On the battlefield of Kurukshetra, where our dog has appeared, the sacrificial ritual had already been performed. The community is gathered together on this field and surrounds the sacrificial object, a substitute for an object of desire. The community is concentrated on the object with all its lust. At the potential threat towards the sacrificial object posed by the bitch Sarama's son, there appears the first moment of violence. Sarama does not respond further than by putting a curse on the king. She first of all speaks, albeit angrily. She doesn't bite the king's brothers, or even consume pieces of their torn bodies the way an animal, a dog might do, but speaks, puts a curse on King Janamejaja. Her resentment is changed into an oral utterance, into a curse which introduces (constitutes/establishes/determines) a narration instead of an act of revenge. Sarama also "follows a path of Truth," and her name is to be understood as signifying both the "Heavenly dog" and "Speech."[\[63\]](#)

So in the very first part of the *Mahabharata* we have a narration in the form of a curse, representing a deferral of violence, and the generative, anthropological beginnings of culture, much as Eric Gans has hypothesized human beginnings. "This mass of poetry," says Dumézil, "is an encyclopaedia, where the inherited mythical knowledge of the past becomes available for use."[\[64\]](#) What we may develop and add here is the observation that the highest law of the *Mahabharata* seems to be to avoid needless violence and cruelty, atrocities which, paradoxically, are abundantly present in the epic.[\[65\]](#)

As we can see, the *Mahabharata* refers to those times which are "always known and never forgotten" and may be viewed as exhibiting the universal pattern of all human existence, of the beginning of all beginnings of gods and humans, on both terrestrial and celestial levels. Participants in this *theatrum maximum* depict experiences which to a surprisingly explicit degree imitate and reconstruct a generative moment of language and culture where, according to Gans, "language and culture emerge not simply as products of our superior intelligence but with the explicit function of momentarily preventing or deferring an outbreak of violence."[\[66\]](#)

In the *Mahabharata* we may find more examples which correspond to many categories distinguished by Generative Anthropology: objects of desire, rivalry, resentment, *sparagmos*—all related to different forms of violence and its deferral.

Among the many objects of desire present in the *Mahabharata*'s labyrinth, pride of place belongs to the central one, the realm over which the Pandava brothers and Kaurava want to rule. It concentrates all the discourse of the epic—a kingdom being an object of the rivalry to be won through the war of Kurukshetra, the most important event in the narrative. If we take the *Mahabharata* as a single, huge speaking scene or even sign, then following Gans's idea we may say that it constitutes an example of the “use of representation”[\[67\]](#) to defer potential violence (in this case war) over a central object, a kingdom, and the possession of power over that kingdom. Moreover, this great scene or sign both shows and is a mechanism for the deferral of violence, being a global message to humanity concerning or modelling the means of preventing, at least for a time, our general destruction. So, it is not violence itself that determines the importance of the *Mahabharata*, although the story offers a limitless number of violent actions. It is the deferral of violence which establishes its position and significance in human cultural history.

The *Mahabharata* contains a collection of knowledge of past societies, transmitted to future societies for the preservation of Being, where Being is “to be of culture,” meaning the protection of existence facilitated on a cognitive level. Gans's narrative of a first sign developing into a collection of signs and culminating in writing, often in detailed narratives, suggests a “recognition of the importance of writing,”[\[68\]](#) as Alan Barnard puts it, of which the *Mahabharata* constitutes an example. Whether we like it or not, the *Mahabharata* returns us to the foundations of cultural world, where we cannot escape from Gans's perspective, which unites differentiated areas of reflective knowledge. We don't have to speak about social, ideological, mythical or historical distinctions.[\[69\]](#) They are united in the *Mahabharata* into a single generative vision based on cognitive rules.

Perhaps we may conclude by referring to the ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel,[\[70\]](#) whose fundamental cognitive inquiry we may paraphrase for our own purposes as: “What do you mean, *Mahabharata*? What is your message?” To which we may answer that the *Mahabharata* means that a narrative chain, which substitutes and defers violence, is essential for the human and for human culture. It also means that already in one of the oldest Sanskrit epic texts, the rule of scenic logic is present and preserved. It also means that fundamental knowledge about the world is even here contained in terms compatible with those formulated in GA, expressing itself in bundles of mental files which, taken together, code the crucial universal human project: the deferral of violence through representation.

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Anthropoetics would like to thank Ian Dennis for his help in the preparation of this

article.

