Download Zip File

Anthropoetics IX, no. 1
Spring / Summer 2003

ISSN 1083-7264

Table of Contents

Return to Anthropoetics home page

Eric Gans / gans@humnet.ucla.edu
Last updated:

Anthropoetics 9, no. 1 (Spring / Summer 2003)

Africa: A Theme(s) Park(1)

Jean-Loup Amselle

EHESS (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales)
54 boulevard Raspail
75006 Paris
amselle@atacama.ehess.fr

"Semblable à l'obi des nègres, au sagamore des sauvages" (Balzac, Louis Lambert)

In The History of Sexuality,(2) Michel Foucault highlighted the prolixity of the discourse on sexuality in Western history, thereby refuting the omnipresent theme of sexual repression. The same type of reflection can legitimately be applied to Africa. Contrary to the affirmations of a large number of African and Third World specialists, Africa--or at least its representation--occupies a major place in the Western imagination. I would like to shift the focus away from the view of this continent as neglected, sick, economically anemic, and intellectually unattractive, by examining the ways in which Africa is often over-invested with affective and libidinal qualities in Western representations. To fully explore this phenomenon, I would like to shed light on the "sexual relations" that at once unite the West and Africa and mark the profound ambivalence between them.

The relationship of the West to Africa may be conceived as fitting into the order of the sublime according to Burke and Kant. To employ an oxymoron, the West experiences a sort of "delicious fright" that takes hold of us (as "Western" individuals) when we make reference in one way or another to Africa. This image of the African sublime (or this subliminal image of Africa) translates well the contradictory place this continent occupies in the Western subconscious: that of a degenerate entity on the one hand, and of a source of regeneration on the other.

A blood made of ink

Even if in "The Degeneration of Animals,"(3) Buffon places Blacks above the Lapons, he concludes that Africans and Caribbeans, because of the climatic conditions in which they live, are incapable of fully developing the intellectual aptitudes of Europeans. We should note that in both Buffon and Gobineau (at a later date), this idea of degeneration accompanies the emotional qualities attributed to Africans. This coupling of intellectual and emotional

degeneracy has provided the basis for primitivisms of all shapes and sizes, whether in the form of Pan-Africanism, Négritude, or Afrocentrism. The general trend, however, is to view Africa as an "underdeveloped" continent, whether this "underdevelopment" be due to the climate, to economic or historical isolation (Hegel, Braudel), or to some other factor. The verdict is clear: Africa is a "cursed" continent according to biblical exegesis dating back to the fourth century of our era that views black Africans as the descendants of Shem of the Old Testament. This prejudicial configuration taints our Western perceptions of Africa from the outset and imprisons this continent in a vicious circle of poverty, corruption, sickness, and tribal warfare.

For sponsors of all types (international organizations, great powers, non-governmental organizations) as well as for the media, Africa is the continent par excellence of misery, to the point that Africa and poverty have become synonymous. The representation of Africa in the media focuses on sickness and destitution evidenced by the condition of famine, hence the emaciated bodies shown ad nauseam. This impoverished image of Africa is crucial to the "charity business," an enterprise that relies on mobilizing and instilling guilt in large portions of the European and North American population. Poverty in Africa results from economic marginalization (less than 2% of world trade, a global debt of $334 billion); this initial, essential poverty is complicated by a whole series of additional factors that combine to make Africa a continent unlike any other.

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, specialists in African politics focused on corruption (using the concepts of "neo-patrimonialism" and "politics of the belly") as a fundamental cultural characteristic of the African continent. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank subscribe to this idea and make the attribution of international aid dependent (these organizations call this "conditionality") on criteria of good "governance." These criteria are supposed to regulate the public order (res publica) of Western state apparatuses, yet (to the great joy of African leaders) the same phenomena of corruption emerge in Western countries. When Westerners attribute the abuse of power to a specific geographical and cultural entity, they remain blind to the transcultural nature of the forms of appropriation and redistribution of resources. Most importantly, by "culturalizing" corruption, Western critics overlook its universal character. The corruption of African States and the corruption of the French State (la "Françafrique") are related, notably through the numerous, notorious Elf Affairs.

2

For Western analysts, there is little distance between corruption, and tribalism and genocide, since the same political analysts consider corruption to be tied to, or even engendered by, tribalism. These analysts reason that Africans, incapable of providing themselves with civil societies clearly separated from State apparatuses, are therefore condemned to live within political structures dependent on clientelist forms of appropriation and redistribution of wealth. Following this line of argument, the income from petroleum and mining--notably the diamond trade, source of the famous gemmocraties--as well as income resulting from international aid is

said to circulate only within familial, tribal, or ethnic networks that constitute the veritable driving force behind the ethnic conflicts affecting the region.

The proliferation of the "ethnicist" vulgate has done much to accredit the idea of "tribal" Africa, in step with views of India as "the continent of castes" and the Arab-Muslim world as the home of fundamentalism. This prejudiced vision of Africa treats lightly the diversity of civil wars joined under the label "ethnic conflict" and begs the following questions: Is mono-ethnic Somalia the theater of a tribal war? Are the Tutsis and the Hutus of Rwanda and Burundi ethnically distinct if they speak the same language? The limited vision expressed in such inquiries remains so deeply in denial with respect to the deeply ethnic nature of the European State--as witness the limpieza de sangre of the Inquisition--that one has the right to wonder whether the tribal characteristics attributed to Africa are not simply projections of Europe on exotic societies. Such projections are destined to comfort, by purification or elimination, Europe's own identity.

This projection on the part of Europe, initially accompanying colonization, has had a lasting impact because it contributed to shaping and solidifying ethnicities on this continent. When the European colonizer left, these new tribal entities launched an attack on African State apparatuses. This colonial tribalism--as a mode of political management of territories under European influence--thus constituted a veritable time bomb whose effects are still felt in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, and the two Congos.

This question of tribalism in African societies is closely tied to that of genocide. The theme of genocide cannot be dissociated from the comparison established between Nazi genocide and the massacres of the people of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo beginning in 1994. Did Africa--as Hannah Arendt has claimed--serve as a trial ground for Nazi geneticists, on the example of E. Fischer whose training took place in the German colony in Southwest Africa (Namibia) during the early years of the twentieth century? Is genocide a "tropical Nazism" or is it, because its massacres are perpetuated by its own population, totally different from the extermination of the Jews during the Second World War? This lively debate among Africanists masks the deeper question of Western representations of Africa as a continent of absolute horror, a theater of primordial savagery only temporarily interrupted by European colonization and threatening to start up again once independence has been gained.

The question of genocide is essential to the expression of humanitarian doctrine, that is, to the right of intervention, as a means by which non-governmental organizations identify, and exclude, the Other (the humanitarian is always destined for Others)--at the risk of finding themselves embarrassed when genocidal horror makes a comeback among white Europeans (ex-Yugoslavia). This return of the repressed is itself reappropriated by African genocidal perpetrators who use European labels (Bosnia, Kosovo, etc.) in carrying out their fratricidal combats.

Finally, last but not least, we must not forget the connotations of genocide envisioned as a label, or as a floating signifier, of planetary scope. This question emerged, or rather reemerged, during a recent conference on racism organized by the United Nations at Durban, South Africa. On this occasion, the African delegates reiterated their demand, which was finally accepted, that the Atlantic Slave Trade be recognized as a crime against humanity. This demand, first expressed by the Nigerian billionaire politician Moshood Abiola and then by African Americans, constitutes a new way of turning the tables by attempting to show that the real genocide is not the one that usually comes to mind--that of the Jews--but rather that constituted by the deportation of Africans to the New World, a genocide claimed to be in large part the work of Jewish traders.(4)

The theme of AIDS and its proliferation--omnipresent in discussions of Africa--is another way of making reference to genocide. A particularly strong symbol of the dereliction into which the African continent has plunged, the global AIDS epidemic is represented differently in European and African perspectives. Whereas for Europeans, AIDS, or at least certain forms of this illness, originated in Africa where it was transmitted from monkey to man, African representations are exactly the opposite. According to them, the Whites contracted AIDS through zoophilic practices and then contaminated Africans.(5) Whatever truth may exist in these representations (they may be based on actual practices followed by certain Africans during the colonial period or afterward), one cannot help comparing them with the recent comments by South Africa's President M'Beki. By denying responsibility for the HIV retrovirus as a transmitter of AIDS and attributing this disease to underdevelopment and poverty and thus, in the final analysis, to European colonialism, M'Beki once again put the ball in the European court by making this interpretation a major identity label of Africa in this phase of globalization.

The heroes are tired

3

In contrast to this representation of Africa as a degenerate continent, a haven for the cursed descendents of the sons of Shem whose blood is polluted, we find a completely opposite image that presents this region of the world as a fountain of youth and source of regeneration for all of humanity. It is important to note that these two representations are not contradictory and that they effectively translate the profoundly ambivalent status of the "delicious fright" that takes hold of Westerners when they think of this continent. Africa has a place in the mind of every Westerner, especially the French whose collective and individual histories are often tied in almost visceral ways to the African continent. Who among our compatriots has not had an ancestor or near relative living in Africa in the past, or even in the present?

This repulsive fascination for Africa, this libidinal and viral way of thinking about it is, of course, merely the inverse of our representation of Europe, and of the West in general, as a sterilized, anemic, disembodied continent. At bottom, and this is a vision whose origin can be found in

the thought of colonial administrators like Faidherbe, Europe is felt to suffer from a hypertrophy of intellectual functions and an underdevelopment of physiological ones: the loss of the body has been the price to pay to obtain supremacy in the area of cold reason.

From this type of representation emerges a whole philosophy that permeates economic, political, social, cultural, and religious domains. In the economic field, first of all, the ingeniousness of the informal African sector stands out in opposition to strict economic rationality and the utilitarianism of the market. The informal sector consists of an entire economy of resourcefulness and recycling--we will encounter this theme again with respect to art--capable of providing a valuable counterexample to our ossified economy. This system of thought is inscribed within anti-utilitarian thinking in the social sciences that emphasizes the principles of reciprocity along the lines of the gift/counter-gift at work in our "local systems of exchange," for example, and that, more generally, valorizes small businesses that create work at the expense of deterritorialized multinational corporations. Once again Africans--making a virtue of necessity--show themselves to be "good savages" with respect to the economy, an example to their denatured colleagues to the North. In this respect as well, the vigor of African civil society would have something to teach the bureaucratized and dehumanized economy of the West.

We find in the face-to-face negotiations (the palabre) of the political domain the same human qualities that are attributed to the informal sector in Africa. Just like the economy, the field of political relations in the West and in Japan is subject to the power of contract and tied up in the corset of "public space." Western politics could revive its vigor by adopting the deliberation techniques of African village assemblies that come to a decision only after having heard the opinions of all their members, emphasizing consensus rather than drawing an opposition between "losers" and "winners." As a model of equilibrium for small communities that respect the status of their members, the reign of consensus and palabre would provide a useful complement to the bureaucratized and contractual procedures that rule the behavior of decision-makers in developed countries.

We can slide imperceptibly from the economic and political to the social domain by highlighting the principle of solidarity at work in the background of African society. This principle is only a rehash of the old division between sociology from anthropology--community/society, holism/individualism--and thus between "Us" and "Others," which serves as a narrative schema for the film Little Senegal, where the "warmth" of relationships among Africans is contrasted to the "cold" interactions among westernized African Americans.(6)

That African economics and politics are collective and marked by solidarity in accordance with Durkheim's conception of consciousness, Western representations explain by the fact that the African psyche is still dominated by magic and the sacred. When Balzac presented himself by reference to Africa in the guise of a writer-sorcerer in Louis Lambert,(7) it may be because he felt that the sacred had already deserted Christianity. One century later, Pierre Gaudibert, the

former director of the Museum of African Art in Grenoble, only reconfirmed this abandonment when he declared: "The sacred disappeared when we put Christ in the museum."(8)

From Picasso to Jean-Hubert Martin (the curator of the exhibitions Magiciens de la terre and Partage d'exotismes),(9) without forgetting Bataille and Artaud, we find the theme of the desertion of the sacred, of body and blood, visibly at work in the art and literature of the first half of the twentieth century. This theme, subsumed under the notion of primitivism, continues to play an essential role in the renewal of French intellectual life.

The Franco-Congolais métis writer Henri Lopès's formula for Francophone literature as a mixture of "the language of Sévigné and the balls of the black man" serves as a logo for the collection entitled "Dark Continents," under the direction of Jean-Noël Schifano at Gallimard. Lopès's formula was chosen because of the preconception that French literature is withering and drying up as a result of its overly cerebral nature. In this view, French literature is no longer able to produce the likes of Malraux, Camus, and Sartre. Michel Le Bris, promoter of the travel literature of the 1920s and 1930s and organizer of the Festival "Surprising Travelers" at Bamako, Mali, made the same observation last year when he declared: "French literature will regenerate itself from the peripheries and the margins."(10) Africa will thus be there to provide our tired gentlemen of Arts and Letters the needed new blood. The need for this new blood was never clearer than in the inglorious episode in which our venerable French Academicians were so titillated that they stuttered while searching for words to justify the contested attribution of their institutional prize to African author Calixthe Beyala. In the same vein, Stéphane Zagdanski's latest novel, Noire est la Beauté (Pauvert, 2001), proposes an "exploration of the sexual and pictorial universe of the doubly dark continent of woman." The work revels in the specific charms of African female sexuality with accents that would not have been disavowed by the colonial administrators of yesteryear.

4

But let us be assured, the African virus is not unique to Western machismo; women artists are also plunging into deep Africanism. To begin with, Mathilde Monnier, director of the Choreographic Center of Montpellier, left for Africa in 1992. Having spent her childhood there, she thought she might recharge her batteries: "I realized that I was heading straight for the wall. . . I didn't know where I was going, I was just repeating what I had already learned. Thanks to African dancers, I finally had access to the internal necessity of my dance, my deep truth."(11) Renowned cinematographer Claire Denis (Chocolat, Beau Travail) has placed her most recent film, Trouble Every Day, under the sign of cannibalism. Like Monnier, Denis spent her childhood in Africa, and she makes reference to the diminished drives of the European male in contrast to the primal force of his Black counterpart.(12) As against an emasculated, deodorized Europe, Africa stands out as deliciously nauseating, peopled with leopard-men who devour body and soul. Such depictions remind us of Les Hommes-Tigres, composed by Jean Giroudoux in 1926 on the basis of the accounts of colonial administrators. This vision of a

Jurassic, feline Africa (in the sense of Jacques Tourneur's La Féline)(13)--that of the animal lurking within us, of the growling of wild beasts launching the call of the jungle--is certainly the ultimate point of the positive fantasies projected onto the continent. But it also testifies to the deep ambivalence that presides over psychological and economic investments affecting this geographic entity.

It may be true that the African-connoted art known as "gore-trash-crash" only holds interest for a small Euro-American elite--those, for instance, who attend the annual International Fair of Contemporary Art(14) in order to contemplate African "Self-Hybridations" by Orlan, digitized mixings of African photos and self-portraits that take off from the artist's surgical performances. The same cannot be said for the Africa-concept in marketing, which reaches a much larger clientele, including those who haunt the ethnic boutiques in Paris or the African expositions in the Galeries Lafayette.

The globalization of Africa is not as much about the fascination for tribal art (as seen in the popularity of Arts premiers and the construction of the Museum of the Quai Branly) as it is about the recycling of African kitsch, as seen in the promotion of the work of Malian photographers Seydou Keita or Malick Sidibé, saved from oblivion by the magic of curator-experts; in the "Ethno-chic" fashion lines that remix old-fashioned items from our imaginary constructions of Africa; and in the transubstantiation into artists of naïve prophets and designers such as Frédéric Bruly-Bouabré--whose works occupy a prominent position in the gallery owned by collector and clothing designer Agnès B.

The production of African primitiveness can no longer be reduced to the discovery of ancient African artifacts: it consists more and more in recalling technical procedures and antiquated European objects whose regeneration is assured by passing through the prism of African freshness ("African" plastic kettles made in China, miniature model cars fashioned with the help of old cans, etc.). African "primitiveness" at this stage in the globalization process is no longer characterized by throwing Africa back into an immemorial past of pre-historical savagery, but by throwing Africans back into the Western past, as if their works testified in the Westerner's stead to a world we have lost. In this sense, Africans are thought of as Westerners' immediate ancestors, benevolent Uncle Bens who will hold down the fort in the absence of its members, busy with other tasks in our high-tech era.

The African Time Lag

If the West creates primitiveness by recycling African kitsch, it remains to be seen how Africans produce their own modernity or post-modernity, whether in the economic, political, or cultural domain. Even if several discordant voices have been raised here and there that attempt to think beyond the intellectual givens, it is scarcely surprising that most African thinking, encouraged by post-colonialism, cannot manage to extricate itself from the circle of victimization.(15) Based in the anti-imperialist discourse of the 1960s and 1970s--that of the

Algerian and Vietnam Wars--the dominant African economic and political attitude is to denounce colonialism and neocolonialism as fundamentally responsible for African underdevelopment. No doubt the impact of European colonization in molding the economic and political structures of contemporary African governments should not be played down, but are the constant references to the torments of colonialism and the slave trade anything but a convenient way for African leaders to keep on the right side of public opinion? Although we should not allege "cultural specificity"--simply a new variant of the old refrain of "obstacles to development"--to account for the marginalization of Africa at the heart of the global ecumene,(16) we must insist that recognizing the slave trade as a crime against humanity--whether or not this recognition carries with it reparations from European powers--will change nothing in the lives of millions of Africans.

By continuing to stigmatize colonialism and neocolonialism, the self-proclaimed spokespersons of Africa--whether white or black--are doing Africans a disservice. They effectively keep Africans in a state of intellectual dependency that refuses to cut the ties between Africa and the West and prevents Africans from viewing their continent as capable of evolving on its own. For African politicians, adopting a mature attitude would consist in giving priority to internal matters over external relations. It is above all on the internal political scene of each African state that the future of democracy must be decided. It is there as well that the conditions of sustainable economic development can be put in place. Paradoxically, the very conditions of economic globalization require the determination of internal choices that alone make possible an optimal adaptation to the new international division of labor. The African countries that are the most engaged in the worldwide economy are those that complain the least about the past and consequently that reap the fewest secondary benefits from colonial trauma.

5

We find similarities in the artistic domain, where Africans still practice a self-serving esthetic dating from the 1970s and the 1980s. This esthetic builds on a base of genocides, AIDS, famines, national liberation struggles against dictatorships, pillage of African resources, and denial of emigration. Even if this esthetic employs--much to the displeasure of Western sycophants of traditional art--modern media such as videos and installations, it nonetheless ties African artists to the victimization syndrome and demonstrates their inability to define themselves through a macabre esthetic of their own that would intensify the real or imagined savagery of the continent. True contemporary art might consist--if an African example is needed--in showing photos of scarified, mutilated bodies from Sierra Leone that would testify to the symbolic assumption of the current violence in that country. Yet the works of contemporary African artists continue to engage a certain number of "politically correct" themes in a resentful mode, demonstrating thereby that they have not yet left behind the esthetic of domination.

Taking on savagery in contemporary art would mean grafting it, incrusting it, or skewering it--

this would be the sign of true Africanité in this period of late modernity. Incapable of this, African artists continue to recycle an image of Africa that the West conceived during the belle époque of the wars of national liberation. Or perhaps these artists privilege these themes in response to the presumed expectations of their clients, playing--consciously or unconsciously--on the guilt of their public. This would only be one more proof that they have not yet gained autonomy, that they are still caught in the mirror the West holds out to them. In this sense, no matter how modern African art seems to be, it is still an annex or a tropical dependency of Western art. This dependence can only come to an end if African art ceases to be presented as such, if artists of African origin exhibit their works as emanating not from Africans but rather from members of the global art community. For the moment, few African artists fit this criterion. Perhaps only Ousmane Sow, in "clicking" on or attaching his work to the Nuba of Leni Riefenstahl, manages to extricate himself from the mirror-play of Africanism. He is joined in this by the American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, whose perfectly scandalous plastic "Greco-Negro" strikingly illustrates the general circulation of signifiers within the hermeneutic constellation of "African" art.

In Africanizing its own impulses, the West has extended a mirror to Africa. Africans today are compelled to see themselves in this reflected image. In this sense, Africa represents the self-development of Europe; the continent is a pure fantasy of archaic primitivism that provides the point of departure for globalized Western postmodernity.(17) Could we not affirm, paradoxically, that Africa is late in arriving on the scene of its already "tardy" image in Western consciousness? But taking refuge in the the West's guilty conscience toward the Third World will not aid in overcoming this gap. On the contrary, the key to surmounting Africa's "tardiness" lies in consciously assuming Europe's fantasy of primitivism and "customizing" it. Only by turning this fantasy to its own use in a process of abreaction will Africa gain access to a mature consciousness.

Africa Outside of Africa

What if this savagery attributed by the West but not accepted by Africans were the factor that determined the Africa-concept in its full scope? Wouldn't the return of instinct paradoxically provide the leitmotiv for our globalized modernity at the heart of which Africa would be only one of the "mobilizable" elements? An instinctive constellation is currently emerging on the artistic-intellectual and political scenes in which reference to Africa is either minor or nonexistent. What logical connection exists between the erotic, militant saga of Catherine Millet (incidentally, a major artistic literary figure in Paris); the porno-trash of Virginie Despentes; the zoophilia and taste for blood of playwright and plastic artist Jan Fabre; the eugenics of the human park of Peter Sloterdijk; and the novelistic ethology of Michel Houellebecq, if it isn't precisely this slightly sulfurous return of savage impulses to the artistic and intellectual center stage? Where is Africa in all this? Never very far off, to tell the truth.

Michel Houellebecq expresses himself through the mouth of Bruno, one of the characters in the

book that catapulted its author to success, Particules élémentaires: "We envy and admire the Negroes because we wish to follow their example and become animals again, animals endowed with a large dick and a small reptilian brain, annex to their dick."(18) If these comments are taken from fiction, and if Michel Houellebecq is closer to the parody and pastiche of Josephine Baker than to the veritable provocation of Baudelaire or Zola,(19) it is nonetheless true that his discourse is part of an intellectual climate that vastly exceeds the microcosm of the media. How can we not see an echo of these comments in those made by former Minister of the Interior Jean-Pierre Chevènement who referred to Blacks and Beurs from the difficult suburbs as sauvageons, or "wild ones," indicating the closeness of this so-called "republican" ideology to the eugenics of the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk?(20) How can we not see in this new ethnic vision of "dangerous classes"--a vision tied to governmental forms of surveillance and continuous tracking (video, anti-criminal brigades)--a final form of the globalization of Africa? How can we not see in the curfew for minors--initiated by certain mayors of areas deemed "sensitive"--the entry point of a repressive apparatus destined to tame a reptilian libido welling up from the depths of the past? But isn't it, first and foremost, in the framework of this "hexagonal" Africa threatening the Republic that we form our definitive representation of Africans?

