

Benjamin Barber

United International College: Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University

Freedom: An Improbable, yet Possible, Future Sacred

Drawing on David Graeber and David Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything* (2021), this paper proposes that, in the future, a unitary sacred centred on individual choice may be a sustainable alternative to mimetically-constituted, public sacreds. The power of the individual's choice to transcend mimetic forces is expressed in mimetic theory's (MT) conception of conversion (see Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*) and GA's theorization of the first gesture of aborted appropriation. In both MT's and GA's models, shifting attention to a different model of desire and deciding to emit the gesture of aborted appropriation are both instances of individual choice, wherein the individual centralizes her prerogative in place of a collective mimetically charged focus. The individual thereby becomes a unitary sacred centred on her own chosen orientations and gestures. This unitary sacred presents a self-sustaining paradox—an instance of the absurd. She, by electing to act, is centre-as-periphery-as-centre-*ad infinitum*. Drawing on the modern reassessment of the sacred appearing in discussions of the infinite and the absurd—specifically as it is represented in the philosophical work of Emanuel Levinas and Lev Shestov—this paper will develop Gans' vision of the future multiplication of secular centralities with many peripheral subjects (*Originary Thinking*, p. 219) as, instead, an increasing multiplication of unitary sacreds. As Gans' characterization of contemporary aesthetics illustrates, individuals are aware of the attraction of secular-cum-sacred centres in their vicinity and often elect to provisionally attach themselves to these scenes, e.g., participating in a market of sacred centres. New analysis of anthropological and archeological data suggests that past social configurations, with their attendant sacreds, were frequently fluid, arising as experimental, temporary arrangements freely chosen by individuals (Graeber and Wengrow, pp. 426-7). I propose that individuals' prerogatives themselves could take precedence over the draw of stable, static sacred centres—be they religious, economic, or ideological. In this projected future, instead of manifesting within large communities focused on a single centre, the sacred will increasingly inhere in individuals' centralization of their own idiosyncratic choices to move, act, and re-imagine social relations. This sacred would consist of a universal centralization of ipseities, ipseities which remain troubled by mimetic compulsions. Arguably, the creation of such a sacred has been the modern project *par excellence*. However, this paper will query this assumption and consider the implications of a more radical and explicit centralization of individual volition.

Trent Brandner

Independent Scholar

The Negative Ostensive and Civilizational Politics

The main line of argumentation in this presentation is two- fold: one; there is a difference between GA theories of the declarative as the double imperative and the declarative as the negative ostensive; two, Gans' neglect in the *End of Culture* of what he calls a "theory of politics" is so tied to the difference. That neglect was necessary for *The End of Culture* to pursue its original research objective, so I'm expanding on a nuance and not rebutting the premise of the writing.

In essence what separates declarative cults and cultures from imperative ones is the nature and conscious intentionality of the negative ostensive. In imperative cultures the double imperative still implicates, however marginally, that the object will still be appropriated.

Regarding the Pleistocene cave paintings, there were recent advances in the paleo-anthropological field with this. There is upcoming research that seems to suggest the claim made by Gans is truer than what he originally devised. He backs down away from the harder ethical distinction that these images were used by imperative cultures for obtaining these sacred hunting animals and begins a dialogue on artistry. However, those recent studies show promise for, what they are calling, a "proto-writing" that demarcated each animal with a series of lines. These corresponded to lunar cycles and when the group could, presumably, obtain them. There is clearly a line of dialogue here that GA would still do well to re-cast and discuss.

Obviously, the rest of the article would then contain discussions on the methodology of Generative Anthropology and how, by proposing, this new theory of politics could have helped generate new advancements in fields adjacent to our own.

