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## Generative Anthropology and Cultural Sexuality

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Our analytical point of departure concerns Generative Anthropology's notion of a "scene of exchange" which occurs as a secondary "phase" of the whole originary event. This scene serves to resolve the appetitive drive which has been temporarily deferred in favor of the preservation of the community. Gans interprets this scene "formally" insisting that it

involves the establishment of non-institutions of exchange; for this to be the case, the desire-object would have to be specified (say as a bison captured by a band of hunters) so that an institutional form of division could be achieved.<sup>1</sup>

Our contention is the following: if appetitive drive is defined dichotomously in the first place as alternatively corporeal/sexual or material/alimentary, can we understand the promised erasure of object-specificity alone as a plausible circumvention of an institutional choice? Gans' prioritization of a broadly materialist foundation for human freedom curiously suppresses the possibility that sexual activity may constitute a specific originary scene and a distinct cultural category with a set of ethical/esthetic criteria all its own. On the scene of "exchange"—a purportedly formal term which conceals its own materialist/economic bias—the portioning and shared possession of an originary object anticipates a cultural evolution that hinges on the categories of the representational, the ethical, the esthetic, and economic exchange. Our *formal* contribution

to Generative Anthropology then concerns the necessarily dichotomous potential of the scene of appetitive satisfaction. Any empirical analysis of the exordium of culture should then address the twin phenomena of economic exchange and sexual activity.

Gans assures us that Generative Anthropology may "without difficulty integrate within itself the results of positive anthropology" (End of Culture 99). However successfully Generative Anthropology explains the phenomena of agrarian economy, ritual art, and mythology in primitive society, it fails to incorporate the vast implications of anthropological data concerning human sexuality as a central component of cultural evolution. In fact, it seems to dismiss these elements summarily with the assertion that: "the difference of the sexes is marked from the beginning of culture but this difference does not suffice to make sexuality itself culturally significant" (End of Culture 274).

As a plausible alternative to Generative Anthropology's originary model of culture, William Irwin Thompson, in his book *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light*, develops a theory of human origin founded on the specificity of human sexuality. Thompson presents abundant evidence which has been culled from artifactual as well as mythopoeic sources, and that demonstrates the irrefutable preeminence of sexuality in elementary culture. He reports that

the very language we use to discuss the past speaks of tools, hunters, and men, when every statue and painting we discover cries out to us that this Ice Age humanity was a culture of art, the love of animals, and women.<sup>2</sup>

All of the artifactual evidence which Thompson adduces to support his theory of primitive matrilineage, the religion of the Great Goddess, and divine iconographics that are sexual in content, remain starkly absent from Generative Anthropology's positive plan. Moreover, Thompson provides a more integral empirical scheme because he attributes cultural evolution to both economic and sexual factors. At the watershed of early egalitarian society toward patterns of human dominance lies a "new economic order" and a recognition of biological paternity (156).

Thompson indeed offers a pictorially fascinating scenario. But we cannot place a great deal of confidence in his self-proclaimed mythologizing as a cohesive heuristic for investigating contemporary phenomena. While Generative Anthropology provides a lapidary

analysis of the modern market, Thompson fails, in particular, to develop a formal theory of "cultural sexuality" which might elucidate some of the more pivotal aspects of modern sexual revolutionary trends. A proposed theory of "cultural sexuality" as such, derived from the originary hypothesis, would depend on two categorical imperatives—those, in fact, which comprise the unique position of Generative Anthropology: the evenemential nature of human origin and representation as the founding category of that origin. These components guarantee a *formal* model whose claims to synchronic truth provide the framework for an analysis of the fundamental categories of culture. However, Thompson's scheme derails on both of these counts: it refutes an evenemential point of departure and situates language as an epiphenomenon in primitive culture. Subsequently, the most he can seem to say about the contemporary sexual scene is that

sexuality creates individuals; many cannot stand an individual existence and so they seek to return: to the womb, to the herd, to the church, to the totalitarian state. Sexuality creates individuals and then has to face the conflict of individuals moving in all their different directions for comfort in mother, herd, church, and state. (54)

The ominous moral and political implications of this statement never achieve theoretical fruition in Thompson's work.

