GASC 2022 Abstracts

(In Order of Presentation)

Session 1

Matthew Taylor

"Hudge, Gudge and Star-bellied Sneetches: Arcs of History in the Past Progressive"

G. K. Chesterton personified political polarization through the imaginary figures "Hudge" and "Gudge," who respectively represented socialism or statism (the left) and capitalism or business interests (the right). However adversarial in the West's political dialectic, Chesterton proposed that they actually co-exist symbiotically in the service of their mutually aggrandizing interests. I feel Chesterton's characterization applies even more to our 21st context than it did some 100 years ago to his own.

Just in the past two decades, left and right have precisely reversed positions on a number of major issues such as military interventionism, globalism, the surveillance state, or corporatism (to name only a few). Through this same period, interventionism, globalism, surveillance and corporatism have not just prevailed but hugely expanded, whatever the wildly swinging stances from the advocates of "Hudge" or "Gudge."

From the perspective of mimetic theory, Hudgeans and Gudgeans instantiate René Girard's dueling twins: seeing only stark difference, they look and act more and more the same. This perpetual "crisis of undifferentiation" unfolds rather like Dr. Suess's fable of the Sneetches. Chesterton's nefarious interests were also captured by Suess: an entrepreneur grows rich from the Sneetches' antagonism by playing both sides.

Generative anthropology (GA) might see "Hudge and Gudge" more positively; they discharge resentment in a beneficial, or at least minimally harmful way. Whether or not they serve entrenched interests, they do benefit society (in this view) because the symbolic exchange substitutes for real violence. Furthermore (in some GA views), they are part of a larger process

engendering human flourishing: an "arc of history" such as was proposed by Barack Obama but extrapolated to a telos like Francis Fukuyama's "End of History."

Chesterton's collaborator Hilaire Belloc saw a much different arc. For him, the trajectory of capitalism, which entails more and more socialism, was inexorably regressing to a "servile state" mirroring pre-Christian slave civilization. Belloc's scenario is unnervingly similar to the emerging technocratic oligarchy noted above. The alternative advocated by Belloc and Chesterton was "distributism," in which more and more people, rather than business and state interests will own productive property.

In Belloc's view, *this* was the original "arc of history," the first "progressivism." It was the trajectory of the peasant society, emerging from feudalism, toward universal ownership. This arc was derailed by both capitalism and statist collectivism under an aegis of progress, but Chesterton and Belloc sought, perhaps Quixotically, to reclaim it. It is uncertain whether such an original "arc of history" can really be reclaimed, not least because the polarization described above seems to preclude it from consideration. Notwithstanding, given the emerging omnipotent plutocracy, distributism is an increasingly compelling alternative.

Kiyoshi Kawahara

"'Ordinariness of Spirituality': An Anthropology of Personal Integration from a Perspective of Japanese Buddhist Philosophy"

Generative anthropology posits a private scene tied to language and signification. Since both Eric Gans and Ian Dennis have begun a conversation with Buddhism and the problematic nature of desire, I would like to engage that conversation in this presentation through a model of the self derived from Japanese philosophy, specifically, "linguistic ālaya-vijñāna" in the philosophy of Toshihiko Izutsu, and "logic of place" "philosophy of the individual" and "self-identity of absolute contradiction" in the philosophy of Kitaro Nishida.

I argue that each person embodies a spirit and that "spirituality" comes to arise at every moment in our daily lives. This is what I call the "ordinariness of spirituality" hypothesis. I verified this hypothesis by analyzing every comment about a book dealing with terminal illness. My assertion is that we realize that we always reconstitute and renew what could be called our authentic self at every moment of daily communication, sometimes with instantaneous awakening. This process includes detachment from our desires, from a competitive mode of our mindset, and from a dichotomic way of thinking such as winner vs. loser, assailant vs. victim, and center vs. periphery. In the terms of generative anthropology this corresponds to overcoming resentment. Instead of competition, struggle and exclusion, we can mutually recognize ourselves as diverse beings each with something unique to contribute and advance toward integration instead of polarization.