In fact, this epistemology is embedded within the declarative as the emergence of ethical esthetics and what defines the birth of civilization. I would then establish the nuance on why Gans must have chosen, then, 'the end of culture' as the end of aesthetic culture, and the consequences of focusing on de-ritualization of real referents and rituals of imperative cultures. And, why it must have precluded him to avoid naming the research study, "The Birth of Civilization." In essence, by focusing on this theory of politics--the differentiation of social orders through the big-man and his originary counterpart in the "producers desire" in the originary scene--we can unearth exactly the problems of the resentment generated and the praxiological considerations of why one person is at the center and another is not. This is exactly tied to the original call for papers of the GASC ("improbability" is my main ire) and relates to what I will then expand on as re-sacralization and how that, itself, is demonstrated explicitly through the emergence and existence of declarative culture itself. It is not a question of the improbability of the sacred in mature culture, it is a function of the difference proposed by the negative ostensive.

Of course, none of this is "beyond" the bounds of GA, I will obviously be referencing the second edition of *The Origin of Language* demonstrating why this is simply a logical expansion of what we've "always already" been doing.

Ian Dennis

University of Ottawa

Transcendence and Its Enemies: The Aesthetics of the Nude

The sustainability of what Generative Anthropology characterizes as a re-situation of a de-ritualized sacred in the aesthetic is tested in particularly intense ways in the instance of representations of the unclothed human body. Taboos on nudity bear witness in a multitude of times and places to the association of the sacred with the naked human form and while GA may postulate an alimentary object of desire on the originary scene we may assume that if mediated sexual desire did not come first, it surely followed soon after and remains a prominent force in the constitution of human scenes. But if contemplation of the nude human body, the oscillation of attention it provokes between perceived form and imagined appropriation, persists as a fundamental aesthetic experience long after ritual designations of inviolable centrality have fallen away, there is no guarantee of course that lusts of various kinds, most particularly for the centrality afforded by transgression, will not finally overwhelm this form of the sacred as they have others. It is a struggle of particular import, given the intimate association of the human person with such representations, one that might be plausibly framed in terms of the parallel and related struggle to create and preserve that form of sacrality we call individual human rights. The proposed paper will consider a range of representations along a continuum from pornography to “high” art, looking specifically at ancient and modern statuary and paintings by Rembrandt and more recent artists to trace the struggles over this particular claim to transcendence and centrality, and perhaps project, from the historical trajectory sketched, the way the contest might (probably or improbably as may be judged) develop in the future.

Izumi Dryden

Mie Prefectural College of Nursing, Tsu, Japan

The Sacred Art of Nursing: Musico-Philosophical Perspectives of Florence Nightingale on Ontological Dichotomy

This virtual presentation via Zoom extends ideas considered in my presentations at the 14th GASC 2021 and the 15th GASC 2022. After both presentations the question persisted, as first raised by Professor Eric Gans: “What is the origin of music?” A related question follows: “Can animal voices and sounds be music?” Pursuing the questions leads to the possibility that music began by human imitative behaviors of animal voices, sounds, and rhythms. -- In this presentation, I investigate the origin of music by consulting two nineteenth-century British scientists: Charles Darwin (1809-1882), the evolutionary naturalist who considered animal voices and sounds as music in *The Descent of Man* (1871), and Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), the founder of modern nursing on principles that were influenced in part by Darwin.

-- Darwin recognized musical powers in nature and examined music of animals among their existential issues. He mentions that even mice can handle major and minor keys to produce music by controlling musical notes such as C sharp, C natural, D, and B (two flats) (p. 478). He notes, “A critic has asked how the ears of man, and he ought to have added of other animals, could have been adapted by selection so as to distinguish musical notes. But this question shews some confusion on the subject; a noise is the sensation resulting from the co-existence of several aerial ‘simple vibrations’ of various periods, each of which intermits so frequently that its separate existence cannot be perceived. It is only in the want of continuity of such vibrations, and in their want of harmony inter se, that a noise differs from a musical note” (p. 478). It is obvious that noise is not necessarily music, and noise is not what humans desire to listen to. ---