6

Notes

1. This article initially appeared in French as "L'Afrique: un parc à thèmes" in a special issue of Les Temps Modernes ("Afriques du monde") 620-621, août-novembre 2002, pp. 46-60. (back)

2. Originally published as La volonté de savoir (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). (back)

3. Originally published as De la dégénération des animaux (Paris: Parent Desbarres, 1868) by Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon. (back)

4. On this subject, see "The Nation of Islam" in The Secret Relationship between Blacks and Jews, v. 1, Latimer Associates, 1991. (back)

5. See A. Le Palec's article on "silencing" AIDS, "Bamako, taire le SIDA" in Psychopathologie africaine, XXVI (2) 1994: 211-234. (back)

6. Little Senegal is a French film directed by Rachid Bouchareb (Alamode Film, 2001). (back)

7. See the quotation in the epigraph. (back)

8. Cited by Hassan Musa in "Partage d'exotismes," Catalogue de la 5e Biennale de l'Art contemporain de Lyon (2000): 15-16. (back)

9. These exhibitions for which Martin was the curator could be rendered in English as Magicians of the Earth and The Sharing of Exoticisms. (back)

10. Le Monde, February 23, 2001. (back)

11. Télérama 2685 (June 27, 2001). (back)

12. Libération, July 11, 2001. (back)

13. The use of the adjective "féline" here is a play on words that simultaneously refers to "catlike" qualities and evokes the cinematographic work of Federico Fellini. (back)

14. The most recent "Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain" took place in Paris in October 2002. Over 900 artists from 19 countries displayed their work at the 29th annual event of the FIAC. (back)

15. On the victimization in which a number of African intellectuals take pleasure, see Achille Mbembe's article "A propos des écritures africaines de soi" ("About African Writings of the Self") in Politique africaine, 77 (septembre 2000): 16-43. (back)

16. This term is taken from Ulf Hannerz's Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). (back)

17. "The Black man is the fear that the White man has of himself" is what Octave Mannoni wrote in Prospéro et Caliban, Psychologie de la colonisation (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1984): 191. (back)

18. Michel Houellebecq's Les Particules élémentaires (Paris: J'ai lu, 2001) is translated into English under the title The Elementary Particles (Vintage Books, 2001). This quotation is translated from page 195 of the French original. (back)

19. Libération, September 7, 2001 (back)

20. See Peter Sloterdijk, Règles pour le parc humain (Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 2000). (back)

Anthropoetics subscribers may copy or download this text from the network, but its distribution or publication shall constitute an infringement of the Author's copyright.

Anthropoetics - The Journal of Generative Anthropology

Volume IX, number 1 (Spring/Summer 2003)
ISSN 1083-7264
URL: http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/
Email: anthro@humnet.ucla.edu

Anthropoetics 9, no. 1 (Spring / Summer 2003)

Anti-pathos: On Italo Svevo's *Zeno's Conscience*

Fabio Brotto

Liceo Ginnasio Antonio Canova
brottof@libero.it

> There is only one small difference of opinion between Augusta and me: what is the proper way of treating troublesome children. I always feel that a baby's sufferings are less important than ours, and that it is worthwhile making it suffer if by that means a grown-up person can be saved a great deal of annoyance; she, however, takes the view that having brought children into the world we have got to put up with them.
>
> Zeno

> The evil of originary resentment is the price man pays for a first glimmer of lucidity, for eating of the tree of knowledge.
>
> Eric Gans, Signs of Paradox

I. Mimetic Zeno: survival and power

La coscienza di Zeno (1923), translated into English by Beryl de Zoete after discovery by James Joyce (Confessions of Zeno, 1930), and retranslated by William Weaver (Zeno's Conscience, Everyman's Library, 2001, used here) is a well known Italian novel. Italian criticism has much enlarged on and argued over it, and now views Italo Svevo's book as one of the most innovative and important narratives of the twentieth century. But Svevo's writing being unstylish (dialogues are clumsy, vocabulary is limited, there are many errors of form, etc.), criticism has made many very different arguments for his greatness as a writer, none of them very persuasive. (Italo Svevo's real name was Ettore Schmitz, his family was a Jewish family living in Trieste, the chief port of the Austro-Hungarian Empire till 1918; little Ettore, born in 1861, spoke first Triestine dialect, then studied in a commercial German school, so that Italian was his third language.) Poet Eugenio Montale, for instance, said Svevo was the greatest Italian novelist of our time, and that "there is no modern author who extended the knowledge of the human soul more than Svevo." But since this criticism isn't familiar with Mimetic Theory, not to mention Generative Anthropology, the underlying reasons for Svevo's significance are still virtually unrecognized. Here I shall try to demonstrate how Zeno's Conscience points out

the modern market's predicament as a Darwinian-fighting-for-survival terrain from which violence is only partially removed and deferred, and where there is no place for sentiments like sympathy or mercy. The leitmotiv of all Svevo's works is mimetic resentment, which all forms of exchange can only increase, while deferring violence at the same time, until the saturation point is reached.

Zeno's Conscience indeed begins with evidence of a particular (and impossible) resentment, that of psychoanalyst doctor S. toward his own patient, Zeno. The doctor declares his intention to publish his patient's memoirs "and I hope he is displeased" (3). The novel ends with a manifestation of absolute resentment: mankind is regarded as a parasitic mass, of which Earth should be catastrophically purged. If Svevo's work as a whole lies under the sign of resentment, and if the disguising strategy (partially failed) of Zeno, who manipulates his own memory--a strategy accurately investigated by criticism--is rooted not so much in a misunderstood Oedipus complex as in a more fundamental problematic, then it is necessary to subject this novel to a closer scrutiny. It will reveal the signs of a collapse of bourgeois identity qua something historically definite, a breakdown as well of traditional mimetic mechanisms (a crisis our postmillennial world is consummating), and yet this survey will be particularly concerned with highlighting the real nature of these mimetic mechanisms. In my opinion, Zeno's Conscience is the most conspicuous example within twentieth-century Italian literature of penetration--altbeit only partially lucid--into what constitutes the crux of human relations: mimetic inter- and intra-subjective rivalry. Here lies the true greatness of Svevo's novel. In this paper I can't deal with the questions regarding the novel's intricate pattern; instead, my goal will be to show how it lends itself to Mimetic Theory-based investigation, and how René Girard and Eric Gans can give us guidelines for an anthropological understanding of Zeno as a character and as a human specimen. Zeno, in fact, represents the twentieth century self as striving for its own escape from the boundaries of the Jewish and Christian revelations.

It is absolutely necessary always to distinguish between appetite and desire. While the first belongs also to animals, desire is properly only human. Sexual desire itself, as Gans notes, "as opposed to the sexual appetite, is desire before being sexual."(1) In the decades gone by, a lot of criticism has gotten lost in a tangle of paths, difficult to follow, faint or even aporetic, ending with embroidering the signs of fetishism discoverable in the novel's text, thus losing contact (or never reaching it) with the primary reality, that of desire itself, and not being able to understand the necessity, very strong in Zeno, of contrast with a mimetic rival, a necessity of mimesis that makes models and rivals rise one after the other in an infinite process.

2

Zeno seems to me first and foremost to be a master of resentment, a resentment that in him mingles with desire in an inextricable knot. He feels different from others:

> Even when I was not thinking of my mistress, I still thought of her in the sense

> that I craved her forgiveness for thinking of other women as well. Other men leave this mistress disillusioned and despairing of life. I have never known life without desire, and illusions sprang up afresh for me after every shipwreck of my hopes, for I was always dreaming of limbs, of gestures, of a voice more perfect still. (399)

This is one of the keys of this book--Svevo's Don Juanism. Zeno's desire for women is restless and unlimited.

> I was not satisfied with one or even with many; I desired them all! (13) . . . my dying eyes will be lifted in desire to the nurse by my death-bed, supposing she does not happen to be my wife, and that my wife allows me to have a pretty one! (14)

This unlimited desire, this unrestricted psychic urge to possess females, is in itself somehow primitive. Yet it is the expression not so much of the need to confirm a dubious potency through brutal sexual actions as that of a Power which feels threatened by death and therefore craves only its own survival (Canetti):

> Hitherto my way of approach to the women I had had to do with had been quite different. I had put my hands on them at once without asking anyone's permission. (81)

> Perhaps I didn't mention my virtue because I was constantly being unfaithful to Augusta in my thoughts, and even now, speaking to Copler, with a shudder of desire I thought of all the women that I was neglecting on her account. I thought of the women hurrying along the streets, all bundled up, and whose secondary sexual organs for that reason became too important, whereas those of woman possessed then vanished as if possession bad atrophied them. I still felt keenly the desire for adventure: that adventure that began with the admiration of a boot, a glove, a skirt, of all that covers and alters shape (173-174)

This Power in a simple middle class bourgeois such as Zeno finds a possibility of residual display, as regards the immediately sexual, only in clumsily seductive behaviors, which sometimes verge on paedophilia (the young girl Teresina, at the end of the novel), or entail the mediation of money (his mistress Carla, etc.). Moreover, it's important to bear in mind that Zeno always thinks about death, and this is a thought absolutely and purely selfish, stemming from archaic selfishness, bound to the idea of survival, as is revealed by the remark to his father when he tells him that he has made his will:

> I'll never have to undergo that nuisance, because I hope all my heirs will die before me! (36)

The fear of ageing is linked by Zeno himself to a kind of jealousy (151): his wife could get into another's hands--just like all his possessions, we may add. Actually "The moment of survival is the moment of power," says Elias Canetti in Masse und Macht,(2) where we find a passage that clarifies Zeno's attitude towards his rival/brother-in-law/business partner Guido's death.

> The moment of survival is the moment of power. Horror at the sight of death turns into satisfaction that it is someone else who is dead. The dead man lies on the ground while the survivor stands. It is as though there had been a fight and the one had struck down the other. In survival, each man is the enemy of every other, and all grief is insignificant measured against this elemental triumph. Whether the survivor is confronted by one dead man or by many, the essence of the situation is that he feels unique. He sees himself standing there alone and exults in it; and when we speak of the power which this moment gives him, we should never forget that it derives from his sense of uniqueness and from nothing else.
>
> All man's designs on immortality contain something of this desire for survival. He does not only want to exist for always, but to exist when others are no longer there. He wants to live longer than everyone else, and to know it; and when he is no longer there himself, then his name must continue.
>
> The lowest form of survival is killing. As a man kills an animal for food, and cuts bits from it as it lies defenseless on the ground and divides it for himself and his kin to devour, so also, and in the same manner, he seeks to kill anyone who stands in his way, or sets himself up against him as an enemy. He wants to strike him down so that he can feel that he still stands while the other lies prostrate. But this other must not disappear completely; his physical presence as a corpse is indispensable for the feeling of triumph. Now the victor can do whatever he wants with him, and he cannot retaliate, but must lie there, never to stand upright again. His weapon can be taken away and pieces cut from his body and kept forever as trophies. This moment of confronting the man he has killed fills the survivor with a special kind of strength. There is nothing that can be compared with it, and there is no moment which more demands repetition.

3

What can't be performed again in reality becomes an object of a recalling ritual repetition, and hence an object of narrative repetition. Narration re-presents endlessly the high point of triumph. Lying prostrate, whereas the subject stands alive and well, the rival's physical body will give way to its representation within the transcendental world of signs, in the linguistic-narrative universe.

If we compare to this Canetti passage the famous "Hymn to Health" that erupts from Zeno after Guido's funeral (which he misses), we clearly see how this fundamental anthropological truth is interwoven with Zeno's consciousness.

> That day the weather had turned fine again. A splendid spring sun was shining, and, in the still-soaked countryside, the air was clear and healthy. My lungs, taking the exercise I hadn't allowed myself for several days, swelled. I was all health and strength. Health is evident only through comparison. I compared myself to poor Guido and I climbed, higher and higher, with my victory in the very struggle where he had fallen. All was health and strength around me. The country, too, with its young grass. The long and abundant watering, the other day's catastrophe, now produced only beneficent effects, and the luminous sun was the warmth desired by the still frozen earth. Surely, the more we moved away from the catastrophe, the more disagreeable that blue sky would be, unless it could darken in time. But this was the forecast of experience and I didn't remember it; it grips me only now as I write. At that moment there was in my spirit only a hymn to my health and all of nature's: undying health. (392)

I shall make a point that will be hereafter confirmed: the comparison Zeno sees as a source of health is first of all a confrontation, an antagonistic relation between two competitive subjects. He is always driven to enter the lists.

Zeno proves to be fully aware of the true nature of desire. He knows that the objects on which it centers have no autonomous existence, being mere creatures of desire itself.

> I was dealing with the simplest of girls, but thanks to my dreams of her, she appeared to me as the most consummate flirt. (82)

> It is true that now I wanted all of Ada, whose cheeks I had assiduously polished, whose hands and feet I had made smaller, whose figure I had thinned and refined. I desired her as wife and as lover. But the way a woman is approached the first time is decisive. (84)

Thinking about Ada, whom he presumes he has freely taken as his own wife, the protagonist says:

> She was the woman I had chosen, she was therefore already mine, and I adorned her with all my dreams, so that the prize of my life would appear more beautiful to me. I adorned her, I bestowed on her all the many qualities I lacked and whose need I felt, because she was to become not only my companion but also my second mother, who would adopt me for a whole lifetime of manly struggle and victory. (81)

For Zeno, a virile life is one based on confrontation and clash with other men; fight is necessary, victory desirable. Zeno's basic models are three. Of these, two are differently ideal; the first, abstract and ideological, is the Nietzschean-Darwinian victor in the fight for life and domination. The second, which we may call local, is the Triestine bourgeois and successful entrepreneur. Third we find the Girardian model-obstacle, here figured by Guido. As Eric Gans writes in Signs of Paradox, "mimesis itself defines a hierarchy, however unstable, between subject-self and other-model, and this hierarchy is the basis upon which all others are founded."(3) In the case of Zeno this hierarchy is extremely unstable, since the first model-mediator of desire for him is Guido, actually a weak personality, who's unsure about what to do, and whom Zeno certainly chooses simply because from the outset he looks vulnerable. Indeed, to defeat Guido seems to be an easy task.

II. Guido: rival equal and violence deferred

In the eyes of Zeno, Guido Speier is an equal rival. The closest thing to a brother is a brother-in-law. Actually the core of this novel is not the Oedipal relation with the father, about which too much has been written by those who have been lured into the deadly traps set by Svevo's text. The core of this novel is brotherly antagonism; its subject is doubling, doubles and their endless proliferation.

Svevo seems to be perfectly conscious that appropriative desire alone does not trigger rivalry, and his novel shows indisputable evidence of this consciousness. For instance, when Zeno feels himself compelled to counter the little fables composed by Guido, in competing for the admiration of Carmen--the secretary of the "business partnership" and Guido's mistress--by telling better fables than his brother-in-law's, the writer says something crucial:

> What did I have to do with this? I didn't have to fight to win Carmen's admiration, which, as I have said, meant nothing to me; but remembering my behavior then, I have to believe that even a woman who is not an object of our desire can drive us to fight. In fact, didn't the medieval heroes fight over women they had never seen? To me that day it so happened that the shooting pains in my poor organism suddenly became acute, and I thought I could alleviate them only by dueling with Guido, immediately writing some fables of my own. (308)

4

The model-rival precedes the object of desire, which one chooses just because it is desired by him. Given Zeno's evident drive to deceive (other characters, readers, and himself), hence without stretching Svevo's text (but this text is always conducive to demystification), we may suppose that in fact the protagonist got to know Guido first, and Ada only later on. As he states: "I would have hated him even if Ada hadn't been present" (109). It's hard to figure a

rivalry more unambiguously declared.

> But behind us a hesitant call was heard: "Signorina! May I -?"
>
> I turned, outraged. Who dared interrupt the explanations that I hadn't yet begun? A beardless young gentleman, dark-haired, pale, was looking at her with anxious eyes. In my turn I also looked at Ada, in the mad hope that she would call on me for assistance. A sign from her would have been enough to make me fall upon this individual and demand an explanation of his audacity. And if only he were to persist! My ailments would have been cured at once had I been allowed to give free rein to a brutal act of force.
>
> But Ada didn't make that sign. With a spontaneous smile that slightly altered the line of her cheeks and mouth and also the light in her eyes, she held out her hand. "Signor Guido!"
>
> That given name hurt me. Only a short time before, she had addressed me by my surname.
>
> I took a closer look at this Signor Guido. He was dressed with an affected elegance, and in his gloved right hand he held a walking stick with a very long ivory handle, which I would never have carried, not even if they were to pay me a sum for every kilometer. I didn't reproach myself for having actually considered such a person a threat to Ada. There are some shady characters who dress elegantly and carry similar canes. (108)

Here the ambivalence of Guido's character is in full view, an ambivalence that will last until the end. His entry is marked by expressions of utter repugnance. His eyes are anxious, an evident sign of weakness, as is also his pallor, while we should notice that the stick, brassy as it is, is a token of strength, evoking shady characters clearly inclined to violence. Girard taught us, developing Max Scheler's lesson, that the model who is an object of resentment is always at the same time idealized, to the extent that to him are attached signs of a superiority he objectively does not have, and together with them, negative features equally unreal.

This passage reveals also another important point: Zeno has a drive to the use of force, to aggression, but never yields to this drive, because his socio-psychological and cultural condition doesn't allow him to be openly violent, and he always defers his violence through language. Thus language in him performs the function defined by Generative Anthropology.

In spite of his frequent protestations of close friendship with his brother-in-law, whom Zeno comes to proclaim his own "closest friend" (392), the novel's text is peppered with many expressions of enmity. Guido is "disliked" (112), "fool," "genuine fool"(119, 120), "charlatan"

(128), "a fool whose every word shows what a jackass he is" (132), "a clever fool . . . also truly foolish" (310), "a boy," "a child," (340, 341), "nauseating and unmanly" (368).

In regard to the model-rival's ambivalence, the event in Via Belvedere is illuminating (141-48). "He was a very important person for me, and I would have been unable to refuse him anything" (141), Zeno says, beginning the narration of the fateful walk that will bring him to the threshold of homicide. After these words the text recounts that for Zeno "Guido's company was downright terrible" (142), and that in the conversation the protagonist contrives to sting him severely. But immediately they "were friends again" (143). Then the narrator-protagonist claims to have listened, "with admiration" for his learning, to Guido delivering a tirade against women, inspired by "the brilliant theories" of Weininger (144). And then once more Guido's chatter drives Zeno to distraction, until his rival, incongruously, stretches himself out on the wall that separates the upper road from the one below, placing himself in a perilous position where he runs the risk of falling thirty feet, and Zeno begins "to wish fervently that he would fall" (145).

> We reached the foot of the Via Belvedere. Guido said a little climb would do us good. Once again I fell in with his wishes. Up there, in one of those acts best suited to very young boys, he stretched out on the low wall that separated the street from the one below. He thought he was being brave, risking a fall of about ten meters. At first I felt the usual horror, seeing him exposed to such danger, but then I recalled the method I had invented that evening, in a burst of improvisation, to free myself from such suffering, and I began to wish fervently that he would fall.
>
> In that position he continued preaching against women. Now he said that, like children, they required toys, but costly ones. I remembered that Ada said she liked jewels very much. Was he actually talking about her? I had then a frightful idea!
>
> Why didn't I cause Guido to fall those ten meters? Wouldn't it have been fair to exterminate the man who was robbing me of Ada without loving her? At that moment I felt that when I had killed him, I could rush to Ada and receive my recompense at once. In the strange, moon-filled night, it seemed to me she must have heard how Guido was defaming her.
>
> I have to confess that, honestly, at that moment I was ready to kill Guido! (145-146)

5

However, Zeno doesn't carry out his murderous intention. An prohibiting inhibition always stops

him when he is on the verge of violence. But there is nothing moral here, only Zeno's wish to sleep well that night (146). He then has a fit of psychosomatic pain, which expresses his inhibition, and afterwards, as he has mentioned to Augusta how Guido talked about women, he notes:

> The recollection of my words poisoned my mind for several days, while I may say that the recollection of having wanted to kill Guido hadn't troubled me for so much as an hour. But killing, even treacherously, is more virile than harming a friend by betraying a confidence. (151)

Physical violence is always deferred by Zeno, whereas backbiting or verbal attack is allowed. In the same way as he manages his deathly rivalry with Guido, Zeno's attitude in his extramarital clandestine affair reveals the complete irrelevance of the Judeo-Christian ethical perspective for him.

> I felt no trace of remorse. Therefore I believe remorse is generated not by regret for a bad deed already committed, but by the recognition of one's own guilty propensity. The upper part of the body bends over to study and judge the other part and finds it deformed. The repulsion then felt is called remorse. Even in ancient tragedy the victim wasn't returned to life, and yet the remorse passed. This meant that the deformity was cured, and that the tears of others had no further importance. Where could there be any room for remorse in me, when, with so much joy and so much affection, I was speeding to my legitimate wife? For a long time I had not felt so pure. (214-215)

Zeno's intermittent remorse and sense of guilt belong always to the psychological-verbal domain and never to the ethical one. Here archaism appears, and not by chance, when the narrator refers to Greek tragedy. Side-stepping two millennia of Judeo-Christian culture, as many western intellectuals pretended to do in the last two centuries (Nietzsche and Heidegger definitely, but also Freud), Svevo goes back to a scapegoat-based victimary culture, to the pharmakos as a means of purification. The victim does not return to life, and yet remorse vanishes; it never was true remorse. It vanishes because the deformity has been cured. Purification is always achieved by means of sacrifice.

III. Other rivals

Guido's playing of the central antagonist's role doesn't prevent the emergence of other rival figures in the Svevian text, namely, the brother, the father, and Mr. Malfenti (Svevo's father-in-law). The first rivalry is that between two brothers (Abel and Cain being the archetype), and it is the first for Zeno too. The brother's figure is deleted; he is annihilated even in memory, except for a very short flashback that reveals his pale face and prognathism. His absent figure is invoked at the beginning of chapter III, just at the moment when Zeno remembers the

genesis of his "filthy habit"(8) of smoking, which corresponds substantially to the beginning of Zeno's psychoanalytic treatment, and it is invoked again at the moment of the ultimate crisis of Zeno's involvement in psychoanalysis as well, in chapter VIII.

In the first of these two moments (7-8) the genesis of Zeno's weakness for smoking is clearly related to a contest that is acutely mimetic. This is strikingly revealed in a scene of his boyhood, rescued (and elaborated) by Zeno's memory: round one of the cardboard boxes in which cigarettes were then sold, several people collect, people who "are replaced by some clowns, who mock me" (7). The perception of being ridiculed is one of the concurring causes that generate resentment. One of those figures is a friend, Giuseppe, who has money and cigarettes, another is Zeno's kid brother, whose features we don't see. And the narrator says he is "certain he offered more of them to my brother than to me" (7). It's Cain's syndrome: the subject is sure he is mistreated in receiving a third less than he thinks himself entitled to, in contrast with his unworthy brother, who receives more. Then Zeno writes that he and two other boys engaged in a competition to see who was able to smoke the most cigarettes, and he triumphed. From the outset therefore the cigarette signifies rivalry, mimetic contest. And we know that the primum movens of little boys to smoking is the mimesis of adults, the drive to be like them. Zeno's father is a heavy smoker. Chain-smoking for Zeno is a means to be like him.

In the second moment we have another scene from Zeno's manipulated memory, in which the brother "didn't appear, but he was its hero" (385).

> I sensed him in the house, free and happy, while I was going to school. I went off, choked with sobs, dragging my feet, an intense bitterness in my spirit." (ibid.)

Where the English version translates "intense bitterness," the Italian text has intenso rancore, which means "intense resentment."

