Mimesis, the Center and Auto-Immunology: A Review of Daniel Ross's Psychopolitical Anaphylaxis: Steps Toward a Metacosmics. Open Humanities Press 2021.

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It's long past time for originary thinking to think *technics*, which is emerging, in the wake of the work of Gilbert Simondon and Bernard Stiegler in particular, as a term to refer to the co-constitution of the human with the "exteriorizations" through which humans act on (and are acted upon by) the world and each other. I would like to establish the necessity to do so by pointing to a technical issue in GA, which is to say, a scaling problem. The mimetic interactions and central concepts of Girardian mimetic theory and then Gansian Generative Anthropology are

unduly tied to, first, scenes upon which all persons are present to each other (small groups) and, second, literature, especially the realist novel (and Shakespeare, as read consistently with realist novels), and to some extent, the lyric. Concepts like envy, desire and resentment are readily intelligible on this small scale: we know what it means to be envious of a neighbor, resentful of a more successful coworker, to desire the possessions or attributes of another person.

Our representational technologies are suited to this scale, but these concepts don't scale up in any obvious way. What can it mean to speak, on a social scale, of millions of people of some more or less arbitrarily designated group "resenting" millions of members of some other vaguely defined group? What do we imagine we're describing if we say something like "women resent men," "blacks resent whites," "whites resent immigrants," etc.? All members of the "resenting" group "feeling" in unison, continuously, and doing nothing but resenting? Resenting in a differentiated manner (some resent a lot, others less so, some not at all)? Occasionally resenting, while at other times going about their business? Wavering between resentment and admiration, or indifference?

As soon as we try to explain some event or history trajectory using such terms, we will find that we need to at least

mention intermediary factors, such as the media that single out objects of desire and targets of resentment and suggest actions to pursue such desires and resentments; institutions, corporate, judicial, and law enforcement, that prevent or facilitate the enactment of some desires and resentments rather than others; educational and research institutions that provide justifications and mitigations of one or another desire or resentment, and so on. All these institutions involve technics, that is, mediations that serve as material memories of shared human practices. I don't think it can be said that there is any sustained thinking of technics in GA, and we can't scale up without it; and once we do scale up, our concepts will take on a different shape, at least insofar as we apply them to the historical world.

Fortunately, the world of academic theory has turned its attention to questions of technics and technology: there is the work of Benjamin Bratton, and the Strelka research group he leads, which explores the implications of what Bratton calls "planetary scale computation"; there is Yuk Hui, who in several books has followed post-Heideggerian discussions of technology through discussions of cybernetics, recursivity, Western and Chinese ethics and aesthetics, and Chinese thought on technics; design theorists like Beatrice Colomina, historians of our growing integration into informational systems like Orit Halpern or researchers into the ethical and political dilemmas of

algorithmic rule like Louise Amoore, Taina Bucher and many others. If I have to generalize, I would say that what powers these discussions is a willingness to discard a squeamishness regarding the potentially totalitarian implications of modern technology, especially those types of it that seem to extend into the remaking of subjectivity, which we have inherited from both critical theory of the Frankfurt School variant and post-structuralism—both of which seemed to be consumed with preserving some "humanity" or "unruly" subjectivity from the imposition of what Jean-Francois Lyotard called the "performativity" of all human practices. That whatever is entailed in being human is inseparable from the technical is now presupposed, and this will have important implications regarding the kinds of subjectivities that must be presupposed as a basis of liberalism and democracy: to put it simply, there can be no more external human "measure" of the justice of social and political arrangements.

