

# **UCLA**

## **Paroles gelées**

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### **Author**

Brimhall, Cathryn

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## UCLA French Department Symposium— Generative Anthropology: Origin and Representation

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Cathryn Brimhall  
Editor, *Paroles Gelées*

*A group of pre-humans (perhaps following a hunting expedition) surround an object that strongly excites their appetite (perhaps a large edible animal that has just succumbed to their blows). Everyone is preparing to move toward the object. But each, noticing the appropriate movement of the others, and intimidated by the scene's potential for violent conflict, aborts his gesture. This aborted gesture, directed toward the central object, and consequently reinforcing the attention that all already bestow on it, functions as an ostensive designation of it. For as soon as everyone notices that, for a certain time at least, no one will seek to appropriate the object, each understands the others' gesture as "meaning" the object. The scene will remain in their memory as centered on an object that so excites their appetite that it paradoxically becomes for that very reason untouchable. The aborted gesture of the individuals on the periphery, which is prolonged in the kinetic imagination of each toward the object, becomes the sign of the object. The reproduction of this sign not only evokes the object but designates it to the other participants of the scene. This gesture is thus the first act of representation, and its collective performance constitutes the originary group as a human community bound together by its common observation of the ethical constraint realized in the substitution of the gesture/sign for the act of appropriation.*

—Originary Hypothesis,  
Unpublished summary from Eric Gans'  
Introduction, "The Promise of Generative Anthropology."

The "origin": scene of origin, its representation in the form of a superior minimal hypothesis as cited above was (re-)presented by Eric Gans in his introductory remarks at the French Department Symposium on Generative Anthropology held April 20 and 21, 1990 at UCLA. This formulated model is the core from which Professor Gans has developed an extensive theory of Generative Anthropology which can and does contribute to a vast range of academic disciplines, as demonstrated by the wide scope of papers presented at the conference sponsored by the French Department of UCLA. After a brief introduction by Eric Gans, discussing the value of the originary hypothesis and the need for the very notion of origin as an event and not as a gradualistic process, Marvin Harris, the well-known anthropologist currently at the University of Florida, Gainesville, offered the Keynote Address, "Postmodernism and Anthropology: A Cultural Materialist Perspective." According to Professor Harris, in his response to postmodern theories, a materialist definition of culture is not committed to banishing semiotics altogether. However, in his perspective, anthropology should appropriate a theory of man, and not one of "being" or of language. In his words, "Abstract ideas need materialism. Problems of concrete reality and intentional ideas are seldom what they seem. . . ."

Throughout the conference, fundamentally different approaches were at stake: ideas and research efforts culminated at times in rather heated reactions and discussions. How can a theory of origin whose concerns are those of representation and of language, such as that provided by Generative Anthropology answer the evidence of scientific, empirical research? Speculations upon this topic as well as the contention which arose concerning "origin" itself—a struggle opposing a gradualistic process of human origins with the scene of origin as a specific event—all provided the setting for a stimulating colloquium.

Debates continued on the second day with seven speakers, four of which graciously offered their papers to appear in this issue. Matthew Schneider, presenting his work on Thomas De Quincey, treated the problem of trust and its role with regard to the history of monetary transaction and the origin of representation. Continuing a "scene of exchange," William C. Juzwiak approached questions of ethical concern formulating a theory of cultural sexuality as a specific system which appears as an hypothesis of the originary event. Andrew McKenna brought the marathon day to its "end" by a vibrant speech on Derrida's resistance to an anthropological originary event with

which deconstructionist theory ["itself" (at the center of negation)] is doubly bound and inevitably fascinated.

*Paroles Gelées* would like to thank Professor Gans for his special post-conference summary which includes an effective description of all the contributions to the conference, as well as a few of his insights into this "event."

Whatever possibilities G.A. may hold for Science, its approach to language theory and to problems of representation proposes to scholars and students of Literature many new questions to be considered in re-thinking their analytic models. On this basis, *Paroles Gelées* is offering this special feature on the Generative Anthropology symposium. [Please note that the preceding remarks are the responsibility of the editor and in no way reflect the opinions of the staff for *Paroles Gelées*.] The following is a reproduction of the program:

*Friday, April 20, 1990*

Opening remarks: Herbert Morris, Dean of Humanities, UCLA

Introduction: Eric Gans, UCLA "The Promise of Generative Anthropology."

Keynote Address: Marvin Harris, Univ. of Florida, Gainesville  
"Postmodernism and Anthropology: A Cultural Materialist Perspective."

Respondant: Allen W. Johnson, Anthropology, UCLA

*Saturday, April 21, 1990*

Kenneth Mayers, UCLA "Anthropo-logos: The Congenital Hypothesis."

William C. Juzwiak, UCLA "Generative Anthropology and Cultural Sexuality."

Douglas Collins, Univ. of Washington, Seattle "The Generative Anthropology of *A la Recherche du temps perdu*."

Tobin Siebers, Univ. of Michigan, "The Werther-Effect: Notes on the Anthropology of Suicide."

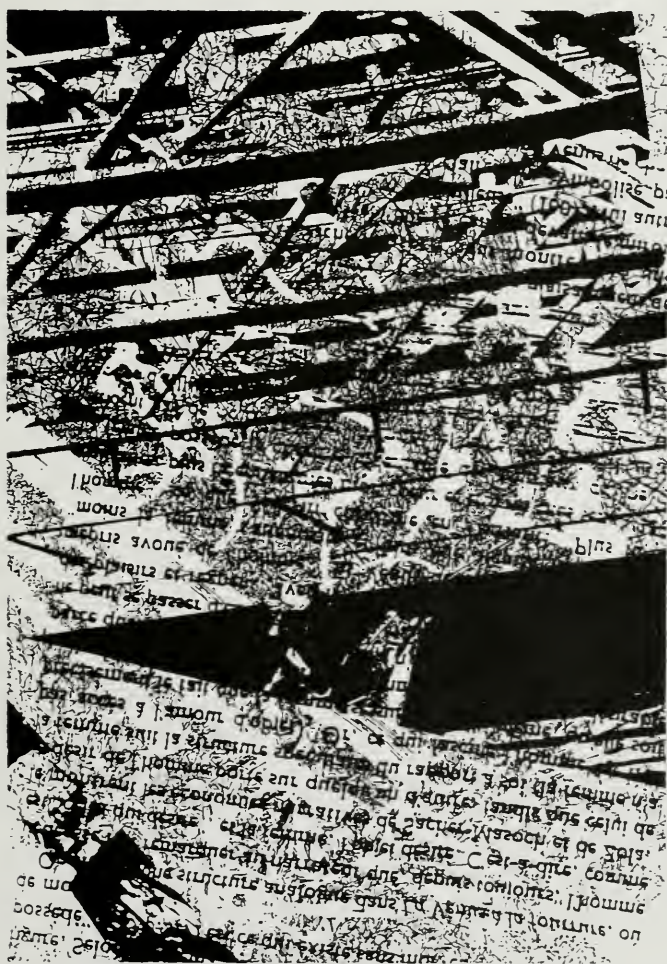
Matthew Schneider, UCLA "Paper Money and Palimpsests:  
Thomas De Quincey and Representational Crisis."

Thomas Bertonneau, UCLA "Originary Poetics and the Poetry of  
Origin."

Andrew McKenna, Loyola University, Chicago "Anthropology,  
Resentment and Resistance."

# PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies



Volume 8 1990



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UCLA French Studies

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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Editor: Cathryn Brimhall

Assistant Editors: Sarah Cordova  
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