Italian literary criticism, with Freudianism well rooted in it, has engaged in a long-lasting analysis of the figure of Zeno's father, emphasizing his importance. I'll confine myself to noting that mimesis is so powerful in Zeno that, when his father is dying, he "almost unconsciously" imitates the accelerated rhythm of his breathing (45). Surely in chapter IV (The Death of My Father) we could read many signs of paternal weakness. And if in Zeno there is something never called into question, it is his contempt for weakness (his own paradoxically included).

6

Giovanni Malfenti, the businessman who becomes the hero's father-in-law, is a powerful man.

> My deeply felt desire for novelty was satisfied by Giovanni Malfenti, so different from me and from all the people whose company and friendship I had sought in the past. Having gone though two university departments, I was fairly cultivated,

> thanks also to my long inertia, which I consider highly educational. He, on the contrary, was a great businessman, ignorant and active. But from his ignorance he drew strength and peace of mind, and I, spellbound, would observe him and envy him. (62)

Zeno always oscillates, when he is confronting the other, between envy (sometimes disguised as admiration) if the other seems to him to be like him but stronger, and antipathy if the other is apparently different. Mimetic antagonism, however, is always operative. When Malfenti appears, Zeno's mimesis is like a flash of lightning:

> When I admire someone, I try at once to resemble him. So I also imitated Malfenti. (63)

What does Zeno admire in his father-in-law above all? His brute strength (67). Malfenti is a successful wholesale dealer, absolutely free from what he calls "humanitarian fancies" (68), whose sole aim in life is to get rich, whose morality is that of mere success. At the end of the novel, when Zeno succeeds in financial transactions, he becomes another Malfenti, with a difference: a more developed awareness of the mimetic nature of human beings.

On his death-bed Malfenti holds on to his tenets, and expresses, with the habitual brutality that Zeno so much appreciates, the envy of the sick towards healthy people, an envy without mercy.

> I wept at my father-in-law's grave, even though his last farewell to me hadn't been too affectionate. On his deathbed he told me he admired my shameless luck, which allowed me to move freely while he was crucified on that bed. Amazed, I asked him what I had done to him to make him wish me ill. And he answered me with these very words: "If I could pass my illness on to you and thus rid myself of it, I would give it to you immediately, even doubled! I have none of those humanitarian fancies of yours!" (67-68)

We must underline that we don't find in Svevo any form of refusal (be it "social" or explicitly cultural) of his own society's structure, nor any utopian transcendence in the future (that appears only in the nihilistic outburst at the novel's end). On the other hand, Svevo doesn't dream of a pre-bourgeois past.

A mature Zeno is the novel's narrator. The gap between the narrated younger Zeno's time and the other characters' time (the major source of Svevo's humor and irony) could be explained à la Gans as deferral of violence. In several pages of the novel Zeno comes, in fact, to the threshold of violence--the most significant episode is the one we have seen of Via Belvedere, but there are others, such as the failed clash with his mistress Carla's singing teacher, or the violent action he dreams of against his fiancée Augusta--a violence he never condemns qua

violence, whereas he often attacks people affected by a persecution complex. Zeno, however, never crosses the boundary of the transcendent domain of signs to enter the arena of real violence. Therefore the Svevian hero's attitude is open to a mimetologic and to an originary analysis alike.

Everywhere Zeno encounters enemies, he sees every male as a rival.

> During those days of isolation, the most bitter jealousy was my constant companion. I had made the heroic vow to correct my every fault in preparation for my conquest of Ada in a few weeks' time. But for the present? For the present, as I subjected myself to the sternest discipline, would the other males of the city remain inactive, or would they try instead to take my woman away from me? Among them there was surely one who didn't need all these exertions in order to make himself welcome. I knew--I thought I knew--that when Ada found the man suited to her, she would immediately consent, without waiting to fall in love. During those days, when I encountered a well-dressed male, healthy and carefree, I hated him because to me he seemed to fit the bill for Ada. The thing I remember best from those days is the jealousy that descended like a fog on my life. (100-101)

Zeno's omniconflictual attitude is fully revealed throughout his honeymoon.

> In our long progress through Italy, despite my new-found health, I was not immune to many sufferings. We had set out with no letters of introduction, and very often it seemed to me that many of the strangers among whom we moved were my enemies. It was a ridiculous fear, but I was unable to master it. I could have been attacked, insulted, and, especially, slandered; and who would have protected me?
>
> This fear reached a real crisis, which fortunately no one, not even Augusta, noticed. I was accustomed to buying almost all the newspapers that were offered to me along the street. One day, having stopped at a news vendor's kiosk, I felt the suspicion that he hated me and might easily have me arrested as a thief, for I had acquired only one paper from him, while under my arm I was holding many others, bought elsewhere and as yet unfolded. I fled, followed by Augusta, to whom I gave no reason for my running off. (160-161)

7

Here Zeno's mimetic drive is revealed to be inextricably bound up with his fear of a confrontation in which he could be defeated. He evidently projects his own inclination to be resentfully aggressive onto every male human being he comes in contact with. It's a

confrontation that could occur anywhere, at any time, and for any reason: for it has no cause beyond itself. Polemos is the father of everything.

IV. Pure Nature: Club-Law

Polemos is the father of everything. In this way we can speak of a Svevian naturalism, to the extent that nature, seen as a merciless legislator, is the steady landmark and the touchstone that enables him to measure the essential folly of the human, which, in Svevo's view, consists in opposing nature's demand for universal conflict, victory of the best, survival of the fittest. This is a folly that borders on impurity, which is a leitmotiv, strangely ignored by criticism, of Zeno's Conscience. Let us examine some passages where animal nature offers to Zeno guidelines that he generalizes and applies to the human realm.

The protagonist is put off by nurse Giovanna's "old crone demeanor and her youthful eyes, shifty like the eyes of all weak animals" (23). Weak, more than timid, suggesting the idea of a Darwinian natural selection. "The sick animal will not allow himself to be observed at any orifice through which disease or weakness can be perceived (39)" is said in reference to the father who turns his face when Zeno looks him in the eye. "Many animals become prey to hunters or to other animals when they are in love" (105-106)--a sentence followed by the episode of the fly at which Zeno aims a blow. The insect has a leg paralyzed by the blow, but for a long time it cleans its wings, as if appearing to ignore which was the wounded limb, and

> in the determination of that effort it revealed that its minuscule mind contained a fundamental belief that good health is the birthright of all and must surely return when it abandons us. (106)

Here a mind and a faith attributed to an insect don't signify the ironic promotion of flies to human status but rather the equation of humans with insects, or with crustaceans, as we see in the night fishing scene. When Zeno accepts his brother-in-law's invitation to go fishing with him, the shrimp with the hook through its tail--the bait--seems to him

> to be moving slowly the upper part of its impaled body, that part that hadn't become a sheath. This movement made it seem to be meditating rather than writhing in pain. Perhaps whatever produces pain in large organisms can be reduced, in the very small, until it becomes a different experience, a stimulus to thought. (301)

Birds are invoked to emphasize the importance of the violin in the contest for Ada between Zeno and Guido.

> It seemed ridiculous to me because, honestly, among human beings the violin should not count in the choice of a husband, but that thought didn't save me. I

> felt the importance of that sound. It was decisive, as it is among songbirds. (116)

Animality is simple, as it is club-law.

> Once married, you don't talk anymore about love, and when you feel the need to speak of it, animal instincts quickly intervene and restore silence. Now, these animal instincts may become so human that they also become complex and artificial, and it can happen that, bending over a woman's head of hair, you also make the effort to find in it a glow that is not present. You close your eyes and the woman becomes another, only to become herself again when you leave her. You feel only gratitude, all the greater if the effort has been successful. This is why, if I were to be born again (Mother Nature is capable of anything!), I would agree to marry Augusta; but never to be engaged to her. (154)

Here animality is clearly distinguished from humanity by the absence of complication and falsification, that is, by its purity, whereas the human is characterized by a desire that creates its own object--beauty, of hair in this case--an imaginary object.

> Guido told me Ada wouldn't believe him when he said that certain wasps could, with their sting, paralyze other insects even stronger than they, then preserve them, paralyzed, alive and fresh, as nourishment for their offspring. I thought I recalled that something so monstrous did exist in nature, but at this point I was unwilling to give Guido any satisfaction.
>
> "You think I'm a wasp, so you're aiming at me?" I said to him, laughing. (217)

8

This joke of Zeno's that turns into lusus the significant speech of Guido is in fact much more significant than the latter's, and points out a monstrous human reality: he desires to be that wasp, he desires his rival's paralysis. Each time animal behavior is invoked by Svevo within a conflictual situation, there is struggle, confrontation, and the doubles: predator and prey, healthy and sick, winner and loser. And sometimes the pure rage of the defeated turns into a verbal furor illustrated with an animal simile, as occurs when his mistress Carla leaves him.

> I felt lost, and in my anger, like the dog who, when he can't reach the desired morsel, bites the clothes of the one withholding it, I said: "This husband of yours has an excellent stomach. Today he digests me. Tomorrow he will be able to digest everything you like." (264)

Sometimes an animal incurs Zeno's violence, a violence that is never discharged physically on a human being, and is always deferred. An animal can't strike back mimetically, and Guido's gun

dog is a surrogate victim ("I took great pleasure in giving him an occasional kick when Guido wasn't in.") (281) Hence in Guido's presence the dog doesn't trust Zeno, and shows his dislike, but Guido misunderstands it--he doesn't grasp this dislike as a revelation of his brother-in-law's hostile feelings, as it really is: "How strange! . . . A good thing I know you, because otherwise I wouldn't trust you. Dogs as a rule never get their dislikes wrong." (ibid.)

The simple idea of sympathy (syn-pathos, lat. compassio, the true pity as Dostoevski sees it) just as it entails pathos, that is, suffering, is abhorrent to Zeno/Svevo, who is the opposite of Dostoevski. He thinks that its inexistence in nature makes it unjustified also among human beings.

> In my opinion, even someone more innocent and more unlucky than Guido doesn't deserve compassion, because otherwise in our lives there would be room only for that feeling, which would be very tiresome. Natural law does not entitle us to happiness, but rather it prescribes wretchedness and sorrow. When something edible is left exposed, from all directions parasites come running, and if there are no parasites, they are quickly generated. Soon the prey is barely sufficient, and immediately afterwards it no longer suffices at all, for nature doesn't do sums, she experiments. When food no longer suffices, then consumers must diminish through death preceded by pain; thus equilibrium, for a moment, is reestablished. Why complain? And yet everyone does complain. Those who have had none of the prey die, crying out against injustice, and those who had a share feel that they deserved more. Why don't they die, and live, in silence? On the other hand, the joy of those who could seize a good part of the food is pleasant, and it should be displayed in broad daylight, to applause. The only admissible cry is that of the triumphant. The victor. (367-368)

The law of nature is invoked here in a passage that is basic for reading this novel, within a scene of resentment that includes first Zeno's brother-in-law and then all who, being unfit for competition and defeated, become indignant as about an injustice. Syn-pathos and anti-pathos are here clearly outlined.

V. About resentment and purification

Doctor S. is resentful of Zeno. Has this resentment a reason? It could express Svevo's refusal of Freudian psychoanalysis as not concerning reality (no matter how intimate his knowledge of Freud's works), inasmuch as it is a mere discourse, a set of narratives. Zeno declares himself a positivist--"I am a convinced positivist and do not believe in miracles" (112).

We have to say that this novel as a whole comprises a rejection of psychoanalysis, which Zeno clearly and violently formulates when he claims to be healthy, absolutely (434), and the story (in all senses) ends.

> If those hours of reflection at the doctor's had continued to be interesting bearers of surprises and emotions, I wouldn't have abandoned them, or before abandoning them, I would have waited until the end of the war, which makes all other activity impossible for me. But now that I know everything, namely that it was nothing but a foolish illusion, a trick designed to affect some hysterical old woman, how could I bear the company of that ridiculous man, with that eye of his, meant to be penetrating, and that presumption that allows him to collect all the phenomena of this world within his great new theory? I will spend my remaining free time writing. To begin with, I will write sincerely the story of my therapy. All sincerity between me and the doctor has vanished; now I can breathe. No stress is imposed on me any longer. I don't have to force myself to have faith, or to pretend I have it. The better to conceal my true thoughts, I believed I had to show him a supine obsequiousness, and he exploited that to invent something new every day. My therapy was supposedly finished because my sickness had been discovered. It was nothing but the one diagnosed, in his day, by the late Sophocles for poor Oedipus:
>
> I had loved my mother and I would have liked to kill my father. (403)

9

Qua discourse analyst, the doctor deals with words and with words only. He can't attain reality. With his memoirs Zeno challenges him to do this. In the doctor's eyes, what Zeno writes to justify his own behavior is secondary to the impossibility of discriminating in the text even the simple reality of the events from the reconstruction made by Zeno, which decidedly he manipulates. However, if Zeno is Svevo, doctor S. is also S(vevo): they are doubles. And the bond between doubles is always automatically mimetic and violent, while doubles proliferate in an endless circulation. Svevo, who generated Zeno as a double, cannot but generate doubles in succession: his little brother, Malfenti, Copler, Guido, doctor S, and so forth. Incidentally, since the Italian for Health is Salute, doctor S. might also mean "doctor Health."

Zeno desires Health. It is tantamount to true life, true being, which is always where the self is not. Health, inasmuch as it is elusive, manifests a transcendental predicament. It is the residue of the divine central object. It is therefore the object of originary resentment. Here we can grasp the meaning of the ultimate phantasmagoria in the last pages of this novel. As Gans states, "the ironist is a masochist; his proof of being is furnished by suffering," and "the persistence of irony is proof that resentment of the divinity outlasts faith in it; the ironist is an atheist who condemns God for his failure to exist."(4)

The character of the great talker is always that of a resentful creature, and qua antihero it dominates modern literature. Zeno is a resentful human being, and he is such from the beginning; he retains this character, eluding every conciliation, unless it is merely apparent.

Thus the end of the novel is by no means a sham; it is necessary, it is the omega that corresponds to the alpha of the beginning. If Health is unattainable, it's because the sacred has vanished, and for Zeno the sacred coincides with club-law, which the civilization of mankind, unfortunately, has opposed. Since Health can be experienced only as victory in a conflict, that of effeminate humans is secondary and deceptive. As the dead Guido is pure ("Guido now was pure. Death had purified him") (385), so only a global extinction of human life on Earth could purify our planet.

Max Scheler notes that old people are notably affected by resentment, because in their eyes the young have a strength that they don't deserve, and which would be better used by themselves who are so much wiser.(5) Before his third novel, which we are discussing here, Svevo titled his second novel Senilità (Senility).(6) When Zeno figures universal annihilation in the last pages of Zeno's Conscience, he is almost old. Max Scheler also elaborated the notion of organic mendacity, meaning that the resentful become more and more unfit for human relations, because their sympathy for humans is aborted in them, who see themselves surrounded by enemies. The resentful are inclined to mistake goodness for enmity.

The more the resentful are self-conscious, the more hypertrophied are their egos, relegating others to a role of mere functions, obstacles, ghosts. In fact, we see all the other characters of this novel through the eyes of Zeno actor and Zeno narrator, without any certainty of objective truth. That is, if Zeno the narrator tells the truth, Zeno the narrated often tells lies, for various reasons. Moreover, Zeno always tries to highlight the poor self-consciousness others have, which points to their difference from him.

Resentment is circular. What criticism has noted with regard to the formulations in chap. IV and chap. VII respectively: "He was dead, and I could no longer prove my innocence to him" (59); "Now she was abandoning us, and never more would I be able to prove my innocence to her" (401), would signify no attainment of independence in Zeno's life, whereas it is better explained by knowledge of resentment, of its nature, and of the possibility of escaping from its dominance only through scapegoating. In Zeno's Conscience we have a scapegoat; it is Guido, but for reasons we can easily understand, this scapegoat can't fulfill its function, so that Zeno's resentment, increasingly mounting, reaches a climax where for the purification of Earth the human species as a whole has to be expelled from the world.

VI. An archaic dream: lynching Basedow

Basedow's disease plays a major role in Svevo's novel. After she gave birth to twins (an archaic sign of mimetic crisis that is by no means incidental) the disease affects Ada, Guido's wife and Zeno's sister-in-law, whom the latter had fancied as a wife for himself and whom he desires still. She now is deprived of health and beauty. By meditating on this pathology, Zeno reaches the conclusion that health is a median value between the two extremes of a scale.

> Basedow's is a great, significant disease! For me, becoming acquainted with it was highly important. I studied it in various monographs and thought I was finally discovering the essential secret of our organism. I believe that many people, like me, go through periods of time when certain ideas occupy, even cram, the whole brain, shutting out all others. Why, the same thing happens to society! It lives on Darwin, after having lived on Robespierre and Napoleon, and then Liebig or perhaps Leopardi, when Bismarck doesn't reign over the whole cosmos!
>
> But only I lived on Basedow! It seemed to me that he had shed light on the roots of life, which is made thus: All organisms extend along a line. At one end is Basedow's disease, which implies the generous, mad consumption of vital force at a precipitous pace, the pounding of an uncurbed heart. At the other end are the organisms depressed through organic avarice, destined to die of a disease that would appear to be exhaustion but which is, on the contrary, sloth. The golden mean between the two diseases is found in the center and is improperly defined as health, which is only a way station. And between the center and one extreme--the Basedow one--are all those who exacerbate and consume life in great desires, ambitions, pleasures, and also work; along the other half of the line, those who, on the scales of life, throw only crumbs and save, becoming those long-lived wretches who seem a burden on society. It seems this burden, too, is necessary. Society proceeds because the Basedowians push it, and it doesn't crash because the others hold it back. I am convinced that anyone wishing to construct a society could do so more simply, but this is the way it's been made, with goiter at one end and edema at the other, and there's no help for it. In the middle are those who have either incipient goiter or incipient edema, and along the entire line, in all mankind, absolute health is missing. (316)

10

This is, however, a temporary conviction. At the end Zeno will claim his own absolute health. But he will be able to do it only after he has understood: 1) that health is a mere conviction, just as sickness is; 2) that he, Zeno, is a winner. Sickness is, then, just a conviction, sometimes groundless as in his case, of being a loser. Is also symptomatic of the fact that Zeno attains his health against the background of WWI, and that the token of health is the money he easily makes by seizing the opportunities provided by war. In contemporary inter-human competition, success is economic success, and the mark of a winner is money.

> At the moment I pocketed that money, my chest swelled, as I felt my strength and my health. (435)

At the same time, Health is not given to humans insofar as they are human beings; in fact it resides only in the central object. Since all humans are lacking in Health, Zeno can feel himself

to be supremely healthy. If you are purely and simply human, to declare yourself healthy or sick is one and the same thing.

> Present-day life is polluted at the roots. Man has put himself in the place of trees and animals and has polluted the air, has blocked free space. . .
>
> Any effort to give us health is vain. It can belong only to the animal who knows a sole progress, that of his own organism. (436)

Because of techne

> Devices are bought, sold, and stolen, and man becomes increasingly shrewd and weaker. His first devices seemed extensions of his arm and couldn't be effective without its strength; but, by now, the device no longer has any relation to the limb. And it is the device that creates sickness, abandoning the law that was, on all earth, the creator. The law of the strongest vanished, and we lost healthful selection. We would need much more than psychoanalysis. Under the law established by the possessor of the greatest number of devices, sickness and the sick will flourish.
>
> Perhaps, through an unheard-of catastrophe produced by devices, we will return to health. When poison gases no longer suffice, an ordinary man, in the secrecy of a room in this world, will invent an incomparable explosive, compared to which the explosives currently in existence will be considered harmless toys. And another man, also ordinary, but a bit sicker than others, will steal this explosive and will climb up at the center of the earth, to set it on the spot where it can have the maximum effect. There will be an enormous explosion that no one will hear, and the earth, once again a nebula, will wander through the heavens, freed of parasites and sickness. (436-437)

For Svevo, technology blocks natural selection. Whoever evades the purely natural way is sick. Thus, all humans are sick. And all humans are resentful. And the Destroyer will be driven by what is the main characteristic of every human being, since he is like the others, only a little sicker (that is weaker, i.e. resentful). To what extent does Zeno-Svevo identify with him? I hazard a guess and say: totally.

The ultimate phantasmagoria of Zeno's Conscience seem to be endowed with a truly modern character, even an anticipatory one, but indeed it is only the consequence of a logic of purification that is very archaic, a perverted logic of which our text presents many signs: from the very beginning, where smoking is a filthy habit, through the many passages where Zeno's dream of Health is invested with an aura of purity, as in the liberating outburst subsequent to Guido's funeral. Sickness is impurity, pollution, miasma. Purification is attained through fire,

violence, lynching. Hence I find very interesting that dream of Zeno in which we see the very scientist whose name is associated with Ada's disease. He is identified with the disease itself, and seems to be a veritable plague-spreader, a pharmakos. Criticism has always found a close affinity between the old Basedow of the dream and Zeno's father, whereas I think it would be better to read the passage of Philostratus' narrative in which Apollonius of Tyana purifies Ephesus of the plague by lynching an old beggar, an individual who looks much like the Svevian Basedow. René Girard in I see Satan Fall Like Lighting points to the revelatory and antichristic predicament of the Horrible Miracle operated by Apollonius.

> "Take courage, for I will today put a stop to the course of the disease." And with these words he led **the population entire** to the theatre, where the image of the Averting god has been set up. [The Averting god in this case is Hercules, as will become clear later.] And there he saw what seemed an **old mendicant** artfully blinking his eyes as if blind, and he carried a wallet and a crust of bread in it; and he was **clad in rags** and was **very squalid of countenance**. Apollonius therefore ranged the Ephesians around him and said: "Pick up as many stones as you can and hurl them at this enemy of the gods." Now the Ephesians wondered what he meant, and were shocked at the idea of murdering a stranger so manifestly **miserable**; for he was begging and praying them to take mercy upon him. Nevertheless Apollonius insisted and egged on the Ephesians to launch themselves on him and not let him go. And as soon as some of them began to take shots and hit him with their stones, the beggar who had seemed to blink and be blind, gave them all a sudden **glance** and showed that his eyes were full of fire. Then the Ephesians recognized that he was a demon, and they stoned him so thoroughly that their stones were heaped into a great cairn around him. After a little pause Apollonius bade them remove the stones and acquaint themselves with the wild animal which they had slain. When therefore they had exposed the object which they thought they had thrown their missiles at, they found that he had disappeared and instead of him there was a hound who resembled in form and look a Molosian dog, but was in size the equal of the largest lion; there he lay before their eyes, pounded to a pulp by their stones and vomiting foam as mad dogs do. Accordingly the statue of the Averting god, namely Hercules, has been set up over the spot where the ghost was slain.(7) (my emphasis)

11

Here is the correlated passage in Zeno's Conscience. In my view, Basedow bears all the signs of the scapegoat. He is old, alien, shaggy, and his demeanor is half threatening and half frightened. He is the one who has to be sacrificed, and the mob wants him to be lynched. But the modern world can't accept scapegoating openly, as its mechanism works only when misunderstood, nor is Zeno himself, who regrets the loss of hard natural selection, in a position

to invoke bloody rituals. Nevertheless, in the core of bourgeois Zeno's life lurks the ancient monster of sacred, purifying violence. It can emerge only as an apocalyptic vision of universal annihilation. Indeed, if the world can't be purified, depolluted through the old violent ritual, it will sink into chaotic violence and final undifferentiation.