His gradualistic theory of origins turns upon a biological phenomenon: the evolution from estrus to menstruation in female hominids represents the "human revolution" (77). The concomitant "eroticization of time" (72) augments the *symbolic* value of sexual activity and unleashes a human imaginative potential in the expression of physical intimacy. But the fervid and unyielding pursuit of libidinal gratification eventuates in a "highly volatile situation," in which "some form of sexual repression and control would have to be established" (77). Hence, the potential liberatory function of specifically "human" sexuality—that which transcends any prehuman biological limitations and precedes any historical "moral" limitations—represents little more than an egocentric flight from the nascent "political" order. The subject is ever-torn between individual freedom and integration into the community. In fact, as Thompson's discursive statement about sexuality creating "individuals" and the will to return to the "herd" indicates, individual freedom will never coincide with communal presence.

The repressive forces to which Thompson alludes, but that he never defines bring about an incondite social structuration based both on gender polarization and the division of labor. This theory remains at an institutional or practical level because it considers the preservation of the community only in terms of equality and the satisfaction of needs. Relative egalitarianism is maintained only *at the expense of* the satisfaction of individual desire. Thompson does not recognize that a genuine ethical preservation of the community depends on both general equality and expanding opportunities for individual significance or "freedom."

Generative Anthropology offers instead a formal "dialectic" of culture based on the co-presence of a public ritual sphere which is always virtual, and of a private social "real" sphere. The former may be said to establish the concept of value and guarantee equality; the latter may be said to usher in ever-expanding opportunities for individual freedom. This "freedom"—which is associated with material acquisition—belongs, in particular, to those early "big men" whose superior economic productivity affords them a more and more centralized position in society. In this way, Generative Anthropology's scheme may be thought of as primarily *ethical* rather than practical: relative egalitarianism is maintained dialectically with growing opportunities for individual significance. In a few words, the ethical may be defined as the will to *self-control* in favor of equality, and as imaginative cooperation toward the enhancement of individual significance. Both of these phenomena function preeminently to preserve the community.

This delicate balance finally disintegrates, however, when the "big men" recognize the "arbitrary" status of ritual and usurp public or "sacred" centrality. Nevertheless, this ethical program provides us with a more optimistic model to which we can ascribe the salubrious functioning of the modern market. In Generative Anthropological theory, the market optimally restores this balance because relative egalitarianism is achieved through the infinite circulation of difference and the mass production of more accessible and distinctive value signs.

This formal vision of elementary culture allows us to hypothesize about the ethical and liberatory potential of cultural sexuality. With Thompson's narrow definition of sexuality in culture, we find ourselves at a frustrating impasse: what priority he affords sexuality as a *cultural* category, he retracts from sexuality as an *ethical* category.

Our point is not to defend the greater authenticity of either set of anthropological claims, but to emphasize the need to integrate the more tenable contributions made by both toward a superior heuristic for "cultural sexuality." Our restructuring of the originary event to include a scene of sexual activity and our critique of the specific criteria of that scene constitute then a secondary hypothesis. First, we will not attempt a rigorous definition of these categories, rather we will raise a number of questions concerning their potential import.

Let us suppose that the originary event occurs as the result of primitive mating activities; the central object becomes one of sexual allure. Although this object might indeed be a female, we need not attempt to validate this probability; we may speculate equally that the object is a male or even another non-hominid primate or an animal of another species. We would hypothesize rather a specific minimal criterion: that the object, whatever its biological specificity, assumes a "position" of symbolic value which invites sexual activity. This position would be an *al tergo* one in preparedness—at least, as the members perceive it—for dorsal coitus. The originary group may, and would most probably, include representatives of both genders and the rapid diffusion of sexual tension would make the object attractive to all those present.

Since, as Gans points out, "the successful completion of the originary scene in appetite satisfaction depends on the appetitive content of the object" (End of Culture 43), we can hardly think of the succeeding scene as one of equal portioning and distribution of a central "economic" object. Rather, we can conceive of a scene of general sexual activity: orgasmic release would be sought *around* the object. Sexual activity among the participants—a founding orgiastic scene—is inspired by the imagined or mental possession of the central object.