Part of this new thinking of technics results from the reception of thinkers of technics like André Leroi-Gourhan and Gilbert Simondon whom one might say were marginalized by the domination of structuralism and post-structuralism, thinking that finds a kind of synthesis in the work of Bernard Stiegler, who furthermore synthesizes a critical appropriation of Derrida's "grammatology" with his reading of these precursors. The book I'm concerned with

here is by Daniel Ross, a long-time translator, explicator and colleague of Stiegler. In this ambitious book he brings to bear and extends Stiegler's thought on the entirety of our current crisis. Along the way he has an all too brief encounter with Girardian mimetic theory (unsurprisingly, no mention of Eric Gans), but I want to make the case for seeing Ross as a crucial and enabling interlocutor for those of us determined to introduce a thinking of technics into GA. To suggest briefly the lines along which I will make the case, if we can imagine speaking of mimetic crisis as death driving "entropy," and the originary event and the linguistic world emerging from it as "negentropic" (terms Stiegler and now Ross take over from systems theory and cybernetics) we already have the terms on which we can learn from Ross and perhaps teach him a few things in turn.

The technophobia of humanists and poststructuralists alike has been complemented by a "biophobia," or a terror of seeing human life as continuous with life in general. Here, as elsewhere, the founding of post-war thought on the revulsion from Nazism left its mark. It is here that Stiegler, and here Ross, identify the limits of Derridean deconstruction. Derrida, in one of most famous early articulations of "difference," in a passage referencing (briefly) Leroi-Gourhan, proclaimed the "mark," or the "gramme," as suggesting that "inscription" needs to be considered as part of the history of "life." Derrida, despite

returning repeatedly to the need to deconstruct the boundaries between life and death, animal and human, never continued this line of inquiry, preventing his project, in Ross's view, from fulfilling its early promise due to a reluctance to pursue the history of "inscription" beyond anything that could be called "writing."

Stiegler retrieves this promise of a grammatology. Rather than writing, it is, for Stigler, technics that has been suppressed by metaphysics. The very fact that it is still habitual to speak of the human as something outside of technology, and affected after the fact by it, in control of or losing control over it, demonstrates the depth of this suppression. Stiegler, drawing upon Husserlian phenomenology, and continuing Derrida's deconstruction of it, provides a simple and plausible frame for thinking technics: as retention. There is, first of all, "primary retention," which is the "memory" of the information of life itself, encoded in the genes; there is then "secondary retention," the memory of and capacity to repeat and, within limits, depending upon the degree of complexity of the organism, vary "action sequences" that are not transmitted beyond the individual animal. And there is, finally, the tertiary retention characterizing humans, in which material is inscribed with the results of the learning and experience of the human community. Technics, then, begins with the "mark" on some material, a mark that differentiates itself

from other marks and defers the meaning indicated by the mark insofar as that meaning can only be redeemed by subsequent marks.

Stiegler acknowledges the question: whence tertiary retention? He speaks of a "default of origin," which anyone cognizant of the originary hypothesis will find unsatisfactory. Stiegler comes close to recognizing the need to think about the origin in terms of an event in insisting that the "first" mark would be "accidental" but nevertheless meaningful. This is as far as Stiegler (and Ross, declaring any answer to the question of "invention" "impossible" [93]) goes—how this accidental meaningfulness, or meaningful accidentality, might have emerged, goes unexplained. Stiegler has not repudiated the "origin-phobia" that, along with the aforementioned technophobia and biophobia, have characterized post-War thinking (and in this case goes much further back). It seems he would rather think in terms of a gradual process in which humans would find themselves with tertiary retention without realizing how they came by it—as if the various "marks" made by our hominid predecessors came, imperceptibly, to take on a new character.

But that just means that the originary hypothesis has a different account of tertiary retention, of the objectification of memory in some material. Where, exactly, though? The sign itself? This is still "internal" to each individual member

of the group, even if each matches his gesture to the others. The central object is consumed and, anyway, is not really "inscribed." We can see why technics seems a much later development, rather than co-originary with the human itself —the intangible dimension of the scene, the transcendent center, seems not to rely on any lasting mark—memory is retained in the group as a whole. But, then, that must be the co-origin of technics—the configuration of the scene itself, maintained by the reciprocal coordination and holding in place of each by the others. That's a kind of inscription—the scene is the marking of each by all and all by each. The originary scene is commemorated in ritual, and the specific movements, arrangements and props that organize the scene through the accretion of the memories of the group in its ongoing dialogue with the center is the origin of technology.