> Where's Basedow now?" "Can't you see?" asked Augusta, the only one of us who managed to look into the street. With an effort we leaned out also and we could see a **great crowd** advancing, with threats and shouts. "But where is Basedow?" I asked once more. Then I saw him. It was he who was advancing, followed by that crowd: an **old beggar** wrapped in a huge cloak, **tattered** but of stiff brocade, his great head covered by **disheveled** white locks flying in the air, his **eyes protruding** from their sockets, **anxiously** looking forward with a gaze I had observed in fleeing animals, **of fear and of menace**. And the crowd was shouting: "**Kill the disease-spreader**!"
>
> Then there was an interval of empty night. And then, immediately, Ada and I were alone on the steepest stair of our three houses, the one that leads to the attic of my villa. Ada was perched on some higher steps, but turned toward me, as I was about to climb up, though she seemed to want to come down. I was embracing her legs and she was bending toward me, whether out of weakness or the desire to be closer to me I don't know. For an instant she seemed to me disfigured by her sickness, but then, looking at her breathlessly, I could see her as she had appeared to me at the window, beautiful and healthy. She was saying to me in her solid voice: "Go ahead, I'll follow you at once!" I promptly turned to precede her, running, but not fast enough not to notice that the door of my attic was very slowly opening and Basedow's head, with its white mane and that face, **half-afraid, half-menacing**, emerged. I saw also his **unsteady legs** and the **poor, wretched body** that the cloak was unable to hide. I managed to run off, but I don't know whether it was to precede Ada or to escape her. (320-321; my emphasis)

Conclusion

Gustaw Herling, a famous Polish writer who lived in Italy and was a great expert in Italian literature, argued that contemporary Italian writers were always too much concerned about style to be able to say anything truly substantial. I think it's difficult to disagree. At the bottom of the matter we find the inheritance of Petrarch's poetics and Pietro Bembo's (1470-1547) theory of literature, which have had innumerable reincarnations. Italian novelists are always--at least potentially--self-reflective academics, as we can see in Italo Calvino's divertissements and in Umberto Eco's narrative Titanics. No wonder then that modern Italian literature has little to say about such a substantive and crucial issue as resentment. We have had some exceptions, for instance in Ignazio Silone, Federigo Tozzi, and Cesare Pavese, who look at the sacrificial in

some way (D'Annunzio is a special case), but the stylistic obsession (something to be studied as a mimetic phenomenon, perhaps) prevents Italian novelists from investigating reality with the insight into mimetic violence that we find in Jean Giono's Colline or William Golding's Lord of the Flies.

Svevo's narrative has nothing in common with the virtuosity of the Italian literary tradition. This is due to his immersion in the world of industrial activity and commerce, far from belletrism: the domain of production and exchange. Nevertheless, Svevo's view of the modern Western world is in no way an optimistic one, and in his text exchange never occurs between equals who recognize each other as such, and all humans as free subjects. On the contrary, the exchange of information (signs) and goods turns into an exchange of blows; within the conflict, the sign itself, which emerged to defer violence, becomes a weapon, deferring and igniting it in an endless circle, like the mythical spear that wounded and healed the wounds. Exchange of signs may be an exchange of deceitful signs, as we see in Cormac McCarthy's novel Blood Meridian, where Mexican scalps are deceitfully sold for Indian, in a perverse market transaction.(8) In Svevo's text, where truths and lies are inextricably interconnected, signs are absolutely ambiguous and are manipulated to trap the reader, for whom the narrator feels no sympathy. But in his turn the reader, who is aware of mimetic mechanisms, so powerful in Zeno's Conscience, can find just in this ambivalence of signs the revelation of the nature of the modern market system, where deceit is by no means less important and effective than veridicity. Moreover, Zeno's Conscience points to the untranscendability of the modern market system as a means of controlling violence, because, all things considered, Zeno, with all his drives to violence, remains an old inoffensive bourgeois, who evokes club-law, dreams of universal annihilation, but never crosses the border. Market resenters would cross the border not many years after Svevo's death.

Outside the civil garden
Of every day of love there
Crouches a wild passion
To destroy and be destroyed.
Auden

12

Notes

1. Eric Gans, Signs of Paradox. Irony, Resentment and Other Mimetic Structures, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 1997, p.112. (back)

2. Elias Canetti, Crowds and Power, The Noonday Press, New York 1998, p.228. (back)

3. Eric Gans, op.cit., p.19. (back)

4. Eric Gans, op.cit., p.68-69 (back)

5. See Max Scheler, Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen, in Gesammelte Werken, Bern, Franke, 1955, vol. III, 33-147 and Richard H Weisberg, The Failure of the Word, New Haven-London, Yale University press, 1984, passim. (back)

6. Translated into English by Beryl de Zoete, As a Man Grows Older, New York Review Books Classics, 2001 (vintage translation); and by Beth Archer Brombert, Emilio's Carnival, Yale University Print, 2001. (back)

7. René Girard, I see Satan Fall Like Lighting, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2001. (back)

8. Cormac McCarthy, Blood Meridian, Vintage, New York 1992. (back)

Anthropoetics subscribers may copy or download this text from the network, but its distribution or publication shall constitute an infringement of the Author's copyright.

Anthropoetics - The Journal of Generative Anthropology

Volume IX, number 1 (Spring/Summer 2003)
ISSN 1083-7264
URL: http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/
Email: anthro@humnet.ucla.edu

Anthropoetics 9, no. 1 (Spring / Summer 2003)

Oedipus the Cliché: Aristotle on Tragic Form and Content

Christopher S. Morrissey

Department of Humanities
Simon Fraser University
8888 University Drive
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada V5A 1S6
PGP email: Key ID 0x6DD0285F

1. Introduction: Oedipus the Best?

One of the most widespread assumptions about a good Greek tragedy is that it must have an unhappy ending. Aristotle himself, in Poetics 13, seems to sanction this persistent misunderstanding with his remarks on Sophocles' most famous work, the Oedipus Tyrannus. For this reason, commentators have long puzzled over Aristotle's subsequent ranking of Oedipus Tyrannus as a kind of second-rate tragedy in Poetics 14. The puzzle over the apparent contradiction between Poetics 13 and 14 has not been resolved by philologists, but recent scholarship has nonetheless argued persuasively that Aristotle must be read as making a coherent argument across both chapters (see Belfiore 160-176 and Halliwell 202-237).

In this spirit, then, that is, in defense of the coherence of Aristotle's argument about the best esthetic experience that tragedy can offer, I would argue that the Poetics needs to be read more carefully (and more anthropologically) in order to recognize that, in Poetics 13, Aristotle is discussing the content of tragedy, and, in Poetics 14, the form of tragedy. For such a reading, Eric Gans's understanding of esthetic experience as an oscillation between form and content can help to clarify Aristotle's argument, because Gans's theory of esthetic history also helps to clarify, with the benefit of hindsight, the discussion of high culture and popular culture also embedded in the Poetics' treatment of tragic form and content.

As Matthew Schneider has observed, "Aristotle anticipates Gans" in many ways, because the key insights of the Poetics into the esthetic experience of tragedy in fact address key anthropological questions:

> The durability of Aristotle's theory therefore results neither from historic accident nor scholarly conspiracy: discovering that an anthropologically-grounded theory of the sign could sidestep Plato's fears about art initiating the contagion of conflictive

> mimesis enables the classical aesthetic eventually to achieve its logical end point: the exploration [of] the scene of representation qua scene.

Subsequent literary criticism may have abandoned Aristotle's rigorous anthropological questioning, as Schneider notes, in exchange for a much more sloppy "sacred ambivalence" about esthetic experience. But in addition to shrinking from the anthropological desacralization of tragedy, literary criticism has also made Sophocles' Oedipus into a sacred cow, by propagating (on the authority of a hasty reading of Aristotle) the idea that the Oedipus Tyrannus is Aristotle's favorite tragedy.

While the play's peculiar construction of tragic irony is a unique case (and hence a special case that tests the esthetic rule about the best tragedy),(1) apart from its irony the play is a textbook example of clichéd form and content in tragedy: a hero learns the truth too late, and comes to an unhappy end. It is this clichéd form and content that makes it exemplary for Aristotle's purposes in the Poetics. For Aristotle thinks, and says (1453a27-30), that Euripides, not Sophocles, is the gold standard in tragedy. To understand Aristotle on this point, we need to see that he is not contradicting himself between Poetics 13 and 14 on the matter of Oedipus. Generative anthropology can help us here to make a closer reading of Aristotle's discussion of form and content, and of high and popular culture, with regard to the esthetic of tragedy. In particular, such a closer anthropological reading solves philology's special difficulties with the received text of Poetics 13 and 14. But it also serves a more general and salutary purpose. It argues against the popular prejudice of many readers of Aristotle and Greek tragedy, a prejudice to which even writings on generative anthropology have hitherto not been immune: the notion that Aristotle gives preeminent esthetic rank to the Oedipus Tyrannus. On the contrary, Aristotle's Poetics gives no warrant for us to see this play as the "perfect" tragedy (Schneider) or as the "greatest tragedy" of Sophocles (Gans 1993, 139). It is, rather, in Aristotle's eyes, a compendium of exemplary tragic clichés.(2)

2. Unhappy Form, Unhappy Content: The Problem of Oedipus in Poetics 13 and 14

2

The plot of the Oedipus Tyrannus is well summarized as, formally, the unhappy belated discovery of a violent pathos (suffering), and, with regard to content, as the unhappy end of a morally serious man, King Oedipus:

> The Thebans, in the grip of a terrible plague, are instructed by Delphi to kill or expel the murderer(s) of their former king, Laius. The present king, Oedipus, determined to uncover the truth, eventually discovers that he himself is the murderer and, moreover, that Laius was his father and the widowed queen, Iocaste, whom Oedipus had married, is his mother. Iocaste commits suicide;

> Oedipus blinds himself and begs, in vain, to be cast out of Thebes. (Sommerstein 43)

The play, which is dated to between 436 and 426 BCE, stands on its own, and not as part of a trilogy with either Oedipus at Colonus (401 BCE) or Antigone (c.442 BCE). Even if forced together as an artificial "trilogy" (as in contemporary anthologies commonly used by the public, usually in schools and universities), the three plays scarcely portray an ultimately optimistic reversal of fortune for Oedipus. While he seems at the end of his life, after years of wandering in misery, to be taken by the gods to themselves and to become a blessing for Athens, this outcome in the Oedipus at Colonus would have to give way chronologically to the continuance of the curse of Oedipus in the multiple suicides enacted in the Antigone: those of Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice. The mythological chronology of the events comprising the artificial "trilogy" would have to be: Oedipus Tyrannus, Oedipus at Colonus, and Antigone. That is, the "happy ending" of the Oedipus at Colonus would be succeeded by the "unhappy ending" of the Antigone.

In the historical chronology, of course, the play with the "happy ending" is dated two decades after the other two plays, the Oedipus at Colonus being written instead in Sophocles' old age. But it is interesting to note, in this regard, that the Oedipus Tyrannus did not win first prize in competition. The posthumous production of the latest work Oedipus at Colonus, however, did win first prize. Yet in spite of its lesser acclaim Aristotle nevertheless still has much to say about the Oedipus Tyrannus in the Poetics.

In the Poetics, Aristotle refers to the Oedipus Tyrannus ten times (Kassel 68; cf. Halliwell 40 n.59): twice with Thyestes, in chapter 13, as possessing the best sort of subject matter for tragedy (1453a11, 20); twice in chapter 11, as an example of peripeteia (reversal of the action) and an anagnorisis (recognition of persons) coincident with the peripeteia (1452a24-33); again in chapter 16 as possessing (along with Euripides' Iphigenia among the Taurians) the best kind of anagnorisis that arises from the dramatic action itself (1455a18); twice in chapter 14, as a tragedy whose plot summary alone causes one to shudder (phrittein 1453b7), containing an anagnorisis of philia (i.e., of kinship: 1453b31); in chapter 15, as a plot that leaves the inexplicable (the alogon) outside the action of the plot (1454b8); meaning, as he says in chapter 24, that Oedipus's lack of previous inquiry into how Laius died does not concern the action of the plot (1460a30); and in chapter 26 as being of the right (non-epic) length for effectively portraying the action (1462b2).

This frequency of mention (a veritable top ten list of Aristotelian literary criticism) has led readers to assume that the Oedipus Tyrannus is Aristotle's gold standard for tragedy. Yet a major puzzle has long confronted interpreters of the Poetics: if the Oedipus Tyrannus is so unproblematically the gold standard, how are we to reconcile the account in chapter 13 (where the Oedipus myth is the stuff of the best tragedies), and the account elsewhere (that it has the best kind of thrill, a coincident anagnorisis and peripeteia, as part of a taut plot structure that excludes inexplicable external action from the course of its own internal development), with the

account in chapter 14? For chapter 14 argues that the Oedipus Tyrannus is an example of the second-best plot structure. The best formal plot structure is exemplified for Aristotle in the Iphigenia among the Taurians, with its coincident anagnorisis and peripeteia preventatively before, and not tragically after, the fact of violent pathos (the violent pathos here which, while certainly being the play's implicit subject, is never realized as its actual content):

> Iphigenia, spirited away by Artemis when about to be sacrificed by her father Agamemnon at Aulis, is now her priestess in the land of the Tauri (the Crimea), obliged to sacrifice every Greek who lands there. Orestes and Pylades arrive in quest of the image Artemis Tauropolos; they are captured, but Iphigenia spares Pylades on condition that he takes a message back to Greece for her. The message reveals her identity to Orestes, and after a joyful reunion they plan and execute a scheme to escape from the wicked King Thoas, taking the image to be with them (to be set up at Halae in Attica). (Sommerstein 52)

This is the tragedy with a "happy ending" that Aristotle clearly commends in Poetics 14. In Poetics 17, Aristotle gives his own summary of the Iphigenia play's plot form, that is, of the general [katholou] form, the form without the "contents" [hupothenta] of the character names [onomata] and episodic details concerning these characters [epeisodia]:

3

> As for the story, whether the poet takes its general outline ready made or constructs it for himself, he should first sketch the general outline, and then fill in the episodes and amplify in detail. The general outline [to katholou] may be illustrated by the Iphigeneia. A young girl is sacrificed; she disappears mysteriously from the eyes of those who sacrificed her; she is transported to another country, where the custom is to sacrifice any strangers to the goddess. To this ministry she is appointed. Some time later her own brother chances to arrive. The fact that the oracle for some reason ordered him to go there, is outside the general plan of the play. The purpose, again, of his coming is outside of the plot's proper action. However, he comes, he is seized, and, when on the point of being sacrificed, reveals who he is. The mode of recognition may be either that of Euripides or of Polyidus, in whose play he exclaims very naturally: "So it was not my sister only, but I too, who was doomed to be sacrificed"; and by that remark he is saved. After this, the names being once given [hupothenta ta onomata], it remains to fill in the episodes. The episodes [ta epeisodia] must be fitting to the general action. In the case of Orestes, for example, there is the madness that led to his capture [cf. Eur. IT 281-335], and his deliverance by means of the purificatory rite [cf. Eur. IT 1029 ff.]. In the drama, the episodes are short, but it is these that give extension to epic poetry. (1455a34-b16)(3)

This passage shows not only that Aristotle is conscious of a distinction between plot form (which can be sketched in outline without names) and plot content (which concerns the people named and portrayed in dramatic episodes). It also shows that he has reflected on the problem of plot form and content with regard to the Iphigeneia among the Taurians, the very play that he has just commended as best in form, in Poetics 14 (1454a4-7). The problem, however, is whether this contradicts Aristotle's apparent recommendation of the Oedipus character-arc, the "unhappy ending" metabasis (change of fortune), in Poetics 13.

Stephen Halliwell has rightly observed that the unhappy ending of the metabasis apparently recommended in Poetics 13 is "exceptional within the Poetics' discussion of tragedy"; for Aristotle, "the possibility of a change in either direction" clearly describes all the metabasis options available to tragedy (218). A careful reading of the text shows that Aristotle is noncommittal on any formula for the recommended metabasis in tragedy. For Halliwell, then, there is continuity between Aristotle's discussion in Poetics 13 and 14 (223), and "the anomaly between Poetics 13 and 14" (226) with regard to the variations of plot-form is best interpreted in light of a unifying idea: the consistently serious content of tragedy (227-230, 235-237, esp. 228). While Halliwell thus suggests a reading in the direction of content to achieve a coherent account of Poetics 13 and 14, he does not fully work out, however, the esthetic interplay of form and content in tragedy.

Elizabeth Belfiore, in her book Tragic Pleasures, attempts to reconcile Poetics 13 with Poetics 14 by reaffirming the Oedipus Tyrannus as Aristotle's gold standard for tragedy. In absolute terms, she suggests, Aristotle prefers a plot with an unhappy ending, where the coincident anagnorisis and peripeteia occurs after a pathos. The Iphigenia plot, with its happy ending, is ranked superior in Poetics 14 only because it "provides an easily followed formula" (Belfiore 176). The Oedipus plot is thus absolutely best "according to craft" (kata ten tekhnen 13. 1453a 22-23), whereas the Iphigenia plot is only relatively best; that is, relative to what poets have been able to generate in formulaic practice by chance (ouk apo tekhnes all' apo tukhes 14. 1454a 9-11). Belfiore admits that her suggested interpretation is inconclusive and "a plausible suggestion only" because it rests on "this slight different in phrasing" regarding chance and craft (Belfiore 174).

Despite Belfiore's efforts, the distinction between the content apparently recommended in Poetics 13 (an unhappy metabasis) and the plot form recommended in Poetics 14 (a happy anagnorisis coincident with a peripeteia generating an ending without pathos) reflects a tension inherent in tragedy that cannot simply be explained with reference to chance practice and carefully cultivated craft. The question remains why an "unhappy ending" ought to be associated with the best craft, and the "happy ending" associated with allegedly formulaic plots. In a word, if the crowds are relatively happy with the formulaic happy Hollywood endings, why is the art-house "unhappy ending" absolutely superior? Moreover, why did allegedly formulaic happy endings evolve only later, after the earlier, absolutely superior unhappy endings? The case in point: Oedipus Tyrannus is dated to between 436 and 426 BCE and Iphigenia among the Taurians is dated to c.414 BCE (Sommerstein 80-81; cf. Knox and

Bates).

The problem still remains why Aristotle in Poetics 14 would rank later, allegedly formulaic developments in plot composition higher than the earlier, high culture "unhappy ending" type of tragedy. Surely an appeal to chance or formula would define not the superiority, but rather the inferiority, of "happy ending" tragedies, just as people imply today when they sneer at the haphazard and formulaic composition of Hollywood endings. The problem has traditionally been seen as concerning why Aristotle gives highest rank to the Hollywood ending in Poetics 14 but seems to imply everywhere else that Oedipus Tyrannus is, despite its second-best type of ending, the Oscar-caliber gold standard in all other respects. Positing that the craft of tragedy degenerated artistically as it advanced technically introduces unwarranted (Nietzschean) assumptions nowhere justified in Aristotle's text. A more minimal hypothesis is required to explain the harmony between Aristotle's remarks on the Oedipus and those on the Iphigenia.

4

As I have already suggested, the distinction that explains this apparent contradiction in the Poetics is not, pace Belfiore, the distinction between chance and craft, but rather the distinction between content and form. The evolution of tragedy's subject matter no doubt followed what, by "chance" in a given year, best resonated with audiences. But the cultivation of such tragic content (a metabasis that proved successful with audiences) surely was a practice that was subsequently refined by the development of craft no less than the cultivation of the tragic plot forms (that used more complicated configurations of anagnorisis, peripeteia, and pathos). The tension between form and content is not reducible, then, to the opposition between chance and craft. The interplay between form and content, rather, opens up more possibilities for the artwork, possibilities greater in number than a simple binary opposition between happy and unhappy endings.

3. Sophocles, Euripides, and Homer: Aristotle on High Culture's Form and Content

The fact that there is an apparent contradiction in the Poetics between the recommendation of happy and unhappy endings points only to the inadequacy of this binary standard for literary criticism, and not to the inadequacy of the Poetics. It is insufficient merely to define the difference between high culture and popular culture as the difference between unhappy endings and happy endings. Someone who classifies every movie with a happy Hollywood ending as crowd-pleasing (philanthropon) popular culture, and every movie with an unhappy art-house ending as serious (spoudaios) high culture, is being superficial. Clearly there can be products of high culture with happy endings and products of popular culture with unhappy endings. A more subtle classification, based on a more careful consideration of both the artwork's form and content, is required. To Aristotle's credit, the Poetics does contain such a careful classification and consideration. The tension reflected in the apparent contradiction

between chapters 13 and 14 testifies to the depth of Aristotle's analysis, a nascent critical theory that distinguishes between popular effect and more refined artistry, and that does so, moreover, with reference to form and content.

Evidence for reading Poetics 13 and 14 this way is indicated elsewhere in the work. The plot summary of the Iphigenia in Poetics 17, which distinguishes between form and content, has already been mentioned. But the distinction is prepared from the beginning, in Poetics 2, where Aristotle outlines the ultimate subjects, that is, the defining content, of tragedy's mimesis: namely, the type of people it represents. Tragedy represents people as better than they are in real life, whereas the content of comedy is people represented as worse than they are:

> We must represent people either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are. . . . The same distinction marks off tragedy from comedy; for comedy aims at representing people as worse, tragedy as better than in actual life. (1448a2-5, 16-18)

In Poetics 25, Aristotle remarks that Euripides in his drama, unlike the drama of Sophocles, represents people not as they ought to be but as they are (1460b33-36). This remark should not lead us to conclude that Aristotle thinks that Euripides composes in a third genre of drama, one that, by virtue of its realistic content, is neither tragedy nor comedy. For Aristotle says in Poetics 13 that Euripides is "the most tragic of the poets" (1453a27-30). What we have here, rather, is an only apparent contradiction between Poetics 2 and 25 in Aristotle's comparison of Sophocles and Euripides. Like the tension between Poetics 13 and 14, we also have here a tension that reflects the tension between content and form. We ought not to say that Sophocles is high culture and Euripides is popular culture, any more than we ought to say that unhappy endings are high culture and Hollywood endings are popular culture. We will return, therefore, to this comparison of Euripides and Sophocles at the end of this paper, after having studied how Aristotle balances a consideration of content in Poetics 13 with a consideration of form in Poetics 14. Any apparent contradiction between the two considerations merely reflects the inherent tension between form and content. The proof of this interpretation, unlike Belfiore's weak distinction between chance and craft, is a strong textual basis for reading an underlying unity in the discussions of high and popular cultural effects in the Poetics.