Nightingale’s knowledge of Darwin’s ideas appears in her voluminous correspondence and in her nursing theories set down in her magnum opus, *Notes on Nursing: What It Is, and What It Is Not* (1859, 1860). Nightingale developed her musico-philosophical perspectives based on her observations of patients’ relations to sounds or noises, and she believed that the ontological dichotomy (i.e., the life and death) of patients could be controlled by sounds or noises in nursing care. -- Nightingale knew from experience that certain noises could kill patients. Such “obstacle noises” appear in the works of twentieth-century British writers—Anthony Burgess’s *1985* (1978) and E. M. Foster’s *A Passage to India* (1924)—that were discussed in my previous GASC presentations. By contrast, the opposite of obstacle noises, i.e., euphonious sounds and music, can help humans recover from illness and live. In a previous presentation, I cited Gans’s observation that “the art/entertainment dichotomy. . . forces us to face the ontological dichotomy within ourselves” in “Art and Entertainment” in *Perspectives on Musical Aesthetics* (1994). Medical patients might confront their own ontological dichotomy physically and psychologically by listening to healing sounds or music as transcendent sacrality in the course of being restored to health and life. --- In this presentation, I discuss ways in which music can provide human beings with transcendent sacrality. The musico-philosophical perspectives of Darwin and Nightingale inform a deeper understanding of sacrality and may provide clues to the elusive origin of music itself.

Tomoya Fujihara

University of California, San Diego

Language in Deep Consciousness:

The Japanese Philosophy of Neo Kotodama-Gaku

Generative anthropology (GA) draws on the work of René Girard but unlike mimetic theory recognizes the centrality of language and representation. This paper introduces the Japanese philosophy of Neo KotodamaGaku and attempts to elucidate the language of deep consciousness from the human perspective.¹ The Japanese thinker who best engages this problematic is Toshihiko Izutsu (井筒俊彦), who discusses “essence” based on consciousness and the roots of Eastern philosophy. The problematic nature of “essence” has dominated philosophical thought throughout the history of Western philosophy. However, “essence,” “true nature,” and similar concepts play a remarkably important role in the East as well, in relation to the semantic function of language and the hierarchical structure of human consciousness. Izutsu identifies two important aspects of the discussion of the theory of “essence” in the East: language and consciousness.

Izutsu presents a rudimentary structural introduction to synchronic Eastern philosophy by detaching Eastern philosophy from the complex historical linkages among its various traditions, moving it into the dimension of synchronic thinking, and reorganizing it. Specific categories of Eastern philosophy include Buddhist studies, Islamic mysticism, Greek philosophy, Song-Confucianism, Judeo-Kabbalah, I Ching, and Taoist thought. He then proposes a model for how language comes into being and proposes a model that shares commonalities with a number of ideas and philosophies, citing the existence of root words that are impossible to capture within our consciousness.

However, Izutsu’s model of Eastern thought and philosophy does not include references to ancient Japanese thought and language or a specific view of language. In Japan, Shintoism and numerous schools of thought and philosophy existed before the influx of culture from the Chinese continent. As Kamata (2011) also points out, the term Shinto first appears in literature in the *Nihonshoki* (日本書紀, “The Chronicles of Japan”) during the reign of Emperor Yo-meï (用明天皇), but the history of the Japanese archipelago and the evolution of culture over the past 12,000 years have been closely related before the awareness of Shinto came to be recognized (Kamata, 2011, pp. 76-77). Incorporating them into Izutsu’s thought would make a significant contribution to Japanese studies and comparative philosophy and might help overcome conceptual boundaries between Japan and other countries.

This paper draws on the Japanese philosophy of Neo Kotodama-Gaku, which is thought to have started as a response to the research on the study of the Kotodama-Gaku in the Edo period. It was established by Akimasa Yamakoshi (1890-1949) and Koji Ogasawara (1903-1982), and was called “Neo

¹ “Kotodama” means “the power of words” and “Gaku” means “the study of.” Neo Kotodama-Gaku is post-modern research of Kotodama that differs from the early modern period studies that have been widely followed until the present.

Kotodama-Gaku” by Kenji Nanasawa (1947-2021), heir to and follower of the Shirakawa Hakuoh lineage. One of the major characteristics of the Neo Kotodama-Gaku is that it holds that the *Kojiki* (古事記, Japanese Mythology), and the 100 deities from the first deity “Amenominakanushi (天之御中主神)” to the 100th deity, “Takehayasusanowo (建速須佐之男命)” born as a result of purification (禊), represent the fundamental principle and function of all things, including the human mind (including all conscious and unconscious thought) and the universe, and that the Japanese language and syllabary reflect this aspect of the underlying Kotodama. In the Neo Kotodama-Gaku, the question of how words come into existence is addressed in a variety of forms. In particular, it relates the process of the birth of words, in terms of each sound of the Japanese language, to the occurrences and changes in the human mind, in which each word constitutes a unique understanding and expression.

Considering the above, the ideas proposed by Neo Kotodama-Gaku and Izutsu’s model of the semantic function of language and the hierarchical structure of human consciousness, can be integrated and incorporated into Izutsu’s “synchronic structuring of Eastern philosophy.” This paper will introduce the Neo-Kotodama-Gaku to the realm of the language of deep consciousness, which Izutsu has systematized

extensively, and will discuss the features of the language of deep consciousness in Japan. Mostly, it is hoped that this introduction to the concepts of language and consciousness in the Neo Kotodama-Gaku will open up a bridge to dialogue with the perspective of generative anthropology.

Marina Ludwigs

Stockholm University

***Aftersun* as a Case Study of the Aesthetic Use of the Sacred, Seen through the Notions of the Sacred in Generative Anthropology and in Gregory Bateson**

In this presentation, I will compare the theories of the sacred offered by Eric Gans and Gregory Bateson and bring them to bear on the 2022 award-winning film *Aftersun*, from the first-time Scottish director Charlotte Wells.* In GA, the sacred is one of the fundamental concepts, a force anchoring the center of the scene of representation as the focal point of human desire. Bateson thinks of it differently, incorporating the sacred into his theory of order as realized through communication. Bateson relates the sacred to the need to maintain order through occasional noncommunication in the form of nontransparency, silence, and secrets because every act of communication leads to distortion. Consequently, in a system of full transparency and unhindered traversability by communicative messages, there is a risk that order will become degraded. At first glance, the two conceptualizations of the sacred seem quite different, but I will show that they can be reconciled using *Aftersun*, a recent film on memory and trauma, as an example that brings both of these perspectives together. Through its reminiscences of a father-and-daughter past vacation, the film tells a story with a mystery at its heart, an unspoken event, which the viewer can only start putting together in retrospect. The innovative storytelling technique brings into focus the originary trauma of representation: our internal rift or non-coincidence with ourselves. I will suggest that this experience is what the sacred ultimately designates. (*N.B. I strongly recommend that you watch this astonishing film ahead of time, so that my presentation makes more sense.)

Matthew Taylor

Kinjo Gakuin University, Nagoya, Japan

How John Lennon's "No Religion" Instantiates Religion: A Symbolic Analysis à la the Brothers Pageau

John Lennon's "Imagine" is an extraordinarily successful song that has become a secular anthem. Not surprisingly, its message often aggravates religious believers, who do not appreciate the invitation to imagine "no religion." In this reflection I want to engage the anti-religious thrust of "Imagine" from a different angle, following the symbolic worldview of Jonathan and Matthieu Pageau. Their project is to reclaim the symbolic grammar of the ancient world, which they hold to be as true for us now at the phenomenological level as it ever was. However, we do not understand this symbolic language and thus tend to operate with blinkered vision, including when approaching religion and the biblical text, no matter how religious or irreligious we are.

"Imagine" is a striking demonstration of this. From the symbolic perspective of the Pageaus, the paradox is that it asks us to imagine no religion while at the same time it instantiates religion. Even this iconic anti-religious hymn is, to use Jonathan Pageau's phrase, "nested in religion." In almost every line, "Imagine" expresses itself as religion, puts forward religious propositions, and assume a religious structure. Ironically, the religious elements woven so skillfully (if unintendedly) into "Imagine" may explain why it continues to grip so many people and never goes out of style. Yet, as a symbolic analysis shows, the message of the song undercuts itself.

For instance, from the very first line, there could by definition be no "imagine" without a "heaven"—heaven having once been universally understood as spirit or meaning, which confer identity on undifferentiated potential, "earth," specifically through human mediation: spirit (heaven) informs matter, while matter (earth) expresses spirit. Not coincidentally, this is precisely the substance as well as the thrust of "Imagine," though the first line rules it out as impossible. Lennon's religious *intuition* (what the song enacts) is extremely astute, while his religious *imagination* (what the song is about) is deeply impoverished. Yet this is also so of the religion Lennon putatively opposes, and both reflect the hollowed-out imagination of modernity. Indeed, as moderns, we all suffer this poverty of imagination to some extent.

Turning to generative anthropology (GA), we have what could be considered another modernist project. Yet, its view of humanity as "the symbolic species" (to borrow Terrence Deacon's phrase) seems quite resonant with the symbolic perspective of the Pageau brothers. This is especially so because, for the Pageaus, symbolism and the sacred are ultimately about *attention*. Is this compatibility with GA more than just superficial? The question cannot be satisfactorily addressed here, but on that note and with that question I conclude.

Robert Rois

Independent Scholar, California

Ransom for Desire in *The Iliad*: Hector and Patroclus

The *Iliad* dwells on the wrath of Achilles. The backdrop for the story is the legend about the abduction of Helen by Paris while a guest in the palace of her husband, Menelaus. Violation of the guest-host relationship starts the Trojan war. Yet the *Iliad* itself starts with the wrath of Achilles over Agamemnon's taking of his companion, Briseis.

René Girard in his *Violence and the Sacred* unveils the concept he calls the mimetic double bind: two lovers become rivals over the possession of the same object of desire. Just as Helen is an object of desire between Menelaus and Paris, Briseis is the disputed object of desire between Achilles and Agamemnon. We can project a fourth element to assess the loss caused by the mimetic rivalry. Hector and Patroclus represent the measure of loss in the two quadrangular relationships.

The Greeks stand in an equivocal position. Although they fight for the restitution of the abducted Helen, their King deprives their main warrior, Achilles, of his companion. There is disorder in their own ranks, analogous to the cause of the war waged against Troy. The Argives must pay the penalty for their leader's betrayal of the cause they fight for. Patroclus is killed by Hector, who perishes at the hands of Achilles. Their death reflects the loss which must be suffered and endured within the mimetic double bind.

The crucial speech which outlines the quadrangular relationship in the Achillean clash with the King occurs when Briseis mourns the dead Patroclus as the one who would have made her Achilles' legally wedded wife.

Patroclus, far most pleasing to my heart in its sorrows,
I left you here alive when I went away from the shelter,
but now I come back, lord of the people, to find you have fallen.
So evil in my life takes over from evil forever.
The husband on whom my father and honored mother bestowed me
I saw before my city lying torn with the sharp bronze,
and my three brothers, whom a single mother bore with me
and who were close to me, all went on one day to destruction.
And yet you would not let me, when swift Achilles had cut down
my husband, and sacked the city of godlike Mynes, you would not
let me sorrow, but said you would take me back in the ships
to Phythia and formalize my marriage among the Myrmidons.

Therefore, I weep your death without ceasing. You were kind always.

[Il. XIX, 287-300]

While Patroclus is the ransom exacted by the struggle in the Greek camp. Hector is the victim who must perish in the story to outline the measure of sacrifice in the mimetic double bind struggle between Menelaus and Paris over Helen. Mirroring Briseis' lament over Patroclus, Helen starts her litany over Hector's death by considering herself the wife of Paris.

Hector, of all my lord's brothers dearest by far to my spirit:
my husband is Alexandros, like an immortal, who brought me
here to Troy; and I should have died before I came with him;
and here now is the twentieth year upon me since I came
from the place where I was, forsaking the land of my fathers. In this time
I have never heard a harsh saying from you, nor an insult.
No, but when another, one of my lord's brothers or sisters, a fair-robed
wife or some brother, would say a harsh word to me in the palace,
or my lord's mother – but his father was gentle always, a father
indeed – then you would speak and put them off and restrain them.
I mourn for you in sorrow of heart and mourn myself also
and my ill luck. There was no other in all the wide Troad
who was kind to me and my friend; all others shrank when they saw me.

[Il. XXIV, 762-775]

Hector takes on the role of prospective brother-in-law who protects Helen from the Trojans who blame her for their troubles. Although both speeches occur five Books apart, they have the same length in lines. The parallel stands out. The warriors closest to the heroes Achilles and Paris, represent the ransom exacted by desire in the *Iliad*. The relationship linking Brises to Patroclus and Helen to Hector is balanced by the paradox of opposites. Brises, born in the Troad, is protected by the Greek Patroclus; while Helen, a Greek, is protected by Hector, a Trojan. This opposing binary structure supports the direct equivalence we ascribe to the importance of two leading women characters, absent from their clan, who subsist precariously among antagonistic factions in the *Iliad*.

Both, Hector, and Patroclus, fall as victims to the object of desire in the mimetic double bind conflict among embittered heroes over Helen and Briseis, respectively. We note that both litanies by the two women characters, who stand as backdrop for the violent devastation of war, reveal the penalty for desire. Hector and Patroclus, the noble benefactors, are the ransom for desire. The two heroes share the spotlight as central figures in the *Iliad's* plot, for they both intrude in the two love triangles which outline the theme of sacrifice in the great epic.

Matthew Schneider

High Point University, North Carolina

Deference, Preference, and the Bond of Common Humanity in “Bartleby, the Scrivener”

Though largely unnoticed upon its publication in 1853, Herman Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street” is now one of the best-known and most widely-read nineteenth-century American texts, and a seemingly inexhaustible object of critical analysis. Scores of critics and biographers have attempted to explain Bartleby’s mysterious withdrawal first from the customs and agreements of office work by combining psychology with philosophy: depressed by the futility of copying others’ words, by refusing to work—and, ultimately, to live—the scrivener strikes a Miltonic blow for freedom from the “prison house of language” and the failure of the signifier to reach the spirit of the signified. In this paper, I will employ the insights and heuristics of generative anthropology to propose an interpretation of Melville’s novella that examines the communicative dimensions of the scrivener’s careful and memorable locution: “I would prefer not to.” “Prefer” is obviously etymologically related to “defer,” and suggests that Bartleby’s odd behavior reveals a constitutive element of the scene of representation. Though much of the critical literature focuses on Bartleby’s “refusal” to proofread or copy, he never actually refuses to do so—he only says, “I would prefer not to,” leaving open the possibility that at another time, his preference may change. By “preferring not to,” Bartleby effectively reverses what GA sees as the evolution from the imperative linguistic form to the declarative. This reversal demonstrates symbolic representation’s paradoxical power to defer its own deferral, and clears the way for Melville to explore—through the reactions and responses of the other characters, especially those of the unnamed narrator—the bonds of common humanity that are revealed and strengthened by telling this story of Wall Street.

Richard van Oort

University of Victoria, Canada

Prospero's Orinary Scene

In contrast to Shakespeare's other exiled big men (all of whom eventually return to the center), Prospero spends his exile creating a highly entertaining, first-person narrative of self-justification, self-exculpation, and self-memorialization (i.e., a version of what today we call memoir or autobiography). In doing so, he turns an apparent weakness into a strength. His eccentricity—which is to say, his idiosyncratic position on the margins of political power—becomes the occasion for an extended diatribe against the center. Prospero's political impotence turns out to be a precondition of his aesthetic power as a narrator or storyteller.