The conclusion for how we can conceive of "spirituality" is as follows:

a) the core of spirituality: tathātā ("thusness" or "suchness"; the true, concrete essence or nature of things before ideas or words); absolute non segmentation and the most fundamental sphere in a person's subconscious

b) the phenomena of spirituality: the attitude or appearance of the segmented aspects of a person; that is, the domain where we interact with others and use language in our everyday life

c) the functions of spirituality: the self-awakening process through detachment from compulsive desires, resentment and competition

These layers of the self might correspond in generative anthropology to the center (a), the periphery (b), and the internal communication between the two (c). As suggested, the last is sometimes attainable even through everyday communication, but in a more disciplined way everyone, not restricted to Buddhist monks, can practice meditation, and through meditation we practice detachment from desires and negative feelings. In this context, I would like to propose the shift from dichotomic mindset which entails confrontation and resentment, which is the ultimate source of polarization in society, to an absolute zero state in a subconscious sphere beyond dichotomic conflicts with segmentation, confrontation and resentment.

Session 2

Magdalena Złocka-Dabrowska

"Generative Anthropology in Dialogue with Malinowski's Concept of the Trobriand Islanders' Kula Ring"

Generative Anthropology and its heuristic can offer new insights into the rituals of primary societies, discovered and documented by early anthropologists. One of the most famous anthropological texts describing and explaining rituals is Bronisław Malinowski's *Argonauts of Western Pacific* (1922), which documents the "Kula" Ring Ritual of the Trobriand Islanders, a people inhabiting the Solomon Sea to the East of New Guinea. Clifford Geertz's critiques notwithstanding, I argue that Malinowski's magnum opus offers a multi-contextual image of human actions rooted in the system of balanced reciprocity that he observed in his fieldwork, and that by applying the cognitive tools offered by GA, a further and richer understanding can be developed from it. If we imagine the "Kula" Ring Ritual as a huge scene of representation generated by mimetic mechanisms, we can identify the potential violence in the rivalry for necklaces (*soulava*) and armbands (*mwali*) and theorize its mitigation using GA's central idea of deferral, in this case through symbolic gift exchanges in a process of constant designation of individual value. The ability to give a socially valued gift leads to the sanctioning of a position that produces hierarchical order and stabilizes society. The "Kula" Ring ritual might also be seen as a continuous prototypical process of representation, which announces a system of social institutions which serve basic human needs, and satisfying what Malinowski characterizes as a "deep-seated desire to possess." Indeed, his various later works develop a theory of needs and desires that anticipates and can productively be compared to that articulated by Eric Gans.

Ken Mayers

"The Victimization of a Hypermimetic Protagonist: the Case of Gregor Samsa"

The paper begins by situating both Girardian mimetic theory and Generative Anthropology as approaches to understanding "Victimhood, Desire, and Polarization." From a social science perspective, what do these theories offer as resources for research and interpretation? How do they frame the essential questions? In addition, how can they support a broader interdisciplinary exploration of the topic, bridging social sciences and literary studies?

Before turning to the analysis of a literary work, these questions are brought to bear on the contemporary situation in which a media-infused "hypermimetic" society is emerging. The transformations of "victimhood" since the 19th century are traced and mapped within their changing social contexts.

Kafka's *Metamorphosis* offers a fascinating example where the traces of these transformations can be considered in a literary context. Girardian mimetic theory offers pathways to analyze and interpret the interpersonal dynamics of the Samsa household and its place in society; however, although it provides a way to consider a shift from a modern mimetic social world to a postmodern hypermimetic one, Girardian theory falls short at the literary dimension of metamorphosis. This is where Generative Anthropology, with its careful attention to language, offers critical resources, not only in order to anticipate the contemporary social developments, but also to fully engage with the text as literature.

Session 3

Matthew Schneider

"Mimesis is All the Rage."

After the last two years, can there be any doubt that Generative Anthropology's foundational tenet—that mimesis is humanity's defining characteristic—is true? At the beginning of Things Hidden, Girard observes that by evacuating religion from their field of inquiry, the human sciences have aided in hiding the closed logic of sacrifice. Covid-19 and today's political and cultural polarization suggest that for the contemporary era—even more than the founding murder—the thing hidden is imitation itself, especially when its acknowledgement threatens to undermine metaphysical desire, as in the phenomenon of "rapid onset gender dysphoria" I explored at GASC in 2019. As technology's capacity to accelerate mimesis grows, so does the stubborn insistence that there is a vital core of the human spirit that remains uncontaminated by imitation. In this paper, I will return to the ongoing controversy over gender dysphoria to explore how today mimesis is all the rage. The political and cultural polarization currently experienced around the globe, to a large degree, can be indexed to the degree to which mimesis is recognized as the prime mover of human action. The pandemic and the increasing

sophistication with which social media are able to amplify the effects of imitation would, it seems, prove once and for all that we are fish, and mimesis is the water we swim in. But for a substantial proportion of the population today, such proofs serve only to harden the *mensonge romantique* into totalizing identity.

Eric Jacobus

"The Art of Violence"

See: https://ericjacobus.com/the-art-of-violence/

https://ericjacobus.com/the-art-of-violence/intent-load-theory/

Session 5

Panel Discussion on "'Resentment' by "*Denis Bouvard*"

For this session, please see:

https://dennisbouvard.substack.com/p/resentment?s=r

Session 6

Richard Van Oort

"More Sinned Against than Sinning: Lear's Victimary Rhetoric"

This twenty-minute paper will draw on my argument in *Shakespeare's Mad Men: A Crisis of Authority* (forthcoming from Stanford UP). The book discusses two of Shakespeare's mad men: King Lear and *Measure for Measure*'s Duke Vincentio. I plan to use my twenty minutes to talk a bit about Lear. More specifically, I will show that the standard idea that Lear is a victim of other people's violence is, at best, incomplete and, at worst, complicit in a sacrificial dynamic that the text itself works hard to undermine. Lear sees himself as a victim ("I am more sinned against than sinning"). But why should we privilege his point of view? Might he not be exaggerating?

What motives does he have for deceiving himself? Might his madness be conceived instead as a deliberate strategy of avoidance (as Stanley Cavell has famously argued)? By reading the play against the

grain of dominant critical opinion, I hope to throw some light on the concepts of victimhood, desire, and polarization. In other words, I think the play can serve as an excellent heuristic or "ethical discovery procedure" for thinking about our conference theme.

Zenon MacKinnon

"The Imperative Sign and the Anthropological Machine: Agamben and Gans in Conversation"

Giorgio Agamben explains the process by which humanity mediates its relationship with nature through what he calls the anthropological machine, which deals with ambiguities between what is animal and what is human by reducing certain categories of person to bare life, depriving them of the right to think and speak for himself in the context of the political community. I argue that the modern version of the anthropological machine is best understood in relation to the Center. In this reading, the mechanisms of social control deployed by the modern state take on a sacral quality since they limit who can appear on the re-enacted Originary Scene and who can issue imperative signs, gradually reducing this category through the dissipation of identifiable Centers leading to what I argue is a crisis of the imperative. This reading allows for a reimagination of what it means to be human within Agamben's framework: it is to have close proximity to, and the ability to command, the Center.

Andrew Bartlett

"In the Light of the Scenic"

In 1973, Theodosius Dobzhansky penned an article titled "Nothing in Biology Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution." Google tells us he was "criticizing anti-evolution creationism and espousing theistic evolution." The title became a slogan for biology as one big discipline. Jump ahead almost fifty years, to the time Zack Baker kindly interviewed me about my enthusiasm for GA. I repeated a slogan I'd previously invented to express my resentment of the scientism of militantly gradualist evolutionary theory. The slogan: "Nothing in anthropology makes sense except in the light of the scenic." During the interview Zack asked me to expand on, to explain the slogan. I did a bad job. In this paper, I try to do a better job and spell out what it means – inspired by the spirit of GA – to insist *nothing in anthropology makes sense except in the light of the scenic*.

Session 7

Zack Baker

"Technology as Scenic Design"

Technology is an extension of the human and a specific way of dealing with our scenic origins. In our increasingly technological world we often hear about techno-utopian schemes that purport to transcend these origins. I'll select two contemporary examples of this: general artificial intelligence and trust-less legal and monetary systems. I hope to show that these projects are doomed to fail without taking into account the inextricably human (and therefore scenic) dimension of technology. The technical way I will work this out will be by unpacking the notion of the "irreducibility of presence" and I'll draw on the scenic vocabulary of Generative Anthropology to do so. I'll argue that if we do want to build new kinds of civilization-promoting technology (whether it be artificial intelligences, new monetary and legal systems, or otherwise) we'd do well to return to the origins of money, law, and the human itself and construct these technological systems with those origins in mind.

Dominic Mitchell

"First Steps Towards a Computational Model of a Scene"

Eric Gans provided a Description of a new way of thinking about human origin and evolution: the Scenic. One feature of this is that it has tried to avoid depending on metaphysics to achieve its goals. Gans is working in the context of humanities and social science however the stated aim is to engage with evolutionary theory, which usually finds its home in the STEM disciplines. If the equivalent to the Description in the humanities/social sciences, in STEM is the Model then it is understandable that a response to Gans from the STEM disciplines would be a Model of the Scenic. What is attempted here is a very modest first step towards this ambition. Many STEM models make use of metaphysical constructs and this may be entirely legitimate according to the terms of the model. But if the model is intended to explain the Scenic then the use of metaphysics is problematic, as the Scenic is intended as an explanation of how the metaphysical became possible. Accordingly, what is demonstrated here is how a precursor to a Binary Distinction may be achieved by the focus of a population on a centre without the need for any metaphysical intervention. The distinction in question is individuals' decision whether to acquiesce or to challenge in encounters with another. Previous models which employed dominance hierarchy result in a distinction which is endlessly graded, however the present model produces a result which is binary and final.

Session 8

Eric Gans

"The Sacred and the Significant."

Participants might consult:

http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw730/

http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw731/

and

http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw739/

Session 9

Benjamin Barber

"Capricious Metaphysics contra Polarization: Lev Shestov's Creative Anthropology"

According to GA, "[m]etaphysics, the intellectual attitude of Western philosophy, is best defined by its unexamined presupposition that the declarative sentence or proposition is the fundamental form of language." In *Originary Thinking*, Eric Gans asserts that conventional metaphysics present "[c]ategories such as 'being' and 'reality' [that] attempt to substantiate human understanding of the universe in objective, nonhuman terms." He goes on to claim that "[t]he epistemology behind such categories is ultimately theological and revelatory." With this gesture, Gans indirectly aligns himself with the thought of the Russian émigré to France, Lev Shestov, who had a great influence on the intellectual foment of continental philosophy in the early to mid-twentieth century. In his master work *Athens and Jerusalem* (1938), Shestov resists philosophy's efforts to establish logical, necessary truths and, instead, valourizes the creative caprice of the biblical God. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus interpreted Shestov's position as an exemplum of absurdism. Of Shestov's thought, he writes, "[o]ne thing only interests him, and that is the exception, whether in the domain of the heart or of the mind." Camus's observation highlights Shestov's interest in the particularity and complexity of the human against dehumanized, abstract metaphysical systems. In his early work *All Things Are Possible* (1920), Shestov points out the inherent emptiness of propositions about the nature of reality, writing: "We know nothing of the ultimate realities of our existence, nor shall we ever know anything. Let that be agreed." He goes on to say humans are under no obligation to accept the dogmatism of metaphysical systems, stating: "It only follows that man is free to change his conception of the universe as often as he changes his boots or his gloves." For Shestov, "constancy of principle belongs only to one's relationships with other people, in order that they may know where and to what extent they may depend on us. Therefore, on principle

man should respect order in the external world and complete chaos in the inner." Thus, Shetov shows his respect for human sociability, while also celebrating the possibilities of unbounded, individual intellectual creativity. I propose to compare Shestov's embrace of intellectual caprice and changeability to the creativity of hypothesizing the anthropological origins of metaphysics expounded by GA. Given the tendency for humans, especially in current cultural and political discourse, to hedge themselves into intellectual positions dogmatically defended with proposition drawn from pre-established metaphysics, such a comparison is timely. Focusing on this tendency and considering that metaphysical propositions are often competing centres, or polarities, around which language-users array themselves, this paper will argue that Lev Shestov's critique of metaphysical certainties validates GA's characterization of metaphysics, showing that GA's experimental way of thinking, which—if emphasis is laid on its creatively hypothetical nature—is obliquely similar to Shestov's critique of metaphysics and, thereby, has the capacity to evade the mimetically charged lure of propositions that generate polarization.

Chris Fleming

"I Know I Am But what Are You?"

Abstract forthcoming.

Izumi Dryden

"Notes on Music in Literature: What It Is, and What It Is Not, in the Works of Forster, Burgess, and Dostoevsky"

This presentation is a sequel to the previous one titled "Musical 'Notes from Underground': Anthony Burgess's Mimetic Uses of Dostoevsky's Polyphonic and Metaphysical 'Voices'" given at the 14th Annual Generative Anthropology Summer Conference on June 15, 2021. Laurence Dryden and I focused on Burgess's novel *1985* and Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* to investigate Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of "polyphonic" constructions of Dostoevsky's novels in reference to Burgess's idea of "cacophony." To that end, we explored a metaphysical "Dostoevskian apocalypse" in *1985*, in which Burgess's mimetic efforts regarding musical features in Dostoevsky can be detected in relation to "coexisting" or "fused" characters.

This time, I develop the discussion of ways that sounds affect the identities of main characters in the works of three musical authors–E. M. Forster, Anthony Burgess, and Fyodor Dostoevsky–in response to a provocative question posed by Professor Eric Gans after the previous presentation: "What is the origin of music?" To consider music's origin, we need, first of all, to define what music is. According to Brown, et al., "The question what is music? is one that has no agreed-upon answer" and "music is simply whatever people consider it to be" (*The Origins of Music* 6). In that case, the desire to listen to something that surpasses ordinary sounds and noises might have inspired the origin of music. Gans states in "Art and Entertainment" in *Perspectives on Musical Aesthetics*, "Desire takes us to our origin because that is what we all desire" (47). If music was born of our desire to distinguish euphonious sounds from noises, sounds can be differentiated into music and noises. What, then, is music and what is not? In this regard, as Brown, et al. insist, "Music is very much about who we are, as individuals, as

societies, and even as a species. . . . we . . . listen to music, . . . to what it is telling us about ourselves" (483). In relation to what Gans and what Brown, et al. say on the subject, in this presentation I tentatively define the term of "music" as "what or who we desire to be."

Thus, in contrast to "what music is," the alternative "what it is not" could be considered as "noise" or "what or who we desire not to be." It may surprise some that Friedrich Nietzsche was an accomplished composer who once philosophized, "Without music, life would be an error" (Liebert, *Nietzsche and Music*, 8). Out of the view that "Music is the metaphor of life itself, of life as it ought to be," Nietzsche develops his ideas of music in line with Dionysian and Apollonian tensions and ressentiment, musing that "he is a philosopher-musician—and a philosopher [who] because a musician" (9). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, another philosopher who had a serious sideline as a composer, reflected on the complementarity of music and philosophy found in classical Greek thought in his "Essay on the Origin of Languages" and his "Dictionary of Music." Both Rousseau and Pythagoras had significant influence not only on such composers as Mozart, Beethoven, and Wagner, but also on such musical writers as Nietzsche (in mainly negative ways) and Dostoevsky.

As Gans explains, "Desire 'envy,' . . . Nietzsche gave it the more specific name of ressentiment" (*The End of Culture*, 173). Out of "the popular Nietzschean dictum, 'God is dead,'" Gans finds that "a more profound understanding of the symmetry of the God-man hierarchy is expressed in Dostoyevski's 'You will be as Gods each for the other'" (262-263). Even if man kills God in Nietzschean terms, we cannot be God, a philosophical dilemma that is traced by Dostoevsky through his "polyphonic" style.

To investigate "what is music" and "what it is not," I compare the works of Forster, Burgess, and Dostoevsky by analyzing exemplary scenes in which contrasts of music and noises appear. These authors' works show similarities in their "operatic" features and are filled with musical elements like those that Bakhtin and Grossman observe specifically in Dostoevsky's musical structures.

As Gans continues, "The art/entertainment dichotomy. . . forces us to face the ontological dichotomy within ourselves" (52). Indeed, music forces us to consider what is not unlike Hamlet's dilemma, the inner dichotomy of "who or what we desire to be or not to be." Music urges the main characters in the works of Forster, Burgess, and Dostoevsky to transform into "new selves" by inner revolution, while noises torment them with invisible fears. As Gans notes, "The future of the art/entertainment dichotomy is significant precisely because it cannot be in any sense determined; because its future determination depends on an ongoing process of freedom through self-understanding" (52). Complicating matters, as Rousseau famously asserted, "Man is born free, yet everywhere he is in chains." Such musicians as Mozart and Beethoven imitated and adapted Rousseau's melodies into their compositions to affirm the need for human freedom from "who or what we desire not to be."

In I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, René Girard reflects on the ways that humans tend to fall into "self-misunderstanding":

> If we listen to Satan, who may sound like a very progressive and likeable educator, we may feel initially that we are "liberated," but this impression does not last because Satan deprives us of everything that protects us from rivalistic imitation. Rather than warning us of the trap that awaits us, Satan makes us fall into it. He applauds the idea that prohibitions are of no use and that transgressing them contains no danger. (p. 32-33)

In a Girardian sense, noises may be analogous to Satan himself. Humans who tend to listen to noises fall unthinkingly into satanic traps. One such trap occurs when music transforms into noises, as exemplified in Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* when the protagonist Alex is chosen as a victim of the "Ludovico's Technique" and is forced to view filmed scenes of "Nazi torture and other horrors" while Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is sounded in the background" (Ziolkowski, *Music into Fiction*, 118). In this perversion of art in the name of social engineering which produces a living hell, Beethoven's sublime music is turned into cacophonous noises that erase Alex's "free-will" and effectively cancel his humanity. Ziolkowski notes Burgess's own explanation of this process in his subsequent work, *A Clockwork Orange: A Play with Music*: "Man is defined by his capacity to choose courses of moral action. If he chooses good, he must have the possibility of choosing evil instead: evil is a theological necessity" (cited in Ziolkowski, 119). Sounds can be polarized into music and noises by human choices, and noises can be considered as diabolical (or at least malevolent) voices of temptation that lure the main characters to fall into ethical traps in the works of Forster, Burgess, and Dostoevsky.

In this presentation, I analyze the main characters who engage with music and struggle against noises in the works of three musical authors–Forster, Burgess, and Dostoevsky. I examine how the characters' identities change as they become who or what they desire to be under the influence of classic music and songs, complicated by occasions when they are led astray by "noises."

Session 10

Andrew McKenna

"Firstness, History, and Truth from a GA Perspective"

I am exploring questions of history and truth in terms of recent publications where the Gansian circle/center structure and the Girardian triangles intersecting the former help to clarify a history-based epistemology. GA and MT enable a systemic analysis for three important books that have appeared recently concerning the interlocking dynamics of colonization, slavery, market capitalism, and genocide. In his deeply researched book, *Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World*, Howard K. French adopts an Afrocentric reading of actions, attitudes, and institutions that lie at the heart of modernity. In *Exterminate all the Brutes*, Sven Linqvist engages in anthropological field research and close textual analysis to trace the path from African colonialism to the logic informing the genocide conducted by Germany's Third Reich. The recent republication of the noted anthropologist Henri Rolph Trouillet's *Silencing the Past* explores the Haitian revolution (1791-1804) and events surrounding and succeeding it to engage readers in the epistemics of historical narrative. The information and arguments provided by these three books authorize a coherent reading of what we call Western Civilization that unveils the sacrificial practices at work in all the violence they report on. My report, therefore, would be an exercise in what René Girard has called "mimetic history" in his work on Clausewitz, *Battling to the End*, as it concerns the epistemological and ethical issues, especially those involved with the all-too-human mechanisms of denialism, for historiography and largely unwelcome truth-telling narrative as inspired by Israel's "woke" perspective; this is the first and only of its kind in cultural critique and

perdures among us for viewing a people's experience from the point of view of imperial victims rather than its victors.

Marina Ludwigs

"Thinking from an Event: A Model of Humanist Reason"

Generative Anthropology met and is still meeting some resistance based on its claim that the singular event of human origin and the evolutionary dynamic that it initiated explain human culture. These people claim that since we cannot ascertain what exactly happened at the origin, it does not serve any purpose to speculate about this event. The humanities have appropriated the epistemological approach of the sciences, which reduces observed phenomena to synchronic regularities, aka laws, which are unchangeable and always in operation. The current scientific paradigm does not have very much to say on the origin of laws. Additionally, philosophy of science cannot ground explanations. Where do our beliefs in the Occam razor or the hierarchical organization of knowledge come from? From the scientific perspective, we don't know. But an anthropological approach to explanation can, in fact, show why events explain. In my presentation, I will show that explanations are, first and foremost, humanist enterprises. They are therapeutic acts grounded in the collective scene. I will also show how our unexamined criteria of explanatoriness are embedded in the structure of the originary scene.

Session 11

Susan Wright

"#MeToo and Victim Testimonies."

Responding to the conference theme, "Victimization, Desire, Polarization," this presentation will consider the MeToo movement. Originally a grassroots effort to build "a community of advocates determined to interrupt sexual violence wherever it happens," in October 2017, following Alyssa Milano's hashtag, #MeToo, the internet and the mainstream media were quickly flooded with MeToo hashtags and allegations of sexual harassment. Within six months, millions of people across the globe had shared their testimonies, provoking a firestorm of political and social polarization and upheaval. MeToo not only saturated the public sphere, for the majority of 2018, it held the political center hostage. Like so much dirty laundry, MeToo exposed liberalism's weaknesses. It dethroned celebrities, senators, and even Mario Cuomo, the governor of New York. Finally, after running its course, it left the West wounded and deeply demoralized. What did it all mean? What, if anything, did it accomplish? How and why did it happen in the first place?

Bracketing politics and advocacy, to the extent that that's possible, this presentation will draw on a number of thinkers—Eric Gans, René Girard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Serres, Melissa Matthes, and Stephanie H. Jed—in an effort to frame the following points: the perceived role of public testimony and

self-proclaimed victimhood, the possibility of even claiming victim status, and the so-called victim's position as it relates to the political center. Setting aside, for now, MeToo as the primary context for reflecting on the above, this presentation will turn to a single testimony, that of Lucretia, penned by Livy over two millennia ago. The founding narrative of the Roman Republic, Lucretia's story, is also a first for Western liberalism. As such, it provides important tools for interpreting MeToo's sudden contagion of victim testimonies and rape allegations.

Ian Dennis

"Listening to *Jagged Little Pill*"

This paper will ask how the Generative Anthropology heuristic might contribute to an understanding of contemporary aesthetic experience, and in particular how it might allow us to gauge the relative balance between the capacity of such experience to reconcile us to our tragic alienation from the object of our desires, and its tendency to exacerbate or prolong the resentment that alienation generates. More specifically, I ask how artistic expressions or descriptions of victimhood either or both contribute to and/or help mitigate modern "polarization." As my example, I will examine responses to the highly successful studio record, *Jagged Little Pill* (of 1995) by the Canadian singer-songwriter and Ottawa native, Alanis Morissette.