The treatise's unity is visible when it becomes clear how the distinction between form and content neatly solves longstanding difficulties with interpreting some notorious passages. In Poetics 18, four "kinds" [eide] of tragedy are identified in a passage that has long baffled interpreters with regard to how it is connected to the discussion in the rest of the Poetics (cf. Lucas 184-186):

> There are four kinds [eide] of tragedy: the complex [peplegmene], depending entirely on reversal and recognition; the pathetic [pathetike]--such as the tragedies on Ajax and Ixion; the ethical [ethike]--such as the Phthiotides and the

> Peleus. The fourth kind is the simple . . . (1455b32-56a2)

Here the "simple" and "complex" kinds can only refer to the plot forms discussed back in Poetics 14. But the introduction of "pathetic" and "ethical" as kinds of tragedy is novel. I would suggest, however, that these two terms refer to the two possible outcomes for a character's character-arc (metabasis, or change of fortune): an "unhappy" or a "happy" ending as the tragedy's content. For example, Ajax and Ixion are two characters who, considered as tragic subject matter, invariably come to an unhappy end. Ajax commits suicide after losing the battle over Achilles' armor to Odysseus and then descending into dishonorable madness. For trying to rape Hera, Ixion suffers eternal punishment in Tartarus on a flaming wheel. The pathetike outcome of both their stories offers tragedy the straightforwardly poignant and sacrificial content of intense human suffering.

5

The Phthiotides ("Women of Phthia") and Peleus (the father of Achilles), on the other hand, are perhaps less clear for us as examples, for the plays do not survive. Based on what evidence we do have, however, it is sound to conjecture that they had "happy endings." For example, the famous myth of Peleus, Achilles' father, tells of how he wrestles the goddess Thetis who, in spite of her best efforts to change shape and escape, nevertheless is compelled to be his bride. A wedding is the classic example of a happy ending, and the wedding of Peleus and Thetis could have been the happy finale of a Peleus (cf. Euripides, Iphigenia at Aulis, 1036-1079). (The judgment of Paris at the ensuing wedding reception, however, and the Trojan War which followed upon it, would not be episodes proper to the unitary dramatic action of the wedding, if the wedding were taken as the content for a Peleus; cf. Aristotle at 1462b2-5 and 1459b1-7.) But if Aristotle is referring in Poetics 18 rather to the non-extant Peleus of Euripides, that play would treat the rescue of Peleus from persecutors by Philoctetes on his return from Troy (Post 15; cf. Euripides, Trojan Women 1126-8).

Similarly, the ending of the Phthiotides would also have been happy, since the play would concern the rescue of Hermione and Orestes from their persecutors and then their marriage. Aristotle could be referring to the non-extant Phthiotides of Sophocles, in which this is likely what happened. Or else when he says, "Phthiotides and Peleus" (hai Phthiotides kai ho Peleus), he is referring to them, not as names of plays, but simply as characters, as he has just done with Ajax and Ixion. That is, he is perhaps referring to both the character Peleus and the chorus of the Women of Phthia in an extant play of Euripides, namely, the Andromache (as Post 13-15 suggests), in which precisely this persecution and marriage of Hermione and Orestes does happen:

> Hermione, daughter of Menelaus and wife of Neoptolemus, plots in her husband's absence against his concubine Andromache (widow of Hector), whom she accuses of making her barren by witchcraft. She calls in her father, and Andromache and

> her son are about to be put to death but are saved by Neoptolemus' aged grandfather Peleus. Hermione contemplates suicide, but her ex-fiancé Orestes, who hates Neoptolemus for having robbed him of Hermione, opportunely arrives; she runs off with him, and he successfully plots to have Neoptolemus murdered at Delphi. (Sommerstein 51)

It would not be unusual for the play to be known by a second name; that is, by the name of its chorus, the Phthiotides, as well as by the name Andromache (Post 14). In any case, by adducing the Phthiotides and Peleus as examples, it seems clear that by ethike Aristotle means a tragedy that has a plot whose content is "persecution and deliverance" (Post 15); in other words, he means a metabasis with a happy ending.

This reading of Aristotle's classification of tragedy (in terms of form and content) is strengthened by the parallel passage in Poetics 24, where Homer's epic poems are also described both in terms of general form (being either simple or complex) and their content (being either "pathetic" or "ethical"). The passage confirms, with reference to the Iliad and the Odyssey, my thesis about the "pathetic" and "ethical" in Poetics 18 as being descriptions of the metabasis content ("unhappy" or "happy"):

> Again, epic poetry must have the same kinds [eide] as tragedy: it must be simple [haplen], or complex [peplegmenen], or ethical [ethiken], or pathetic [pathetiken]. The parts also, with the exception of song and spectacle, are the same; for it requires reversals, recognitions, and sufferings. Moreover, the thoughts and the diction ought to be done well. In all these respects, Homer serves as our earliest and sufficient model. Indeed each of his poems has a twofold composition. The Iliad is at once simple [haploun] and pathetic [pathetikon], and the Odyssey complex [peplegmenon] (for recognition scenes run through it), and at the same time ethical [ethike]. Moreover, in diction and thought they are supreme. (1459b7-16)

Aristotle's remarks here make sense when we consider the facts. On the one hand, the Iliad has an unhappy ending, as Achilles accepts his impending death and the women of Troy mourn for the slain Hector; but not only is the Iliad thus pathetike in content, it is simple (haple) in form, for Achilles' anger has simply destined him for eternal glory (kleos) all along.(4) (Of course, he had not foreseen how his anger, and how he does or does not control it, would be the motive force for his winning glory in the successive conflicts, first with Agamemnon, then with Hector, and finally with Priam. But the simple plot form of the Iliad works out the consequences of Achilles' wrath in all its glorious manifestations.) On the other hand, the Odyssey has a happy ending, as Odysseus returns home, slays the interloping suitors, and is reunited with his wife Penelope; but not only is the Odyssey thus ethike in content, it is complex (peplegmene) in form, as the suitors undergo a reversal (they intend to insult a beggar for sport, but in doing so they precipitate their destruction) and a recognition (for they

incur the wrath of Odysseus, who it is in disguise as the beggar).

6

Better translations for "pathetic" and "ethical" in chapters 18 and 24, therefore, would be "poignant" (pathetike) for the unhappy metabasis, and "morally uplifting" or "inspirational" (ethike) for the happy metabasis. Generative anthropology, moreover, would probably be most comfortable with translations that point to generative contexts for the content of these two types of metabasis: "sacrificial" (for pathetike) and "sentimental" (for ethike). If we admit with Schneider that "Aristotle anticipates Gans," then it is not hard to see that, in terms of ultimate content, tragedies can be either "chronicles of love" (ethike) or "chronicles of resentment" (pathetikon).(5)

Both Sophocles and Euripides achieve the high culture effect of Greek tragedy, but in Aristotle's literary criticism their mimetic achievement can be distinguished with regard to how they employ form and content. Further, Aristotle's remarks on Homer help us discern his views on the kinds of tragedy composed by Sophocles and Euripides. But before clarifying Aristotle's stance on these more general questions, it is time now to confront the particular problem still before us: the fact that, in Poetics 14, Euripides' Iphigenia among the Taurians is ranked by Aristotle above Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus. In the latter play, I maintain that Aristotle sees how Sophocles reworks clichéd tragic form and content to good effect, whereas in the former Euripides play we see innovation that is not simply effective tragedy but, in Aristotle's view, the development of the composite of form and content that is most proper to the high culture of tragedy. To see this, we need to recognize the harmony in Aristotle's presentation, as already evidenced in the discussions above (from Poetics 17, 2, 25, 18, and 24), where he has shown his sensitivity with regard to distinguishing form and content. We turn now to read this harmony in Poetics 13 as commending a certain exemplary content for tragedy, and in Poetics 14 as commending a certain exemplary formal structure. In the end, this will help us to see, not just how each poet is a master of the "complex" (peplegmene) plot form, but which poet is more "sacrificial" (pathetike) or "sentimental" (ethike) with regard to content.

4. Serious (Not Unhappy) Content: The Exemplary Metabasis of Poetics 13

First we turn to Poetics 13 to discern its recommended metabasis. We have a clear distinction between types of content in Poetics 13 with Aristotle's distinction there between what he calls the "single" plot and the "double" plot. Aristotle describes the content of the "double" plot as what is popular with the audiences (philanthropon):(6) the good are rewarded, and the bad are punished. In contrast, Aristotle affirms the superiority of a "single" plot because it exemplifies what he considers to be the right kind of metabasis:

> A well-constructed plot [muthon] should, therefore, be single [haploun] in its

> issue, rather than double [diploun] as some maintain. It is required to change the fortune [metaballein] not from bad to good [eis eutukhian ek dustukhias], but, reversely, from good to bad [ex eutukhias eis dustukhian]. It should come about as the result not of depravity [dia mokhtherian], but of some great error [di' hamartian megalen], in a character either such as we have described, or better rather than worse [beltionos mallon e kheironos]. The practice of the stage bears out our view. At first the poets recounted any plots that came in their way. Now, the best tragedies are founded on the story of a few houses--on the fortunes of Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, and those others who have done or suffered terrible things. A tragedy, then, to be perfect according to the rules of art should be of this construction. Hence they are in error who censure Euripides just because he follows this principle in his plays, many of which end unhappily [eis dustukhian]. It is, as we have said, the right procedure. The best proof is that on the stage and in dramatic competition, such plays, if well worked out, are the most tragic in effect; and Euripides, even if in other aspects he may be considered not to manage his content well, is still conspicuous as the most tragic [tragikotatos] of the poets. Thus in the second rank comes the kind of tragedy which some place first. Like the Odyssey, it has a double [diplen] thread of plot, and opposite endings for the good and for the bad. It is usually ranked in first place because of the weakness of the spectators; for the poets are guided in what they write by the wishes of the audience. This popular pleasure, however, is not the pleasure proper to tragedy. It is proper rather to comedy, where those who, in the plot, are the deadliest enemies--like Orestes and Aegisthus--depart the stage as friends at the close, and nobody is slain by anybody. (1453a12-39)

The sentences in this passage, usually taken as commending an unhappy ending over a happy ending, must be read in the context that clearly frames the entire discussion: Aristotle's express preference for the "single" metabasis over the popular "double" metabasis. Euripides follows the right procedure because he uses a single metabasis. It is following this principle of using a single metabasis that ensures that a poet's effect is "the most tragic." Aristotle remarks that many of Euripides' plays end unhappily (1453a26-27), but with that remark, read in context, he is still implying nonetheless that Euripides' plays are all single in metabasis. Further, when Aristotle says that the single metabasis should be from good to bad (1453a9), he is speaking relatively, not absolutely, and intends only to contrast the usual metabasis of good people portrayed in a double plot (viz., from bad to good fortune) with the usual metabasis of good people portrayed in a single plot (viz., from good to bad fortune). The remark is not a general prescription that all tragedies must have unhappy endings in order for them to be "most tragic." It can only be misread as such if taken out of context.

7

In Poetics 13, the type of content that is being commended is the singular focus of plot on one person's fortune, and not so much the type of end that that person meets. The only

prescription for the ending is that it should be a single (haplous) plot metabasis. Tragedy's high culture is best achieved through a single metabasis, and not through the popular metabasis of a double (diplous) plot ending. On the one hand, as Aristotle remarks, the double ending in comedy would have the bad man (Aegisthus) coming to a good end (avoiding the death penalty at Orestes' hands), and the good man (Orestes) coming to a bad end (failing to exact the necessary vengeance against his enemy, instead making Aegisthus his friend). On the other hand, the double ending in tragedy would be what we actually have in Aeschylus: Orestes kills Aegisthus in vengeance; hence the bad man comes to a bad end (The Libation Bearers 838-877), and the good man comes to a good end (Eumenides 752-777). Aristotle is silent on whether Aeschylus's treatment of this plot outline is more haple than diple in its execution in the Oresteia, and thus he is silent on the rank of Aeschylus's Oresteia as an achievement in tragedy. But in outline, nevertheless, the revenge tragedy, with its content of double metabasis, is a "formulaic sub-genre" (Gans 2000, 62) that risks descending into the crude satisfactions expected by popular culture, however much we must still affirm that the Oresteia and the Odyssey do not descend into such diple cliché (cf. Gans 1985, 227-268). In any case, it seems clear enough that in this passage Euripides is the "most tragic" poet, the one who has mastered the use of the content of single metabasis.(7)

The classification of the possible kinds of single metabasis that precedes this very passage in Poetics 13 also supports the thesis that, for Aristotle, a single plot metabasis with an unhappy ending is not the preferred content. For in that preceding section he says that an unhappy ending can be miaron, vulgar (1452b36). Instead, the single plot metabasis that is to be preferred is selected, not on the basis of the ending being happy or unhappy, but on the basis of the metabasis being generated by a hamartia (mistake):

> First, it is clear that the changing of fortune [metaballontas] presented must not be the spectacle of noble men [epieikeis andras] brought from prosperity to adversity [ex eutukhias eis dustukhian]: for it moves neither pity nor fear; it is merely vulgar [miaron]. Nor, again, that of depraved men [mokhtherous] passing from adversity to prosperity [ex atukhias eis eutukhian]: for this is the most un-tragic [atragoidotaton] of all things; it possesses nothing of these things: it can neither be popularly satisfactory [philanthropon] nor does it call forth pity or fear. Nor, again, should the downfall [ex eutukhias eis dustukhian] of the utter villain [sphodra poneron] be exhibited. A plot composed in such a manner would, doubtless, be popularly satisfying [philanthropon], but it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves. Such an event, therefore, will be neither pitiful nor terrible. There remains, then, the character between [metaxu] these two extremes--that of a man who is not preeminent in excellence or righteousness, yet whose changing into misfortune [metaballon eis ten dustukhian] is brought about not by badness or depravity, but by some error [di' hamartian tina]. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous--a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families. (1452b34-53a12)

The important thing to note here is not that Aristotle talks about Oedipus as an example of this kind of single-plot metabasis content. To do so would risk being misled into thinking that an unhappy metabasis is the criterion of high culture. The important thing to note, rather, is that the desirable single-plot metabasis is one whose content concerns hamartia. Whether or not this content, with its hamartia criterion, is sufficient for high culture is not reducible to an "unhappy ending" formula. Aristotle states only the guideline for the mimesis of the metaxu person ("the character between these two extremes": i.e., the above-average person), and of the hamartia, that is to be the content of the tragic representation. That is, he says that the representation ought to be of a person beltionos mallon e kheironos (1453a16-17): more of a person as people ought to be, rather than of a person as people are. The content guideline concerns the person, and not the ending. In other words, the high culture criterion with regard to content is that a spoudaios (morally serious) person, and the presence of a hamartia, constitute the content of the representation. By chance, plays with unhappy endings brought this fact about content to light. But we should not mistake an unhappy metabasis for Aristotle's recommended content.

The classification of the possible kinds of single metabasis in this preceding section can be summed up as:

> c(1) the very good [epieikeis] meet an unhappy end: miaron
>
> c(2) the below-average [mokhtherous] meet a happy end: atragoidotaton
>
> c(3) the very bad [sphodra poneros] meets an unhappy end: philanthropon
>
> c(4) the above-average [metaxu] meets an unhappy end: pitiable & fearful(8)

8

What is needed to read this list in context is to realize that the third item, c(3), listed here on its own as a kind of single metabasis, can also be taken as one half of a double metabasis; the other half would be: "good person meets a happy end." From this point on, after the classification of possible types of single metabasis, Aristotle proceeds, as we have already seen, to discuss just this sort of popularly satisfying double metabasis. We may note that Aristotle does exclude the logical possibility of "good person meets a happy end" from this list of four here (cf. Else 367). The reason is that he does go on to identify this thread of plot as usually characteristic of one half of the popular double metabasis. As he does so, he limits himself in Poetics 13 to rejecting its incarnation as half of the thread in the popular double metabasis. He remains silent on whether "good person meets a happy end" is acceptable as single metabasis content in Poetics 13. Only in Poetics 14 does he go on to consider this single metabasis content, not spoken of in Poetics 13, and to articulate the sort of form that can shape it into

the best sort of composite of tragic form and content.

In sum, it is only the type of person who is here in Poetics 13 being commended as content, and not so much a happy or unhappy ending. A double metabasis is identified as being (like certain types of single metabasis) often characteristic of inferior, vulgar (miaron), and popularly satisfying (philanthropon) culture, and hence more proper to comedy than to tragedy. Further, an unhappy ending is not sufficient for tragic high culture content; a morally serious person implicated in mistaken action certainly is. Thus the high culture criterion is content consisting of serious (and preferably mistaken) action, which is ultimately related to how the person is portrayed relative to how people are or ought to be. By chance, craft discovered workable serious content in the unhappy metabasis. But Aristotle's point about Oedipus as exemplary content is not that his metabasis is unhappy, but that it is only unhappy because its serious hamartia content is opposed to the popular effect of the double-plot metabasis (1453a12-17). Moreover, concerning how the practice of the stage has demonstrated that Oedipus is exemplary content, Aristotle merely observes that, when in search of an effective metabasis, poets have discovered that by experience the unhappy single metabasis is an easy way to achieve this, because pathos is already embedded in the unhappy content. The happy single metabasis, however, is formally more challenging, and hence a later development, as Aristotle goes on to explain in Poetics 14, since it has to formally generate pity and fear in the absence of any realized pathos content.

5. Timely (Not Belated) Deferral in Form: The Exemplary Anagnorisis of Poetics 14

So much for content in Poetics 13. Regarding form, we have a clear distinction in Poetics 14 between four possible plot forms and their configurations of pathos, anagnorisis, and peripeteia:

> Let us explain more clearly what is meant by skillful handling. The action may be done consciously and with knowledge of the persons, in the manner of the older poets. It is thus too that Euripides makes Medea slay her children. Or, again, the deed of horror may be done, but done in ignorance, and the tie of kinship or friendship be recognized afterwards. The Oedipus of Sophocles is an example. Here, admittedly, the incident is outside the drama proper; but cases occur where it falls within the action of the play: one may cite the Alcmaeon of Astydamas, or Telegonus in the Wounded Odysseus. Again, there is a third possibility: when someone is about to do an irreparable deed through ignorance, but comes to recognize it before it is done. These are the only possible ways: the deed must either be done or not done--and that wittingly or unwittingly; of all these possibilities, [the remaining and as yet unmentioned fourth possibility (which we ought to number, rather, on account of its extreme rarity and unsuitability for tragedy, as "possibility zero"), namely,] to be about to act knowing the persons,

> and then not to act, is the worst. It is vulgar [miaron] and is not tragic, for it involves no suffering [apathes]. It is, therefore, never, or very rarely, portrayed in tragedy. One instance, however, is in the Antigone, where Haemon tries to kill Creon [but fails, and then kills himself instead: see Sophocles, Antigone 1226-1243]. The next and better way [namely, "possibility one" as mentioned above] is that the violent deed should be perpetrated. Still better, ["possibility two" as mentioned above:] that it should be perpetrated in ignorance, and the recognition made afterwards. There is then nothing vulgar [miaron] involved, and the recognition is thrilling [ekplektikon]. The last case [namely, "possibility three" as mentioned above] is the best, as when in the Cresphontes Merope is about to slay her son, but, recognizing who he is, spares his life. So in the Iphigeneia, the sister recognizes the brother just in time. Again in the Helle, the son recognizes the mother when on the point of handing her over. (1453b26-54a9)

Commentators, as usual, have made the passage more complicated by postulating a lacuna (cf. Belfiore 171); my comments inserted in editorial brackets above, however, demonstrate that the passage can be read naturally in a logical progression. Following my numbering, then, the entire passage can be summarized as follows, with the four possibilities corresponding to Aristotle's classification of plot form, from worst to best:

9

> f(0) Un-tragic plot, without pathos: about to occur with full knowledge, but averted. Example: Haemon's attack on Creon in Sophocles' Antigone.
>
> f(1) Simple plot, with pathos: occurs, and happens with full knowledge. Example: Euripides' Medea.
>
> f(2) Complex plot, with pathos: pathos occurs in ignorance, and anagnorisis happens afterwards [usually without a coincident peripeteia]. Example: Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus [in which, unusually but most effectively, a peripeteia is coincident with the anagnorisis].
>
> f(3) Complex plot, without pathos: a coincident anagnorisis and peripeteia averts pathos. Example: Euripides' Iphigenia among the Taurians.(9)

The fact that a plot structure that takes the complex form having no pathos is ranked highest by Aristotle should not mislead us into thinking that an Iphigenia-style "happy ending" is the gold standard for high culture, in contradiction with the apparent indications elsewhere that Oedipus, unhappy metabasis and all, ought to be. The recommended plot in Poetics 14 is not simply a popularly satisfying "happy ending" but, more rigorously, a unitary plot that avoids an unhappy pathos by means of a coincident anagnorisis and peripeteia having a thrilling effect.

In other words, a happy metabasis content is not as important as the formal discovery of hamartia. Formally, preventative discovery of hamartia is superior to tragically belated anagnorisis. Formally, Oedipus Tyrannus is only second-best. But this means only that high culture can treat pathos, peripeteia, and anagnorisis in various configurations as either present or absent in the plot structure. It does not require them to be configured so as to generate formulaically an unhappy metabasis (following a crude "high culture" formula: i.e., "avoid Hollywood endings"). Nor does it require them, pace Belfiore, to be configured so as to generate by chance (learning by chance what pleases the crowd) a formulaically happy metabasis (following an easy "popular culture" formula: i.e., "strive for big box office"). Formally, what is essentially prescribed by Aristotle in Poetics 14 is the superiority of a timely deferral of pathos to a belated recognition of the hamartia that generated a pathos.

In summary, then, Poetics 14 distinguishes between the various simple and complex plot forms, while Poetics 13 distinguishes between the single and the double metabasis of plot content. And Poetics 13 rejects, not the happy ending metabasis, but only the popular culture incarnation of it in the double metabasis. The failure to read Aristotle's remarks about the unhappy ending metabasis in their context leads to the mistaken conclusion that Aristotle commends only the unhappy metabasis. On the contrary, Aristotle simply commends the single metabasis. Although longstanding theatrical practice has associated the single metabasis with the unhappy ending, this is only because a single metabasis that has a happy ending is harder to achieve than the single metabasis with an unhappy ending. Hence Aristotle proceeds in Poetics 14 to analyze in detail the evolution of form that has led to highest achievement of tragedy's high culture. At the summit, he ranks the single metabasis content with a complex plot form that discovers and prevents violent pathos.

6. Drowning Resentful Form-of-the-Content: Complex Form and Single Content

Yet the question remains why Aristotle ranks the happy absence of pathos higher in terms of formal plot structure, when he has so emphatically treated the high seriousness of Oedipus Tyrannus as exemplary in terms of content. The answer to this question lies in the esthetic theory of Gans, who has developed his analysis of esthetic history in response to René Girard's theory of mimetic desire (cf. Gans 1977), to explain more fully the relation of texts to material culture. Gans credits Girard alone among critics as seeing the "priority of cultural form over content" (Gans 2000, 55). By this Gans means that prior to both form and content in the artwork is the cultural form-of-the-content (forme du contenu): "literary works, like all cultural forms, can be traced back to events which form their original content" (Gans 1981, 807). There is an anthropological form-of-the-content that is prior to, and originarily generative of, both the artwork's literary form and content. The anthropological form-of-the-content visible in literary works is found in individual triangles of desire or, more generally, in the resentment of the periphery toward the center. This is the human reality behind the artwork, the cultural reality that generated it. Resentment is our emotional state with regard to those ways in which we are

powerless to change our station in life. In a particular situation, for example, we may be frustrated in a triangle of desire and resent the rival who models our desire for the object; the clichéd example here is the romantic triangle. In general, we inhabit the social periphery, and hold resentment towards those who inhabit the social limelight; some clichéd examples here would be resentment towards politicians or celebrities.