Of the economic exchange scene, Gans says that "the very nature of the hypothesis demands that in participating in the division [each member] be at least further from a state of critical tension than before."<sup>3</sup> The scene of sexual activity that *precedes* a sacrificial division of the object appears as a plausible explanation for this important reduction in tension inasmuch as sexual activity results in somatic depletion. Here, we cannot speak in terms of "gang rape" because the capital point of this activity is to defer real violence through cooperative, creative engagement. Certainly, sexual activity represents a



more tenuous collective effort than rational divvying-up of an object; but it must, by Generative Anthropological definition, preserve the community while appeasing the primary appetitive urge that caused the event in the first place. However, once orgasmic release or general enervation has been achieved, the extant object, while devoid of individual "sexual" significance, would still contain a generalized communal significance and could then be meted out in fair portions. Hence, the formal/physical moment of sexual activity would constitute a nexus between the strictly formal scene of representation and the material scene of economic exchange.

This intervening activity may then explain an *evenemential* origin for Thompson's gradualistic "eroticization of time." This scene must contain, in minimal form, all the potential for specifically human, that is, "cultural" sexuality. At the heart of cultural sexuality is the deferral of violence and imaginative, individual expression in sexual activity, which is a celebration of personal freedom. It is an "intimate act" only in a real sense of coupling or small groups, but in a virtual sense it always has a "social" functioning. It is "communally significant" in the sense that it preserves the community *synchronically* by avoiding anarchy: the quality of life is enhanced within the community by the maximum significance afforded to its members. But the fact that it implicitly preserves the community *diachronically*—that is, reproductively—cannot be an element of authentic "cultural sexuality." It is here, on the scene of sexual activity—potentially at least—that all forms of sexual diversity are born, transcending any prehuman biological or historical moral limitations. In our theory, this activity guarantees the ethical preservation of the community because it does not vitiate the functioning of the public ritual sphere. For William Thompson, this erotic explosion threatens the community and must be controlled by the practical polarization of gender groups.

Here we would insist on a synchronic imperative of "cultural sexuality": it defers violence most effectively because it is first a physical, intra-dividual contact. Gans suggests that the scene of exchange liberates the members "materially." As an originary alternative, our theory posits the importance of "physical" or corporeal liberation as a distinct category. Intimate physical engagement with the communally significant other *as a means to possession*—albeit imaginary—of sacred significance best diminishes "real" tension and potential conflict.

The members of the originary group, with their fixation on the

central object, may have "used" their partners in a way that would appear to *us* as genuinely aggressive. However, we must recognize the primacy of their functional commitment to a deferral of potentially anarchical violence.

Our second synchronic imperative for a "cultural sexuality" is that it contains no *a priori* formal specificity. In primitive culture—and throughout history at varying levels of visibility—the ever-expanding need for significance will continually spur the human imagination to abandon orthodox restraints on sexual expression. Sexual activity will always potentially spell out a celebration of originary freedom and, though ostensibly removed from primitive ritual as *the* stabilizing force of culture, its association with the sacred will never be extirpated. Ideological sexual repression will occur first at a point in history when emerging socially significant difference—both sexual and economic—begins to transform culture at large, but *not* in response to any conflict inherent to sexual activity itself (as Thompson supposes). Rather, this shift will come about as a restriction on *representational* forms of sexual activity in favor of heterosexual, reproductive activity which guarantees—albeit in a largely symbolic way—the productive prowess of paternal "big-men." The institutionalization of human sexual activity, bound up as it is in socially (re)productive heterosexuality achieves two things: first, it crystallizes for millennia the strict male/female polarization and second, it determines inter-individual rapport as that in which individuals become material objects of possession and exchange. At the dawn of intersubjective domination, culture is predominately masculine and economic.

In light of these claims, Generative Anthropology's superordination of the modern market at the expense of human sexuality seems symptomatic of a long history of repressive creeds. But we can only attack Generative Anthropology in general terms because it *summarily* rejects sexuality as a distinct and culturally significant category. In his article on Mallarmé's anthropological intuitions about the sexual specificity of cultural origins, Gans states:

Since literature has existed, sexual desire, gratuitous and "supplementary," has always provided a better ground for catharsis than the rather banal alimentary concerns. Could this be the originary cultural deformation? or a similarly privileged formulation of this? If so, have we ever—Freud included—provided a genuinely sufficient explanation of human desire?<sup>4</sup>



