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Abstract Title:
The Stake of Acknowledgment

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In his book, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, Stanley Cavell highlights the conditions for the successful functioning of what he calls the passionate utterance, which serve to articulate a moral obligation of acknowledgement, the slack of which, Cavell reminds us, can never be taken up by knowledge (CR, 338). If language is less about discovering what really exists out there (i.e. in the form of knowledge) and more about acknowledging (i.e. signifying) our passions, what might be the moral drawback of, say, denying a speaker the validity of his/her passions (particularly if no ritual means of acknowledgment exist)? Turning to the work of American Romanist Eric Gans, I hope to show that what is at stake is not some metaphysical notion of truth, but rather, the very survival of the species. For Gans, the origin of language has less to do with some biological evolutionary leap allowing us, finally, to construct a pragmatic referential system, and more to do with the deferral of appetitive behaviour, a gesture exclusive to humans. The conflation I hope to make, then, is of Cavellian passion and Gansian deferral. Both men understand what is at stake if either passion or deferral goes unacknowledged; and both posit that language exists fundamentally as an ethical mechanism designed to undermine any such elision.