10

In this regard, improving upon Girard's literary analysis of triangular mimetic desire, Gans's generative anthropology has observed how "resentment is the basis of all esthetic form." By using resentment, Gans is best able to distinguish between popular culture and high culture in esthetic phenomena. Popular art "satisfies the resentment that generates formal closure." For Aristotle, such popular formal closure can happen both in the happy endings of the double plot or in the unhappy endings of the single plot. But "high art turns us against [resentment]": this is the more austere experience generated by successful esthetic complications in high culture (Gans 2000, 62 n.9), as Aristotle intimates with his preference for the deferral of violent pathos.

Gans explains esthetic experience as an oscillation between the contemplation of form and content. It is this oscillation that "drowns" resentment, whether in the askesis of high culture that lingers on the form of the artwork, or in the appetitive satisfaction of popular culture that lingers much more over the consumption of its content (Gans 1993, 117-131). Resentment is deferred in high culture through sublimation, but deferred in popular culture by being discharged (Gans 1997, 132). In this way, "mimesis is a purgative cure for resentment, a catharsis" (Gans 1993, 135). High culture encourages us to dwell more on form, whereas popular culture encourages us to dwell more on content. Yet we can never have an artwork made up of either exclusively form or exclusively content. And thus, on the one hand, high culture can satisfy the full range of our esthetic appetite, by allowing us to oscillate to the "vice" of popular culture (a resentful enjoyment of pure content) and, on the other hand, popular culture can satisfy our esthetic appetite by allowing us to oscillate to the "virtue" of high culture (a sublime contemplation of form). But esthetic experience, of course, is concerned primarily with neither virtue nor vice; its amoral oscillation is what makes it, not moral, but esthetic. Esthetic experience is a purgative cure for resentment because it is not concerned with either moral discipline or indiscipline in the real world, but rather with an emotional catharsis generated of, by, and for the imaginary world of the artwork.

The content of an unhappy metabasis is consumptively enjoyed as we resentfully delight in the fearful downfall of a great man who had previously occupied the center inaccessible to us, dwellers on the periphery. But the literary revenge enacted to satisfy our resentment also oscillates from the content to the form. The unhappy discovery of unwitting hamartia arouses our pity as we esthetically contemplate the narrative form of the suffering: the formal structure highlights the belatedness that makes our literary revenge possible. Paradoxically, in the case of Oedipus, the pathos has already occurred, before the discovery, and so we can oscillate

back to resentful enjoyment of the content. Esthetically, we have our pitiable tragic form and eat its fearful content too. We pity the sacrificial form our resentment takes while, at the same time, we witness the dramatic enactment of that resentment's fearful power (cf. Gans 1993, 136-142).

In Sophocles, the esthetic experience is one of high culture as we can linger on the ironic form that depicts how people ought to be, that is, how they ought to bear themselves in undeserved suffering and thus merit our pity. Noble people (people "as they ought to be") meeting an unhappy end would merely merit the pop-culture Schadenfreude provoked by the merely miaron (vulgar) metabasis: for example, as in the movies, when the wealthy businessman gets a punch in the face from the downtrodden employee; and if the businessman, moreover, is caricatured as totally evil, the violent pathos that occurs is philanthropon (popularly satisfying). Sophocles, however, innovates in developing tragedy's form, refining the practice of complex form in the service of high culture. His audience's resentment towards the "better people" (the very resentment that shapes the form-of-the-content of Sophocles' people) is sublimated by their contemplation of his artistic refinements of complex form.

But in Euripides, who lingers more on people "as they are," our emotional engagement with the human content deepens. Moreover, when hamartia is discovered and pathos is avoided, as in the Iphigenia among the Taurians, the formal structure is a higher order of culture than the Oedipus plot form, because there is no pathos and hence less impetus from the narrative form (which is merely the artifice that relates the story of the violent pathos) for us to oscillate back to resentful enjoyment of the content. The height of Sophocles' formal achievement was the coincident anagnorisis and peripeteia of the Oedipus Tyrannus, which was purchased, however, by placing the pathos outside of the drama (1453b31-34); but in Euripides, the pathos is deferred, and not just by the poet, but by the play's action: a signal advance in esthetics, for which Aristotle gives him due credit. The violent pathos in tragedy, as a formal closure with regard to human content that mimics the form-of-the-content of a longed-for, resentful real-world pathos, attains its highest possibility of deferral in Euripides. In a word, our resentment is sublimated more than indulged.(10)

Oedipus Tyrannus then is not so much the gold standard and exemplary paradigm of tragedy's high culture as it is a handy compendium of its resentful clichés and stereotypes generative of both pity and fear: unhappy metabasis as content, and unhappy belated discovery as form. While useful for illustrative purposes, the Oedipus play's composite of form and content is not as tragic as Euripides' plots. For Aristotle's distinction between form and content, implicit in the Poetics' analysis of the esthetic of tragedy, allows us to see how Euripides' works of high culture are unlike Sophocles' works of high culture. While, on the one hand, Euripides more effectively appeals to the sentimentality prized by popular culture, on the other hand, he deepens our emotional engagement with his plays' human content (by having us identify with characters as being "like us" more than having us resent them as being "better than us"). Thus Euripides, not Sophocles, best sublimates the vengeful power of resentment visible in tragedy's

clichéd sacrificial form: "somebody has to die."

11

Aristotle's apparent endorsement of this clichéd single-plot "unhappy" tragic ending at Poetics 13 (1453a12-17) ought to be read more carefully for what the text in fact says there: that this kind of single-plot "unhappy ending" is preferable only to the inferior double-plot "happy ending" preferred by popular culture. This in no way means that the single-plot "unhappy ending" is the best possible high culture ending. Aristotle's preference in Poetics 14 for the single-plot "happy ending" that defers violence confirms his attunement to the anthropological function of high culture. A timely recognition that formally defers violence is better than belated discovery of mistaken violence. For in this way, our catharsis formally sublimates our resentful identification with the drama's content, a content that, anthropologically, is a mimesis of our resentful relationship with the form-of-the-content. That is, the people of the drama (as "better than" or "just as" people are) are shaped as content by a form-of-the-content: by the social resentments that originarily generated the drama's subject matter and that continue to generate our fascination with its literary content. Formal deferral best sublimates our resentful relationship with the content: that is, with both imaginary content and the real form-of-the-content.

How ironic that literary criticism has been so scandalized by Aristotle's apprehension in Poetics 14 of this anthropological truth. For it is no small irony that, in spite of Aristotle's rigorous desacralization of the play's form and content, Oedipus has become, not anthropology's recognition of tragedy's cultural form-of-the-content, but rather literature's foremost tragic cliché. Indeed, the hardest reading to do is a close reading of what you are closest to: neither content nor form, but the form-of-the-content.

12

Works Cited

Bates, William N. "The Dating of the Oedipus Tyrannus," American Journal of Philology 54.2 (1933): 166-168.

Belfiore, Elizabeth S. Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1992.

Burnett, Anne Pippin. Catastrophe Survived: Euripides' Plays of Mixed Reversal. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1971.

Carey, C. "'Philanthropy' in Aristotle's Poetics." Eranos 86 (1988): 131-139.

Cropp, M.J. (ed.) Euripides Iphigenia in Tauris. Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 2000.

Else, Gerald F. Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1963.

Gans, Eric. Essais d'esthétique paradoxale. Gallimard, 1977.

---. "Differences." Modern Language Notes 96.4 (1981): 792-808.

---. The End of Culture. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985.

---. Originary Thinking: Elements of Generative Anthropology. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1993.

---. Signs of Paradox: Irony, Resentment, and Other Mimetic Structures. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1997.

---. "The End of Seinfeld." Chronicles of Love and Resentment 121 (January 10, 1998): <http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw121.htm>.

---. "Form Against Content: René Girard's Theory of Tragedy." Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia 56 (2000): 53-65.

Garvie, A.F. "Aeschylus' simple plots." in Dawe, R.D., J. Diggle, and P.E. Easterling (eds.), Dionysiaca: Nine Studies in Greek Poetry. Cambridge: 1978, 63-86.

Golden, Leon and O.B. Hardison, Jr. (eds.) Aristotle's Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature. Translation by Leon Golden. Commentary by O.B. Hardison, Jr. Englewoord Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

Halliwell, Stephen. Aristotle's Poetics. Second edition. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998.

Hiltunen, Ari. Aristotle in Hollywood: The Anatomy of Successful Storytelling. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002.

Kassel, Rudolph (ed.) Aristotelis de arte poetica liber. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.

Knox, Bernard M. W. "The Date of the Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles." American Journal of Philology 77.2 (1956): 133-147.

Lucas, D.W. (ed.) Aristotle Poetics. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001 [1968].

Murnaghan, Sheila. "Sucking the Juice without Biting the Rind: Aristotle and Tragic Mimesis." New Literary History 26.4 (1995): 755-773.

Post, L.A. "Aristotle and Menander." Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 69 (1938): 1-42.

Rutherford, R.B. "Tragic Form and Feeling in the Iliad." Journal of Hellenic Studies 102 (1982): 145-160.

Schneider, Matthew. "Sacred Ambivalence: Mimetology in Aristotle, Horace, and Longinus." Anthropoetics I.1 (June 1995): <http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0101/schneid.htm>.

Sommerstein, Alan H. Greek Drama and Dramatists. London: Routledge, 2002.

13

Notes

* Portions of this essay were delivered as part of the presentation, "Aristotle on Textual and Material History: Mythical Structures of Reality," a paper read at the 2003 Classical Association of the Canadian West conference on Texts and Material Culture: Possibilities and Problems at the University of Calgary on March 22, 2003. I would like to thank the conference participants for feedback and discussion of the paper. In particular, the comments of Prof. Laurel Bowman of the Department of Greek and Roman Studies, University of Victoria, inspired me to refine my argument. I would also like to thank the referees for Anthropoetics, whose feedback helped me to revise and expand this article.

1. I would argue that Aristotle in Poetics 14 (at 1453b31-34) is aware of the special case that the Oedipus Tyrannus presents, because of his distinction between Oedipus, on the one hand, and Alcmaeon and Telegonus, on the other hand. Hence I surmise that Aristotle would have shared my opinion about the Oedipus Tyrannus, namely, that it is such an interesting topic for conversation about tragedy because it is both so sui generis and so clichéd. (back)

2. The Oedipus Tyrannus, however, is admittedly a tour de force that turns stones to bread. Sophocles' esthetic miracle is one of clichéd form and content reworked, to turn out unparalleled, and literarily exemplary, tragic irony. But our concern here is not this unique esthetic achievement of Sophocles (on this, see instead Gans 1985, 289-295; cf. Gans 1997, 72 and Gans 2000, 58-59). It is, rather, the persistent misunderstanding of Aristotle's discussion of the play's clichéd form and content in Poetics 13 and 14, which both professional scholars and Greekless Hollywood amateurs have preferred to read as an endorsement of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus, and of its unhappy ending, as the Oscar-caliber "master plot" of Greek

tragedy (cf. Hiltunen 5-20). Murnaghan, for example, defends this misunderstanding by tracing Aristotle's "contradictions" back to those of tragedy itself: "The contradictions of the Poetics are conditioned by the nature of tragedy itself, which has the paradoxical mission of giving acceptable form to unacceptable actions, of presenting the unpresentable" (767). (back)

3. All translations from the Poetics are my own modified versions of Malcolm Heath's modified version of S.H. Butcher's translation. Heath's adaptation is available on-line at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/resources/poetics/poettran.htm>. See Lucas, Kassel, or Else for recent editions of the Greek text. All my references to Aristotle, Homer, and the tragedians are keyed to the line numbers of the Greek text (and hence not reliant on any particular bibliography entry for page numbers). On the history of the happy plot of Iphigenia the Taurian priestess, see Burnett 73-75. For an excellent recent edition of the play, see Cropp. (back)

4. For a different view of the Iliad, arguing that it is complex due to a peripeteia and anagnorisis in response to the death of Patroclus, see Rutherford. I am not persuaded, however, since Achilles forswears neither anger nor glory at Iliad 18.98-126. (back)

5. Cf. the thematic discussion of love and resentment in the first few Internet Chronicles of Eric Gans at <http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw9596.htm>. (back)

6. This is my fresh interpretation of philanthropon in Aristotle, for which I credit the generative anthropology of Gans as my inspiration. At any rate, it is a word that has exercised many an interpreter. See Carey for recent discussion. (back)

7. Aeschylus, in contrast, may be seen to have mastered, not the content of single (haple) metabasis, but the form of simple (haplous) plot. See Garvie for details. (back)

14

8. Halliwell 217-220 complicates things rather too much, but relatively useful schemata of the discussion are found in Belfiore 161-162, Else 367, and Golden and Hardison 185. Examples from Belfiore corresponding to my schema are: c(1) Prometheus in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound (pity and fear is generated, however, by Io's analogous suffering); c(2) Medea in Euripides' Medea (pity and fear is generated, however, by the suffering of Jason's loved ones); c(3) the suitors in Homer's Odyssey (pity and fear is generated, however, by longsuffering Penelope and by Odysseus in disguise as a beggar); and c(4) Oedipus in Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus (whose story, even in plot outline, generates pity and fear; cf. Poetics 14. 1453b7). (back)

9. See the useful schemata at Belfiore 173, Else 418-419, Golden and Hardison 197, and Halliwell 224-225. (back)

10. An example of how sublimated resentment might be effected in a relatively crude dramatic scenario: The student of the story does not throw a pie in the face of the teacher; the student comes to a knowledge of the teacher's burden in life and bakes a pie for the school bake sale instead. For a more nuanced discussion of the configuration of high and popular culture in the postmodern era, in which they no longer simply contrast, but rather commingle, see Gans 1998. (back)

Anthropoetics subscribers may copy or download this text from the network, but its distribution or publication shall constitute an infringement of the Author's copyright.

Anthropoetics--The Journal of Generative Anthropology

Volume IX, number 1 (Spring/Summer 2003)
ISSN 1083-7264
URL: http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/
Email: anthro@humnet.ucla.edu

Anthropoetics 9, no. 1 (Spring / Summer 2003)

Conceptualizing and other Generative Acts

Raymond Swing

Copenhagen, Denmark
Swing@mail.tele.dk

a) Introduction. Simple notions, concepts, and measurements

Consciousness cannot be separated from what consciousness is about, whether sensations, feelings, or mediations in the sense of "thoughts" or aesthetic creations. These mediations include music, dance, art, and--especially in our own Western culture--language, linguistic structures consisting of words and numbers. First, we shall here be concerned with the representation of a quite everyday notion about the experience of temperature.

Even concerning this linguistically and numerically mediated content of consciousness we recognize that representations may have different forms. Besides simpler "notions" about temperature as such we may also have genuine "concepts" (in the strict sense of the word) about it. But how are we to develop such concepts (or other more specific forms of representation)? That is, how are we to define the meanings of the words (and/or other representational moments) when talking about these things so as to include also numbers and their denominations? Furthermore, being able to do all this consequently also requires us to define further more abstract concepts such as, for instance, "identity."

The question to be touched on here shall involve only a few such "intellectual" concepts developed outside of their real contexts that alone give them meanings; so, for example, we shall examine how the real concept of temperature is founded. In this connection we shall refer to a psycho-physiological theory about consciousness as such, the "motor theory" of consciousness, as proposed by Rodney Cotterill in his book Enchanted Looms (1998). He views consciousness to be in steady correspondence with--in addition, of course, to the functions of the brain and sense organs--the bodily functions of, among other things, the spindle system in the muscles. But let me affirm at the outset that this concept may in no way be viewed as a mere psycho-physiological phenomenon.

As a starting point I choose a common-sense technical example, the function of a thermostat. We adjust its pointer to 25° C and see what happens. The heating element switches on and the temperature increases until a control mechanism switches the electrical current off, not letting the temperature become too high; then the temperature falls and the control mechanism switches the heater on again not letting the temperature become too low. Then again the

temperature increases a little, falls a little, and so on. Cf. figure 1 (left side).

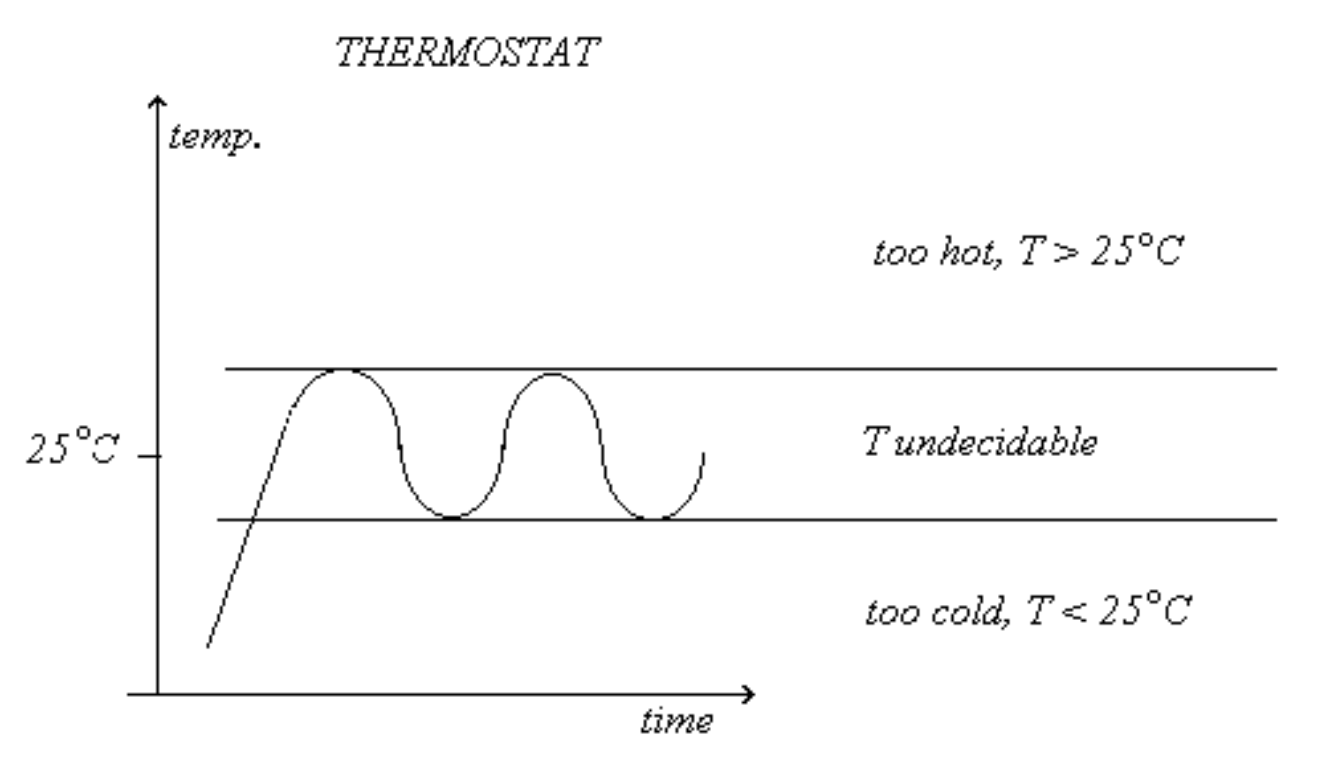

Figure 1

This diagram indicates three temperature domains (to the right). The upper domain indicates temperatures being "too high"; the lower one the temperatures being "too low." In the first domain, the temperatures are certainly higher than the desired 25° C, in the other they are certainly below 25° C ("certainly" here in the sense of "undeniably"). The interesting domain, however, is rather the middle one indicating temperatures neither "too high" nor "too low." But really, what is the temperature there? We don't know--at least not exactly! We can only say that the temperature is appropriate, but that the exact temperature T in this middle domain is, indeed, undecidable.

2

Observe here the negations: "neither too hot nor too cold," or "not too hot" **&** "not too cold." Even the word "too" represents something as being not-convenient. Also observe--in this specific context--the use here of the positive negations. Thus "too hot" is not merely the negation of "too cold" but its positive contra-affirmation. And so also is 'not too hot' the positive negation, or contrapositive (in the sense of contra-affirmation) of 'not too cold' where the "not" in this connection is interpreted as simple negation.

We shall use this diagram reading in one further quite trivial way. We turn it around, letting its vertical temperature axis become horizontal like a kind of surface. Imagine this to represent a

living space, for instance a long box in which to some hypothetical animals like ants or caterpillars one end is "too hot" and the other is "too cold." These animals will therefore concentrate themselves in an area "neither too hot nor too cold," "not too hot" **&** "not too cold." We recognize, however, that these negations are merely linguistic expressions; language is the only medium in which we can express such negations explicitly. So our hypothetical animals will in no way be able to express themselves in this way, but they are nevertheless able to "express" themselves by tacitly (without mediation) realizing a local distribution somewhere in the middle of this box--and so "expressing" themselves through actual behavior--analogous to that of the thermostat. See figure 2.

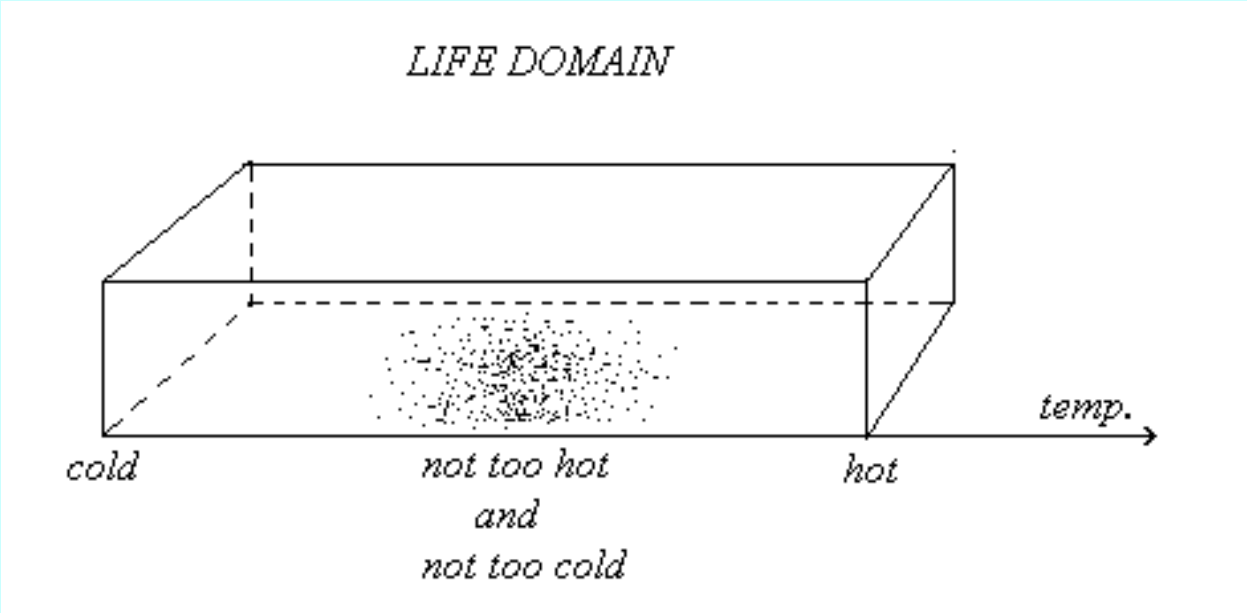

Figure 2

Here the part of the box indicated by the words "neither too hot nor too cold," or "not too hot" **&** "not too cold" represents the milieu that makes life comfortable or at least possible to these animals. Accepting that "too hot" (call it h) in this connection is just the positive negation (the contra-affirmation, **C**) of "too cold" (c) we may write h = **C**c. Further we here write the simple negation "not" as **N** and so "not too cold" as **N**c, its opposition "not too cold" (using the double negation) as **N**h = **NC**c. In this way we characterize the vital domain by means of the complex expression Dom_{vital}/ε (**N**c & **NC**c) containing the complex predicative (**N** & **NC**). This, as we shall see, is an essential dialectical term here characterizing the vital domain.

