

15th Annual Generative Anthropology Summer Conference

University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada

June 21-23, 2022

Victimhood, Desire, Polarization

Call for Papers

Scholars in the humanities and human sciences have for decades studied electoral and affective polarization: weakening political centers and increasingly intractable "culture wars." Resentful assertions of victim status now ground discourses at either end of the political spectrum, be it the "victimhood culture" described by Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning (2018), or the American right's "anger and mourning" evoked by Arlie Russell Hochschild (2016). In art and politics, claims on centrality (for power, attention, justice) increasingly express themselves in resentful representations of victims' exclusion or marginality. Can social and cultural desirability be represented at all now without invoking the sacrificial? How and when can victimization be disentangled from the desirable centrality with which it is now rewarded? How have the arts fostered the desires that produce polarization? Which esthetic or discursive practices might contest the saturation of the public sphere by victimhood culture? Or might polarization still be a feature or side-effect of genuine social and cultural flourishing, even progress?

Generative anthropology, a way of thinking rooted in the mimetic theory of desire and in the heuristic of a minimal but universal scene of culture, seems particularly well-equipped to address such questions. We welcome proposals for 20-minute papers that use GA, mimetic theory, or other anthropologically or philosophically grounded approaches. Other formats will also be considered—please contact the organizer. We aim for a mostly in-person meeting, as conditions permit, but will go fully online if necessary. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- literary production in a culture of polarized reception
- cinema and polarization: political readings of fictional and documentary film
- dystopian fantasies and victim-playing (zombies, vampires, plague and virus)
- polarization over science and public health: vaccines, lockdowns, masks
- "cancel culture," LGBTQ advocacy and fragmentation, social change, puritanism
- the natural world as victim: environmentalism, alarmism, technological pragmatism
- polarizing representations of human migration (refugees, unsettled immigrants)
- polarization and economic inequality: poverty, class, meritocracy, technocracy
- victimhood and/or polarization in any of the major religious traditions
- polarization and history: progress, democracy, liberalism, globalism, the market

For further information or to submit a paper or proposal, please contact Chief Organizer Ian Dennis (idenis@uottawa.ca). Submission deadline: April 30, 2022.

Please see <https://gascwebsite.wordpress.com/student-award/> for information on our annual Student Award. Open to students at any level of study, it offers a cash prize and other benefits.

For an introduction to Generative Anthropology, see <https://gascwebsite.wordpress.com/ga-primer/>

For updates about the conference and the GA Society, visit <https://gascwebsite.wordpress.com/>.