Life is a struggle against entropy, which is to say, it is what Ross refers as to as the "negentropic" counter-tendency to entropy. The construction of internal systems engaged in interchange with an external environment creates regulation and self-reproduction, which is nevertheless always threatened by and always defending against the broader entropic environment. The creation of structures resistant to entropy is always improbable, then, and to that extent incalculable, an observation that will have important ethical implications for Ross. The originary hypothesis is entirely

consistent with the establishment of negentropic agencies and tendencies: mimesis is first of itself negentropic insofar as the capacity of members of a group to learn from each other enhances each member of the group's ability to resist entropic tendencies; but mimesis itself turns entropic once it interferes with other group stabilizing mechanisms (the pecking order) and, more precisely, subtracts rather than adding information regarding the action sequences of other members of the group. Some knowledge of a likely range of action sequences attributable to other members of the group (of whatever species) is essential to group stability, and what characterizes a mimetic crisis is that this knowledge becomes impossible. Maybe the other members of the group will order themselves in familiar ways, but it's at least as likely they won't and, since there's no way of knowing in this novel situation, it makes the most sense to assume the worst which, in turn, encourages all the others to assume the worst about you as well. The originary gesture is a highly improbable, indeed extraordinary, restoration of information exchange amongst members of the group and erects the tertiary retention that must henceforth be protected for its negentropic effectiveness.

I can't recall any discussions in GA that take the notion of the "scenic" literally enough to consider that scenes need to be *constructed*, and constructed in such a way as shape actions so as to keep all members of the group in conformity

with the constraints and affordances of the scene itself. The earliest ritual scenes, of course, design a scene, with props, costumes and boundaries separating the scene from what is outside of it, but also turning what is outside of the scene into potential supports for a modified or expanded scene, so as to align everyone in the relation to the center dictated by the center. In constructing scenes, material is inscribed and arranged so as to derive information from the center. If we think scenically in this way, we are prepared to enter fully into commerce with discourses such as Ross's, and provide an anthropological "density" lacking in Ross's discussion.

Such scenic thinking, that is, is what will enable GA to scale up. Indeed, rather than Ross's still subject-centered analysis of the political, which remains focused on the kinds of citizens need to sustain negentropic institutions (an important question, of course), we can argue for a more center-focused approach that tracks the successive occupations of the center, from the divine beast of the earliest human communities, through the Big Man, sacred kingship, divine kingship, empire, through to today's liberal democratic centralizing anti-centrism. We can think of the kind of scenes that need to be constructed in each case so as ensure that information flows back and forth between center and periphery.

There would be plenty of room for productive disagreements

here—a liberal case might be made, for example, to the effect that with sufficiently trained and rehearsed "actors" ("educated citizens" in a high trust society), a wide dispersal of scenes allowing for high levels of improvisation would allow for an ongoing exchange with a minimally authoritative center temporarily occupied by figures who are selected from and reintegrate back into the periphery following their tenure. This would, furthermore, direct our attention to the construction of scenes ("educational" and "media") that ensure the kinds of necessary "rehearsals." It would also keep us aware that all of us, as participants in the design of whatever scenes we contribute to, are ourselves fully products of the scenes we have rehearsed on and for, scenes designed by those whose work we continue.

Stiegler, as Ross points out, draws upon the invention of alphabetic writing, as analyzed in the work of the linguist Sylvain Auroux, to develop the concept of "grammatization," which is "Auroux's name for the process necessary for the temporal flow of speech to be turned into the spatial and material forms of alphabetic writing, necessarily involving the discrimination and analysis, not necessarily conscious, of the discrete phonetic elements that would become the letters" (38). This is critical to Stiegler's revision and continuation of the project of grammatology initiated by Derrida:

Stiegler's genius was to recognize that a process of

spatialization, materialization, discretization and analysis lies at the root, not just of the alphabetic writing that made possible the Greek *polis* and its tragedy, philosophy and democracy, but also of the industrial revolution. In the latter case, however, this was a process of grammatization applied not to the temporal flow of speech but to the temporal flow of *gesture*, and, more specifically, of the gestures of the tool-equipped hands (those hands that are the exosomatic *consequence* of the pre-hominin *foot* that becomes *implied* by the tool) of workers possessing the knowledge of how to craft material objects, from the weaver to the potter to the blacksmith and beyond. It was this gestural knowledge of the worker that had to become subject to a process of grammatization in order for the mechanization and automation of industrial manufacturing to be established in the nineteenth century. (ibid)

We can see in this discussion the prerequisite for Stiegler's notion of "proletarianization" that he sees as having accompanied industrialization, as the knowledge, tacit and inherited, as well as explicit, of workers gets expropriated and transferred to the owners and managers of machines (and of humans). The "gramme" must have preceded "grammatization"; if the gramme is the accidental/meaningful mark that defines the human variation on life then "grammatization" goes all the way back (even if we'd want to distinguish it conceptually from what Ross is

referring to here). Ritual itself involves the "discretization" of the gesture, refining so that it serves more effectively in the "mnemotechnic" practice that is ritual—and a ritual will be more or less effective depending upon how it is designed so as to preserve the memory of everything that has "worked" in previous scenes, in response to disruptive events.

Moreover, ritual is meant to do something and make something happen, even if what it makes happen is not exactly what the participants imagine it does (is not the same true to some extent with technology?), so to think of technology as emerging out of ritual as a new way of eliciting information from the center is not really a stretch. The break from ritual that will eventually make a genuine technical thought and practice possible would, then, involve those occasions on which some sovereign actor must act upon either his own or another community as such—such external organization could not be covered by internal ritual arrangements. So, such events as conquest, war, and the levying of mass labor armies is what would "liberate" technics from its ritual origins. Technology would still be a practice of materializing memory, but in this case memory of those external interventions which discretized gesture for some unprecedented purpose.

Meanwhile, the expropriation of the knowledge of workers brought about by grammatization does make possible new

forms of knowledge—knowledge of the results of grammatization itself, which involves the creation of a system of references, which can themselves be compressed into more complex references, of the more or less automated practices comprising the system. The problem is that the transition from one form of knowledge to the next is far from "automatic," and in the meantime can generate significant amounts of resentment towards a newly interventionist and imperious center. The establishment of new pedagogical relations necessary for the transition is costly and uncertain, since it is inevitably unprecedented itself, and can be easily seen as part of the same expropriation it aims at ameliorating and then converting it into genuine social advances. It seems very likely that the new industrializing elites will focus directly on simply immunizing the new arrangements against this disruptive resentment, thereby further disqualifying and alienating the displaced target populations.

The necessary scenic conditions, that is, are daunting. This is part of the "pharmacological" nature of all transformations in the social "exoskeleton," in which what is medicine is also poison. Ross has a long and interesting discussion of the way industrializing society directly accesses and manipulates the "limbic system" as a means of social control (further proletarianization, this time of the intellect), but I think we can frame the problem he's pointing to more simply.

The fully technological (post-ritual) system relies upon a steady flow of reliable "information," that is, signs that can be immediately put to some use (and therefore quickly become useless). Ross, following Stiegler, insists on a very sharp distinction between "information" and "knowledge," and I think we could say that information is the direct descendant of ritual insofar as its use is measured by the immediate transformation it effects.

But information can be, like currency, constantly pumped into the system so as to become "useful" in simulated, ritual-like ways, while being ultimately worse than useless, that is, harmful. We could say that much political information is like this, as it is used to stage polarizing scenes that are meaningless in the strict sense that the outcome of the events staged changes nothing while the constant "rush" of information builds an "addiction" to more such information. Knowledge, meanwhile, we can now say, synthesizing Ross's analysis with my previous reworking of "scenic thinking," is more a descendent of myth and involves "rehearsing for the improbable." This is indeed very difficult because it requires that one defer the direct investment in the polarizations of the moment and learn to look for what, in terms of those information-driven scenes, would be improbable in terms of those scenes but provides the resources for a "organology" that would remediate the scenic conditions of social participation.