Of course, Gans is not the first to dismiss Freud's biologicistic model of human desire: the structuralist and post-structuralist "sexologists" have relegated human sexuality to an increasingly subordinate space—that of a secondary cultural phenomenon—until Lacan is able to assert in reference to the substitutive nature of structural desire: "the fact that everything analyzable is sexual, doesn't mean that everything sexual is analyzable."<sup>5</sup> And Foucault is able to reduce human sexuality to a "minuscule secret in each of us."<sup>6</sup> This century's early pan-sexualist pursuit of a science of the subject first as *sexual* being—promulgated by both Freud and Wilhelm Reich—gave way to the structuralist disclosure of the "anti-subject." In Generative Anthropology, the return of the subject—a return which marks, for us, the commencement of a genuinely post-modern age—is predicated on the individual "career" and the possession of private property. From our theoretical vantage point, the essential *duality* of this subject may be understood as "career/consumer" and "sexual/intimate identity."

In treating the market/sexuality dialectic, a more fruitful critique might look outside Generative Anthropology to consider the point-counterpoint theories of Reich and Foucault. We would not wish to fall into the trap of the former who, reacting against Freud's implicit moral approbation of the Oedipal model as the foundation of human "normality," categorically attributed contemporary sexual repression to the alienation and mechanization effects of early industrial society and its economically sanctioned patriarchal family. Nor would we wish to ally ourselves uncritically with Foucault who lauds the early market and the sexually "self-affirmative" bourgeois family as the auspicious locus of emerging modern sexuality in its rich diversity. Quite clearly Reich, in his fervid diatribe, misses the complexity of this dialectic. Furthermore, his model of "natural genitalia" which targets bourgeois "marriage morality" depends *a priori* on biologically exclusive heterosexual orientation. Foucault responds to Reich's biological and social determinism and essays to paint the market/sexuality dialectic in all its chiaroscuro. But Foucault's analysis of sexuality in *La Volonté de Savoir* reaches a paradoxical impasse; it is the rise of sexual discourse through religious confession and later through psychoanalytical "scientific" investigation that incites the dissemination of concrete "sexualities." But it is this very same effusion of discourse which finally vitiates the mystery, the "ars erotica," of human sexuality. The "scientia sexuales" which plagues occidental culture represents "a form of power-knowledge rigorously

opposed to the art of initiations and the magistral secret" (Foucault 78). Is one to believe that the emancipatory potential of sexual discourse has reached its hypothetical limit, either in political or ontological terms? Can we abide by the final word of Foucault's discourse on sexuality which states, in a word, "no more discourse on sexuality?" While he critiques sexual discourse itself as a modern day *bête noire*, his critique of the market seems oddly abortive: it trickles out somewhere around the turn of the century with the eruption of discourse on Freudian psychoanalysis. We must look to the likes of other post-structuralist thinkers, Jean Baudrillard for instance, to take up this challenge. In Foucault's work, the market's effect on human sexuality finishes mostly unscathed, while contemporary sexual discourse itself reeks of a pestilential "volonté de savoir."

Our point here is to maintain just the opposite: the market's ability to promote salubrious "cultural sexuality" has reached its hypothetical limit, while the discourse on sexuality—a genuine discourse of "cultural sexuality"—has only just begun. For this discourse proposes a tripartite analysis: 1) the originary synchronic criteria of culture (the representational, the ethical, and the esthetic) as the foundation for an understanding of all cultural phenomena,<sup>7</sup> 2) the fundamental diachronic dialectic of human freedom between economic and sexual activities, which are first desire-based and not need-based institutions, and 3) a progressive, potentialist model of human sexuality which we will call "bisexualism." To this date, we can not look to any modern sexologist who satisfactorily incorporates these elements into a comprehensive theory of human sexuality.

