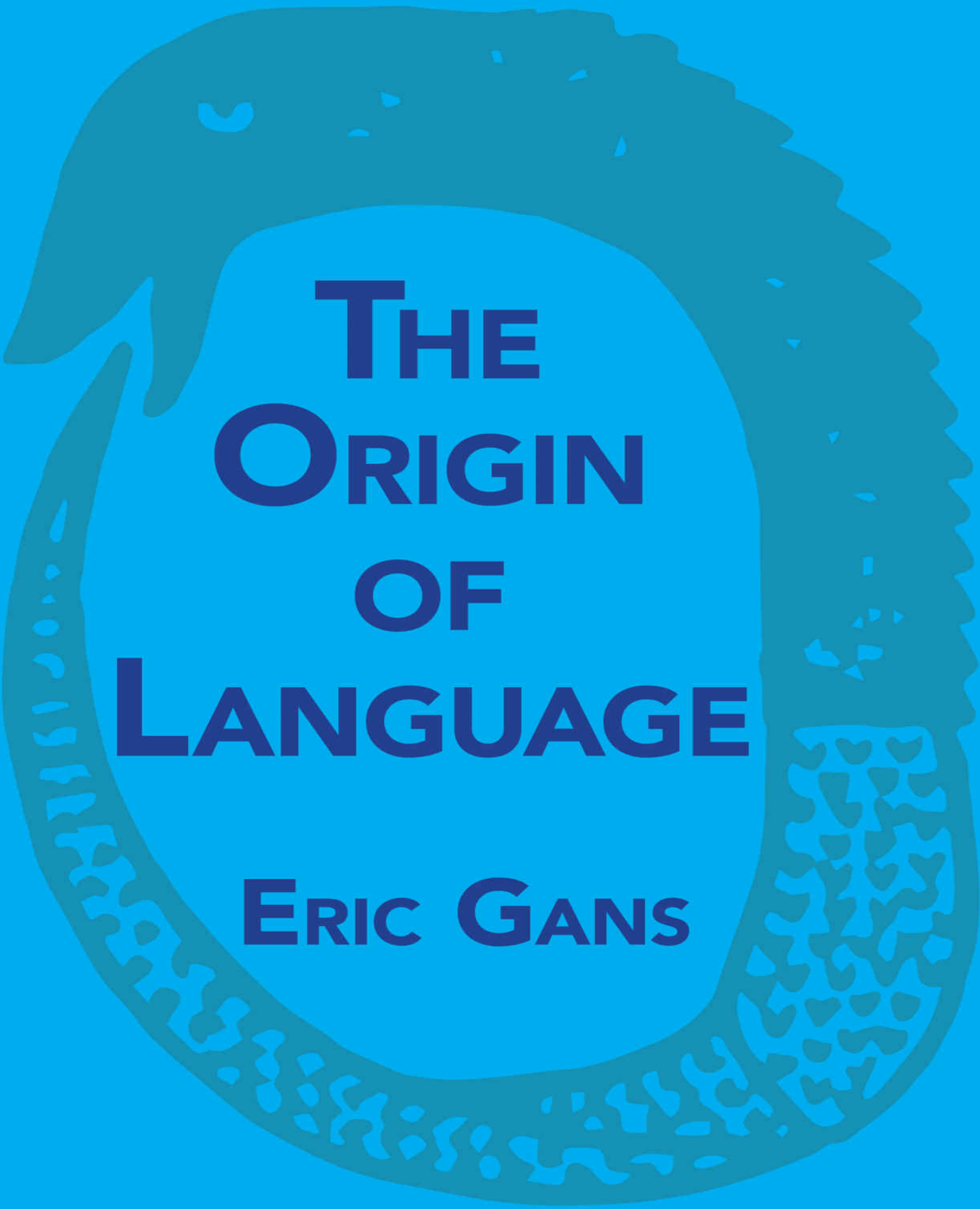

The Origin of Language

Eric Gans

A New Edition

Introduction by Adam Katz

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Spuyten Duyvil

Introduction:

The Origin of Language and the Anthropological Imagination

In this new edition of *The Origin of Language*, originally published in 1981, Eric Gans provides a hypothesis for the origin of language, and then extends that hypothesis to account for the most fully developed linguistic form, the declarative sentence. In doing so, he shows how the earliest human group would have gone from using a single, “ostensive” sign, to a variety of ostensive signs, to the use of imperatives and then, finally, the declarative sentence.

It is astonishing that no one had ever considered the necessity of doing something like this, much less attempted it, because how else could one have imagined that humans would have gone from no language at all to such complex linguistic structures as the subject-predicate relation comprising the declarative sentence? Gans shows how the sequence he follows here is the only plausible way of imagining the evolution of the earliest linguistic forms, and he does so by analyzing the sequences in intricate detail, addressing everything that is necessary to account for linguistic evolution, and nothing that isn’t. *The Origin of Language* remains as completely original and unprecedented (and intellectually demanding and satisfying) today as when it was originally published, so much so as to constitute a kind of intellectual scandal.

In all of the decades in which immense intellectual energy has been put into “dismantling” and “deconstructing” metaphysics, hardly a single one of our leading thinkers has found it necessary to address the startlingly simple definition provided by Gans: *metaphysics is the assumption that the declarative sentence is the primary linguistic form*. And if you assume that the declarative sentence is the primary linguistic form, you will never think to ask, or to think one can ask, whence it derived—even if a moment’s reflection must convince us that it must have derived from some previous linguistic form. If you don’t ask these elementary questions, you remain within metaphysics, regardless of how you have “implicated” it in power relations, or Eurocentrism, or technology, or whatever. Gans, in this book, stays focused on the dialectic of the linguistic forms, without many side comments on metaphysical obfuscation, because how could he point out that every moment in that dialectic is obscured by metaphysical assumptions and still get on with the only work that could really clear out those assumptions?

I hope that the effect of this publication of a condensed edition of Eric Gans’s *The Origin of Language*, originally published by the University of California Press in 1981, will be to make Gans’s work visible. I don’t just mean “visible” in the sense of more widely available, or more effectively publicized, although those things would be nice as well. I mean “visible” in the sense of no longer occluded, conceptually, by the reigning “language games” and “problematics” in the human and social sciences. We have known for a long time that inquiry takes place within a Gestalt, or frame, that makes some things visible, other things obvious and other things invisible or unthinkable. That’s why science advances through “epistemological breaks” that don’t just correct previous mistaken conclusions, but reorganize the entire field on conceptual terms. For there to be any possibility that this will happen, though, discoveries must be made that, as Michael Polanyi argued, “must be not only true, but also interesting, and more particularly, interesting to science” (66). What is “interesting” is generally what continues along the paths already laid out by scientific authority and tradition, reinforced institutionally in many ways.

Polanyi provides an example of how scientific theories get sorted out into “interesting” and “not interesting” from the reception of “a paper by Lord Rayleigh, published in *The Proceedings of the Royal Society* in 1947”:

It described some fairly simple experiments which proved, in the author’s opinion, that a hydrogen atom impinging on a metal wire could transmit to it energies ranging up to a hundred electron volts. Such an observation, if correct, would be far more revolutionary than the discovery of atomic fission by Otto Hahn in 1939. Yet when this paper appeared, and I asked various physicists’ opinions about it, they only shrugged their shoulders. They could not find fault with the experiment, yet they not only did not believe its results, but did not even consider it worthwhile to consider what was wrong with it, let alone check up on it. They just ignored it. About ten years later some experiments were brought to my notice which accidentally offered an explanation of Lord Rayleigh's findings. His results were apparently due to some factors of no great interest, but which he could have hardly have identified at the time. He should have ignored his observation, for he ought to have known that there must be something wrong with it. The rejection of implausible claims has often proved mistaken, but safety against this danger could be assured only at the cost of permitting journals to be swamped by nonsense. (65) What makes a claim "implausible" is its misfit with the prevailing research program, and Polanyi's example is of a case where that misfit turned out to be a reliable indicator of the observation's falsity. But if such rejection proves mistaken, what remedies are available? In the physical sciences, we might be able to expect self-correction and what Polanyi calls "mutual control" to maintain steady progress towards a more truthful and comprehensive understanding of the natural world; at any rate, it serves no purpose of mine to contend otherwise here. In the human sciences, though, "interesting" is a far more loaded term, as is "implausible," since these sciences contain far more disagreement regarding the basic assumptions of what constitutes a legitimate research program, and are far less able to control for (and perhaps should not exactly "control for") the moral, ethical, religious and political convictions of the inquirer. The only remedies here lie in pointing out the sources of the refusal to grant sufficient "interest" and "plausibility" to an observation to make it worth one's while to even "check up on it." These sources would be "obstacles" to scientific thought, of the kind Gaston Bachelard "psychoanalyzes" in his *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*. In this case, the identification of such obstacles would not only aid in making the more genuinely scientific theory more visible, but would serve as a demonstration of the power of the theory. I will right away give a name to the primary obstacle, which includes the others I will mention below: the *anthropomorphism of the human*, that is, the explanation of human activity by qualities that rely upon the prior constitution of the human, which is in turn simply taken as given. In other words, anything we could say about human beings always already presupposes beings capable of language—this capability is therefore retrojected back to the earliest models of humanity we can imagine, making entertaining an originary hypothesis that would have the human and language emerging together extraordinarily difficult.

Eric Gans's "originary hypothesis" of the origin of language runs up at every point against the anthropomorphism of the human. I think the most obvious source of opposition is the prevalence of what Gans has examined very thoroughly over the past several decades, and has recently described (in his online *Chronicle of Love and Resentment* 563, "Victimary Humanism") as "extreme humanism": what he has termed "victimary thinking." Victimary thinking, as a product of the twin iconic markers of World War II, Auschwitz and Hiroshima, frames all inequalities as instances of "oppression," to which the Nazi-Jew model can be applied, in a social and technological environment in which the potential for violence is virtually unlimited. For victimary thinking, although this may be expressed with greater or less explicitness, any "ascriptive difference," that is, any "inherent" difference between groups, portends unacceptable levels of violence. And we have more recently discovered (as Gans shows in the aforementioned *Chronicle*) that any difference can ultimately be framed as an "ascriptive" one, that is, attributed to racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, and so on. Gans's hypothesis, meanwhile, locates the origin of language and hence of the human in the unanimous acceptance of the sign as the deferral of violence on a scene of extreme mimetic danger. There is no room for "ascriptive" differences there, no way of conceiving of the scene as an "exclusionary" one, even if it is possible to conceive of it as an "uneven" one, in which the sign is repeated in different ways at different paces by the members on the scene. So, the originary hypothesis provides no foothold for victimary thinking—indeed, it seems unlikely that contemporary thinkers of the victimary could even find much use in evoking the egalitarian hunter-gatherer communities that once inspired the left, insofar as the various "exclusionary" elements of those communities are all too evident. If one were to devise a theory directly aimed at occluding the originary hypothesis, one could not do better than victimary thinking, which is perhaps why Gans has found it "interesting" and, perhaps, in its own way, "plausible": victimary thinking isolates and thereby brings into heightened focus a single moment of the originary scene, the equality or symmetry of all before the sacred center, while obscuring all other pertinent elements of the scene, such as the existence of the center itself.

The anthropomorphism of the human multiplies differences within the human, while considering the difference constitutive of the human beyond the realm of plausible inquiries. It's as if as soon as the question, why do humans engage in rituals? is raised, the question is shut down by pointing to yet another ritual, different from all the others, that has been discovered. A good example of such thinking, which in its mixture of blindness and insight will also help me to clarify the conditions under which the originary hypothesis might be found both highly plausible and of the greatest possible interest, is the anthropologist C.R. Hallpike's "Rene Girard's World of Fantasy" (from Hallpike's website: hallpike.com). As the title suggests, the essay is intended as a "debunking" of Girard's theory of mimetic violence, a theory which lies at the origin of Gans's own originary hypothesis. Hallpike begins by restating Girard's theory, which "begins with the premise that all human behavior is learned, and is therefore based on imitations," and goes on to assert that mimesis leads to violence because individuals imitating each other converge on the same object of desire, and concludes by arguing that the resolution of this mimetic violence is the arbitrary selection of a scapegoat to be sacrificed as the "cause" of the violence (1-2).

Hallpike begins his critical examination by questioning this last part of the sequence, noting with surprise that Girard seems to assume that the original act of communal violence

> took place far back in prehistory before humans acquired language. The first scape-goating ritual, being pre-linguistic, was simply based on instinct, and since scape-goating is the substitution of one thing for another it is also the origin of language, since words themselves are also substitutes for things. Sacrifice and the prohibitions associated with it would have created communal peace for early hominid groups and a safe space for mothers and their babies in particular.
>
> The victimising process was therefore the missing link between the animal and human worlds that explains the humanisation of primates, and hunting and the domestication of animals were also motivated by the need for a stock of sacrificial victims. Scape-goating and sacrifice are the basis of all ritual and archaic religion generally, and archaic religion is the basis of all political and cultural institutions. Girard claims that the victimisation process is the rational principle that explains the infinite diversity of culture, and compares it to the principle of natural selection, which cannot be proved experimentally but convinces us by its great explanatory power. (2-3)

So far, Hallpike might be arguing that Girard's hypothesis is insufficient to account for the emergence of language and hence to initiate the humanization process. In that case, there would be some overlap between

Hallpike's critique of Girard and Gans's. But the "substitution of one thing for another" cannot be the origin of language, because words are not "substitutes for things"—for one thing, how would anyone know that the first word or sign was a substitute for a thing? They would already have to have language: joint attention mediated by a sign. Hallpike also makes a point of mentioning Girard's claim that "experimental proof" cannot be expected with regard to a hypothesis of origin, but we must rely on its "great explanatory power" (evidence of which it already seems Hallpike does not believe can be forthcoming). Hallpike continues:

> Girard's belief that scape-goating could have been the source of language because it involves the substitution of the arbitrarily chosen victim faces two major problems, the first of which is a simple matter of evidence, or rather the lack of it. We simply know nothing about the thought processes of early hominids such as *Homo erectus*. Nor can we imagine what the social relations of pre-linguistic *Homo sapiens* might have been either, and attempts to do so are pure speculation. Indeed, we actually have no direct evidence for when grammatical language emerged. By 'grammatical' I mean, for example, predication – the ability to say that something or someone has certain qualities; distinguishing between acting on and being acted upon; questions; negation, and referring to past and future. This raises the second problem, which is that it is hard to see how any symbolic culture would be possible at all without language. This is because the relation between a symbol and what it stands for, while drawn from nature, is not a representation of it. For example, among the Konso of Ethiopia, white is an inauspicious colour, but without language how could a group of people decide that white rather than black or some other colour should be regarded as inauspicious? (Indeed, how could the very idea of 'inauspicious' come to be understood by a group of people without language?) In fact, the Konso regard white as inauspicious because it is the colour of bone, of death, therefore, and also the colour of cotton, which ripens during the hottest and driest part of the year. Black, on the other hand, is the colour of the life-giving rain-clouds and is therefore auspicious. But these are simply one set of symbolic values and other cultures have chosen different ones. In short, Girard does not explain how symbolic culture could have existed in a pre-linguistic society. (3)

Hallpike immediately focuses on the question of evidence, but again there are a couple of possibilities here. We don't know what the thought processes or social relations of pre-linguistic hominids might have been. Hallpike seems to have in mind the kind of pre-linguistic hominid that has already gone through Girard's scapegoating event, but has not yet completed the process of acquiring language, or what we could recognize as language, as a result of that event. Fair enough, but what, exactly, do we need to do here to assess, first of all the plausibility, and even probability, of Girard's account?

Gans's originary hypothesis is predicated upon a gap in Girard's account very similar to the one Hallpike identifies here, but Gans's critique addresses the nature of language and its constitution of the human: the originary event could not be significant without being memorable, and it couldn't be memorable, which is to say it couldn't be repeated, without a sign. There is no sign in Girard's account. What does Hallpike think language is? Well, he knows that language is necessary to attribute qualities to objects, to describe relations between objects and actions, to publicly distinguish between the more and less preferable. And it is certainly true that without being able to do these things, the ritual culture Girard imagines could not have existed. But Hallpike seems uninterested in the question he has implicitly raised here—we might say he cannot even see the question: how, exactly, did it become possible for humans to do all these things? What interests Hallpike, and what we can say interests the modern anthropological imagination, is all the different ways humans have found of doing it. We could say this is a primary obstacle to seeing the originary hypothesis: the principled, constitutive fascination with "diversity" (not, of course, in the sense this takes for a contemporary HR department) precludes an interest in the originary.

I would suggest that it is that fascination which prevents Hallpike from considering that we do know quite a bit about the "social relations" of pre-linguistic, that is, pre-human hominids, and how they differ from even the most primitive human societies of which we are aware. At the very least, hominids have a pecking order determining access to food and mates; no such pecking order exists in humans. The coordination of a group against an individual is possible for human, but not for animals; hierarchies among humans are organized institutionally, not established through one-on-one confrontations. Are we forever barred, due to "lack of evidence," from constructing plausible accounts of what replaced the pecking order, and what role language might have played in the transition? Aren't some "speculations" along these lines going to be of greater explanatory and heuristic power than others, and couldn't we make those yet more powerful? You can only answer such questions in the negative if you are determined to bar the way to any inquiry into the transformation of the "pre-human" into the "human," and therefore to accept that we can never understand the constitution of the human, but only observe all the different things beings we know to be human do.

To continue:

> We can now move on to his general theory of imitation or mimesis. There is no doubt that human culture could not exist without imitation, notably by children imitating their parents and other adults. We all have a natural tendency to imitate our peers as well, and important people or classes also have a very powerful influence on fashions of all kinds. The overall effect of imitation is therefore to create social solidarity so it seems very strange, even perverse, that Girard considers it the principal basis of conflict. A fundamental weakness in his theory is that he assumes as the typical example of mimesis that only *one* object is available to be desired by the model, so that he and the imitator then inevitably come into competition over it, like the two children in the earlier example. But in fact this must be very rare, and what is far more typical is imitation of something that is readily reproduced and plentiful, such as a form of dress like a New Guinea penis-sheath, or some form of bodily decoration. We may imagine a prominent hunter who puts a streak of red ochre down his nose which is then imitated by all the other hunters in the band. Since there is plenty of red ochre to go around, how could this act of mimesis possibly bring about conflict? The obvious outcome is far more likely to be solidarity – the group now has its own emblem to distinguish itself from others.
>
> This example also reminds us that imitation by itself is quite unable to explain culture, because someone has first to create or discover the desirable things that are imitated. The hunter who first put the red stripe down his nose, the child who first noticed the interesting toy, and the man who carved the Lion Man statue were all creators, not

> imitators. Societies, too, potentially have a wide range of traits which can be imitated, and this means that people must *choose* in some way between these possibilities. Here again, mimesis is not enough to explain the facts. (4-5)

In addition to imitation, there is creation and/or discovery—after all, there has to be something to be imitated in the first place. Mimetic theory would therefore be reductive—there is a fundamental element of culture that it would fail to account for. But there is either some non-mimetic theory that enables us to account for the origin of such creations and discoveries, especially of the non-utilitarian variety of Hallpike's examples, or we work within mimetic theory in order to account for this possibility. Otherwise, we are just left to say that lots of things cause lots of things, which would mean that the presumably scientific insistence on "evidence" would lead us to proceed in a way that no real science does.

Moreover, Hallpike's objection here is far from insurmountable. The one who discovers or creates something new might very well be imitating the process of discovery or creation witnessed in another. This is especially plausible insofar as the most immediate purpose of such discovery or creation, as Hallpike implicitly concedes here, is to defer conflict through the generation of signs that can be shared—something we all learn as language users, if we accept the plausibility of the hypothesis that language emerged to address just such a contingency. Even more, if the first sign was itself an imitation, but an imitation that inverted the intentional arc of the gesture it imitated, by turning a gesture of appropriation into one of renunciation, then the very choice between possibilities (violent vs. non-violent ways of imitating) would "always already" be built into language.

As for the "weakness" in Girard's account, Hallpike surely can't claim that it is never the case that there is, in fact, only one object, or that some objects are preferable to other, even very similar ones, in all kinds of ways for all kinds of reasons; or, most importantly, that the process of imitation itself couldn't generate desires that exceed possession of a desirable object and lead one to focus on the model himself as a rival. Here is where some credit to the anthropological insight offered by literature and the esthetic more generally would be a helpful addition to Hallpike's undoubtedly prodigious erudition. And why would this very valuable skill of replicating desirable objects have been created or discovered in the first place if not for fear of other, undesirable, outcomes of mimetic desire? Again, a kind of allergy to the originary presents itself as an insuperable obstacle to considering some very interesting questions and equally plausible answers. To be an anthropologist, or to inhabit the anthropological imagination, seems to involve the circularity of knowing what a human being *is* because you know what human beings *do*, with knowledge of the human therefore being a matter of the accumulation of details.

Beyond this, much of Hallpike's critique of Girard is reasonable, and accords with Gans's counter-assertion that the human sacrifice Girard places at the origin of humankind didn't emerge until much later—an observation central to Gans's radical reconfiguration of Girard's originary scene. (And I'll mention that Gans himself works through a great deal of anthropological and historical material in accord with his hypothesis in *The End of Culture*.) All Hallpike can really do, though, is analyze all kinds of different ways in which various societies control violence and engage in ritual and sacrifice. Why controlling violence is so central to all human societies doesn't get addressed—indeed, there's no way to address it. So, Hallpike ridicules Girard's "obsession with violence"—after all, it's not the only thing that concerns societies—far from it! Here, the obstacle in the way of perceiving the originary hypothesis is a refusal of paradoxical thinking.

To be "obsessed with violence" is to give violence too central a role in human affairs—to "see it everywhere" (to find it too "interesting" and "plausible"). But wouldn't such an obsession with violence lead to the creation of means to defer and minimize it, and to identify and deflect even the most preliminary movements toward the violent resolution of conflicts? And, therefore, to elaborately constructed social orders, with constraining rituals, kinship relations, traditions and social obligations that aim at making violence less and less "thinkable"? In which case, the result of an obsession with violence would be the marginalization of violence, a marginalization which social theorists, whose own social role is predicated upon such marginalization, would help to obscure? This line of thinking could itself be denounced as "obsessive," but at least it is a line of thinking, one that takes us from a defining human characteristic (learning through mimesis) through an observable consequence of that characteristic (conflict over the objects we teach each other to desire) and a means of resolving that consequence (through representation, as the deferral of violence). Is there an alternative to this line of thinking other than "lots of people do lots of things in lots of different ways"? I am calling for an epistemological break here, one which would redefine what counts as "evidence" (and what such evidence would be evidence of), in the interest of a "research program" that might turn out to be "plausible" after all.

I haven't yet said anything about this book in particular, as I am first of all interested in the conditions of possibility that it be read. What Gans does here is what Hallpike seems to assume cannot be done: account for the emergence of "grammatical language," and in particular predication. The obstacle posed by the allergy to the originary is particularly tenacious here, and is further aligned with the investment in victimary thinking. The two obstacles are in fact one, and we will further "economize" by saying the resistance to paradoxicality, or, perhaps, to dialectics, which is to say the study of repetition producing difference, is also implicated.

Modern philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau used quasi-originary models, but it was always understood that events such as the "social contract" were not to be taken as having really happened—they were just models, extrapolations from the social relations seen to be emergent from, or resistant to, the new bourgeois society. In fact, these models were directly opposed to, even while opportunistically referencing, versions of origin coming from Biblical sources. But even such models eventually became too "toxic," as they essentialized and prioritized human capacities that inevitably privileged one group over others—who benefits, after all, from representing "human nature" as intrinsically and fundamentally self-interested and acquisitive? Those best at acquiring, naturally. Such tautologies will be found in any model that eschews the originary, while the institutional and social investments in these models contributes to rendering invisible the originary thinking that would not only point out the tautology but show how to transcend it.

Today's predominant intellectual habit, outside, perhaps, of those working out models meant to serve primarily practical purposes in, say, economics or communications, is to identify the implicit "originary" assumption in any model of human activity and direct attention "obsessively" to whomever we can imagine might be victimized by it. The habit is too deeply rooted to allow for a moment's hesitation, in which one might ask whether a model that doesn't victimize is possible. It may be that victimary anti-models are not all that different from the liberal models they supplant—if you try to present a model of human interaction that starts with the human defined outside of any social interaction, you will inevitably project the humanist anthropomorphisms most present to you—there's no way social interests and power plays could fail to enter into the equation. All victimary thinking does, in insisting upon an even more complete assumption of equality, is take the model at its word and demand that some such model be imposed upon real inequalities (blind, of course, to the fact that such imposition, even if possible, would generate a new set of inequalities).

In Gans's model, there is no human prior to the shared relation to the center. Now, to accept what, after all, seems in accord with common sense, that there must have been a moment when there was no language and then one when there was language, that some event must have gotten us from one moment to the next, and that we can speculate more or less plausibly on what that event might have been, is to raise a series of subsequent questions: since that initial sign couldn't have been a full blown language, what kind of sign was it? And, then, how might we have gotten from that sign to other signs, that would look more and more like the languages we know? The more real and interesting these questions become, the harder it is to dismiss them as "idle" speculation, and the less compelling the absence of any direct evidence for any of this becomes. And the startling and yet completely plausible line of reasoning (no one has ever even thought of doing what Gans does here) provides no way to project one's own anthropomorphisms back on these hypothetical language users considered solely as language users, with "language" defined in the most minimal fashion as the deferral of violence. And if all were to eschew their anthropomorphisms, the need for a radical reconstruction of the human sciences might become evident. After all, can one point to a single model in the human sciences that doesn't rely upon an ultimately indefensible model or set of assumptions regarding the constitution of the "human"?

Dismissing an originary model for lack of evidence overlooks the fact that there's no real evidence for things like social "structures" and "systems" either (certainly no one has ever observed one), and yet such terms are used unproblematically, taken on faith, to make sense of the patterns we construct out of the endless sprawl of human activity. The concepts we use to theorize social orders register the effects of innumerable unwitnessed and unrecorded actions, and we assume that various common threads unite them. In making sense of regularities, what we really have faith in is repetition, since if every event were absolutely singular we could make sense of nothing. But repetition must produce differences, otherwise nothing would ever happen. So, our faith is in differential repetition. Now, differential repetition is the way signs work: a word must be the "same" in order to be that word, but it must be different to mean something here and now. And differential repetition is precisely the way Gans traces the successive emergence of the elementary linguistic forms, the imperative from the ostensive and the declarative from the imperative. Gans shows how the various uses of the ostensive sign follow from the possibilities already implicit in its initial "invention," and that this proliferation of uses eventually leads to a use that converts the ostensive into an imperative; likewise, charting the new social relations, desires, and forms of "dialogue" generated by the range of uses implicit in the imperative, Gans shows how the declarative sentence, that is, predication, would emerge.

Part of the difficulty in appreciating Gans's account is that of imagining language before it was language. It's one thing to place oneself, imaginarily, within the ritual and mythological world of archaic peoples, and "dispossess" ourselves of the conceptual and moral assumptions that interfere with us doing so; it is far more challenging to dispossess ourselves of grammar so as to see the subject-predicate relation as one that must have emerged, or been created. And Gans makes no concessions here, and resists absolutely the anthropomorphism of the human: the imperative was already a possibility implicit in the ostensive, but the users of the ostensive didn't "want" to issue commands, finally finding a way of doing so; nor did the users of imperative seek out in their linguistic resources the means for "describing" something out there, for in what language would they have expressed this desire? Whatever is characteristic of "ostensive," "imperative," or "declarative" culture becomes evident in the emergence of these forms, even if our account of this linguistic dialectic relies upon its result, fully developed language.

For the linguistic forms to take hold, they must have been intentional, but this intentionality, like that of language itself, must have been discovered in the event of its creation—we must refrain from the metaphysical, anthropomorphizing habit of projecting the new form back into some immanence (a "faculty") already present in the previous form. And this kind of thinking is what Gans, I think, means by "dialectical" in his analyses of the dialectic of the linguistic forms. The "method," one might say, is to find the most minimal "accident" or "mistake" that would be an accident or mistake *of that form*, and that would generate a new, self-contained form that could not have emerged without nor been imagined within the previous one. The new form emerges when someone treats the mistake as a new intention.

