Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture

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The Phantom of the Ego

MODERNISM AND THE MIMETIC UNCONSCIOUS

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from the very beginning already a phantasmal creature. Not in the superficial sense that it is merely a copy or reproduction of other egos, but in a deeper, affective sense that it is through a unconscious form of communication with the other (or socius) that the ego is born. The experience of mimesis, in this sense, does not entail a dispossession of the ego of its "real," "original" identity, since there is no such identity to possess in the first place. It is rather the very condition that allows for an affective, relational emergence to take place. And it is because of this primary, mimetic principle that bursts open the passages of communication and brings the ego into being as a relational subject in childhood, that the ego, for better or worse, continues to respond to the haunting power of mimetic (dis)possession in adulthood. More generally, if Bataille's communicative thought can anticipate future theoretical developments concerning the intersubjective foundation of ego formation, it is also because he relies on, and extends, the interdisciplinary tradition of the mimetic unconscious that has underscored our entire investigation. In this sense, the postmodern death of the subject Bataille anticipated continues to rely on a modernist birth of the ego. After the dissolution of the ego, it is the story of this birth that Bataille allowed us to tell.

Bataille's account of the mimetic, communicative subject does not promise any final revelation that would unmask, once and for all, the phantom of the ego we have been tracking all along, reassuringly pointing towards something original behind the mask. Nor does he offer a single, homogeneous, and definitive answer to the open question "who comes after the subject?" Yet, his account of the birth of the subject out of the laughter of the socius affirms the emergence of a mimetic being that is always open to the possibility of *becoming*—other. He also reminds us that the feelings that overtake us in the experience of communication ring an echo in the subject, if only because we are, from the very beginning, permeable to that other/socius who is ourselves while being someone other. In this sense, the ego, for Bataille, emerges, quite literally, out of the "phantom who is there next to me or in me."[119] This phantom is interlocked with the ego in such a fundamental way that it cannot be dissociated from what the ego is; it does not communicate *with* me, but *through* me, because it is already chained *into* me—part of the experience of "being multiple singular" (*être à plusieurs un seul*) (*Sur Nietzsche* VI, 279).

CODA

Mimetic Theory Revisited

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold . . .
—W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

The spiraling movement of our mimetic inquiry has been turning around contagious patho(-)logies that traverse the modernist period and are responsible for generating what Nietzsche calls "the phantom of the ego." What this ghost hunt through central figures in literary and philosophical modernism has taught us is that, in fin de siècle Europe, protean forms of psychic dispossession take place in a widening number, with increasing speed and power of infection. It also has revealed that the problematic of mimesis, though rarely discussed in the context of modernist studies, is one of the most intense preoccupations of modernity. Mimesis affects the body, thought, and soul of the modern subject; it also informs disciplines as diverse as literature, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and different schools of dynamic psychology. Consequently, new unmasking operations and diagnostic techniques proved necessary in order to track a

protean concept that changes form at will, adapting to fast-moving times. Modernist authors like Nietzsche, Conrad, Lawrence, and Bataille, read in the company of founding theorists of mimesis like Plato—but also Tarde, Burrow, and Janet—and, more recently, mimetic theorists like Girard—but also Lacoue-Labarthe, Baudrillard, and Borch-Jacobsen—have taught us that in the modernist period, it is no longer possible to point to a single, unitary, essential ego behind the turning kaleidoscope of mimetic masks that envelop it. Nor is it realistic to propose a single, unifying, and ultimately homogeneous explicative model to predict the heterogeneous manifestations of ghostly apparitions in a period when the line between appearance and reality, copy and original, the ego and the phantom of the ego, no longer holds. Mimesis can thus no longer be framed within the confines of a single mirror stage, but is fragmented in a house of mirrors instead.