Notes

[1] See: Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory": *Jean-François Lyotard. Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. By Victor E. Taylor, Gregg Lambert, Volume II, Routledge, London New York 2006 p. 504.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 514.

[3] Eric Gans, *The End of Culture*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, p. 67.

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 66. Emphasis added.

[5] Smṛiti ([Sanskrit](#): स्मृति, [IAST](#): *Smṛti*), See, Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon, Germany.

[6] Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon, Germany.

[7] Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory": *Jean-François Lyotard. Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. By Victor E. Taylor, Gregg Lambert, Volume II, Routledge, London , New York 2006, p. 524.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 66.

[9] So far I have analyzed some examples from the Scandinavian mythical tradition of *The Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson. See : Magdalena Złocka-Dąbrowska, "Cratos as Cognition: Gans and Dumézil in Dialog on Language and Violence", *Anthropoetics XXII, no.1, Fall 2016*.

[10] *Ibidem*.

[11] Eric Gans, *The End of Culture*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, p. 70.

[12] Hayden White, *op. cit.*, p. 524.

[13] Listed below are examples of the prose translations of the Mahabharata from English into Polish, in adapted versions, published in recent years:

Mahabharata : największy epos świata / [adapt.] Krishna Dharma ; tłumaczenie z j. angielskiego, Iwona Szuwalska, Wydawnictwo Purana, Wrocław, Lubotynia ,

2014. *Mahabharata*. Ks. 1, *Adi Parva* (w jedenastu opowieściach). Ks.2, *Sabha Parva* (w pięciu opowieściach), opowiada Barbara Mikołajewska ; napisane na podstawie Mahābhārata, 1. The Book of the Beginning, 2. The Book of the Assembly Hall, w ang. tłum. z sanskrytu J. A. B. van Buitenen, The Lintons' Video Press, New Haven, 2007, *Mahabharata* Ks.3, *Vana Parva* (w dwudziestu dwóch opowieściach), opowiada Barbara Mikołajewska ; napisane na podstawie Mahābhārata, 3. The Book of the Forest, w ang. tłum. z sanskrytu J. A. B. van Buitenen, The Lintons' Video Press, New Haven CT, 2007, *Mahabharata*. Ks. 4, *Virata Parva* (w sześciu opowieściach). Ks. 5, *Udyoga Parva* (w osiemnastu opowieściach) opowiada Barbara Mikołajewska ; napisane na podstawie Mahābhārata, 4. The Book of the Virāta, 2. The Book of the Effort, w ang. tł. z sanskrytu J. A. B. van Buitenen, The Lintons' Video Press, New Haven, 2009, *Mahabhatta*. Ks. 6, *Bhiszma Parva* (w czternastu opowieściach, Ks. 7, *Drona Parva* (w czternastu opowieściach) opowiada Barbara Mikołajewska ; napisane na podst. Mahābhārata, w ang. tłum. z sanskrytu, The Lintons' Video Press, New Haven CT, 2010. *Mahabharata*. Ks. 8, *Karna Parva* (w siedmiu opowieściach). Ks. 9, *Śalja Parva* (w sześciu opowieściach). Ks. 10, *Sauptika Parva* (w dwóch opowieściach), Ks. 11, *Stree Parva* (w trzech opowieściach) opowiada Barbara Mikołajewska ; napisane na podst. Mahābhārata, w ang. tł. z sanskrytu, The Lintons' Video Press, New Haven CT, 2011. *Mahabharata*. Ks. 12, *Santi Parva*. Cz. 1 (w trzydziestu pięciu opowieściach) / opowiada Barbara Mikołajewska, The Lintons' Video Press, New Haven CT, 2012. *Mahabharata*. Ks. 12, *Santi Parva*. Cz. 2 i 3, *Mokszadharma Parva : o drodze do Wyzwolenia* : (w pięćdziesięciu czterech opowieściach) / opowiada Barbara Mikołajewska, The Lintons' Video Press New Haven CT, 2015.

[14] See: *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. by James Clifford and George Marcuse, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1986.

[15] See: *Reading Culture, Contexts for Critical Reading and Writing*, ed. by Diana George & John Tribune, Harper-Collins, New York 1992 ; Burszta Wojciech, *Czytanie kultury: pięć szkiców*, Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej UAM, Poznań 1996.

[16] Barnard Alan, *History and Theory in Anthropology*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 168.

[17] See: Roman Ingarden, *O dziele literackim*, przet. Maria Turowicz, PWN, Warszawa 1960.

[18] Anna Wierzbicka, *Język- umysł-kultura*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1999, p. 6.

[19] Not forgetting the myths of other cultures as well as collections of other myths of Hindu civilization, for example the *Ramayana*.

[20] Eric Gans, *Science and Faith. The Anthropology of Revelation*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1990, p. 10.

[21] Rachel Goodman, "Cognitivism, Significance and Singular Thought," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 263, April 2017, p. 236.

[22] Anna Wierzbicka, *Semantics, Culture and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1992, p. 355.

[23] Kim Fortune, "Foreword to the 25th Anniversary Edition": *Writing Culture*. Op. cit., p. vii.

[24] Indologists and linguists conduct constant discussions on dating and authorship of the *Mahabharata*. See: Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée I, II, III, Quatro*, Gallimard, Paris 1995, p. 61.

[25] Kim Fortune, "Foreword to the 25th Anniversary Edition" [in]: *Writing Culture*. Op., cit., p. viii.

[26] R. Radhakrishnan, *History, The Human and The World Between*, Duke University Press, Durham & London 2008, p. 120.

[27] Stephen A. Tyler, "Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document" [in]: *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Op. cit., p. 139.

[28] See: Ward H. Goodenough, In Pursuit of Culture [in] : *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol 32, 2003, p.1-12. See also : Ward H. Goodenough, *Culture, Language and Society*, Benjamin/Cummings Pub. Co., University of Michigan, 1981.

[29] See: Ward H. Goodenough, "Componential Analysis" (Kinship studies in cultural anthropology are producing a new tool for semantic analysis), [in] *Science*, 02 Jun 1967, Vol. 156, p. 1203-1209.

[30] Culture as knowledge is presented already in 1871, in the first scientific definition of culture by Edward Burnett Tylor ("Culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge ..., and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"), where, as B.G. Blount says, the central concept is "capabilities," meaning the ability of people to acquire and produce knowledge,

beliefs, etc. Later also reappeared a number of concerns with the definition of culture as cognitive capacity, expressed usually as “ideas” and “knowledge” (See: B. G. Blount, “A History of Cognitive Anthropology” [in] *A Companion to Cognitive Anthropology*, ed. by David B. Kronenfeld, Giovanni Bennardo, Victor C. de Munck, and Michael D. Fisher, Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2011, p. 13.)

[31] See: Ward H. Goodenough, *Culture, Language and Society*, Benjamin/Cummings Pub. Co., University of Michigan, 1981, p. 47-52.

[32] Jean-François Lyotard, *Kondycja ponowoczesna. Raport o stanie wiedzy* (trans. Małgorzata Kowalska, Jacek Migasiński), Warszawa 1997, Fundacja Aletheia.

[33] *Dharma* (moral law) and *itihasa* (literally “that’s what happened”).

[34] *Religion and the Authority of the Past*. Edited by Tobin Siebers. With an Introduction by Wendy Doniger, The University of Michigan Press, Michigan 1993, p. 58, and Garima Sharma, “A Critical Survey of the Mahabharata”, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, ISSN(Online): 2319-7722, www.ijhssi.org/Volume 6, Issue 6// June 2017, p. 12.

[35] These judgments by Moritz Winternitz come from his best-known work, *Geschichte der indischen Literatur* (C.F. Amelangs Verlag, Leipzig 1920), and have been broadly cited, including on current websites, such as:
www.mahabharata-research.com (Evolution of the Epic: History of Mythology) and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahabharata.

[36] Eric Gans, *The Scenic Imagination*, Stanford University Press, Stanford California 2008, p. 5.

[37] Ibidem, p.2.

[38] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1997.

[39] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, The Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth, 1976, p. 86.

[40] Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, Cambridge Philosophy Classics, Cambridge 2016, p. 136-137.

[41] Ibidem.

[42] Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Textual Sources for the Study of Hinduism*,

Manchester University Press, 1988 p. 2-3.

[43] Jan Gonda, "The Ritual Sutras" [in]: *A History of Indian Literature*, ed. by J. Gonda, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1977, vol. 1, p. 468.

[44] María Jesús Martínez Alfaro, "Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept," [in] *Atlantis*, Vol. 18, No. 1/2 (Junio – Diciembre 1996), pp. 268-285.

[45] Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et Épopée* I, II, III, Éditions Gallimard 1995, p. 105.

[46] Frank Ankersmith, *Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie. Studia z teorii historiografii*, Universitas Kraków 2004, p. 8.

[47] *One Discipline, Four Ways : British, German, French, and American Anthropology*, [Fredrik Barth](#), [Andre Gingrich](#), [Robert Parkin](#), [Sydel Silverman](#), University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2010, p. 384.

[48] See: Eric Gans, *The Origin of Language*.

[49] See: Eric Gans, *The End of Culture. Toward a Generative Anthropology*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1985.

[50] Paul Ricoeur, *Symbolika zła*, Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, Warszawa, 1986, p.162.

[51] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan, Beacon Paperback ed., Boston 1969, p. 5.

[52] See: Klaus Eder, "The cultural code of modernity and the problem of nature: a critic of the naturalistic notion of progress" [in]: *Rethinking Progress. Movements, Forces and Ideas at the End of Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Piotr Sztompka, Unwin Hyman, London 1990, p.67-89.

[53] Ben Martin R., "The Origins of the Concept of 'Foresight' in Science and Technology: An Insider's Perspective," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, t. 77 (9), p. 1438-1447.

[54] *The Mahabharata of Krishna - Dwaipayana Vyasa*, Volume 1, Books 1, Adi Parva, Section I, Translated into English Prose from the Original Sanscrit Text by Kisari Mohan Ganguli (1883-1896). The text file scanned at sacred-texts.com, 2003, proofed at Distributed Proofing, Juliet Sutherland, Project Manager. Additional proofing and formatting of the text file at sacred-texts.com, by J.B.Hare, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15474/15474-h/15474-h.htm#bookone> .

[55] Eric Gans, *The Origin of Language*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los

Angeles, London, 1981, p. 76.

[56] Ibidem, p. 74.

[57] *The Mahabharata of Krishna – Dwaipayana Vyasa*, Volume 1, Books 1, Adi Parva, Section I, Translated into English Prose from the Original Sanscrit Text by Kisari Mohan Ganguli (1883-1896). The text file scanned at sacred-texts.com, 2003, proofed at Distributed Proofing, Juliet Sutherland, Project Manager. Additional proofing and formatting of the text file at sacred-texts.com, by J.B.Hare, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15474/15474-h/15474-h.htm#bookone> .

[58] Eric Gans, *The End of Culture, Toward a Generative Anthropology*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1985, p. 236.

[59] Ibidem. p. 24-25 and first of all: Eric Gans, *The Origin of Language*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1981, p. 45-59.

[60] Eric Gans, *The Origin of Language*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1981, p. 44.

[61] *Mahabharata* opowiada Barbara Mikołajewska, Księga I, Adi Parva (on the basis of *The Book of the Beginning*), English translation from Sanskrit J.A.B van Buitenen, The University of Chicago Press, The Lintons' Video Press, New Haven, CT, USA 2007, p. 19.

[62] Ibidem.

[63] Nagendra Singh, *Indian Legends*, APH Publishing, 1997, 144-153. Sarama is also identified with Vāk or Vāc (Sanskrit: वाक्, stem vāc-, nominative vāk), the Sanskrit word for “speech”, from a verbal root vac- “speak, tell, utter”. Vac is the goddess of the spoken word, the personification of speech and oral communication. Michael Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods*, New York, Facts On File, Inc. 1993, p. 275; John Bowker, *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 1011.

[64] Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et Épopée* I, II, III, op. cit., p. 105.

[65] *Mahabharata* opowiada Barbara Mikołajewska, Księga III, Vana Parva (on the basis of *The Book of the Forest*), English translation from Sanskrit J.A.B van Buitenen, The University of Chicago Press, The Lintons' Video Press, New Haven, CT, USA 2007, p. 12.

[66] Ibidem.

[\[67\]](#) Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et Épopée I, II, III*, op. cit., p. 2.

[\[68\]](#) Barnard Alan, *History and Theory in Anthropology*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 159.

[\[69\]](#) See : Danielle Feller Jatavallabhula, *Violence Denied: Violence, Nonviolence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History*, edited by Jan E.M. Houben and Karel R. Van Kooij, Brill 1999.

[\[70\]](#) Harold Garfinkel, “Harold Garfinkel: Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities” [in] *Readings in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism*. edited by James Farganis, NY: McGraw-Hill., New York 2011, p. 287-295.