We must presume that our hypothetical animals are in the possession of some non-linguistic "notion" about--or at least some simple experience of--that temperature domain in which they can live. If such an experience shall be somehow "conscious" to the animal it must have "meaning" to it and so have achieved the character of a quale. Cotterill refers to different quasi-automatic reactions in primitive organisms like bacteria (using "random walk" behavior to come nearer to or farther away from "good" or "bad" sources) or like our hypothetical insects doing some "probe-by-movement" actions relative to their environments. In this connection Cotterill

recognizes that at least higher organisms must further be in possession of such "notions" (based on his hypothetical "schemata") so that these organisms also may realize what Cotterill calls "probe-by-proxied-movements":

> Ultimately, the probe-by-movement mechanism [as in bacteria; R.Sw.] appears to have bifurcated into two sub-mechanisms: one, a direct descendent of that seen in unicellular organisms, and the other covert, a probe-by-proxied-movement. The latter faculty, conscious . . . Indeed, it would seem to be no exaggeration to call such reflex modifications and acquisitions the raison d'être of consciousness. (Cotterill 2001, p. 5)

And he adds:

> The term proxied . . . requires explanation. For a given set of synaptic couplings in the motor-planning areas, a specific pattern of output signals from the former will produce a specific sequence of muscular movements. Efference copies of those output signals must carry the full information sent to the muscles, but they will not directly produce movement because their target neurons are not immediately concerned with motor output. Those efference-copy signals may be above the threshold for thought, however, and the latter will thus be tied to a pattern of possible motor output, albeit in a rather subtle manner because that output is not actually executed. This is the rationale behind the use of the term proxied movements. (Ibid., pp. 10-11)

3

Even on the simpler "probe-by-movement" basis it will be possible for the animal to "warn" itself if it makes dangerous movements, thereby anticipating the threatening consequences (for instance, pain) of going too far in the direction of hot or cold. So we must presume the existence of such schemata concerning the essential conditions for performing safe behaviors relative also to the "notion" of temperature. So these schemata in the organisms react just like the switching mechanism of the thermostat.

To go one step further in direction of "intellectualization" we shall now, in contrast to simple "notions," turn to the real behavioral process of temperature measurement. This demands, first, that we already have a well-established notion of temperature as such; secondly, that we also have material devices for estimating temperature beyond simple feelings (qualia); thus we strongly (historically) depend on the existence of readymade thermometers, and, finally, that we also linguistically and numerically are able to operate with these notions, that is, that we mentally have the necessary words and numbers at our disposal. So, now we take our

thermometer and look at the column of quicksilver in the tube. See figure 3.

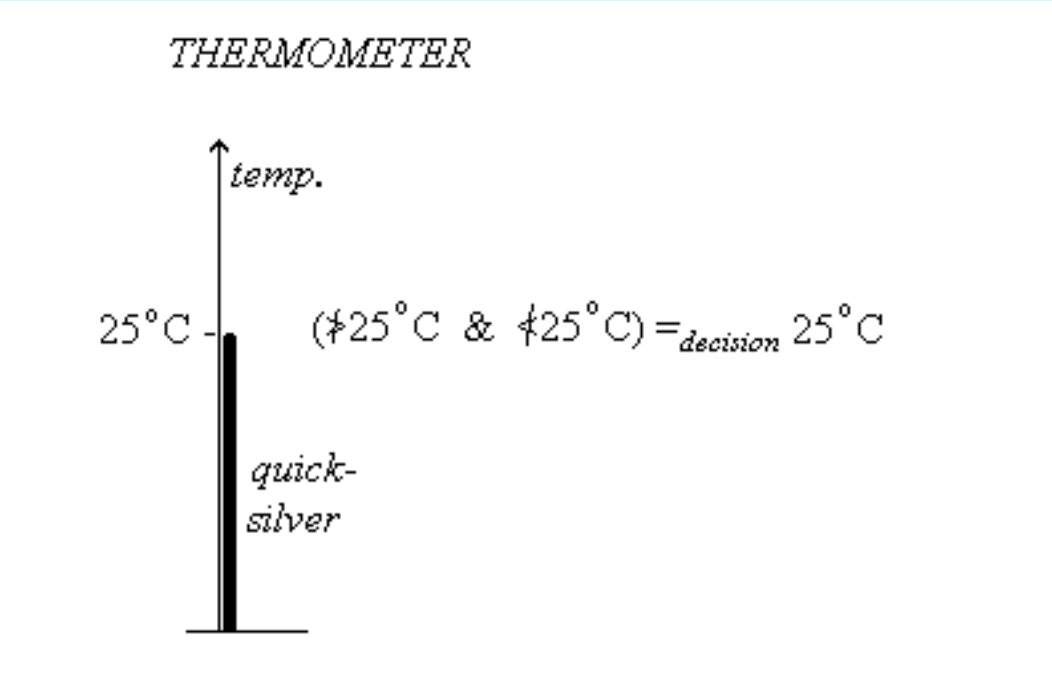

Figure 3

We observe (to the left) the quicksilver along the temperature scale reaches the mark 25° C. We now might be content with saying that the temperature of the room is 25° C. However, we could observe the device more carefully: Does it really point to the 25° C mark, or is it a little below, or possibly a little above? No! Under the given conditions of observation we must judge that the temperature is really neither below nor above 25° C. So now we state that the temperature is 25° C. But how can we say that? In our thoughts we have indeed imagined a couple of "probe-by-proxied-movements"--the "proxied" movements just being "conscious" to us relative to our "notion" of temperature--the one seeking below, the other seeking above this mark. Obviously, no one of these probings gave defendable results; we have to deny these possibilities. Eventually we stop the measuring activities and simply (to the right of the figure) decide that the temperature is exactly (that is, unfalsifiably) 25° C. In our logical way of expression, therefore, we propose the following implication--on the basis of the subjective decision made under the actual observation conditions:

IF the temperature T /ε (≮ 25° C & ≯ 25° C), THEN T $=_{\text{decision}}$ 25° C.

This implication as the "logical" result of a conscious "probe-by-proxied-movement" and the subsequent decision raises the primordial notion to the status of a genuine "concept" that formally has assumed the character of a "value" (here taking the form of a numerically expressed (measurable) parameter, but not necessarily) and as such generated by "abstraction."

Using the above presented notation the sign > can reasonably be reinterpreted as **C**<, the crossing / meaning the simple negation **N**. So we write the following implication:

$$T /\varepsilon (\mathbf{N}< 25° C \ \& \ \mathbf{NC}< 25° C) \Rightarrow_{decision} T = 25° C.$$

On this basis we judge T = 25° C to be true. But what does that mean for the concept of "truth" in general? It means that "truth" as such can in no way be something existent in the world. Quite on the contrary, generally it means that "truth" to the extent that it is itself a "value" is an ideal construction made under given material, subjective, and social (communicative) conditions.

4

This expression, indeed, at the same time offers us a genuine concept of identity. If by comparison (for example, relative to temperature) one thing (A) is neither smaller nor greater than another thing (B), and when < and > may be interpreted as any couple of moments, properties, characteristics, and so on standing in the mutual relation of contra-affirmation, that is, when > = **C**<, then the complex term (**N**< & **NC**<) as the predicative of the sentence B/ε (**N**<A & **NC**<A) is valid and the things A and B are--under the specified aspect--equivalent. This, in other words, means that their compared (measured) magnitudes in the sense of "values" (indicated by []) of the explicitly defined dimension are identical; we therefore write [A] = [B]. In this case the "values" can be numerically mediated (insofar as they are isomorphic to the rational number system) and consequently these "values" may be expressed by means of real numbers (their denominations assuming the dimension, or parameter, in question).

In this sense the concept of identity itself represents a "generative" valuation moment of the "intellectual" work to obtain "objective" knowledge about the thing in case. But even such a primordial moment of generativity must have been realized under certain social conditions to make people capable of this form of "intellectual" decision-making. This then, has, on the basis of the primordial "notions," introduced once and for all a further constraint on consciousness, which hereafter "intellectually" expresses itself in binary terms (using the negation "not," **N**, in its strong sense). Quite trivially, nevertheless, all of this simply means that two things in a certain sense either are valued as identical, or they are not. In other words, linguistically expressible identity must (unfalsifiably) be declared either "true" or "false"--thereby introducing the quasi-axiomatic assessment of the non-existence of any third possibility of thinking, tertium non datur.

This conscious activity of "probing-by-proxied-movement" and the following act of decision really anticipate a form of (only linguistically expressible) generative-dialectical logic. But how are we to "defend" such an "intellectual" activity and its actual emergence? In what context and under which conditions could such a way of thinking, the first time, have had any meaning at all? On the other hand, this question concerns nothing less than the concept of "Truth" as such.

What does that mean? Even our hypothetical insects realized their simple form of behavioral adequateness, "rightness" and practical "truth"; but such "truths" cannot be linguistically mediated and explained like the numerical "truth" of the thermometer reading. Neither do they represent "Truth" as such, whatever meaning we might give the capital letter. We can only assume that inherent in "Truth" we find the dialectical contradiction of subjectivity and objectivity, the one side of this opposition inseparably connected to the other. Indeed, other forms of "truth" might be grounded in other domains of life, in religious belief, or simply in the everyday functionality of common human activities, all of them being subject to relevant decisions on the basis of likewise relevant "probe-by-proxied movements." More or less logical reasoning in this sense, measurements, and so on, have been realized for millennia and purified in genuine scientific work--but seldom reflected on as intellectual creations in themselves.

b) Parmenides' "Way of Truth"

Thus the real question is how concepts such as "Truth," "Identity," and "Congruence" in particular could emerge at all. Common sense notions of "truth," "correctness," "rightness," and so on are not identical to logical truth based on predication and proof. On the contrary, we should ask how "proofs" in general could be reduced to purely linguistic operations in the sense of Cotterillean "probings," but under the strict condition of their linguistic mediation. This question is essential to understanding the specific Western way of thinking and its emergence.

In the history of philosophy the first remarkable example of this way of thinking is given by Parmenides and his famous concept of the "One." In his great essay Prologue to Parmenides, Giorgio de Santillana asks with the words of John Burnet, which he calls "words of wisdom":

> Does Parmenides refer to the world of sense or the world of ideas; concrete existence or abstract being; matter or spirit? All these questions would have been absolutely meaningless to an early Greek philosopher, and the system of Parmenides is the best touchstone for our understanding of this fundamental historical truth. (de Santillana 1968, p. 84)

Whether referring to "the world of sense or the world of ideas," however, the Parmenidean concept of "Truth" is of the purely linguistic (logical) kind. But on what might be the ground--or contextual condition, or even the excuse (!)--for reflecting this unity in a way that apparently opposes these "worlds" to each other--even calling this way of thinking the "Way of the Gods" themselves? "So we are led back," de Santillana says, "to the neutral ground on which Parmenides had placed himself, a ground where reason and truth about nature were one and the same" (Ibid.). This "ground," therefore, must be just that from which the new concept of "Truth" emerged--and we must ask, then, what happened.

De Santillana characterizes the introduction to Parmenides' famous hexameter poem in this way:

> The overture is a grandiose and mythical adventure. . . The poet is taken aloft on a divine chariot, beyond the Gates of Night and Day, until he reaches the abode of the Goddess of Truth, who undertakes to explain to him the ways that are open to mortals, that of Truth and that of Opinion. . . (de Santillana 1968, p. 84.)

5

This original Female principle of production and reproduction, the Goddess herself--de Santillana identifies her to be no less than Aphrodite Ourania, the "Daemon who steers all things"--unites two seemingly contrasting aspects, the intellectual and the physical, into one and the same universal principle of absolute, pre-Olympian power (cf. ibid., p. 88). Thereby de Santillana attempts to "look at the formal and mythical element" on the explicit basis of the new possibilities that Greek culture's beginning literacy and social self-consciousness offer its thinkers. Hence the issue must be more than an explication of some personal notions. "Given the character of the poem, which is evidently an "intellectual purification," and the straight Pythagorean lineage of the author, we might speak of a Hieros Logos, a Sacred Discourse" (Ibid, p. 85).

One problem about this "Sacred Discourse" is the meaning of the term doxa, "opinion without any pejorative connotations." "It means, barring supernal knowledge, the kind of conclusions a man has been able to reach and is willing to stand by. . . In Pythagorean language, it is equivalent to "scientific inquiry" pure and simple" (ibid., p. 84). From quite another perspective, Wolfgang Lefèvre in his Rechensteine und Sprache (1981) mentions that this "science" to a great extent operated through material means such as reckoning-tokens, that is, exactly by means of materially realized and intellectually reflected-on specific "probings-by-proxied-movements." However, Lefèvre also adds that the results of such operations were explicitly expressible only through language, this medium alone having the necessary strictness to be the genuine medium of unfalsifiable "truth." We should remark that this form of scientific work uniting "the world of sense" and "the world of ideas" contains no hints of meaninglessness at all.

Parmenides' "Way of Truth is," as de Santillana says, "without any doubt, one of the most impressively obscure affirmations in the history of thought." "But," he adds, "if the way of Opinion is a physics--and it has taken centuries of exegetic blinkering to obscure this obvious fact--then the Way of Truth must make a sense which is correlative to that" (ibid., p. 89).

Essential is here that the Way of Truth ascertains indivisibility of Being, its inseparability, wholeness, continuity, permanence: "the idea of a homogeneous plenum seems to be passionately insisted on" (p. 90). So, "the substrate of all things is found back where it should be--everywhere, rather than nowhere" (ibid., p. 91). This he attempts to prove unfalsifiable.

De Santillana solves the problem of Parmenidean Being as follows:

> I suggest then, that we treat the word "Being" throughout as an undefined term, and replace it in the text with X. . . . Now . . . there is one, and only one, other concept [sic!] which can be put in the place of X without engendering nonsense or contradiction, and that concept is pure geometrical space itself, for which the Greeks did not yet have a technical term... Moreover, as I think I could show, it was built up by the use of what we could call scientific logic . . .
>
> So, after Parmenides the physicist, there emerges another, and even less known, Parmenides the mathematician. Why is it strange? It is, because we tend to forget that the Master of Elea was considered among the foremost mathematicians and astronomers of his own time. (de Santillana 1968, pp. 93-94)

This philosophy emerging about 480 B.C. was a clear and revolutionary breakthrough expressible only by a non-visualizing and therefore purely linguistic, abstract representation. So de Santillana concludes:

> This, the conversion point in which Truth and Being become interchangeable, contains in itself all future developments of speculative thought. They are not distinct as yet, and can be confused in fieri with dangerous ease. But Hegel is quite right in seeing here the transition from the stage of Vorstellung to the stage of Begriff. (de Santillana 1968, p. 100)

This concept of the One, therefore, contains nothing but relations, "all-the-relations-there-is" (ibid.). "A strange kind of a 'body' indeed, devoid of all concreteness. It might be more adherent to this stage of ideation not to call it 'real body' but 'body-of-my-thought'; body of Truth, body of reality; not Being, but 'Be-er' . . . But from this stratospheric peak of logical immediacy there is no going backward; no, nor forward either, except in mathematical theory" (ibid. p. 101). Exactly this "strange kind of a body" is generated through the process of abstraction and as such builds a concept. At the same time, in the spatial sense it comprises just "all-the-relations-there-is" and hence conditions the whole of later conceptualized Greek geometry.

"Is this, then, the Truth?" de Santillana asks. Non-being--as a "Non-body-of-my-thought"--is non-thinkable, "is not to be spoken of." The answer, therefore, must be Yes. But we have no organ "that can be imagined as grasping Being." "This is indeed the first time in which thinking has to mean "being aware" in an explicitly different sense than that of perceiving or imagining through phantasia." (Ibid.) And this "being aware" in the course of time and under new conditions just developed into the modern measuring sciences.

6

Exactly this idea of the abstract "space" in the sense of a "homogeneous plenum"--if de

Santillana is right in this interpretation of Parmenides--realizes the concern of all theoretical sciences: to find the substrate of things, the One that unifies the Many, the Pythagorean numbers or the Euclidean points having positions, relations to each other, and so defining the homogenous geometric background for all that happens in reality. The non-limit as bearer of position and number itself carries in it the very determination of position and other forms of the limit. As mentioned above, for example, the concept of "parameters" represents just such a "non-limit." Any logical concern with such ideas brings forth the idea of the homogeneous continuum underlying it, some kind of "substances"--eventually even bringing forth the idea of the "irrational," the "existence" of which, nevertheless, is "not to be spoken of"--at least until new forms of awareness of concepts have been generated (cf. ibid, p. 102).

So, on this complex background, outside geometry "mathematical theory" cannot be anything but a general numerical theory of magnitudes, of "values" in this sense, representing exactly such specified abstracta and "homogenous plena" based on the equally abstract concept of congruence and identity.

We really have to acknowledge this Parmenidean breakthrough of about 480 B.C. in a revolutionary way, as generating these non-material, therefore merely linguistically (possibly numerically) expressible abstracta, just what Hegel described as Begriffe, or--in the terms of Cotterill--the development from more or less diffuse qualia-based notions to exactly defined logical concepts produced under the condition of "probing-by-proxied-movements" on the basis of literalized language.

However, an essential moment not to be forgotten in this connection is the mentioned postulate of the participation of the Goddess herself, Aphrodite Ourania. Why this divine ingredient in this conceptual generation? Her ideal existence, certainly, must be grounded on contemporary mythic-religious rites (especially in the secret religious "lodges" of Elea and the Pythagoreans). Consequently we must ask how there could emerge the mode of abstract conceptual thinking that Hegel had in mind. Our attempt to answer this question will lead us into further domains of generative dialectics.

c) Rappaport and "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual"

To take this further step we shall refer to the essay "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual" by Roy A. Rappaport, reprinted in his book Ecology, Meaning, and Religion (1979). If we accept that Parmenides' ritualistic background cannot be quite contingent but must have some relevance to the development of his "Way of Truth" then we must take notice also of this profound analysis of the meaning of ritual and liturgy in general.

Like Hegel, de Santillana saw the Parmenidean "Way of Truth" as the "transition from the stage of Vorstellung to the stage of Begriff" and called the overture to the Parmenides' poem "a grandiose and mythical adventure" led by the great Goddess Aphrodite Ourania. So Parmenides' journey behind the "Pillars of Day and Night" must itself be characterized as a grandiose

generative event, even an epochal one in terms of philosophy. Below we shall again compare this "generative event" to other simpler, "objective" measurement events (and to equalization and comparison events in general, for example, payments on commodity markets), thereby defining their mutual analogy.

We shall therefore suppose that Rappaport's essay too defines a "generative event," being a study of religious experiences essential to all mankind in the form of rituals, and we shall attempt on this basis to give a formal definition of such an event. Our purpose is not to declare all such "events" to be similar, nor to affirm the necessity of religious experiences in philosophical and scientific work, but rather to reveal the similarity of their forms and dialectical structures that establishes them as analogous. In short, we shall show each of these forms to be representative of the same general form of "generative event," the key structure of generative dialectics.

Rappaport distinguishes between two double-negative concepts, one defined as the unfalsifiable, the other as the undeniable. He relates unfalsifiability to the "sacral" aspect of ritual and the concept of the "numinous"--thereby referring to Rudolph Otto (1926)--to ritual's undeniable aspect. Finally he defines ritual as such as the unification of these--in themselves contradictory--conceptual structures. In the traditional manner of dialectic, we recognize these aspects to be distinguishable but inseparable.

In the sense of logic we must here distinguish between "outer" negations of a statement (sentence) in the sense of denial (traditionally indicated by the sign ¬: "It is not true that...") and "inner" negations of the predicate in the sense of "not" (indicated by the sign ~). It will then be possible to give a quite formal--or, as Rappaport calls it himself, a "meta-logical"--definition, first, of these two aspects of ritual singly and, finally, of ritual as one behavioral whole.

7

To achieve this, let us try to interpret these expressions in words and then by means of logical signs to give these dialectical concepts their formal definitions. We shall use the signs f for false; w for "true" (= not-false); finally, we introduce the terms s for the simple ostensive form of expression and m for the manifest ostensive form of expression to indicate that to the minds of the participants themselves these religious experiences indubitably emerge out of the ritual situation as such. We then obtain the following definitions (where !, opposite to ¬, means "It is true that..."):

> The Numinous (undeniable): It is not possible to declare this simple ostensive false:
>
> ¬ s/ε f (= /ε ~ w). [It is not true that s is false (= is not-true)]

> The Sacred (unfalsifiable): This manifest ostensive is declared in principle non-false: !m/ε ~ *f* (= /ε w). [It is true that m is not-false (= is true)]

It is of interest here that Rappaport relates the "numinous" in the sense of the undeniable to forms of anthropogenetic evolution, thereby viewing language as a specific moment emerging from the very process of ritualization to be found, indeed, even among animals--this being also a central theme of GA, the introduction of the sign to establish the acculturation of anthropoid groups. On the other hand, behaviorally these domains of falsity and non-falsity can be controlled by "probe-by-proxied-movement" tactics in the sense of Cotterill, and thereby in the given social context threaten ritual-breaking participants with excommunication or other difficulties. On this basis human ritualizations may easily have developed out of forms of animal ritualization, generating the stable ethological background necessary for symbolization (e.g., language) to emerge. Hence ritualization might be the necessary generative moment not referred to by de Santillana. The crucial moment here is that any confirmed form of falsifiability as such (as well as its opposite, unfalsifiability) must be viewed precisely as the consequence of ritualization in general and the creation of language in particular. So the negation marker "not" of the primary formulae could directly refer to some breaking out of that ritual "invariance," indicating a kind of "more" or "less" ("hybris") or simply refer to the general ability of developed language (possessing the declarative sentence) to combine words more freely than ritual had originally prescribed.

Formally, therefore, the evolution undeniabililiy → unfalsifiabililiy may be expressed by the transition: ¬ s/ε *f* → !m/ε ~ *f* ≈ $(\not> \ \& \ \not<)$ – but notice that this last term seemingly involves comparison, decision, etc. That is, on the basis of the undeniabililiy of the simple ostensive "impossibility of stating something false" (cf. Parmenides!) there follows (temporally, logically) the certainty of the corresponding manifest ostensive (predication, judgment) emerging under ritual conditions as unfalsifiable. This would in common language mean that such social predications--here in the sense of the ritually defined sacred--are always true, that is, representing the social "Truth." However, this "Truth" must concern the whole ritual situation, including its sacred utterances and their meaning, taken as an originary form of the manifest ostensive; this truth is opposed to that of the declarative, truth in the sense of the rightness of individual linguistic or numerical propositions. In our connection here, however, the negative term "un-false" is of quite special interest. In the light of the discussion above about the decision made in reading the measurement device, this means precisely that we cannot make such singularized truths "sure" in any other way than--under the given conditions--by deciding them to be so, that is, just un-false, respectively by "believing" in their non-falsity as expressed by the complex predicative $(\not> \ \& \ \not<)$ of the neither-more-nor-less (**N**> & **NC**>).