And we are capable of treating a mistake as a new intention because, as language users, our highest priority is to maintain what Gans calls here "linguistic presence," which is to say, the repetition of the shared attention produced on the originary scene. Ultimately, we are still participants on that scene. Our faith is that in sustaining linguistic presence by tacitly retrieving the scene, we will preserve at least the possibility of the peace promised on the scene, the possibility of the deferral of violence, however limited. And it is this faith that a reader of this book must summon up in order not only to find it interesting and plausible, but to realize its incredibly far-reaching implications, some of them pursued in Gans's many subsequent books, but many others yet to be explored.

In Gans's analysis, we are never outside of the space of shared linguistic presence, inappropriate uses of signs that threaten to disrupt linguistic presence, and recovered and discovered intentions that restore linguistic presence by introducing a new form of social interaction. At each point along the way, Gans's analysis follows the implication of the newly emergent speech form for the evolving structure of language as an increasingly flexible cultural form. For example, he points out that by attributing to the imperative "nascent grammaticality"

> the situation of the imperative on the grammatical scale between the ostensive and the declarative follows immediately. The ostensive is meaningless in the absence of its referent; the declarative can do without a real-world referent. The imperative operates in the absence of its object-nominal or -verbal, but can be satisfied only upon the object's being made present. The declarative stands at the end of the scale of grammaticality as the telos of linguistic evolution, after which no substantial progress is possible. This explains, if it does not excuse, the grammarians' inclination to treat all other forms as imperfect declaratives irrespective of their evolutionary status. (49)

Gans consistently points out the ways in which the completed and "obvious" nature of our grammar gets in the way of imagining that grammar itself must have evolved somehow. Here, he looks at one axis of this evolution: language's relation to a "real-world referent." By establishing the spectrum between the absolute necessity of and the lack of any need of such a referent, the strong plausibility of the imperative having come between the ostensive and the declarative is established. Gans then points out the effects of this development upon grammar:

> As we have noted, the ostensive makes no formal distinction between verbals and nominals; because verbality proper is a quality of predicates, the very term "verbal" is at this stage an anachronism. . . Yet the fact that in mature languages the imperative is always considered to be a form of the verb, and that nominal imperatives like "Scalpel!" are categorized, if at all, as elliptical forms of the verbal imperative ("[give me the] scalpel!"), cannot simply be attributed to the perversity of grammarians. What it demonstrates is that by subordinating the appearance of the desired object to the *action* of the interlocutor, the imperative has already taken a major step in the direction of predication. (49)

So, we go from an absence of formal distinctions to the preliminary form of such a distinction. Again, Gans points out how these distinctions are made in standard grammar, showing both the elisions effected by the naturalization of grammar and the way in which the reality of linguistic evolution imposes itself upon grammatical categories, despite the lack of comprehension on the part of grammarians of why, exactly, they must make such distinctions. A little bit later on, Gans points to the implications for the emergence of the human community of the emergence of the imperative out of the ostensive:

> The scene of representation, once established in the originary event, can be recreated between any two members of the community, because once the protection of nonviolent presence vested in the sacred object is deemed to extend over nonritual communication within the community, the size of the group involved would be unimportant. In the originary event that gives birth to human desire, the individual desires of the participants for the sacred object cannot be satisfied; the object can only be revered/possessed in common, leaving a residue of resentment. In contrast, the imperative form overtly expresses such desire qua desire, which is to say, claims for it potentially communal significance.

> Thus the imperative is a more “secular” mode than the ostensive, one more oriented to the practical world. Its existence alongside the ostensive allows for continued dialogue—for example, the surgeon’s conversation with the assistant who passes him the requested instruments: “Scalpel!” – “Scalpel!” “Forceps!” – “Forceps!” and so on. This was not possible with the ostensive, which outside the ritual context is rather a means for revealing an unexpected presence than for facilitating continued action. It is indeed difficult to imagine a cooperative work situation without the imperative, the use of which would tend to contribute to the lexical categorizing of necessary implements and therefore to their distinctly cultural quality as tools. (51-2)

The ostensive form creates and is created by community, and does so through the renunciation and transcendence of desire, of shared “reverence.” The imperative is the more secular form, and dispenses with reverence, openly presenting desire as such. There is no room for dialogue in the ostensive, as the object is what it is and what it must be to sustain the shared space of peace; the imperative initiates dialogue and action, serving utilitarian purposes and treating reality as manipulable. It is, I would suggest, worth considering the implications of taking these opposed dispositions toward reality and towards others (“idealistic” vs “realistic,” “worshipful” vs. “cynical,” and so on) and treating them as the effects of interdependent grammatical forms that followed one another in a sequence and for reasons we can determine with great plausibility.

All this has been under the “intentional form” of the imperative. “Intentionality” is used in Gans’s discussion to refer to the shared attention to the object, including the respective relation of various participants on the scene to the object via desire, and the relation between the participants on any scene with regard to priority—who saw the object first and pointed it out to the other. In moving on to the grammatical form of the imperative, Gans shows how the grammatical features of tense and person, which are wholly absent in the collective and present ostensive, are fully developed in the declarative, and emergent in the imperative:

> We have seen that the temporality of the imperative, that is, its *tense*, is the prolongation of the linguistic scene in *awaiting*. The time of awaiting is both real, lived time standing outside the scene *stricto sensu* and a prolongation of the presence intended by the utterance.

> Thus the imperative includes within itself a model of a time other than that of its moment of utterance. We should contrast this with the simple identity of linguistic and real time in the ostensive, where the time of linguistic presence remains, as in the originary event, merely the time of deferral of action while attending to the speaker. The ostensive model has no temporal dimension; the word and its referent coexist in the same suspended present. The temporality of the imperative, although not yet a true tense independent of the scene of communication, like that of the declarative, is if not a temporal mapping of reality on language, already a mapping of language on reality. The hearer of the ostensive can immediately verify its informational content for himself, and so to speak discard the linguistic model that conveyed it; the hearer of the imperative must retain the model as a guide for his conduct, "verifying" it only upon the conclusion of his performance. (54)

There is emergent tense in the imperative because there is *temporality* in the imperative (one waits for its fulfillment) and everything that serves linguistically as a *model* of the scene constructed by the linguistic act must come to be marked linguistically. (We can already anticipate that part of what will distinguish the declarative is that the temporality of the scene constructed linguistically has no relation to the temporality of the utterance itself.) The ostensive is immediately verifiable, while the imperative provides a "guide for… conduct," introducing an ethical dimension to the emergence of the new speech form: when we relate to each other "imperatively," we are separate but interdependent beings, potentially cooperative, potentially critical, sharing the presuppositions that make social being possible while being ready to set aside the confirmation of those presuppositions in the interest of getting something done.

> The genesis of the notion of *person* follows similar lines, although in contrast to that of tense, it can undergo internal differentiation in the context of the imperative model. The verbal imperative is personalized even in its basic "second-person" form because, again in contrast to the nominal, it requests an action to be performed, and thus made to exist, by the hearer. Just as we have seen that the "run" requested is a "run now," so we may say that it is also a run-by-X, which is by no means identical to a run-by-Y. And as in the case of governance, the

> specificity of action on the part of the hearer of the verbal imperative may be presumed to be included in the intention of the speaker. Thus if several hearers are present and the speaker requests a hammer (*Hammer!*), the intentional model includes only the hammer. Even if one person is specifically addressed, this intentional structure is not violated if someone else brings the hammer, although the speaker's expectations may be. But if he says "Come!" to one of the group, then the coming he is requesting could not normally be performed by any other.
>
> Now at this point "person" simply means second person, the contrast with the first person not having any basis in the intentional structure, the third being for the moment undefined. The speaker is normally at least the "dative" object of the imperative, and he may on occasion be its "accusative" object, as in a request for help or other personal services. But although personal "shifter" pronouns must have been among the first words, each individual being obliged to refer to himself or to the other by means of symmetrically "shifting" gestures, even as the accusative object of an imperative verb, the speaker is never in symmetry with the hearer. The performance requested of the hearer implies no contrast with one by the speaker. (56)

Note how at every point along the way the development of the new grammatical form is tied in with the increasing differentiation and sophistication of cognitive operations and social relations. If the point is having an object supplied, it doesn't matter who brings it; if the point is having a particular person perform a task, it matters very much—it is in the latter request, that generates a relation between individuals, that grammatical person starts to take shape. Gans here notes in passing another feature of the imperative (coming, again, between the immediate symmetry of the ostensive and the "restored" symmetry of the declarative, where speaker and interlocutor both knowingly accept the independence of the object of their respective desire), its asymmetry. The asymmetry here is complex: on the one hand, the individual issuing the command, at least for the moment, "dominates" the other and the scene in general; but the implication of Gans's reference to the need for shifter pronouns in the more singularized imperative is that the word "you" comes before "I." That is, it is the one who is commanded who is first named, and hence placed at the center of the scene and, of course, in possession of the power to refuse (or delay, or modify) the command. If we are ever to recover the energizing relation between linguistic and social inquiry that inspired the great “theory” revolution in the West, we could not do better than to take Gans’s book as a touchstone for it.

The Origin of Language initiates a new disciplinary space and, as I have been suggesting, only a deliberate dispossession of assumptions ungirding other disciplinary spaces in the human sciences makes it possible to enter it. It might help to consider Gans’s originary thinking to be a revision of the (often forgotten) constitutive assumptions across fields such as sociology, aesthetics, anthropology, religion, and so on. Why is there such a thing as the “social,” or the “aesthetic,” or the “literary,” or the “human,” the “ritual,” “faith,” etc.? Gans’s hypothesis actually offers answers to all these questions. In reading this book, a good place to begin would be to give the question, “why are there sentences, rather than signals?,” the weight that has been given to Heidegger’s famous question, “why is there something rather than nothing?—in fact to see this question as a more “rational” version of Heidegger’s. And, therefore, as providing a more powerful and, I stress, still undiscovered, way into all the deconstructive questions raised in Heidegger’s wake—questions which, along with many others in the human sciences, seem to be in desperate need of rethinking.

Foreword

I For years my intellectual universe has been increasingly characterized by dissociation. Nearly forty years ago I formulated a heuristic hypothesis that I believe revolutionizes our conception of human language and culture. Yet although this idea first appeared in 1981 in a well-publicized major university press book, and has since been reproduced and refined in numerous print and web publications, it remains virtually invisible, and is never referenced in "scientific" works dealing with the origin of language.

Nonetheless, a small group of academics have remained attached to this idea, allowing *Anthropoetics* (anthropoetics.ucla.edu) to appear uninterruptedly since 1995. In 2007, this group became the Generative Anthropology Society/Conference (GASC), which has subsequently held a series of twelve annual conferences, with a thirteenth scheduled for 2019.

Why do I believe that my little scenario of language origin is so important? While thousands of intellectuals spent decades enthralled, as some still are, with the Derridean idea of *la différance* as exposing the lie of the "presence" of the sign to our consciousness, and debunking the oppressive dominance of the Center privileging male over female, white over black, right over left… only a tiny handful appreciate seeing deferral explained simply and apolitically as a stepping back from mimetically enhanced "instinctive" violence, a modification of René Girard's "emissary murder" conception of human origin that I think more faithful to its spirit than his own sacrificial formulation.

Deferral in this sense, which establishes within a group of proto-humans the first scene of representation, is as far as I know the only non-metaphysical and non-supernatural explanation anyone has ever come up with of the difference between human, sign-mediated consciousness and that of other creatures. It offers an anthropological model of the unique human *pour-soi* that has been the focus of philosophy since Descartes, culminating in Sartre's *L'être et le néant*. This work is indeed the "last word" of metaphysical analysis, but because it remains a work of metaphysics, it describes our consciousness as an individual rather than a communal scene and, neglecting language, deprives itself of the possibility of bridging the gap between natural science and philosophy.

Nothing that has happened since I first formulated the originary hypothesis has in any way altered my judgment of its importance. But having reached the age of seventy-seven, I feel that I owe it to those who have remained interested in this idea, and even more, to the idea itself, to outline a strategy that would maximally preserve GA's chances for eventual success. This will depend on our ability not simply to persuade the intellectual world of the plausibility of the originary hypothesis, but to demonstrate its usefulness in reinterpreting humanity's cultural legacy. Republishing *The Origin of Language* in an updated and streamlined version is a first step in this direction.

Although, as with philosophical constructions, and even some anthropological ones—e.g., Mauss' notion of the *gift* as confirmed in the contemporary world by social rather than economic exchange—GA's hypothesis can be confirmed *in vivo* by the examination of the scenic structures of our own lives, it is doubly handicapped. Not only is it not empirically falsifiable but, I think more importantly, it does not bear the imprimatur of an authority in linguistics or the related social sciences. Had such as Derek Bickerton or Terrence Deacon formulated the originary hypothesis, it would surely have been widely discussed, no doubt further elaborated, and might well by now have achieved general acceptance.

Yet such an eventuality would have been highly unlikely. My hypothesis is too paradoxical, too *humanistic* to appeal to, or even to occur to, a social scientist. The day of "natural philosophy" is over, and GA as a *new way of thinking* is not merely lacking in appeal to those whose work is resolutely empirical, it is far too *revelatory* for the tastes of those who enter and are trained in these fields. These include analytic philosophy, which is today a highly technical subject, not one friendly to armchair speculation.

None of this makes GA less necessary than it would be otherwise; on the contrary. But it requires that we become aware of the need to persuade social scientists of the value of this kind of speculative "theory," as opposed to the incremental conceptions that derive from empirical study, and which conceive of human culture as an *emergent* structure in the sense of adding a new layer of recursion, but without understanding its paradoxical, faith-based essence: the human attribution of sacrality/significance as preexisting the human. Or to put it more simply, the inextricable unity of *God creates man/man creates God*.

We must also undertake the hopefully less arduous task of persuading humanists that grounding philosophy and its ethical foundation in anthropological reality is both necessary and made qualitatively simpler by means of a hypothesis that begins with the constitution of the human community in an *event*, the origin of language and culture.

No doubt these programmatic suggestions are easier to propose than to realize in practice. I have attempted to implement them over the years in a number of books, as well as in over 600 online *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* (references to Chronicle number *nnn* can be found at anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw*nnn*), but whatever insights I may have achieved, these writings could not demonstrate sufficient mastery of the fields of world culture to persuade the specialists in these domains, let alone the intellectual public, of their value. It is clear in hindsight that *The Origin of Language*, which introduced the originary hypothesis to the world, would have benefited from a clearer idea of what GA could accomplish. Most of my early GA books—*Science and Faith* is an exception—lack a strategy of composition; they are extended thought-experiments rather than satisfying wholes. I would no doubt have done better to focus more closely on the relationships between my new way of thinking and the various older ways with which it intersects, philosophy in particular, rather than attempting to rewrite in outline the history of Western literary culture.

At this point in my life, I believe my time is best spent in returning to the foundations of GA in hopes that by clarifying its relationship to these other domains, I might stimulate workers in these fields to explore its consequences. In preparation for this, I offer a few watchwords whose visibility as corollaries of GA is not as obvious as I would like. Failure to accept these points almost inevitably means falling into a compromise position in which one combines GA with other ultimately incompatible ways of thinking in a lazy eclecticism. GA has its roots in “French theory,” but even more than Girard’s writing, it is allergic to being name-dropped into a mix of other fashionable notions. Although GA’s notion of deferral derives from Derrida’s idea of *différance*, the two cannot simply be “used” alongside each other.

Language is not “about reality”

William Flesch, whose presence at our 2017 Stockholm GASC I greatly appreciated, is one evolutionary-psychology-oriented literary theorist who does not accept the rationalistic clichés of the genre, but understands the paradoxical nature of human culture. Flesch rejects the facile notion of *identification* as an explanation of the reader's relationship with fictional characters, insisting rather on the anomalous, not to say paradoxical nature of our interest in fictional beings; how can they affect our lives if they do not "really" exist? As he points out quite correctly, our relationship to literary characters is like that we have with people in the real world; we judge their acts, and espouse or oppose their desires, depending on what I would simply call our sense of justice, as providing validation for our community-oriented values, notably our penchant for what he calls "altruistic punishment." That is, our moral sense makes us willing to forgo personal satisfaction (thus to act "altruistically") in order to punish those who violate the norms that maintain the human community on the right side of the "prisoner's dilemma." Whence his provocative title, *Comeuppance* (Harvard UP, 2007).

I would respectfully append to Flesch's analysis a basic notion that should simplify the question of our relationship to fictional beings. It derives directly from GA's central idea about language: language is not in the first place "about reality." It is not "about" anything; it is a means for deferring violence (not simply "aiding cooperation") by communicating/renouncing desire in the present in lieu of acting on it, in order that it may be subsequently acted on without conflict. The fictional characters that we meet on our mental scene of representation are in cultural terms *more* significant than our problems in the "real world," because they engage us directly with the communal scene of culture. (Which is why we cry so easily at the movies.) Durkheim saw religion as embodying the values of the community that individuals would not otherwise adopt for themselves. This is true enough, but backward, since we would have no "values" at all in the absence of the scene of representation that exists in us as individuals only because it was first created in and along with the community.

Although the absence of originary about-ness is obvious once one realizes that language cannot have begun with declarative sentences, this is no doubt the most difficult aspect of GA for people to grasp. This is particularly true of scientists. Their language is disciplined by truth-value, and they obey very strict rules concerning what can be affirmed. To them, it seems obvious that language emerged so I could make to a fellow proto-human the falsifiable statement that "the food is over the hill." What they fail to realize is that had this been the originary purpose of language, we would have evolved like vervet monkeys, emitting different signals for the different objects of interest in our environment.

Particularly since the Enlightenment, we have lived in a rationalistic world in which every use of language is supposed to be falsifiable. Hence we tend to understand Nietzsche's critique of objective truth as a debunking, when it might more usefully be seen as an insight into its evolution (see Kieran Stewart, "Nietzsche's Early Theory of Language in Light of Generative Anthropology"; anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2202/2202stewart/). Truth-seeking is a beautiful thing, as are the achievements and applications of natural science. But the originary function of language cannot have been to "convey information" about "reality." Henry Frankfort's ironic concept of BS (online at http://www.stoa.org.uk/topics/bullshit/pdf/on-bullshit.pdf; see *Chronicle* 475), comes closer to its original purpose, which is, to use Durkheim's term, to create "solidarity."

The sacred and the significant are originarily identical They only come to differentiate themselves on the scene of representation that their common manifestation inaugurates. The notion that it is we who attribute significance to objects of experience is, like the declarative sentence, not an originary one. The first significant object, by being designated by a sign, is thereby distinguished from every other object in the universe as something to which we cannot relate through our "instinctive" appetites. We do not need "supernatural" categories to define the sacred; it is thus already defined.

The sacred/significant is the originary cultural supplement to what has been revealed as the dangerous inadequacy of our "natural" pre-human restraints. This danger is deferred by the imposition of the sign between us and our "instinctive" nature. The sacred is experienced as the object of a desire that cannot be fulfilled and for that very reason is *desire* and no longer mere appetite. Unlike the rational uses of language that we falsely think of as fundamental, it is the use of the ostensive sign to designate the originary sacred / significant object that is the founding gesture of language.

The preceding stepping-back or deferral of appetitive interest inaugurates the contemplation of the central object of the group at the inaccessible center of a *scene*.

This is not to suggest that there is no difference between religious and rational thought. But discussing such differences as though they were grounded in an unchanging cultural ontology is the action of a “historian of ideas,” not an originary thinker. The object of GA is to show the common root of our ways of commemorating / reproducing / perpetuating the originary scene, both in order that their differences may be appreciated and in order to find better ways of recombining them.

The contemporary Judeo-Christian West’s loss of faith is a serious matter. Whether effective substitutes for religion exist beyond Europe’s abstract human-rights “Ethical Culture,” or whether the traditional faiths can be revitalized, as seems to be occurring in various places, the purpose of GA is not merely to register these developments but to contribute to them by providing a new level of human self-understanding.

Finally, as both these lessons demonstrate,

Our human essence as symbolic language-users is ineluctably paradoxical Because natural language attributes significance as if it were independent of this attribution, it can never be fully “understood” as a formal system. All works of cultural significance, whether of art or religion, function to let us experience the paradoxical emergence of significance, or to put it in spatial terms, the emergence of verticality from the horizontal world of pre-human interaction. This is a “mystery” whose existence cannot be explained, since it concerns the sign-system in which the explanation must be given.

But this third lesson is best kept in the back of our minds, since insisting on it risks conveying to the world of science the mistaken impression that GA is a kind of mysticism. On the contrary, GA’s first words, the first sentence of *The Origin of Language* in 1981, were: *Mysteries should not be multiplied beyond necessity*. To allow us to better understand ourselves by grasping the pre-rational foundation of language and culture is GA’s purpose. It is also, I believe, that of human science.

II. Sign and Event

The originary hypothesis is close to forty years old, having first been formulated during my visit to Johns Hopkins in 1978. Not only have some of its basic constituents changed, notably the dropping of Girard's lynch mob conception not long after the 1981 publication of *The Origin of Language*, but over the years I have tended to emphasize different elements of the scenario. On the occasion of this new edition it is useful to recall a few of those aspects that I have had less occasion to reiterate in recent years, but which strike me as having a renewed relevance in our day.

Minimality

The first *Origin of Language* put great emphasis on the Ockham's-razor minimality of the hypothesis. I saw the creation of as simple a scenario as possible as the theory's greatest virtue. At the time, this was uncontroversial; but times have changed. My impression is that in the era of Big Data, simplicity is no longer a value in itself. Anything that smacks of non-empirically grounded intuition is looked upon with suspicion: *where is your data set?*

In any event, getting the causality right is surely more important than minimizing the list of parameters. But as opposed to the natural world, where the farther we go the more complex everything seems, Ockham's razor in human matters is more than just a rule of thumb for efficiency in the laboratory. A corollary of the big-data approach to causality is to consider that any simple cause-effect explanation is just a kludge to which we were obligated back in the days when we couldn't handle all the parameters. Even today, this is difficult. But just wait another few years when we'll have million-qubit computers; then we'll really be able to understand causality. Or rather, we won't have to understand it at all, for our computers will be able to make predictions with currently unimagined degrees of precision.

The recent developments of particle physics, whatever their benefits, have made it impossible for the layperson to have the faintest idea of the fundamental composition of the universe, well over half of which appears to be undetectable ("dark"). Although there appears to be no alternative, I have my doubts about our future understanding of the natural world. But be this as it may, I think I can say with some authority that we are obliged to give credence to simple explanations in *cultural* matters. This is more a matter of attitude than of "fact." The physical-physiological causality involved in forming the first sign is no doubt as complex as any big-data equipment has the capacity for. But to understand it from *within* human culture is to grasp it from the standpoint of the creatures who were motivated by a conscious judgment that could only explicitly take a small number of factors into account.

It is the big-data temptation that has led to the oft-repeated yet intrinsically ludicrous assertion that language "emerges naturally" when our cognitive level reaches such and such a threshold. The absurdity of treating language as a biological-cognitive function whose communicative setting is simply irrelevant reflects the reduction of causality to a web of correlations none of which “means” any more than another, whatever the naïve participants in the activity may think about it. After all, economists and psychologists have shown us that people ceaselessly misunderstand the “real” motivations for their acts. The first users of language may have fancied they were designating a significant/sacred object, but what they were “really” doing was finding a new outlet for their overactive neurons. We must unlearn this effectively brainless attitude.

Eventfulness

All of which leads me to a related and even more important element of the originary hypothesis. The most pertinent way of describing the minimality of our hypothesis' causal chain is that it is an *event*, a memorable occurrence that establishes a new category of activity, the marking of the deferral of appetitive appropriation by a sign that originates as an aborted gesture of appropriation. The act of participation in this event is conscious in a way no animal action can be, because its conscious nature is inherent in the sign that is shared with the other members of the group. The act of representation finds its purpose outside itself in designating the object of its renunciation as sacred/significant, which minimally means that, rather than being seen as an object for appropriation, it is understood by the newly founded human community as something that can be approached only via the sign.

A corollary of this reflection is that not just the originary use of language but *every* use of language must be understood as an event, a term that must be understood as referring to every human, cultural phenomenon.

Language and "Writing"

One of Derrida's most famous and significant points about language was that, in contrast to the apparent immediacy of speech, the truly exemplary form of linguistic communication is rather writing, *l'écriture*. This assertion generated among the faithful many delectable paradoxes in the service of denouncing the oppressive central authority that Derrida associates with the "myth of presence," by means of which it persuades its subjects that its decrees are of divine origin. In undermining this authority, Derrida, while deconstructing Rousseau's metaphysical faith in the immediacy of speech and the decadence of writing, in fact extends this decadence backward from writing to language itself. For Derrida, to claim that language is "really" writing is to claim that *all* language makes a false claim of presence, of sacred authority, which is only a mask for political authority. That primitive human societies are egalitarian rather than hierarchical is a fact too trivially "anthropological" for Derrida to consider.

Nevertheless, like most of Derrida's intuitions, his idea of the primacy of "writing" is essentially true, if only we return to GA's primary point about language, which is that it is a mode of *deferral*. A sign is not a signal; it is a product of conscious renunciation, just the opposite of an assertion of immediate "presence." Which is to say that, as Derrida himself never realized, it is precisely this *différance*, this *espacement*, this écriture, that is *what (human) presence is*. Language is present to its referent the way we are present at a theatrical performance: *in its presence*, in which we know ourselves to be existing before it, not stuck up against it, as Sartre describes the beings in the world of the *en-soi*.

And just as writing embodies deferral more obviously than speech, emphasizing the author's distance from both the referential world and his interlocutor, so does writing emphasize more clearly than speech its inscriptive or record-making character. *Scripta manent*, *verba volant* is true only for societies that have a written language; purely oral cultures preserve their sacred texts in memory.

Properly understood, the "inscriptive" character of language is evident; there is no need to assert it as a Derridean paradox. By marking the language-event with a sign, the user of language, oral or written, "inscribes" it in the universe of human culture, and more specifically, makes it an object of personal and collective memory that belongs henceforth to the cumulative history of humankind. Whence my insistence that we understand the origin of language as an event, even if the heuristic model furnished by the originary hypothesis will most likely never be identified with a specific time and place. Yes, the sign must have emerged through a number of stages. But there is gradualism and gradualism. A series of events is not the same as a series of unmarked occurrences such as take place among animals.

Just as it is absurd to say that at some point we begin to have "ideas" and that speech emerges because we "want to express them"—an absurdity that has nevertheless become almost a truism in the recent literature of the human sciences—it is equally absurd to speak of animals as "unable" to mark the events of their lives by signs. Neither the action nor the desire are part of the animal repertory, *un point c'est tout*. Lacking a sign-system, the animals have no way of referring to, hence of culturally sharing these occurrences, let alone of regretting the fact. The first signing event was no doubt repeated a number of times before its discovery of sacrality/significance became universally accepted, but it was an event from the start, a memorable occasion, if not *the* memorable occasion that we find in "myths of language origin"—or in the first sentence of Genesis.

Philosophy and Anthropology

Philosophy understands all this, in its way. Hegel's world-spirit is in fact the historical spirit of human culture, historical because conscious of being part of a series of events. Beginning with Being and Non-Being in a universe of prehuman abstraction from which consciousness in and for itself eventually emerges, Hegel provides the most thorough version of the metaphysical organon. Here, even in the supposed absence of humans or of an anthropomorphic God, the universe is driven by *ideas*, which is to say, by the human scene of representation and its contents. But although today Hegel's speculations are dismissed as "metaphysical," it is not enough to deconstruct them in what are in the final analysis equally metaphysical terms. Philosophy cannot find its ground in itself, but it cannot find a ground either in the denunciation of its groundlessness—although the paradoxical configuration of this activity prepares the way for GA's more rational approach, both to the origin and nature of human culture and to paradox itself.

In *Science and Faith*, written over thirty years ago, I criticized the social sciences for their dogmatic gradualism, which Big Data has only reinforced. On the principle that *natura non facit saltus*, cultural innovations are described as proceeding by imperceptible steps so that no moment of sudden revelation is ever envisaged. As for the revelations that our religions are founded upon, the task of science is to study their gradual emergence, their revelatory reality being "bracketed" for use in the non-scientific universe of ritual devotion.

Hence the primary challenge that GA responds to, even before attempting to fulfill its mission of providing a plausible scenario for the origin of language, is to persuade the intellectual community that such a revelatory origin both can and must be thought. The originary hypothesis describes the emergence of a totally new form of behavior that could only have appeared as a revelation to its participants because the very categories that it inaugurated were categories of revelation.

Unless the first object to become the referent of a sign was the focus of common attention in a wholly new way, it would not have been so designated at all. There is no gradual path from animal signals to human signs. The only gradual element of the process is getting it to stick and be reiterated until it becomes expected rather than extraordinary, so that from a unique event the use of language becomes banal—although, even at its most banal, every use of language remains an event, an inscription.