And yet this does not mean that our guiding question—who is this phantom, and wherein lies its power?—remained unanswered. On the contrary, modernist figures answered the same question by consistently and insistently pointing towards the same, yet protean force of affective contagion that generates this phantom in the first place and that, for convenience's sake, I have grouped under the ancient concept of "mimesis." At the same time, the spiraling movement of mimetic patho(-)logy allowed more specific, diagnostic questions to emerge. For instance: is the phantom of mimesis a haunting force that penetrates the ego in order to deprive it of its originality from the outside, as Nietzsche seemed to initially suggest? Or is it the product of an "inner experience" that is communicated to the ego in order to bring it into being from the inside, as Bataille finally indicates? Is this phantom a deadly, life-negating presence to be condemned and rejected? Or is it a generative, life-affirming force to be celebrated and accepted? And if this phantom transgresses the barriers between origin and copy, interior and exterior, private and public, active and passive, self and other, in which direction should we read the genitive in the title phrase, "the phantom *of* the ego"? Is the *phantom* of the ego, or the *ego* of the phantom that haunts the mind of modernism? These reflections are not the product of abstract theoretical speculations. They point, rather, to the complex, unconscious process of communication that troubles the foundations of the ego in such a way that it is no longer clear if the ego comes before the phantom, or the phantom before the ego. What is clear, however, is that contagious experiences generate an identity that is,

quite literally, not one, insofar as it transgresses the boundary between being singular and becoming plural.

If we started this study by chasing a mimetic phantom with the power to take possession of the ego from the outside—from the ancient theater to the modern polis, from archaic rituals to modern crowds, from mass opinion to public opinion, from Wagnerian theaters to the movie theaters—we have been progressively led to question this adventurous, perhaps still too romantic desire for a final revelation of mimesis that would expose the ego from without. Instead, in a self-reflective move characteristic of the modernist turn, the Nietzschean authors we have encountered progressively directed our diagnostic lenses inward, in order to question the unconscious foundations of the ego from within. And what we found is that at the origins of the ego there is nothing original, but the experience of mimesis itself. This originary mimetic experience that gives birth to the ego, out of the pathos of the other, points to the unconscious reflex of communication that must be understood in intersubjective, psychosomatic or, as contemporary science suggests, neurological terms. I have called the psychophysiological source of involuntary, communicative reflexes that are not under the volitional control of consciousness, but shape the malleable ego nonetheless, "the mimetic unconscious." And I did so not only to differentiate it from the Freudian variant, but also to emphasize the primacy of an embodied, affective, and relational imitation in the process of ego formation.

The conclusion of this study, then, brings us back to the "phantom" with which we started, allowing us to see it from the other end of the spectrum. And what we now see, in an inversion of perspectives reminiscent of a looking glass, is that what appeared to be a "phantom of the ego" turns out to be an "ego of the phantom." This means that the ego is an effect of mimesis, rather than its cause; there is no ego prior to imitation, but it is imitation that generates the ego in a communicative process in which mimesis comes first insofar as it is an originary, yet unoriginal, experience out of which the ego is born. This is no minor perspectival inversion. It involves a Copernican turn away from egocentric approaches to subjectivity that dominated our past, Freudian century. It also allows us to catch up with recent, post-Freudian developments that recognize the importance of behavioral forms of imitation in the formation of the ego. As Bataille has shown, anticipating recent discoveries in the neurosciences that posit automatic reflexes at the foundation of subjectivity,

mimesis is not an experience that comes after the ego has been formed. Rather, mimesis is constitutive of an interior, communicative experience out of which the ego is born. The phantom of mimesis gives life to the ego by animating or, better, innervating its psycho-physiological system through a dynamic process of unconscious communication that places the reflex of the other (or socius) at the heart of subjectivity. In this sense, mimesis is at the origin of the ego; the ego is but a shadow cast by a mimetic phantom.

There are a number of important consequences that ensue from this Nietzschean inversion of perspectives. In guise of conclusion, I would like to cast a retrospective glance on the spiraling movement of our trajectory, and flesh out some of its implications for modernist studies and mimetic theory—not so much as *the* final concluding gesture but, rather, as a coda whose aim is to open up possible starting points for future inquiries.