To return briefly then to our point concerning the hypothetical limitations of the modern market's salubrious effect on human sexuality, we can indicate two possible directions of investigation: what we will refer to as the twin phenomena of reification and rarification of cultural sexuality. Foucault was certainly justified in ascribing to the early market a positive effect on marital sexuality and the subsequent amplification of diverse sexualities. We can trace the reification of cultural sexuality to this unprecedented and vast economization of the "population."<sup>8</sup> In the early industrial age, individuals were needed merely to manufacture products—a condition which would not confuse these products with sexuality *per se*. More recently, with the advent of modern advertising, individuals *become* these products figuratively—the optimal example being the beautiful woman standing beside a sleek new automobile. If we look back

to our analysis of the originary scene of sexual activity, we can speak of that activity as an "abstraction" in the sense that the central object is never possessed *qua* sexual object. The unconscious, imaginative belief in this possession by the originary participants is replaced here with a subliminal "thematization" of this possibility on account of the reification tactics of modern advertising. The latter portrays and reinforces the belief in the sexual partner as an object of exchange and possession. This encourages the perception of the partner as an object of asymmetrical gratification, and not as a reciprocal partner in the pursuit of freedom. This ushers in with greater frequency the real violence lurking behind the sexual act as a gesture of complete, egocentric appropriation.

The other face of this phenomenon, the rarification of cultural sexuality, refers to an actual and potential decrease in inter-dividual coital activity as well as to the increase in autoeroticism. The proliferation of economical or convenient "signs" (pornography, cinematic idols, and so on) augments the facility and allure of autoerotic sexual activity. The decline of intimate physical contact whose premium is psychosomatic catharsis and inter-dividual significance, spells out then a greater emergence of real violence. The market's ability to increasingly rarify cultural sexuality in this way, especially since the advent of the AIDS crisis, indicates the hypothetical limit of the market's healthful contribution to the sexual sphere.

These twin phenomena and the general uneasiness they instill among conscious individuals have, we believe, perpetuated the urgent quest for subjectivity in *sexual* being. It is not, as Foucault would have us believe, theoretical discourse—discourse which aims at some "truth"—that undermines human sexuality. This undermining is the result of the market which has subsumed the distinct cultural category of sexuality. To these reification and rarification proclivities, we may also add that while the market has progressively dismantled the patriarchal order, it preserves the primacy of institutionalized heterosexuality. Early industry effaces gender distinction under the labor force, but that force is contingent upon the reproduction of its members. With recent concerns about global overpopulation and with the advance of modern technological manufacturing techniques, such a conception appears as both outmoded and inimical. We see emerging, however, the market's "realization"—that is, the human community's realization—that sexual diversity is vastly more "profitable" than sexual homogeneity. The modern market has

provided a small aperture for that part of human freedom which is originarily sexual, but only a revolutionary discourse of specifically cultural sexuality can truly tap this fountainhead of emancipation.

If Generative Anthropology promotes greater faith in the development of the modern market, what contemporary phenomenon does our theory seek to invest with augmented faith? Certainly, the market itself, but only its dialectical relation to the human sexual sphere. Within the latter, the specific phenomenon we wish to accentuate is the increased visibility of a bisexual co-culture. Though gay rights movements have been making political headway since the sixties, bisexuality has begun only recently to attract attention as a distinct and viable sexual orientation. Previously, it was

often treated as a myth, as a developmental phase that had no meaning in and of itself, or as a pathology—either a neurotic inability to choose between a heterosexual or homosexual orientation or a sign of an incapacity to make any serious emotional commitment.<sup>9</sup>

Our hope is, however, *not* to praise the “biologically” distinct category of bisexuality, but to promote an awakening from dogmatic sexual ideologies to the bisexual potential of every human being. It is our belief that gender and forms of sexual activity may be perceived as secondary differences that no longer restrict physical intimacy—sexual or other—between individuals. We look forward to a fully liberated network of potential physical intimacy—from hugging to holding to sexual contact—without “biological” or moral restraints: for this potential represents, in our opinion, the greatest of all “cultural” privileges—after that of the ethical foundation of culture itself. And for this steadily emerging cultural trend (a trend which may well achieve for the human race in the proximate future what the market has achieved in the last few centuries) we have selected the term “bisexualism.”

The individual components of bisexualism are not new: 1) the generic “cultural” or social learning theory of sexual identity and orientation. We may trace the inauguration of this phenomenon to Freud’s psychoanalytical credence in “the passion of the signifier”:<sup>10</sup> the collective socio-cultural factors which will determine the “normal” or “abnormal” course of ubiquitous latent bisexuality. But what Freud rescued from the domain of “biological illness” he relegated to a status of “psychological perversion”; bisexualism must now reinstate this cultural legacy to its originary status of “ethical potential”;

2) physical intimacy which sublimates into primarily ethical activities, guaranteeing both the peaceful preservation and the enhancement of culture,<sup>11</sup> and 3) sexual activity which is other-oriented or "intimate" before it is "orgasmic" or egocentric. We may find this pacifistic message in Lacan's description of non-narcissistic love whose "supreme interest is the care taken by the subject for the partner's 'jouissance'" (735).

What a Bisexualist model of human sexual potential has to offer is the *unique* combination of elements which have appeared dispersively in sexual theory since the late 19th century. Bisexualism asserts that exclusive "biological" sexual orientation—especially in the case of heterosexuality—is a psychosomatic condition which results from millennia of ideological inculcation. More recently, exclusive "biological" *homosexual* orientation may be attributed not only to general repressive forces but to the need for allegiance to a growing gay co-culture. Exclusive homosexual orientation on a large demographic scale as such, represents a recent historical phenomenon associated with the push to declare politically one's identity—sexual or otherwise. Our target then is institutionalized exclusive sexual orientation of either variety which promotes a limited dialogue of human sexual potential. And bisexualism seeks to dismantle in particular the great bulwark of institutionalized heterosexuality which perpetuates strict gender polarization and the economization of human subjects. We can no longer remain entrenched in a "culture," in the local sense of the term, which transmits a predominant, restrictive sexual ideology. We should begin to perceive gender difference *in its relation to* forms of sexual activity as wholly secondary—as in the case of eye color, height or weight. In the meantime, no amount of attacks on patriarchal structure, no amount of women's or men's "libbing," no amount of unisex fashion trends will effectively eradicate the origin of gender difference and human dominance patterns.

Jacques Lacan, in his essays on the phallus and feminine sexuality, has intimated the complexity of symbolic sexual attraction. But such suggestions in his work remain so shrouded in a critique of the structural foundation and *logical* outcome of sexual identities, orientations, and forms of activity that they can finally offer us little hope for a genuine circulation of secondary difference in the sphere of human sexuality. Lacan's structural explanation of generalized human desire in the infantile "mirror" stage surpasses Freud's phallogocentric, biologistic model. At this stage both genders are leveled to an equally



"lacking" ego-base. Nonetheless, Lacan's formulation of the origin of individual sexual identity at the "imaginary" stage faithfully retains the physical family structure of Freud's Oedipal model—though here identity is based on symbolic anatomical identification and not on libidinal desire or actual fear of castration. Both theories of Freud and Lacan take *a priori* as their point of departure the heterosexual nuclear family as the cross-cultural foundation for consciousness and sexual identity. This psycho-structural model seems inferior to an anthropological model such as that of Generative Anthropology because the latter's empirical base is vastly less restrictive.

Lacan's institutional *a priori* contains serious ethical implications as well. These implications grow disconcertingly in his speculation on the outcome of early structural situations at the "real" stage—a stage which he professes to largely disregard, consonant with his denial of any "cultural" ambitions. Despite this disclaimer the salient factor of the human "real," according to Lacan, is the *logical* inevitability of heterosexuality in human behavior: it functions as an optimal locus for the irrepressible and aggressive pursuit of wholeness. He remarks that "the man acts as a relay so that the woman may become this Other for herself, in the same way that she is this Other for him" (732).

In response to early feminist attacks on his refusal to surrender to the structural imperative of female genitalia depicted as symbolically lacking, Lacan posits what appears (as a logical structural implication) as an apology for this incommensurable slight of the feminine gender. He supposes, in a word, that female homosexuality constitutes a sort of "ideal love": women seek wholeness or completion less fervidly than men do because they are accustomed to "lack" from the outset. Therefore, they become "oriented on a disappointment that reinforces the side of the demand for love" (290). This renders them more fit to participate in non-narcissistic relationships. Male homosexuality, on the other hand, logically lives with aggressiveness at its egregious worst because "in accordance with the phallic mark that constitutes desire, [it] is constituted on the side of desire" (290). This conception is in step with René Girard's notion that male homosexuality derives from tendencies of acute mimetic desire. Bisexualism seeks to promote the conviction that all forms of sexual activity between consenting partners serve equally as a deferral of conflict and an incomparable source of significance and freedom. Lacan would likely respond that any sort of unisexual or bisexual



reality as such adds to the murky backwash of secondary “castration”—or secondary difference—which perpetuates the viciousness of the unconscious dialectic of desire; heterosexuality at least provides a visible marker which might lead us to a higher awareness of the mechanism functioning unawares in the human subject.