Even after nearly forty years, it is still asking much of a reader to entertain the hypothesis presented in these pages. It has no doubt more in common with the speculations of "French theory" than with the more positivistic modes of scholarship in favor today. Now that, in the academy at least, the oppressive nature of (Western) culture is universally acknowledged, it seems no longer necessary to follow Derrida in unveiling the oppressive nature of the myth of linguistic presence. Hence the more rational tend to believe that our only chance at apolitical objectivity lies in undertaking the data-driven study of human behavior without recourse to metaphysical niceties, forgetting that it is these niceties alone that differentiate us from our animal brethren.

On the assumption that there is nonetheless a potential audience for the originary hypothesis and its immediate consequences, this second edition is intended to present the underlying theory in a more concrete and logical fashion than the first, where I still relied on Girard's human-sacrifice scenario of the originary event. The text is more clearly written, and disencumbered of many secondary observations and reflections on the linguistics of the 1970s.

I can assure my reader that, at the very least, the originary hypothesis that an event inaugurates the human world of representational culture still stands, undamaged and undaunted, as solitary now as it was when I first formulated it in 1978. If only in tribute to its ability to survive in the near-total absence of institutional support for nearly four decades, I hope the reader will be willing to give it a second look.

Eric Gans

Santa Monica
January 1, 2019

Chapter 1.

Introduction

Let me repeat the first sentence of the original 1981 edition of *The Origin of Language* (TOOL): *Mysteries should not be multiplied beyond necessity*. To the extent that the word *mystery* has a genuine referent and is not merely a synonym for *hoax* or *ignorance*, there is only one human mystery, the mystery of language, which is also the mystery of the sacred and of the representational culture that separates us from our fellow creatures. Given that we have no way of understanding this mystery from without, we can assume that we will never understand it fully as the product of simpler components, which is another way of saying that faith will always be necessary, that we can only postulate, not demonstrate, the human essence we seek to explain.

Nonetheless, there is no need for mysticism. The object of Generative Anthropology (GA) is, like that of all human science, to minimize the mystery of the human sign, the sacred, and the other cultural phenomena that derive from it. It remains within the limits of philosophical reflection, discoursing on the elements of human experience without reference to the material substrate (neurons, synapses, genes, etc.) that embodies them. However, unlike traditional philosophy or *metaphysics*, which brackets the question of the emergence from "nature" of the declarative proposition from which philosophical discourse is constructed, GA confronts the problem of the origin of mature, declarative language as a secondary problem to that of the origin of language itself. Thus we begin with the emergence of human language from a pre-human, prelinguistic state, through the minimal utterance forms of the *ostensive* and the *imperative*, reaching the declarative only at the end of our journey.

We know from Terrence Deacon's *The Symbolic Species* (Norton, 1997) that human language is neurologically discontinuous with animal signal systems; their headquarters are even located in different parts of the brain. And from our own experience we are well aware that human "calls" such as laughter, tears, and cries of pain are not continuous with language. Nor can language be understood simply as a "behavior." There is no need to redo

Chomsky's demolition of B. F. Skinner's attempt to conceive language as a system of conditioned reflexes. (See his "A Review of B. F. Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*" in *Language*, 35, 1, 1959: 26-58, reprinted in *Readings in the Psychology of Language*, ed. Leon A. Jakobovits and Murray S. Miron, Prentice-Hall, 1967.) But perversely, the clear indications that human language is sui generis appear to have led empirically minded linguists to focus entirely on the *cognitive* content of language as a way of "expressing thoughts" rather than on its *communicative* function. Since, on the one hand, human *symbolic* language differs absolutely from animal *indexical* signals, but on the other, it is transmitted to our fellows primarily through the broadly similar mechanism of articulated sound, the implicit conclusion is drawn that there is no particular need to concern ourselves with its communicative function, since the true uniqueness of human language must be found in the cognitive content of its symbols. But on the contrary, what is specific about human linguistic "behavior" is in the first place not its content but the uniqueness of the linguistic communication situation itself. Linguistic communication is uniquely characterized by *joint shared attention*, a mode of interaction that distinguishes humans from animals, and that contains the act of *signifying* at its very core, lacking which we would merely have two persons attending to the same thing.

One of the key problems that has beset the current state of inquiry into the origin of language is the unreflective, one might say unconsciously Chomskian equation of "language" with its present, mature state, as manifested in all known languages. It is surely of interest to study child language acquisition, as has been done in recent years in great detail. But observing a child learning a mature language tells us nothing about how language itself came into being.

That we know of no speakers of "elementary language" does not of course mean that linguists assert that the structures of language appeared all at once; even Chomsky assumes that our Language Acquisition Device (LAD) evolved from a simpler state. But although it has often been noted, not without some surprise, that our fellow apes do not *point*, the idea that pointing at something is actually the emission of a *sign*, and therefore *already a form of language*, seems never to arise in the context of language origin. This is an idea that Raymond Tallis comes close to in his book on *The Hand* (Edinburgh, 2003), which expresses a view largely compatible with GA, as I had occasion to remark a propos of Tallis' keynote address at the annual Generative Anthropology Summer Conference in 2014.

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Let us then rehearse the basic scenario of the hypothesized originary event. The purpose of this scenario, and of the originary hypothesis in general, is not to offer a guess as to *was wirklich geschehen ist,* but to provide a *heuristic* model that, in contrast to real-world events, includes only content relevant to the meaningful result that is presumed to emerge from it. The notion of the *laboratory*, as developed by the beloved French epistemologist Gaston Bachelard (e.g., *La formation de l'esprit scientifique*, Vrin, 1938), is as a place where distracting sources of variability are reduced to a minimum in order that *experiments* may be carried out in which the values of specific parameters may be determined. The originary event as described by the hypothesis is so to speak a *thought-experimental* laboratory.

The fundamental intuition that presides over GA, a paradigmatic idea of René Girard to which the professional world of anthropology has never given the importance it deserves, is that human representational culture comes into being only when our ancestors had become *too mimetic,* and consequently too potentially violent to be able to continue to rely on animal mechanisms of violence-inhibition. The pecking order that operates among higher animals depends on the group's forming a queue structure rather than a centralized community. The hypothetical originary event presupposes only that the progression of mimetic ability among proto-humans has reached the point at which this serial hierarchy breaks down.

Let us imagine an appetitive object, such as the cadaver of a large animal discovered or killed by a hunting party. The members of the group surround the object, the Alpha among them. But the level of mimetic tension in the group has risen too high for the Alpha to be able to rely on his primacy as in the past: appropriating the (whole) animal, taking his portion, then passing the remainder to the Beta, and so on. Under the pressure of increased mimetic rivalry, the Alpha taking the first piece of meat, from being simply at the head of the queue, comes to be viewed *and resented* as a unique privileged figure *in opposition to all the others,* who for the moment are not benefiting from the meat distribution.

Hence the Alpha's potential act of appropriation is contested not by individual rivals but by *the group as a whole*. Like the hands of children at a party reaching out for the last piece of cake, all make a gesture of appropriation toward the object, but, observing this symmetry, all *including the Alpha* hesitate to incur the aggression of the others by prolonging their gesture toward the object.

Thus the members of the group are obliged to *defer* their appropriation of the animal, and consequently *abort* their gesture. "Defer" (*différer*) is a term I have "anthropologized" from Jacques Derrida, who uses it to refer to the hesitation implicit in the choice of a word in a paradigm. But before the existence of linguistic paradigms, the originary object of deferral must have been the potential violence attendant on a worldly rather than a "symbolic" act. It is this *aborted gesture of appropriation*, designating the object, but no longer directed at appropriating it, that we postulate as *the first sign*.

This suspension of appropriative activity would convert the "theater of action" in which the hunter-scavengers confront the animal as a source of nourishment into a *scene* where, although action is for the moment impossible, the group's attention remains jointly focused on the animal at the center. The aborted gesture would then come to be collectively understood as a new form of communication, directed both at the central object itself as the first "deity" and at the other members of the group. This originary occurrence of joint shared attention would arise through the consciousness shared by the participants of both their own gesture and that of the others, coupled with the awareness that peacefully exchanging this gesture, in contrast to fighting over the central object, makes this new form of exchange memorable and desirable, worthy of being repeated. The idea that the sign both reproduces and participates in the "aura" or numinousness of its referent while at the same time leaving it intact is the essential benefit of signification.

In a less minimalistic form, mediated through his construction of the psyche around erotic energy, this same core intuition presides over Freud's scenario of father-murder in *Totem and Taboo* (original edition, 1913), which was the direct ancestor of Girard's scene of emissary murder in *La violence et le sacré* (Grasset, 1972). Regardless of the ostensible appetitive motivation of the group (for Freud, access to the women in the patriarchal harem, for Girard, finding someone to blame for a plague or other calamity, for GA, instituting a communal system of distribution to replace the failed pecking order), the core of all these scenes is *the designation of a central figure* by a *sign*, which I have consequently called the *name-of-God*. Once this is accomplished, I am happy to accept the idea shared by both Girard and Freud that this central figure will be torn apart by the peripheral participants, although the *sparagmos* serves a different purpose and certainly obtains superior alimentary results in GA's originary hypothesis than in the other scenarios.

The event of the origin of language is the true origin of the human. Language and the scene of representation on which it takes place add a new dimension to animal existence. This dimension can be understood as that of *eventfulness* itself, in which an incident leaves its trace as a sign shared with the community rather than a mere epigenetic inflection: an *event* in the human sense is ipso facto a *signified*.

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The originary event cannot simply be assumed to have occurred in the minimalist fashion that this exposition of the originary hypothesis describes. Any such hypothesis must be in some sense a just-so story. But its heuristic value is undiminished. The point is that, unlike the progress of genetic evolution through mutation and selection, the emergence of culture, of a shared system of representations, starting *ex hypothesi* from a single shared representation whose sacred referent embodies significance-sacrality itself—this emergence is by its very nature *self-representing*. The precise instant at which the aborted gesture of appropriation that is the source of the first sign acquires a *value* in itself, not as a signal but as a *sign* that paradoxically both reflects and at the same time creates the separation of its now-sacred referent from the "horizontal" world of appetite, could no doubt not be determined empirically even were we capable of reconstructing the entire history of human evolution. It is nonetheless *functionally* a unique moment of creation that can be understood only as an *event* taking place on the scene shared by the proto-human participants.

All other theories of language origin agonize over the necessity of passing from, as Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* put it, *quantity* to *quality*. But what distinguishes language is not the qualitative complexity of its content; it is the nature of the communication it enables. It is useless to conceive complex cognitive blueprints that, once fulfilled, would allow language to "emerge." Language is ipso facto a *conscious, interactive* phenomenon; it is our evidence for consciousness itself in a sense beyond animal awareness. The scene of consciousness exists in individuals when and only when it subsists as well as a scene of representation shared by other members of the group, as the basis for a cultural/linguistic *community*.

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In my early descriptions of the originary event, I assumed that all the participants, fearful of making the first move and being attacked by the others, spontaneously aborted their appropriative gestures toward the central object and acquired the consciousness that they were not merely deciding *not* to appropriate, but that their aborted gestures had themselves become *intentional signs* embodying both deferral of action and the public communication of this deferral, while representing the object itself as the common focus of interest. The dynamics of the situation would lead to the pragmatic paradox that the more the object was represented and focused on, the less it could be appropriated. This progression would persist until the entire group, realizing that they were all agreed on the desirability of the object and on their common need for access to it, would approach it *together* in a collective *sparagmos* that would end with each participant possessing a roughly "equal" portion.

But Adam Katz suggested in "Remembering Amalek: 9/11 and Generative Thinking" (*Anthropoetics* 10, 2 (Fall 2004 / Winter 2005) that the discovery that to designate the object by an aborted gesture was in effect to *represent* it should not be assumed to have occurred to all the participants at the same moment—in other words, that an element of *firstness* was a necessary constituent of the scene.

One might say in defense of my original scenario that this differential element is of a lower heuristic order than the unanimous conclusion of the scene, with the creation of a human community linked by the sign, which I conceive here as taking place in a single event, although the consciousness of the gesture as a sign no doubt emerged through many false starts. But I think the important factor in Adam's emendation is not so much the gradualness of the discovery/invention of the sign as the *differentiation* this discovery would have effected among the participants. Since clearly the end result would not single out any individual initiator, given that the ethical equality of all the participants in relation to the center (what I call the *moral model*) is the necessary outcome of the signing operation, one might ignore this differentiation. But as we well know, as soon as surpluses come to be accumulated beyond the needs of immediate consumption, firstness will reappear as a social reality with the introduction of hierarchy, and this will remain the norm, with a few minor exceptions, throughout human history. That is, the moral model of linguistic reciprocity will remain with us as our ethical foundation, but will no longer supply the model for the exchanges of goods and the power-relations they guarantee in the social order, as it had done at the origin and as it still does in the remaining "hunter-gatherer" societies. Linguistic and moral exchange will remain symmetrical, but economic and political exchange will henceforth be conducted among unequals.

Indeed, this may be said to have been inevitable from the outset. The moral model cannot dictate the entirety of human behavior, even human *cultural* behavior, and this because the scene of representation, on which the human *pour-soi* is *free* as Sartre defines it, is not limited to the public scene of ritual but belongs to each individual. If I have the freedom to *intend* the central object, then I have the freedom to contemplate manipulating it in a new way, and to formulate *projects* (Sartre's term as well) that are not shared spontaneously with the group.

This is in my view the real importance of Adam's emendation. An innovation such as the sign cannot be the "emanation" of a situation; it must be the product of *innovative reflection* of the kind that the scene of representation permits each of us as individuals. Thus even if all the members of the group got the idea of the sign at the same time, the essential point is that each of them would have to grasp it as an individual reflecting on the scene shared with his fellows.

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No doubt my depiction of the psychological nuances of the communicative relationship thus established is wholly speculative, but what must be understood as its minimal core is the sense, for the first time, of a *scenic* communication mediated no longer through an instinctive appetitive gesture or a signal derived from it via the Pavlovian process of "conditioned reflex," but through a gesture that has so to speak turned back upon itself as a self-conscious, voluntary act, one that will be understood by all as referring to the common interdicted, sacred, significant object of desire.

Chapter 2.
The Linguistic Dialectic

The most significant difference between this work and other accounts of language origin lies in its proposed outline, on the basis of the hypothetical originary event of language/culture, of the evolution of the basic utterance-forms, from the ostensive through the imperative to the declarative.

Given the lack of empirical evidence to guide this account, it may remind philosophically minded readers of Hegel's *Logik* and its dialectical derivation of the categories of thought via the principles of negation and synthesis. I have always admired Hegel, the greatest of all metaphysical system-builders. But my use of a dialectical series is much less ambitious. Its purpose is to offer an understanding of how the hypothetical originary event can furnish a model for the emergence of a mature culture capable of elaborating, as GA does, a theory of its own emergence. That is, I propose a model, beginning with the originary event of the sign, of how using signs can eventually produce the theory that describes their beginning in the originary hypothesis, thus completing the circle and justifying the elaboration of the theory in its own terms.

The telos of the dialectic of linguistic form is the emergence of the "objectivity" of the declarative sentence from the "irrational" privileging/sacralizing of the central object in the originary ostensive. This irrationality is central to the Girardian scapegoat scene, described as an act of *méconnaissance*. But we do not require emissary murder to understand why language in its originary form fails to fully implement the objective detachment that the deferral at the heart of the formal *pour-soi* makes possible.

We might be tempted to say that the very structure of human consciousness in its contemplative relationship to its intended objects warrants a means to communicate "objective truths" about reality. But such reasoning can be engaged in only a posteriori. I offer it only to point out that *metaphysics has always not merely made this inference, but taken it for granted*. For GA, the Achilles' heel of philosophy is its failure to understand the secondarity of the declarative proposition to language—hence to the human—itself. Whence the need to elaborate a model of the dialectic connecting originary language to the declarative form.

* * *

Once humans learned to defer mimetic violence through signs, they were faced with the dialectical tension that the following chapters describe between the use of language to express the desire of a speaker and its prolongation in the acts of his interlocutor, to whom this desire is alien. The communal symmetry of the originary scene, with the humans on the periphery surrounding the sacralized central object, remains the model of all cultural communication, but the individual elements of this symmetry, the separate "conversations" between the participants that will serve as models for future non-ritual uses of language, embody an asymmetrical relationship between speaker and hearer. In the originary event, we may assume that all emit and perceive the "same" sign, and that this sameness is guaranteed by the success of the signing in preventing violence. All realize that the gestures of the others "mean" the same thing as their own, which is to say, renunciation of the immediate act of appropriation of the central object desired by all.

But the importance of modeling the formal dialectic that generates the declarative form, the presumably universal basis of fully evolved or "mature" language, is to make clear how the interplay between symmetry and asymmetry in the use of language can acquire the flexibility without which "language" and "culture" would have remained merely ceremonial activities. The point is to show how this new mode of consciousness, this *pour-soi* freed from "instinct," in which the subject is separated by a *néant* from its object, could find a functional means of making objective, or more precisely, *objectivizing* use of this detachment.

The historical invisibility of this evolution makes it understandable that human thought should have been divided since its inception between, on the one hand, attributing language as a whole to God, who "always already" possessed it and made a gift of it to man, and on the other, taking the proposition as a given without conceiving of the necessity that it be generated from its "natural" substrate. If for this reason alone, it is useful to reflect on the dialectic from which the declarative emerged. (In *The Scenic*

Imagination [Stanford University Press, 2007], I examined various philosophical accounts of the origin of language in the early modern era; none of these *philosophes*, to my knowledge, ever attempted to describe the evolution of the declarative proposition from more elementary forms.) * * *

This series of dialectical "moments" is constructed on the basis of a logic whose plausibility has not been tested experimentally; I would be happy to see empirical psychology attempt such a test. But although the specific steps in the sequence are open to doubt, the whole is not. The endpoints of the ostensive on the one hand and the declarative on the other can hardly be questioned. At the origin, pointing/designating/representing in the new mode of joint shared attention; at the conclusion, the fundamental information-conveying sentence. And the placement of the imperative between these two poles is equally hard to deny.

In this dialectical sequence, the tensions provoked by the asymmetry of the speech situation are deferred by the generation of new linguistic forms. This seems to me the model that linguistics must always follow when describing formal evolution. And indeed, it does so when it can make use of historical evidence, for example, in studying the loss of morphology and its replacement by detachable elements, which in a world of widespread literacy are much less likely than in more primitive times to themselves degenerate into morphological particles; or the rise of attention-getting forms that lose their emphatic status and are replaced by others; or the emergence of "prestigious" forms such as the elision of 'r' in New York speech, as described by William Labov in *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (U of Pennsylvania, 1966), which winds up being associated rather with the pretensions of the lower-middle class than with the elite its speakers had hoped to emulate. But whereas these developments take place on the surface of mature language, whose basic functionality cannot be substantially improved upon, the developments hypothesized here involve the emergence of its fundamental forms.

The idea that language used to convey objective information first emerges as an antidote to desire is not one to be disdained by moralists. I cannot prove that things really happened this way, but on this occasion at least, *si non è vero, è ben trovato* is more than a *bon mot*. To the extent that desire differs from mere appetite, it is as a result of its mediation by representation, and it is this mediation that allows it to be deferred in the indefinitely complex ways that the declarative makes possible. And conversely, it is only because the originary model of the objects of our desire is the sacred that we can bear to have their presence deferred by chains of representations that may or may not permit us eventually to attain them.

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In the original edition of TOOL, this formal dialectic was prolonged by a discussion of the super-linguistic categories of *dialogue* and *discourse*. But having reviewed this material, it seems to me to lie outside the limits of a discussion of the origin of language and its fundamental forms. Once the declarative sentence has emerged, the ways in which sentences can be put together in longer units is no longer truly an element of the formal theory of representation, but belongs to the history of cultural institutions. Hence I have not reprised this material in this new edition.

Chapter 3.
A Derridean Parenthesis

Il n’y aura pas de nom unique, fût-il le nom de l’être. Et il faut le penser sans *nostalgie*, c’est-à-dire hors du mythe de la langue purement maternelle ou purement paternelle, de la patrie perdue de la pensée. Il faut au contraire l’*affirmer,* au sens où Nietzsche met l’affirmation en jeu, dans un certain rire et dans un certain pas de la danse.

Depuis ce rire et cette danse, depuis cette affirmation étrangère à toute dialectique, vient en question cette autre face de la nostalgie que j’appellerai *l’espérance* heideggerienne. Je ne méconnais pas ce que ce mot peut avoir ici de choquant. Je le risque toutefois, sans en exclure aucune implication, et le mets en rapport avec ce que *La parole d’Anaximandre* me paraît retenir de la métaphysique : la quête du mot propre et du nom unique. Parlant du “premier mot de l’être *“(das frühe Wort des Seins:* το χρεών), Heidegger écrit: “Le rapport au présent, déployant son ordre dans l’essence même de la *présence,* est unique *(ist eine einzige).* Il reste par excellence incomparable à tout autre rapport. Il appartient à l’unicité de l’être lui-même *(Sie gehort zur Einzigkeit des Seins selbst).* La langue devrait donc, pour nommer ce qui se déploie dans l’être *(das Wesende des Seins),* trouver un seul mot, le mot unique *(ein einziges, das einzige Wort).* C’est là que nous mesurons combien risqué est tout mot de la pensée [tout mot pensant : *denkende Wort*] qui s’adresse à l’être *(das dem Sein zugesprochen wird).* Pourtant ce qui est risqué ici n’est pas quelque chose d’impossible; car l’être parle partout et toujours au travers de toute langue.” Telle est la question : l’alliance de la parole et de l’être dans le mot unique, dans le nom enfin propre. Telle est la question qui s’inscrit dans l’affirmation jouée de la différance. Elle porte (sur) chacun des membres de cette phrase : “L’être / parle / partout et toujours / à travers / toute / langue /.”

Jacques Derrida.

There will be no unique name, be it the name of being. And we must think this without *nostalgia*, that is, outside the myth of the purely maternal or purely paternal language, of the lost homeland of thought. We must on the contrary *affirm* it, in the sense that Nietzsche puts affirmation into play, in a certain laugh and a certain dance step.

From this laugh and this dance, from this affirmation alien to any dialectic, there comes into question that other face of nostalgia that I shall call Heideggerian *hopefulness* [*espérance*]. I am not unaware of how shocking this word may appear in this context. I risk it nonetheless, without excluding any of its implications, and put it in relation to what "The Anaximander Fragment" [*Das Spruch des Anaximander*] seems to me to retain of metaphysics: the quest for the "proper" word [*le mot propre*] and the unique name. Speaking of the "first word of being" (*das frühe Wort des Seins*: το χρεών [necessity]), Heidegger writes: "The relation to the present, deploying its order in the very essence of *presence*, is unique (*ist eine einzige*). It remains exemplarily incomparable with any other relation. It belongs to the uniqueness of being itself (*Sie gehort zu Einzigkeit des Seins selbst*). Language should therefore, to name what presents itself in being (*das Wesende des Seins*), find a single word, the unique word (*ein einziges, das einzige Wort*). Here is where we measure how risky is every word of thought [every thinking word: *denkende Wort*] that is addressed to being (*das dem Sein zugesprochen wird*). However, what is risked here is not something impossible; for being speaks everywhere and always through every language/tongue." This is the question : the alliance of speech and being in the unique word, in the at-last-proper name. This is the question that is inscribed in the played/performed affirmation [*affirmation jouée*] of *la différance*. It bears (on) each element of this sentence: "Being / speaks / everywhere and always / through / every / language /."

Jacques Derrida.

Although for GA, Jacques Derrida's notion of *la différance* is second in importance only to René Girard's conception of the mimetic origin of the sacred, I never had the opportunity to discuss these matters with Derrida, even indirectly. As Richard van Oort can tell you, although Derrida had promised to participate in *Anthropoetics'* special issue on deconstruction (IV, 1: Fall 1998), and I still have somewhere a brief letter to that effect bearing his signature, when he arrived in Irvine for his annual visiting professorship, rather than spending an hour on the freeway, I asked Richard, who was then a doctoral student intending to take his course, to make the first contact, a procedure that no doubt failed to show the great man an appropriate level of deference. The fact is, however, that what Derrida was undoubtedly prepared to do was to answer questions about his ideas, not engage in a discussion where they might be challenged, and recognizing this fact, he gracefully withdrew from the issue. We had no further contact.

This is regrettable because although today it is not uncommon to hear Derrida dismissed as a *mystificateur* by those who emphasize his irritating preciosity over his philosophical genius, this does no service to human thought. As a parenthesis in the new TOOL, I therefore propose to comment briefly on the final paragraphs of his seminal essay/lecture on *la différance*. A sympathetic analysis demonstrates both the quasi-anthropological insight of this "last metaphysician" and his desire to "save" and transcend metaphysics (I dare not speak of a Hegelian *Aufhebung*), as well as what seems to me the obvious fact that GA answers this desire as far as possible while extracting the kernel of Derrida's intuition from the mystifying language in which he envelops it. For with all his genius, his loyalty to the metaphysical tradition, so different from Girard's healthy skepticism, made Derrida incapable of dealing with the paradoxical nature of the enigma, which could be clarified only in a language *structurally* different from the language of the sacred that he borrows, with irony and bad conscience, from Heidegger.

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The linguistic foundation for *la différance* is Saussure's famous dictum that in language there is nothing but *differences*. This is obviously true at the boundaries of the physical components of language; a phoneme can only be defined as such by comparison with contrasting phonemes, whence the practice of *minimal pairs* to distinguish them as elements of contrasting words. We note, for example, in contrast to the English phoneme set, the absence in Spanish of a distinction between "b" and "v" (*v de vaca y b de burro*), or between "r" and "l" in Japanese. And if we consider semantic paradigms such as colors, similar boundary confusions are equally possible.

But aside from the fact that one need not think about red and green to call something blue, or gorillas and lions to call something an elephant, the fundamental flaw in this understanding of language is that the *primary* difference in language, one that must precede all others, is not between elements of a paradigm but *between the sign and its referent*. The first word is a *sign* because it is no longer a “practical” gesture of appropriation nor is it an “instinctive” indexical signal; in its persistence as a *communication*, the aborted gesture acquires a *meaning* transmissible to the other members of the group. It is *this* difference, which inaugurates the sign as a wholly new category of being, that creates the representational doubling of *signifier* and *signified* that in turn allows differences *within* the first category to designate different representations of worldly objects. But the original deferral that allows for difference, *la différance*, is the deferral of appropriation and thereby of the practical, “horizontal” world of instrumentality. This deferral creates the *néant*, the empty scenic space of contemplation, in which the new dimension of *meaning* can emerge.

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Derrida develops his “non-concept” of *la différ**a**nce* over fourteen pages. The “misspelling,” which in French cannot be *heard*, and is therefore an artifact of *writing*, the form of language that does away with “presence” and becomes therefore for Derrida its canonical form, is the central symbol of the lack of a *proper* name for the sign-in-general.

But in the essay’s surprising conclusion, reproduced above, the author returns with great nostalgia of his own to Heidegger’s nostalgic hopefulness (*espérance*) for the *single word* of metaphysical Being. If we read Derrida sympathetically while nonetheless refusing to accept that the only possible expression of this paradox must be itself paradoxical, the intuition expressed in this passage can be reformulated in much clearer *anthropological* terms.

What is the mystery evoked in reference to this “one word,” the nostalgia for which Derrida rejects yet cannot avoid evoking in a secondary nostalgia for the hope it continued to inspire in Heidegger? Clearly one could go on in this vein as so many have, my own text nostalgically evoking in turn Derrida’s nostalgia as a reminder that metaphysics never really leaves us, that the absence that founds it is of its very essence, *und so weiter*. But having had the good fortune to study with someone whose impatience with philosophy was the contrapositive of his anthropology, I understand that rather than remaining complacently in the world of concepts we are obliged to do our best to ground them in reality.

Clearly in thinking of the *one word* Derrida, at least, if not Heidegger, is thinking of the *name of God*, which for Jews is ineffable, or to take God at his word in Exodus 3, inexistent: the only "name" he gives, in what I consider to be the most important passage of the Bible, is the *proposition "I am that I am*." But this understanding of the *one word* represents a great historical insight. Revelations such as this, or John's later rival insight that *In the beginning was the word . . . and the word was God*, help to explain the aura that surrounds the question, but at the price of incorporating into the scene of origin a level of understanding which at that point could have only been that of a deity.

At the origin of human language, the "one word" these gentlemen are seeking was simply the aborted gesture of the originary event, which in reality was no doubt repeated a number of times before its status as a sign acquired the *communal* recognition necessary to the establishment of a sacred culture around the scene of representation.

As described in the previous chapter, the hypothetical originary event is concrete and easily imaginable, and above all it is *plausibly motivated*, rather than the result of some unfathomable cosmic decision by God, Being, or the Anthropic Principle. This should not be taken to mean that I consider Derrida, or even Heidegger, to be mere mystifiers. These thinkers came at the end of the great tradition of metaphysics and were straining great intellectual powers to seek a way out of it. But they failed to realize that reaching this goal requires the addition of a new *anthropological* dimension to their conceptual analysis. Their language, like that of Sartre and the other major philosophical minds of the 20th century, is, following in the footsteps of the more empirical-minded Husserl, but open as the latter was not to the resentful dissatisfaction of Nietzsche, an attempt to *think through* what Kant had recognized as the aporias of thought itself. But "thought" is not an autonomous entity, and its categories must finally be grounded in the reality of human existence, in a *scene* that is not merely internal to the individual consciousness, as for Sartre and phenomenology in general, but situates the human mind in the sole context in which it can exist and has ever existed, which is that of a linguistic, cultural *human community*.

* * *

Once this is done, one realizes in all humility that the “end” of metaphysics in no way brings with it the solution to the world’s problems. I remain convinced after nearly 40 years that GA, if only as demonstrated by its absence from the contemporary scene of public discourse, is bound to play an important role in the “history of thought.” But the effect of its “discovery” on the general welfare, if any, is wholly unpredictable. It is an instrument of freedom, as are all such discoveries, but only faith can provide the *espérance* that adding it to the mix will make things better. It is nonetheless clear to me that it represents an objectively improved level of human self-consciousness, one that in no way trivializes the results of the human sciences, but that may hopefully influence their future choice of research subjects.

The fascination of Girardians for the discovery of “mirror neurons” is understandable, but the neuroscientists, for their part, show no signs of making use of the *humanistic* understanding of mimesis that “mimetic theory” provides. Let us hope that these scientists’ eventual exploration of the neurological substrate of the scene of representation, both individual and collective, will take place in a more cooperative environment. Only then will we truly be able to speak of the end, or more prudently, of the *Wendung* (turning point) of the metaphysical era.

Chapter 4.
Formal and Institutional Representation

The first edition of TOOL was chiefly devoted to a discussion of the basic utterance-forms (ostensive, imperative, interrogative, declarative), speculating on how they might have evolved from the original ostensive gesture/sign. This sequence of forms will be developed in the following chapters. This focus on language rather than ritual, *formal* rather than *institutional* representation, was reflected in the book's subtitle: *A Formal Theory of Representation*.

* * *

As the reader may have realized, the originary event of language as I have described it is also that of sacred ritual. Indeed, the spectacle of a group of humans whose gestures designate a central object inaccessible to them not coincidentally resembles the configuration of virtually all religious rites. More specifically, it suggests the preliminaries of ritual sacrifice, which culminates in the *sparagmos* that we hypothesize as following the emission of the sign. The "linguistic" moment of deferral and the moment of distribution, whether or not followed immediately by consumption (presumably the hunters would bring back meat for their women and children and others too feeble to participate in the hunting party) are two phases of *a single event*. There would be little profit in inventing the sign if it did not lead to an alimentary outcome for the group superior to that of the pecking-order system, which had formerly allowed everyone to be fed.

The unity of this scenario provides a model for the complementary relationship between the formal and institutional elements of our representational culture. In the originary event, this separation is merely potential, since the sign has not yet been revealed as detachable from the event as a whole. What has been created is less "language" or "the sacred" than the *scene of representation*, the shared space within which we contemplate and *represent* an object that, from appetitively attractive, has become *significant*. This scene within which we defer the “instinct” of the appetitive, being inhibited from action not by a conditioned reflex, but by a will outside the realm of the appetitive itself, marks the inauguration of the human.

By its nature, the sign is an *individual* act, even when performed with others. This act of *intending* its object, which sacralizes the central god/offering and keeps it from consumption by any individual until the formation of a new human collectivity, can subsequently be performed by the individual subject independently of the public scene, and while it may recall the scene as a whole, it would nonetheless specifically re-present the scene’s central figure, the original object of the aborted gesture. The new category of *significance* contains within it both the *sacred*—the quality of indefinitely *attracting and thereby deferring* human appetite—and the *desirable*—the same quality, but with the horizon of the deferral experienced as finite rather than transcendental. The persistence of the sign after the sparagmos realizes the difference between these two modes of significance. The animal itself is eaten as an object of appetite, but the sign remains as a reminder of its transcendent central role, as designating the “transcendental signified,” or more simply, as the *name-of-God*.

* * *

It is the aim of GA to dissolve the frontiers between empirical anthropology and “human science” on the one hand, and on the other, the speculative anthropology we call *philosophy*. Philosophy originated in Greece with the liberation of discourse from ritual constraints, under the impulse of reflecting on the problems of post-ritual political organization. It has remained ever since *metaphysical* according to what I consider the most useful definition of that term: thought that takes for granted the existence of mature human language, that is, language that includes declarative sentences or *propositions*.

But now that GA has provided the birth of our signing ability with a plausible real-world foundation, the problems of both philosophy and the human sciences can be placed on a new footing. The *new way of thinking* that is generative anthropology is not a panacea for solving the world’s ethical problems, let alone those of empirical social science, but it should allow thinkers of all disciplines to situate themselves in a nonconfrontational manner toward the totality of the human culture we share. It is time that the Enlightenment divorce of science from religion, however necessary and even inevitable within the Judeo-Christian world itself, be followed by a reconciliation that renews their sense of common purpose.

Unlike the hypothetical utterance forms of “elementary” or pre-declarative language, no clear trace of which subsists, the institutional or ritual aspect of the originary event is well documented, and cannot be discussed without concrete reference to actual practices. This task transcends the speculative limits of GA, but the anthropological community would surely benefit from taking GA’s originary insights into account.

* * *

The preceding *chapter* sought to demonstrate the underlying affinity of Jacques Derrida’s conception of *la différance* with the aims of GA. Derrida’s original French neologism is not unsurprisingly richer than the English *deferral*, as the French word *différer* means both *defer* and *differ*, and *différance*, which is pronounced the same way as *différence*, meaning simply “difference,” adds to it the gerundive verbal element of the *act* of deferring. Although Derrida’s idea was intended not as an anthropological concept but as a “deconstruction” of metaphysical “presence,” it requires only a small change in mindset to convert it into a key anthropological term.

In Derrida’s conception, the deconstruction effected by the revelation of *la différance* exposes the mythical nature of sacred presence in order to liberate us from the dominance of the authoritarian center. Derrida never saw that it was precisely this deferral of the appetitive relationship between the human subject and the object of his desire that embodied our *freedom* from the animal world of instinct, as reflected in Sartre’s conception of the *pour-soi*—that (sacred) *presence* in the human sense was made possible as a result of *différance* rather than being undermined by it.

As Derrida implies but cannot explain, deferral is much more central to the act of signification than simply delaying the application of a paradigm. Even if that “paradigm” contains but a single member, *any* use of language is a deferral. Before humans invented/discovered the sign, no creature could relate to objects in the world other than appetitively. Inappropriate appetitive urges, when not blocked at the source by innate reactions, could be countered by learned inhibitions ("conditioned reflexes"); but deferral as it emerged in the originary event is a *voluntary, cultural* act.

I imagine that Derrida would have agreed with me that *la différance* is the minimal definition of the human. But he would surely not have wished to situate it at the *first moment* of human history as the source of language and representation itself. Derrida's *différance* denies the very notion of origin; it is *always already* constituted by a set of differences, and offered as a refutation of phenomenology's conception of the scene of representation as the *presence* of the object to our consciousness.

As implied by the nostalgic text cited in the previous *chapter*, this debunking of metaphysics was in fact its final affirmation. Metaphysics, even when it distinguishes with Kant the "thing-in-itself" from the "thing-for-us," affirms that our specifically human understanding of the world is independent of language and is merely *expressed* in it. But for the Nietzschean aftermath of metaphysics, the language of philosophical reason betrays a secret nostalgia for the plenitude of the sacred Word, for the "language of presence" as sole guarantee of revealed truth. Save in asides such as the quoted passage, deconstruction inverts the positive sense of this affirmation, but does not question its substance. The object's presence being always *différée*, we cannot claim any unmediated knowledge of it. Hence any claims that may be made of such knowledge are mystifications, tools of oppression. To deconstruct presence is to reveal the hidden (political) agenda of metaphysics.

For GA, on the contrary, the metaphysical myth of presence is indeed a misprision of *la différance*, but it is properly the latter, not the former, that provides the characteristically human understanding of the world. "Presence" is less a sinister myth than a theologically inflected understanding of what is in fact the *separation* of consciousness from its object, as inaugurated by the originary abortion of the gesture of appropriation. Something can be *present* to us only if we stand back from it and contemplate it independently of our appetitive interest in it; we *sacralize* the originary object of our intention by deferring its appetitive role. Its numinous presence to us depends on its *absence* from the animal world of appetite that would henceforth be doubled by the human world of representation.

Once this is understood, deconstruction's critique of authority imposing its mythical-theological presence on the duped multitudes is shown to be based on the false premise, one that Derrida strangely shares with Rousseau, that language is itself a form of oppression rather than the fundamental locus of human reciprocity. On the contrary, language cannot be understood as a product of social hierarchy. The originary sign as the name-of-God is a guarantor not of tyranny but of the human community's liberation from the reign of the strongest. The equality before God that monotheism would later make explicit in the face of the god-kings of the ancient empires was there at the birth of human society.

* * *

The relationship between language and ritual has scarcely been explored in recent decades. The nineteenth century Sanskritist Max Müller saw language as emerging in the context of sacred ritual, and the coevality of language and religion was more recently explored in its broad outlines by Roy Rappaport in *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge, 1999), but this line of inquiry has not been pursued by recent students of language origin. Michael Tomasello's throwaway quip about religion: One way that leaders throughout human history have sought to legitimate themselves and their laws from a moral point of view is to claim that they have somehow been anointed by a deity or in some other supernatural way.

A Natural History of Human Morality (Harvard, 2016): 131

is emblematic of the *désinvolture* of not just one highly respected scholar but of the entire field.

No one expects contemporary linguists to share Müller's concern for religious practices, but they should be aware of the originary unity between the simplest form of *formal* representation and the basis it establishes for its eventual *institutional* repetition, if only as a way of understanding how the sign acquired a "portable" linguistic association with its referent while at the same time guaranteeing the reaffirmation of communal *solidarity*, to use Durkheim's term, in the ritual repetition of the entire event.

Such matters are, indeed, altogether susceptible to being studied empirically, provided the "religious" be understood as an anthropological reality rather than as a fanciful excrescence on "secular" rationality. The underlying identity of significance and sacrality is not a mere metaphor.

Although the idea is understandably absent from the metaphysical/philosophical tradition, the characteristics attributed to God are in fact those of the embodied or "incarnate" signified. The sign is "immortal," and in the originary event and on the scene of representation to which it gives birth, it is "omnipotent" in interdicting the central object, and "omniscient" in embodying a knowledge of the whole configuration that the individual participants do not possess—the foundation of Durkheim's insight that the sacred embodies the ethical values of the community that transcend individual interests.

The identity of origin, God, and the *Word* / *Logos* / *Verbum* affirmed in the first line of the Gospel of John is inscribed thereby in Christianity and in Western civilization as a whole. It is time we began once more to take it seriously.

Chapter 5.
The Ostensive

In any account of the genesis of language, one must assume that the first linguistic sign was both absolutely new, a “symbolic” sign (Peirce), yet as close as possible to what animals were capable of producing. I have always been amazed that the recent accounts I have read, such as the one in Fauconnier and Turner’s *How Do We Think* (Basic Books, 2002; see *Chronicle* 528), simply neglect this question. This is no doubt a residue of the metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy that has since the beginning taken the existence of propositional language for granted. This tradition has persisted throughout the entire history of philosophy, and the attempts in the Early Modern era (see my *The Scenic Imagination* [Stanford, 2007]) to theorize the origin of human culture, and in some cases specifically of language, culminating in Freud’s father-murder scenario in *Totem and Taboo*, never penetrated mainstream philosophical discourse, even among thinkers whose avowed intention was to abolish “metaphysics”—for which they had a rather different definition than mine.

As I have described the originary event, the first linguistic sign was an “aborted gesture of appropriation,” and since it was performed in the presence of its referent, I labeled it an *ostensive,* a term not altogether original but scarcely common in the linguistic literature. I have no desire to boast of the profound intuition that led me to this term; on the contrary, I think it would be difficult for anyone to choose a “first sign” very different from this one, given Terrence Deacon’s well-taken point that human linguistic signs are *not* outgrowths of the signals or “calls” used by animals to signal to their conspecifics, including the complex signal system of the vervet monkey. The fact that such obvious thoughts do not occur to those who write on this subject is a clear indication that the elephant in the room of language origin, *the specificity of the human*, is in fact taboo, and must be drowned in a sea of “cognitive” detail that makes language the essentially inevitable outcome of our increasing intelligence, for which it is easy to allege a Darwinian justification.

Let me repeat that what makes the originary ostensive different from any kind of signal is the fact that it emerges, not from a need to exercise the newly added neurons in the proto-human brain, but from a *deferral* of action. This is the central concept lacking in Girard's groundbreaking account of human origin in *La violence et le sacré*. It is this first example of *joint shared attention* that is the beginning of human language. It requires no special cognitive abilities; what is new is not cognitive but *communicative*, and the deferral becomes necessary not because we have become more intelligent, but because with the growth of our intelligence we have become more *mimetic*. One wonders why this rather obvious point is so difficult to communicate in a world of people capable of solving differential equations and describing multi-dimensional vector spaces.

* * *

In order that the originary ostensive gesture become a *sign*, it cannot be the simple *negation* of the original gesture of appropriation. Here as elsewhere, we can well imagine that similar interruptions of the attempt to obtain nourishment took place well before the birth of the sign, which can only occur once the abortion of the gesture has become expected, so that the aborted or deferred gesture is performed *deliberately*. What had been at first an "instinctual" gesture inhibited by fear of the others in the group morphs into a voluntary gesture of communication to these others that they have nothing to fear or to defend against, while designating the central object of desire as the *cause* of this deferral—the originary template of *joint shared attention*. The repetition of the gesture would then be self-reinforcing until at least the moment at which all are confident that no individual will break the symmetry of the group, at which point the communal division of the animal in the sparagmos can begin.

In the course of this process, the sign becomes a conscious act that is no longer a failed attempt at appropriation but has acquired a *form* of its own. The fact that animals *do not point* is most significant; the first sign need be no more than a pointing, yet not solely a pointing-at but also a *pointing-for* the other members of the group. The very fact of designating something to the others' attention makes the gesture more than a directional indication. It has become a mark of *significance*, and hence of *signification*. The sign is not a simple designation but a *re-presentation*.

At the origin, we assume that language began with a single sign, and that the significance it attributed to its object signaled the sole significant object in the universe: *this* is significant, and all the rest is not. And this is indeed the fundamental characteristic of the scene of representation in general. Obviously when speaking about A we are not denying the significance of B, but language is a mechanism for directing the selective attention of our audience. Each utterance assumes the existence of a world in the background, but cannot allude to it without thereby moving it out of that background.

Calling the first sign the *name-of-God* is not just a mnemonic device that serves to point out the uniqueness of the bearer of significance at that moment, but an affirmation of the originary indistinguishability of the sacred and the significant, and of the source of both sacrality and significance in the excess of desire that is generated by and at the same time constitutes the new human collectivity, which we can rightfully call a *community*. The contrast with the old pecking-order system lies precisely in the reciprocal relationship that links all in their distance from the sacred center. At the same time, the inaccessibility of the center generates an originary *resentment* that is beyond the mere rivalry inspired by the pecking-order system, since it concerns not a single member of the group but a sacred being that stands over against the group as a whole. Our originary ambivalence toward the sacred is the central problematic of all religious traditions.

If in the first edition of TOOL, I described the first sign as a physical gesture without allusion to any vocal component, in reading linguistic anthropologist Daniel Everett's *How Language Began* (Liveright, 2017) I was reminded that all known human languages save those expressly designed for the deaf are primarily vocal, with gesture serving so to speak as an analog accompaniment to the digitally encoded meanings of the words. Thus we must assume that such a vocal component was present from the beginning. If it makes sense to speak of an "aborted gesture," it is difficult to apply this condition to the production of a sound. But on the other hand, if we assume that the original gesture was accompanied by a vocalization, then the fact that the interruption of the gesture would *not* require that of the sound may be alleged as a factor in the eventual dominance of the oral component, independently of the superiority of sound as a means of communication. If in the past, as we can well imagine, significant gestures such as the Alpha's taking possession of a consumable object had been normally accompanied with vocalization, the persistence of the first sign's vocalization in the absence of the appropriative gesture would have been a significant break with the previous signaling practice. But such speculations are not, needless to say, of central importance to our understanding of the origin of language. I would leave the determination of what kind of articulation existed at the dawn of language to the paleontologists who study such things as the evolution of the vocal tract, and even of the hand—for some have speculated that the relative lack of pigmentation in the palm gives evidence of the use of the hands for communication.

* * *

Once we have provided a plausible understanding of the genesis of the originary sign, the rest of the development of language might be expected to belong to linguistics proper—save that we have no clear evidence of any "primitive" form of language. The apparent fact that the Pirahã language lacks recursive structures, a discovery of Everett recently popularized in Tom Wolfe's *The Kingdom of Speech* (Little, Brown, 2016; see *Chronicle* 525), may be a sign that not all modern languages possess all the features of mature language, but whether or not Chomsky's Language Acquisition Device has heuristic, let alone biological validity is not something that GA need concern itself with. The important point is that it is absurd to use the complexity of mature language as the basis of a demonstration that the earliest forms of language must have been driven by a watershed advance in our cognitive ability. On the contrary, a simple increase in mimetic tension is the only contribution our increased intelligence need have made to language's emergence.

How then might an ostensive language have evolved into mature language? Here again, it seems to me that the most fruitful avenue for speculation on this subject is not that of cognitive subtlety but of the broadening of the uses of language as a mode of communication. The peace-producing effect of language may not have left any direct evidence, but our survival (so far) as dangerously rivalrous creatures is its unmistakable testament. This implies, independently of any accompanying improvements in our cognitive abilities, what I called in TOOL a "lowering of the threshold of significance” to accommodate a broader spectrum of significant objects and differences among them: different signs for different (sacrificial) animals, for example.

Thus we must assume that although the use of signs may well long have been restricted—as much later, certain types of written language commonly were—to sacred circumstances, language eventually liberated itself from ritual, the formal becoming “secular” in contrast to the institutional reproduction/commemoration of the originary event. The originary scene would have been a locus of extreme tension, in which the emergence of the sign was a means of avoiding conflict. But once the peace-bringing effects of this scene became anticipated, the sign would spread to less formal encounters, and in particular to groups of humans that formed a part rather than the whole of the local community.

Once utterance of the sign has become an act in its own right, it is in principle detachable from the collective scene of representation and capable of recreating this scene between any two interlocutors, or in a somewhat different sense, within the individual consciousness. One’s internal scene of representation is the mental space within which we conceive the meaning of language, as when listening to another or reading a book. Such an individual space, however implemented in our nervous system, must have begun to exist in the originary event itself, or in any case in the memory of those who had participated in the event and its early repetitions.

In *Chronicle* 419, I developed the idea that Eve’s temptation by the snake, making woman rather than man the first sex to experience resentment, might well reflect a time when only men were permitted to use language. Clear examples of male priority in the use of sacred signs remain to this day among conservative religious groups, and that Catholics, Muslims, and traditional Orthodox Jews have only male clergy is in all probability a reflection of the priority of (more violence-prone) males over females in the origin of language. If men indeed used language before women, Eve’s taking up the snake’s suggestion to acquire forbidden knowledge when Adam had remained content to name the animals is a fascinating parable of the productivity of resentment.

* * *

Thus we may assume that at some point there emerged an *ostensive language* by means of which individuals could communicate in small non-ritual groups about objects they were able to point to. As in the originary event, reality was no doubt messier than our theoretical model; it is not unlikely, for example, that the introduction of the more advanced utterance-form of the *imperative* might not have awaited the development of a full-fledged ostensive language. But to treat as separate stages of language developments that were necessarily chronological in the small—one cannot conceive of an imperative sign that would not have previously been intelligible as an ostensive—brings heuristic advantages with no obvious side-effects.

We use ostensives today for such things as teaching new words to children (for example, in picture books), where a pointing gesture is supplemented with a spoken word. Beyond its pedagogical function, the ostensive serves in emergencies to alert those around of a danger potentially present to all but hitherto unnoticed. The major example I gave in the original TOOL was *Fire!*, which is not simply an exclamation but a warning to those who have not yet detected the fire, and who would be expected to repeat the word to warn others farther off.

The secularization of language obliges us to consider the notion of *felicity* or appropriateness conditions. In the originary event, the sign is so to speak dictated by the presence of the central object, and this constraint remains in the reconstitution of the event in ritual. The question of felicity arises only for signs uttered outside the institutional framework of the ritual scene (we can ignore for our purposes the question of infelicitous *institutional* representations, such as black masses).

Once signs began to be used to convey "information," their use would be subject to criteria concerning the validity and pertinence of this information. With regard to pertinence, the "lowering of the threshold of signification" that allows words for everyday objects to enter the language implies the use of ostensives, in circumstances less urgent than the originary mimetic crisis, to point out significant objects or phenomena in the environment, dangers as well as opportunities. Assuming the pertinence of the information conveyed by the ostensive sign, its felicity would depend on its fulfilling its implicit promise that the object referred to as present to the speaker is indeed present, and thus can normally be made to appear to his interlocutor(s).

The classic example of an infelicitous ostensive is that of the *boy who cried "wolf!*," for "wolf!" is clearly an ostensive intended to signal the presence of a wolf. In the normal case, the boy would have seen or heard the wolf, no one else being close enough to do so, but his hearers would presumably be within range of the danger the wolf represents. This common vulnerability is an important detail; "Wolf!" is not the equivalent of "Help!," which signals only a private danger. The boy presumably wants others in the community not simply to come to his rescue but to praise him for pointing out a danger to all.

This Aesopian parable of the infelicitous use of the ostensive is meant to warn us against the danger that such actions will make one an unreliable interlocutor whose future warnings risk being ignored, with potentially fatal consequences. It is of interest to us here as a demonstration that once signs exist, even signs that can presumably be easily verified, this verification, being independent of the sign itself, may fail, and the sign-user may use this fact to deliberately mislead. Higher animals are known to practice deception, but only a human being can be a *liar*.

Chapter 6.
Linguistics of the Ostensive

Thus far we have been concerned with the hypothetical preconditions for the existence of the ostensive utterance form. We now turn to the "linguistics" of what we can conceive of as "ostensive language." Here we can benefit from the observation of ostensives in our own language.

In the originary event, the central referent is not detachable from the sacred scene of representation on which it appears. In the profane world, however, this scene is evoked in the communication situation, but the sacred is no longer an attribute of the referent itself. The ostensive offers a "profane" version of the scene, an intentional model of the universe limited to a single present reality, whose significance is presumed to require immediate attention. Enlarging the ostensive lexicon can increase the precision of the model, but without modifying its *intentional structure*, the relation of the model to our perception of the world and to its potential interlocutors under the specific conditions of joint shared attention in which it is communicated.

We may assume that the ostensive would indifferently designate actions and their real or potential agents. An expression like "Fire!" would refer indifferently to a fire and to its burning. Similarly, an ostensive such as "Run!" would be understood as not distinguishing the nominal (*a* run or running) from the verbal ([something] runs). But although it is pointless to divide its vocabulary into nominals and verbals, epistemologically speaking, it seems reasonable to classify all ostensives functionally as nominals. For example, *stampede* is a verb as well as a noun, but until such time as the verbal form becomes a true predicate and takes on a tense relating linguistic time to that of the real world, *Stampede!* would be simply, like a fire or a wolf, a thing/event to be reacted to.

The intentional structures of elementary language, the ostensive and the imperative that emerges from it, do not possess the "third-person" stability of the declarative's mapping of the world, but as the *Wolf!* example demonstrates, reflect the tension between the different standpoints of speaker and hearer. It is this tension that will lead, through the dialectic of desire and paradox, to the mature form of the declarative.

The Intentional Structure of the Ostensive

The ease with which we construct complex declarative sentences inspires in us the illusion that such sentences reveal "transparently," as Sartre affirmed of prose in opposition to poetry, the order of things, or more precisely that of "phenomena." In contrast, the ostensive, which asserts no propositional truth, appears to grammarians if at all as less an objective model than a "defective" expedient inspired by practical necessity.

It will take more than the "deconstruction of the discourse of Western metaphysics" to make a dent in the stubborn logocentricity of this perspective. The "truth" of the ostensive is by no means that of the declarative proposition. But to recognize the ostensive as nonetheless the simplest linguistic model of reality, subject to verification within the limits of its information-bearing power, makes us appreciate both the declarative's superiority for conveying information and its derived, non-originary nature. In contrast, Western philosophy is founded on the *metaphysical* postulate that the declarative is not an evolved linguistic form but simply the *natural* one.

Considered from the standpoint of mature language, the ostensive utterance lacks the *shifters* of person and tense that explicitly relate the present of linguistic communication to the scene it evokes. The ostensive needs no tense because its referent is present to the speaker and verifiably present to the hearer. Similarly, it lacks person because the hearer/s is/are intended to stand in the same relation to the referent as the speaker. Thus after hearing an ostensive, and possibly observing its referent for himself, the hearer may repeat it for the benefit of others; the first person to cry "Fire!" has no monopoly on his utterance. Even in the case of "Ouch!" (as opposed to a true *cry* of pain) what is referred to is not the internal sense of pain so much as the verifiable violation of a social norm (e.g., "you stepped on my toe!" or "how stupid of me to hit my finger with the hammer!"). The ostensive presents its model and does nothing more, it being assumed that its referent is of sufficient significance for the hearer to react to it as soon as possible. The hierarchical relation between speaker and hearer on the scene of representation thus gives way to a symmetrical sharing of information, and if necessary, to cooperative action. But we should note that, unlike the imperative that derives from it, the ostensive does not explicitly refer to or demand such action. Its only reference is to the present, which it does not yet distinguish from the scenic presence of linguistic communication in general.

Within this intentional structure, the ostensive can potentially make use of a lexicon extendable in theory to the totality of perceptibles—things and actions. But although there is no a priori limit on the semantics of an ostensive language, its "signifieds" are not equivalent to those of mature language. Employed only in the presence of their referent, ostensives express an ontology of *events* rather than of beings. Because they define their object as significant in a given situation, and their enunciation necessarily implies the presence of this significance (danger or benefit), they are closer to exclamations than to models of conceptual thought, which signify without themselves participating in the significance of their object. The ostensive "word," itself a complete utterance, does not possess the context-free conceptual status of our own vocabulary. The establishment of the ostensive within the profane world outside the sphere of ritual will reveal the contradictions latent in its model of reality.

Dialectic of the Ostensive

The originary sign had no place in a lexicon, not simply because it was unique, but because in its evocation of the sacred object as center of the communal scene of representation—as *name-of-God*—it was only in retrospect detachable from this scene. Even today, the enunciation of a divine name hints toward the ritual enactment of this scene, which in its more complete versions reproduces the originary deferral and its festive resolution. The *formal* or linguistic evolution of the sign must take place through the differentiation of the criteria guaranteeing its appropriateness in a given situation.

This guarantee has two aspects, of which the first is prerequisite to the second. First, the act of speech must be justified, as opposed to saying nothing at all, and second, the specific sign used must be appropriate to the situation. We may call these the criteria of *significance* and of *signification*. The intersubjective basis of the significance-criterion, which applies to ritual as well as language and other forms of representation, is the reconstitution of the public scene of representation. In contrast, the signification-criterion is roughly speaking that of truth, although only declarative sentences possess a genuine truth-value.

Although it is perfectly possible for a "true" sentence, ostensive or otherwise, to be insignificant, when there is a high threshold of significance, as we may presume existed at the earliest stages of language, the danger of falling below it makes the criterion it imposes far more critical than that of appropriate meaning. The ostensive's emphasis on significance over signification suggests that the lexicon at this stage is likely to remain relatively undifferentiated.

In the lexicon of a language possessing declaratives, a word is not an utterance, and its meaning or signified can be considered apart from any given use of it. But in the case of the ostensive, the word can only be associated with its appropriateness condition, which is the significant presence of the object that it can be said to designate. *Fire* means a certain state of matter, but *Fire!* means the presence of a (dangerous) fire. To think "fire" is to imagine a fire, but to think "Fire!" is to imagine a situation where the cry would be appropriate, perhaps accompanied by its expected consequences: panic, flight, organization of a bucket brigade, and so on. The use of an ostensive creates an imaginary *scene*, and its speaker's power to do so is an element of its "definition," given that its appropriateness condition is the existence of a situation where the exercise of this power would be appropriate. Thus to think of an ostensive is to imagine a public scene of action. Such a thought not merely gives rise to desire, but is in itself an expression of desire, the same desire that would be felt in the presence of the scene itself.

To use a sacred name, even today, evokes a power that reconstitutes at least symbolically the communal scene. Most societies impose strict limits on such evocations (“taking God’s name in vain”). But the appropriateness of “profane” ostensives, in contrast, depends on circumstances that can only be observed a posteriori. Thus the very existence of an ostensive lexicon contains an implicit contradiction, and to think of any of its constituent elements presents the thinker with a pragmatic paradox. It is no doubt true to say that in contrast with *fire*, *Fire!* means the presence of a fire, but the word itself will provoke the same effect independently of this presence. In imagining, in the absence of this referent, its power to compel the presence of the community, the potential speaker cannot help but realize that, given humanity’s shared scene of representation, the use of the sign alone will unleash the same power.

As we have seen in the *Wolf!* case, this gives rise to the possibility of *lying*, of deliberately provoking a wolf- or fire-reaction in the absence of its object. Considered simply as a lie, one presumes it would be sanctioned, but seen subjectively from the speaker’s point of view, this “inappropriate ostensive” opens the door to a broadening of the intentional structures of utterance forms to include the deliberate expression of desire. Because the hearer of “Fire!” is enjoined to react, the utterance itself expresses, independently of its “truth,” the desire to provoke the hearer’s anticipated reaction. The expression of desire that emerges from this new use would tend to disambiguate itself from the ostensive’s revelation of a socially significant presence. Once it becomes accepted as an utterance-form in its own right, the word would signify not the presence of its referent but the desire of the speaker for (the power conferred by) this presence. The ostensive will then have become an *imperative*.

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A possible framework for such a development is linguistic apprenticeship. One must learn the words of the language before grasping the totality of their appropriateness conditions. Yet in the case of the ostensive, the very constitution of a personal lexicon involves the learner in a contradiction. No real practice use of the ostensive is possible because it cannot be imagined in abstraction from its use. Even if we assume that a child learns the ostensive by observing its appropriate use rather than through a deliberately conducted apprenticeship, he cannot be expected to learn to use these words appropriately without a few trials. But to "practice" the ostensive is to evoke the scene of its legitimate use. A child's inappropriate ostensive will not be taken seriously, but a mother may well respond to what she understands as the child's intention, which is to bring about the presence of the object designated by the ostensive, thereby treating his utterance as an imperative.

A plausible scenario might be a child, having learned a word as an ostensive, using it in the absence of its referent to bring about, as it were magically, its presence. Indeed, this remains the standard vocative use of personal names, *Mommy!* for example. In learning to use any ostensive, the child relives in his own linguistic universe the dialectic we are now describing. He need neither learn the imperative use of the word by example nor need he know in advance that its imperative use is acceptable. Motivated by the desire for the physical presence of his mother or some other necessity of life, he simply (re)creates the imperative for himself in the same way that its creation would have occurred in the course of the formal evolution of language.

From the presumed near-instantaneity of this evolution in the modern child—an assumption that it would be useful to confirm by research—it does not follow, of course, that the historical ostensive-imperative evolution was equally instantaneous. We cannot exclude the possibility that linguistic signs, as opposed to prehuman "calls," may have retained for many generations a strictly communal, religious function.

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In sum, because the ontology of the ostensive remains, like that of the sacred, dependent on a public scene, even with the lowering of the threshold of significance to permit its application to the profane world, the ostensive sign cannot attain the stable lexical status of a concept-sign or "signifier." Only the reinterpretation of the inappropriate ostensive as an imperative resolves the pragmatic paradox it poses.

In St. Anselm's "ontological proof" of the existence of God, our possession of the concept of the "most perfect being" (*ens perfectissimum*) itself implies that being's existence. Kant refutes this proof by affirming that existence is not a predicate. But at the stage of language at which the concept of the sacred was generated, the predicative function of the declarative sentence had not yet been conceived. Because the ostensive word *means* its object-as-present, to conceive of using the word is to conceive its object as present, and to pronounce the word is to provoke this conception in its hearer.

But this means that the ontology of the ostensive is identical with that of the sacred as expressed by St. Anselm. Whatever punishments may have been meted out to the inappropriate users of the ostensive who were its first "believers," with the emergence of the imperative, their faith in the ontological proof obtained its reward. In the imperative form, the desire of the individual soul, to which the ostensive had provided a means of expression but not an accepted vehicle for its communication, attains significance in the eyes of the community.

Chapter 7.
The Imperative I

Linguistics, even in our post-Chomskian era, still takes NP + VP as the fundamental form of the sentence; anything less is a "defective" transformation. But once we attempt to explain how *à partir de rien* NP became associated with VP, we discover that this synchronic model not only does not provide us with an answer, but does not even permit us to ask the question. Thus the foundation of one of the most advanced human sciences is surrounded by a taboo even more constraining than those of primitive religion, which at least attempts through etiological myths to explain the origins of cultural forms.

If traditional grammar does not recognize the existence of the ostensive as a distinct utterance form, it is willing to grant syntactic status to the imperative as a poor relation of the declarative sentence. Although the imperative has no true tense, its verbal form may be considered a sort of immediate future. Similarly, although its nearly universal zero-morphology attests to an apparent ignorance of the category of person, it can generally be classified functionally with the second person. We need not concern ourselves for the moment with the obviously derivative third- or first-person forms (*Let him; Let's*).

From our perspective, the imperative is characterized not by "defective" but by nascent grammaticality, which we shall define as a linguistic form's degree of self-containment or "context-free-ness," considered as an intentional model of reality. From this definition, the situation of the imperative on the grammatical scale between the ostensive and the declarative follows immediately. The ostensive is meaningless in the absence of its referent; the declarative can do without a real-world referent. The imperative operates in the absence of its object-nominal or -verbal, but can be satisfied only upon the object's being made present. The declarative stands at the end of the scale of grammaticality as the telos of linguistic evolution, after which no substantial progress is possible. This explains, if it does not excuse, the grammarians' inclination to treat all other forms as imperfect declaratives irrespective of their evolutionary status.

As we have noted, the ostensive makes no formal distinction between verbals and nominals; because verbality proper is a quality of predicates, the very term "verbal" is at this stage an anachronism. If the ostensive "Run!" designates the presence of running, the imperative "Run!" would similarly request running from the interlocutor, indifferently by asking him to run or "do a run." The "nominality" or substantivity of this object obtains in principle because only as a *substance* capable of being an independent object of the imagination can it become an object of desire. Yet the fact that in mature languages the imperative is always considered to be a form of the verb, and that nominal imperatives like "Scalpel!" are categorized, if at all, as elliptical forms of the verbal imperative ("[give me the] scalpel!"), cannot simply be attributed to the perversity of grammarians. What it demonstrates is that by subordinating the appearance of the desired object to the *action* of the interlocutor, the imperative has already taken a major step in the direction of predication.

Let us now consider more precisely the intentional structure of the imperative. The ostensive is an expression not of individual but of social concern, the significance of its object being measured by its capacity to arouse the community to action. The individual speaker of the ostensive thus expresses an interest in the object no greater than, and possibly even less than that of his addressee, because the speaker, being already aware of the significant object, may be assumed to have already at least begun whatever action its presence might require. The ostensive may indeed be wholly altruistic, warning the hearer of a danger to which the speaker is immune. It creates a symmetrical stance with regard to its object, which it situates on the scene of representation as equally present to all interlocutors, retaining the nonviolent symmetry of the originary sign.

The Collective Imperative It is not a priori apparent from the consideration of the two forms simply as intentional structures that the imperative should be a less public form than the ostensive. If the ostensive points out communally significant present objects, the imperative may equally well refer to communally significant absent ones. The ostensive reference to a present object creates a model of reality—the simplest possible—in which this object becomes the unique and therefore unifying object of attention. A collective imperative would use essentially the same model, although now its referent would become the object of a communal effort to procure it. Examples of collective imperatives are not hard to find: the sanguinary shouts of crowds, *Kill the umpire!* or *Down with X!* as well as the celebratory *Three cheers for Y!* and *Long live the king!* In these cases the imperative functions to "spread the word" within a group and to reinforce a particular decision concerning what is to be done, the content of which may be nominal as well as verbal.

Because the originary ostensive as name-of-God would remain associated *essentially* with the scenic center rather than the animal that was eventually devoured, this dichotomous representation of "the sacred" remains ever a conundrum, whether for believers (who cannot *point to* the object they originally pointed to/deferred appropriation of) or non-believers (who speak of "God" as a being while believing "he does not exist"). Thus in ritual, the repetition of the originary collective ostensive is *always already* a collective imperative; to evoke God is to call on him, and to call on him is to presume, not that he will "come," but that he is *already there*. I think the reader will agree that our depiction of the hypothetical originary scene gives a plausible real-world configuration to these paradoxical frontiers of language/culture, while showing, to the extent that it can be shown, that their paradoxes cannot be "resolved" by Creationism or "materialism" or anything in between.

A closer examination of collective imperatives reveals their apparent symmetry to consist rather of a reciprocity that is necessarily unstable, hovering between the asymmetry of the true imperative and the group identification of the first-person *Let's!* construction. In this context, it is noteworthy that the typical example of the "collective imperative" is less the expression of the need of a community genuinely threatened by some outside agency or of its pleasure on the discovery of an object of collective satisfaction than the cry of the mob intent on discharging its violence on a designated victim. The fact that GA does not follow—as the original TOOL in fact did—Girard's scapegoat/emissary murder scenario of the originary event does not mean that it should be taken, as Girardians often do, as a bowdlerized substitution of a rationalistic "social contract" for the originary reality of human violence. The origin of language is, as Chairman Mao might have reminded us, not a tea party. And the *sparagmos* in which the original "sacrificial" animal is divided up may be assumed to discharge not only the hunger but also the resentment derived from the frustrated mutual aggression of the participants. But the simple *instinctive* discharge of aggression is not a *cultural* phenomenon. Even a lynching "consecrates" its victim, often in a violently degrading fashion. The sparagmos, in order to be one, that is, a sacrificial feast, must *follow* the deferral of instinctual appropriation, just as the provision of food must be, as it remains to this day in human interaction, the chief reinforcing mechanism for sacrificial activity. We should not ignore the evidence of such "primitive" cultural phenomena as the ostensive sign and the sparagmatic communal gathering in our own lives, just as we should not fail to note the pervasive presence of "Maussian" gift-exchange in our social relations everywhere outside the marketplace.

The action of the sacrificial/scapegoating mob is motivated not by instinct but by *desire*—a desire founded on representation. The indifferently ostensive and imperative designations of the victim by the mob are a degraded version of the original designation of the sacred central object in which the originary resentment directed at that being takes precedence over awe at its numinous centrality. Indeed, the merely aggressive rather than alimentary nature of the mob's desires—which serves to indicate their liminal rather than central social significance—makes the mob's common action a less fraught process, since dividing the spoils is, if relevant at all, of less concern than causing pain and death to the victim.

It is worth noting that in less violent circumstances, collective imperatives tend to be addressed not to the group formed by the speakers but to a real or undefined figure of authority who is called upon to carry out the desires of the mob. "Down with X!" is not equivalent to "Let's get X!" And when baseball fans shout "Kill the umpire!" they have no intention of performing the "murder" themselves, or even of inciting anyone in particular to perform it. The task of the undefined "murderer" is to satisfy the collective desire while the collectivity incurs neither danger nor guilt. A more sinister version of this are the cries accompanying the execution of "enemies of the people"; these are nominally imperatives addressed to the executioner, but the mechanism of desire remains the same. Only in the most extreme moments does the mob return to the participatory frenzy of the originary sparagmos, and at such moments, it is no longer useful to speak of an "imperative."

The scene of representation, once established in the originary event, can be recreated between any two members of the community, because once the protection of nonviolent presence vested in the sacred object is deemed to extend over nonritual communication within the community, the size of the group involved would be unimportant. In the originary event that gives birth to human desire, the individual desires of the participants for the sacred object cannot be satisfied; the object can only be revered/possessed in common, leaving a residue of resentment. In contrast, the imperative form overtly expresses such desire qua desire, which is to say, claims for it potentially communal significance.

Thus the imperative is a more "secular" mode than the ostensive, one more oriented to the practical world. Its existence alongside the ostensive allows for continued dialogue—for example, the surgeon's conversation with the assistant who passes him the requested instruments: "Scalpel!" – "Scalpel!" "Forceps!" – "Forceps!" and so on. This was not possible with the ostensive, which outside the ritual context is rather a means for revealing an unexpected presence than for facilitating continued action. It is indeed difficult to imagine a cooperative work situation without the imperative, the use of which would tend to contribute to the lexical categorizing of necessary implements and therefore to their distinctly cultural quality as tools.

* * *

It is significant that in Wittgenstein's 1953 *Philosophical Investigations,* which bring together the linguistic speculations that occupied him during the last decades of his life, the "language games" that he analyzes turn constantly to explorations of the "elementary linguistic structures": questions of how an imperative is used to request something, and how the same word can be used as an ostensive in reply, with the ultimate goal of carrying out a predetermined *praxis*. For example: . . . is the call "Slab!" in example (2) [which describes a language in which a builder calls out the names of building materials to request them from an assistant] a sentence or a word?—If a word, surely it has not the same meaning as the like-sounding word of our ordinary language [i.e., the noun "slab"], for in §2 it is a call. But if a sentence, it is surely not the elliptical sentence: "Slab!" of our language. . . . [Y]ou can call "Slab!" a word and also a sentence; perhaps it could be appropriately called a ‘degenerate sentence’ . . . ; in fact, it *is* our ‘elliptical’ sentence. (*P. I*. p. 8, §19, Blackwell, 2001 [1953]) What is missing from these fascinating if confused speculations is a plausible origin for the exchange of signs that gave us the tools of language in the first place. It is nonetheless significant that the last great theoretician of the philosophical proposition, the thinker who raised the declarative to an ontological principle, ended his philosophical career fascinated by what he clearly intuited were more originary elementary linguistic forms.

Chapter 8.
The Imperative II
The Intentional Structure of the Imperative

The intentional structure of the ostensive can be summed up in a few words: The speaker transmits to the hearer an immediately verifiable model of the universe as containing one significant present object. That of the imperative is more complex, and this complexity is expressed as well in the existence of variant forms, such as the “collective imperative” and the third- and first-person forms.

In its primitive stage, the imperative has the same linguistic substance as the ostensive. The appropriate reaction would then depend on the interpretation of the utterance: either the referent is present, and is being designated, or it is absent, and being requested. In ambiguous cases, the dynamic of the situation would tend to lead to the dominance of the imperative: because the speaker’s designation of the object indicates that he, at least, is interested in it, whereas the ostensive presupposes the interest of the other interlocutors as well, the imperative will be preferred as assuming less a priori significance. By informing its interlocutor of the desire that defines the speaker’s relation to the object, the imperative, even in the absence of any morphology or specifically verbal element, is a proto-grammatical form, possessing in its intentional structure the fundamental grammatical relations of person and time.

An utterance-form is more grammatical when it contains more information, not about “reality,” but about the communication situation. The identity of substance between ostensive and imperative corresponds to an identity of information about the world. But whereas the ostensive communicated nothing about the desire of the speaker that it did not at the same time presuppose in the hearer, the imperative accentuates the asymmetry of the speaker’s role as conveyor of information by making his desire mediate the action of the other.

In certain social contexts, this mediation may be taken to imply the existence of an asymmetric authority relation that transcends the immediate speech situation. But it is important to explain why this need not be the case. It is the situation of linguistic presence itself, the evocation of the scene of representation, that is the original source of the “authority” of the imperative. To be a participant in this situation, the hearer must defer his attention to worldly tasks in order to attend to the intentional model constructed by the speaker. In the imperative, the speaker takes advantage of this attention in order to extrapolate his linguistic intention into a worldly one aimed at the appropriation of its object. The ambiguity of the word “intention” here is not coincidental, nor is the instrumental nature of the imperative that exploits it. This identity of linguistic and practical intention resolves the paradox arrived at in the dialectic of the ostensive and thus produces a stable linguistic form, although, as we shall see, the use of this form will give rise to a paradoxical situation of a different sort.

The originary ostensive would have been maintained until it was clear that no individual would attempt to appropriate the object, that is, that it was sacred to all. But in the profane use of the ostensive, the end of the utterance is the end of the linguistic scene, which would presumably give way to actions not dictated by the utterance itself. In contrast, the felicitous imperative’s extrapolation of linguistic into practical intentionality prolongs the interlocutors’ virtual presence on the linguistic scene until the assigned task is carried out, independently of other worldly claims. The deferral constitutive of linguistic presence now becomes the awaiting of an anticipated action.

Grammatical Form Our discussion up to this point, concerned exclusively with intentional structure, has maintained the assumption that the primitive form of the imperative was substantially identical to that of the ostensive. As we know, however, although the nominal imperative continues to exist, the imperative in developed languages has a verbal form. We have seen that the temporality of the imperative, that is, its *tense*, is the prolongation of the linguistic scene in *awaiting*. The time of awaiting is both real, lived time standing outside the scene *stricto sensu* and a prolongation of the presence intended by the utterance. Thus the imperative includes within itself a model of a time other than that of its moment of utterance. We should contrast this with the simple identity of linguistic and real time in the ostensive, where the time of linguistic presence remains, as in the originary event, merely the time of deferral of action while attending to the speaker. The ostensive model has no temporal dimension; the word and its referent coexist in the same suspended present. The temporality of the imperative, although not yet a true tense independent of the scene of communication, like that of the declarative, is if not a temporal mapping of reality on language, already a mapping of language on reality. The hearer of the ostensive can immediately verify its informational content for himself, and so to speak discard the linguistic model that conveyed it; the hearer of the imperative must retain the model as a guide for his conduct, "verifying" it only upon the conclusion of his performance.

Whether the imperative takes on a nominal or a verbal form, the anticipated result of the imperative is an action by the hearer, so that the verbal form provides a more explicit model of the action. This is not true merely in the trivial sense that "bring the hammer!" or "Give me the hammer!" is more explicit than "Hammer!" If we compare "Hammer!" (conceived as a nominal) with "Run!" (considered as a verbal substantive rather than a verb), the former requires the performance by the hearer of actions not explicitly stated, whereas the latter is a fully explicit instruction; the run, unlike the hammer, is wholly under the control of the hearer. This difference between nominals and verbals was not visible in the ostensive, where in either case the significant phenomenon was merely a thing/event present to the speaker and potentially to the hearer. In the imperative, the hearer can perform an action, but can only *supply* an object. This divergent relationship to nominals and verbals in effect inaugurates the *governance* of the former by the latter, although, as with tense, not yet in the fully realized model of the declarative, which presents the relationship of agent, verb, and object independently of any worldly action.

It is nevertheless this action that permits us to explain governance from a generative perspective. It is perfectly conceivable that "double" or even "triple" ostensives may have existed, consisting of a verbal and one or more nominals; for example, on observing a flight of crows, "Fly! Crows!" or even something like "Burn! Fire! House!" But it would be an error to consider such utterances as true linguistic forms, and thereby as the direct ancestors of the declarative. The elements of such compound utterances would remain independent as potentially complete utterances in themselves, whereas the declarative sentence is not complete until all its positions have been filled.

The fact is that no governance relation, even the inchoate one of the imperative, is conceivable in ostensive language. “Fly! Crows!” is no more a “sentence” than “Fly! Sky!” or “Sky! Crows!” or indeed any other combination of ostensives. Governance, which is a relation between linguistic elements of an utterance, as opposed to the intentional relationship (expressed in tense and person as well as in the reference of substantive words) of the utterance to reality, cannot be derived from the mere observation of relationships in nature, but only from the significant functioning of these relationships on the scene of representation. In the ostensive model, this interaction ends when it points out a significant phenomenon in the real world. The imperative model, however, includes not the mere presence of its object but the relationship to be assumed toward it by the hearer. If a compound ostensive like “Fly! Crows!” presents two independent observations, a compound imperative like “Bring [the, a] hammer!” or, if the notion of “bringing” be thought to beg the question, “Come! [with] hammer!” requires of its hearer not a contemplative analysis of the relation of its elements but a *performance* in which the referents of the elements are combined.

We need not suppose the analytic counterpart of this practical operation to be present in the mind of the hearer. It suffices that his performance be more explicitly determined in its verbal than its nominal aspect, so that, in the example at hand, the hammer cannot be provided without the hearer’s coming to the speaker, although the action of coming can be performed without the hammer. And in general, the verbal element will be performed by the hearer as agent, accompanied in some way by the nominal element as object or instrument. Thus although a bystander could describe the performance in our example in an ostensive *coming! hammer!* analogous to *fly! crows!*, the performer of the act himself could not be unaware that his coming was “governing” the appearance of the hammer. The phenomena described by the ostensive, whether or not they involve human agents, are independent of the linguistic model that refers to them, whereas the imperative specifically requests a human performance.

Similarly, the extension of the scene of representation created by the imperative to the awaiting of a requested performance adds the notion of *tense* to the verbal element of the imperative. As a result, this element acquires in its most rudimentary form the character of a *verb*. In the nominal imperative, the requested object is merely made present, but in the performance requested by the verbal imperative (*Run!*), the object created in order to put an end to the awaiting is defined within the temporality of the imperative speech-act. The same hammer may be requested today as yesterday, but not the same run.

Here again, the contrast with the ostensive brings out the increased grammaticality of the imperative model: the ostensive, concerned only with the presence of its object, is indifferent to its temporal specificity. The "run" observed today is no more different from that observed yesterday than today's hammer differs from yesterday's hammer. The function of the ostensive is to designate phenomena of general significance, and significant objects are always "the same" object because their appearance leads to functionally identical situations. "Fire!" always warns us of "the same" fire. But whereas the ostensive is unconcerned with the distinction between the identity of phenomena and their repetition, the imperative is not, because it requests its hearer to present the identical and/or reproduce the repeatable within linguistic time. Although the imperative does not yet permit the distinction among different tenses, it does respect the more fundamental distinction between the verbal, which possesses a tense, and the nominal, which does not.

The genesis of the notion of *person* follows similar lines, although in contrast to that of tense, it can undergo internal differentiation in the context of the imperative model. The verbal imperative is personalized even in its basic "second-person" form because, again in contrast to the nominal, it requests an action to be performed, and thus made to exist, by the hearer. Just as we have seen that the "run" requested is a "run now," so we may say that it is also a run-by-X, which is by no means identical to a run-by-Y. And as in the case of governance, the specificity of action on the part of the hearer of the verbal imperative may be presumed to be included in the intention of the speaker. Thus if several hearers are present and the speaker requests a hammer (*Hammer!*), the intentional model includes only the hammer. Even if one person is specifically addressed, this intentional structure is not violated if someone else brings the hammer, although the speaker's expectations may be. But if he says "Come!" to one of the group, then the coming he is requesting could not normally be performed by any other.

Now at this point “person” simply means second person, the contrast with the first person not having any basis in the intentional structure, the third being for the moment undefined. The speaker is normally at least the “dative” object of the imperative, and he may on occasion be its “accusative” object, as in a request for help or other personal services. But although personal “shifter” pronouns must have been among the first words, each individual being obliged to refer to himself or to the other by means of symmetrically “shifting” gestures, even as the accusative object of an imperative verb, the speaker is never in symmetry with the hearer. The performance requested of the hearer implies no contrast with one by the speaker.

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Once the imperative acquires functionality in the profane world, it is easy enough to conceive how its third- and first-person-plural (*Let’s*) forms might have evolved. The use of language to assign tasks would naturally enough be extended to other parties, including the speaker, the principle being that an intentional structure that names an object on which work must be done, whether to make it present or to construct it from scratch, would (like Wittgenstein’s language games) not remain limited to the dialogue of two interlocutors. However, the paradigm in which all three persons play parallel roles as subjects of a verb cannot exist prior to the declarative.

Chapter 9.
Elementary Forms and Grammatical Structures

The preceding discussion has shown that the requirement of human performance in the imperative is the source of the categories of tense, person, and governance that will become the touchstones of the grammaticality of the declarative sentence. By *grammaticality* we simply mean an utterance's capacity for presenting a model of reality no longer dependent on the conditions obtaining during the communication situation, having corrected by means of "shifting" elements chosen from these categories for the specificity of time and speaker.

But because we cannot discuss these categories in terms of a hypothetical imperative language, our presentation has unavoidably been oriented teleologically toward the declarative. Tense and person can already be associated with the verbal imperative, but they remain context-bound as they will not be in the declarative, without which they could not have emerged as fully grammatical concepts.

The categories of person, tense, and governance (case) are precisely those that give rise to the most familiar paradigms of the declarative and its related modes, as a glance at a Latin or Greek grammar will show. Even in languages with few or no such paradigms, these categories must be marked in other ways. For they are constitutive of the notion of grammaticality itself, and the declarative sentence is inconceivable in their absence. Thus the intentional structure of the declarative not only admits of the possibility that oppositions between persons, tenses, and so on, will generate paradigmatic combinations in a given language, but, regardless of the morphological means employed, the declarative sentence presents a model that is situated with regard to the time of utterance and to the speaker and his audience, and where the relations among nominals and verbals are, within certain limits, specified. The constitution of this intentional structure, which we shall take up in the following chapter, is the result of a dialectical process generated by the internal contradictions of the imperative.

Although if we would explain the genesis of the declarative from the imperative, it is heuristically useful to assume the inchoate existence of grammatical categories in imperative language, the intentional structure of the imperative does not require their specification. The imperative model minimally requires only the definition of the phenomenon whose presence is requested. The time of the action is not a true tense, but an extension of linguistic presence; similarly, the "governance" of the passive object by the active performer is a matter of practicality, not truly of grammaticality. It is senseless to speak of grammatically "correct" and "incorrect" imperative utterances, because the only relevant criterion, assuming that the addressee accepts his role in the intentional structure, is whether or not the task itself is well-defined in context. We may as well assume that the dominance in mature language of the more explicit verbal over the nominal form of the imperative was already present in imperative language. But the greater explicitness of the verbal form would not make it more *correct*.

The category of *person* appears at first to constitute an exception because, in contrast with that of tense, it can be said to possess a true paradigm in the opposition between the second- and third-person imperatives. But for proof that this paradigm is not essential to the imperative, we need look no further than our own language, where the third- (and first-) person imperatives employ periphrastic constructions, in contrast to the second-person form, which simply uses the root form of the verb. (Even in ancient Greek, where the third-person imperative is classified as part of a paradigm, it contains a true ending [–(ε)τω] in contrast with the "zero" ending [–ε] of the second-person form.) But morphological evidence aside, the question of whether the basic form of the imperative is truly a "second-person" form involving an implicit opposition to third- and/or first-person forms must be answered in the negative. It is the real-world person, not the linguistic "person," who is the true subject of the imperative.

In a word, the elementary linguistic forms lack true grammatical structures because they are not yet fully emancipated from their origin in the original crisis. The scene of representation is still primarily a place of deferral of conflict, not contemplation of a model of reality. The imperative and ostensive are pragmatic, not theoretical, which is to say that the linguistic *present* internal to the utterances is not fully separated from the linguistic *presence* in which they are uttered. Thus although the imperative takes different forms, these can never be grasped as paradigms of possibilities inherent in the imperative intention; their use merely corresponds to different real-world situations.

Language at this stage is anything but instinctual, but there is a sense in which behavioral models still apply: each word is still "associated" directly with the real or desired appearance of its object. Thus not only an ape but even a rat could be trained to "speak" in elementary language by pressing one lever when a cat appears and another when it is hungry, the two levers being connected to a mechanical voice which would produce, respectively, the ostensive "Cat!" and the imperative "Food!"

Such models of human language, because they neglect the crucial element of scenic presence, are etiologically inadequate to explain the elementary forms, and incapable of even conceiving an explanation for the higher forms. But so long as we confine our analysis to the practical functioning of the imperative, we will not touch on its contradictions and the forms generated in response to them. Our assertion that the proto-grammatical developments to which we have referred do not make use of true grammatical categories is in effect equivalent to saying that they could *à la rigueur* be described as accretions to the original ostensive arrived at under the pressure of "conditioned reflexes," that is, by mere trial and error. Yet conditioned reflexes lead to insoluble pragmatic paradoxes that are incapable of provoking formal evolution.

Whence the significance of the absence of a *first-person* form at this stage. If utterances are to be explained as resulting from "association" with the presence of their objects, then the self, being by definition always present, must either be spoken of constantly or not at all. The most elementary form of the *recursivity* that Chomsky sees, rightly if taken in a broad enough sense, as the mark of human language in opposition to pre-human signaling systems, is simply the speaker's linguistic reference to himself.

Dialectic of the Imperative (I)

The intentional structure of the imperative has up to this point been presented as a structure in equilibrium: a verbal request establishes an awaiting of performance by its hearer, compliance with which abolishes the awaiting and terminates the prolonged presence that it maintained. This indeed constitutes the felicitous performance of the imperative. Because, however, this felicitousness requires the action of someone other than the speaker, it cannot be predicated of the utterance alone, whose constitutive expectations, however reasonable, may not be fulfilled by the addressee. The imperative utterance is not complete in itself. The asymmetrical positions of its speaker and hearer are not simply those of the speech situation; the hearer must, within the linguistic presence created by the speaker, not only hear but act. It is the contradiction implicit in this asymmetry that will lead to the creation of the "objective," information-bearing declarative form.

The dialectic of the ostensive was motivated by the power implicit in the (ostensive) sign in its capacity to generate linguistic presence. Once this presence has been actualized by an inappropriate ostensive utterance, the hearer may fulfill the expressed desire of the speaker for the object designated by supplying it, whether to avoid conflict with the speaker or simply in order to render his utterance appropriate. Thus the contradiction between the (inappropriate) ostensive speaker's power in the linguistic situation and his symmetry with the ostensive hearer in the real-world situation (where the referent is at least potentially present to both) is resolved in favor of the former. In the imperative, the implicit asymmetry of the ostensive speech-act becomes explicit, so that the speaker commands not only linguistic presence but the extra-linguistic actions of the hearer within the extendable limits of this presence. But by the same token, from the standpoint of its own autonomy, the speech act overextends itself, leaving itself open to disconfirmation or infelicity not on its own merits but at the hands of another.

The ostensive can be inappropriate if it refers to an absent object, but this is a feature of the real-world situation. The imperative eliminates this possibility by ordering the hearer to himself modify the situation. But at the same time, it creates a new possibility of infelicity that has no analogue in the ostensive, and which points up the contradiction latent in the intentional structure of the imperative between the status its model of reality holds for the speaker and that which it holds for the hearer. This contradiction is not the effect of a "misunderstanding," but of the stricture placed by the imperative intention on the hearer.

For the speaker, the imperative is in effect nothing more than an extended ostensive, as it was in its origin. The presence of the referent gave him power over the other; now he employs this power, transferred to the sign, to demand the presence of the object. And the hearer's performance justifies this exercise of power; the act once accomplished, the original "ostensive" has indeed been made correct.

The speaker's awaiting, as this analysis shows, is not merely in origin but in function a prolongation of the deferral of action characteristic of linguistic presence from the beginning. In the true ostensive, this deferral lasts only for the instant of the utterance, followed immediately by its confirmation by the hearer; in the imperative, the deferral of the hearer's own self-motivated activity is prolonged until the utterance, like the ostensive, can be verified, although this "deferral" may be interrupted by other tasks.

It must again be stressed that this prolongation, which of course lends itself to exploitation by those who possess authority over others, is a formal possibility of linguistic presence itself and thus perhaps as much a source as a product of social authority. But although the imperative obtains its original force from the sanctity of the scene of representation, from the hearer's standpoint, the awaiting of his presentation of the object is not a simple equivalent of the deferral required in order that he may understand the speaker's message. Here we need not even speak of an unwillingness to perform the requested action, although the very possibility of this unwillingness is already a distinguishing feature of the situation. The deferral of linguistic presence itself is very different in kind from that necessary to the imperative's requested performance of a worldly action, which must be maintained throughout the duration in real time of the performance. The imperative is dependent on extra-linguistic real time in a way the ostensive is not. This, the hearer, however great his good will, cannot help but experience, whereas the speaker, however well he may understand this truth, cannot put his understanding "into words," that is, into the intentional structure of the imperative.

To say that from the speaker's standpoint the imperative is no more than an extended ostensive is to say that for the speaker, the hearer's performance is not a voluntary act, not a worldly act at all, but merely an element of a linguistic construction. The supplying of the object that will convert the imperative as an inappropriate ostensive into an appropriate one is awaited in *linguistic* time, although it must take place in *real* time. The hearer, insofar as he performs this act, is not truly the addressee of the imperative but only its *agent*. This implicit denial of the role of interlocutor to the hearer can be realized explicitly in a situation where a third party is present. Thus if a fashion designer showing his dresses to a prospective buyer says “summer dress” and a model wearing the appropriate clothing appears, his speech act is an ostensive addressed to the buyer and only secondarily an imperative, the presentation of the dress being simply assumed to take place upon the utterance of the ostensive.

This analysis is, however, made from the speaker’s point of view. The hearer of the imperative, however “mechanically” he obeys it, is not reacting “instinctively” but through the mediation of linguistic presence, so that his act of obedience is not merely voluntary but *intelligent*, mediated by a prior representation. And thus, not only nonperformance but deliberate disobedience is possible. Here again, there is no reason to assume the speaker to be ignorant of these facts; but the intentional structure of the imperative has no place for them. The performance is implicit in the structure, which would otherwise be simply infelicitous. Conversely, the hearer can well understand the absolute nature of the imperative; but its intentional structure from his own viewpoint, by the very fact he has a *viewpoint* and is not simply an element of a linguistic construction, cannot be the same as that of the speaker. The hearer can only interpret the imperative as expressing the desire of the speaker, as was indeed the case of the original “inappropriate ostensive.” His performance is for him the worldly fulfillment of the speaker’s desire, whereas for the speaker, this desire is fulfilled in linguistic presence, the performance being merely a prolongation of this presence.

The inherent contradiction between these two versions of the intentional structure of the imperative remains latent in the case of satisfactory performance. In the event that the task is not performed, however, it manifests itself openly. In effect, whatever his intention, the hearer who fails to satisfy the imperative request restores the imperative to its original status as an inappropriate ostensive. Now if this is indeed the hearer’s intention, that is, if he simply ignores the imperative and considers the absence of its referent not as an indication of an act to be performed, but as an impropriety on the part of the speaker, then he reacts as a speaker of ostensive, not imperative language. In language which admits the imperative, however, this reaction can only be understood as a refusal of linguistic presence, for within this presence, performance is the only satisfactory response to the imperative.

The hearer who is unwilling or unable to accede to the request is thus faced with the latent contradiction of the imperative situation: the response demanded by the imperative is *representational* for the speaker, but *real* for the hearer, and if this real response cannot be made, then the latter has no representational response available. The hearer thus can be said to feel the need to maintain linguistic presence, as the speaker wished, even if he cannot provide real-world satisfaction for the latter's desire. It is this need that will give rise to the declarative form.

Chapter 10.
The Fundamental Asymmetry of the Speech Situation

The contradiction in the intentional structure of the imperative between the speaker's and the hearer's intentions reflects the fundamental asymmetry of the speech situation, which emerges at this stage, and which is not so much resolved in the higher forms as made explicit and thereby deferred. This asymmetry was in fact present from the beginning, even independently of the assumption that not all the members of the originary group grasped the *meaning* of the sign at the same moment.

In the originary event, each individual's participation in designating/representing the sacred object, although productive of the same intentional structure of deferred desire/sacralization as that of the others, was at the same time an imaginary possession of the object at the others' expense. From the vantage point of the imperative, however, and *a fortiori* from that of the higher forms, we may now express this asymmetry in more formal terms, because the significance expressed by these forms is no longer, as with the ostensive, inherent in scenic presence, but is mediated by the desire of the speaker. This mediation occurs in its most overt form in the imperative; in the declarative it is discounted but not simply eliminated.

The "objective" formulation of the distinction between speaker's and hearer's intention requires that we consider linguistic presence as a virtual relation, actualized voluntarily by the speaker and entered into by the hearer as a duty incumbent on him qua member of the community. In the originary event, this enforcement was experienced as incarnate in the sacred object. But the deritualization of the modern world has not lessened this dissymmetry. On the contrary, the rise of the media, and more recently, of social media, has tended only to accentuate it. Thus the speaker chooses to speak, or perhaps to tweet, but the listener/viewer cannot help but view or listen, collectively if not individually. It is not that virtual linguistic presence confers on the speaker a permanent advantage; the community imposes appropriateness-conditions that if violated will be punished a posteriori. But he benefits a priori from a presumption of significance. Viewed from without, speaker and hearer in the speech situation are equally present to one another, yet the speaker need not justify his role to the hearer otherwise than through the linguistic representation expressed in his utterance.

For the hearer, however, the representation does not appear alone, but as spoken by the speaker-speaking-the-utterance, and thus the hearer's intentional model of reality in the speech-situation is complicated by the addition of a supplementary factor. The speaker intends only the linguistic model, but the hearer intends the speaker's intention. If this were not so, the communication situation would not be "intentional," that is, representational, at all. To understand the speech act as something other than an instinctual/involuntary signal, it must be seen as an intentional actualization of linguistic presence. On this point it might be said that hearer and speaker are in accord, since the latter is certainly aware of his own intentionality. But the speaker does not *intend* this intentionality; it is not an element of his representation. Were this not so, the speech act would suffer from infinite regression, as do in fact all theories that attempt to propose a completely symmetrical (or "metaphysical") model of the communication situation. Linguistic presence is not a "channel" of communication, and although for the higher linguistic forms, the channel analogy is an adequate approximation in most cases, it cannot help us to understand the origin of these forms.

The speaker's model of the communication situation must be incomplete if it is to exist at all. Thus he acts as though a "channel" indeed existed into which to pour the information he desires to communicate, whereas for the hearer, the actualization of this "channel" depends on the intentional act of the speaker.

Before pursuing our formalization of the speaker-hearer asymmetry and the analysis of the dialectic of linguistic forms on which it directly bears, we should dispose of a potential epistemological objection. We communicate through language, and conceive of this communication as "transparent" to our thoughts, the proof being that we can always add qualifications to our previous statements; in Peirce's terms, to every sign may be appended an "interpretant" that may be made as explicit as we like. But under the hypothesis that this explicitness is limited and language is indeed “opaque,” there would be no vantage point from which we might speak of the inherent contradictions of linguistic communication, because our own discourse would remain subject to the limitation we purport to denounce. This objection, then, has a double expression, “optimistic” and “pessimistic,” the one “metaphysical” and traditional, accepting philosophy’s presumption that the declarative proposition is the “natural” form of the “expression of ideas,” the other, post-Nietzschean and nihilistic, using language only to deconstruct its earlier pretensions.

In response to this double objection, I would defend both the need for and the possibility of a *humanistic* theory of representation—the first, in answer to the “optimists” who find it unnecessary, the second, to the “pessimists” who think it inconceivable. The transparency of communication does not consist in the sharing of a “pure intuition,” but simply in the capacity of language to include indefinitely many levels of metalanguage—what in a somewhat different context Chomsky calls *recursion.* This capacity is virtual and by definition cannot be exhausted; what we say on any subject can never be a definitive “last word.” And precisely because this virtuality is an element of the intentional structure of our discourse, our communication remains *transparent,* that is, open to explanation and eventual refutation. But this condition of language is not contained in the extant works of language; it consists rather in our capacity for further construction on them.

In particular, the originary hypothesis is the realization of a possibility latent, but certainly not preexisting, in the discourses of social science. From its perspective, neither these discourses nor their linguistic structures preexisted in a timeless metaphysical realm called “language,” but all were constructed on the basis of earlier forms, the earliest of which is the object of the hypothesis. Linguistic “transparency” was not available a priori, but became a virtual reality through the construction of the general form of *dialogue,* which is itself based on the preexisting form of the declarative sentence. “Transparency” being merely potential openness to further discourse, it does not abolish the original asymmetry of the communication situation, but permits its effects to be indefinitely deferred. But only once the founding hypothesis has been made explicit, as GA does for the first time, providing an epistemological link between the subject matter and the theory that purports to explain it, can the discourse that performs this task properly claim for itself the name of science.

* * *

From this perspective, the logical impossibility of complete self-inclusion does not prevent the construction of new forms to resolve whatever contradictions may arise, and it is to our analysis of this process of construction that we now return.

The speaker intends his words as a model of reality; the hearer intends them as intended by the speaker. This opposition can be expressed schematically in very simple terms. If S says “X,” then Speaker’s model: X

Hearer’s model: S (X)

It is important to note, however, that this schema applies only to mature language, because only by means of the declarative sentence can the “hearer’s model” be explicitly formulated. At the elementary stages, although the hearer realizes that the words are being pronounced intentionally by the speaker, he cannot *say* this himself, and therefore cannot conceive that *his* model of the situation might possess the same objective status as that presented by the speaker. To recapitulate the preceding stages of linguistic evolution in terms of the schema just proposed demonstrates its unavailability to the forms of “elementary language.”

In the originary event, the participants are presumed to experience, in emitting the sign representing the sacred object, an imaginary participation in the mediating or presence-compelling power of this object. Each individual’s ostensive gesture is both a (linguistic) sign of the object and a (ritual) sign of his participation in the communal attention to it. The model of the central sacred object is reinforced by the deferral of action within the communal presence around it. Thus the significance of the speaker’s utterance is fully guaranteed by the community. Conversely, from the hearer’s standpoint, the intentionality of every speaker coincides with that by which the community as a whole establishes itself, through the deferral of action within the nonviolent scenic presence mediated by the sacred object.

Yet on each individual scene of representation, the symmetry of the communal intention is disrupted by *originary resentment*, the supplement to appetite that, once the sacralization of the central figure has been established, leads the group from its originary stasis to the controlled violence of the collective division of this figure in the sparagmos, in which each receives an "equal" portion. A more synthetic term for this combination of appetite and the frustration occasioned by its (sacred) object's withdrawal is *desire*.

The above schema provides the means both for understanding and discounting the element of desire in linguistic intention, although the participants in the originary event neither possess nor have need of these means, given the symmetry of the situation mediated by the sacred. Desire nevertheless exerts a dialectical pressure on representation by conferring on the sign the power to evoke the appetite-deferring significance of the object, eventually bringing about the lowering of the threshold of significance to include other, profane objects, while in a parallel, "institutional" development, the sacred guarantee of the communal scene of representation is reenacted and reinforced through ritual.

From the standpoint of our schema, this evolution takes place as though the individual-as-hearer were reinterpreting the others-as-speakers' originary designation of the sacred object as the expression, not of a collective, but of an *individual* choice of referent, so that the ostensive-in-general can come into existence to represent profane as well as sacred objects. The sacred power of the object was one with its desirability. But what is its "desirability" other than the fact of its designation by others? The dialectic of desire appears here fully mystified; language at this stage offers no possibility of representing its own operation, even in others. The individual not only cannot see the beam in his own eye, he is blind to the one in the eye of his neighbor.

The spectacle of this blindness illuminates for us the entire dialectic of representational forms, which can be seen—as Girard first saw it—as a progression in the understanding of desire. At the same time, it permits us to grasp the element of anthropological truth in the enduring notion of the lost paradise of original presence, the falling away from which was described by Heidegger as the "forgetting of being" coeval with the institution of *metaphysics*, the world-view that considers the declarative proposition as at the same time independent of and transparent to its content.

Stripped of its theoretical reinforcement in philosophical doctrine, metaphysics is simply the non-recursive understanding of propositional form as expressed in our schema; that is, capable of seeing desire in the representations of others, but not in our own, and therefore not *in the form itself*—treating the declarative sentence as not merely originary, but *natural*.

When desire was born in the originary event, its blindness was symmetrical and therefore "innocent." The higher forms of language mark a fall from grace where each speaker begins to suspect the "subjectivity" of his fellows. This suspicion is a step on the road to the objectivity of scientific discourse, and well as an incentive for the construction of ever-more-powerful modes of deferral.

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The second stage in our dialectic, the passage from the ostensive to the imperative, requires less comment. Here we are much closer to the opposition represented in our schema, because the hearer of the inappropriate ostensive can only treat it as an imperative if he understands it as the expression of the speaker's desire. The imperative sign denotes an absent referent, significant to the speaker, in contrast to the ostensive, which designates a phenomenon of communal significance. But if in the ostensive the role of individual desire was neglected, in the imperative it is exaggerated. In the ostensive, the speaker's own intention is absorbed into that of the community, and his original initiative forgotten in the collective repetition of his utterance. In the imperative, quite the opposite is the case: whatever the referent's communal significance, it can appear only through the mediation of the desire of the individual subject. This opposition reflects the polarity between the presence/absence of the referent. This polarity is all the more striking when the absence is only relative to the speaker, as when he requests that a nearby but "distal" object be placed in his immediate possession, making it unambiguously clear that what is desired is not the mere presence of the object but its appropriation by the speaker. In the imperative model, the *linguistic* presence of the referent reflects its *worldly* absence, and by responding to the "inappropriate ostensive," the hearer demonstrates that he understands that "possession" in language is a sign of desire for real possession.

If we examine the ostensive-imperative progression in terms of our schema, we observe that, if the ostensive utterance is interpreted not as S(X) but simply as X, the imperative interpretation must be expressed as something like $S \rightarrow X$. The absence of a parenthesis represents the lack of a formal barrier between the speaker and the referent, so that his utterance is interpreted by the hearer not as the speaker's significant model of reality, but as the significant model of *his* reality.

This functionalization of the imperative in turn tends to limit its referents to objects whose appropriation by the speaker is considered felicitous. It thus serves to "educate" desire as no longer a purely subjective phenomenon but one capable of being communicated in linguistic presence, and consequently obliged to take criteria of communal significance into account. Thus a point of equilibrium is established at which the imperative speaker can continue to profit from his command of linguistic presence to realize his desire, but where his desires are functionalized in the service of the community, making them more likely to be adhered to. From the standpoint of intentional structure, however, the external functionality of the imperative request is irrelevant; the speaker's desire as expressed by the imperative is "significant" by definition. Whence the disequilibrium that will lead to the emergence of the declarative form.

Chapter 11.
Imperative Dialogue

By his acceptance of the speaker's desire, the addressee of the imperative becomes not merely the latter's hearer but his interlocutor. Thus he hears not only the utterance but the person, and by hearing the utterance as a personal one, he comes to assume on the scene of representation the role of member of the community and respecter of its norms of significance. In this fashion, the addressee of the imperative creates the possibility of *dialogue* with the speaker.

At the same time, this dialogue demonstrates the inadequacy of the imperative model to fully comprehend the fundamental asymmetry of the speech situation. In the exchange at the operating table —"Scalpel!"-"Scalpel"; "Forceps!"-"Forceps"—the ostensive serves as a reply to the imperative. The hearer's reply "corrects" the first speaker's "inappropriate ostensive," universalizing his expression of personal desire by asserting the objective presence of the object. Yet this reply in no way transcends the asymmetry of the imperative intention. The second speaker responds in a form nominally different from the first, but which permits of no further dialogue; the content of his utterance is entirely determined by that of the first speaker, which he simply mimics. The identity in linguistic substance of the two utterances reflects the dependency of the second speaker's role, in which making an ostensive reply is only possible upon prior completion of the requested performance. The imperative-ostensive dialogue represents the expression and annulment of desire, the successive pairs of utterances marking the beginning and end of successive periods of awaiting; the fundamental asymmetry of the two speakers with respect to this desire and this awaiting is never called into question.

The addressee may of course refuse the imperative and put an end to the conversation. But even if he accepts the role it designates for him, he may not be able to carry out the required performance. In the absence of performance, no linguistic response to the imperative is possible, even if the addressee has no desire to violate the terms of the imperative dialogue—a violation that might lead to unfortunate consequences.

In this situation the contradiction inherent in the imperative model becomes explicit. This contradiction is not a purely private one, as was that between individual desire and the communal sacralization of the originary object. Nor does it stand in an ambivalent position between the "private" and "public" spheres, as we found in the second stage of our dialectic, where the inappropriate ostensive, an expression of individual desire, came to be interpreted as a legitimate imperative speech act. Here the contradiction overtly involves the distinction between the speaker's and hearer's model of the imperative. It is not yet a fully dialogic conflict because it cannot be assimilated to a symmetrical disagreement in which one speaker contests the other's objectivity. The hearer's model merely permits him to understand the situation in a way closed to the speaker, for whom the possibility of nonperformance cannot arise because performance is already included in his intention.

It would be a mistake to view this situation as that of a contradiction between the imperative model on the one hand and "reality" on the other. This contradiction of course exists, but from a representational standpoint, it is mediated by the speaker's relationship to the hearer. For the referent of the imperative model is not merely an object of desire, but the object of a desire expressed on the scene of representation, and its impossibility of fulfillment, before leading to a contradiction in the sphere of reality, provokes a contradiction within the limits of this scene. This fact would certainly be obvious to the addressee, to whom "reality" is apt to afford little protection from the wrath of the speaker.

The hearer's model of the imperative was never blind to the possibility of non-fulfillment, because the speaker's request appeared in it from the beginning not as an objective model of reality but as an expression of desire. But the non-identity of the hearer's intention with the speaker's remained only latent so long as the former was willing and able to bring the two into coincidence by fulfilling the expressed desire of the latter—a coincidence expressible in an ostensive reply. Now the non-coincidence becomes a contradiction, although, as befits the asymmetrical structure of the imperative, one visible only to the hearer. Even if "reality" is the ultimate source of this contradiction, the situation would be little different if this source were the latter's recalcitrance, for in any case his problem is to maintain, despite the contradiction, his relation of linguistic presence with the speaker. But this implies that instead of using an ostensive to express the presence of the object, he must find a way to communicate its *absence*. It is this need that will lead to the creation of the declarative.

The speaker of the imperative awaits a performance by which his utterance will be realized as an ostensive (whether or not actually spoken by either party). The addressee, lacking the possibility of producing the object, must produce an utterance that will have to be accepted in lieu of the object. What is required is, so to speak, a negative ostensive—the *contradictio in adjecto* being merely a reduced form of the contradiction between the hearer’s and the speaker’s intention. Once the reduction is accomplished, however—that is, once the possibility of expressing the contradiction by an utterance is recognized by the addressee of the imperative—the negative-ostensive resolution of his paradoxical situation will become possible. It suffices that the materials of which this solution is constructed be available: the ostensive, and the concept, or more precisely the *operator*, of negation.

Negation and the Imperative

The ostensive admits of no negation because its referent is required to be present, and this is true even if the referent is itself "negative" in character. Thus, for example, we may consider the familiar utterance "Help!" despite its imperative appearance, as in fact an ostensive. Although from a semantic standpoint, help is obviously what is being requested, the word embodies no representation of the aid to be furnished; what it expresses is rather the presence of a help-requiring situation. And in the absence of such representation, no imagined help exists either in the mind of the hearer, who knows only to come to the rescue.

Yet the notion of *interdiction* is as old as the originary sign itself, which is in a sense its chief component. The originary sign designating the sacred object can be seen as a negative imperative *avant la lettre*, indicating that its referent is not to be appropriated by any of the members of the group. From this perspective, in the passage from ostensive to imperative, a communal interdiction is transformed into one imposed by individual desire. Just as the object of the ostensive, whether an item of value or of danger, is in general not to be appropriated individually by any member of the group, the object of the imperative is designated for appropriation by the speaker, and by the same token refused to the hearer. It is the explicit formulation of this refusal, once the ostensive can be used "inappropriately" as an expression of desire, that will constitute the negative imperative.

We have referred to the desire aroused by the ostensive as the motive force for its inappropriate use, and thereby for the emergence of the imperative form. But the expression of desire by one speaker should not be taken as a sign of its extinction in others, but rather of the contrary. The power of the scene gives a supplementary force to expressed desire and thus permits the constitution of the imperative; but this expression of individual desire can only mimetically strengthen the interlocutor's own unexpressed desire for the object. To the extent that the (ostensive) sign can be used imperatively to demand an object, there would arise the need for an *operator of negation* to permit the speaker to make explicit his supplementary interdiction of the object to his interlocutor.

The speaker of an interdiction implicitly recognizes in the other a desire similar to his own, yet within the intentional structure of the interdiction, no symmetry is established between this desire and that of the speaker which contravenes it. On the contrary, interdiction addresses itself not to the desire of its hearer but to his action. If anything, the asymmetry between speaker and hearer is even greater here than in the prescriptive (positive) imperative, because the desire of the former is now realized explicitly in the negation of the activity of the latter.

The interdictive imperative thus tends to imply more readily than the prescriptive the preexistence of a relation of authority between the interlocutors. The strength of this relation is most evident in a phenomenon we may call *normative awaiting*, which is particularly, although not exclusively, characteristic of interdiction. In such cases, the imperative scene is not terminated by any specific performance, but prolongs itself indefinitely into the future. Thus a mother who tells her son “Don’t play in the mud!” does not await any specific act, even an act of renouncement, although a sign of such renouncement might be expected to terminate linguistic presence *stricto sensu*. She simply states a general rule of conduct, and will consider the interdiction to be violated if contravened at any future time. A similar situation, we may note, is created by a positive normative imperative such as “Always put on your scarf when you go out!” or “Keep your hands clean!” although it is significant that the more natural expressions are the interdictions, “Don’t go out without your scarf!” and “Don’t forget to wash your hands!”) In normative awaiting, the linguistic presence of the speaker is in effect indefinitely prolonged—one might say, as a “superego”—so that any offending conduct becomes a violation not merely of the speaker’s desire but of the scene of representation, guaranteed by the community through the mediation of the sacred. This form of the imperative thus plays a major role in the maintenance of the social order. The normative propensity of the interdictive form is of interest here because it serves to emphasize the asymmetrical attitudes toward desire implicit in the imperative model. The speaker’s desire, here as always, is identified with the maintenance of the communal scene, whereas the interdiction makes the desire of the hearer incompatible with this presence. In the normative imperative, whether prescriptive or interdictive, the expression of the speaker’s desire may well be the repetition of a generally accepted norm, the original pronouncement of which may even be attributed to a sacred being. But even in this case, the communal authority of the norm and the awaiting it imposes is realized in the speech situation through the intermediary of the speaker’s own authority.

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The negative imperative, as it appears from this discussion, is not an independent linguistic form; it differs from the prescriptive variety only in its content. It would further be a mistake to classify the positive/negative dichotomy as a *grammatical* paradigm like that of person. As we have defined the grammatical, it functions to objectify linguistic intentionality by universalizing over the particular temporal or spatial conditions of speech acts. The positive-negative dichotomy is not paradigmatic in this sense, affirmation and negation not being in any sense a pair of “shifters.” As an operator, negation affects the entire content of the performance requested by the speaker.

The effect of an operator must be distinguished from that of a simple *modifier*. In the imperative, modification, like governance, receives a primitive form of grammaticalization. Requests for physical objects, for example, must in practical contexts distinguish between the category of things and that of qualities; once more, the performative nature of the imperative model provides the impetus for grammaticalization. Thus if a big hammer is requested, a small hammer will probably be more acceptable than a big basket. The same analysis evidently applies to constructions like “Come quickly!” where a verbal rather than a nominal request is qualified.

Hence we can consider imperative modification to be, like governance, in a state of incipient grammaticalization. Whether or not specialized lexical terms existed, the intentional structure of the imperative provides in its asymmetry a model for asymmetrical relations of both kinds, although this asymmetry is not fully realized in the linguistic model. Thus, as in the case of governance, analysis into, for example, “noun” and “adjective,” although implicitly carried out by the speaker, is structurally speaking a matter of concern only for the hearer, because it develops from the analysis of his performance. The asymmetry that provides the foundation for this analysis is at the same time an obstacle to its formalization in the linguistic model, because the speaker’s words, unlike the hearer’s actions, are intended to produce fulfillment through their mere presence on the scene of representation—the imperative remaining always, in essence, an “inappropriate ostensive.”

The use of operators to modify the imperative performance model as a whole constitutes the limit of semantic polarization possible within imperative language. In “Big hammer!” or even in “Run fast!” the requested performance is merely more specific than in “Hammer!” or “Run!” In a case like “Run *again*!” however, what is added by the operator *again* is not a specification of the object/action requested, but of the performance in which this object/action is included. An operator takes the substantial part of the linguistic model not merely as designating an object or action, but as a performance complete in itself. And in negation, the operator most clearly distinguished from a simple modifier, the polarization must be fully conscious to the speaker as well as the hearer. On hearing “Don’t walk!” not only the hearer but the speaker as well must consider that the command cannot be separated into the substantive action of walking and a secondary but independent quality that attaches to it.

Since interdiction operates on the imperative model as a whole conceived in a positive sense, we may represent this situation by the equation:

$$\text{Perf}\ (\sim X) = \sim [\text{Perf}\ (X)]$$

where “Perf” refers to the performance requested by the speaker, and “~” is the sign of logical negation. We must be careful to distinguish this equation from the apparently similar but incorrect: $\text{Imp}\ (\sim X) = \sim \text{Imp}\ X$

where “Imp” stands for the entire intentional structure of the imperative, the sense of which would be that to forbid something is simply not to order it. To claim that this distinction is a merely logical one would miss the point that we have specifically defined the negative operator *in imperative language*. For the only thing wrong with the second equation is that it contradicts the normal functioning of imperatives as we know them. Declaratives do not function in this manner: There is ~ man = ~ [There is (a) man], and the “illogicality” of such constructions as “must not,” which ≠ “~ must,” is indeed traceable to their connection with the imperative. In the imperative, the operation of the negative is fixed at the level of performance. In interdiction, the performance of the addressee is the negation of a possible “positive” performance, but the fundamental elements of the imperative intentional structure remain the same, the nature of the awaiting merely being altered to fit the non-performative nature of the request. This represents the closest thing to a logical paradigm within imperative language, and thus its highest level of what we may call “thought” or “reasoning”—manipulation of linguistic models as context-free substitutes for/models of reality.

Chapter 12.
Dialectic of the Imperative (II)

From a grammatical standpoint, operators are different from, but similar to, modifiers, traditional grammarians emphasizing the similarities, modern linguists, the differences. Negation is, in imperative as in mature language, the most extreme case because it is the most unambiguously transformational in character, requiring for its application a preexisting linguistic expression. In the imperative, negation (or more properly interdiction) requires for its formulation the designation of a substantial performance that could always in principle be the object of a prescriptive imperative.

Interdiction shares the asymmetrical structure of all imperatives; it does not negate the subordination of the addressee to the desire of the speaker, but only the performance that, formulated in the same words, the latter might in another context have requested. Thus interdiction is meta-representational, inverting the positive relationship between the signified performance and the desired outcome that obtains in the prescriptive form. But the factor that stops interdiction short of the context-free—in our terms, *grammatical*—functioning of negation in the declarative is its continued dependence on imperative awaiting, which limits its field of operation to the linguistic scene of speaker and hearer.

Thus non-performance remains always, even when it consists in inaction, a real-time fulfillment of this awaiting, just as, conversely, the performance of the forbidden action would constitute a violation of it. The substantial performance is refused, but its shadow haunts the nonperformance, and by so doing prevents it from becoming a purely formal operation. In the last analysis, not-running in an interdictive context remains a kind of running, because its satisfaction of the interdiction will be measured by its (non-)correspondence to the criteria that define running.

Declarative negation is quite different. If I say “John is not running,” my statement will be judged true or false by those same criteria, but John’s activity need not itself be governed by them. Negation here is purely formal, metalinguistic. Whatever else John may be doing, I may if I like interpret his activity as being not-running, thereby liberating my imagination to grasp analogies with areas of experience not intended in John's action.

Hence, like governance and modification, the operation of negation (and a fortiori the use of other operators such as "again," "twice," etc.) is not fully grammaticalized in imperative language. But because interdiction, unlike the other qualifiers of the imperative, involves the use—and hence the lexicalization—of an operator not independently realizable as a performance, it would appear to create a declarative-like distinction between "parts of speech" linked in a formal hierarchy. This would seem to contradict our contention that the full grammaticalization of the negative can occur only in the context of the declarative.

Because interdiction remains a request for performance, it is difficult to consider its "not" as a potentially substantive element defined outside the linguistic context, such as "fast" or "big," which add observable qualities to a performance. Yet that this is indeed the case is suggested by our own usage of the expression *Don't!* One might object that, like "No" in answer to an interrogative, *Don't!* is merely an ellipsis for "Don't do X!" But although this would be the case when I respond "Please don't!" to "Should I close the door?" it need not be so.

The woman who exclaims "Don't!" to a lover's tentative caresses is a useful example. In claiming that this is not an ellipsis I am not merely playing with words. An ellipsis is the omission of an *already present* linguistic element, like "(Please) don't" in reply to "Should I shut the door?" The woman's "Don't!" to her would-be lover is another case entirely. Although we might imagine various verbs to fill out the meaning of this expression ("Don't touch me!", "Don't try to seduce me!"), the lack of a specific verb is significant. By failing to offer a linguistic model of her partner's behavior, the speaker avoids any characterization of its intentionality and thereby forecloses any possible attempt to reinterpret his actions to her satisfaction. Her utterance alludes to a behavioral complex of seduction that "Don't!" interdicts in toto, rather than "Don't do that!" which focuses on the specific act performed. And this is only possible because in the imperative, negation is applied not to strictly linguistic models, as in the declarative, but to *performances* that, although they are indeed normally specified in language, may simply be *exemplified* in reality.

We should point out that this analysis does not imply that this type of imperative negation is the *origin* of the operator of negation, which would presumably first appear as a way of saying “No!” to an ostensive. Such a negation would presumably apply to the ostensive situation taken as a whole rather than to its specific object. But it is difficult to unambiguously “translate” negation in an ostensive language into mature language, whereas the imperative “Don’t!” conveys a clear message.

Thus the operator of interdiction, although specifiable lexically, retains sufficient substantiality to stand alone when its real-world referent is sufficiently evident. And this is not an accident of modern usage, but a necessary consequence of the intentional structure of the imperative, in which the interlocutors’ shared scene of representation is not fully divorced from their real temporal presence. Interdiction is not true negation, because it addresses itself to the “will,” not to the “intellect,” to performance, not to a context-free model of performance. And by the same token, it is not wholly devoid of substantiality, because it can assume as its content that of the present moment. Taken out of its temporal context, the lexeme of interdiction appears as a pure operator, but imperative language does not permit this purely lexical abstraction. There is no linguistic space available in which to ask the metalinguistic question of what “Don’t!” means, because its utterance intends unavoidably its real-time context. Its evolution into a true negative, which is at the same time the genesis of the declarative, must therefore depend on its *inappropriate* use.

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We have been assuming that the hearer of the imperative, knowing the requested object to be unavailable, requires a means of expressing this fact to the speaker. But we cannot consider that on the one hand he possesses the “thought” of the absence of the object, but on the other, he is unable to “express” it and must therefore invent a new form for this purpose. Rather, the “thought” itself is the invention, and if we can specify precisely what it should be, we will find it already expressed. For whether or not thought be deemed possible without language, the desire to express a thought to another, as is the case here, can be formulated only in the terms of whatever system of representation is available.

Thus the imperative did not arise when, desiring to command the presence of an object or action, someone decided to use the ostensive for this purpose in the absence of its referent. Rather, the “thought” of the desire for the object was simply expressed by the (ostensive) means at hand, without deliberation on the change in linguistic convention that it would entail. And the second party’s response, by correcting this “inappropriate” usage and at the same time satisfying the speaker’s desire, led to its reinforcement and to its eventual acceptance as an appropriate linguistic act. Similarly, in the present case, the second speaker does not seek the means to express the absence of the object—for if he sought them, he would find them wanting—but expresses it simply as he has formulated it to himself. The model he creates may not be immediately comprehensible to the first speaker. But because he has no doubt been on occasion in the same situation as this interlocutor, he will eventually grasp its meaning.

The creation of new linguistic forms thus passes through a moment of subjectivity in which desire is expressed as faith. In the case of the nascent imperative, the object of this faith was the “ontological” power of the ostensive to compel the presence of its referent. In the case now at hand, the desire of the second speaker is to communicate to his interlocutor the impossibility of carrying out the imperative. For both interlocutors, it is the absent object that is the focus of their attention: the first speaker desires its presence, the second knows that this presence cannot be obtained. This object is designated by a linguistic expression, a word or combination of words, which has already been employed by the first speaker as an imperative, and which, if the object were indeed presentable, could be employed anew by the second speaker as an ostensive, as in the “Scalpel!”-”Scalpel” dialogue.

But it is we who have classified these two usages as belonging to two linguistic forms, linked by a historical dialectic. For the speakers who make use of ostensive and imperative utterances in the process of communication, they do not possess, as they do for us, the discrete existence of elements in a paradigm. The forms represent for us two different intentional structures, but these structures cannot themselves be “known” to their early speakers, and are not normally perceived as such even by speakers of mature language. They are conventions of communication, the choice among which is not overtly made but predetermined by the situation in which the speaker finds himself. If, in ostensive language, the word designating the object could be said to “mean” or intend its presence, this was because the usage of the word always accompanied, and specifically designated, the object-as-present. In the significant memory of the members of the community, even at this stage, the word could be said to possess the same lexical signification that its counterparts possess today, that is, it is simply the *name* of the object. The “ontological faith” that we have attributed to the user of the ostensive is not the product of the *signification* of the lexeme, but of its *meaning*, which is nothing but the shared memory of its usage.

The speaker of imperative language possesses two utterance forms that are in effect conventional uses or meanings for the word, not significations of it. “Hammer” simply *signifies* (a) hammer; it is the *usage* of the word that is limited to an imperative or ostensive interpretation, and this not because the word could not be pronounced independently of either form, but because its *utterance* could be given no other meaning. In elementary language, one cannot simply “talk about” a hammer, because there is as yet nothing else to say about it than that it is present or that one wishes it present. To combine the words “big” and “hammer” in an utterance tells us, of course, that the hammer is big, but the *meaning* of the sentence at this stage is either that the big hammer is here, or that the speaker wishes it delivered. That it is big is not *information* conveyed by the utterance, because the function of utterances is not to convey context-free information but to designate significant or desired phenomena.

In the “Scalpel!-Scalpel” dialogue, the word designates a specific object of interest to the speakers (to the second through the mediation of the first). Both surgeon and assistant are capable of formulating sentences of indefinitely great complexity concerning the scalpel, but in the given situation, such sentences would be inappropriate. Nor is it likely that the speakers would be aware that their dialogue consists of an imperative followed by an ostensive, even assuming that such terminology were familiar to them. Their conversation uses the word simply as a means of communication, the intentional structure created in each utterance being an appropriate model of reality: The surgeon says “Scalpel!” because he wants the scalpel, and his assistant repeats the word to show that it is now available for the surgeon’s use. In both cases the word simply signifies the object; its place in the intentional structure is determined by the context.

We should suppose this to be the case as well for the speakers of imperative language. Thus for the second speaker in an “infelicitous” imperative dialogue, the word used by the first to demand the object is simply its name, and not in itself either an imperative or an ostensive. And by the same token, his own (ostensive) reply, were the object in fact available, would repeat this name. Given that it is not, we may assume that he imagines the requested object/performance, but that he understands that the image is at the present moment inactualizable.

This situation bears a certain similarity to that of the original speaker of the imperative, who, imagining an object in its absence, called its name to make it appear. But this role has already been preempted by the first speaker, whose ontological faith the second knows to be in the present case unjustified. It is this non-justification that constitutes the object of the latter’s desired communication. Calling the name of the object will not make it appear, whatever the sanctity of the scene of representation. The second speaker’s knowledge demystifies the faith of the first. This knowledge is the negative moment of the declarative, and of higher linguistic form in general. The use of the word must now be divorced from the presence of the object. But from the standpoint of the first speaker, one still implies the other; it is not *his* usage that is intended to exemplify this disillusion.

The first speaker uses the word as an imperative; the second is aware that his interlocutor awaits the desired object. To fulfill this awaiting is impossible, for all he can produce is its name. But at the same time there *is* an awaiting that would indeed be fulfilled by the absence of the object: *the negative imperative consisting of the name of the object and the operator of interdiction*. Uttered in linguistic presence, the name-plus-operator would indeed be an interdiction. In the second speaker’s thought, however, it would simply evoke the image of the object as absent; in other words, it is the *name* of the object-as-absent. The second speaker is aware that to say the name of what is not will not necessarily make it appear. But to say the name of what *is*, even if all there is, is the absence of the object, is to use the name not as an imperative but as an *ostensive*.

This negative ostensive is at the same time a correction of the first speaker’s utterance, which, insofar as it is an imperative, is itself a transformed ostensive, no longer “inappropriate,” no doubt, but deferred. The second speaker’s ostensive, then, in its negativity, is already fulfilled, but at the same time, by presenting in ostensive form the object requested by the first speaker, even if it is presented-as-not-present, his utterance has the potentiality of putting an end to the awaiting created by the original imperative.

There is no guarantee, of course, that this communication will be successful, because the ostensive offered in the dialogue is not what was originally expected. But in the genesis of the imperative there was no reason either to assume that the inappropriate use of the ostensive would be automatically rewarded. What is essential is that the new form exist as an intentional structure for the speaker, so that the hearer, who at first finds it inappropriate, may understand its meaning and eventually come to use it when he finds himself in similar circumstances.

The negative ostensive can thus arise as a possible negative “reply” to the imperative. Its acceptance by the first speaker in lieu of the requested object, as opposed to the more violent response that might be expected in a case of inappropriate fulfillment of his request, would constitute a further lowering of the threshold of significance from that which gave rise to the imperative. At that moment it was individual desire that was accepted as a possible source of significance; now it is the unfulfillability of this desire. But this is too negative a formulation: what the negative ostensive presents is simply the state of affairs, not as an object of desire in itself, but on the contrary, insofar as it *withstands* the desire to modify it. Which is to say, that the lexeme of negation/interdiction has become a *predicate*.

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This defeat of desire by reality is, in the sphere of representation, an immensely significant triumph of objectivity. The inappropriate (positive) ostensive opened the domain of linguistic representation to the infinity of desire; the inappropriate negative ostensive, in representing the limitations of desire, permits the dialectic of desire and reality to be comprehended entirely by language, so that linguistic models can henceforth mirror and anticipate the results of our attempts to realize our representations. But this development is predicated on the prior acceptance of the significance of those elements of reality that oppose desire. In urgent situations, these facts are signs of crisis and must be overcome through action. In those less urgent, the facts, albeit negative, may acquire communal significance in themselves.

Thus, if our “Scalpel” dialogue occurs during an operation, the answer “Scalpel-no!” to the doctor’s question is not likely to be of help. If no scalpel is present then a substitute must be found immediately, and the assistant would do better to rush off to seek one than to attempt to “correct” the doctor’s imperative. But were the request made in more leisurely circumstances, say in the course of taking inventory, the negative reply would permit the functional act of reordering the missing item. The key criterion here is the immediacy of the universe of discourse. When the horizon of the interlocutors is limited to the present moment—to the moment of mutual presence—the inappropriate negative ostensive is functionless. Conversely, its functioning makes the universe beyond this presence and its extension through imperative awaiting for the first time a possible source of the significant.

Chapter 13.
Negation as Predication:
The Origin of the Declarative

The negative ostensive is a new linguistic form, not merely a variant of the ostensive. The original imperative-ostensive dialogue took place around the successful presentation of the imperative object. The two utterances of its "name" mark the beginning and the end of the first speaker's awaiting of this object. If we imagine a conversation consisting of a series of such exchanges, this name is all that can be said "about" each object, that is, just enough to identify it as the topic of both linguistic and real interest.

In contrast, let us stipulate that the negative ostensive is acceptable to the first speaker as terminating, at least for the moment, the awaiting created by his request. Then the role of the object as topic would remain as before, but whereas the imperative intended its worldly presentation, the negative ostensive in this context, on the contrary, *represents* its non-presence. Thus it is the first linguistic form that truly says something *about* its object.

As a "name" for its absence, it would be not unlike other names, but precisely, it is not the absence that is the topic of interest but the object itself. Whereas in the negative imperative, the operator of negation was a coordinate element of the requested performance, the *not-hammer* or *not-run* being both a kind of hammer or run and a specified inaction, hence a kind of "not-," in the negative ostensive the preexistence of the hammer as topic makes its absence for the first time a true *predicate*.

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Thus the negative ostensive is the germ of the declarative sentence. The widespread existence, alongside the subject-predicate form, of the *topic-comment* sentence, for example in Chinese and Japanese, lends support to our derivation, which suggests that in the declarative form, a topic is first established and then commented on. We have no need to distinguish here between the two sentence types. The topic exists a priori as supplied by the desire of the first speaker, and the “comment” is at the same time a predicate.

No doubt the negative ostensive allows only for negative predication. But once a wholly verbal reply to the imperative is accepted as adequate in certain situations, the dialogue will naturally attract other predicates, since once language has become acceptable in lieu of performance, more informative language can only be an improvement over bare negation. The criterion, here as before, is the level of significance of the imperative situation. Where this level remains high, the imperative retains its exigency. But if a verbal reply comes to be tolerated, and under certain circumstances expected, the imperative is transformed into an *interrogative*, presumably pronounced in the hesitant tone, raised at the end as a rifle barrel is raised to demonstrate the absence of violent intention, that remains in most languages its distinguishing characteristic.

Thus in our linguistic genealogy, *Scalpel?* is a softened form of *Scalpel!* The request for information is a direct descendant of the request for the object. It suffices that, as a consequence of the modified imperative-ostensive dialogue, the category of predication exist as an intentional structure. Nor would imperative language presumably lack potential predicates, either predicate nominatives/adjectives or verbals. The imperative speaker could no doubt request a big hammer or a small one, a green branch or a yellow one. Now, given the lowering of the threshold of significance implied by the new form, what could formerly only be *named* by an ostensive/imperative (*Big hammer!*) can now become an information-bearing utterance (*[The] hammer [is] big*). We need not deny the validity of the transformational analysis that considers adjective-noun constructions like the first to be derived from sentences like the second. But this analysis applies only in mature, declarative language, within which the proto-grammatical relationships of ostensive and imperative language are formalized in hierarchies of dependent and independent terms. In elementary language, *Big hammer!* was not a true grammatical construction because there was no way of discriminating between the hammer being big and the big (thing) being a hammer. It is only in the declarative that, the sentence topic having an a priori existence, its qualities can be predicated of it as *accidents* of a *substance*.

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As an example of the evolution that might have led to the multiplication of predicative terms, consider the case of locatives. Clearly locative expressions, which can be formulated gesturally by pointing, must have been among the earliest linguistic terms. Thus a speaker of ostensive language, seeing or hearing the arrival of, say, a herd of buffalo, might not only produce the sign “Buffalo!” but indicate by a gestural and/or verbal sign the location of the herd. In ostensive language this usage, even if “symbolic,” is not predicative; it expresses rather a modification of the presence within which the utterance is made, as is still the case when we use an ostensive in this manner today. (“Over there! Buffalo!”) Now let us suppose that, in answer to an imperative request for a hammer, the addressee, rather than simply denying the presence of the hammer, replies that it is “over there.” In ostensive language, use of the sign for “over there” included that location *within* the scene of representation, that is, within the domain with which the speaker and his audience could consider themselves immediately concerned. But used as a reply to an imperative, the sign locates this same space *outside* the immediate presence defined by the speaker’s request. It thus becomes a modification not of presence but of absence, an elaboration of the negative ostensive: the hammer is not-present, and furthermore it is *over there*.

Given an appropriately non-crucial situation, this reply will be not only understood by the first speaker, but accepted as supplying information adequate to his request; he wants the hammer, and he learns where to find it. Were such a reply anticipated, the “imperative” would thus be already little more than an interrogative, less “Give me a hammer!” than “Is there a hammer around here?” and eventually “Where is the hammer?” This example can serve to suggest the variety of conceivable nuances between the simple imperative on the one hand and the simple interrogative on the other. The degree of urgency of the situation and the spatial extent of “presence” for the speaker define a continuum between the surgeon’s urgent demand for a scalpel and a casual request made to an indifferent stranger.

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With the derivation of the declarative sentence we reach the final stage of the dialectic of linguistic form per se. The further evolution of linguistic representation will take place on a higher level, that of *discourse*, within which the declarative sentence is of course predominant.

Chapter 14.
The Declarative Model

With the derivation of the declarative sentence we have reached the final moment of the dialectic of linguistic form per se. The chief obstacle to the comprehension of the intentional structure of the declarative is its familiarity to us. We write of the lower forms from the telic perspective of the higher. But having attained the final stage of linguistic evolution, we find ourselves writing about the structures of the declarative sentence in declarative sentences. The paradoxes generated by desire in elementary language, which had led to the evolution of the elementary forms, can now be converted without syntactic innovation into *logical* paradoxes.

The declarative sentence may be described as a *predication* about a *topic*. In its origin, as we saw, this topic was pre-established by the desire of the interlocutor, as expressed in an imperative. We may assume that in any declarative sentence, the locutee has an implicit a priori interest in the topic; the topic-comment form makes the objectal focus of this interest clearer. Obviously, however, this interest need not be previously expressed, and certainly not in imperative form. The topic is always *substantive*, even if it refers to an activity, in which case we may think of it as a verbal noun (like the gerund in English).

Predication is a term rich in philosophical implications. Our use of it is not meant to imply that the evolution of language is telically subordinated to logic. To attempt to define predication at this stage as anything more than *saying something about* a topic would be self-defeating, because formal dichotomies like substance/accident or being/modification are merely ex post facto formalizations of the topic-predicate relation.

I choose to designate the chief nominal as *topic* rather than *subject* to avoid giving currency to the view, expressed in the *Grammaire de Port-Royal* and elsewhere, that the grammatical agreement between subject and predicate in Western languages possesses a peculiar ontological significance. It seems more likely that the topic-comment form evolved into the subject-predicate form through the tightening by habitual usage of the morphological links between topic and verb. This evolution is not, however, irreversible, for the concomitant reduction of the topic to a merely coordinate rather than superordinate position in the sentence may be compensated by the adjunction of a new, emphatic topic not bound by rules of agreement. Such constructions (*e.g.*, compare “My sister(, she) likes spinach” with “My sister, her teeth are crooked” or “My sister, I can’t stand her”) are available in colloquial English, and, we may assume, in all subject-predicate languages. The significance of this plausible cyclical alternation between topic and subject is that it demonstrates the resistance of “natural” language to grammatical formalization, which is also *a fortiori* its resistance to the rigor of logical formalization. The logical proposition is no doubt a sentence, but the assimilation of sentences to logical propositions, however justified by the inherent potential of the declarative for the formulation of “context-free” de-temporalized models, eliminates from consideration precisely that element of temporal urgency, or in other terms, of *significance*, without which no linguistic usage can be understood. If grammarians and linguists fail to comprehend the elementary linguistic forms because they see them as degenerate declaratives, logicians and language philosophers misunderstand the higher linguistic forms in viewing them as *avant la lettre* elements of logical discourse.

* * *

The original negative-ostensive form of the declarative does not include a verb. The subject and negative operator are simply “coupled,” without a verb *to be*—as in Russian, which, however, supplies the omitted copula in other tenses. The specific question of the origin of the copula is not of interest to us here. But we cannot avoid the more general one of the origin of the *verb*. The latter is ubiquitous, and the markers of tense and person, which we have designated as the most fundamental grammatical categories, are in all languages attracted to it, if not actually contained within it as inflections. It is no doubt the ubiquity of the verb as bearer of these markers has led grammarians to consider it a more fundamental constituent of the sentence than its subject; a verb alone (as in the imperative) may constitute a complete sentence, a noun, never. The grammatical prestige of the verb appears paradoxical in the light of the unquestionably more fundamental character of nouns as the names for persons and palpable objects. But the paradox remains only so long as we consider the declarative as the "natural" sentence form, in which case the very existence of syntactical relations requires the simultaneous genesis of both nouns and verbs. It vanishes in our hypothesis, where nominal forms (whether semantically nominal or "verbal") are the more primitive, and where the first utterance-forms are precisely lacking in verbs.

The verb is the sign of the declarative because it is the more evolved of the two substantial forms, through an evolution that is at the same time a degeneration, given that pre-declarative verbals were, like nominals, capable of serving as topics in themselves. But whether the topic be nominal or verbal in nature, it is not a *verb*. A verb can serve only as a predicate; it may in fact be defined simply as a *predicate verbal*. And whether nominals or verbals constitute the most fundamental lexical elements, words denoting objects are particularly likely to be found as topics, and words denoting actions as predicates.

If we return to our derivation of the negative ostensive, we note that the negative operator, which we consider to be the first predicate, can apply equally well, if not better, to verbal as to nominal imperatives, but that *as a predicate* it is more readily associated with nominals. This is in both cases because of the performative nature of the imperative verbal as opposed to the objectal nature of the nominal. Thus if one is equally likely to request an object or an action, the action, being commonly available to the imperative addressee independently of any requested object, is, although more likely to encounter interdiction, a far less likely candidate for unavailability than the object. And if indeed an action cannot be performed, merely "negating" it as unavailable conveys no information beyond a simple refusal, whereas the absence of an object is prima facie a verifiable fact. This original superiority of nominals as topics is only relative. But if we suppose the differentiation of predicates along the lines that we have suggested in our locative example, predicates that carry supplementary information beyond that of mere unavailability will apply even more exclusively to nominals, because an absent object exists and can thus be otherwise qualified, whereas an absent performance is simply inexistent. Thus if we assume that the original function of the declarative is to express the non-performance of imperatives, nominals will tend to appear more frequently as topics and verbals as predicates.

In the case of predicate adjectives and nominals ("the scalpel is broken"; "that tree is an X" [and therefore not good for tool-making] , etc.) it is difficult to suppose that the "verb" provided by the copula is anything more than the result of assimilation of this sentence form to the true verbal form, presumably in order to bear the grammatical burden of person and tense already attached to the verb. Which is to say that the existence of the verb as an indispensable formal element of predicates rather than a merely probable one is dependent on its association with these shifter paradigms. But this association should not be looked on as a merely morphological one, as though the evolution of the inflected verb could be described as the attachment to a proto-verbal predicate of proto-adverbial morphemes denoting tense and person. For such an explanation merely begs the essential question of why these morphemes are indeed necessary to the constitution of the declarative, even to the extent that dummy verbs come into existence to bear them. Our answer to this question must be founded on the already-established dominance of the verbal predicate. It is actions, not relations, that are *essentially* located in time and that differ in nature according as they are performed by speaker or hearer.

Thus it would appear that the morphological, paradigmatic elements of the verb merely formalize the verbal nature of predicates. Yet the passage from the probabilistic dominance we have described to formal dominance depends on an additional element: the linguistic *present* constituted by the declarative. We have already seen the germ of this present in the imperative, which can be said to possess an incipient tense because it refers to a real time outside of linguistic presence *stricto sensu* (*i.e.*, the time of the speech act), although referential time is intended not as independent of this presence but as an extension of it. In contrast, the declarative, even in its most primitive form, provides the model of a present independent of linguistic presence, and thus possesses a true tense, even if, as we must assume, the emergence of a paradigm of tenses is a later development. The existence of the verb is thus prior to its grammatical inflections, but this is so only because, even before the existence of tense paradigms, the declarative sentence already possesses an implicit tense. Once this has been more clearly established, the emergence of the verb as the general predicative form will follow, because, as we shall show, tense is an essentially verbal category.

Linguistic Present and Linguistic Presence As a negative ostensive, the nascent declarative would appear to stand in the same dependent relation toward linguistic presence as its positive ostensive counterpart. The absence of a hammer “takes place” in the same real time and space as its presence: the presence of communication as established by the speaker of the imperative. But the function of the declarative model is very different from that of the ostensive. The latter recreates communal presence centered on a significant new phenomenon; the declarative functions *in an already-established linguistic presence* to negate the model proposed by the first speaker. The information contained in the declarative acts as a bar to the anticipated fulfillment of the imperative request, and in so doing establishes a barrier between the prolonged linguistic presence within which this fulfillment was awaited and the situation at hand.

The model of reality presented by the negative ostensive can, of course, be acted on, but the model for such action is not given by linguistic form. If the answer to the original imperative be, for example, that the hammer is “over there,” then the first speaker can make use of this information to go and get it. The relation of act to model, however, is now no longer immediate but analytical. The declarative has presented a state-of-affairs, and the realization of the original speaker’s desire within this state-of-affairs is neither dependent on the linguistic presence of the speakers nor, indeed, mediated by the utterance at all. It is the fact that the hammer *is over there now* that makes the appropriative action possible, not the fact that it is *said* now to be over there.

The correspondence between the *now* of the utterance and the *now* of the being-over-there of the hammer is thus not essential to the declarative model. If the second speaker had said that the hammer was over there yesterday, or that it would be over there tomorrow, his interlocutor might still act (perhaps differently) on this information. This locative predicate here, of course, has evolved beyond the simple negative. But the same considerations apply even in the more primitive case. The original imperative expressed a desire that was to be immediately satisfied through performance. The negative-ostensive reply leaves it to the first speaker whether he will redefine his desire in more realistic terms. The negative-ostensive model refers to the present, but only to annul the relationship between this present and the linguistic presence of the speakers. The imperative was founded on the faith that these two were inseparable, that there was no "present" other than linguistic presence, prolonged sufficiently into the future to permit the presentation of its referent. The negative ostensive reveals the illusion of this faith in the magical powers of the scene of representation.

Thus the declarative has a tense from the beginning, even if at first it be only the present. For the other tenses too are "presents," presents of the past or future. To say the hammer was there yesterday is to say that, yesterday, it was *present*, yesterday's present being, from the context-free perspective of the model, just like today's. This present is that of the declarative model as a whole, yet it is within this model specifically an element of the *predicate*. The topic is requested by the first speaker and denied by the second, but whether it exists at all in the world, it has a reality in linguistic presence on the scene of representation. Its absence or even its nonexistence is what is said about it by the predicate. The topic is simply a given of the linguistic model, as the topic-comment sentence makes explicit by setting it off in first position, independently of the grammatical dependencies of the rest of the sentence.

Philosophers have been confused by the coordinate subject-predicate form into arguing for and against the "existence" of such things as a *round square*. In topic-comment form, however, even if we say "a round square, that cannot even be imagined," the topical linguistic "existence" of the round square is beyond dispute. The present of the declarative, in which the topic becomes an element of a model of reality, is realized only in the predicate. This predicate need not be verbal in nature. But to the extent that it refers to a *present*, it temporalizes the topic, which at first presented itself atemporally, as a non-referential linguistic presence. Thus the topic-predicate form expresses a passage from the atemporal to the temporal.

Now insofar as we can distinguish verbals from nominals, the former are names of *actions*, that is, phenomena that can be realized only in time, whereas nominals exist in the significant memory as atemporal images. But this implies that when the predicate is verbal, the temporality inherent in the verbal-as-such becomes a property of the topic-as predicated-of, or we might say that the verbal predicate *verbalizes* the topic. In contrast, adjectival and nominal predicates have no verbal with which to verbalize the topic because the adjective or nominal cannot be itself an agent of temporalization. In a sentence like "the hammer (is) broken" or "John (is) sick," the words "broken" or "sick" express states, not actions, and the *now* implicit in the declarative is verbalized, not in these words, but in the copula, even if unexpressed. The semantic sources of copulatives in verbs like *to stand* (Latin *stare*), *to bear* (Sanskrit *bhū*), which denote static "activities" and thus *temporalize* stasis, lend support to this analysis.

Thus declarative predicates acquire a verbal form as the result of their expression of a linguistic present. The other chief grammatical categories, governance and person, also inchoate in the imperative, are likewise formalized as specifications of the predicate and thus as functions of the verb. Imperative verbals may be associated with objects, but cannot truly be said to *govern* them; they involve them in a desired performance. In the declarative, the object becomes an element of the predicate, temporalized by its role in the action denoted by the verb. Thus in a sentence like "John takes (took) the hammer," the hammer is not present in the model as an object of the speaker's desire, but as the object of John's action. The hearer is required to conceive it as subordinate to this action, because it is this action alone that constitutes the *now* of the linguistic present.

The category of person is similarly formalized in the declarative model. Here we may pass over the third person, rightly classed by Benveniste as merely the nonpersonal, or if we like "zero-personal," member of the paradigm. The first-person or second-person topic, upon its temporalization by the predicate, becomes itself situated in the *now* of the linguistic present. The *shifter* function of the personal pronouns situates the declarative model relatively to the linguistic presence of the two interlocutors, so that the original speaker, hearing (say) "I" as the topic, must imagine the other speaker in the temporal situation designated by the predicate. Thus the declarative model specifically presents one or the other speaker as a "real" element of the present (such as was only implicit in the imperative model), and because the verb carries in the predicate the tense of the present, it will tend to become "personalized" as well.

In contrast to the asymmetry of the imperative-declarative dialogue, the use of personal pronouns in the declarative reestablishes the symmetry of the ostensive gestures of pointing which were no doubt the most primitive "shifter" forms. In the present of the declarative, "I" and "you" form a paradigm, with the third-person form standing in contrast to both. The asymmetrical speaker-hearer relation is neutralized within the linguistic model; this is the same neutralization as was carried out by the (declarative) present on the asymmetry of (imperative) desire. Artificial languages may be made “context-free” without reference to the linguistic presence in which their messages are conveyed, but in human language this presence can never simply be ignored, if language is to continue to serve as our means of liberation from prelinguistic violence.

Chapter 15.
The Esthetics of Linguistic Forms

The declarative sentence, as a “context-free” model of reality, offers us the possibility of an objective understanding of the universe. It is the foundation of scientific discourse, which makes explicit and rigorous the decontextualizing elements of the declarative model by calling for empirical verification/falsification, eventually in the controlled environment of the laboratory. But the declarative is by the same token the origin of *fiction*, which exploits its liberation from the discursive context in the opposite fashion, as a source not of objectivity but of the free representation and transcendence of desire.

The esthetic relation is constituted by our oscillation between contemplating the sign and its sacred referent that originates on the scene of representation. But this space and attitude of contemplation (Sartre’s *pour-soi*), once constituted, can then be evoked by real-world objects, which are no longer perceived in the “instinctive” framework of appetite but can in various ways acquire an aura of sacrality. Although there is no point in speaking of mimesis itself as an esthetic phenomenon, the mimetic structure of desire as described by René Girard in *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, (Grasset, 1961) includes an esthetic dimension that depends on the scene of language, if not on language itself.

Imitation of another’s behavior can of course be performed for strictly practical reasons. But in Girard’s schema of desire, the subject imitates a model whom Girard calls the *mediator*, whom he regards consciously or unconsciously as an esthetic object. The perceived reality of the model alternates with an imaginary being that embodies an inaccessible, sacred essence. The subject may subsequently attempt to acquire the objective components of this being for himself, in which case his mimetic activity rejoins the domain of the practical. But in the esthetic moment of desire, the non-equivalence between being and act, or substance and appearance, presents itself to the imagination of the subject.

The esthetic imagination as so defined is not practical, anticipating possible future activity, but paradoxical. On the one hand, possession of the appearance appears to include within itself the possession of the being that is expressed by it; but on the other, because the appearance is an expression of this being, the being must be acquired before the appearance and is therefore inaccessible through it. Thus the esthetic embodies in a paradoxical *experience* the fundamental paradox of signification: that the word signifies its referent as *already* significant. Or in theological terms, man creates God/God creates man.

This esthetic element is not dependent on language, nor indeed on any formal system of representation, except insofar as such systems lend significance to the appearances to be imitated. Yet it is important to insist that the moment in which the "being" of the model is contemplated, as opposed to "instinctively" imitated as in animal mimesis, is a mode of deferred action dependent on the human scene of representation. The desiring subject's contemplative "possession" of the real or remembered image of his model is homologous to the speaker's "possession" of the sacred object in the originary event through the intermediary of the sign, the object of the ontological faith expressed in the inappropriate ostensive.

For the subject of desire, the remembered image of the model is like that of an ostensive sign which, because its utterance accompanies in principle the presence of its referent, comes to be employed inappropriately, with the same paradoxical consequences, in order to obtain the presence of this referent in its absence. Hence although the desire is purely mental, it is nonetheless an effect of representation, a *cultural* phenomenon.

Yet the means of expression furnished by the ostensive, although adequate to this task, can scarcely be said to constitute an esthetic object in itself. The ostensive sign does not specify a particular mode of appearance of its referent, but the appearance of the referent per se; it stands for the substance of the referent, just as for the desiring subject, a particular phenomenal aspect of the model can be said to stand for his being as a whole. Ostensive language does not express the content of the esthetic imagination, but is only its formal sign, and what we have called ontological faith in language is precisely that this sign, given the conditions of linguistic presence, is sufficient.

A case in point is the magical use of a person's name to "possess" his "essence," a quasi-universal phenomenon in archaic societies, which is often guarded against by the expedient of maintaining this essence in a secret, sacred name revealed only to privileged members of the family group. The name is a merely formal attribute. But if its use is thought to give access to the substantial being of its bearer, then contemplation of the name may be taken as a linguistic equivalent to the contemplation of some more palpable manifestation. Desire is ultimately concerned, after all, not with appearance but with substance, appearance being only a means to an end.

The inadequacy in our eyes of the esthetic that expresses itself in the evocation of a name in order to “possess” its bearer comes, not from the impotency of ostensive language, but, on the contrary, from its excessive power, its proximity to the sacred. The desiring subject only contemplates as much of the model’s appearance as he needs in order to assure himself that it expresses the latter’s being: if a name suffices, he need go no further. Indeed, the concrete appearances that function in the same fashion in the extra-linguistic imagination tend to be of a similar fragmentary, unesthetic character, as in possession through a piece of clothing, a lock of hair, etc., exercised by the practitioners of voodoo and similar rites.

Yet in the iconic realm, there is no clear frontier between the magical and the esthetic. Although a stick figure or voodoo doll might suffice to permit “possession,” the cave painters of the animal figures whose beauty still amazes us today were almost certainly not displaying their skill for the sheer esthetic satisfaction of their fellows; these paintings, like the art displayed in cathedrals, clearly had a reverential purpose, as well as an ultimately alimentary one.

In the formal, minimalistic domain of language, however, the distinction between the elementary linguistic forms and the declarative is critical. Although the elementary forms produce an esthetic effect, the dependence of the sign on the speech situation precludes the development of an esthetic internal to linguistic communication, that is, a *literature*. This is merely to reformulate in esthetic terms the dependence of the elementary linguistic forms on the scene of representation, which makes them incapable of furnishing objective models of reality. The “excessive power” of the ostensive-imperative that transcends the esthetic sphere is the exact counterpart of its non-objectivity; the failure to distinguish between desire and reality is in both cases inherited directly from the originary scene of representation.

Hence what we may call the esthetics of the elementary forms can be grasped only by going beyond the linguistic models themselves to the entire scene on which they are presented. The pragmatic paradoxes generated by the use of these forms in specific situations can then be understood in esthetic terms, and the emergence of first the imperative and then the declarative "solutions" to these paradoxes as steps in the evolution, not merely of the objective representation of reality, but of esthetic expression.

In this perspective, because the ostensive is dependent on the presence of its object, its own "esthetic value"—its capacity for evoking when contemplated by its hearer the being-for-desire, or simply the *significance* of this object—is limited to the moment of deferral in which it presents itself as a representation of the object. In the development leading to the constitution of the imperative, this deferral is prolonged in an awaiting in which the sign designating the object becomes for the hearer the stimulus to a practical performance. Here, for the first time, the utterance can function outside its practical use, as an object of esthetic contemplation. Insofar as the imperative remains an "inappropriate ostensive," its utterance, rather than being realized in practice and thereby annulled as an expression of desire, may be merely contemplated as a sign of the absent desire-object.

But then it would not be accurate to speak of the object of such contemplation—the linguistic expression of desire—as an *imperative* utterance. Rather, the dialectic of the inappropriate ostensive may be said to lead to two complementary results. One is the imperative, in which ontological faith in language is made the basis for a praxis that resolves the paradox it contains. But the other is the esthetic contemplation of the linguistic sign, in which this paradoxical faith is not tested in practice but enacted, without resolution, in the imagination. This enactment may be said to be the birth of esthetic expression as such; but its effectiveness remains dependent on the linguistic presence that gives the sign a potential, albeit unused, power over its real referent. Thus "inappropriate ostensive" language can be said to afford linguistic expression to desire, but only to the extent that it takes real beings as its models, for the relation between the substance of the model and its (linguistic) "appearance" or attribute must be guaranteed in the real world, and not, as in esthetic representation proper, within a fictional universe.

With these considerations in mind we may now turn to the declarative form, which by providing a context-free model of reality, possesses by the same token a “context-free” esthetic. Here the linguistic object presented for contemplation is not a mere sign attributed to its referent by the speaker under the guarantee of linguistic presence, but an articulated model consisting of topic and predicate, in which the topic sign refers to what may at this point truly be called a *signified*, to which the predicate furnishes a context-free attribute. The declarative begins where the ostensive-imperative ends, with the designation of an object of desire guaranteed implicitly by a preceding imperative, that is, by the implicit interest of the hearer, and not merely in general terms by “ontological faith.” But instead of replacing the sign by its referent, as with a successful imperative, the declarative “comments on” the referent with a predicate that explicitly constitutes it as inaccessible to the desire of the (imperative) interlocutor. Thus the declarative model, because it is indifferent to the “magical” power of desire as expressed in the imperative, obliges the subject of this desire to contemplate its object *esthetically*, within the representational confines of the model, producing the mental oscillation between sign and imagined referent that defines the esthetic experience.

The relation thereby established between speaker, hearer, and object is structurally identical to Girard’s “triangular” model of desire, which it can be said to “express” in the same way that inappropriate-ostensive language “expressed” the desiring subject’s ontological faith in the sign. Thus, in the sense in which desire may be defined as an intersubjective relation, it can only be said to emerge at this stage. But to define desire by its fully evolved configuration would lend itself to the same criticism as the choice of grammarians and linguists to define linguistic form on the basis of the declarative sentence. Such definitions foreclose the possibility of generative analysis.

In Girard’s model, the mediator openly or covertly designates, by means not specifiable in advance, the desire-object to the subject. The vagueness of this designation is analogous to the indeterminate nature of the relationship between the declarative speaker and the predicate attributed to the object. This predicate, as we have seen, is necessarily temporal, and its temporality designates a moment, real or imaginary, of the declarative speaker’s experience that is presumably not shared by his interlocutor. But this experience of the object is not presented as such in the declarative model, from which the speaker qua speaker is absent; the model is merely understood to be founded on temporal experience as the source of its predicate.

In what Girard calls “internal” mediation, the mediator may well be invisible to the subject, or even an anonymous *on/Man* of social judgment. Here the field is less the domain of an overtly privileged model than that of social experience in general, and the specific value of individual objects of desire is wholly dependent on their status in a given social group. Triangular desire is thus both more objective and more subjective than the desire expressed by the imperative. On the one hand, it depends on the “objective” form of predication, but on the other, because the source of this predication—that is, the mediator—is absent from the declarative model, the valorization of the object is cut off from the public presence implicit in the ostensive sign.

The declarative sentence, taken as an objective model of reality, is the foundation of metaphysics. (See “Plato and the Birth of Conceptual Thought,” *Anthropoetics* 2, 2, January 1997; http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0202/plato .) Predication, its distinguishing feature, is both the source of its objectivity (as it situates the topic outside linguistic presence), and at the same time, the expression of the mediating role of the (declarative) speaker between his hearer (the speaker of the original imperative) and the object of his desire (the topic). When this role is grasped explicitly by the hearer, the intersubjective situation is that of the dialogic schema discussed a propos of the imperative in Chapter 11. But in the esthetic contemplation of the declarative model, the speaker does not appear; instead there is only predication “in itself.” Thus it is not the predicate but its *predication* of the topic that reveals to the detached observer what it hides from its desiring hearer: the presence of a second subject as mediator of his desire.

We can now understand more concretely the position of the declarative in the dialectic of desire. The first (imperative) speaker of the imperative-declarative dialogue already desires the object, because he pronounces its name in order to acquire it. The declarative response transforms this desire into its “triangular” form by providing a mediator, in the person of the second speaker, and a predicative attribute independent of linguistic presence. The subject’s original desire was founded on the magical power of language to make present its referent; now this making-present becomes purely imaginary, and at the same time, defined for him by another. The second speaker acts as an unavowed rival, maintaining the desire-object in its inaccessible position in the declarative model through his act of predication, although at the same time not revealing his own agency within his utterance.

In practical terms, this utterance carries information that may be of use to the first subject in realizing his desire. But insofar as the utterance itself becomes, on the scene of representation, an object of contemplation, the declarative expresses the inaccessibility of its topic within the real world. Thus to realize the desire, the speech situation would have to be abolished rather than, as in the imperative, fulfilled. Worldly fulfillment thus now appears as incompatible with the scene of representation, which generates an imaginary, or more precisely, a *fictional* universe. The prolongation of the linguistic presence of the declarative thus leads in the opposite direction from that of the imperative, because the hearer remains thereby immersed in a fictional world in which his desire is incapable of practical fulfillment. The fiction of the declarative sentence can only prolong itself in fictional discourse, which is to say, in literature, where the imagined object is constantly reconstructed synchronously with the temporal progression of the work.

The great flaw of "esthetics of literature" is that they begin with an anesthetic notion of language proper and are then obliged, in order to understand its literary use, to posit a "literary language" defined by some mysterious "esthetic" difference from "ordinary" language, like the "opacity" by which Sartre distinguished poetry from prose in his 1948 *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* The indefensibility of this position is apparent even from the limited perspective of pragmatic linguistics. But it is not enough to speak vaguely of the "esthetic element" in language without making clear the structural relation between linguistic form and the esthetic.

Thus the question must be turned on its head. Language is from the outset an esthetic phenomenon as much as a communicative one, the two functions being only separable at the discursive level, and even then, never fully. Even the ostensive, which in linguistic presence merely designates a present referent and thus can operate as an esthetic expression only during the quasi-instantaneous (although repeatable) time of deferral, functions esthetically in significant memory, and lacking this function, its inappropriate use as an imperative—but also, as we have seen, for the esthetic contemplation of the ostensive sign—would be inexplicable.

The marginality of the esthetic, as exhibited in such phenomena as the bohemian life of artists and the estrangement of esthetics from the mainstream of philosophical analysis, perpetuates its original and never quite forgotten connection with the sacred. This connection is as real, if less salient, in the minimal, formal domain of language as in that of iconic representation. Yet no student of painting or sculpture considers the pictorial or plastic components of artworks as in themselves devoid of esthetic interest, apprehended and integrated by means of a formal "competence" to which the esthetic is irrelevant. If we are less likely to insist on the fundamentally esthetic nature of language, it is because the esthetic's irrelevance to the practical world of science and technology makes it appear as a "supplement" to language rather than part of its original essence. This mind-set is that of metaphysics, become no longer an auxiliary to but a substitute for religion. The *arbitraire du signifiant* in the world of declarative language is a rootless world of "structures" that are "applied" to nature, but shorn of their own natural, let alone anthropological, ontology.

The revelation of the internal contradictions of the metaphysical world-view, long relegated to the marginal domain of esthetics, has since Nietzsche become a staple of continental philosophy, of which Jacques Derrida was no doubt the ultimate exponent. Analytic, "Anglo-Saxon" philosophers have safely ignored this trend, which they not unjustifiably dismiss as tainted with estheticism. Thus as both schools increasingly concentrate their attention on language, one attempts to deconstruct its basis without examining its forms, whereas the other attempts to construct its forms—increasingly in the context of "artificial intelligence"—without examining their basis. Generative anthropology, by demonstrating the centrality of the esthetic/sacred element in the genesis of language, and understanding the "context-free" declarative as a product of linguistic evolution that liberates us from the immediacy of the speech-situation, would substitute a historical dialectic for this *dialogue de sourds*.

Conclusion

Having come to the end of this second edition of *The Origin of Language*, the reader may wonder whether taking up this “new way of thinking” based on the originary hypothesis has been worth the trouble. Why should the intellectual world reject its current division of labor, evolved over generations, that leaves the question of human origins, including that of language as only one of humanity’s many distinctive components (opposable thumb, bipedalism, neoteny, “aquatic ape”…), to empirical scientists, whether paleontologists, neuroscientists, primate ethologists, laboratory psychologists, or of course, linguists, while the more abstract aspects of human consciousness that can be systematized by some kind of logic are left to philosophers?

Generative anthropology is the creation of a humanist, and it is no accident that until now it has with very few exceptions been of interest only to humanists. Yet all who are concerned with understanding what is specific to humanity have an interest in exploring this “new way of thinking” (see *A New Way of Thinking*, Aurora, Colo.: Davies Group, 2011) that offers a framework for the productive synthesis of empirical anthropology with religion and philosophy. This is not the kind of quasi-philosophical mish-mash known as “French theory,” which, despite its great intellectual creativity, disdained to construct rigorous systems of thought. For as Jacques Derrida, its greatest exponent, made clear, its purpose was de-construction, the undoing of the metaphysical dogma of the “objective” reality of the philosophical proposition, the declarative sentence, while affirming nevertheless that nothing else could be put in its place.

The framework offered by GA is not a magical synthesis of previous modes of thought, but a scenario that provides a plausible path from “nature” to “culture.” Let me recall the simple but potent example of Jean-Paul Sartre’s distinction between the *pour-soi* and the *en-soi*, an “existentialist” elaboration of Hegel’s distinction between the *an sich* and the *für sich*. *L’être et le néant* consists of a long and intricate analysis of the specificity of human consciousness. One would think that this analysis, in a book of over 900 pages, might be of interest not just to philosophers and "historians of ideas," but to anyone concerned with the specific difference between humans and the higher animals. The latter can "ape" human behavior but cannot be taught language, let alone taught to teach it to their young, and they lack all but the most rudimentary degree of the facility for triadic joint attention that permits us to communicate by exchanging representations.

Yet frustratingly, Sartre's depiction of the *pour-soi,* although referring pointedly to negation, which Sartre explicitly recognizes as dependent on language, makes no direct reference to linguistic communication, let alone to the question of its origin. As in all metaphysics, the declarative sentence is tacitly understood to have existed from eternity. But when one situates Sartre's formulations within the scenario of the originary hypothesis, although they lose nothing of their philosophical rigor, they gain immensely in concreteness. Sartre's *pour-soi* is a scene of consciousness internal to the human mind, the locus of the separation between the mind and the thought-objects that it contemplates, but one that can be understood only as reflecting an earlier, *communal* scene of separation.

I doubt if Derrida ever imagined that this scene could provide the archetype of what he called deferral, *la différance*. This is another French-theory term that, as they say, *a fait couler beaucoup d'encre* because it seems to correspond to nothing in everyday experience; yet nothing is more characteristically human than stepping back from our potentially appetitive relationship with objects in order to contemplate and think about them, and to share our impressions through signs with the rest of our species.

The scenario of the originary hypothesis, whatever its accuracy in portraying "how it really was" when humans first emerged as speaking creatures, allows us to situate the birth of the *pour-soi* and triadic joint attention in a plausible scenario, where the motivations of the proto-human actors and their invention/discovery of the sign are explained as motivated by the need to prevent/defer violence. Both Sartre's mysterious *néant* as well as the Derridean notion of *différance* are given the same simple worldly counterpart. I challenge any other mode of thought to thus make "philosophical," that is, metaphysical concepts, accessible to the anthropological imagination.

The integration of religious discourse into the anthropological context, building on the insights of René Girard, is perhaps of even greater importance. GA allows believers and non-believers alike to acquire an anthropological understanding of not just “the religious” in the Durkheimian sense of the domain of communal as opposed to individual values, but of the *sacred* in its originary manifestation. Rejecting the trivial denigration of religion in recent years (*God Is Not Good*, *The God Delusion*…), GA situates the God-creates-man/man-creates-God dichotomy at our hypothetical point of origin, granting to both sides an equivalent understanding of the anthropological issues involved. By following Ockham’s razor and minimizing the parameters that define the human, GA thus opens the door to a creative synthesis of the domains of anthropology, philosophy, and religion, as well as the humanistic not-just-French theorizing that has somewhat haphazardly attempted to synthesize them.

One hears a great deal nowadays about a “post-human” era, whether inhabited by humans with digitally enhanced bodies and brains or by cyborgs who will have replaced us as the world’s dominant creatures, as they have become the world’s best chess and now Go players. GA’s understanding of our relationship to language allows us to clear up some of the confusion surrounding this subject.

The human scene of representation, in inaugurating a wholly new mode of intraspecific communication, cannot be understood simply as a feature of the individual human mind. It is easy to show that the absurdity of the currently fashionable ideas concerning language origin stems from their failure to take its communal aspect into account—for example, the solipsistic notion that we begin to speak because we have “ideas” that we want to “communicate,” as though, given a certain level of neuronal complexity, “ideas” can spring up by themselves even without the means to communicate them.

It would be foolish today, in what is still the infancy of the cybernetic era, to assign limits to the future accomplishments of artificial intelligence. But the Girardian thesis that it is the deferral of human violence that is the critical factor in the origin of language suggests that our fears that machines may acquire the ambition of conquering the world are merely projections of the real dangers of our own violence. Suspecting computers of wanting to do away with us, as though some kind of Darwinian process independent of human will would drive their “evolution” in this direction, allows us to forget that well before any such thing becomes remotely conceivable, human beings bent on conquest and/or destruction will be able to command programmable machines to carry out their desires. We are already on the verge of being able to create robot-drone armies whose programmed aggressiveness needs no secretly emerging robot DNA. If we can find a way to survive the next century or two, I think we can be sure that our fears of robot take-overs, even more than those of apocalyptic "climate change," will no longer be at the forefront of our preoccupations.

The ultimate criterion of a valid anthropology, using this term in the most general sense, is its ability to enhance our ethical self-understanding. This is not a matter of seeking a Pollyannish formula to transform our vale of tears into a realm of sweetness and light. But in the current state of affairs, adding the ethical insight of GA to those supplied by history's great religious revelations will enhance our ability to combat the victimary dogmatism that has largely taken over the ethical consciousness of the educated classes in Europe and increasingly in the US. It is not a matter of countering "lies" with "truth," but of proposing a better model of human behavior that has some chance of persuading those of the victimary faith to begin to doubt its commandments.

GA is not a "philosophy of the Right." It accepts as the basis of all moral thinking the primordiality of the moral model that understands humanity as founded on the reciprocal exchange of signs on the originary scene, an exchange that gives us our intuition of moral equality. The Left has committed many crimes both before and since attaining its modern self-consciousness in the French Revolution, but the reason that these crimes never arouse the same universal opprobrium as the excesses of the Right, so that Hitler has become a symbol of evil in a way that Stalin and Mao and Castro are not, is that the Left's professed egalitarianism, however hypocritically and inhumanly implemented, is rooted in our originary moral intuition, whereas dogmas of ontological superiority are not.

The horror of the Holocaust is clearly enough the origin of the victimary ethic, one that has only grown stronger as memories of the war have faded, and this because it increasingly seems to provide an answer to all the problems of "inequality" that face humanity today, perhaps more urgently than ever now that poor people are increasingly able to live well enough to resent those who live better.

GA allows us to understand that what keeps the victimary alive is that it offers a comforting explanation, however absurd, of the "digital divide" that is increasingly creating a gulf between those who are able to educate themselves to manipulate symbols skillfully and those who cannot. (See, for example, *Chronicles* 484 and 541.) I suggest that this division has brought about a crisis in human history, not because it makes manual labor increasingly less valuable, but because it challenges for the first time the moral model of universal human equality by putting into question our common ability to reciprocally exchange signs.

It goes without saying that, in the past, differences of symbolic competence were far greater than today: most people were simply illiterate. But such differences could be explained by social conditions: a peasant would not expect to be educated like a cleric. It sufficed that, in the West, Christianity taught that all souls were equally loved by God; worldly inequalities were not the fault of the unequally favored. In today's world, such explanations are no longer credible. Whence the increasing use of victimary thinking to explain these inequalities: if whites (Asians?) do better in school or on intelligence tests than members of a given "minority," it is the result of their "white privilege." It is much easier to explain their superior status as the result of ascriptive discrimination than to justify it in "Rawlsian" terms as ultimately beneficial to the society as a whole. GA's understanding of the co-dependency of the moral model that provides us with our sense of equality and the element of *firstness*, the space for which is opened up by the freedom of human consciousness on the scene of representation, gives us a more objective basis for addressing this problem than the resentments of those who know only that they are being hurt by it.

"Pure" science is an activity pursued for knowledge's sake, independently of practical considerations, but in the faith, borne out time and again throughout history, that seeking the truth about whatever we are curious about, be it dark matter or the origin of human language, is our best way of improving our practical grasp of reality. It is in this spirit that I offer this new edition of *The Origin of Language*.

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