This romantic strategy of recapturing the center from the periphery is the Shakespearean exile's greatest achievement. Armed with his magic cloak and staff, Prospero is able to turn his personal narrative of resentment into a three-dimensional life-sized dramatic performance. The courtly figures who pass across his private stage are objects of his resentment, which dates back to his occupation of the ducal throne. Having been rudely thrust from Milan, he longs to teach his persecutors a lesson. When he tries to explain this fact to Miranda, she does not appear to be impressed. Her main concern remains on the side of the victims of her father's wizardry and pyrotechnics. Annoyed by her intractability, Prospero puts her to sleep. Alone with Ariel, who seems to represent Prospero's capacity for aesthetic invention, he is free to get on with his self-exculpatory, wish-fulfilment narrative, which one would be hard-pressed to call redemptive, though it is certainly sentimental and melodramatic. Even the romantic engagement of the lovers is too contrived to appear as anything other than a deliberate construction of Prospero's resentful position on the margins of someone else's centrality. The fact that he does not destroy his enemies is, of course, commendable. But when we remember that these rivals exist only within Prospero's autobiographical narrative of self-exculpation, this act of forgiveness becomes no more redemptive than the highly contrived and sentimental narrative involving the pair of lovers. If Prospero controls what his enemies do and say, how can we say he has forgiven them? If there is no one to accept his forgiveness, then who exactly has been forgiven?

This is a problem peculiar to narratives in which an internal character is also the author of the story. If the internal character is the artistic creator of the conflict represented on the stage, how can we say that the conflict has been resolved? Prospero exerts a level of control over the story unmatched in all Shakespeare. No other character, not even Iago or Richard of Gloucester, comes close to Prospero's command of the dramatic conflict. I will argue that Prospero's epilogue may be conceived as a kind of joke. Because Prospero remains an exile of the center, his death can never be depicted on the (tragic) stage. It can only be alluded to by the lonely figure of the protagonist-narrator, whose domination of our attention ends only when he (finally!) stops speaking.

Pierre Whalon

Independent Scholar

The World Mediated by Meaning Will Always Evoke the Sacred

Humans live and move and have their being in two realms, the immediate world created by the senses, and the vastly larger world mediated by meaning. Rites and rituals connect the two and inform the latter. From this intersection ritually expressed arises the sacred, at least primordially. Gans has written: “The sacred, in its simplest sense, is the restraining force on human appetite that gives birth to desire, mediated by the world of signs” (*Chronicles of Love and Resentment* 726).

There is however more to the sacred than original interdiction. Losing any sense of it is part of the modern dilemma. As seen by Charles Taylor, people today have a “buffered self”, as opposed to people of previous ages who had “porous selves.” By this he means a perspective that grows out of a denial that anything that cannot be empirically proven has any claim upon us: we are “buffered.” Charles Taylor calls the present moment “the immanent frame”:

It is the sense of an absence; it is the sense that all order, all meaning, come from us. We encounter no echo outside. In the world read this way, as so many of our contemporaries live it, the natural/supernatural distinction is no intellectual abstraction. A race of humans has arisen which has managed to experience its world as entirely immanent. In some respects, we may judge this achievement a victory for darkness, but it is a remarkable achievement nonetheless. And yet that “achievement” is coming apart at a rapid pace. The fear that grips much of humanity today is stoked by inimical climate change, pandemics, economic chaos, war, and political divisions stoked by propagandists wielding tools that Josef Goebbels could only have dreamt of. For people who believe their world of meaning is “entirely immanent”, the need for the sacred comes roaring back. How else to explain the fascination for angels, extraterrestrials (science fiction angels), for magic, reviving dead pagan religions in the form of Wicca, the whole phenomenon of the “powers’ of crystals and amulets...

In any age, humans need rituals to give structure and meaning to our private and social lives.

The terms “rite” and “ritual” (which can be considered synonyms) come from the Latin *ritus*, meaning “prescribed order”, which would itself come from a form of Indo-European Vedic *rta* or *arta*, which evokes *the order of the cosmos*.

Generative anthropology has begun to develop the heuristic of the originary scene, in which the sacred center plays a vital part. That has not gone away. But with the disappearance of classical culture, the dying spasms of modern culture giving birth to postmodernism, humans have ever more extraordinary ways of trying to understand ourselves. Our technology inundates us with meanings to understand. The dilemma today is not one of understanding so much as it is judging. Each of us has to judge for ourselves what is worth living—who am I and what must I do?

This means the future of the sacred future is anything but improbable.