Feminists who attack Lacan for the putative phallocratic content of his theory have then rather missed the mark—we should be more vigilant in exposing his credence in the *logical* preeminence of heterosexuality in culture which does a great deal to perpetuate the institution of this sexual form. Men’s liberationists have made it indelibly clear in recent decades that they are the unwitting and increasingly unwilling inheritors of a patriarchal system which promotes its baleful effects with less gender discrimination than previously believed. But while sexual libbers look for imagined “equality” between the sexes, bisexuality—true to its origins in Generative Anthropology—seeks an infinite circulation of sexual difference. This is not to say that a discourse of bisexuality obviates the need for female/male dialectical politics any more than a discourse of the market obviates the need for a critique of culture based on the rich/poor dialectic, however superannuated that ideology may increasingly appear. Rather, we might speak of overlapping fields of discourse, one working from the top down, critically dismantling political and social superstructures; another working from the bottom up, designating cultural phenomena which, as a part of an ethical infrastructure, creatively exploit opportunities for unlimited difference, desire and significance, thus conveying humankind more and more fully toward its own originary, bright prospect.

Foucault and Gans, both poststructuralists from radically disparate schools of thought, do not prioritize diverse forms of sexual activity—socioculturally, biologically, or structurally—as their antecedent thinkers have done. But this advance appears, as we have suggested, at the expense of sexuality in general as a cultural priority.

Generative Anthropology’s conception of the end of culture as a scene of unlimited circulating difference approximates Foucault’s conception of culture which consists of “spirals of power and pleasure. One could say as well that [modern society] has—if not invented—at least carefully managed and proliferated the groups and multiple elements of a *circulating sexuality*” (62). Similarly, Gans’ notion of “resentment” as a productive dynamic of culture comes very close to Foucault’s definition of “power”: power contains “points of resistance everywhere which are mobile and transitory” and it has

"a directly productive role" (124-26). Both theories hinge on conceptions of circulating difference and networks of highly diffused resistance. At this point, a nominalist reduction of the two theories seems a not unlikely gambit.

Methodologically speaking, Foucault's "images" remain securely ensconced in the neutrality of an "histoire"; he makes no claims to synchronic truth and eschews any "scientific" investigation toward a *positive* meta-theory. This is why we are left somewhat nonplussed by the fact that *his* discourse on sexuality survives its own *ukase* about the necessary repudiation of sexual discourse. The paradoxical double bind of a culture that is "always already" and a discourse which bids adieu to discourse, is never satisfactorily reckoned with. Conversely, Generative Anthropology adopts a "scientifically" self-reflective methodology that engages in a meta-discourse of originary analysis as it relates to social prognoses. The truth claims of Generative Anthropology are doubly demonstrated: the hypothetical "origin" of culture finds its logical and *avowed* realization in the hypothetical "end of culture." Discourse, rather than turning in upon itself, unravels the complexities of a topical reality whose function is first an ethical one.

But the pivotal watershed occurs in the application of these "principles" to the analysis of contemporary cultural phenomena. Generative Anthropology founds its analysis on the formal dialectical relationship between equality and freedom and rigorously demonstrates how the market functions to achieve a salubrious balance of these counterparts. While we can challenge Generative Anthropology on the extent of its application, we cannot fault the applicability of the originary critical approach itself. In Gans' general ethical fervor and in his cultural materialist perspective, he dismisses human sexuality as a distinct cultural category. But our inheritance from Generative Anthropology remains the *possibility* that human sexual activity constitutes a specific ethical system worthy of "originary analysis."

Foucault, on the other hand, can only speculate about instances of potential individual freedom. Thus he proceeds with an alarming veneration of the "ars erotica" still prevalent in Middle eastern and eastern cultures; he overlooks the rather patent observation that these cultures have maintained more inflexible caste systems and gender polarization than western civilization which, purportedly, has lost a great source of individual freedom with its emphasis on a "scientia sexuales." In short, his concern is not an ethical one: he does

not explore the full dialectical potential of equality and freedom. He exalts "corporeal pleasure" as an optimal mode of rethinking human intimacy, but he rejects "sex desire" as an ethical category. He highlights instances of greater personal freedom rather than exploring possibilities for "the greatest good for the greatest number."

We would neither want to accuse Foucault of a facile, solipsistic escapism nor Gans of a facile, meliorist humanism; post-structuralist thought, as a matter of course, seeks to transcend such limitations. This caveat notwithstanding, we shall conclude that a theory of sexuality as "ars erotica" can never possibly provide an adequate heuristic for a culture whose originary impetus is an ethical one, nor can it satisfy the growing demands of an academia in quest of such ethics.

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### Notes

1 Eric Gans, *The End of Culture* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1985) 40.

2 William Irwin Thompson, *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light: Mythology, Sexuality and the Origins of Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981) 102.

3 Eric Gans, "Originary Ethics" (lecture notes for French 260A, UCLA, Spring 1989)

4.

4 Eric Gans, "La femme en X: Mallarmé anthropologue" *Romantic Review* 72.3 (1981): 298. [my translation]

5 Jacques Lacan, "Propos directifs pour un Congrès sur la sexualité féminine" in *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966) 730. [my translation]

6 Michael Foucault, *La Volonté de Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) 206. [my translation]

7 Our principal debt to Generative Anthropology lies with this first point of analysis.

8 In pre-market society, we may speak of this economization under the patriarchal order as more "symbolic" than "instrumental" because women and children were chattel to their patriarchs. Rather, it is the economization of both men and women and the incipient leveling of gender difference within the labor force that signals the decline of the patriarchal order.

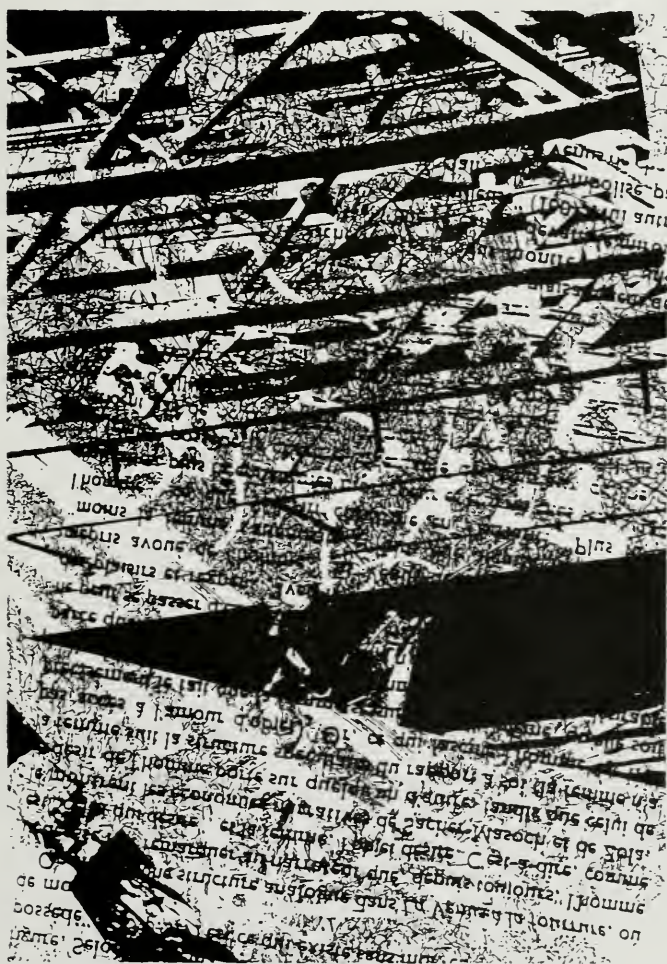
9 Jay P. Paul, "The Bisexual Identity: An Idea Without Social Recognition" in *Bisexual and Homosexual Identities: Critical Theoretical Issues*, eds. John P. De Cecco and Michael G. Shively (New York: The Hayworth Press, 1984) 45.

10 Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus" in *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977) 284.

11 This second component stems from Wilhelm Reich's revolutionary insight.

# PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies



Volume 8 1990



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Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de  
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouverait  
ici l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

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