The "cosmos" in Ross's subtitle refers to the Greek word for an order that generates and finds sufficient for its self-regulation knowledge of actors directly involved in the interactions comprising the order. The challenge of the contemporary world is, in fact, to scale up a "cosmic" order to global dimensions. Ross provides a sustained and subtle critique of Friedrich Hayek's pretensions to be supportive of such an (market) order against a state-led command economy (an exogenous, or "taxis" order), but, by associating "cosmos" with the self-regulation offered by the cybernetic autonomization not only of functions within the market but markets themselves, lays the theoretical groundwork for today's neoliberal imposition (often state mandated) of "market" imperatives (really, subjected to the calculations of global financial institutions) on all spheres of life. And this expropriation is predicated, paradoxically, on the naturalization of what are necessarily artificial socio-economic relations:

Hayek's version of the cosmo-local is therefore fundamentally based on a *denial* of Stiegler's demonstration that the *condition* of all neganthropic order *is* artificial and that the function of neganthropic reason arises and can arise only from processes of artificial selection, where shifts in these processes *disrupt* existing systems and existing forms of knowledge, and therefore present a *problem* requiring the *care-ful reinvention of knowledge* and not just the

assumption that existing knowledge guarantees successful adjustment to changed economico-technological conditions. (264)

At this point, Ross's very ambitious book is taking on the global economy, which it's hard to imagine anyone, at this point, seeing as very just or functional. Whatever one's politics and whatever one's views of inequality, social justice, or the question of climate change (Ross's book is published in a series entitled *CCC2 Irreversibility*, predicated upon addressing a crisis in the progress of climate change), there is clearly much to be addressed in a global economy in which most activity is controlled by a few dozen mega-corporations with no imperative other than maintaining control over economic activity and beholden to no sovereign power (only perhaps a few of which could exercise any control, and that only through very intrusive and coercive mechanisms).

Ross advocates a transition to what he calls a "contributory economy," without saying very much about what that looks like or how to get there. Ross's book is refreshingly free of cant and NGO-speak about "strengthening democratic institutions," "renewing citizenship," etc., but he also doesn't have much to say about political institutions, especially the state. There's a real problem here, because if one gets serious and hopes to be precise about agencies capable of

bringing about any kind of change without collapsing into laughable clichés about "grass-roots movements," one ends up fixing one's eyes on the very figures who seem to be the problem—those with power.

This is another way of saying that Ross, while admirably avoiding the trap of indulging in yet another set of political fantasies involved in "decentralization," does not want to discuss the center. Stiegler, or, for that matter, Peter Sloterdijk, whom Ross invokes later on to talk about the immunological disorders that seem to be accelerating entropy and "anthropy" (the dispossession of the "endogenous" knowledge needed to construct and maintain negentropic orders), seems to leave him bereft here. Ross here invokes an anti-metaphysical tradition of thought that he traces from Empedocles through Nietzsche and Freud, that would see reality as composed of a perpetual struggle between opposing forces, with this mode of thought enabling the "metacosmical" program Ross calls for.

All this remains within contemporary philosophical debates: what tensions, exactly, are to be "composed" in such a way as to ensure the kind of "localizations" required for endogenous knowledge production? Thinking scenically and mimetically can help here as well. Indeed, if we are suffering from "anaphylaxis," that is, an exaggerated and potentially deadly response of the body to some disturbance that is not

really that dangerous, can we not attribute this over-reaction to the anti-"totalitarian" fervor that has guided Western politics since WW II? Doesn't any stance or proposal that reminds too many people (that triggers recognition in the exosomatic or institutional memory) of one or another of the totalitarian enemies (Nazi Germany and "fascism" in WW II and the USSR in the Cold War) send the political and ideological system into overdrive, sending out antibodies that extirpate anything the liberal democratic order considers anomalous?

This auto-immune disorder has the paradoxical result of attacking every form of social attachment that can't be "read" by the "programs" created by the neoliberal algorithm, with the result that the means of identifying and neutralizing potentially threatening antigens (like social media TOS violation determinations and the priorities of the intelligence and police agencies with which they are linked) are increasingly centralized precisely as a function of the reigning anti-centerism (any decision that comes transparently from a responsible center triggers the release of antibodies). That more and more books, like Ross's, explore these questions without seeming to worry too much whether they are too "like" either "extreme" may be a sign that some autoimmune adjustment is possible. We may be ready to devote our political resources to something other than mopping up after either of the two great 20th century

conflicts.

What we need to "care" about in order to transition to the "contributory," to be blunt, is a pathological anti-centerism. (We could say that the "West" is best defined, not in terms of shuffling around various definitions of "freedom," but as the first social order that sought to maintain a perpetual opposition to any settled center.) This is an anti-centerism so pathological that even those who actually occupy the center are devoted to it—no person in power, whether elected official or member of any one of the numerous "committees" and "commissions" claiming the right to plan our future offers any form of legitimation that doesn't involve fighting against some other more powerful center. Everyone wants power to fight the power, without ever wanting to acknowledge that this constitutes an admission that there will always be power.

Not only does each national state use every crisis and pseudo-crisis to reach more deeply into every aspect of its subject's lives (and, therefore, Ross wants to point out, subjectivities), but the fact that the summer of 2020 saw "Black Lives Matter" demonstrations across the world, regardless of racial composition or race relations in all those countries, indicates that much of the world would like to look on the US as a de facto world government, even if cynically, as a way of gaining leverage. Our own contribution to this

crisis of the center is to advance, as an economic and political principle, one of the simplest imaginable principles: emulation. Someone you look up to is someone "programming events" you would like to "contribute" to. And someone you don't or can't look up to, but who is nevertheless in power, can be presented with the demand to become worthy of emulation. This is how you turn poison into medicine: study people in their social roles with an interest in everything that might make them actionable models.

I'm not talking about some anodyne "character matters" political pablum or, if we want to apply that label, we'd have to keep in mind that only someone who fills his office is worthy of emulation, and to fill one's office is to assume all its formal powers and responsibilities and expose all attempts by informal and "behind the scene" actors to interfere with the exercise of those powers. Ross has nothing to say about ritual, as his notion of a small scale "cosmic" order seems to draw upon models such as the medieval city or small town, but ritual order is equally endogenous while involving more of a "prayerful" than a "careful" relation, not just to other members, but to the center.

A prayer involves an exchange of imperatives: tell me how to serve you. At its most refined, or most "technical," the imperative exchange enacted in prayer distills itself into

something like “help me to know how to donate to you.” This is an exchange prior to any market and an exchange that is a genuine “composition” insofar as the relationship is nothing more than the exchange itself. Moreover, such an exchange relation is the proper relation to those whom we emulate or would emulate or, for that matter, to those who might emulate us.

If such relations are impossible and even unthinkable, well, then, that is what needs to be remedied, and if you want to say that doing so is impossible and unthinkable, I will simply respond by saying all the familiar bromides regarding freedom, democracy, citizenship, justice and so on are far more so, and nonsensical and ultimately vicious as well. They all represent fantasies of a more real order that will some day be able to shake off the center: I’m not obeying any orders from you until you’ve provided me with a full account of the infrastructures ungirding your power (how you came by it, with whose help, in whose interest, at whose expense, in conformity with or denial of which legal mechanisms or principles…)—to my satisfaction, of course. This is the resentment that scales up and proliferates virally across the social and political order without regard to distinctions between right and left. More local resentments, of the kind that provide the material for pulp media narratives, are mere “spin-offs” of this more general one.

Within the current "organological" arrangements, the most urgent medium of exchange between center and periphery is *data*. Any decision anyone, at any level of the social order, has to make, whether it regards corporate governance in turbulent times or which private nursery school to try and enroll your child in (or, needless to say, whether to take—or mandate—a particular vaccine) will depend upon readily available, competently packaged, and "legible" data. We all know about the intense interest companies and the social media companies gathering "intelligence" on their behalf have in our personal data; governments are no less interested in such data, to the point where traditional ways of thinking about privacy and civil liberties seem pathetically outdated.

We as individuals are equally (desperately) dependent upon reliable data from power centers, whether they be governments, corporations, or other institutions like universities—or, for that matter, "rogue" sources we may trust more but themselves must claim some access to secure data banks. Data is becoming more currency than currency itself; indeed, isn't one of the virtues attributed to money that it provides reliable and up-to-date information on the field of social desires and distribution of resources and labor capacities? As money becomes more malleable, it can perhaps be massaged so as to become more akin to data gathered elsewhere within what Benjamin Bratton calls

the planetary scale computation that draws upon ubiquitous sensing, measuring, and calculating devices. We need data to design the many scenes on which we act, and thinking in terms of data exchange will help us to mind Ross's injunction to strive for a genuinely "cosmological" order in which the integrity of each node of "individuation" (individual, family, community, institution, locality, nation, transnational organization, etc.) as a site of data curation is acknowledged precisely in the name of a more "intelligent" as well as more "idiomatic" (that is, differentiated) order. Every one of us does know things about our respective milieus that no one else does, even if it may sometimes be the case that the proper questioning or framing is required to elicit such knowledge.

So, rehearsing for the improbable means enhancing one's curatorial capacities so that one is increasingly competent in providing data that might be of use to the center and sifting through the data that comes at one through the center. This may sound banal, and I hope there is something commonsensical and readily accessible to such a "politics," but the kind of practice I have in mind involves a whole range of difficult judgments regarding how to inquire, whom to trust, how to make oneself worthy of trust, what to disclose, when, and to whom, and endless learning regarding the creation, encoding, protecting and distributing of data. It requires "imagining" expanded scenes, upon which the data

one has at hand might take on very different meanings as it is included in very different data sets over time and across space within the various mnemotechnical institutions.

And it requires the habit of treating as data what is not ordinarily seen as such, like one's everyday use of language, which, in a sense is where all data exchange finds its terminus. Think about what it would mean to gather, in various formal and informal ways, at different scales, data regarding what "following an order" "means" today (a very Wittgensteinian question, but one brought into history). The orders you receive and comply with or resist, and those you yourself give and find obeyed or not in varying degrees and manners might be your starting point. But your inquiry could lead you to examine the vast expanse of the current order. At stake is our basic linguistic knowledge, upon which all other data collection, curation, and interpretation depends—if we can't say that we know what it means to follow an order, what can we say we know? Restoring such basic linguistic capacities is the first order of business in contributing to the kind of "metacosmos" Ross would have us turn our sights to.

For GA, meanwhile, this focus on data exchange serves as a reminder that we are always on a scene, even if the scenes upon which we act today are more likely to be disciplinary research scenes than ritual ones. A scene is a scene—it is bounded, it is "set," it positions actors in relation to each

other with some kind of shared attention toward a center—even if that shared attention needs to be located by someone outside of the scene, a spectator, which is itself merely another scene, but one that can be represented within the spectated scene. We can scale up and scale down as much as is necessary—what counts as data, or a "sample," will differ from scene to scene, even if it's the "same" object presented differently at the center of different scenes. What we determine to treat as data provides an ostensive anchor to any scene. Data exchange therefore names a mode of deferral suited to this more thoroughly industrialized age, as we must always act on the data we have and the analysis we've made of it, while keeping in mind that data continues to come in and might dictate some new programming at any moment. It's therefore helpful in dispersing the various on and off line mobs that gather under the influence of various information "highs." It enables us, that is, to model ways of thinking and acting worthy of emulation, so that GA can become integral to the contributory economy.

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