

16th Annual Generative Anthropology Summer Conference

The Zephyr Institute, Palo Alto, California

June 22-24, 2023

Improbable Futures of the Sacred

Call for Papers

For Eric Gans's originary hypothesis, the sacred and the significant, God and meaning, emerge simultaneously and remain coterminous with the human. Generative anthropology thus cuts against the grain of secularization theses, even as it acknowledges the advance of de-ritualized forms of social life, such as the modern liberal state and market. GA entertains a de-ritualized sacred, re-localized within the individual and the aesthetic (literature, film, music), and continuing to unite the sacred and significant. But it also asks whether a mode of sacrality without ritual is sustainable, capable of being a life-giving force in the face of what Gans himself recently referred to as "the disappearance from public view of the embodiments of transcendence that had throughout history allowed each unit of human society to recall the originary lesson that made humanity possible."

GA thus does affirm that the sacred will have its futures, while remaining open to dialogue with skepticism and acknowledging the difficulty of predicting what they might be. Any such futures, we concede, are improbable. Yet we invite submissions exploring such potential co-constitutions of humanity and the sacred. We also welcome engagement with other thinkers who have drawn attention to the implications of desacralization (Agamben, Berger, Douglas, Eliade, Girard, Habermas, Rappaport, Taylor, Whitehouse). For a more detailed exposition of our theme, see page 2 below. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Possible reconstructions of the public sacred
- Plural, dispersed forms of sacrality
- The structure and prospects of existing forms of the sacred
- Potential decompositions and recompositions of human reality through algorithmically driven technologies
- Ritual functions within materialist and economic institutions and practices
- Aesthetic, cultural and/or political reformulations of the public sacred and their prospects
- Popular (mis)understandings of the sacred and their prospects
- The role of artistic representation in the preservation or erosion of sacrality

For further information or to submit a paper or proposal, please contact Chief Organizer Andrew Bartlett (Andrew.Bartlett@kpu.ca). **Submission deadline: April 30, 2023.** The conference will be held in person, and online via Zoom, with a preference for the former.

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

For Eric Gans's originary hypothesis, the sacred and the significant, God and meaning, emerge simultaneously in the same event of the human. Generative anthropology to that extent cuts against the grain of all "secularization" theses positing the abolition of the sacred through the advent of shared rationality or technologically produced affluence. GA is therefore also in agreement with all those dissatisfied with or skeptical of hopes for secularization to, say, eliminate superstition and myth from modern life. At the same time, though, GA in its own way acknowledges the advance of de-ritualized forms of social life, as exemplified by the modern liberal state and market. A de-ritualized sacred, re-localized within the individual, would then continue to unite sacred and significant. But the question remains open: is a mode of sacrality without ritual sustainable? Can an individualized sacred withstand and be a life-giving force in the face of what Gans himself recently referred to as "the disappearance from public view of the embodiments of transcendence that had throughout history allowed each unit of human society to recall the originary lesson that made humanity possible" (*Chronicle of Love & Resentment* #752).

So, we generative anthropologists assert that the sacred will have its futures, while having a place for mutually productive dialogue for those who find any such future improbable and acknowledging that any particular future of the sacred we might anticipate now will be improbable. We invite submissions from anyone interested in exploring the co-constitution of humanity and the sacred posited by GA, whether that involves arguing for full scale reconstructions of the public sacred, the possibilities of plural, dispersed forms of sacrality, redefinitions of the sacred so as to include institutions currently viewed as secular, or an examination of the structure and prospects of any existing form of the sacred. Since our conference is being held in Palo Alto, the heart of Silicon Valley and "high tech," we would find especially interesting proposals exploring the tensions and conjunctions between the "decompositions" and "recompositions" of human reality effected by algorithmically driven technologies, on the one hand, and old, new, and potential modes of sacrality, on the other. Finally, since the originary hypothesis reminds us that ritual was originally inseparable from the sharing of the central object of desire, we might find that even the most "materialist" and "economic" institutions and practices contain a kind of ritual distribution hidden behind hyper-rationalist mathematical formulas. We see a call to re-center the sacred as more open and engaged with contemporary realities than further attempts to parcel out territory between sacred and secular.

Adam Katz