However, a severe problem is veiled in this formal expression. On the one hand, the predicative $(\not> \ \& \ \not<)$ presupposes as mentioned above predicative expressions the truth-value of which must be either decided or simply "inherited" through correct logical deduction. This must be considered an unsound condition. On the other hand, the predicative $(\not> \ \& \ \not<)$ in the sense of

the neither-more-nor-less (**N**> & **NC**>) also presupposes a conscious decision-making in a concrete situation of intellectual "navigation" among different questions at issue. This cannot be a valid model for understanding rites more often experienced as behavioral wholes rather than singular examinations of the environment.

These objections might be related to Parmenides' abstraction of space (according to de Santillana) defined as the comprehensive One, the homogeneous plenum containing nothing but relations, "all-the-relations-there-is." This, indeed, must be the very foundation of geometry in the form in which we have inherited it from the Greeks--but only its "foundation." This apprehension of "space" is the condition for all subsequent geometrical knowledge and single geometrical "laws" formulated, for example, in Euclid's Elements. These Euclidean "truths" must necessarily be seen on the background of the "Truth" of Parmenides.

8

On the basis of Rappaport's essay these formal considerations can be related to de Santillana's discussion of Parmenides. First Rappaport states, concerning the principal concepts of the sacred, the numinous and ritual as such:

> It is of interest that sacred propositions and numinous experiences are the inverse of each other. Ultimate sacred postulates are discursive but their significance is not material. Numinous experiences are immediately material (they are actual physical and psychical states) but they are not discursive. Ultimate sacred postulates are unfalsifiable; numinous experiences are undeniable. In ritual's union ultimate sacred propositions thus seem to partake of the immediately known and undeniable quality of the numinous. That this is logically unsound should not trouble us for, although it may make problems for logicians, it does not trouble the faithful. In the union of the sacred and the numinous the most abstract and distant of conceptions are bound to the most immediate and substantial of experiences. (Rappaport 1979, p. 217)

The assumptions of this quotation from Rappaport can very well be viewed as throwing some further light on Parmenides' ideas according to de Santillana. So the Parmenidean One, assumed to represent abstract "space" in the sense of the "ultimate sacred" learned on the "Way of Truth" is clearly discursive; the whole hexameter poem (at least its first partly preserved part) is one great logical discourse. It is even "a Hieros Logos, a Sacred Discourse," as de Santillana says. In this sense, in the words of Rappaport, the significance of its postulates is "not material"; that is, it is abstract. On the other hand, "in ritual's union ultimate sacred propositions . . . partake of the immediately known and undeniable quality of the numinous." That is, these "sacred propositions" are endowed with the quality of undeniable "evidence" that according to the quotation must be based on the "immediately material" in the sense of actual physical and psychic states (presumably of the celebrants). This sense of evidence that even modern readers of Parmenides' poem feel so strongly is just the feeling of the undeniability of

the "numinous" according to Rappaport. Precisely in this sense, therefore, we may conclude that Parmenides expresses something at the same time evidently undeniable and discursively unfalsifiable; that is, he expresses a teaching, or doctrine, learned probably through some religious experience related to Aphrodite Ourania.

Rappaport's essay contains other remarks of great interest in connection with this last comment. If in the light of the Parmenidean "Way of Truth" we consider the analysis of the discursive sacred in relation to our previous analysis of the temperature measurement process, taken as our general model of measurement praxis, then, indeed, we find also on this point astonishing parallels. Rappaport writes:

> I would hesitantly suggest that the notion of the divine has at least four features. First, while divine objects may be incarnated, the quantity of the divine itself is not material in any ordinary sense. Second, the divine exists, or, rather, has being. It is not deemed to be, simply, a law, like the laws of thermodynamics, or an abstraction, like truth, but a being, like Zeus. Third, it is powerful, or efficacious. It has the ability to cause effects. Finally, it is something like alive. It possesses something like vitality. To use Rudolph Otto's term, it is "urgent." (Rappaport 1979, p. 215)

What Rappaport here "hesitantly" suggests is certainly, on the one hand, in most beautiful accord with our measurement analysis. The aim of measurement is to determine "values," here the value of a given temperature; but we have assumed that a "value," too, may have different forms depending on the conceptualization that generated it, that is, abstracted it as "value." All this will be even more striking if we interpret "values" in the more specific sense of economic values of commodities being "measured" by purchase on the market. Just in this form "measurements" are certainly most essential to the whole way of material life in society today and so also most relevant material for "probing-by-proxied-movements." Consequently, in a society built on an universal interest in manipulating physical, economic, and other abstracta, here called "values," these values and their material carrier-bodies will be just such "mystical" (cf. Marx: "fetishist") "divine objects," generally endowed with specific social meanings.

In this last quotation about this "divine object," Rappaport even challenges the Pauline opposition between the "Christ" kata sarka (i.e., "Christ according to the flesh") and the "new," mystical nature of Christ in his own teachings. Incarnation here means an implicit acceptation of the "monophysite" view of Christ and of humans in general. In this connection we even notice that this "sacred" value is quantitatively incarnated, that is, the "sacred" as such indicates or itself "contains" a certain quantity of this divine moment, even if this "is not material in any ordinary sense." Hence, secondly, such values "exist," they "have being" and this even in a powerful way. The final point by Rappaport could perhaps be more difficult to assess. But if, following Karl Marx and others, we accept specific economic and socially essential "value" as the product of productive human labor, that is, of a form of the very human vitality

over time, then we really, like Otto, might call this determining moment of the market economy "urgent"--although not necessarily associated with Zeus himself or other Gods or Goddesses.

9

Although the concept of "value"/"the sacred" would be unthinkable without language, it seems common sense to suggest, first, that possibly language and the social order founded on language could not have emerged without any support of the numinous, nor possibly numbers without reference to socially interesting magnitudes and other values of some kind--and, secondly, that natural sciences could not have emerged at all without mathematical support and implicit knowledge about "space" as such. Exactly counting and measuring are the intentional processes in which material things are ideally reduced, or converted, into abstractions, to mere idealized carriers of "values."

However, a most essential problem of language as well as of magnitudes is that both may lie. Therefore, the general need for socially accepted, confirmed, invariance of religious liturgy as well as the equally confirmed invariance of scientific praxis and the terms used to generate real truth; such generation, or "production," must follow the most generally accepted sacred laws of identity and, correspondingly, a generally accepted ("sacred"!) methodical ("meta-scientific") "law" of scientific work as such. However, this again actualizes the opposition mentioned above between the "logical" (= true) prepositions and the "meta-logical" conceptualization of the One; between the true Euclidean sentences and the Truth of the Parmenidean "space" as the homogenous plenum; between "scientific" work and the fundamental, more philosophical, "meta-scientific" forms of work. All of these "meta-"terms contain moments that must necessarily be implicitly accepted as fundamental to the very ways of thinking and arguing--presumably contained simply in the specific syntaxes of the languages or formula systems used--and hence endows the concepts in question with the necessary unquestionable, just undeniable evidence (an immediately felt truth) under the given social/historical conditions. This unquestionable evidence transcends in a fundamental way all questions about more specific qualitative and quantitative congruencies and identities, the "neither-being-more-nor-less" and so prepares for the sacral "Word," the "Logos" (cf. St. John 1.1), and the very "Truth."

Rappaport himself expresses this idea as follows:

> At the very least they [lie and alternatives] pose problems to any society whose structure is founded upon language, which is to say all human societies. I have therefore argued that if there are to be words at all it is necessary to establish The Word, and that The Word is established by the invariance of liturgy. It may be at least suggested, furthermore, that it emerged phylogenetically as some expressions drawn from the burgeoning language of earlier hominids were absorbed into, and subordinated to, the invariance of already existing nonverbal rituals which seem to be common in the animal world. (Rappaport 1979, pp. 210-11)

So, we might take Parmenides' "Way of Truth" to mean exactly this "sacred" articulation of this "Word" opposite to other words, the True "One," which--even if originally generated in the name of the most powerful and life-giving Aphrodite Ourania--has value also in the modern secular and scientific world. Therefore again:

> One important difference [between language and ritual] is implied in the opposition of Word to words. All natural languages consist of words and sets of rules for combining them into meaningful utterances. While these rules restrict how things may be said they do not themselves restrict what things may be said, and it is possible in any language to say whatever there is vocabulary available to say. In contrast, to the degree that a liturgical [or scientific] order is invariant there are obviously restrictions being placed upon what it can communicate. In the extreme case what it can communicate is reduced to unity. . . Therefore, ordinary language easily accommodates argument, nuance, graduation, and modification, but liturgical language does not. A liturgy [like the "meta-science"] does not argue, but it may [ostensively] assert. . . . The rigidity of liturgical [and in some restricted sense also natural "law" and scientific] discourse, in contrast, is such that it can represent whatever is concerned to be never-changing [natural or social identities, abstract "values," "substances," etc.], and changes in it may be taken to be pathological: erroneous, unorthodox, inefficacious, unhallowed, heretical, or blasphemous. In short, natural languages are open codes; liturgies, although they must use the words of language, are more or less constricting orders. It may be suggested that the very act of confining words that may also appear in the free and loose usage of ordinary discourse to the places assigned to them in liturgy emphasizes that liturgies [as well as scientific paradigms and syntagms] are restrictive orders standing against the possibility of unrestricted disorder. (Rappaport 1979, p. 203; insertions by R.Sw.)

d) Thinking in the form of anticipation

Let us follow up the above discussion by recurring briefly to our initial definition of measurement. On the basis of the distinction between the different forms of negation we now shall introduce the new sign <x|y> to characterize the fundamental function of anticipation; <x| indicates an acknowledged initial situation in which an actualized future state or event |y> is anticipated. So y necessarily has to be defined as the positive (necessary, not accidental) negation (the contra-affirmation, **C**) of x, y= **C**x. If this was not the case it would have been impossible to experience any form of causal, logical or other form of entailment between events. Without the function of anticipation all change would be nothing but inexplicable "random walk." No "meanings" would be found at all. But this also means that anticipation as a temporary intentional function introduces time and hence an essential moment of generativity as defined above; through anticipation we "construct" in a self-referentially "meaningful" way what we are "seeing" as being just "our" experience. So, anticipation also defines the very

moment of creativity in humans and other living organisms that anticipate aspects of the future, even in the more abstract sense of deducing unfalsifiable conclusions from logical (predicative) judgments. On this general basis we shall attempt the unification of Rappaport's double definition into one single formal schema taking our starting point in

10

defining the results of the measuring operation by means of double negation in the sense of the generative dialectics:

"undeniability"	→	**"unfalsifiability"**
¬ s/ε *f*	→	!m/ε ~ *f* ≈ (⊁ & ⊀)
experience	→	predicative declaration
observation	→	decided identity
It would be false to declare the temperature 25° C to be false; i.e., it cannot be false to accept the temperature measure 25° C.	→	After intense observation I decide that neither ⊁ 25° C nor ⊀ 25° C is the case; i.e., I declare "not being false" to mean the "truth" of declaring the measured temperature to be = 25° C on the basis of the concept of "identity" defined by the predicative (⊁ & ⊀) .

The transition from observation to decision using the terms of the simple (s) and manifest (m) ostensives we may define thus (where "manifest" means a historically developed contra-affirmatively defined form of operativity):

m ≈ **C**s ; or: !m/ε w = **C**¬ s/ε *f* = !**C**s/ε w.

Finally, this transition defines itself an anticipatory process analogous to the generative ritual process in which the "sacred" itself is anticipatorily defined as actualized on the basis of a realized (experienced) "numinous" moment. That is, we may also define the sacred (**s**) as the contra-affirmation of the numinous (**n**). So we get the

definition of the ritual situation as a whole through the socially conditioned anticipation

<¬ s|!m> ≈ <~ *f* | (⊁ & ⊀) >, or <(**s**)|(**n**)>.

The same mode of argument was used above to define the real, so to speak, "scientific" (as well as economic, etc.) measurement of magnitudes (parameter values) in contrast to the simple everyday reading of thermometers (prices, etc.). The formal analogy between such everyday operations, Parmenides' finding the very "Way of Truth" and Rappaport's logic of rituals, the "numinous" and the "sacred" is remarkable. These three generative processes form a kind of evolutionary stepladder, the first step of which is clearly embedded in the animal world, the second in the religious world, and the third in the logical (predicative) world that emerged in Antiquity, the--until now--uppermost step leading up to the modern (mathematical and other) sciences. The defining term connecting these intentional domains is the same, exactly that of the generative (literal) dialectics $(\nmid \& \nmid)$.

e) Final comments

At this point we may ask how this theory of cultural genesis relates to Eric Gans's Generative Anthropology (GA), with its hypothetical "originary scene of representation." This "scene" with its "abortive sign" was proposed as the generative event preparing for the development of language and the function of symbolization and so for human culture in general. It has been objected to GA that this "scene" is too appropriatively defined and therefore fails to reflect to a sufficient degree the more general "social intelligence" based on complex inter-individual relationships in the groups of apes and other higher mammals now living. Hence the question must be whether the theory of GA including its critique can be reflected within the framework of the dialectical theory proposed here, primarily on the basis of Rappaport's essay.

However, in the light of the theories of de Santillana and Rappaport there is, perhaps, no longer any real contradiction at all. Imagine again Gans's hypothetical group of anthropoids, everyone equipped with dangerous canines and collected around a large beast of prey, all of them strongly obsessed with getting a big piece of the flesh for himself. As so often in the animal kingdom these "socially intelligent" pre-humans had learned some way of ritualizing their aggressive behavior into more peace-securing modes in order to prevent a disastrous fight of all-against-all. Presumably we must seek the solution of the anthropogenetic problem in the very transition from the non-verbal to the verbal form of group life (society) that Rappaport suggested to be an essential aspect of the transition from the "numinous" to the inclusion of "sacred" aspects of ritual. However, we may possibly have to assume the "numinous" to be just as dependent on its "sacred" contra-affirmation as the latter is on the "numinous" itself. This we attempted to formalize above as the anticipation defined $\langle \neg\, s|\ !m\rangle \approx \langle \sim f \mid (\nmid \& \nmid)\rangle$, where indeed $(\nmid \& \nmid)$ was characterized as the discursively "decided truth."

11

But this interpretation needs further comment. Presumably, as just suggested, the "numinous" as such will not be experienced by any animal, as opposed to feelings of panic in a situation of crisis. Of course, we cannot know, but I think we have to assume this as a matter of fact, even as a precondition for all further arguments. Consequently we must assume that no animal

ritualization immediately leads to proper "rituals" and "liturgies" in the human sense. Hence we have to revise the merely analytic formalisms above based on Rappaport. What formal relationship between "aggressive behavior" and the "ritualized behavior" of the hypothetical hominids has to be acknowledged here? Is it the relationship of (analytic) negation **N**, simply stating "ritualized behavior" to be non-aggressive behavior? I don't think so. Even "ritualized behavior" is certainly aggressive, however positively transformed. We defined this form of negation as the contra-affirmation **C**. Calling "aggressive behavior" p we therefore shall call "ritualized behavior" a "no-longer" aggressive (rather than a non-aggressive) behavior, **C**p.

At the opposite pole from Rappaport's contrastive definition we find the "sacred" analogized to the identity-based logical judgments of, for example, Parmenides, leading to the logical and quantitative "modern sciences." This point too, however, requires a critique. We have analogized this "identity," homogenous abstract spatiality, to the constancy, permanence, and so on of all ritual behavior as basic to the notion of "eternity." Now, on the one hand, as always we have in the case of anticipation to define the right actualized side of the opposition |y> as the contra-affirmation of the left confirmed one <x| . If we call this logical, identity-based, quantitative scientific q from the anticipation formula <p|q> we must here also write q = **C**p; however, the "sacred" q cannot be the simple contra-affirmation of the primordial p (as the temporal "no-longer" p) but must rather represent its double-contra-affirmation **CC**p, that is, represent the contra-affirmation of the primordial q, that is, be **C**q. In this sense, therefore, "sacred eternity" (as a temporal "not-yet q") contra-affirms the modern concept of substantial or temporal identity. In the same sense p is contra-affirmed as **C**p but here too when q = **C**p we nevertheless must say that **C**p ≠ q. We notice the important distinction to be maintained between the (symmetrical) logical and the dialectical negations **N** and **C**.

Together these arguments oblige us to reinterpret the genuine "rituals" and "liturgies" formally by defining then by the predicative (**C**p & **C**q) where q = **C**p. In an anticipatory formalization, therefore, in the sense of "no longer & not yet," genuine ritual must be redefined exactly in the generative dialectical form as a "portal" opening onto new and immediately undecidable developments, of which the genesis of language (and other forms of symbolization as well as all the different "cultures" in general), later logic, market exchange, valuation and measurement, etc. are some of the more essential ones.

And exactly this term (**C**p & **C**q) also characterized the domain of life when seen from the vantage point of our speechless hypothetical insects (cf. figure 2 above). From this "portal" of undecidedness too new and unpredictable life forms sprout.

But we should also notice the remarkable formal similarity between the "Word," the "One," and even the hypothetical (abortive) "Sign" of GA--all of them just being negatively defined: without syntax, without (theological, geometrical, or other) sentence generation, and so on. Or, more positively (contra-affirmatively) and promisingly expressed, all of these "pre-concepts" represent forms of plena characterized by the term of the "not-yet," being "not-yet"-syntactical,

therefore making theological, geometrical, or other sentences "not-yet"-possible ("not-yet" Euclidean geometry, Galilean/Newtonian physics and mechanics, political economy, etc.)--but, on the other hand, "no-longer" animal (in earlier times therefore presumed "unconscious"!). And, finally, all of these comprehensive "pre-concepts" are generated in (real, presupposed, or hypothetical) extreme emotional situations--the importance of which is later intellectually, even very passionately(!) negated.

So we note the essential difference between the language-specific dialectical formulas

$$(\mathbf{N}p \,\&\, \mathbf{N}q) \Rightarrow \text{Identity}$$

and the generative dialectical one, the "portal"

$$(\mathbf{C}p \,\&\, \mathbf{C}q) \Rightarrow \mathbf{?!}$$

Literature

Rodney Cotterill (1998): Enchanted Looms. Conscious Networks in Brains and Computers. Cambridge University Press.

Wolfgang Lefèvre (1981): "Rechensteine und Sprache. Zur Begründung der wissenschaftlichen Mathematik durch die Pythagoreer." In: Peter Damerow und Wolfgang Lefèvre (Eds.): Rechenstein, Experiment, Sprache. Historische Fallstudien zur Entstehung der exakten Wissenschaften. Klett-Cotta.

Roy A. Rappaport (1979): "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual." In: Ecology, Meaning, and Religion. North Atlantic Books, Richmond, California.

Giorgio de Santillana (1968): "Prologue to Parmenides." In: Reflections on Men and Ideas. First M.I.T. Press Paperback Edition, 1970.

Anthropoetics subscribers may copy or download this text from the network, but its distribution or publication shall constitute an infringement of the Author's copyright.

Anthropoetics - The Journal of Generative Anthropology

Volume IX, number 1 (Spring/Summer 2003)
ISSN 1083-7264
URL: http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/
Email: anthro@humnet.ucla.edu

Anthropoetics IX, 1 Benchmarks

This issue of **Anthropoetics** illustrates both the intellectual scope and the international appeal of **Generative Anthropology**; its four authors are from four different countries other than the USA, and their subjects range from Aristotelian poetics to African victimology. **Jean-Loup Amselle's** focus on resentment and the victimary displays an affinity with **GA** that has been remarked on in the work of this distinguished French anthropologist. **Fabio Brotto,** a major proponent of **GA** in Italy, adds to the variety of our literary analyses with a study of a work many have called the major Italian novel of the 20th century. **Christopher Morrissey,** known to many readers for his activity on the **GAlist,** derives a wealth of conclusions from an anomaly in Aristotle's discussion of the Oedipus, and **Raymond Swing,** in his second article for **Anthropoetics**, attempts a bold dialectical synthesis of anthropological and natural-scientific thought, from neurology to the anthropology of religion to **GA**.

About our Contributors

Jean-Loup Amselle is attached to the Centre d'études africaines (Center for African Studies) and directs the doctoral program in anthropology at the EHESS (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales - Faculty of Advanced Study in the Social Sciences). He also edits the Cahiers d'etudes africaines. His main areas of interest are historical and political anthropology, Africa, ethnicity, identity, hybridity, multiculturalism, and African contemporary art. He has done field work in Mali, Ivory Coast, and Guinea. His main publications are: Ed. (with E. M'Bokolo), Au coeur de l'ethnie (Paris, La découverte, 1985); Logiques métisses, Anthropologie de l'identité en Afrique et ailleurs (Paris, Payot, 1990, 1999), English translation, Mestizo Logics, Anthropology of Identity in Africa and elsewhere, Stanford, 1998); Vers un multiculturalisme français, L'empire de la coutume, Paris, Aubier, 1996, English translation Affirmative Exclusion, Cultural and the Rule of Custom in France, Cornell University Press, 2003; Branchements, Anthropologie de l'universalité des cultures, Flammarion, 2001.

Fabio Brotto graduated in philosophy at the University of Padua in 1974 with a dissertation on John Dewey's gnoseology. He teaches Italian, Latin and Comparative literature at Liceo Ginnasio Antonio Canova in Treviso, Italy. His recent publications are Divenire Nulla (Becoming Nothing), Giacobino, Susegana 2000, and Una prospettiva antropologica per la letteratura (An Anthropological Perspective for Literature), Antonio Canova working papers n.1, Treviso 2002. With his web site www.bibliosofia.net he does his best to make GA and mimetic theory known in Italy.

Christopher S. Morrissey (PGP email: Key ID 0x6DD0285F) teaches Ancient Greek, Latin, and Classical Mythology at Simon Fraser University, where he also studies mimetic theory and generative anthropology as a Special Arrangements Ph.D. candidate. His area of research is Aristotle, Greek tragedy, and Shakespeare, in which he is preparing a book that integrates Aristotelian thought with the work of René Girard and Eric Gans. Previous studies have focused on Aristotle's Physics. Other interests include music, cinema and computer hacking. His consulting company, More C Communications Inc., specializes in database projects, and has developed a proprietary program for generating concordances of Greek and Latin texts. He also works with Prof. David C. Mirhady on NOMOI, the Bibliography Database on Ancient Greek Law, which is part of a larger research project on Athens' Democratic Judges.

Raymond Swing studied music at the conservatory in Aalborg, Denmark and theory and history at the Humboldt University in Berlin, DDR. He taught in Denmark as a schoolteacher for thirty years. Since retiring in 1987, he has devoted his energies to his interdisciplinary interests in philosophy and what he calls Formal and Generative Dialectics, based partly on Marx but also involving physics, biology, economics, history, culture, and the philosophy of science. He is a contributor to the Europäische Enzyklopädie zu Philosophie und Wissenschaften. In the course of summer 2003 some of his essays and articles (English and Danish) will be available at http://home20.inet.tele.dk/swing.

Return to Anthropoetics home page | Return to Anthropoetics IX, 1

Eric Gans / gans@humnet.ucla.edu
Last updated: