Deconstruction and Originary Analysis:

Gans, Derrida, and Generative Anthropology

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 1992

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of English

ACCEPTED
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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ABSTRACT

In the wake of Saussurian structuralism, the twentieth century has spawned a great deal of interest in the formal structures that make up our cultural heritage. But "synchronic" investigation, as Jacques Derrida's key "post-structuralist" term *différance* points out, suffers from a certain idealization of history that has no answer to the temporal element in culture. In short, it has no means for exploring history in its broadest sense, namely, in terms of ethical evolution. At the same time, the Derridean critique, though hitting structuralist formalism at the heart of its ungrounded moment in a metaphysics of ideal presence, nevertheless refuses to present a positive ground from which to explore culture in its ethical, aesthetic, and linguistic incarnations, believing that all "grounds" suffer from the same "logocentric" desire for metaphysical presence. But need this negativity be thus hypostatized as a "groundless ground" itself? To what extent does the abyss of the Derridean aporia found a (de)structured *a priori* itself?

This thesis explores the positive recuperation of Derrida via the *generative anthropology* of Eric Gans, whose "transcendental hypothesis" or "scene of origin" seeks to give historical and ethical—in a word, anthropological—rigour to Derrida's agnostic formalism. Gans contends that all explanations of culture, in order to be considered scientific, must begin where all sciences begin—at the origin of their subject-matter. Hence, human science must begin in a generative scene of anthropological origin. Yet unlike the empirical sciences, human science can only understand the origin of its subject-matter—culture—in terms of the origin of its own presence as a theory. For to engage in human scientific investigation is also to engage in culture in its broadest sense: namely, at the level of the ethical. Generative anthropology presents itself as the secular counterpart to the universal religious intuition that humanity originated in an event. But to the religious story of creation, generative anthropology proposes its originary hypothesis, thus foregrounding the transcendental element of metaphysics in a plausibly conceived, historical scene of origin, from which explanations of culture can be generated.

Chapter 1 of the thesis explores the epistemological questions addressed by Gans's conviction that human science must begin in a scene of origin. Thus, it examines, first, the inadequacy of the empirical epistemology of the natural sciences, upon which the social sciences have largely sought to take their model, and, second, Gans's suggestion that what is needed is a synthesis of the work of two thinkers in the human sciences: that is, a

synthesis which combines René Girard's fundamental anthropology with Derrida's deconstructive epistemology. The essential premise underlying the argument is that Gans's generative anthropology successfully builds on the work of Girard by introducing the Derridean problematic—*différance* (difference and deferral)—to provide a linguistic ground for Girard's radically nonformalistic postulate of the scene of victimary origin. Chapter 2 continues the dialogue, showing the greater explanatory power of the Gansian model of "originary analysis" over Derridean deconstruction. Thus, it proposes that Derrida's analysis of Kafka's parable "Before the Law" all but divulges an aesthetic model of human origin. To Derrida's model of the aporetic character of representation, originary analysis proposes the concrete context of the originary sign, which ultimately forms the fulcrum of the originary scene. The basis for the analysis stems from Gans's genetic scheme of linguistic evolution, comprehensively outlined in his *The Origin of Language*. The conclusion upon which the thesis finally comes to rest is that Gans's evolutionary scheme, grounded in the formal structures of language, provides a positive basis from which to explore deconstruction as, ultimately, an "aesthetic" manifestation of the scene of human origin.

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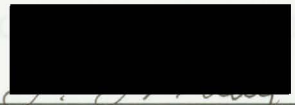

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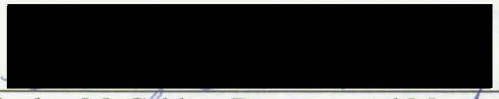

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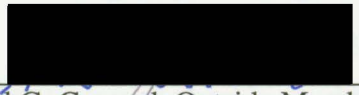

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Introduction

> As God's truth is what God comes to know as he creates and assembles it, so human truth is what man comes to know as he builds it, shaping it by his actions. Therefore science is the knowledge of origins, of the ways and the manner how things are made.
>
> —Giambattista Vico

"The Great Debate": Girard, Derrida, and Gans

In 1981, a remarkable essay appeared in the French issue of *Modern Language Notes*. It suggested, in no uncertain terms, that the debate over the use of literary texts, so fiercely evident in the polemical confrontations between the various schools of critical and literary theory, was a "minor debate at a low level of argument" and thus really a "malaise." For, in this "minor debate," real issues were lost in the face of petty arguments, that reflected more the personal egos of the "debaters" than the only worthy pursuit any humanist could properly lay claim to: namely, the scientific quest for the truth concerning the fundamental anthropological question—"What is man?" The essay then gave the key positions—otherwise shadowed by the literary "malaise"—on this fundamental question, presenting the thought of Jacques Derrida, on the one hand, and that of René Girard, on the other, as the foremost contemporary positions toward providing a dialogue on the question of humankind. Finally, the author went on to present his own position, suggesting that what was needed was a synthesis of Derrida and Girard, the former providing a valuable formalist insight by which to reconstruct the foundationalist anthropology of the latter.

It is thus that readers of *MLN* were introduced to the thought of Eric Gans, who since then has gone on to elaborate his concept of a "generative anthropology" in four major syntheses—*The Origin of Language* (1981), *The End of Culture* (1985), *Science and Faith* (1990), and *Originary Thinking* (1993)—all pertaining to the premises outlined in the *MLN* essay entitled "Differences."

It is unlikely, however, that the original essay would endear many readers to its main premises, and this not least because of the formidable intellectual level of its main thesis and its broad, wide-ranging cultural scope—such universalizing reflection on the question of humanity being in any case something of a taboo in current intellectual circles where "difference," not unity, is the rule. For in Eric Gans's style, one finds a directness and assertiveness which mirrors the boldness of the fundamental premises of his main thesis. Thus, he eschews the tentative, often obsessive, self-reflexive style of much poststructuralist prose, writing with a clarity and simplicity of style that can belie the complexity of the argument behind it. But this is not because of a naive or even a dismissive attitude toward poststructuralist, particularly, Derridean insights. On the contrary, the poststructuralist intuition of the supremely textual nature of all discourse, indeed, of all culture, is confronted head-on by Gans, whose own theory of representation is in fact grounded on the Derridean paradox illustrated by the coinage *différance*. For Gans, the deconstructive slogan—"There is nothing outside the text"—merits attention, revealing as it does the essentially linguistic character of all cultural phenomena.

Yet, by recognizing the primacy of text, one can come to the apparently (onto)logical conclusion that humanity is nothing but text. The danger in thus hypostatizing language as the institution that defines humankind is evident in the nihilism Gans sees deconstruction in particular as being prone to. For, to define humanity as being in a sense wholly inside language can lead to forgetting that humanity created language in the first place. Indeed, it is precisely the question of how things began on the human or cultural level that Gans sees implicitly addressed by poststructuralist thought, though not yet thematized in the explicitly anthropological manner that Gans sees as not only desirable but as ethically imperative. It is not for nothing that humans have evolved means for interpersonal communication, and the distinctive ethos of Gans's anthropology is to relate this fundamental institution to the ethics of human interaction in a theory of language envisioned, not metaphysically—that is, in its traditional philosophical or scientific guises as a transparent relation between sign and referent—but, rather, anthropologically, that is, as a primordially conflict-deferring device, the prime function of which has always been *from the very beginning* the maintainance of communal harmony.

Viewed from this new perspective, the poststructuralist problematizing of the relation between sign and referent opens the door for a radically nonmetaphysical, that is, nonphilosophical, probing of the question of human origin. And, though on the surface the critique of origins we now so famously attribute to Derrida and the quest for origin so forthrightly proposed by Gans appear to be in direct opposition, a more critical and deeper exposition of these two important thinkers should reveal that these apparent "differences" have their roots in an ultimately unified vision of the human, not least because of the respect thus recognized for the specificity of the human being—a specificity that the epistemologies of the natural sciences, and their would-be emulators, the social sciences, can neither acknowledge nor understand as long as they continue to bracket the human factor in the naive, if necessary, empiricism of their methodologies.

The essential purpose of this thesis is to explore Gans's concept of a "generative anthropology," particularly with respect to its "originary hypothesis" or "scene of origin," which attempts to synthesize the Derridean onto-epistemological critique, explicitly illustrated in the neologism *différance*, with the foundational or fundamental anthropology of Girard. It is indeed to Girard's work that Gans owes his greatest debt. Their common belief that the question of the human remains the primordial question—from primitive religion to contemporary human science—reveals that their respective anthropological perspectives belong to a fundamentally different order than the thus far only implied anthropologies of the general literary-critical debates between the various schools of hermeneutic analysis.

The point here is not to pass judgement, but to make a methodological distinction. Neither Girard nor Gans is concerned with providing a hermeneutic in the traditional sense of offering renewed ways of interpreting an otherwise tired literary text. On the contrary, for them the point of the text, and therefore of its critical hermeneutical offspring as well, is not to provide the critic with material for producing evermore subtle interpretations, but precisely to desacralize such textual reverence in the first place, in order to then subordinate the literary text to a properly human-scientific discourse. The question the critic brings to the text is not "What can I say about this text that hasn't been said before?" but "Why does the category of literature, and more generally the aesthetic, exist for humanity at all?" The focus of the second question is clearly not the individual text at all but the human; only insofar as the category of the literary is pertinent for humanity *in the first place* does it therefore imply an *originary* theory of literary aesthetics. To ask, "What is literature?" is to imply the prior ontological question, "What is the human?"

But this is not to concede the question of literature back to the metaphysicians. The ontological must certainly be confronted, but it must be confronted on a basis not metaphysical, but pragmatic. That is, rather than beginning with abstract concepts, we must begin with the pragmatic realization that human knowledge is fundamentally self-knowledge, and therefore any theory of the human must be able to incorporate itself self-reflexively into its own theoretical premises. This is the paradox of the human that Gans equates with the ethical necessity for human self-reflection: humans are only human in that they seek to know themselves. The hypothesis of the scene of human origin merely provides a plausible model that describes how such a paradox could have evolved from prehuman conditions, taking language as the supreme prototype for self-reflection, that is, for re-presentation. It is from this paradox inherent in the human capacity for self-representation that Gans can, in one elegant gesture, explain not only the premises behind his hypothesis of human origin, but also the conditions of possibility for his own theory.

Already we can see a hint of an overlap between the kinds of questioning offered by Gans and Girard, on the one hand, and that offered by Derrida, on the other. For though Derrida certainly refuses to formulate answers to "What is... ?" questions, nevertheless, his own writings are concerned with nothing but questioning the conditions of possibility for the category of the literary, and, as such, his work is bound to broach the same territory as that of Girard and Gans. Indeed, it is the thesis of this essay that the insights of Derridean deconstruction and the anthropologies of Girard and Gans share in a fundamental debate on the notion of representation—and hence on the whole category of hermeneutic analysis and its no small concern with truth and fiction. It will be the purpose of this paper to critically explore these central positions.

Obviously such questions are not easily answered, and obviously neither Gans, Girard, nor Derrida are the only ones to have addressed such questions. The latter, however, is the central contemporary figure for the critique of metaphysical philosophy, while the former two are among the few to have presented, in an explicit manner, an anthropological ground for pursuing cultural analysis, as well as being conspicuously faithful, in the face of the marginal discourses favoured by a *mentalité* of the posthuman, to a universal theory of the human.

By way of introduction to this debate, we can refer to the conclusion of what is now generally recognized as a seminal moment in recent intellectual history, namely, Derrida's 1966 Hopkins paper, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," which began North America's critical fascination for Derrida and deconstruction. In that

paper, Derrida drives home the logical and problematic conclusions which a fully reasoned, thoroughly critical account of the central tenets of structuralist thought necessarily produces. What Derrida is primarily concerned with exposing is how the structuralist adherence to the rigorous scientificity of its synchronic structures is at the same time compromised by a ground or centre that itself eludes the formal play contained within the overall structure. This centre in its unique astructural position becomes paradoxically the ultimate ground or principle of the whole system—the structure of structures, so to speak. But rather than constituting a stable ground, the centre, or the structure of structures, is an insoluble paradox, providing not a self-contained and unique singularity but an aporia, a vertiginous abyss, that only gives the semblance of stability as it simultaneously undermines that self-same stability.

As Derrida shows, high structuralism as exemplified by Lévi-Strauss, though defining itself in opposition to the "myth" of absolute presence—a myth by which classical metaphysics sought to neutralize religious transcendence through the concept of the ideal, transcendental subject—paradoxically falls back on a renewed concept of ideality, no less metaphysical for its being covert (indeed such concealment, as we will see, is perhaps one definition of the metaphysical operation). This concealed ideality is borne out from its hiding place by Derrida, who shows that the structure mapped out by the formalist enterprise can only maintain its structural integrity if it leaves untouched by the play of structural differences a stabilizing centre, upon which to ground, secretly, as it were, the very differential relationships claimed to be productive of meaning and cultural phenomena in the first place. This leads Derrida to conclude that what inhabits all cultural hermeneutical enterprises, most notably in philosophical and scientific cases where such paradoxical self-grounding must pass unnoticed, is an aporetic oscillation between two ultimately irreconcilable interpretive positions:

> There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of freeplay. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the sign, and lives like an exile the necessity of interpretation. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, through the history of all his history—dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game. The second interpretation of interpretation, to which Nietzsche showed us the way, does not seek in

> ethnography, as Lévi-Strauss wished, the "inspiration of a new humanism." ("Structure, Sign, and Play" 264-65)

Though Derrida says that there is no question of choosing between this "absolutely irreconcilable" difference (265), there is nonetheless a marked preference for the Nietzschean interpretation evident in his paper. One can attribute this, no doubt, to Derrida's terror of falling into the traditional authoritarian discourses which seek "to decipher" and dream of "full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game." The quasi-religious tone evident in Derrida's choice of words to describe this form of interpretation-in-exile is no accident, for Derrida ascribes this transcendental quest to the whole "history of metaphysics or of ontotheology . . . the history of all his [man's] history." If man's search for a universal answer to the question of origins is permeated through and through with a certain nostalgic longing for a more perfect transcendent place, then Derrida will not contribute to such ungrounded religiosity.

But to what extent is Derrida's refusal to implicate himself in an ontotheological tradition the religious gesture *par excellence*? Certainly, he has detected the theological aspect of a scientific-philosophical tradition that sought to banish religion from its own discourse. But perhaps to avoid the question of the sacred, to avoid confronting it head-on, is itself an apotropaic gesture by which the sacred continues to assert its power. This is clearly the way Girard sees things. And if Derrida's project constitutes an arduous unravelling of philosophical thought in order to expose its transcendental (theological) premises, Girard has taken the religious tradition itself as his object of study. It might be useful, then, to juxtapose, in a more or less explicit manner, the radically different attitudes these two thinkers hold toward the possibilities of their own discourses, if only to thereby better understand their underlying points of contact.

If Derrida, as we saw, is content to leave the question of hermeneutic procedure wide open, caught ineluctably between the desire for central stability and the counter-force of freeplay, Girard whole-heartedly affirms the priority of the former scientific procedure, equating his own project with the deciphering of a real murder "lying hidden since the foundation of the world." In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard underscores, in an implicit polemic with deconstruction, the need for this real origin in order to account for what he sees as the indisputable evidence of the common crime of humanity (the judicial terminology is not inappropriate, for Girard, in a sense, has all humanity on trial):

> It is foolhardy to condemn the search for a real origin simply because the search has not been successful so far. Antimetaphysical speculation is, after all, another form of metaphysics. At any moment a new theory may arise that will provide a satisfactory—that is, a scientific—answer to the question of the origins, nature, and function not only of sacrifice but also of religion in general. (91)

Here Girard impatiently brushes aside what he sees as being the defeatism implied by the Derridean project: "Such pessimistic suppositions, based on past failures, purport to be ultrascientific but are in fact questions of philosophy and temperament" (91). Girard's claim, then, is that the scientific status he proposes for his thesis, disassociates him from the "philosophical skepticism" (91) that is ultimately merely a question of "temperament," but can have no role in a properly scientific program.

One can observe in Girard's polemic a pattern of criticism often levelled at deconstruction. Thus, on the one hand, the deconstruction of past metadiscourses is welcomed, for it opens the way for new theories, new sciences, and new philosophies. Yet, on the other hand, this very act of reinstating a new positive hermeneutic is precisely what Derrida refuses to allow, remaining undecidably in between the old and the new. Girard is grateful for Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics, aligning this with his own interpretation of the evolution of culture as a gradual exposing of the sacrificial mechanism owing to the increasingly ineffective ritual means for uniting the community, thus opening the way for a critical eye to expose its inner mechanism. But, of course, for Derrida, the whole notion of an over-arching critical eye that can put an end to the freeplay of *différance*, that can decide between what belongs at the source of all interpretation and what must remain merely peripheral, is destined to produce its own irreducible contradictions as those elements subordinated on the periphery reveal themselves to be constitutive of the very centrality from which they are excluded. It is this radically noncommittal stance that Girard dismisses somewhat underhandedly as outside his own scientific project, a mere question of "temperament."

Yet one wonders to what degree Girard's own refusal to countenance Derrida other than in agonistic polemic is evidence of an apotropaic act itself, a partner in the sacrificial exchange so diligently pursued by Girard. Certainly, words are not things, and a real victim is more likely to inspire conceptions of hate and love, disorder and order. One cannot deny Girard the relevance of real victimage. Yet, at the same time, there is an economy of victimage that is inextricably wrapped up in subtle exchange between words and their referents. If Derrida is supremely aware of the essentially paradoxical character of

the former, of human representation, then Girard has led us to a renewed questioning of the possible source of these words in a real historical referent, an origin that is truly originary, the original referent of humankind.

The Argument in Brief

To give ourselves a context for a dialogue between Girard and Derrida, it will be more efficient to begin by first presenting Gans's arguments for a human science that demands an epistemological synthesis of the two. The point of thus beginning with what is to all intents also the conclusion of this writing is not to skirt the issue of the "differences" between Girard and Derrida; on the contrary, by first laying out the common ground presented concisely by Gans, we are then all the better equipped to construct an analysis that holds both thinkers equally within its sights—it is only by sitting down at the same table that a dialogue can begin between different "cultures." Chapter 1 of my thesis will explore the epistemological questions addressed by the anthropologies of Gans and Girard, on the one hand, and by Derridean deconstruction, on the other. Thus, I begin with a summary and critical analysis of Gans's essay "Differences," where Gans lays the foundations for a human science grounded in a synthesis of the Girardian and Derridean epistemologies. The broad scope of Gans's foundational programme for the human sciences will require us to examine, on the one hand, his assertion that the natural sciences—and their positivistic offspring, the social sciences—lack the epistemological criteria for a nonmetaphysical theory of the human and, on the other hand, his claim that humanists, though aware of the unique stature of the human in their literary and cultural analyses, nevertheless lack the intellectual rigour which would give their intuitions more than marginal status in the field of general anthropological knowledge. It is this "unfortunate dichotomy" that Gans sees as harmfully dividing the field of the human sciences, which are thus prevented from constituting themselves as a bona fide discipline.[1] Having investigated these broader issues, my analysis will then turn to the specific "originary hypotheses" of Girard and Gans respectively. Here I examine the internal

[1]See, for instance, Gans's introductory remarks in *Originary Thinking*: "Human science in the present era has so far been characterized by an unfortunate dichotomy. On the one hand, the positive social sciences generate vast quantities of ad hoc constructions, seemingly indifferent to the need for a critical anthropology that would synthesize them into a construction of greater density. On the other, the spirit of minimalist intellectual rigor, snug in the sanctuary provided for it by the humanities, spends itself in critique and refuses to attempt construction of any kind" (27).

plausibility of Girard's hypothesis, showing why it is inadequate and why Gans's revised version of the hypothesis provides a strong case for rethinking, not only Girard's anthropology, but Derrida's agnostic formalism, which denies the possibility for all positive human ontologies *tout court*. That the Gansian "recuperation" of Derrida is more radical and more defiant than his "recuperation" of Girard (which is actually a more rigorous systematizing of Girard's own insights) is evidenced by Chapter 2, which concentrates exclusively on reading Derrida and his post-romantic precursor Kafka from the perspective of the "scene of origin." Derrida's own allegiance to literary models is visible in his essay "Before the Law," which engages—as the title makes clear—in an explicit and problematic dialogue with Kafka's short parable of the same name. The aim of Chapter 2 is to show, first, Derrida's pivotal role in the deconstruction of the aesthetic model of human origin, and, second, the necessity for the anthropological reconstruction of the origin, this time as a verifiable human science and not as an aesthetic scene. It is this latter move that Derrida refuses to grant, equating it with the authoritarian thrust for logocentric closure. But the ace up generative anthropology's sleeve is not the transcendental signifier of metaphysical philosophy, but the anthropological scene of origin, which alone provides a nondogmatic, nonutopian context for interpreting what the literary text was all along concerned with elucidating. Derrida's turning to the literary text remains incomplete, for it does not sufficiently acknowledge the fundamental difference between the aesthetic model of human origin, as a scenic evenemential phenomenon, and the philosophical model of human origin which begins, not with the scenic event, but with the abstract world of metaphysical concepts. The purpose of Chapter 2, therefore, is to make good on the wager, presented in Chapter 1, that human science must begin with an originary hypothesis. By reading first Derrida, then Kafka, from the perspective of the originary scene, I hope to demonstrate the greater explanatory power of generative anthropology over both traditional literary criticism and its more radical formalist counterpart in Derridean philosophy. For, ultimately, it is only by beginning with such a hypothesis that the fruits of humanity's cultural labour can be reaped in an independent scientific discourse on our universal cultural inheritance.

Chapter 1

Gans and the Question of a Human Science

Polemical Differences: The Literary Debate

In his essay "Differences," Gans begins with an openly polemical view of contemporary theory. Thus, he characterizes it as a psychological "malaise" of "persons engaged in a minor debate at a low level of argument" (792) where "minor controversies" necessarily "degenerate into endless repetitions of variants on the same ideas" (793). The author then asserts that his argument, in which he includes the positions of the "major" figures of Girard and Derrida, is "not meant to further this debate, but to end it, for in major debates the participants seek the truth and not the pleasures of debating" (793). Thus, in one fell swoop, Gans sweeps the board of all minor controversies in the contentious world of critical theory, substituting the major figures Derrida, Girard, and Eric Gans for all the peripheral figures otherwise involved in contemporary theory.

If the reader is not simply turned off by this brazen attack on what after all may well be his or her own position in the literary debate, then he or she is no doubt left wondering what strategy lies behind beginning with such a denigration of literary studies. Is the author purposely throwing down the gauntlet to those he is implicitly challenging? Is the state of the literary debate so polemical that to enter the fray, even for a moment, is to draw one's

sword in mimetic contagion? Certainly, this seems to be the way Gans construes it, for, in thus engaging in polemics, Gans admits that he too may be "profiting from" this malaise though he assures us he does not feel any satisfaction from such an engagement ("Differences" 792).

The purpose here is not to evaluate Gans's polemic but to understand it. And as is so often the case with powerful minds, what may appear perverse or even scandalous on the surface is actually merely the exposed tip of a submerged yet perspicacious intellect. The following exposition of Gans's essay and of Gans's thought more generally is in some respects an attempt to come to grips with the apparent "scandal" of such a powerful universalizing theory, flying as it does in the face of the contemporary fixation on relativity, marginality, and fragmentation. Such an operation seems necessary not only because Gans deserves an attention he has not generally received, but also because it is hoped that a careful and sympathetic reading will help to clarify the perhaps all-too-easy misreading and misunderstanding of Gans's work.[2] This is particularly relevant with respect to his essay "Differences" which condenses a huge body of knowledge within the relatively short space of seventeen pages.

How then are we to situate Gans's opening polemic? To properly answer this question we should follow Gans's own argumentation and ask why and for what reasons he can construe the current debate in literary studies as being a low-level malaise. Gans's answer is direct: the contemporary literary debate simply lacks an understanding of the "substantial issues" ("Differences" 793)—i.e., it does not address the primordial question, "What is man?" (795)—and therefore "it attaches itself to unsubstantial ones about which it matters little whether one is right or wrong" (793). Left in this barest of formulations, Gans's answers are unlikely to win over any followers. For even the willing reader may be unsure of how exactly one can make the distinction between what is major and what is minor. But Gans does not leave his distinction without some justification. Thus, he explains the "sinister divisive element" found in the minor debate as evidence of "the 'sociological' needs of academics for symbolic self-definition" (793-94). There are no real issues to be debated because what drives the debate is not the truth or the pursuit of knowledge (which

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[2]This is not for want of lucidity on Gans's part, whose essays are a model of clarity for those willing to accept his thesis. The "misunderstanding" referred to here alludes more to the inability of the contemporary intellectual mind-set to entertain monistic theories of any variety, for fear of committing the intellectual sin of metaphysical dogmatism. But antidogmatism can be a dogmatism too. By concentrating on Gans's reading of Derrida, it is precisely the purpose of this thesis to show, not only the greater explanatory power of generative anthropology over antimetaphysics, but also the historical and theoretical continuity linking the absent, aporetic locus of the latter to the originary scene constructed by the former.

Gans equates with the ethical need for self-knowledge), but the need for symbolic self-definition. Academic theorizing in the "minor" context is little better than a game of self-profit, where formal exchanges or rebuttals with opponents replace the pursuit of common (anthropological) knowledge.

But is this agonistic struggle for symbolic self-definition really there? Can we give substance to this rather suggestive comment by Gans? To grasp what Gans is saying here is to transcend the polemics in which we seem to be currently engaged, both in terms of Gans's argument with the "minor debate" and in terms of the "minor debate" itself. For what lurks behind Gans's undeniably strong words of reproof is a powerful cultural theory of resentment as the fundamental driving force of all cultural endeavour. And what in turn lies behind Gans's conception of resentment is his hypothesis of the originary scene upon which the "human" first came into existence.

The notion of an originary scene is, of course, not something that can be taken for granted. Indeed, the greater part of this essay will be taken up with exploring the epistemological validity of such a hypothesis. For the moment, we can leave the epistemological question suspended, engaging Gans's arguments on their own terms in order to demonstrate the rigour informing the apparent "scandalousness" of their conclusions. The point of such a prior exercise, however, is always with a view to confronting the notion of the originary scene head-on.

In the originary scene, resentment is defined as the scandal experienced by the peripheral individual at the inaccessibility of the desirable centre. Centrality is nothing other than what appears as significant to the individual via the eyes of another. Hence centrality is defined, not by the individual, but by the collectivity. The fashionable man or woman is only so construed because centrality has been bestowed upon him or her through the desiring eyes of society. All desire proceeds from the periphery to the significant centre, but absolute centrality is denied the individual. Resentment is the sentiment inspired by this denial, and unless it is appeased it will seek out evermore destructive means to obtain the significance it so desires. Culture, by creating significant differences, is the ethical answer to resentment, and it receives its highest expression in the art, religion, philosophy, and science of high culture.

It is possible, then, to situate Gans's attribution of resentment to the malaise inflicting the literary debate. But to thus pin-point resentment is not to find the scapegoat in the whole crisis; rather, it is to lay one's finger on an essential category of culture, one which provides a key to understanding the continuity between the current low-level debate on literature and the literary tradition itself.

For Gans, the aesthetic is the privileged resource for exploring the truth of humanity and human culture (the two are in any case indivisible). What drives aesthetic history explicitly (and hence measurably) and culture implicitly is the resentment—the "anxiety of influence"—experienced toward the previous formal tradition against which the experiments of the new tradition are defined. The category of the aesthetic provides in microcosm an illustration of the force of resentment which drives culture to seek continually renewed formal resources for multiple degrees of difference. The striving for symbolic self-definition is, therefore, a universal cultural phenomenon and is driven by resentment of previous and present cultural tradition. "The underlying function of human culture," Gans says, "is the avoidance of conflict through the deferral of resentment. This aim cannot be pursued directly. Instead, culture brings about deferral through the creation of significant differences" (*Originary Thinking* viii). Culture in general reveals this need for oppositional or differential self-definition, but in the realm of the literary tradition this need is explicitly formalized and thus becomes a privileged source of insight for understanding culture.

Returning to Gans's characterization of the literary debate as a sociological "malaise" of persons striving for "symbolic self-definition," we are now better able to understand why this should be so, and why at this particular juncture in history it should present such an obvious impasse. The debate is "low-level" because it is "a perverse variant of the 'generation gap' or 'young Turk' principle." It is "perverse" because here the category of resentment has no literary tradition of its own to turn to in which to experiment with new ideas. This is why Gans suggests that although the "young Turk principle" is ultimately "a healthy one," in a "period which demonstrably produces no great and little good literature, it takes on a caricatural form" ("Differences" 794). That is, with no literary tradition to sustain the traditional tension between "old and young, conservative and radical," the dichotomy "tends to formulate itself as one between intelligence and stupidity" (794). Previously, literary form and literary tradition provided a particularly effective means for absorbing the resentful tension between old and new, which in turn allowed, in the optimal cases, for genuine anthropological insights to evolve. The current crisis, then, in Gans's view, is largely owing to the end of high culture as such and to the fact that "the apparent mortality of the very institution of literature has attracted to the humanities persons wishing in an as yet undefined way to *outdo* literature, to create *their own* discourse that will somehow compete with the traditional fictional forms" ("Differences" 794).

The driving force behind Gans's remarks on the current intellectual stasis afflicting not just literary-critical thought but literature generally—and, one might venture to add,

ultimately culture as a whole—is the belief that modernity has pushed the traditional scientific, philosophical, and aesthetic structures, which have historically maintained its cultural well-being, to the limits of their formal capacities. The twentieth-century concern for language, particularly in its pressed-to-the-limits poststructuralist guise, reveals what is for Gans a unique originary intuition of the *formal character* of humanity's difference from the rest of the animal world, and therefore—and most significantly for a positive anthropology which generally ignores this difference—the *specific* difference of the human from our ostensible cousins, the higher primates. It is precisely the character of modernity, emerging uncertainly from its roots in a powerful sacred tradition, and poised, as it were, on the brink of what Girard would term an indefinitely suspended sacrificial crisis, that reproduces in the traditional cultural domains the aporetic stalemate of Derridean *différance*, and which Gans interprets as signalling the demise of idealist metaphysics in the face of a more rigorous anthropological reflection on the "scene of human origin."

These conclusions may appear absurd without reference to Gans's understanding of the role of culture and of literature particularly. Thus, the modern institution of literature is, for Gans, a privileged mode for exploring the origin and hence the "essence" of humanity. This assumption is not based on logical or empirical conclusions (science, in any case, may turn out to be enslaved by its own myths) but arises rather out of the heuristic procedure of hypothesis formation that is open to critical examination, thereby substituting scientific rigour for otherwise inchoate humanist intuitions, which, though recognizing the value of the literary text, have no means for systematizing this knowledge. Again, the assumption is not based on ungrounded intuition. On the contrary, the assumption is precisely *foregrounded* in the form of an explicit hypothesis of the originary event which includes only those categories seen as fundamental to humanity. In Gans's hypothesis, the aesthetic is situated as the privileged moment of the originary event, for unlike the institutions of language and ritual, the aesthetic remains a fundamentally private and therefore a particularly effective means for anthropological discovery.

By thus retracing the steps between surface polemic and sustained theory, we are slowly filling in the missing (but wholly reconstructible) links between Gans's polemic and his originary hypothesis. The current exposition should therefore serve as a convenient demonstration of the viability of originary thinking as well as paving the way for an introduction to the originary hypothesis itself.

We saw that resentment is evident in the current literary debate in what Gans calls the "generation gap" or "young Turk" principle, and that this resentment is none other than the cultural need for symbolic self-definition. Now this formal need for symbolic self-

definition can only be, as Saussure well knew, based upon a system of differentiation. Academics are no less susceptible to this resentment (indeed, they are arguably closer to its structural imperative than other areas of culture, the academy implicitly employing a form of collegiate competitiveness and, most famously, a doctrine of "publish or perish"). Yet resentment cannot be done away with. If it is exposed, it will merely seek out new quarters from which to drive humanity beyond a looming apathy. As Goethe well knew, there is no cure for resentment, except more resentment: the Lord in *Faust* is quite clear in his belief that Mephistopheles is a good thing, for otherwise humanity would sink into an apathy that would be tantamount to renouncing its humanity—man, the Lord comments, is cultural only insofar as he "works like the devil."

But if culture is driven by resentment, how does this relate to the debate over what humanists should be doing? The "young Turk" principle is ultimately a "healthy one" ("Differences" 794), but, because literature has exhausted its formal possibilities in the final outrage of modernism,[3] there is no new literature by which the new generation can define itself. Without a formal outlet for situating its own new ideas the young are forced to create *ex nihilo* their own form of discourse. But the trouble is there are no literary forms through which to carry new ideas, which means ultimately that there are no new ideas, literary form being the privileged mode of all anthropological truth. The death of literature means the proliferation of a formless mass of inchoate theorizing that seeks "in an as yet undefined way to *outdo* literature" ("Differences" 794), but which in lieu of being adequate to the task of formalizing literary knowledge can only take on a "caricatural form" of old intuitions against new anti-intuitions, and is hence devoid of all genuine ideas. The literary debate represents something like an atom bereft of its nucleus, its peripheral electrons sent spinning into a formless chaotic space, devoid of structure and hence barren of conceptual clarity.

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[3]In Part II of *Originary Thinking*, Gans sketches an aesthetic history from the point of view of the originary scene, placing modernism as the final destroyer of the classically-based theory of aesthetic mimesis inherited from Aristotle, and still present in romantic art, that ultimately led to the postmodern concern for a form-devoid-of-content: "The moderns were the first to recognize that esthetic form was prior to any content, and could therefore be given whatever content one liked" (195). For Gans, the modernist exposing of the content-based Aristotelian aesthetic is a direct intuition of the truth of mimesis as arising not from the aesthetic representation of the (ritual) object but from the formal designations of the resentful and conflictual desires on the human periphery. The trademark of modernism, therefore, is the exposing of the "scandal" of the originary community's resentful desires, which lie at the heart of all cultural phenomena: "In discovering the general form of cultural scandal, modernism unearths, beneath the Aristotelian mimesis it rejects, the conflictual mimesis that is the driving force of the originary event" (195).

It is precisely the purpose of Gans's essay to give order to this disorderly field, to outline the "major debate" that lies in the shadow of the "minor malaise." Yet his polemic is not situated backward to a literary tradition that must be propped up once again on its original liberal humanist scaffolding, a relic of high seriousness to be treated with extreme reverence and sacrality. On the contrary, Gans's view is forward to a rigorous human science that does not content itself with debating the priorities of various hermeneutic methods. For, ultimately, there is no way to outdo literature on its own terms. Whether one defends or attacks the literary text, it will continue to maintain its immunity as long as one remains locked within the overall view that sacralizes the text over and against one's interpretation of it. The literary debate will only progress if an extra-cultural view is substituted for the intra-cultural one.

The ease with which Gans can thus turn around a whole tradition should not blind us to the importance of what he is doing, for, ultimately, it is never the work of one man that can change a world-view, and if Gans is correct, we are not merely witnessing a local debate, but are attempting to make sense of an "essential debate," that has implications far beyond those of merely another kind of hermeneutic. If the literary debate is a prologue to a greater debate lurking in the wings "in latent form awaiting its catalyst" ("Differences" 795) (on this premonition at least the texts of Girard and Derrida are united) then students of literature, so long left in the shadows of science, would do well to pay heed to Gans's assertion that it is precisely now that a truly *human science* can take its proper place in what Julia Kristeva has called the "discursive and scientific adventure of our species" (484).

Having attempted to situate Gans's polemic against the "minor debate," we can broach the question of the "major debate" and the role that literature and literary theory play in this debate with respect to the original synthesis Gans gives to the tenets of Girard and Derrida. But before engaging the "humanisms" of Girard and Derrida, we will first have to explore Gans's reasons for presenting a "humanism," which is, he claims, alone adequate to the task of formulating the epistemology of a human science, and this last because it eschews both the *a priori* metaphysics of philosophy and the ungrounded empiricism of a positivistic social-scientific tradition which rides all too easily on the wake left by the successes of the natural sciences.

Natural Science or Humanism?

For Gans, the major debate shadowed behind the minor one concerns the essential problematic of man. This problematic—one engaged variously by all culture, from primitive religion to secular humanism—concerns man's difference from all other life forms, the most significant of which are the higher primates, for the very reason that positive anthropology does not acknowledge this difference but instead regards man as a particularly bright chimpanzee. *Pace* the anthropologists, Gans argues that it is self-deceptive to see animal communication as continuous with human language, if only because the human capacity for representation allows for a new economy of cultural evolution that far surpasses the comparatively slow evolutionary economy of genetics.

One cannot fully appreciate Gans's point here without understanding his position *vis-à-vis* the anthropologists, on the one hand, and the humanists (or anti-humanists), on the other. The former, true to the unavowed metaphysics of an empirico-positivistic scientific tradition, have no need for language, for to them it is merely a tool for their impeccably scientific observations on the upright posture, brain size, and tool-using abilities of the ape-man brought to light by palaeontological evidence. The humanists, on the other hand, truly understand the cultural difference of man from the apes (for why else would they be studying culture?), but so much so that they ultimately too have forgotten the specificity of the human, this time sacrificing not man for the ape, but language for man—the subject is dead, so is the human, now there is only "text." For Gans, the remarkable thing about this polar opposition between the two "cultures" of science and the humanities is their combined denial of the historical specificity of the human. To the positivists, man is but an ape; to the humanists, man is but text. Between Darwinian biology and Derridean deconstruction falls the non-event of human origin. Or, as Gans puts it in his 1990 book *Science and Faith*, playing on the Girardian concept of ritual mystification: "Positive thought and Derridean deconstruction commune in the ritual murder of the originary event" (10).

By thus presenting the biological view and the cultural view of humanity as opposites that are paradoxically engaged in the same process of denying a human origin, Gans is seeking to first pose the problem and then propose a synthesis. Thus, although he shares the positivist's commonsensical belief in evolution, he will not accept a biological theory of evolution as indicative of man's specificity (which in these positivistic terms can only ever be a relative difference and thus hardly a difference at all). And, on the other hand,

although he agrees with the contemporary humanist's intuition of the primacy of language, notably in the Derridean formulation of the sign as *différance*, he refuses to maintain that, because man is, in a sense, "always already" inside language, he is therefore incapable of producing a theory of human origin without further perpetuating the logocentric myths which his own discourse produces. To see the referent as "always already" beyond one's grasp is rightly to intuit the problematic difference of man as his capacity for representation (construed as *différance* or, more simply, as difference through deferral), but to conclude as a result of this intuition that therefore man can never uncover the mystery of his own origin because he is irreducibly caught in the "moment" of his own speech is to restore the sacrality of man's difference, and hence the transcendental vision of his origin. Thus, unprepared to sacrifice the sacred for human self-understanding, deconstruction falls back into the (ritual) comfort of its "metaphysical" aporia. For ultimately one can problematize all one wants the relation between a sign and a referent, but in thus pushing language to the limits, one is still left with the original relationship. The resulting stalemate—and it is a stalemate—may be admired for its aporetic qualities or what have you, but one cannot help feeling an uneasiness at the holier-than-thou attitude held by those who are privilege to experiencing this semi-mystical mode of contemplation.

These allusions to the sacred are not unmerited, for it may well be—and certainly Girard's and Gans's anthropologies suggest as much—that the insights of deconstruction are at once also its failings. For, as both Girard and Gans persuasively propose, it is the very nature of the sacred from its first moments at the origin of the human to *simultaneously* reveal and conceal, beckon and withdraw, expose and disguise. That deconstruction has divulged this sacrality in the very moment of the linguistic act is a powerful intuition of the originary status of language as the fundamental institution of the ethical human community. But that they wish then to hypostatize language as the ethical act only insofar as it is continually performed and reperformed reveals their ultimate dependence on a sacred (ritual) tradition that cannot separate the ethical from a moment of original transcendence, which "always already" remains beyond the reach of the ritual performer. The desire to prolong this ritualistic act in a moment of aporetic "bliss" reveals a profound insight of the paradoxical relationship between imagined signified and real referent. But insofar as this linguistic act is deemed as itself a sacred act incapable of

conceiving its own nontranscendent motivations, the textual vision of humanity reveals itself to be, in the final analysis, unprepared to shed its metaphysical underpinnings.[4]

Gans's suggestion that positive thought and deconstruction "commune in the ritual murder of the originary event" should not be taken as mere rhetoric. For, ultimately, these two polar views have grown from the same metaphysical (edenic) tree which understands the human as a being beyond time. The only difference lies in the fact that science, in its concern for observing the external world simply ignores or brackets the regarding subject *in toto*, whereas philosophy, in its proclivity for deriving man's essential being, equates man with the eternal spirit, whether it be transcendent or immanent or both. Both views ultimately disallow for the human to be figured historically in the equation, but they do so from different sides of the originary event: science is happiest when the human does not exist, for the knowing subject's presence interferes with the object of his experiment; philosophy certainly affirms the human, but at the expense of man's material origins. The validity of this distinction is evident when one observes the history of these two subjects. By erasing the human observer, science can always claim to be progressing, for there is always more ground to cover, more matter to observe. Philosophy, on the other hand, must be always catching up with itself, for, in seeking to bring the eternal into the human subject, the eternal must be renewed each time, which means revising previous metaphysical constructions. Philosophy is always rewriting; science continually builds higher. But eventually the philosopher gets tired and rather than waiting for his own words to be erased and rewritten, he erases his own words (Derrida). And eventually science gets tired of building ever higher and finds that it can no longer distinguish between the reality it began with and the theories it has hypothesized (witness Hawking).

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[4]This is the fate of Hillis Miller's study *The Ethics of Reading* which serves as a classical exposition of the deconstructive paradox that only understands "textual" demystification as itself a reinscription of metaphysical categories through the theologizing of language. After deconstructing Kant's universal and singular categorical imperative, Miller would reinscribe the theological into the "implacable law of language" itself (53), substituting a linguistic imperative for Kant's immanent one, the transcendent status of which is evident in each linguistic performance: "each act of reading . . . takes place as an event in a certain spot and turns that spot in a certain sense into a sacred place, that is, into a place which is inaugural" (53). The question of an "ethics of reading" is thus seen to be less a question of the interaction between the members of the peripheral human community, than of the sacred communion of the private individual with the sacred centre. That this rehypostatizes the ethical within the closure of ritual performance is clearly evident in Miller's conception of linguistic performance: "My [reading] act is not ethical unless I act in such a way that what I do implies a miniature version of this [divinely sanctioned] initiating act of lawgiving, and has implicit within it a miniature version of a universal historical narrative" (29). Thus formulated, there is little one can do with this notion of ethics except participate in the endless ritual reenactments of language for no better reason than that we are apparently reproducing its "ethicity." In this aporetic stalemate, we find no doubt the source of the resentment directed against deconstruction for its disguised conservatism.

It is this contradiction between the world-view of the scientists, on the one hand, and that of the humanists and philosophers, on the other, that Gans sees as distorting the question of man's identity, the truth of which must lie in a historical hypothesis of origin that can mediate a dialogue between the two perspectives. Thus, Gans is unprepared to accept the (empirical) anthropologists' version of the origin of man because it simply places man at the end of a gradual gradient of evolution that stretches from single-celled organisms to the higher primates. The theory behind this hypothesis is that genetic evolution accounts for our (only relative) difference from our cousins the apes. But, as Gans suggests, the human as the cultural, that is, the self-representing animal presents a significantly more problematic question than the mapping of even the most complex genome.[5]

Not that genetics is to be denied. The origin of life possesses it own problematic which Gans explicitly uses as an analogy for thinking about the origin of language. One can describe the DNA/RNA system as itself a kind of "language," the "coded" DNA chains providing the necessary information for encoding and thence producing the amino acids that then lead to the complex biochemical structure of the entire living organism. Locked inside each nucleus of the millions of cells that make up a complex organism are identical copies of the genome, imperceptible chains of DNA existing only on a submicroscopic—i.e., molecular—level. But Gans points to the analogy between language and genetic code only to make clear the *formal difference* between genetic representation and linguistic representation:

> The word "language" implies a distinctness between (linguistic) sign and (real) referent, whereas the signs of a code encode other signs. This horizontality of codes also entails a particular rigor, lacking which the sign risks confusion with other code- or reference-signs; the smaller the margin between sign and referent, the less room is available for "connotation." ("Differences" 796-97)

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[5]Gans's arguments for the necessity of an originary event conceived in terms of a hypothesis are scattered throughout the introductory sections of his books on generative anthropology. See for instance the early sections of *The End of Culture*. "As soon as the phenomenon of representation is no longer accepted as a given, either 'natural' like the genetic and other 'codes,' or miraculous and incapable of explanation, then it is obvious that any explanation of categories of representation, let alone individual acts of representation, must refer at least implicitly to an explanation, that is, a theory, a hypothesis concerning the phenomenon of representation-in-general. And the only hypothesis that can in any sense explain representation as a historically given activity peculiar to our species must be a generative one that proposes a model of its emergence from an earlier state in which it was absent" (16-17).

The peculiarity of human language is that it is precisely *not* a code. Codes can be deciphered, because, as in the Morse code, they always possess a one-to-one relation with the system they "represent." It is this naiveté toward the phenomenon of human language as simply a code that makes the otherwise unrelated projects of artificial intelligence and teaching chimpanzees to talk ultimately hopeless projects. Computers can be programmed and chimps taught a few—perhaps even a surprising number of—signs, but until scientists stop thinking of language as simply a code, they will never be able to understand human language, however many monkeys they befriend.

The successful functioning of the genetic code, as Gans points out, hinges both on the rigour of its horizontal system—the chain or sequence of nucleotides—and on the small margin (for possible error) between the sign (the DNA strand) and its "referent" (the amino acids). As biochemists well know, the slightest fault in the not inconsiderable length of the DNA molecule can lead to disastrous results. "Connotation" in genetic representation is neither tolerated nor desirable. The process of protein synthesis, the "translation" (as it is commonly termed) of DNA fragments into the amino acids of proteins which provide the building blocks of organic life, is utterly dependent on the "literal" reading of the "grammatology" of the genetic code.

But the point here is not to hold up the example of the literal code of genetic reproduction as a more perfect representational model than that of "connotative" human language. Such a view is illustrative of the (scientific, i.e., metaphysical) forgetting of the fact that the genetic code only exists inside language, which is to say that it only exists for humans because only humans have developed the prior capability of language by which to conceive the genetic code. Man, like the amoeba, is a self-reproducing form, but only man is conscious of this fact. The significance of the genetic code lies not in its representational capacities *per se*, but in its ability to turn matter into something more than merely matter. As Gans indicates, the "genetic code is the realization of a latent property of certain complex chemical structures to encode or 'represent' themselves within themselves," thus permitting "the continued existence of the complex [highly improbable] biochemical structures of life by encoding them in more economical terms—economy here being a function of chemical stability" ("Differences" 797).

The origin of life is founded on the creation of a system of representation where complex life forms are able to represent themselves via a genetic code in the vastly more economical form of a single DNA molecule. The continuity between the amoeba and the ape is explained by this self-reproducing biochemical reality. And yet the formal reality of the genetic code is not measured by its mere ability to successfully translate genetic material

into cellular life. If this were the case, the amoeba would be a more advanced life-form than the ape. Once the transition from chemical matter to organic life has been made via the triggering of properties latent in complex chemical structures, the resulting genetic code allows for the origin and evolution of species that so fascinated Darwin. Life is founded on the genetic code, but its subsequent evolution is a function of the species' ability to successfully exploit this code. Biological speciation and adaptability, the bountiful diversity of nature of which we are so proud, are a function of life's genetically coded economy of reproduction.

The condition of possibility for the evolution of species is precisely the presence of a code—a form of genetic representation where the organism is given the possibility of modifying internally its own structure. But the model of human evolution cannot be taken from the genetic formulation; as linguists well know, culture is not latent within the human genome, a genetic inheritance destined to run its particular cultural program regardless of external social factors. The optimism of geneticists may be warranted in areas confined strictly to biology (i.e., in terms of combating disease), but biology will find no cure for social malaise. The condition of possibility for the evolution of culture can only be understood as distinct from genetic evolution. The origin of life is not also the origin of the human. For, as Gans sees it, the origin of the human presents its own problematic that is quite distinct from the problematic of the origin of life, though it too, in a much more radical way, founds itself on the origin of a form of representation that allows for a level of self-inclusion vastly more efficient than that of the genetic code. It is Gans's contention that the "invention of language" presents "the second problematic step in the course of evolution" ("Differences" 797):

> The crux of the matter is this. With the origin of language, of culture, of human as distinct from animal life, we are dealing with the origin of a new form of self-reflexion or self-inclusion that can be most simply expressed by the term "consciousness." The origin of consciousness, of a form of self-inclusion in which a scene of representation becomes available and a new form of economy is created, is problematic, as is the origin of life, because it cannot be explained gradualistically on the basis of an earlier form of evolution. Consciousness must originate all at once—it must originate *consciously*. ("Differences" 798)

It is this radical contention (radical because it is explicitly posited as a scientific answer to the "missing link" theory that observes a gap between the protohominid and the human)

that leads Gans to make the further radical (but nonetheless logical) conclusion that "human and animal language are separated by a gulf as wide as that between crystals and living beings" (797). Again, this claim is unlikely to win any followers in the scientific community. But its argumentative force and intellectual radicality should nevertheless be appreciated by the humanists, who are currently best situated to note the validity of Gans's claim.[6] Indeed, this is no doubt the reason why the essay appears in a literary journal, and also why Gans can use the thinking of two prominent intellectual figures in the human sciences. It is to these two thinkers and to Gans's revision of their respective fundamental tenets that we can now turn.

Philosophy and Anthropology

Perhaps the best way to appreciate Gans's reformulation of Derrida is to understand how the former reinterprets the latter's key notion of *différance*. For it is I think possible to boil Derrida down (though he would deny the feasibility of such a streamlining of his project) to this obviously key term. As Gans points out in a footnote suggesting the continuity between the structuralism exemplified by Lévi-Strauss and the poststructuralism as expounded seminally by Derrida, the latter's thinking really presents a "more fully reasoned form" of the problems inherent in Saussurian structuralism, Derrida's "critique" being contrasted with Lévi-Strauss's "straightforward adoption" of Saussurian principles ("Differences" 795-96).

In these terms, Derrida's radicalization of metaphysical thought lies in his realization that the synchronic differences so cherished by structuralism can only exist if the diachrony or temporal movement otherwise ignored by this view as unformalizable, and therefore not a subject for scientific enquiry, is seen to slip in unnoticed and take its place at the heart of the structuralist project. Hence Derrida, in the essay "Structure, Sign, and Play" already

[6]The criticism most often levelled at students of literature by a noncomprehending empirical mind-set is that they read too much into things. No doubt this is true when dealing with empirical referents. But this limitation in terms of a scientific tradition becomes a strength when engaging the most elusive referent of all—the human subject. For ultimately the truth of humanity lies not in the naive acceptance of linguistic designation, but precisely in "reading into" or "beyond" these linguistic forms. Humanist intuitions are certainly in need of systematic rigour; but this is not because they are false, but because they are valid—albeit inchoate—hypothetical constructions of human nature (for why else would they continue to inspire general interest?). As a *human* science, Gans's paradigm of a hypothetical epistemology cannot appeal to the scientists, but it has all along been the implicit route of the humanists: "[T]he time is ripe for literary scholars, students of the forms of language, to take advantage of the primordial position of language at the basis of human culture—of humanity itself" ("Differences" 808).

referred to, suggests "that [in the work of Lévi-Strauss] the respect for structurality, for the internal originality of the structure, compels a neutralization of time and history" (263). Although Lévi-Strauss exhibits a justified suspicion of a concept of history that "has always been in complicity with a teleological and eschatological metaphysics" (262), his explicitly "scientific" structuralist perspective always runs the risk of reducing history to "an anhistoricism of a classical type" (263), that is, in the form of an ideal formalism, grounded paradoxically in a notion of absolute presence, the determinate moment of which can only arise out of "the history of metaphysics" itself (263). Thus, the origin of each structure must be paradoxically conceived of as absolutely original, having no connection with previous structures—"a rupture with its past, its origin and its cause" (263).

As we saw earlier, this synchrony deftly exposed by Derrida is the philosophical view *par excellence*, destined always to play catch-up-ball, because the synchronic cut of each structure offered as a moment of theoretical enlightenment can only sustain itself on the assumption that it provides a clean break with all previous (necessarily incomplete) structures. If structuralism eschews the naive idealism of a metaphysics of history for the formalism of unchanging synchronic structure, it must then define whatever structure it uncovers in its theoretical program as absolutely discontinuous with previous theoretical structures (for otherwise how could the teleological version of history be denied?).

We have, as I have already suggested, returned to the crux of the problem: that is, how to define difference and continuity? Derrida notes that Lévi-Strauss can only define structural difference "by failing to pose the problem of the passage from one structure to another, by putting history into parentheses" ("Structure, Sign, and Play" 263). Thus Lévi-Strauss, in his anxiousness to surpass teleological conceptions of history, sacrifices all history for the ideality of the present moment. But this is to turn ideal history into ideal presence, which does not move beyond metaphysics but only perpetuates it. Derrida, with a sure hand, leads us to Lévi-Strauss's conception of the origin of "that structure of structures, language," which "could only have been born in one fell swoop" (263). Though Derrida does not comment on Lévi-Strauss's claim that language originated "in one fell swoop," beyond suggesting that the origin of structure must always be conceived as "an overturning of nature in nature, a natural interruption of the natural sequence, a brushing aside *of* nature" (263), his reference to the fundamental institution of language and his subsequent sparse yet nonetheless probing remarks reveal an intuition of what is at stake in a formal definition of humanity—the origin of difference itself.

But though Derrida realizes the fundamental nature of language as the "structure of structures," he interprets this intuition as evidence of language's supremacy over human

attempts to engage in the search for an origin. Language only signifies because it can never end or begin in the absolute singularity of a pure event or (it is the same thing) in a pure referent devoid of the always deferring and differing play of the signifier. "Language" for Derrida, Gans points out, "is fundamentally incapable of discovering is own origin" ("Differences" 799), and Gans invokes Wittgenstein's sceptical assertion on the project of metaphysics—*darüber muss man schweigen* (on this matter, one must be silent)—as a fitting parallel to Derrida's own notable silence on addressing explicitly the question of language and human origin.

But it may be that such reverence before the institution of language, standing as it does in direct contradiction to commonsensical and positivistic world-views, can only be the "last stand" of a metaphysical desire for absolute presence (even if it takes the form of a denial of such presence). It may certainly be valuable in the face of a naive empiricism to affirm the "textual" nature of all human endeavours, but to turn this text into a definition of the human as the creature "always already" bound inside a state of deferred presence may be more indicative of a kind of impossible nostalgia for metaphysical presence itself (even if it is redefined as deferred presence), than of a radical redefinition of the human condition *per se*. It may be better to see the fact that most people take it for granted that there is a direct connection between a sign and its referent as suggestive not of a metaphysical delusion but rather as evidence of a transcendence of metaphysics itself.[7] Nobody believes that the worth of a 20 dollar bill is measured by the paper it appears on; nevertheless we have successfully "deluded" ourselves into such a belief every time we engage in a monetary exchange. The deconstructionists are right to observe the traces of a metaphysical trust in language analogous to that of our confidence in fiscal exchange, but to assert that the indivisibility of this trust from the act of using language means the hopelessness of ever coming to know how this trust evolved in the first place is itself a refusal to let go of a dependence on the metaphysics of presence: if presence is to be denied, then the denial of presence will fulfill the role formerly held by presence. It is certainly true that a piece of paper—even a nugget of gold—is but an arbitrary representation of value, but this does not

[7]If we are to respect Gans's anthropological thesis at all, we must accept his postulate that it is from the perspective of the ethical alone that we can speak of cultural evolution. Thus, the question of "a transcendence of metaphysics" only possesses meaning when regarded in pragmatic cultural terms, which is to say, ultimately, ethical terms. It is in this sense that the question of "transcendental guarantees" gains ethical lucidity—a lucidity which, Gans maintains, was always at the heart of religion and its "originary theory" of humanity's transcendental origin, the most pertinent of which for Western society has been the "transcendental guarantees" of Judaeo-Christianity: "Millennia of hypocrisy have not killed the Judeo-Christian ethic, but rather strengthened its hold over social reality to the point that its transcendental guarantees have become all but unnecessary" (*The End of Culture* 148).

mean that the question of value cannot be distinguished from its materialization in the practice of exchange. Indeed, the fact that human society has managed to "trick" itself into believing that a bill of paper can represent a nugget of gold speaks volumes about the capacity, even the necessity, for humanity to seek evermore convenient (i.e., metaphysical) modes of formal representation to counteract the destructive forces of internal (i.e., human) conflict. One can lament the lost days of golden guineas or affirm the arbitrary category of human signification, but the essential gesture behind both these moves is ultimately a refusal to believe that one can maintain social coherence without metaphysical categories. Hence, the argument is made that one cannot think the very processes one is engaged in, that one cannot separate the understanding of a sign from the performance of that sign. Language thus hypostatized becomes a manifestation of ritual that affirms the metaphysical inheritance of humanity, but only insofar as we do not attempt the impossible, by seeking to go beyond the sign as a human performance to thematize that performance as evidence of the human, the historical evolution of which is scientifically observable. This dependence on the metaphysical world-view (even if it takes the form of the contemporary denial of absolute presence) refuses to avert its gaze (be it affirmative or negative) from the sacrality of the transcendental referent.

But it is not enough to affirm the "metaphysics" of the human language-user using language. "It is this over-ambitious conception of human self-knowledge," Gans suggests, "that generates the despairing paradoxes in which the very possibility of self-knowledge is denied. This conception would exclude the very possibility of an origin of language" (*Originary Thinking* 17). Gans goes on to show, echoing Derrida's somewhat different conception of Nietzschean free-play, that it is Nietzsche's resentment of religion's guardianship of the story of human origin that led to his affirmation of the supremacy of text over the logos of narrative history. In thus subverting "historical progressivism through the 'eternal return,'" Nietzsche was able to defy the religious conception of origin and claim the "abolition of originarity itself" (*Originary Thinking* 109). But, in seeking to usurp the authority of religious originarity, Nietzsche succeeded not in doing away with originarity altogether, but in substituting the general text of language that "has 'always already' existed" for "the dethroned God who was supposed to have used it to create the world" (109). Thus, textuality is elevated to the throne formerly held by religion's transcendental God. Yet either way, one is left with a denial of the historical origin of humanity.

Origins Denied versus Origin Hypothesized

It is this denial of human origin engaged in by both the scientists and the humanists, though for vastly different reasons, that leads Gans to suggest in his essay "Differences" that the "only truly original" position that he proposes in the "great debate" is that of René Girard (799). For not only has Girard explicitly "recognized the problem" of "man's difference," he has also "proposed a hypothesis to solve it" (800). Thus, Gans readily pays tribute to Girard's anthropology which, as Gans indicates, stands out for its conviction that the question of humanity presents a unique problem not currently addressed by the inadequate empirical epistemologies of the social sciences, which in their denial of the unique stature of the human cannot provide the necessary grounds for a properly human science.

In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard first proposed his anthropological thesis on the nature and origin of the human species as distinct from the higher primates. In a wide-ranging analysis of ritual practices, mythology, Greek tragedy, and Biblical texts, Girard proceeds in this book to uncover a primordial murder lying at the foundation of the cultural order, thus beginning the saga of hominization and man's battle with his own violence through the installation of first primitive ritual and then the higher religions. Girard's survey of the high cultural texts of Greek tragedy and Judaeo-Christianity, on the one hand, and of the ethnological data on primitive rites and sacrificial practices collected by anthropologists, on the other, leads him to locate a fundamental formal mechanism that lies at the heart of all cultural expressions. Girard calls this mechanism—following the scapegoat theme of which it is both the origin and perpetrator—the *surrogate victim mechanism.*

The surrogate victim mechanism is the process by which the community transforms reciprocal, undifferentiated violence into channelled and generative, in a word, unanimous violence. By way of the surrogate victim, human interaction is transformed from the chaotic destructiveness of reciprocal undifferentiated crisis into the constructive, directed spirit of unanimous intention. It is this process of transforming one kind of conflict (random and undirected) into a single polarized conflict (the many directed against the one) that Girard sees as structuring human society. Communal cohesion is only brought about by bringing random desires into focus on a single, central victim. Like an atom that needs its nucleus to prevent its peripheral electrons from spinning centrifugally into space, humanity needs a central victim around which to maintain a stable, harmonious orbit.

As is obvious from this brief synopsis of the Girardian victimage mechanism, the constant factor in the movement from reciprocal crisis to generative unanimity is the element of human violence. The problem is not violence in itself—Girard explicitly refuses to regard violence "in itself," that is, as a psychological or individual phenomenon, be it posed as emanating from a cruel, maliciously "psychotic" mind, or, more surreptitiously, as an unconscious drive, an innate and hence unfathomable characteristic of the human condition. The problem lies not within the Freudian problematic of individual consciousness, but precisely on a level that Girard construes both as anterior to and as consequently more fundamental than the Freudian consciousness, namely, on the level of social organization. By beginning on the level of the human community, Girard both sets his project off—and he does so explicitly—from the Freudian one, and engages the problematic of the human from its ethical basis in a human community. The fact that Girard takes as his subject-matter the religious (primitive and modern) texts of humanity clearly bears out his interest in an ethical definition of man. For Girard, the question of the anthropological origin of humankind is inseparable from a critical analysis of religion, the prime function of which has always been—as the term *religio* makes clear—the "binding" of the ethical human community.

Yet Girard's critical project of providing a unified theory of religion, as is evident from the start in *Violence and the Sacred*,[8] remains ambiguously oriented to its own status *vis-à-vis* the ethnological, literary, and biblical texts from which it draws its central postulates. This ambiguity is not one of a "polite" tentativeness so characteristic of traditional literary-critical discourse—indeed, Girard is more polemical than polite—but rather has to do with the problem of defining Girard's discourse as, on the one hand, a scientific reflection on Western religion and primitive ritual and, on the other, as precisely a revelation of the "truth" of the surrogate victim mechanism within human society. For if Girard can assert the scientific stature of his theory as a "hypothesis" that "should be approached . . . as one approaches any scientific hypothesis" (*Violence* 316), by holding it up against the data it strives to explain, then there can be no question of the "truth" of the victimage mechanism

[8]Girard has commented somewhat regretfully on the "essayistic" style of *Violence and the Sacred* (see *Diacritics* Interview p. 31 and *Paroles Gelees* Interview p. 9) which conveys—right from its *in medias res* beginning through to its forceful conclusion—the sense of an unfolding discovery of which the reader is the privileged witness. Yet perhaps the very "essayistic" nature of this exuberant book lends itself to a spirit of intellectual freedom where the "greater" the blindspot, the greater the insight that is seen to follow. Indeed, the attentive reader will find in this earlier book (the first to postulate the scapegoat mechanism) inchoate insights that directly contradict Girard's later adoption of the Christian narrative as the only path by which to transcend the mimetic cycle of violence he so forcefully uncovers. The path from Girard to Gans is by no means an obvious one, but in *Violence and the Sacred* one finds intuited insights that lead more obviously to Gans's generative anthropology than do subsequent Girardian works.

as a revelation, even if that revelation be gleaned from the Bible itself as the "Gospel truth." As Gans says: "in the last analysis scientific discourse can never privilege another discourse—be it that of the Gospels—above its own" ("Differences" 805).

This paradoxical ambiguity between the Girardian hypothesis as science, as plausibly conceived and rigorously informing the cultural texts analyzed, and, contrarily, the hypothesis as fact, as an empirical event the question of which is undeniable, reveals a parallel tension evident throughout *Violence and the Sacred*, as it hovers uneasily between a truly original human-scientific enquiry into the nature of violence and a dogmatic assertiveness that sacrifices clarity of argument for polemicism against well-nigh a whole tradition of Western secular thought. It is not insignificant that, in these polemical moments toward, preeminently, contemporary thought, one can find a fundamental blindspot—no less visible for the apotropaic gestures of its author—which points us nevertheless forward to a revised (Gansian) hypothesis of origin via the tenets of poststructuralism. By drawing on Gans, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Derrida, my reading of Girard via his *Violence and the Sacred* and *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* will show both why Girard's hypothesis is inadequate as a genuinely originary event and how it can benefit from a negotiation with deconstruction. Ultimately, though, the point of thus putting Girard under such close scrutiny is not to annihilate him, but precisely to pay tribute to him, by following in his main premises and contributing to his goal for a truly foundational human science.

Girard's hypothesis of human origin is derived from his identification of the surrogate victim mechanism as a feature common to all primitive and modern cultures. Having found the scapegoat mechanism to be a universal trait, Girard feels (quite literally) compelled[9] to propose a hypothesis concerning the origin, of not only the mechanism, but of the very

[9]"I do not consider my insights as truly personal. It is 'in the air,' I think, and if I had not stumbled upon it myself, someone else, rapidly, would have. I view this insight as a minor part of that complete disintegration of sacrificial protections it is our misfortune and privilege to witness . . . . It is not the truth of some historical narrative that remains intact through the vicissitudes of cultural evolution, it is the efficacy of the unanimous victimage effect or scapegoat process. How could I avoid postulating the reality of that event since its effects can still be verified down to this day" (*Diacritics* Interview 37). But is the ubiquity and efficacy of the victimage effect (for which Girard marshals impressive and undeniable evidence) ultimately dependent on the event of an original primordial murder? Does not Girard's firm conviction in the necessity of an empirical event precisely undermine his position *vis-à-vis* the contemporary concern for the ubiquity of text and the discursive nature of all referents? We find a hint of scepticism from Gans regarding Girard's double program of perceiving universal victimage and basing a theory of human origin on that perception: "It is no doubt an error to found an entire anthropology on this dichotomy [of domination and victimage], as though our sentiment of insignificance before the other had necessarily to derive from a real act of victimization" ("The Culture of Resentment" 63).

event by which that mechanism enculturated early homonids and launched the transition from animal to human. The method of reasoning here is of some significance; for identifying a universal trait—even if it be the minimal one of mimesis—and proposing a hypothesis of origin are not identical procedures, and the latter does not necessarily follow from the former. The difference has to do with the "synchrony" of the universal trait and the "diachrony" of the narrative proposed to bring it into existence at its origin. As is evident from Derridean theory, the difference between the synchronic and diachronic is a problematic one: "things differ [synchronically] if and only if they are deferred" (Gans, "Differences" 799)—hence the coinage *différance*.[10] In Derrida, this *différance* is really the problematic *par excellence*, inhabiting all systems that strive for an ideal synchronic universality which Derrida equates with the lure for metaphysical presence. The structuralism of Lévi-Strauss is only the most recent instance of this "ungrounded" metaphysics, his case being all the more significant for his own recognizing of the problem of "history" and his trying to eliminate it by limiting himself to "synchronic" structures only.

Derrida's point is that all metaphysical systems must begin with a point of departure outside the actual system itself. That is, the structural integrity of the system founds itself on a point of origin—the transcendental signified—that itself lies beyond that system. Classical metaphysics traditionally seeks to neutralize religious transcendence by striving to conceptualize the very origin of transcendence itself. But, as Derrida points out, logical thought always remains compromised by transcendence, for it cannot maintain its systematic rationality without the security of its transcendental signified. Hence, metaphysics is never really as complete (i.e., "total" and self-contained) as it would like people to think, or, inversely, the point of origin from which it receives its "push" must

[10]My discussion of this term, as will become increasingly clear, remains informed by Gans's historicization of what Derrida would maintain as nonconceptualizable. Thus, for Gans, *différance* refers to the anthropological category of originary *deferral*. It is only by *deferring* instinctive appropriation that the human community can re-present to itself its *difference* from the appetitive object. Where Derrida would give equal weight to difference and deferral, Gans shows that the metaphysical category of synchronic difference depends primordially on the anthropological category of deferral. Derrida correctly perceives the deferral already implicit in the metaphysics of structuralist synchrony, but he errs in assuming that the former is incompatible with metaphysical presence, for it is precisely originary deferral which founds the category of collective presence and thence the possibility for a "metaphysics of presence." See, for instance, p. 73 of Gans's *The Origin of Language*: "Derrida indeed attacks the 'metaphysical' ground of original presence as a myth, that is, as *content*, while opposing it with his own critically de-conceptualized mechanism of 'différance' or deferral as the true ground of communication. This critique fails to remark that presence and deferral, far from opposing each other as (spurious) plenitude and (real) absence, are merely different terms for the same phenomenon, the original presence being precisely a deferral of appropriative action." There are numerous other moments in Gans's books where this criticism of Derrida is reiterated, but we shall here remain content with this one citation.

itself be incorporated into the economy of the system, thus breaking down the intended chronology between (an) origin and (a) supplement. The "deconstruction" of metaphysics reveals this allegiance to an ideal or transcendental point of origin that is otherwise passed over unnoticed under the name of being, history, the unconscious, or what have you.

In Girard, however, the process Derrida finds inhabiting philosophical systems is radically reversed, or, in a word, anthropologized. That is, Girard does not seek to conceptualize at the expense of previous history, nor does he propose to theorize an origin uncompromised by the economy it produces; he explicitly poses the problem of human culture as a "supplement" to its problematic origin in the nonhuman. For Girard too engages in the "deconstruction" of previous systems, though his analyses are in the area of anthropology and religion, not philosophy. The movement of this deconstruction, however, is not a purely negative one where the space is left open in lieu of submitting oneself to the same paradoxical movement of previous systems. It is, rather, in order to locate the truth about humanity in its ethical quest for survival that Girard poses the problem from which his theory is seen to grow.

This ethical dimension—sometimes couched in terms as exhilarating as they can be evangelically polemical—gives Girard's analyses the moral force and power of an urgent conviction, rare in the academic world, and this sense of conviction stands in direct contrast to the elliptic, tentative and ineluctable prose-style of Derrida. Thus, whereas for Derrida the space of truth is left conspicuously open or absent-in-its-presence, for Girard the truth is a function of humankind's ethical need to facilitate communality. That this ethical need is also realized in an essentially "negative" recuperation of the originary act indicates that truth is by no means an eternal metaphysical concept, but rather a function of humankind's ability to contend with its own self-conscious will for survival. In this sense, Girard's anthropology differs from a philosophical tradition—that has always begun (since Plato) with ideal concepts—by posing the conditions of its own possibility in terms, not of transcendent eternal ideas, but of its own relation to a "genetic" history of cultural "solutions" to the problem of human conflict. Hence, the truth which Girard claims for the validity of his own discourse is not discontinuous with the texts he analyses but involves the same process of self-reflection, key for human survival, that motivated culture—from primitive ritual to modern religion—in the first place. That Girard's hypothesis, as we shall see, cannot, in the final analysis, sustain this openness is not evidence for its inadequacy *tout court*, but only calls for the revision of its originary hypothesis; this both preserves the value of his analyses and demonstrates the possibility for cumulative (i.e., scientific) knowledge.

Anthropology in the Girardian or Gansian sense is possible only insofar as one realizes that culture *is* anthropology, and that the process of thus turning back and self-reflecting on previous culture is significant only because the process of anthropological reflection is motivated by the same process as all cultural reflection, the first moment of which marks the origin of this cultural genetics and hence the origin of the human. Ultimately, the point in studying religion and ritual is to understand that the same ethical need lies behind both the original religious practices under scrutiny and the critical discourse that is brought to bear on those practices. Primitive ritual and mythology are not the products of simplistic thought processes; they inform the very structure of our own thinking. There is no question of going beyond religion (as Girard continually reminds us in his polemic with contemporary secularism—e.g.: "There is no society without religion because without religion society would not exist" [*Violence* 221]); one can only return to the religious, even as one mimics its very form. And yet one can still learn from it, because in mimicking its form one reveals not, to be sure, its place of hiding in a realm transcendent to human experience, but its truth for humanity—always a pragmatic and hence ethical truth—which is ultimately the only truth one can have.

This paradox, so conducive to despair for certain contemporary epistemologies, is for Girard the defining characteristic of humanity, paving the way for a truly foundational anthropology. Only in thus turning "the same mechanisms as religion" back on itself "with a virtuosity that religion never approached" can "men make discoveries about their own culture" (*Violence* 237). If Girard has taught us anything, it is to make use of this "agile mode of thinking" (237) in order to understand the cultural inheritance of humanity, thereby eschewing both the nihilism of contemporary philosophy and the narrowly specialized, "regional ontologies" of the social sciences.

But having affirmed the Girardian hermeneutic as, in a sense, turning deconstruction toward a positive aim, we would do well to ask if Girard would not benefit from an engagement with deconstruction, if only in the interests of a mutually beneficial "dialogue," as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe suggests in his reading of Girard in *Diacritics* (1978). Indeed, this is precisely the aim of Gans's 1981 essay "Differences" where Gans presents his original synthesis of Girard and Derrida.[11] The following analysis will draw variously on

[11]Mihai Spariosu also recognizes the importance of this debate, providing a valuable commentary in his 1984 essay "Mimesis and Contemporary French Theory." More recently, Andrew McKenna's book *Violence and Difference* (1992) takes up these issues, suggesting that Derrida can be fully reconciled with the Girardian hermeneutic.

these authors in order to delineate what is at stake in the "debate" between Girardian anthropology and the formal concerns of deconstruction.

I have already suggested that Girard and Derrida intersect in Girard's conception of the originary hypothesis. The tension or aporia Derrida sees between an origin and its supplement as construed in traditional philosophy is in Girard seen to be the inevitably "supplemental" inheritance of a real singular human origin. Origin in philosophy is a necessarily ubiquitous concept, precisely because philosophy begins with concepts and not with real origins. Anthropology, on the other hand, can affirm the necessity and the reality of a singular origin, the event of which explains the birth of the human species. This is why Gans refers to Girard's hypothesis as a "protohistorical reality" ("Differences" 800) and a "hypothetical staging" (801) of Derrida's ubiquitous term *différance*. The enigma of human thought that Derrida finds in humanity's capacity for representation receives its ontological ground in the scene of transition from protohuman to human. The beginning of humanity sets the "stage" for subsequent "scenes" to be played, the most significant of which (after the origin of humanity) is the origin of conceptual ability.[12] In this last moment, one finds the origin of philosophy, which, obviously, needs concepts to exist. But this is not the origin of humanity which has already existed in formal awareness, if not in conceptual awareness. Thus, Gans suggests that Derrida "fails to see that although the origin of consciousness must itself be conscious, it should not be expected to possess in addition a *concept* of this consciousness. The formal, atemporal concept is the origin of philosophy, but not the origin of man" ("Differences" 801-2). Girard, Gans observes, "stages" the Derridean micronarrative of *différance* in his scene of origin where the "choice of the victim *defers* the violence of the group by establishing its *difference* from the victim" (802). This anthropological staging Gans sees as being "a most significant advance over

[12]The origin of conceptual ability is only possible with the birth of declarative language and culture. In Gans's genetic scheme of language evolution, the original sign is an ostensive sign that obviously has no discursive capabilities beyond the simple designation of an object as communally significant. Via the intermediary stage of the imperative, the evolution of declarative language brings about the end of prehistorical linguistic evolution and signifies the beginning of cultural evolution, for it is only with the birth of declarative capability (i.e., subject-verb formations) that narrative and hence represented history can evolve. Derrida's premise that presence is only available through absence is a direct intuition of the birth of the declarative that is founded on the *negation* of a preceding imperative request, thus making the desired object available only in-its-absence. The ability to conceptualize the presence of an object in its physical absence is the *sine qua non* of not just metaphysical thought but of all human culture. The ontological narrative of deferral that Derrida sees as disrupting all claims to absolute presence is at its most elementary level, as Derrida seems to intuit, founded on the negation of what is not materially present. Predication is only born through an original denial. Thereafter, affirmative predications can proliferate, but they are dependent on the prior realization that the desired presence of the material object was denied in the first place.

Derrida," whose "loyalty to the metaphysical tradition" prevents him from producing a similar hypothesis (801). The significance of Derrida, for Gans, lies more in the former's awareness of the formal structures of human representation, than in the philosophy that is seen to arise from this awareness.

Yet Gans's strategic use of Derrida is not solely to demonstrate how Girard presents a "significant advance" over the former. For Girard's originary scene is not without its own problems which Gans suggests are brought to light by Derrida's intuition of the fundamentally linguistic character of all thought. A closer look at Girard's originary scene and Gans's reformulation of it will show, first, what is wrong with Girard's formulation and second, how Gans's revised version resolves certain paradoxes not only in the originary scene, but in Girard's theory as a whole. The exposition will thus show how a human science, as with all sciences, can systematically build on itself to the mutual benefit of all those involved.

The Girardian Hypothesis

In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Girard provides his clearest delineation of the operation of the victimage mechanism as an originary hypothesis from which to generate explanations of culture. The purpose of the hypothesis, as Girard amply makes clear, is to provide a minimal explanation of the transition from animal society, governed by a hierarchy of dominance patterns, to human society, governed by the victimage mechanism and hence capable of representing to itself a cultural order. The crucial point in this procedure is to provide a theory that is truly originary and avoids the paradoxical self-grounding which assumes the conclusion in the premises, as most famously illustrated by Freud's circular thesis of the primal murder in *Totem and Taboo*.[13] A rigorously conceived generative anthropology—to be truly originary and hence escape the vicious circularity which Derrida sees as inhabiting all (nonoriginary) global theories—must ground its originary hypothesis in the noncultural, that is, in the nonhuman, thus showing how the minimal moment of humanity arises from its precursor in the prehuman

[13]Derrida, with a keen eye, also focuses on the paradox of Freud's primordial murder, though from an oblique angle quite different from that of Girard. Where Girard is interested in the empirical reality of the event, Derrida is more taken by the formal demands implicated in such a postulation: "Freud appears to cling to the reality of an event, but this event is a sort of non-event, an event of nothing or a quasi-event which both calls for and annuls a narrative account. For this 'deed' or 'misdeed' to be effective, it must be somehow spun from fiction. Everything happens *as if*" ("Before the Law" 198).

structure of animal society. Girard is well aware that it is only "by beginning with animal nature itself and by making no use of anything that has been falsely claimed to be specifically human" (*Things Hidden* 94) that his theory can lay claim to its status as a fundamental anthropology.

For Girard, the link that provides the bridge for this transition from animal to human society is found in the common factor of "acquisitive mimesis" or mimetically aggravated desire for appetitively attractive objects. "As an element that animals possess in common with human beings" (*Things Hidden* 89), Girard sees acquisitive or appropriative mimesis as the prehuman structure upon which to graft the specifically human structure of conflictual mimesis, which requires for its resolution the expulsion of the victim, hence generating the (cultural) unanimity of the group. As is evident from this formulation, though the common element is mimesis, there are two radically different kinds of mimesis at play. On the animal side of the equation is acquisitive mimesis; on the human side, conflictual mimesis. Animals compete mimetically over appetitive objects; humans engage in competitive mimesis that is devoid of a central object—conflict here is metaphysical, that is, it is without material grounds, pure conflict for the sake of conflict. Thus, we can fashion on one side of the animal/human boundary, the structure of animal mimesis—a purely acquisitive, appetitive desire, subordinated to preestablished dominance patterns (i.e., settled beforehand by one-on-one fights)—and, on the other side of this problematic boundary, the structure of human mimesis, which knows no bounds and can only be controlled through the expulsion of a surrogate victim.

A number of remarks can be made at this point in our analysis. First, though Girard would separate his project off from the ethologists who are too ready to equate animal dominance patterns with human hierarchy (which really amounts to naively anthropomorphizing biology), nevertheless in his emphasis on the continuity between acquisitive mimesis and conflictual mimesis—mimesis being the link from animal to human—one can sense a certain predeterminism, a kind of all-too-human narrative pushing its way to the fore. The story of mimesis is the story of humanity, its mimetic capacities rising from a natural, acquisitive level, where the object desired is the object eaten, to a transcendental, conflictual level which is only satisfied with the blood of a victim, not, to be sure, to satisfy its own appetite, but to appease the divinity whose violence is rife within the community. For the saga of hominization to thus unfold, "[w]e need only postulate a greater mimetic intensity," for latent within animal mimesis, waiting only for its "release" is "the actual victimage mechanism foreshadowed in the animal rites" (*Things Hidden* 98). Like a fledgling that has outgrown its nest, the victimage mechanism is waiting to spread its

wings from its home in mimesis. What separates the animal from the human is not, after all, a specific difference, but merely a certain "threshold," a point of no return, on a steady gradient of what can only be relative levels of mimesis: "Beyond a certain threshold of mimetic power, animal societies become impossible" (*Things Hidden* 95), and the "victimage mechanism" appears on the scene, turning acquisitive mimesis into conflictual, that is, metaphysical mimesis—mimesis bereft of its appetitive object. Humanity is the animal that has become too mimetic for its animality; it needs the surrogate victim for otherwise it would destroy itself.

But it is well-worth pausing here and asking why this should be so, why this disarmingly simple hypothesis beginning in animal mimesis should inevitably lead to a surrogate victim, that is, not simply a cadaver left to nature's silence or consumed by animal appetites, but a *real* murder, *the* primordial murder, with all the religious complexities of conscience that go with it. What, in short, generates the acknowledgement that these animals-becoming-human, in their aggravated mimetic conflict, are in the presence of a murder victim—a true scapegoat precisely *representative* of all the group's hostilities, not merely a dead body, but "a universal signifier" (*Things Hidden* 102), "the *true* transcendental signifier" (103) of all human culture? For though Girard feels he has found in mimesis the minimal mechanism to describe the jump from animal to human, there must slip unnoticed into this mimetic cycle of events (despite Girard's assertion that his hypothesis cannot proceed "without at the same time elaborating a theory of the sign and signification" [99]), precisely that which he would not permit—a conceptualization of victimage, an understanding that what the individuals are contemplating is not a "purely instinctual object," (99), but a sign of communal peace, which, as Girard's analyses so powerfully demonstrate, is the desired effect of the countless ritual reproductions of this movement from crisis to calmness in its endless quest for peace and unity. What we are observing here is a disjunction between the scapegoating undeniably present in human society—this is, after all, the whole force and value of Girard's theory—and the empirical reality of an original victim in the primordial murder. In a single originary scene, Girard seeks to graft the cultural reality of scapegoating onto the animal consciousness of appetitive conflict via the postulate of increasing mimetic rivalry. But the scene, as Gans says, "must do too much" ("Differences" 803). The scapegoat mechanism is already bound up in the complexities of representation; it is assuredly, in its brutality and violence, not merely a "question of words"—it is arguably (as Girard would affirm) *the* question of words—but then all the more reason for proceeding carefully, for precisely not "deciding" on the truth, or (with Girard) the "revelation" underlying the problematic of mimesis and

representation. The moment of "decision"—from *decidere*, meaning to cut, as Girard never ceases to remind us (e.g., *Diacritics* Interview 34)—is, as Lacoue-Labarthe says, "the kernel of the whole question" (108). We would do well, it seems, to defer our decision on Girard by reexamining, as carefully as we can, his originary hypothesis.

As I have shown, Girard's hypothesis attempts to graft a theory of the surrogate victim onto an originary scene. If successful, Girard can truly lay claim to the status of his theory as a "fundamental anthropology." I have pointed out, however, that though Girard realizes that to be truly originary his hypothesis must not introduce into its beginnings in animal appetitive desire the supplemental elements which it seeks to derive, nevertheless, his premise of a mimetic conflict that produces a victim-as-signifier assumes inevitably the cultural element of signification already within its hypothetical conception. Because Girard himself is convinced that his theory withstands the *toujours déjà* criticism of deconstruction,[14] it would be beneficial to demonstrate in detail, not only why this is not so, but why a Derridean reading of the originary scene lays the groundwork for establishing a truly originary scene and hence an epistemology for a truly powerful positive hermeneutic.

The problem hinges on Girard's attachment to the concept of an original victim. Despite Girard's own polemic against Freud's affection for the Oedipus complex that impaired his best intuitions in *Totem and Taboo*, we can level a parallel criticism at Girard, whose own affection for the surrogate victim mechanism lead him into paradoxes not dissimilar to the circularity found in Freud's theory of the primal murder. Thus, the fundamental issue for Girard is how a victim is produced *before* there exist any cultural concepts of victimage. The victim as originary and absolute exists anterior to representations of victimage that can only ever be ritual imitations of this founding "elementary form of the victimage mechanism" (*Things Hidden* 99). To explain this elementary form, Girard must postulate a nonrepresentational form of victimage, that is, a victimage based on physiology, or more properly a physiology of mimesis where aggravated mimetic desires of a purely instinctive, animal type polarize around a victim in the animal group, producing, at least momentarily, a

[14]Andrew McKenna's recent book *Violence and Difference* (1992) deserves mention here, for it too provides a valuable contribution to the issues surrounding the "debate" between Girard and deconstruction. In terms of the epistemological questions we are here addressing, however, McKenna's study does not fully confront the radicality of the Derridean critique and thus remains wholly inside the Girardian epistemological framework without touching the problematic issues presented by the deconstructive reading. The notable absence of Lacoue-Labarthe in an otherwise extensive list of references only highlights McKenna's unwillingness to confront the deconstructive reading of Girard's originary scene of victimage.

unanimous group harmony—"the first noninstinctual attention" (*Things Hidden* 99)—that lays the foundation upon which culture builds its more sophisticated victimary rituals.

Girard's hypothesis is based on the ability for mimesis to effect a mechanical, physiological change in the individuals of the nascent human community. Thus, as mimetic confrontation over an appetitive object builds up within the protohuman group, following "a certain degree of frenzy" all conflicts become "fixed on a single victim. After having been released against the victim, the violence necessarily abates and silence follows the mayhem" (*Things Hidden* 99). It is this structural dichotomy arising from the "maximal contrast" between mayhem and calm, "violence and its cessation . . . agitation and tranquillity" (99) that provides the basis for cultural "appropriation" of this mimetic model in a surrogate victim. It is important to see that, for Girard, at this minimal level the mechanism remains purely physiological and not yet expanded in the cultural pattern of ritual crisis-and-resolution. The postulate thus relies on a somewhat *ad hoc* premise about the mechanics of an animal mimesis, based purely on instinctual drives, which provides, as it were, the fundamental foundation on which culture can only build imperfectly, destined to recreate the essential workings of the original mechanism but decorating it with all kinds of distracting cultural elements, from straightforward human sacrifice to more sophisticated literary and even theoretical productions (Girard does not hesitate to see the mimetic mechanism at work in contemporary theory).

Though Girard sees the foundation of culture in physiological mechanisms of an animal society too mimetic to sustain its existence, it is equally possible to question this view as simply *a posteriori* reasoning derived from observations relevant to mature human culture but hardly acceptable when reflecting on animal or prehuman orders. What, for instance, is to stop the prehuman order from simply descending into conflict once again after they have dispatched the so-called first victim? For they can have no cultural concept of guilt or remorse, no *conscience* which would prevent them from repeating the act. Girard suggests that it is not yet a question of a full-blown conscience with all its religious and metaphysical trappings, but merely a "new type of attention," a kind of minimal consciousness, "imbued with the emotions provoked by the crisis and its resolution" (*Things Hidden* 100). The resolution of this conflictual mimesis is experienced as desirable, but the participants have no idea that an actual victim is involved. The victim is merely the central focus of the event: "The powerful experience crystallizes around the victim. As weak as it might be, the 'consciousness' the participants have of the victim is linked structurally to the prodigious effects produced by its passage from life to death, by the spectacular and liberating reversal that has occurred at that instant" (*Things Hidden* 100). But is it possible to speak of

"prodigious effects," of a "spectacular and liberating reversal" at this stage?[15] These terms indeed seem more at home in a description of traditional sacrifice. And this should not surprise us, for what we are observing in Girard's originary scene is but a miniature version of the structure of those rituals he has been so enamoured with analysing, as so powerfully exemplified in his *Violence and the Sacred.* At the origin, we find not the transformation of animal to human but the complete human-cultural embryo waiting for its "staged" entry on the scene of cultural production. The miniature scene is but an inchoate, minimalist version of sacrifice, but it can have no relation to the animal scene of mimesis.

Or, if it were an example of appetitive mimesis at work, there would be no reason to assume its evolution into victimary processes of ritualized mimesis. No amount of conflictual mimesis at the purely appetitive level could bring about the transformation that saw a dispatched member of an animal group become a victim representative of a communal order. It is simply returning the problematic of origin back to gradualist interpretations if one suggests that an original killing results in a moment of "noninstinctual attention," the time-span of which grows greater and greater the more successful culture becomes (but how could one talk here of culture?) in prolonging the periods of calm between crisis and sacrifice. Ironically, after chastising the ethologists for ignoring the specificity of the human, Girard seems, in the end, to endorse this gradualist view when he suggests that there "is no need to assume that the mechanism of awakening attention works right away," and that it need only "be in the slightest degree cumulative" (*Things Hidden* 100). Such an analysis would indeed explain Girard's somewhat apocalyptic view in *Violence and the Sacred,* that regards modern culture as having expanded the sacrificial crisis to an unprecedented time-span of deferral by avoiding thus far the inevitable turn of the wheel in the sacrificial cycle, the ominousness of which therefore only looms the greater on the horizon. But to adopt this perspective is to dispense with the notion of origin altogether, and it therefore provides no basis for a generative anthropology.

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[15]On the "uselessness" of such an originary postulate, see Gans, *The Origin of Language*, p. 34: "[F]or the moment of silent attention to occur, it is necessary that at some point the gestures of violent appropriation cease before degenerating into rivalry. It is useless to assume that this moment arrives on the 'satiation' or 'purgation' of aggressive energies which the central postulate of mimetic anthropology would define as virtually unlimited. For such satiation, even were it to come about, would scarcely give rise to a moment of collective consciousness; rather it would provoke a turning away from the no longer desirable appropriative activity." Here we observe the essential argument Gans has with the Girardian hypothesis: namely, the inability for Girard's postulate to explain the conscious intentions of the nascent community as anything other than a mystification of their exhaled energies in the dispensing of a victim. The seeds for Girard's pessimism concerning modern secular culture and his adoption of the divine word of the Gospels are sown here in an originary hypothesis that presents no possibility for humanity to understand its own origin.

The problem with proposing such a mechanism for the origin of human culture is that it provides no possibility for the self-knowledge of humanity. We inherit the sacrificial mechanism ultimately from a mechanics of mimesis derived not from cultural factors but physiological ones. Hence, we are as sure to engage in sacrifice as we are to engage in language. It is, as they say, in our genes. As is evident, Girard is more willing than he realizes to ground his theory in *ad hoc* postulates of precultural drives or mechanisms. In this sense his hypothesis is not so far different from the ethologists, who reduce culture to a certain (anthropomorphic) vision of animal society, or from Freud, who postulated an unconscious from which he could derive his theories of the human psyche. To be fair to Girard, one can say that the weakness derives ultimately from the strength of his theory, for in uncovering the universality of the scapegoat mechanism, it is only natural to suppose a unique origin for the phenomenon. There is, however, as the deconstructionists well know, a great deal of difference between a powerful explanatory theory and a theory that can explain its own origin. The power of Girard's theory suggests its universality; but the problem is formulating an adequate epistemology—an epistemology that can generate not only explanations of culture but also its own presence as a theory.

Despite Girard's claim to the contrary, his "generative hypothesis" suffers from the same contradictory claims he accuses Marx and Freud of making. That is, while appearing to ground his thesis in a precultural ontology, his hypothesis is ultimately also inhabited by a similarly "metaphysical postulate of absolute human specificity" in his conception of an originary victim, which Girard strives in vain to theorize as uncompromised by the cycle of ritual violence (see *Diacritics* Interview 34-35). Ultimately (though his anthropology is certainly an improvement on those of Marx and Freud), Girard's hypothesis cannot sustain the transition from prehuman to human and is destined to fall either on one side as pure animal mimesis—where all the robbers fight over the booty until none is left—or on the human side—where the victim is hypostatized, as unknowable, an absolute and arbitrary origin.

One can go two ways with this hypothesis. The first concerns the philosophical "deconstruction" of Girard's originary scene; the second, though recognizing the former's transcendental critique, retains Girard's trajectory of originary hypothesis formation, but suggests a more plausible originary scenario. We shall here briefly examine the former mode of philosophical critique, before presenting Gans's reconstruction of Girard's (deconstructed) scene of origin.

The philosophical—i.e., metaphysical—critique seizes upon the nonconceptual category of representation in Girard's hypothesis. Thus, it observes that in Girard's

suggesting that the victimage mechanism is structured by physiological elements and not by representational ones, it would be necessary to then understand what processes were at play in this anterior mimetic stage where victimage proceeded without concepts in which to enclose it, without—in a word—*representation*. In short, how can the original scapegoaters be said to produce a victim if they have no way in which to understand the *significance* of such a victim? What makes the original killing a murder and not simply a killing? This is both the question and the criticism Lacoue-Labarthe in his essay "Typography" levels at Girard. Thus, he problematizes Girard's notion of unrepresented acquisitive mimesis:

> [W]ould not mimesis, this first and constitutive mimesis, not oblige us to form the hypothesis of "another stage"—still a stage, to be sure, but not yet that of a spectacle, one that is separated from any enclosed theater, from any space perhaps, inaccessible, in any case, to any perception whatsoever—on which the prescribed scenario of desire, unbeknownst to the supposed "subject," would be played every time? (113)

Lacoue-Labarthe is sceptical of Girard's attempt to situate victimage in, or as Lacoue-Labarthe suggests, precisely "on" a stage that is not "always already" presented as a representation, both a play and a repetition, the original of which is "from the 'start' hollowed out and eroded by representation" (117). Lacoue-Labarthe notes (rightly) the problematic use of representation in Girard's originary scene, but it is interesting to see how he turns Girard's theory of human social origin into an example of the "originary" in every act engaged by humanity. Where for Girard humanity begins in an archetypal moment of sacrifice, for Lacoue-Labarthe this moment of origin is not original but "played every time" "unbeknownst to the supposed 'subject.'" For Girard, the truth of ritual is verifiable; for Lacoue-Labarthe, one cannot verify anything without implicating oneself in the reproduction of that ritual scene. Mimesis for Lacoue-Labarthe is not available precisely because "to *verify* it" "is to differentiate it and to appropriate it, to identify it," and this "would without fail betray the essence or property of mimesis, if there were an essence of mimesis or if what is 'proper' to mimesis did not lie precisely in the fact that mimesis has no 'proper' to it" (116).

Girard, however, disagrees with Lacoue-Labarthe's criticisms, observing that the latter's vision of mimesis is derived from Plato and is hence metaphysical, whereas his own is grounded in "the more primitive level of appropriation common to all primates" (*Diacritics* Interview 34). The question we are raising here is whether Girard really

succeeds in locating this nonphilosphical, nonmetaphysical, purely anthropological ground. As should be evident by now, though Girard begins his hypothesis on the right track in animal or appropriative desire for an appetitively attractive object, his own loyalty to the surrogate victim mechanism deflects his original trajectory and leads him to postulate an original murder victim, the possibility of which can only be posterior to a prior hypothesis postulating the origin of representation. In this sense, Lacoue-Labarthe is right to question Girard's original victimary scene by suggesting that what lies anterior to Girard's hypothesis is "another stage" that goes beyond (or before) the "classical concept" of "representation" (113) toward an "originary representation" (114). But Lacoue-Labarthe, as Girard rightly points out, does not refuse the Platonic reading, and he remains always ready to affirm the undecidable space anterior to all representations.

The Gansian Hypothesis

It is at this point in our analysis that we are finally ready to introduce the Gansian synthesis of Girard and Derrida, which has to this point remained only implied in our critical survey of the latter two thinkers. Since this constitutes the core of this essay, it will be beneficial to take stock of the ground we have thus far covered.

From Derrida, we have found persuasive his notion of *différance* as a useful characterization of the problematic inhabiting all systematic attempts to ground a global theory of the human. But though we value this deconstruction of the metaphysical category of absolute presence, we follow Girard in assuming that the question of origin remains a note-worthy pursuit, not least because previous attempts have been unsuccessful in surmounting the metaphysics so keenly pointed out by Derrida. Thus, Girard's powerful analyses provide an anthropological perspective which stands in notable opposition to a tradition of metaphysical philosophy, informed as his analyses are, not by a Platonic heritage, but by a religious one, the boundaries of which lie both anterior to philosophy, in the form of primitive ritual and mythology, and posterior to it, in its high-cultural incarnation as Judaeo-Christianity. It is this more inclusive cultural scope, spanning the very beginnings of human history to the present day, that gives Girard's anthropology a specifically genetic and historical perspective which transcends the philosophical dogmas that must have concepts to have reality.

Yet despite Girard's worthy contributions toward grounding a human science in a nontranscendent hypothesis of origin, he, too, as we have seen, ultimately succumbs to the

Derridean paradox of a self-grounding metaphysics, though this is not for want of posing the question adequately. Indeed, as we will shortly see, Girard's originary hypothesis all but provides the necessary criteria for a generative anthropology. That in the final analysis it does not reveals Girard's own allegiance to his surrogate victim mechanism, the universality of which distracted him from following his own best insights for conceiving an originary hypothesis that could withstand not only the critique of deconstruction, but could also explain its own arrival on the scene of human self-representation. We are now ready to see how Gans's revision of Girard from the point of view of the origin provides both a rigorous historicizing (in the anthropological sense) of Derridean intuitions and a coherent working through of some of the paradoxes evident in Girard's theory, particularly with respect to his problematic interpretation of the increasingly secularized world of modernity.

The genius of Gans's reformulated originary scene lies in its rigorous incorporation of what has always been the thorn in the flesh of previous attempts to provide an adequate theory of human origin. Thus, the onto-epistemological critique carried out by Derrida under the name of *différance* is seized on by Gans as not merely the expression of an always already "late" incarnation of a metaphysical ideal of absolute presence, but as a historically realized phenomenon, that is, the event which produced the specifically human capacity for deferral of appetitive desire through the mediation of a mental scene of representation. By thus interpreting Derrida, Gans provides a historically specific point of departure that does not rely for its intelligent foundation on a model which stands outside the realm of human consciousness. It is in this sense that Gans truly responds to Lacoue-Labarthe's hint that what Girard's probing of the originary grounds of representation implies is properly an "*atheism*" (in the literal, i.e., critical, sense of the term) ("Typography" 115), that is, an understanding of human consciousness that truly makes do without prior metaphysical determinations of that understanding.

How does Gans do this? One can best demonstrate Gans's originary scene by showing how it switches the Girardian emphasis on the original victim-as-signifier to the original victim as simply significant, that is, as designated, or signified. Thus, whereas Girard must have an original victim which provides the focus for the nascent human community as each individual contemplates the dispatch of one of their members, thus creating the first unanimous "noninstinctual attention," Gans dispenses with this superfluous content, making the gesture on the human periphery, not the victim at the centre (which in fact cannot be a victim but merely an appetitive object), the key element of the originary event. Girard's scene would have the victim constitute the first sign of a cultural order, but, as we

have seen, this leaves unexplained how the victim could come to *represent* that order. By shifting the burden of signification from the centrally designated object to the periphery of contemplators, Gans can explain the birth of representation that Derrida and Lacoue-Labarthe see as fundamental to human consciousness, while also maintaining the collective birth of the ethical human community central to Girard's theory. But to truly fathom the radicality of Gans's reformulation of Girard's scene, we must understand the import behind Gans's postulation that the scene must evolve from the unanimous gesture of designation by the individuals on the periphery.

Gans takes seriously both the structuralist principle that man does not exist prior to language[16] and the Derridean principle that (linguistic) difference is only achieved through deferral. In this sense, he acknowledges what Girard does not—the primacy of representation for humanity. Yet with Girard, he recognizes the ethical basis of the human community as founded on a unique originary event, recognized universally by primitive and modern religions. Unlike Girard, however, he makes the basis of this event, not the scene of original victimage, but more simply—and more fundamentally—the creation of an internal scene of representation, without which subsequent "scenes" (victimary or otherwise) would be impossible. The deferral that Derrida points out as underpinning the representation of presence, particularly in its infamous philosophical guises of a metaphysics of presence, is for Gans certainly the condition of possibility for conceptual thought, but not the condition of the human *per se*. The condition of the human lies anterior to its conceptualizations in philosophy—indeed, anterior to any mode of discourse.

At its most basic level, at the level of the originary scene, the human is founded when the individuals of the protohominid group, in seeking simultaneously to appropriate an object attractive to the multiple appetites of the group members, are forced to renounce their instinctive, appropriative gestures for fear of reprisal by the others, thus establishing a unique moment of hesitation, where each participant becomes aware that the others are not simply grasping for the object but in fact designating it. The common moment of designation *defers* (in Derrida's sense) the temporal movement of phenomenal moment-by-moment existence, opening up a unique space of *re-presentation* where the community becomes not simply aware of an appetitively attractive object but precisely of the space thus produced between the signs of the mutually designating gestures of the participants on the

[16]The reference is to Roland Barthes: "Man does not exist prior to language, either as a species or as an individual. We never find a state where man is separated from language, which he then creates in order to express what is taking place within him: it is language which teaches the definition of man, not the reverse" (135).

periphery, on the one hand, and the central object, or referent, thus being represented as mutually *significant*, on the other. It is in this renunciation of appetitive desire through an aborted gesture of appropriation—the originary moment of linguistic deferral—that the object is reproduced on the representative stage of the human imagination where it can ultimately become the scene of truly metaphysical, nonappetitive desires. But these are later cultural developments that are predictable once the originary scene which allows for such cultural representations has been established. The event of human origin lies in the purely formal phenomenon of the linguistic designation that establishes the ethical *difference* of the community from the centrally significant appetitive object. Thus, Gans asserts "that the difference of man is one of form, not content, and that the birth of this form derives from the felt need to defer the immediacy of this (appetitive) content. It is this deferral that produces presence in the uniquely human sense—the presence of the community to itself and of each member to the others" ("Differences" 804).

Following Girard, Gans grasps the need to postulate a unique originary event from which to derive the specificity of the human. But Girard's allegiance to the surrogate victim prevents him from conceiving the event as a purely formal phenomenon, and he ultimately resorts to proposing the minimal institution of victimage as originary, the content of which must have "always already" existed for the community to understand that they were in the presence of a victim and not merely a carcass. Gans understands—with the structuralists and poststructuralists—the primacy of the formal institution of language: language cannot preexist humanity. This is not to say that language with its elegant declarative sentences and grammatical constructions must be born in one fell swoop. It is rather to comprehend that what makes man the cultural animal is his ability to create significant differences on a wholly metaphysical level detached from the phenomenal reality of the surrounding world. And the primordial significant difference, on which are modelled all subsequent (linguistic) differences, is the absolute significance of the originary scene's central object, the designation of which establishes, through representation, the difference of the community from the object at the centre.

That metaphysics, or more simply consciousness, is synonymous with the human is nothing new, and indeed this transcendent origin has always been the point of departure for religion and mythology. The point of departure for a generative anthropology, however, is not in this transcendent origin, which simply hypostatizes what we already know (i.e., that humanity has consciousness), but in the minimal narrative or scene that saw this consciousness come into existence. Taking the poststructuralist insight that language holds the formal key to human consciousness, Gans goes further in proposing a historical origin

that provides the minimal criteria for the structure of linguistic significance to evolve. Thus, the scene of origin describes "the imposition of representational form on an 'animal' appetitive content" ("Differences" 805). The aborted gesture of appropriation becomes by virtue of its suspension or deferral of animal appetite the first sign which, so to speak, transports the central object to a private scene of representation, where the object is grasped in imagination but remains unobtainable in reality. The "imposition" of this "representational form" is thus not explained by the uncritical postulate of a desire to "represent"—such easy explanations only explain *away* the phenomenon of representation like a bad dream, for how are we then to explain this "desire to represent," unless we realize that the desiring creatures at the origin are not protohominids-becoming-human, but merely our desiring selves in the comfort of the modern world, where the desire to represent is but an unreflective reflex. Rather—and more rigorously—the "imposition of representational form" must be explained as arising in the moment of mutual fear when the appetitive object is designated by the aborted act of appropriation. The creation of this "representational form," or simply the ability for the individual to self-represent, founds the minimal institution of language and is thus the *sine qua non* of human culture, that is to say, of humanity at all.

The strength of the Gansian originary scene is that in postulating a purely nonmetaphysical appetitive "animal" context, it does not sacrifice the problem of human ethics to the gradualist vision of humanity that would simply equate human society with the dominance hierarchies of animal herds. By postulating the collective nature of the moment of hesitation, Gans does not lose contact with the ethical basis so evident in Girard's theory. Thus, there indeed arises a moment of unanimous, noninstinctive attention, the like of which had never before been experienced, but rather than hypostatizing this attention as dependent on a human victim, Gans leaves this content as subordinate to the human gesture on the periphery which is ultimately the true source of the significance endowed on the centrally attractive object. The hypostasis of the content at the centre is the result of ritual reproduction but not of the originary scene itself, which is alone responsible for the production of the scene of representation. It is precisely the creation of this new form of self-inclusion via the scene of representation that provides for a new *cultural* economy to evolve, thus initiating the "genetic" history of human culture.

Conclusion to Chapter 1

We have surveyed the epistemological questions surrounding the notion of a human science constituted as a generative anthropology. These questions, we have seen, are bounded by a positivistic tradition, on the one hand, which eschews the specificity of the contemplating subject for the objectivity of an empirico-scientific tradition, and a humanist-metaphysical tradition, on the other, which has no need for science whatsoever and spends its time in intracultural hermeneutic that merely maintains the superiority of the texts being analyzed over the human subjects these texts are supposed to enlighten. Bridging the gap between these two apparently incompatible positions stand the anthropological sciences of Girard and Gans. In following the lead offered by these two thinkers for founding a human science, we have examined their respective foundations in their proposed "scenes of origin," and have found Gans's "originary hypothesis" more persuasive on two counts: first, in his postulation that it is representation, not victimage, that is originary; and, second, in his theory's ability to account for its own emergence within the evolutionary scheme it is concerned with delineating. We can now turn "from theory to praxis" by demonstrating the heuristic power of the scene of origin to generate explanations of cultural phenomena. To this end, I will read first Derrida, whose deconstruction of traditional hermeneutics pays its respects to Kafka in his reading of "Before the Law," and then follow with my own originary analysis of Kafka's parable, thus counterpointing the Derridean reading with the anthropological one. The constant theme permeating my analysis will be the linking of Kafka to Derrida via the originary scene.

Chapter 2

Reading Derrida and Kafka from the Origin

Aestheticisim: An Originary Thesis

"Mysteries should not be multiplied beyond necessity," Gans reminds us at the opening of his *The Origin of Language*. And indeed the remainder of that lucidly argued book, in presenting a dialectical theory of the evolution of linguistic forms from their genesis in an originary event, constitutes a riposte to the radically deconstructive epistemologies that would deny the possibility for a systematic theory of representation. The following analysis takes Gans's lead in affirming the value of a genetic theory grounded in an originary hypothesis. But it also seeks to make clear why the generative hypothesis both incorporates and improves upon Derridean theory. To this end, after briefly engaging Derrida's reading of Kafka's "Before the Law," I will then give my own "originary analysis" of Kafka's parable, thereby indicating both the strengths and the weaknesses of Derrida's perspective. As we will see, Derrida's reading of Kafka's parable, though deserving of praise for its rigour in focusing on key elements in that text, nevertheless fails to present these insights in a coherent framework, which we will here show to be an anthropological framework.

The purpose of such a reading is to show that Derrida's position remains essentially an aesthetic one. That is to say, that in the final analysis, it remains subordinate to the formalism of the literary text and thus unprepared to go beyond the insights produced by

the aesthetic text. This position is not the same as the aestheticism of the New Critical hermeneutic (though it does give rise to a suspiciously similar ethical "angelism"). The Derridean reading at least hits the aesthetic at the centre of its cultural nerve system, namely, at the level of the sign with its capacity for the paradox of representation only through deferral. The discovery of this formal mechanism at the heart of human representation presents a significant advance over traditional hermeneutical enterprises, but deconstruction's failure to ground this insight—i.e., to present an anthropology—results in the hypostasis of the insight. Hence, deconstructive orthodoxy would make the paradox of infinite deferral the ground of all human scientific theory. Not the Platonic realm of perfect forms or the Cartesian God of the thinking subject, but the abyss or aporia of deconstructive deferral.

But the uncovering of the aesthetic path to the originary scene does not mean the annihilation of the originary. Derrida's readings indeed expose the paradox upon which the aesthetic depends, but only at the risk of re-aestheticizing the very discourse of the analyst. Thus every sign is its own aesthetic text with its own unique origin. But this is to mimic the ritual gesture *par excellence*; after hollowing out the aesthetic mechanism of the literary text in particular, and, by extension, textuality in general, the analyst, in horror of being left with nothingness, re-aestheticizes all discourse as text.[17] But once one has glimpsed the "abyss," one cannot ignore it. Conscious aestheticization of the world as text is not the same as artistic production, however much the theorist may wish the contrary.

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[17]The contemporary realization that the universe of words is separate from the universe of things has resulted in an increased interest in literary models, the overt fictionality of which always implies the self-conscious awareness that it is text that is responsible for human reality. The current affirmation of textuality over narrativity—best understood, Gans suggests, as a polemic against the claims of a historical "master narrative"—seeks to find in the signifier itself the ontological key to human history. But the primordiality of the signifier—the originary sign—can only be understood as coeval with the historical desire to signify, to create a narrative; in other words, the aesthetic text of self-reference can only be understood in concert with the historical text of external reference, as Gans continually reminds us: "[The] liberation of history from the ritual universe coincides with the liberation of the esthetic as well. History explores the circumstances of significant events; art invents fictional models of significance. But the common aim of both is the fundamental anthropological aim of human self-understanding. The Aristotelian idea that this common goal may be better served by art than by history is unacceptable to the historian concerned with the emergence of the empirical from the esthetic. It is only in our postmodern age that this idea can take on its most radical form, in which the discourse of history is itself subsumed under the rubric of esthetic narrative. This radical estheticization of discourse is a consequence of the contemporary recognition of the priority of representation over significance, or, in terms more familiar today, of textuality over narrativity" (*Originary Thinking* 24). But, as Gans goes on to affirm, "the real import of textualism is anthropological" (101), for what is ultimately implied by the textualist adherence to text is not the indefinite suspension of the aporetic originary sign, but the hypothesized originary scene, which follows the omission of the sign and produces a minimal narrative, the postulation of which is neither dogmatic nor utopian, it is argued, but a reversible, scientific hypothesis.

The current analysis seeks precisely to historicize Derrida in context of Gans's originary scene. In short, it attempts an originary analysis of Derridean theory. No doubt I can be accused of a recuperation of Derrida under premises he would refuse to countenance. That this is, in a sense, true seems indisputable. But in the interests of scientific investigation it would be an exercise of little value to mimic the unrecuperability of Derridean theory. To paraphrase Gans's own evaluation of his project, originary analysis is interested in showing the reader what it can do. To this end, it adopts lucidity over opacity, eschewing the ludic prose-style in the hopes of producing ethically responsible thought. This is the ethical character of generative anthropology, which situates language as the privileged institution of human (ethical) interaction.

Derrida and the Deconstruction of the Origin

In his analysis of "Before the Law," Derrida finds operative the abyssal structure of *différance* that inhabits all representation. The strength of Kafka's text is to make this clear:

> The story *Before the Law* does not tell or describe anything but itself as text. It does only this or does also this. Not within an assured specular reflection of some self-referential transparency—and I must stress this point—but in the unreadability of the text, if one understands by this the impossibility of acceding to its proper significance and its possibly inconsistent content, which it jealously keeps back. The text guards itself, maintains itself—like the law, speaking only of itself, that is to say, of its non-identity with itself. It neither arrives nor lets anyone arrive. It is the law, makes the law and leaves the reader before the law. ("Before the Law" 211)[18]

In anthropological terms, Derrida's reading hits the fulcrum of the originary scene. For in uncovering the aesthetic nature of the originary sign, which is precisely its paradoxical oscillation between centre and periphery, he has explicitly formulated (or deconstructed) the aesthetic operation that was only implied in the literary text. The paradox inherent in the linguistic sign is none other than the "impenetrable" representational barrier that it creates between the signifier and its referent, which the originary scene shows to be a displacement of appetitive desire into representational desire. Once this displacement has occurred, it is

[18]All subsequent references to Derrida in the text will be to this essay unless otherwise indicated.

indeed impossible to imagine an origin that is not "always already" inhabited by representation, but that is why the origin must become the object of reversible scientific hypotheses, rather than being created aesthetically through the literary imagination.

For Derrida, though, the lure of returning to the origin of representation is already inherent in the linguistic signifier which reveals its signified only by concealing its referent. The desire to uncover the original moment, the originary event, is a hopeless desire, which merely mirrors the naiveté of a countryman who seeks unobstructed access to the law. For, lying in the path between the countryman and his goal of unimpeded engagement with the law stands an interminable hierarchy of doorkeepers. These figures, embedded within the scene staged by Kafka's parable, which they both iterate in exact configuration and yet also (re)present in a singular (re)production, are important for Derrida, endowed as they are "with the greater power of delay" and the "potency" of "*différance*" (204). Thus, they form the impenetrable barrier of infinitely deferring (re)presentation. It is this law of representation that alone can be said to constitute the origin of law. The origin, as with the referent, is not found through the transparency of its representations, for it is in the performance of those very representations that the structure of the law, its interminable *différance*, is produced. Hence Derrida says that what "must not be presented or represented and above all not penetrated" is "the origin of *différance*" (205). This impenetrability of representation was responsible for the fate of Freud's project in *Totem and Taboo*, where the postulated scene of origin both produces and is produced by the narrative that describes the concept of morality. For Derrida, Freud's naively postulated originary event merely enforces the ubiquity of mind and the inaccessibility of events anterior to representation. Thus Derrida concludes that it is representations, or more simply "text," that surround the world of human interaction as an impenetrable barrier.

But this is to hypostatize the textual moment of the originary scene. For though it was indeed the originary sign that provided the linguistic moment of deferral, such a deferral only remains justified by the ethical conclusion of the event in the equal apportioning of the appetitive object to the members of the newly formed human community. This is the minimal narrative of the originary event, which must be considered in its entirety when analysing later moments of culture. Derrida's mistake is to concentrate on the moment of linguistic deferral at the expense of the later ethical conclusion of the event. To be sure, the ethical moment of "communion" present with the distribution of the appetitive and now sacralized object amongst the members of the community is dependent upon the prior moment of linguistic deferral or *différance*, where the *difference* of the human participants from the significant object is established through the *deferral* of the originary sign. But this

dependency is mutual. Just as the concluding ethical narrative of appetitive satisfaction is dependent on the prior moment of "textual" deferral, so the moment of text must give rise to increased appetitive satisfaction, barring which there would have been no need of representation and we could give no explanation for its existence. As Gans states in arguing for the case of an originary hypothesis in *The End of Culture*, "appetite is always the ultimate ground of significance" (20), and if appetite was present at the beginning, as indeed it must have been, then it must be present at the end, where an ethical praxis of appropriation takes place in the presence of the established "scene of representation," which is none other than the collective awareness of the common intentions of the other members of the community.

The point of originary analysis, as Gans makes clear in *Originary Thinking*, is precisely to do away with metaphysical postulates when explaining cultural phenomena. This is only done by explaining culture in its nascent state at the origin through a hypothetical originary scene. The source of metaphysics is ultimately the same as the source of the sacred, which the originary hypothesis historicizes as the central appetitive object designated by the human periphery. It is this central locus that is originally sacralized over and against the community as the source of the interdicting power that holds the community in mutual presence and renunciation, and therefore defers appropriation. At the origin and in subsequent ritual reenactment, the establishment of collective presence—i.e., of the moral human community—is interpreted as a product of the power of the sacred centre, manifested in an attractive object, to compel the performance of the sign and defer appropriation. Thus the community is absolutely differentiated from the power of the centre, which is seen as alone responsible for the act of signification. Humanity at this stage remains wholly subordinated to the divinity. But though the centre is sacralized as the sole source of the human community, it is only thanks to the peripheral designations that the community may establish itself. The process of deritualization is the progressive understanding that it is the peripheral human community that is responsible for its own genesis. Contemporary textualism, as exemplified in the work of Derrida, is, Gans says, the intuition that it is the emitting of the detemporalizing originary sign from the human periphery that is responsible for the establishing of the originary human community and for the subsequent narrative of the originary scene. The contemporary concern for the open-ended concept of textuality over the closure of narrative is the intuition "that humanity is not originarily constituted by narrative but by text" (*Originary Thinking* 100).

And yet the problem with the textualist intuition is that in uncovering the originarity of the linguistic sign or "text," narrative is denied *tout court* as the corruption of indefinite

suspension (*différance*) by the teleology of authoritarian discourse. Logocentrism, formerly the indispensable condition of lucid writing, becomes a term of scorn and denunciation. Yet the simplest counter-argument to the textualists—i.e., that one cannot write without the benefit of narrative—demonstrates not the naiveté of the logocentric writer, but indeed that of the textualist, whose sophistication at the level of words is payed for with interest at the level of human praxis. We all know that we depend upon oxygen and food for our very existence, yet these substances will, during the course of a human life, eventually contribute to our demise, as any biologist will affirm. And yet this most basic of paradoxes hardly impresses us to stop eating and breathing. The biologist's observation that oxygen too can be a poison remains bounded by the knowledge that life is a temporal phenomenon, and that the harnessing of the environment by the organism is a feedback mechanism, which provides for a higher level of self-sustainability; oxygen can only be a poison because it is in the first place life-sustaining. Likewise the textual elevation of language over humanity depends upon a bona fide intuition of humanity's dependence upon language for survival, yet, like the interpretation of oxygen as a poison, this intuition only gains lucidity when situated in context of the human need for language.

Nonetheless, perversity can pave the way to fresh insights, and it is Gans's contention that textualism constitutes a worthy intuition. The emission of the originary sign, the primordial moment of difference and deferral, constitutes the collective presence of the nascent community, but this moment would not arise if it did not then lead to the narrative "resolution of the originary crisis in communal appetitive satisfaction" (*Originary Thinking* 101). Thus, the detemporalized moment is succeeded by the narrative interpretation of the sign in the praxis of appropriation of the appetitive object.

It is in this fundamental sense that Gans reintegrates textualism into a humanist ontology. The rigour of Derridean formalism is given anthropological substance by rooting *différance* in the originary scene. One could say that Gans brings language back to its creators, for it is only in context of humanity that language as an institution can have any meaning. The fact that the textualist vision would deny the notion of origin out of hand stems from its belief that *a priori* narratives, exemplified by classical metaphysics, are the supreme examples of the authoritarian thrust for closure. If text precedes narrative, then *a priori* narratives are by definition monstrous inversions of what can only seem, from the textualist perspective, to be vast constructions on a hopelessly fragile foundation. That these constructions can be deconstructed with alarming ease and rapidity should alert us to the fact that what is in question is not the *a priori* edifice *per se*, but the site of its construction. The downgrading of narrative and the concomitant elevation of text,

however, can lead to its own *a priori*, this time in the name of a purportedly open-ended textuality. The originary hypothesis, by grounding the structure of its originary scene in the Derridean concept of *différance*, avoids both the trap of an ungrounded metaphysical ontology and the nihilism inherent in a textualism that is ultimately inarticulable. On the matter of language, the textualists must indeed share Wittgenstein's dictum and "remain silent," for in their premise that the elusive presence of the speaking subject is identical with the presence of the participants at the origin, they collapse religious transcendence into philosophical idealism, erasing all history in the belief that the "eternal return" of the subject-performing-in-language reproduces—unknowably, as it were—the scene of origin. As Gans contends, though textualism "is antioriginary with a vengeance . . . the originary hypothesis provides the only scientific (neither dogmatic nor utopian) context for the articulation of the textualist intuition" (*Originary Thinking* 101-2). It is this "antioriginary" aspect of the subject cloaked in a theology of language that inspires deconstruction's philosophical utopianism, on the one hand, and the negativity inherent in the despairing paradox of Derrida's *toujours déjà*, on the other.

The relationship between Derrida and generative anthropology, to be sure, is not one of a comfortable mutual compatibility. What Derrida would leave open under the ubiquitous (non)concept of *différance*, Gans would rigorously historicize under the postulate of the originary scene. Yet despite the apparent contradiction between the tirelessly deconstructive project of Derridean onto-epistemological critique and the assertively constructive one of Gansian anthropology, the path from the former to the latter is, Gans contends, one of historical continuity, not a mere expression of incompatible world-views, despite the former's ostensibly "postmodern" reflexiveness which claims to be an end of history in time—the end of narrative, therefore the end of history.

One can observe this continuity—from philosophy to anthropology, as Gans likes to say—at almost any point in Gans's evolutionary account of the genetics of culture, but the pivotal point in the movement from Derrida to Gans, both theoretically and historically (the two are in fact mutually dependent for Gans), lies in his construction of the originary scene. Thus, in terms of history, it is only after "the deconstruction of the origin" has signified the end of high culture, along with its attempted aesthetic reconstructions of the originary scene, that the "anthropological reconstruction" of the originary scene "through the originary hypothesis" becomes possible (*Originary Thinking* 190). Likewise, within the articulation of the originary hypothesis itself, Derrida's formal preoccupation with paradox at the level of the sign is nothing but the uncovering of the primordial moment of aesthetic contemplation produced by the (linguistic) designation of the attractive object in the

originary scene. For Gans, the deconstruction of the aesthetic path to the centrally significant object does indeed spell the end of all aesthetic reconstructions of the originary scene via the transgressing[19] literary imagination. But the end of literary construction also means the beginning of human scientific reconstruction, which differs from the literary-aesthetic project not so much in the completeness of its central construction as in the reversible nature of its testable—and therefore verifiable—originary hypothesis.

The point of the current analysis is to explore Derridean deconstruction from the perspective of the originary scene, the hope being that the Gansian hypothesis can provide genuine rigour to Derrida's insights. For if we are to make any sense of the Derridean critique at the level of the sign, it is surely only at the pragmatic level of the human, the anthropological context being in the first place the testing ground for all epistemological theoretical innovations. In thus stepping back from the domain of representations to that of the human, we are certainly not stepping outside language; but the "etic" context of generative anthropology includes its own viability as a theory of representation by postulating its own potentiality within the originary scene as "always already" within the reach of self-representation. It is by including the human that the originary hypothesis provides a viable ethic for Derridean textualism. This pragmatic consideration is given its most articulate expression in Gans's reinterpretation of Derridean *différance* as the originary deferral of the first linguistic sign. To show the proximity between Derrida's divulging of the essentially aporetic epistemology of the sign and Gans's reconstruction of this "textual" moment within the overall narrative of the originary scene, it is worth quoting Gans at length:

> The human species survives the originary crisis through the production of a sign. Human desire originates from the imaginary prolongation of this sign toward the inaccessible center. Desire is both generated and refused by the sign in its signifying function. But in the ontology of textuality, priority belongs not to the transgressing imagination but to the central force that opposes it, to the sign as an act of renunciation rather than as an agent of imaginary subversion. Without the communal interdictive power that informs the sign, it would signify nothing to the individual imagination. (*Originary Thinking* 102)

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[19]"transgressing," i.e., in the sense that the Romantics defined the poetic imagination as the inheritor and guardian of humanity's spiritual well-being.

For Gans, as for Derrida, the sign is inhabited by the paradoxical oscillation between the desired possession of the central referent and the refusal of that possession precisely because the object is being designated and not appropriated. But for Derrida, who would make this paradoxical oscillation the abyssal ground of his deconstructive anthropology, the sign remains permanently separated from its user on the periphery. Hence Derrida asserts that as long as man seeks to know himself, it is the barrier of representation alone that he will come up against, where he will be continually deferred before a never-ending hierarchy of doorkeepers like the man from the country:

> After the first guardian there are an undefined number of others, perhaps they are innumerable, and progressively more powerful and therefore more prohibitive, endowed with greater power of delay. Their potency is *différance*, an interminable *différance*, since it lasts for days and "years," indeed, up to the end of (the) man. (204)

It is this "interminable *différance*," allegorized by Kafka's impenetrable barrier of doorkeepers, that characterizes the essential textuality of both the law and literature. The search for the singularity of a unique event from which is spawned the narrative of human morality is an impossible search since what lies at the origin is not an event but "text" and with it already a narrative. There is no way around the ubiquity of textuality and mind. Not to realize this was, Derrida suggests, Freud's mistake; his postulation of a primordial murder as the origin of moral law could not account for the anteriority of representation, and thus remained as much a fiction as a historical reality. After exposing the naiveté of Freud's circular hypothesis, Derrida concludes that it is representation itself that stands before man's search for self-understanding, like an impenetrable barrier of innumerable doorkeepers, forever under the law of the sign and its *différance*: "What *must not* and cannot be approached is the origin of *différance*: it must not be presented or represented and above all not penetrated" (205).

It is at this point that Derrida's reading most closely approaches the position of a "negative theology." But rather than entering the debate surrounding Derrida's relation to negative theology, we can simply observe, with Gans, that the textualist position, in sacralizing the ubiquity of text, finds an unprecedented parallel and precursor in the sacred text of the monotheistic religious tradition.

In his essay "Sacred Text in Secular Culture," Gans suggests that "the 'deconstructive' practice of contemporary literary criticism" reflects—"albeit with unnecessarily nihilistic consequences"—the "ultimate basis of unity of religious and literary texts" (54). The basis for this suggestion stems from the contemporary reduction of the literary Subject—formerly associated unproblematically with the author and later with the "new critical" notion of the work's organic wholeness—to the ubiquitous concept of textuality. The search for totality on the part of traditional literary criticism has, however, "in the modern era" (62) been challenged by modernist literary practice, which "constitutes an exploration of the limits of discourse that puts into question the naive anthropomorphism of the intentional Subject" (62). But *nouveau roman* is succeeded by *nouvelle critique*. Traditional literary criticism gives way to its "deconstructive" offspring, where "fragmentary intentions revealed in specific elements and sequences of the text" (63) are substituted for the "naive anthropomorphism of the intentional Subject" (62). Thus,

> just when the critic despairs of ever attaining a clear sense of the literary whole, the unbearable weight of this task is lifted from his shoulders; he realizes that the work is really a text, and that the totality he seeks, even when elements of this text—the plot, or a sequence of symbols—appear to point indubitably toward it, is itself a fiction, a secondary construction that his task is not to elucidate but to deconstruct. Like Saint Paul relieved of the burden of the Law, the contemporary reader has been relieved of that of the anthropomorphic Subject. (62-63)

However, Gans says, though the contemporary reader is relieved of the anthropomorphic Subject of traditional literary criticism, he is not relieved of the "intentional Subject," whose existence "can never be explicitly challenged, for it stands at the horizon of every experience of language, and no reading of a literary text, or even of a single sentence, would be possible without it" (62). This "intentional Subject" is none other than the "divine Subject" of the originary scene, defined in anthropological terms as "the central locus of the scene of representation" (64). Western religion has always recognized the historicity of man's origin in a unique event at the hands of the divine creator. But in place of the religious postulate of a divine creator, generative anthropology provides the scene of origin, which historicizes the sacred centre in terms of its role in the creation of the scene of representation. Contemporary textualism, or deconstruction, understands the primordiality

of representation, but it provides no historical origin for this intuition. Thus, it spends its time in "critique," content to "deconstruct" traditional literary-critical notions of the unified authorial subject. And yet the reduction of the anthropomorphic Subject to the more general concept of textuality turns textual criticism into "the *via negativa* of a theology of language" (63), from which it is but a short step to the anthropological analysis of literary texts as themselves "revealed" texts of the knowledge of human origin. For Gans, then, the claims of textualist "deconstruction" cannot be understood as the mere gainsaying of a classical doctrine of the unified human subject, but as the intuition of the ultimate unity of the human species at the level of its unique evenemential origin in the generation of a scene of (linguistic) representation:

> If the notion of text as the product not of a specific human subject but of language itself has any meaning, this meaning is founded in the common dependency of all human subjects on the revelations of the scene of linguistic representation, without which neither language nor texts would exist. (63)

Where Derrida would interpret the primacy of textuality as the obstacle thwarting all theories of human self-representation, which is to say all theories of origin, Gans suggests that textuality is coeval with humanity. It is only because humanity is forced (through fear of mutual intraspecific reprisal) to interpret the primordial "text" of the first sign as the designation of the central object, that the individuals of the community are then able to proceed with their appropriative gestures, this time under the auspices of the sacralized centre, which is none other than the reflection of the collective order of the community. The barrier of representation that the human community sets up between itself and the sacralized object is indeed impenetrable, but this is only because it reflects the irreversible process of human evenemential genesis through the creation of the scene of representation. To despair at the inaccessibility of the desired central object, or even to delight with Nietzsche in the free-play of representations cloaking the referent, is to miss the point by falling into the metaphysical trap that divorces representation from its human users. Contemporary textualism, Gans suggests, must be understood as secular culture's anthropological answer to the decline of the revelatory powers of the religious text. For it is only with the advent of contemporary textualism, and the concomitant sacralizing of the notion of text, that a secular anthropology can begin by hypothesizing the origin of the human as the origin of language, the "text" of which is precisely the moment of the originary sign. This is the

anthropological correlate to the universal religious intuition of humanity's unique origin in an event.

Derrida's concentration on representation's interminable capacity for deferral is a profound anthropological intuition. But divorced from its historicization in an originary scene, the moment of deferral, hypostatized as *différance*, takes on a life of its own, becoming eventually its own "transcendental signified" and thus the very heart and being of the sacred. For, as Gans's originary scene allows us to understand it, the central locus of the sacred is indifferent to its own appearance; whether it be manifested in a sacred object or merely left absent and unfigured as in Derrida's empty locus, it is always ultimately the human periphery whose attention it demands and whose interest it provides for. It is Derrida's inattention to the human periphery that makes his otherwise perceptive analyses always already within the metaphysical framework of presence, construed as the attempted ideality of union between the sign and its referent. Certainly Derrida recognizes the deconstruction of this ideality, but the deconstruction depends upon the prior construction of the sign-referent relation.

Gans's genetic scheme of linguistic evolution allows us to dispense with the metaphysical concept of the sign by understanding it precisely as originating without concepts. Thus, the first sign is a simple moment of hesitation when a formerly appropriative gesture is aborted and understood as designating, instead of seeking to seize, the appetitive object. What is primary here is not the question of transparency between the sign and its referent, but the detemporalization of the appropriative gesture. It is here that we find Derrida's ungrounded moment of *différance*. The sign is originarily the *deferral* of appropriation that structures the primordial *difference* of the designators from the central object. What is significant here is the creation of a scene of representation, where the designated object, through the universal communal interdiction of all individual appropriation, becomes *re-presented* on a universal scene of representation. The designated object is thus acknowledged as not merely of appetitive interest, but as significant for communal reasons, which is to say *human* reasons:

> Instead of the gesture of appropriation's making its originally intended contact with the object, it is transformed, if only momentarily, into a gesture of designation by the very fact that the object is for the moment inaccessible, not for "natural" but for *communal* reasons. Instead of a part of the natural world immediately subject to appetitive interest, the object becomes the center of a scene in which the relation of primary interest—an interest of a new sort, a *significant interest*—is not the

> appetitive one between man and object but the communal one between man and man. (*End of Culture* 22)

The key here is not the central object, which will after all be appropriated, but the creation of a new type of communal relationship between the participants on the periphery. The genius of Gans's scene of origin lies in his articulation of how the purely formal nature of the linguistic sign can be integrated into the context of a plausible event, the referential content of which sets the scene, as it were, for the subsequent evolution of linguistic and cultural representation. For it is always the formal structure of the sign, the peripheral gesture of the human community, that remains constant throughout the subsequent incarnations of the centrally significant scene. It is "the scene," Gans says, "as the locus for all significant interpersonal communication" that is from the outset the "form separate from its referential content" (*End of Culture* 22).

But it is precisely the peripheral human community that Derrida ignores in his analysis of the interdicting power of the sign. Certainly, in a metaphysical framework, what is primary is the power of the sign to represent referents. Derrida's uncovering of the process of deferral inherent in the act of representation indeed challenges the unproblematic metaphysical view of language as having a transparent relation with its objective referent. But having stepped back from the ideal presence of the referent to the interdicting power of the sign, Derrida will not connect this sign to its human beneficiary. Thus, he still remains locked on the presence of the referent, though his view of it brings with it the self-conscious awareness of the referent's ultimate inaccessibility. By bringing our lens back a step further, however, we can gain a fuller view, which includes the human periphery in the context of the originary scene. In this more global view, we are able to understand the sign not as the originally intended representation of its referent, but as the communally installed interdiction that separates the users from the designatum. The metaphysical notion of the presence of the object to its sign is a later development, that depends for its existence on the prior establishment of the communal presence of the originary community. It is only once material objects have been interdicted that they can then become the subject of metaphysical desires, the "presence" of which is reflected in the sign-referent relation. "The sign," Gans says, "recalls the object because it incarnates the refusal of the object. Instead of thinking of the sign as a reminder of the referent's presence, we should understand it as a reminder of the referent's denial" (*Originary Thinking* 104). We cannot avoid speaking

denials[20] because language was primordially an expression of denial. Derrida understands the denial implicit in the sign but he is unable to give this insight articulation, beyond proclaiming the inarticulateness of all ontological systems of the self-knowing subject.

In summary, Derrida's emphasis on the category of text, as his reading of Kafka makes clear, fails to confront the human aspect in the parable. Thus, for Derrida, the key element is always the paradox that both draws the countryman to and repels him from the centrality of the law. And yet, arguably, to focus on this paradox is to ignore the lives of the peripheral subjects at the expense of the dominating centre. It is ironic that Derrida, in his supreme self-consciousness of the paradoxical structure of centripetal desire, should nevertheless remain himself, as it were, hypnotized by the interdicting power of the sacred centre. That Kafka's parable, on the other hand, has given us, from beginning to end, a view of the peripheral human community should alert us to the fact that there is a lesson to be learned about the ethical nature of human society. Parables, after all, have always had the moral human community as their object of interest. We can now turn to our own analysis of Kafka's text from the perspective of the scene of origin.

Kafka and the Scene of Origin: A Literary Model

Kafka's short parable "Before the Law," though not presented in dramatic form, nevertheless "stages" for us a specific scene, the central locus of which can be described as sacred, with the doorkeeper and the countryman occupying the periphery. What is notable, given this "scenic" topography, is the focusing of the action entirely on the human periphery. No doubt we too, like the man from the country, are intrigued to know what lies behind the gateway before which the doorkeeper stands. And no doubt we too, upon reading the parable, echo the sentiment of Joseph K. in *The Trial* when we feel a certain re-sentiment (*ressentiment*) or resentment toward the doorkeeper for apparently obstructing,

[20]See Derrida's essay "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials." Here Derrida comes closest to the formulation of the anthropological scene of origin as primordially an expression of collective denial. But Derrida's essay is more concerned with the author's own inability to speak without denying than with the participants at the origin, whose denial, we presume, was expressed in wholly more urgent circumstances. This is the trademark of Derrida's belief that the language at the origin and the language of the speaking subject are irreducible: when we speak, we unconsciously reproduce the language of our originary ancestors, but we cannot articulate this knowledge consciously. It is in this sense, as we are defining it, that Derrida's position remains an aesthetic one. Where the aesthetic scene of origin is irreversible, the anthropological scene is reversible, namely, as the subject of a verifiable hypothesis, the measure of which is nothing other than all culture.

or at least deluding, the countryman in his quest for admittance to the law. But resentment, at any rate, has always been the motive force driving cultural phenomena. And if our resentment remains unsublimated via the traditional narrative means of Aristotelian catharsis, then we would do well to check our own aesthetic sensibility, before pinning our resentment on the figure of the doorkeeper.

What is indeed surprising about the doorkeeper is precisely his figurality. For, though he certainly appears human, his apparent immunity to the scourge of time, in comparison to the all-too-evident mortality of the countryman, is more suggestive of his presence as *figured* than as mere presence before the destructive powers of an impersonal nature. Figurality presupposes representation, and as Saussure's doctrine of the arbitrary signifier implies, signs possess a transtemporality which stands in direct contrast to the temporal nature of the material referent. But given the fact that the doorkeeper's invulnerability to time suggests the representative power of the linguistic sign, how are we then to explain the apparent difference between the immortality of the doorkeeper and the mortality of the countryman?

In the originary scene, it is the renunciation of appetitive desire and the designation of the centrally attractive object that creates the linguistic space between the gestures on the periphery and the significant object at the centre. This linguistic space is precisely the difference between the object as mere object-to-be-appropriated and the object as collectively significant. This difference cannot be measured empirically as the result of increased perceptual capabilities. Indeed, it is precisely the nonquantitative nature of the difference that makes the event unmeasurable and therefore unverifiable by empirical means. But what cannot be measured empirically must be hypothesized, and the wager of the originary hypothesis is that the moment of human origin arises from the establishment of a unique scene of representation, where the object is not simply appropriated but remains, as it were, irrevocably separated from its conscious perceiver by a barrier of representation, which is none other than a collective moment of deferral. The sign is thus primordially a time-saving or, more accurately, a time-producing device: by establishing a moment of collective presence, the community becomes aware of time, that is, of the significant temporal space between the interdicted object and the participants' desire for it, desire being a necessary consequence of the interdiction. In lieu of impending conflict, the sign establishes a space where appropriation is denied and community is created in a collective scene that transports the perception of an appetitive object onto a scene of mutual significance. It is this linguistic space that separates instinctual perception from human collective presence.

If we examine once more the action in "Before the Law," we are struck by what can only be described as its inaction. The central moment in the plot, for what it is worth, is the countryman's decision to defer entry and to wait. The plot thus becomes the story of waiting or, simply, of deferred action, which is always, as the parable makes clear, the prelude to a hoped-for admittance to the law. The barrier incarnated by the doorkeeper is hardly a barrier in the physical sense—indeed, he steps aside and the gate stands open "as usual." What generates the countryman's decision to defer his entry can thus only be the understanding that the doorkeeper's words, regardless of their truth value, constitute a barrier in themselves.

But how can words in themselves constitute a barrier? Imperative interdictions such as "Thou shalt not kill" can be thought of as creating barriers. But such interdictions operate referentially and thus cannot be thought of as producing barriers without explicit reference to a material object or action. The success of the imperative hinges on the ability of the locutee to realize the speaker's desire for a material reality either in the form of a requested object or performance. The command "Kill!" can only be realized through a real-world performance. It is precisely the absolute nature of the imperative (either it is performed or not performed) that makes it the appropriate model for interdictions. "Do not kill" implies that all performances of the act of killing are forbidden. Beyond the worldly performance (or lack of performance) of the imperative, its articulation is incomplete. The significance of the imperative thus remains firmly tied to its objective reality in the material world.

If we take another look at the interaction between the two figures "before the law," we note that it is not the doorkeeper who utters an imperative but the countryman. In "pray[ing] for admittance to the Law," the countryman adopts the formal structure of the imperative. He makes a request in order to receive a tangible result. By requesting admittance, the countryman commits himself to the world-view of imperative culture, which can only understand the linguistic utterance as the precursor to the material realization of the speaker's desire. If I request admittance, it is only because I want to be admitted and will not be content until this desire is realized. In the original German text, *bitten* (translated as "to pray" by the Muirs) has the same root as the English "to bid" (from the Old English "bidan"), which conveys more overtly the imperative nature of the countryman's request (the Muirs' translation nevertheless insightfully preserves the theological element). Thus, the countryman literally "bids" the doorkeeper give him admittance. In this sense, the doorkeeper acts not so much as a barrier, but as an agent to the countryman's desire. As the locutee of the countryman's imperative, the doorkeeper is expected to fulfill the desire implied by the countryman's act of bidding.

Yet the doorkeeper's response neither fulfills the imperative request nor negates it. He does not grant permission, but neither does he absolutely forbid it. Instead, he defers the action requested of him. "At the moment," the doorkeeper says, "he cannot grant admittance," which is to say that he merely defers performing the act of admittance. It may be objected that this is still an act of interdiction. The doorkeeper still denies the countryman entry, even if this denial is qualified as "for the moment." But it is precisely this qualification that makes the doorkeeper's reply incompatible with the absolute nature of the imperative. The doorkeeper's ostensible act of interdiction hinges on the future possibility of admittance. It is this oscillation between interdiction and admittance, between inaccessibility and appropriability, that maintains the collective presence between the two figures. No doubt if the doorkeeper had absolutely forbidden entry, the countryman would have simply turned away, or ignored him completely and entered. But either way, the moment of collective presence would have been destroyed.

And yet what is to be gained by deferring the countryman's (imperative) desire into the indefinitely extensible realm of representations? At the origin, the linguistic sign, by creating the scene of mutual presence between the original individuals, deferred conflict over an appetitive object, but there is no appetitive object present in Kafka's "scene." Indeed, what is remarkable about the scene is its lack of a central object. The countryman's desire appears wholly alienated from its material reality. All we have are the representations which the two figures share during the entire life of the countryman.

Precisely. And Derrida is quick to observe this paradox. We are all like the countryman striving for the law which we presume to be grounded in a tangible event, a hard empirical reality, something that can perhaps be grasped and held up for scrutiny. There must be, as Freud speculated (and as we must also feel), somewhere the singularity of a unique event, a deed that gave birth to the subsequent narrative of law and morality. And yet when confronted by the concept of this unique and singular origin—which is none other than our common sense[21] extension from signs to empirical referents—we find our path to it barred by the very representations we use to uncover it. The contemporary metaphysician must thus face the consequences of his assumption that the *concept* of the origin is distinct from

[21]This term—much-maligned in poststructuralist circles—would benefit from originary analysis. Thus "common sense" indicates the difference between animal-sense and human-sense, which the originary hypothesis shows to be the difference between unmediated attraction for an appetitive object and the reperception of that object only through the *common* scene of human representation. For the animal, consciousness merely includes appetitively attractive objects: if an appetitive object is perceived it will be unproblematically appropriated. For the human, consciousness is precisely the imposition of an Other, as the collective presence of the community, between the subject and the appetitive object.

his representation of it. He must in short come face to face with that hairy appearance of "the doorkeeper in his fur coat, with his big sharp nose and long, thin, black Tartar beard." This rather fearful sight, Derrida suggests, is the true reason for the countryman's decision to defer entry: "It is at the sight of this hairy promontory, before this abundance of dark forest surrounding a headland, a nasal point or protuberance, that, through a strange and at the same time a completely natural consequence (we might say uncanny, *unheimlich*), the man makes a resolution, a decision" (195).

This is a far cry from Plato's world of ideal forms which lies at the foundation of the metaphysical belief in the priority of the concept as an origin firm enough to ground an ontology of the human. Firm enough for philosophy, perhaps, but not for anthropology. The *a priori* of ideal concepts has no place at the origin of the human, where the originary participants had not only no such self-reflexive intentions but also no means for conceptualizing at all. Conceptualization is the luxury of a culture with declarative sentences. At the origin, the first sign is an ostensive that merely designates what is significant but cannot conceptualize this significance.[22]

Derrida's preoccupation with the anteriority of representation to all events indicates the philosophical realization that its own foundations have been dependent upon a problematic elevation of conceptual ability as the defining aspect of humanity. With Derrida, we have moved from the formulation of an ontology of ideal concepts to the acknowledgement that these formulations are only possible in language, and therefore that perhaps language provides the ontological key to the human condition. But, as Derrida's analyses more than adequately show, an ontology based on the conceptual capacities of language cannot free itself from its own metaphysical origins in the declarative sentence. Metaphysics is indeed dependent upon the declarative capacity to create presence in absence. The heart of conceptualization is the creation of an imaginary scene or model that is at temporal odds with the scenic reality of the present world. Whether I am reading Tolkien or grappling

[22]The importance of a "genetics" of linguistic evolution for the proper understanding of language and culture cannot be overemphasized. As *The Origin of Language* makes clear, structuralist and poststructuralist formalism suffers from the same metaphysical error of assuming the originarity of the declarative sentence. But, as Gans shows, the proper understanding of the function of language is dependent on an understanding of its origin, from the perspective of which it is clearly foolhardy to postulate the declarative sentence. It is rather the minimal designative gesture of the ostensive that constitutes the origin of language and instigates the evolution of linguistic form, the culmination of which is then the declarative. Gans's scheme of predeclarative linguistic evolution provides the anthropological answer to Derrida's statement that the "problematic of consciousness" needs to be elaborated by studying "the structures of denial before and outside of the possibility of judgement and of predicative language" ("How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" 17). These comments are almost incidental for Derrida, but they serve to show the intuitively anthropological perspective of the (anti)metaphysical "philosopher."

with a physics problem, I must conceive of a separate world from the one of my "scenic" position at the writing desk. But this paradoxical position is the origin of metaphysics, not the origin of the human. Derrida understands the essential paradox or aporia underlying the ontology of originary concepts that can only come from the representations of the language-using individual, and his preoccupation with the latter leads him to his neologism *différance*, where the self is differed from itself only by the self-conscious action of deferral through re-presentation.

This movement from ideal conceptualization to paradoxical self-foundation is a welcome criticism of metaphysics, but Derrida's insights, in Gans's view, remain crippled by his refusal to part with the metaphysical view that must have concepts to have reality:

> Derrida, in his loyalty to the metaphysical tradition, believes that the non-conceptualizable is equivalent to the non-realizable; he fails to see that although the origin of consciousness must itself be conscious, it should not be expected to possess in addition a *concept* of this consciousness. The formal, atemporal concept is the origin of philosophy, but not the origin of man. ("Differences" 801-2)

What Gans's generative scheme of language shows is that the effort of philosophy to understand its own origin is doomed to inarticulateness because its very existence depends on the structure of the declarative sentence which it takes for granted. Ultimately, the declarative finds its origin in the negation of an imperative, thus establishing a scene of representation wholly divorced from the presence desired by the imperative. Thus the declarative founds a scene of linguistic presence that stands in direct contradiction to the desired scene of the imperative. Metaphysics hypostatizes this linguistic presence as the ground of its ontological schemes, not realizing that this linguistic presence is dependent upon a prior absence. Derrida undermines this scene of linguistic presence by showing it to be only present-in-its-absence, thus reintroducing the notion of a prior absence, which Gans's generative scheme shows to be the negated imperative. For Derrida, as Gans suggests, "it is absence that founds presence and as such can never be grasped" ("Differences" 802). Derrida's insight, that metaphysical presence depends upon a prior absence, exposes the very origins of the declarative in the negated imperative, but, dependent as metaphysics is upon declarative form, it is unable to go beyond this most fundamental moment of declarative generation. Absence founds a scene of linguistic presence and with it philosophy, but humanity is not borne out of the black-hole of Derrida's aporia. For the origin of humanity occurs not with the origin of the declarative,

but with the origin of the ostensive sign, where a present object was designated as inaccessible by precisely *re-presenting* it as communally significant to all and thus as an object of potential danger.

We can now return to the question of the doorkeeper's interdiction as constituting not a physical barrier but a barrier of representation. Derrida recognizes the difference between the doorkeeper's (declarative) prohibition and that of an absolute imperative: "The present prohibition of the law is not a prohibition in the sense of an imperative constraint; it is a *différance*" (203). The remainder of Derrida's intricate essay is a wary circling of the abyssal character of *différance* as it simultaneously reveals and conceals its hidden powers. We find ourselves caught in the middle of the sacred rite of old, this time in the mythical prose of Derrida as he chants the rites of textuality and *différance*. But we need not stop under the spellbinding power of the aporia. For Gans's generative scheme of linguistic evolution gives us a functional account of the pragmatic workings of this aporia that signals perhaps the end of metaphysics but not the end of all constructive thought.

The Formal Ground of Culture: The Declarative

We have spent some time dwelling on the contrast between the countryman's imperative position (inward facing, desiring the law) and the doorkeeper's declarative stance (outward facing, deferring the desire of the other). We can now give substance to this contrast. But first we can remark on the fact that Kafka's parable and Derrida's reading of it, in their elliptic concern for their own paradoxical self-foundation, show a heightened awareness of the pivotal transition from imperative to declarative culture, which is indeed the founding event of fiction and philosophical discourse, if not the founding event of humanity *per se*. "The transition from imperative to declarative language," Gans declares, "is of a significance second only to the origin of language itself" (*End of Culture* 120).

The operation of the imperative hinges on the speaker's belief that by uttering the name, the referent will appear. In praxis, the success of realizing imperative desire for an object depends upon the success of the interlocutor in securing the referent and presenting it. At this stage of linguistic evolution, signs are still irrevocably tied to their real-world referents, that is, linguistic presence still depends upon the context of a material reality, even though the imperative (as opposed to the ostensive) undergoes a process of awaiting before the material reality can be realized in the presenting of the requested object or in the

performance of the requested action. In this process of awaiting we recognize the "action" of Kafka's countryman, whom we note operates on a level "before the law," that is, before the law can become an abstract concept and hence the subject of philosophical debate.

The naiveté of the countryman, which must be compared to the maturity of the doorkeeper, stems from his belief that the law can be "presentified" or approached as could be a material object or a specified action. In contrast, the doorkeeper has turned his back on the locus of desire because he understands that the law cannot be "presentified in itself." He has understood the law of *différance*, which is to say, he has grasped the deferring character of the declarative sentence which is nothing but the adding of predicates to a given topic. This topic is none other than the desire of the preceding imperative, which Kafka's parable shows to be the countryman's desire for the law. Derrida is right to point out the homologous origin of law and literature in the declarative structure of *différance*. But we can formulate this origin in wholly less metaphysical terms that will hopefully clarify the context of Derrida's arguments. To do this, we need not have recourse to the abstract world of ontological thought, but can begin with the pragmatic realm of everyday linguistic communication. For it is here that formal revolutions occur, not on the restricting and conservative scene of ritual.[23]

The imperative requests an absent object. The declarative originates in the negative reply to the imperative request. The imperative "Hammer!" is replied by "Hammer—no!" The simplicity of this construction should not belie the momentousness of the change here effected. Before declarative language, all communication took place in the presence or desired presence of the worldly referent. Thus, the ostensive sign was only uttered in the presence of its referent. The imperative, originating in an inappropriate ostensive, signalled the desire for an absent object; that is, once the community has recognized the ostensive designation "Hammer!" as signifying the present referent, the utterance of that sign in the absence of its referent may be taken to mean that the object is in fact desired. The declarative operates by turning the imperative speaker's worldly desire for the absent referent away from its material realization and onto the linguistic scene of representation, where it takes the form of an objective predicate indicating the absence of the object. At the origin, desire was always constituted by the significance of the central referent construed as a signified within the private desiring imaginations of the peripheral individuals, but it is only with the declarative that this incipient desire is able to sublimate itself temporally via

[23]See, for example, p. 92 of *Originary Thinking*: "Because ritual resists any change in the scene it attempts to reproduce, we must assume that the generation of new linguistic forms, such as the emergence of the imperative from an inappropriate use of the ostensive, is unlikely to occur within the ritual context."

the creation of purely linguistic models of reality at once temporally distant from their real-world counterpart. Thus, the reply "Hammer—No!" forces the hearer to not only imagine a hammer but to imagine it as absent on his internal scene of representation. Here, a minimal narrative is constructed that exists only in the realm of linguistic representation. The linguistic model describes a scene where the hammer is absent, the implication being that the imperative is an inadequate articulation of the present reality. Thus, the declarative interposes between the imperative speaker and the desired referent by channelling his desire onto a linguistic model that in effect substitutes for the presence of the real object: "The information contained in the declarative thus acts as a bar to the anticipated fulfillment of his [the imperative speaker's] request, and in doing so establishes a barrier between the prolonged linguistic presence within which this fulfillment was awaited and the situation at hand" (*Origin of Language* 176).

The imperative speaker makes no distinction between linguistic presence and the presence of the desired object. By establishing linguistic presence through the utterance of the ostensive sign, the imperative speaker assumes that the object will be "presentified." It is this naive faith in the conflation of linguistic reality and worldly reality that is thwarted by the realism of the declarative which offers the predication that the desired object is absent, thus destroying "the illusion of this faith in the magical powers of the [imperative] communication situation" (*Origin of Language* 177). By offering an objective model of contemporary reality, we see the roots of scientific modelling available with the declarative, which also offers for the first time the category of truth and falsity, as the linguistic model created is now available for comparison with external reality. But more important for our perspective here is the possibility of narrative and thus for fictional models of the world to be created.

The original imperative speaker desired an external object. The declarative response shows his desire to be unrealizable but it does not eliminate desire. On the contrary, it sublimates this desire into a fictional world, because for the declarative response to be successful the speaker must convince his hearer that the linguistic model offered is an adequate substitute for the former's desire. Thus, what in effect is offered is not the object but a model of the object's situation (i.e., as absent in the case of the original declarative). This is the declarative correlate to the originary sign of the originary scene. There, the sign was accepted as sufficient compensation for the subject's prohibited access to the appetitive object. But the declarative is two steps removed from the originary event. Now, it is not an appetitive object that is substituted for by a sign, but an already linguistic scene of desire that is compensated for by the predicating or "supplementing" of this desire. The imperative

situates a desired referent on the linguistic scene of representation as a topic to be realized materially. The declarative response does not realize this worldly desire but offers instead a linguistic supplement in the form of a predication upon the already established (imperative) topic. This process of predication is theoretically infinite and constitutes the limitless possibility for fictionalization. It is here that we find Derrida's notion of mythical predication as the "dangerous supplement" to (imperative) ritual performance.

At this point, we can make some observations about this hypothetical scenario. The declarative response definitively divorces linguistic presence from worldly reality. Whatever is predicated of the topic, the hearer must first understand the act of predication before he can seek to verify it. Because the act of predication is anterior to verification, it can thus be said to legitimately constitute a model of the world. But though this modelling explains the origin of philosophy and science, there still remains the question of why it would be desirable to use the declarative to create unverifiable, that is, fictional models of the world as well.

But this question has already been answered. For, by interposing between the original imperative speaker and the desired referent, the declarative sublimates or displaces an otherwise potentially disruptive desire. This may not be so apparent in the case of trivial objects, but on the communal scene of ritual, where harmony is the prime objective, the declarative finds an altogether more likely home. For the sacred locus of the originary scene is by definition inaccessible. The originary sign deferred conflict over the appetitive object by sacralizing it as indefinitely inaccessible. This is the originary locus of the divinity. The declarative makes possible the infinite supplementing of this inaccessibility through predication. This is ultimately a more reliable method for preserving communal order than ritual performance, which depends upon the "presentification" of the divinity in relatively rare material objects. By offering mythical narratives as predicates of the divinity, myth satisfies the desire for the central figure by substituting the linguistic model for the referential object which was sacralized in the originary scene. By "maintaining the priority and independence of the divine topic with respect to its predicates, [myth] permits a secure, albeit imaginary, possession of this being that had not previously been possible" (*Originary Thinking* 95).

What the declarative model offers to the original imperative hearer is a "distraction" of the latter's immature desire for worldly action. Thus, in the most fundamental sense, the declarative is primordially a barrier to worldly action as it defers, like the sign in the originary scene, the imperative speaker's (naive) faith in the power of his utterance to bring about a worldly event. Taken "as an objective model of reality," Gans says, the declarative

sentence "is the foundation of metaphysics" (*Origin of Language* 193). But this is only possible because the declarative is *in the first place* accepted as an adequate linguistic substitute for a worldly referent, which is to say, it is primordially a fiction, the verification of which is independent of the internal structure of the declarative construction. If I declare, "John is in the library," you are free to verify this for yourself, but your doing so is not implied by my statement, which must first be understood as an independent state of affairs, constructed on your imaginary scene of representation, that is therefore verifiable in principle but always potentially fictional.

But we have just seen that fiction comes into its own in ritual where the inaccessible central locus of the divinity serves as the topic for indefinite predication. "God is in the library" is not verifiable in the same way as "John is in the library." Thus, if desire is sufficiently strong, as in the ritual scene it inevitably is, the declarative becomes not the source of practical information but the focus of aesthetic contemplation, where the predicate is admired for its utterance alone. Such aesthetic contemplation, Gans suggests, is a necessary consequence of the original scenario where the declarative functioned as the diversion of the imperative speaker's desire. In this context, the declarative speaker "acts as an unavowed mimetic rival, maintaining the desire-object in its inaccessible position in the declarative model through his act of predication, although at the same time never revealing his own agency within his utterance" (*Origin of Language* 193). By offering not the desired object but a predicate concerning that object, the declarative speaker holds the imperative hearer within his (linguistic) power. As soon as the declarative speaker's position as mediator to the latter's desire is realized, however, the "spell" is broken, and the "esthetic presence of the declarative is dissolved" (193). This latter operation, where the speaker's position is foregrounded, is the operation of descriptive discourse. Here information is at a premium, and the utterance is only regarded as having value if it contributes to an understanding of the desired worldly referent; that is, the information is only accepted on the principle that it is verifiable. No doubt, we as mature truth-telling adults have long since lost the capability of aesthetically contemplating pragmatic, information bearing utterances. If I say to you "Your cat was run over today," your immediate inclination will not be to admire the utterance as a fiction. But what Gans terms "esthetic presence"—that is, the power to hold the hearer on a scene of linguistic presence that operates primordially by deferring the hearer's contact with a worldly reality—is certainly suggestive of the child's linguistic development as fundamentally an aesthetic operation. Adult incomprehension at the apparent violence of, for instance, nursery rhymes (e.g., our proverbial "Three Blind

Mice" whose tails were cut off "with a carving knife") underscores the impatience of a mature empiricism for a "naive" (immature) aestheticism.[24]

Literature depends upon this most fundamental operation of the declarative. Thus, the literary text is fictional in the crucial sense that it is not verifiable. Our "willing suspension of disbelief " hinges on our willing subordination to the declarative speaker (the literary Subject) in accepting his predicates (the literary narrative) as worthy of aesthetic contemplation in itself. The ultimate source of aesthetic significance is the originary sign of the designating individual in the originary scene. By designating the central object, the originary sign establishes the object on a scene of universal significance that prohibits access to the object at the same time as it reveals the object as present to each of the surrounding imaginations. This paradoxical oscillation between the object-as-desired and the object-as-interdicted is the aesthetic moment of the originary scene, which Derrida uncovers as present in the formal operation of the linguistic sign.

What Derrida cannot account for, however, is the originary resentment experienced by each individual in the interdiction imposed by the sign on the appetitive object. This resentment is displaced in the subsequent distribution of the object, where the signs are interpreted in the originary narrative of social distribution. This is the originary model of exchange, without which there would indeed have been no reason for the establishment of representation. Ritual repetition reproduces the centre-periphery configuration of the originary scene. Such is the structure of egalitarian society, where the desires on the human periphery remain absolutely subordinated to the sacred centre. But already the interpretation of the originary egalitarian exchange of signs as a narrative of distribution implies a hierarchy, the full implication of which is first articulated by the declarative that offers an independent linguistic model for the sacred centre, thus opening the central position to the peripheral individual who may take the centre as a model for his own individual significance.

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[24]In his popular book *Talk, Talk, Talk,* Jay Ingram draws our attention to the parallel between the child's language acquisition and the child's need for linguistic interaction. The child's interminable questions of the parent (usually the simple interrogative rejoinder "Why?" following every adult statement) are not driven by a scientific quest for (verifiable) knowledge, but are simply posed in order to maintain linguistic presence, the desire for which is satisfied by the continual answers of the adult. No doubt, Ingram is correct to see this "aesthetic" concern for utterance, shorn of its real-world context, as crucial in the child's language acquisition process: "Children who hear slightly expanded versions of what they have just said themselves aren't getting the benefits of a conversation that moves along. Some linguists have suggested this is the reason behind children asking, 'Why?' It's not that they really want to know—they just want to keep the conversation going" (192). The child's desire for narrative is fundamentally a desire for fiction, for what is sought is not the referent but precisely the aesthetic presence of linguistic interaction. Need we point to the similarity between this model and Kafka's immature, desiring, and "insatiable" countryman as he questions the doorkeeper on the origin and home of the law?

This fundamental link between the declarative and the subsequent opening of the centre to hierarchy is the *sine qua non* of literary creation. Kafka's parable, on the verge of a literary tradition that has all but played itself out, exposes its own underpinnings in the scene of declarative origin and in the subsequent hierarchicization of the centre, on which literature depends for its existence. Like the progression of evermore powerful doorkeepers standing before the countryman, literature feeds on the "insatiable" desires of differentiated—i.e., hierarchical—society. The doorkeeper's postulated scene of the increasingly more powerful doorkeepers finds its ethical correlate in the opening of the sacred centre, which provides the primordial model of difference—between divine centre and human periphery—upon which is modelled the local differences of hierarchical society. Literature is only possible with the origin of social differentiation, for without social hierarchy there is no resentment, and without resentment there is no need for the "cathartic" sublimation of resentful desire, which is to say, there is no need for literature.

That literature finds its *raison d'etre* in the origin of social differentiation is evident, Gans suggests, in the "big-man" phenomenon observed by anthropologists in the potlatch-like feasts of certain Melanesian societies.[25] On the model of the originary scene, Gans locates the origin of social differentiation—and hence of hierarchy—in the "producer's desire" of the big-man, who usurps the position of the sustenance-providing divinity by claiming for himself the sole significance of the ritual centre as provider and producer of the ritual feast. It is on this model of the big-man's appropriation of economic surplus that Gans suggests the model of literary supplementation must be modelled, for with the differentiation of society—from the first big-men to the mythical figures of the mass-media today—is born the mature form of resentment, the sublimation of which it will be the specific purpose of literature to effect.

The declarative, we saw, arose from the need to provide a linguistic predicate to supplement the imperative hearer's desire for an unavailable object. The hearer's resentment at not obtaining the requested object is compensated for by the linguistic presence of the object's predicated absence on an imaginary scene of representation. Once this absence has been established, models of purely scenic presence can be created—e.g., the object may be predicated as present elsewhere—to further defer the hearer's resentment. No doubt this immature form of resentment is relatively trivial, but like the child's easily-forgotten resentful desires, this immature resentment can grow to wholly more virulent

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[25]See the section on "The 'Big-Man' and the Origin of Social Differentiation" in Chapter 6 of *The End of Culture*, and Chapter 2 of *Science and Faith*.

levels. From the moment of the originary sign, where resentment originated in the displeasure of the individual's separation from the appetitive object, culture has been nothing but the response to the potentially destructive force of resentment, which is fundamentally the scandal of the peripheral self at the centrality of the other. At the origin and in ritual society, this scandal is controlled by the relatively equalitarian existence of the periphery in the face of the divine centre; here resentment is wholly subordinate to the absolute other of the sacred. But with the usurpation of the significant centre by the first big-man, resentment becomes relativized as simply the resentment of one man for another. The origin of differential society, where hierarchy replaces the egalitarian order of primitive society, is also the origin of mature resentment. No longer polarized around the inaccessible sacred centre, the big-man's production contrasts with the participants' consumption in the ritual feast. This "opening of the centre," as Gans calls it, allows for the first time the transformation of individual desire—or, more precisely, resentment—into socially significant praxis. The "altruism" of the big-man, who renounces the easy life of his fellows for the hard labour required in order to produce the feast, may eventually give way to the hypostatizing of his role as producer into that of the tyrant of hierarchical empires, but what is fundamental is the opening of the centre to socially significant praxis.

It may be objected that we are swerving from our original trajectory of situating Derrida's linguistic aporia in context of the originary scene. On the contrary, for it is precisely the ethical solution to resentment which Derrida's discussion of representation implicitly invites without confronting. Held before the law of Derrida's aporetic text, we are given no indication why such an operation is necessary or even desirable. No doubt, this is the intention. We find ourselves, like the naive countryman before the doorkeeper, simultaneously beckoned and repelled. But that there is more to Kafka's text than this aporetic oscillation is indeed the thesis of this essay. For with the heuristic of Gans's originary scene, we are able to claim more than an abstract textualist significance for Kafka's text. We are able, in short, to offer a reading that is of direct anthropological significance by interpreting Kafka's "impenetrable and unreadable" text as perhaps the end

of high-cultural discourse but certainly not the end of man.[26] That Derrida's text believes that the former implies the latter is evident in his own aestheticist, high-cultural point of view. But the originary hypothesis allows us to substitute Derrida's intracultural perspective for our extracultural, or more precisely, extraliterary, discourse, lacking which we would have no choice but to join Derrida in the sacrificial rites of deconstruction.

The End of Literary Form: "Before the Law"

We have already observed the declarative stance of the doorkeeper as he holds the countryman in his (linguistic) presence by virtue of his words alone. But we also noted that this linguistic presence is first and foremost an aesthetic presence. The aesthetic moment of contemplation is all that is available on the ritual scene where the central divinity is always absent, but it is dissolved in the case of "logocentric" discourse, where the agency of the speaker is foregrounded and the referential function of language is permitted to complete its teleological narrative toward extratextual reality. That the sign is primordially borne out of denial and not out of unproblematic access to the referent is evident in the hypothesis of the originary scene. The origin of the declarative reiterates this denial on a conceptual level, for here it is not merely the denial of a present object that occurs but the sublimation of an already referential (imperative) *desire* to an imaginary scene entirely removed from all reference to the real world. We have already discussed this anteriority of fiction to all verifiable discourse.

Fiction operates by confounding the hearer's (reader's) desire for extratextual reference. In submitting ourselves to the text, we function like the original imperative speaker, who accepts the aesthetic scene of presence as an adequate substitute for the desired object. The declarative speaker, on the other hand, functions as the "unavowed mimetic rival, maintaining the desire-object in its inaccessible position in the declarative model through his act of predication, although at the same time never revealing his own agency within his utterance" (*Origin of Language* 193). In literature, the unavowed mimetic

[26]See the passage by Derrida already quoted: "After the first guardian there are an undefined number of others, perhaps they are innumerable, and progressively more powerful and therefore more prohibitive, endowed with greater power of delay. Their potency is *différance*, an interminable *différance*, since it lasts for days and 'years,' indeed, up to the end of (the) man." ("Before the Law" 204)

rival is the literary Subject, whose narrative we accept without seeking verification in a worldly reality.[27]

But in reading Kafka's parable, we of course realize that the entire literary operation is staged before us, thwarting our own attempt to grasp an essential significance.[28] The doorkeeper stands impassively before the law much as the text lies before us, impervious to our desire but at the same time inviting us in, like the man from the country who is irresistibly drawn to the law. Our two figures on the periphery present a rather comical inversion of the stage of classical tragedy. For what is precisely denied is the entrance of the actors onto the stage. And with this denial of action is denied our own cathartic experience. Like the frustrated theatre-goer without a ticket, we are left before the door of the playhouse, forced to eye the doorman's forbidding gesture while we, no doubt, imagine the scene being played behind his back.

But if Kafka has turned his story around to reflect the very desires of his audience, then we would do well to look where we are pointed, namely, to the peripheral human community, where the entire plot takes place not at the centre but, as it were, in the wings of the stage. The first lesson of our parable would then appear to be the peripheral nature of desire. Significance always emanates from the centre, but desire for significance is expressed not in the desire for the centre, for the centre is impermeable, but in the resentment of the self at the significance of the other who appears to possess centrality. But all human action, which is to say all humanity, exists on the periphery. Significance only appears to emanate from the centre. Kafka's parable emphasizes this topography between

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[27]The literary Subject, Gans says, "is not identical with the author, and even less with the 'implied author' whose views may be expressed directly or indirectly in the work. The Subject is a function of the work, the original source of the language that flows through the mouth or the pen of the 'inspired' literary creator . . . . [T]he literary Subject is a fictional God who never reveals himself openly in the world of his creation. What is revealed to us through his words is not the Subject himself, but the figures whose existence he affirms, and which we experience solely through his affirmation" ("Sacred Text Secular Culture" 61). By holding the reader in the moment of aesthetic contemplation, the literary Subject produces a fictional world that is independent of criteria of verification. The declarative is the origin of all discursive structures, but it is literature alone that remains tied to the original function of the declarative, which channelled desire for an object onto a linguistic scene that revealed this object only to be present-in-its-absence, that is, only present linguistically. Literature is founded on the paradoxical moment of representation that shows the desired object to be only present on the linguistic scene. Descriptive discourse cannot tolerate this fundamental aesthetic aporia, as Derrida points out in commenting on the aporia in Kafka's text: "This, perhaps, is where literature begins. A text of philosophy, science, or history, a text of knowledge or information, would not abandon a name to a state of not-knowing, or at least it would do so only by accident and not in an essential or constitutive way" ("Before the Law" 207).

[28]See Derrida's comments on the text's self-referential character: "Is not what holds us in check before the law, like the man from the country, also what paralyzes and detains us when confronted with a story: is it not its possibility and its impossibility, its readability and unreadability, it necessity and prohibition, and the questions of relation, of repetition and of history?" ("Before the Law" 196).

inaccessible centre and desiring periphery. The centre is only present-in-its-absence: the ritual centre, the home of the law, exists as a hypothesis beyond the scene of action which we are observing. The action thus takes place, as the title suggests, before the law, which is acknowledged but never presented. The first sentence of the parable announces not that we are in the presence of the law, but that we are in the presence of a doorkeeper who stands before the law: "Before the Law stands a doorkeeper." The second sentence adds the second member to our society, who is described as approaching not the law but the doorkeeper: "To this doorkeeper there comes a countryman." We have spent some time on the subject of the countryman's inward-facing imperative position as representative of the immature desire for material satisfaction and, on the other hand, the doorkeeper's outward-facing declarative poise as the mediator of the countryman's desire, which he displaces by deferring it onto the linguistic scene of representation. But this relation is also a model of the reader's relation to the text. The *mis en abyme* of Kafka's text—its unreadability—arises from the very subject of which it is supposed to be the representative. Stories are primordially the predicating of a narrative on a presumed topic of significance. Fiction originates with the birth of the declarative which predicated a desired object as being absent, thus initiating the linguistic possibility for the creation of models separate from worldly reality. But what Kafka's enigmatic little story predicates of its topic is nothing but the topic of its own emergence. We are continually rejected admittance to significance and are left interminably "before the law." Centrality is denied us, and all we are left with is the peripheral mundaneness of a countryman forever waiting admittance.

What permits the doorkeeper to turn his back on the law and thus to become a guardian of the law is precisely his mastery of language and fiction. As a declarative speaker he possesses not only the formal capability of mature culture, but he has also realized the unfigurable character of the ritual centre. All that there is left for him to do is to stand before the law as its humble servant and guardian. But to stand before the law is to realize the peripheral nature of resentment. The doorkeeper is not so much a single individual as the incarnation of the human community as the collective object of resentment for the alienated individual. Individuals, like the countryman, die, but the human community, like the doorkeeper, lives on. As we shall see, this revelation of resentment at the heart of modern culture will have increasingly problematic consequences for the literary author, whose own profession depends upon the very resentment that his texts are concerned with uncovering. Once the "abyss" of resentment has been revealed, the literary Subject's true mastery of fiction will have arrived and hence will paralyse the author's ability to write. High-culture can thus only join the market and mass-culture. No longer the romantic revolutionary of

Shelley's "unacknowledged legislator," the author stands like a guardian before the law, content to accept the "bribes" of the consumer market as he satisfies its insatiable desire for models of resentment.

It is thus as consumer that the countryman stands before the guardian (the producer) of the law. But as we have just seen, the guardian is none other than the human community. The law is undefinable because it is simply the law of human community, the emergence of which is synonymous with the establishment of the scene of representation. The origin of law is also the origin of representation. Hence, representations of the law that do not explicitly acknowledge this coeval birth will "always already" be late manifestations on an already established scene of significance. Like Joseph K. interminably late for his court appointments, we find ourselves always arriving late on the scene of our desire.

But this is also the countryman's predicament. For, in contrast to the doorkeeper, the countryman has not shed his imperative belief that the law—the ritual centre which comes to appear like "a radiance that streams inextinguishably from the gateway of the Law"—is accessible. Thus he treats the doorkeeper as a model for his desire. His obeisance before the doorkeeper as he "prays" for admittance suggests his readiness to accept the idols of a past ritual culture. The doorkeeper does not so much stand in his way as an obstacle, as provide a focus for his resentment, which is the spin-off of the countryman's desire for central significance. Centrality is inaccessible, but resentment enables desire to be put into practice when it allows the individual to see his desire through the model of others. The "bribes" which the countryman offers the doorkeeper provide the minimal model of the translation of resentment into praxial exchange. This is the ethical substance of the modern market economy. From the point of view of the alienated individual arriving late on the scene of which he feels dispossessed, the market will only exacerbate his impotent frustration, appearing always as the cause and obstacle of his self-centred desire for unique significance. This is the irony of the market, which operates on the principle of a perpetual recycling of resentment. From the perspective of the human community, however, the market offers the resources for absorbing limitless, always potentially destructive, human desire. Like the guardian before the law, the market's apparent capacity to absorb our desires will, as the doorkeeper says, "keep you from thinking you have omitted anything."

But the doorkeeper is not yet the market, and the countryman approaches him in the first place because he is a model for his desire and hence a subject of resentment. The minimal story that the doorkeeper relates—that of the progressive hierarchy of doorkeepers, which in fact provides a succinct operation of the market—displaces the

resentment of the countryman, but it is not designed to deter him, since it only defers his resentment. Indeed, one could say it holds him intrigued, for he accepts the stool from the doorkeeper and he waits expectantly, perhaps eager to hear more of the doorkeeper's tales. But even these wear thin as the countryman "forgets the other doorkeepers," seeing only the one in front of him who becomes increasingly the object of his resentment. As time passes, he "wearies the doorkeeper by his importunity," who even tells the man he is "insatiable."

But appetite, we remember, is the ultimate basis of the originary scene. It was the understanding that each member of the original group was designating rather than appropriating the object that led to the deferral of conflict and to the collective establishment of a scene of representation. But the object is still held "in mind" by the participants, whose desire for it is in fact strengthened by its being represented to all as universally attractive. The countryman's "insatiable" desire is evident in his persistent questioning of the doorkeeper, whom he treats as an obstacle to his (alimentary) satisfaction. Of course, Kafka's text gives no indication of an alimentary object, but the originary scene allows us to contextualize the countryman's desire as grounded in a nonmetaphysical, hypothetical origin of which Kafka's text is an intuitive inheritor, if not yet a scientific investigator.

The purpose of culture is always to defer the originary resentment which necessarily emerges with the interdiction imposed by the collective act of designation. Representation produces human desire and defers immediate conflict, but desire brings with it its own conflictual problematic in the resentment that the self experiences at being denied privileged access to the desired object. At the origin, it is the aesthetic component of the originary sign that provides for the moment of deferral or hesitation when the object is contemplated and not merely appropriated. Aesthetic contemplation originates in the realization that the object is permanently inaccessible owing to the formal barrier which the act of designation institutes upon the central object.[29] It is this "communally instituted formal barrier," Gans says, "that is the source of the explicit and permanent barrier that will later surround art-objects" (*End of Culture* 30). High-culture in general serves to defer destructive resentment by capitalizing on the deferring capacity of the originary sign's aesthetic moment.

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[29]See, for instance, Gans's Chapter "Originary Esthetics" in *Originary Thinking*: "The tension between the desire for the object and the formal barrier of its inaccessibility is esthetic only insofar as this tension is specifically mediated by the sign—the sign that is in the originary event both observed and performed. We may call the experience of the central object 'esthetic' when what prevents us from appropriating it is its inseparability from its representation. The effect of inviolability that derives from the collective act of signification is similar to, but not identical with, the inaccessibility attributed to this object when it is experienced as sacred" (117).

Resentment becomes a necessary social phenomenon with the origin of social difference, which is first evident in the big-man's practice as producer of the ritual feast. The division of society into the nonreciprocal roles of producer and consumer destroys the former reciprocity where all were equally subordinate before the central divinity. Though this opening of the centre leads to hierarchy—indicated by the doorkeeper's postulated scene of a limitless hierarchy of superior doorkeepers beyond his gateway—it constitutes nevertheless an ethical revolution, since it permits the engagement of socially significant praxis on the model of individual desire. Egalitarian culture remains subordinate to the originary exchange of signs, which it associates with the subsequent division of the appetitive object. Hence, at this level, the communal exchange of signs has not been ethically distinguished from the exchange of things, both of which are attributed to the power of the central divinity who is presumed responsible for what is indistinguishably both a linguistic and a material equality. The big-man is the first to make the distinction between the sacred locus as the presence of the divinity and the sacred locus as a model for secular exchange; in other words, he realizes the separability of the exchange of representations from the exchange of things.[30]

But if resentment becomes a necessary social phenomenon with the origin of hierarchy, so then does literature become possible as the high-cultural solution to resentment.[31] Aristotle's formulation of the cathartic nature of the pity and terror we experience in observing tragedy, succinctly encapsulates the high-cultural function of literature in sublimating our resentment at not possessing the centrality which another appears to have. On the model provided by the first big-man, the kings and tyrants of classical literature are centralized on the stage of literature, where their downfall purges us of our resentment of worldly nonreciprocity.

But what are we then to make of a scene that denies us access to the classical stage of central significance? In Kafka's text, we have been pushed back to the very source of significance in the representing gestures of the peripheral human community. The text can tell us of nothing but its own emission. We have been pulled back so far that we find

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[30]We can compare this moment of cultural revolution with the birth of the declarative, which forced the imperative speaker to recognize the separability of his desire for a worldly object from his representation of it. The big-man revolution is thus seen to produce in the cultural-economic domain what the declarative achieved in the linguistic realm. This comparison enforces Gans's claim that it is linguistic form which precedes and informs cultural evolution.

[31]See *The End of Culture*, Chapter 10, which describes the Greek origins of secular literature, where we find the following statement: "High Culture becomes possible, not to say necessary, as soon as resentment comes to be perceived as a necessary social phenomenon" (239).

ourselves, like the man from the country, face to face with the literary Subject, whose story we are supposed to be enveloped by. Our hero dies before he even succeeds in overcoming his first obstacle, which is simply to get on stage. But if the hero cannot even make his way to centre stage, we must blame not the hero but the author, whose own apparent inability to express finds its way into his main character, as his diary-entry of November 30, 1914, written at the time of the composition of *The Trial*, suggests:

> I can't write any more. I've come up against the last boundary, before which I shall in all likelihood again sit down for years, and then in all likelihood begin another story all over again that will again remain unfinished. This fate pursues me. And I have become cold again, and insensible; nothing is left but a senile love for unbroken calm. ("Excerpts from Kafka's Diaries" 278)

If we are to take these words seriously, we should understand them as the expression of the author's dissatisfaction with the transcendent Subject of his own literary work. Kafka cannot grant admittance to the countryman because his own writing process is paralysed. Our hero cannot enter on stage because Kafka himself feels he cannot write. All that is left for the author is the thematization of his own inability to write. If these words are suggestive of the fate of our countryman standing interminably before the law, we can suspect that the very boundaries of the literary work are being pushed to their limits.

These limits we have hypothesized to be none other than the knowledge that the work is formally separated from its contextual reality. But these are the institutional limits of the art-work. In the originary scene, the aesthetic moment emerges when the object is contemplated via the designating sign; it is thus synonymous with the deferring capacity of the sign. This process of deferral is thematized in the art-object as product, which hypostatizes the moment of deferral and presents it as an object irreducible to appetitive satisfaction. Whether we are listening to a symphony or contemplating a painting, we are always aware that our experience of the art-work is divorced from our worldly desire to possess its content. This is perhaps more obvious in the case of music than painting, but the temporal nature of the fleeting experience of music is paralleled by the spatial delimitation of the picture by its frame; we are aware that we are in the presence of art because it is separated from the world by its frame. And yet, as the example of music makes clear, art is primordially an aesthetic *effect*, lacking which we are inclined to conclude that the work in question is not art. It is this aesthetic effect which Kafka's text—more explicitly then a traditional literary work—takes as its object and thematizes, thus

eschewing the traditional classical scene of ritual centrality which stages for us the crisis-resolution pattern of the originary event. Like Oedipus—of whom Kafka's antihero seems to be an implied parody—the countryman arrives at the gates of culture, but unlike Oedipus he has no answer to the words of his nemesis. Indeed, as Derrida suggests,[32] he plays out the sphinx's riddle: from child (four legs), to man (two legs), to old man (three legs), and in his blindness of old-age, the gateway merely seems to shine brighter. Kafka's post-romantic parable rejects classical narrative to the point where the protagonist will not even be allowed onto the stage where all significant action primordially takes place. But this rejection of narrative is a revelation of the anteriority of textuality and the deferral of the originary sign. Kafka's incapacity to write is the recognition that the aesthetic effect is primordially detemporalizing. The teleological thrust of narrative follows on the aesthetic moment, but only at the price of destroying the aesthetic in the conclusion of the originary scene in appetitive satisfaction.

The realization that literature is not opposed but in fact in complicity with—indeed a precursor to—the modern exchange economy results in the characteristically postmodern position of art-as-quotation, or art as the endless recycling of previous art. Art, like the products of the mass-market, becomes itself a functionary of the market, where it is endlessly circulated among the desires of the periphery. Joseph K., to whom the parable "Before the Law" is also recited in *The Trial*, is both a reader of the text and a functionary in the bank—the exemplary locus of the abstract circulation of human desire. *Der Prozess*, to take the original German title, suggests more explicitly than the English the correlation between the individual as both a subject before the law, like the countryman, and a process of the law, like the guardian. The two attitudes adopted by this complementary couple, the guardian and the countryman, reflect the aporetic constitution of the self as both an individual and a part of a universal community. The resentful self is at the same time a part of the moral human community. This divided self finds its origin in the paradox of the originary sign which is performed by the individual but only constituted by the symmetrical designations of the others. Once constituted as part of this order, the self as an independent actor becomes free to engage in individual praxis. But efforts to found an anthropology on this self are necessarily always "late" representations of the originary scene. Hence Derrida argues that we are "always already" deferred from the origin. But this critique of the metaphysics of self-presence ultimately makes way for the anthropological understanding of the self as coeval with the human community. It is the achievement of modernity to

[32]See Derrida's essay "Before the Law" p. 208.

resituate this alienated Cartesian ego back on the scene of collective origin. The ego cannot return to its origin alone, as Kafka's little parable makes clear. As long as the epistemology of individual resentment maintains the upper hand, our path to the origin will be barred before the persistent deferrals of a culture that nurtures itself on individual resentments. To despair at the inaccessibility of the origin to the individual is to adopt the perspective of the countryman and of his extradiegetic counterpart Joseph K., whose own despair is mirrored in his sympathy for the countryman and his resentment toward the "deluding" role of the doorkeeper. To accept the doorkeeper's role as necessary, K. comments, is to turn "lying" into "a universal principle" (*The Trial* 220). But K. is right without realizing it. His mistake is to interpret representation as primordially a matter of correspondence with reality. Thus, he commits the characteristic error of metaphysics. Representation is indeed universal, but not in order to provide a metaphysical truth outside representation, but to defer conflict. The issue is not a question of the truth or falsity of representations, but simply, as the Priest remarks, of the necessity for representation: "'No,' said the priest [to K.], 'it is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary'" (220).

The moral of our parable arrives, characteristically, at the end of the story. The scene of human origin is not an individual phenomenon, but a collective one; culture is not created out of the desire for a "better world," but is fundamentally a response to conflict and disorder. The aesthetic response to the literary text is primordially the sublimation of the individual's resentment at not gaining the significance of the desired centre. The literary text, like the countryman's gateway, is "made only for you," the individual reader. The epistemology of resentment is also the epistemology of the individual, whose resentment it is the specific purpose of literature to sublimate. But the resentful individual is at the same time part of a universal human community—both guardian and countryman. Resentment itself can never be definitively appeased, but the lucidity of the individual's own experience as a participant in a human community nevertheless depends upon an awareness of the interdicting power of the doorkeeper. This power of interdiction lies, as we have seen, at the heart of representation and, consequently, of culture.

Kafka's short parable spans barely more than a page. But its scope, as we have seen, spans the entire history of literature and of all culture before literature, back to its birth-place in the scene of human origin. If we are to do more than furnish ourselves for the long road ahead with arbitrary commentaries on this text, like a countryman armed with bribes to persuade his local deity—a procedure which is already parodically provided for us in the text of *The Trial* itself with its extensive commentaries on the parable which "prefaces the

Law" (213)—we must interpret Kafka's text not as a mere text (which is, at the limit, impossible anyway), but as an aesthetic view of the scene of human origin. Only thus can we become the true beneficiaries of culture. The sooner we take the guardian's advice and close the door to the sacred centre that always demands our attention but gives little in return, the better; for it is only when we realize that we are all guardians of the law, that we have learned the vital lesson of not only Kafka's parable but of the origin of humankind. To stand, with the guardian, consciously "before the law" is to recognize the paradox between periphery and centre, which is ultimately to recognize, through the aesthetic experience of the originary sign, the ethical unity of the universal human community. The law implied here is indeed the law of laws, that is, the originary morality latent within the emission and reception of the originary sign. The "end of culture" is not the end of resentment or indeed of any component of the originary scene, but it is the end of literary creation and the beginning of theoretical reflection on the intuitions of the literary text. It is the thesis of generative anthropology that these intuitions, to be fully appreciated, must be contextualized in a founding hypothesis of what it means to be human, to be, that is, a participator in the culture of our times.

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Deconstruction and Originary Analysis:

Gans, Derrida, and Generative Anthropology

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July 4th, 1994

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