Modernism and Mimetic Theory

What emerges from this study is not a single, homogeneous theory of mimesis, nor a unitary, structural model to contain the proliferating effects of the contagious affects that transect the social body in the modern, post-Romantic period. In a sense, what the modernist brand of mimetic theory proposes is nothing new. It reenacts a diagnostic, clinical approach whose origins are as old as the origins of mimetic theory itself and can be traced back to Plato's *Republic*. This perspectival method was, in turn, recuperated in the early-modernist period by that anti-Platonic figure par excellence who is Friedrich Nietzsche. It is based on the realization that the observer is not external to his or her observations but participates in it with its whole soul, and thus with its whole body. This "philosophical physician" is, *volens nolens*, implicated in the pathologies he diagnoses and, for this reason, is paradoxically "most skilled" in the art of psycho-physiological dissection. Given its modernist recuperation by a Nietzschean axis of modernism, it is not surprising that this old Platonic realization is also at the source of new anti-Platonic investigations. The ambition of what we have called *mimetic patho(-)logy* was thus not to propose final transcendental solutions to the riddle of mimesis; nor was it to advocate a metaphysical system of thought that would contain the physical fluxes of contagious affects in neat, ideal forms. Rather, our ambition was to diagnose, on

an immanent, embodied, patho-*logical* basis, increasingly contagious forms of mimetic pathologies that infect, in a variety of historically determined contexts, the modern subject, from its early-modernist beginnings in Nietzsche, to high modernist figures like Conrad and Lawrence, eventually spilling over into postmodernism, via Bataille.

In the process, we have seen that key advocates of the modernist tradition join efforts to analyze the devastating effects of affective contagion in a period characterized by acceleration of time, conflation of space, condensation of populations, confrontation with otherness, globalized wars, technical innovations, and massive forms of psychic depersonalization. They have also offered a clinical diagnosis of the underlying psychic and somatic reasons that render the modernist ego so permeable to the pathos of the other. Last but not least, they propose an alternative model of the unconscious based on a mimetic, rather than a repressive, hypothesis. Instead of making grand, totalizing claims about being the only possible *via regia* to the riddle of the unconscious, this hypothesis functions as a starting point to rethink the foundations of the mind of modernism from relational, intersubjective presuppositions that are in line with a variety of disciplinary positions. One of the goals of this study was thus to dislocate Freudocentric approaches to the psyche in order to open up the ego to the kaleidoscopic experience of mimetic forms of communication. What we must add now is that the modernist decentering of the ego in favor of mimesis also meant positioning our approach in relation to that rival of Freud and key figure of mimetic theory who is René Girard. If Girard's theoretical presence has been in the background of this study, it is now the time to bring his theory into the foreground. This will allow us to articulate the continuities and discontinuities between our respective approaches to the old riddle of mimesis and to propose new lines of inquiry for mimetic theorists of the future.

In his first book, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1961) Girard single-handedly revitalized a field that is as old as literary theory—if not Western thought itself—from an original perspective. His theoretical move was deft and forceful. Without necessarily making grand claims about his operation, he brilliantly inverted the Freudian approach to the Oedipal triangle by positing mimetic identification as the *cause* rather than the *effect* of desire, solving thus the riddle of "ambivalent" relations with father figures and of the rivalries that ensue. In many respects, then, Girard's thought remains much

influenced by Freud. The rivalrous triangle is, after all, an agile inversion of a Freudian structure. Girard's emphasis on desire as a privileged door through which to access subjectivity was, however, not simply of Freudian inspiration. It was also in line with the Hegelian spirit of the 1960s.[1] In the wake of Alexandre Kojève's anthropomorphic reading of *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Girard integrated the Hegelian lesson about the master-slave dialectic of desire by positing the "desire of the desire of the other" at the origin of his structural model. He did so in order to account for a Romantic problematic that had so far gone unnoticed, and therefore unstudied, which he aptly called "mimetic desire." In the process, Girard developed an ambitious theoretical alternative to solipsistic and egocentric accounts of the psyche that challenged Romantic notions of the "autonomous" and "spontaneous" self, while at the same time setting out to explain, in a dynamic, structural way, the novelistic genesis of individual desires, rivalries, and interpersonal quarrels in the Romantic period and beyond. Later, in what remains, in my opinion, his most ambitious work, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), Girard supplemented the Platonic critique of mimesis in light of the rivalrous and violent consequences of mimetic desire by opening up mimetic theory to the field of comparative anthropology. Extending his early literary investigations to the ancient sphere of myth, he shed new light on hidden phenomena that lay at the foundation of culture, such as the contagious dynamic of violence, the cathartic social function of sacrificial rituals, and the scapegoat mechanisms that have the power to resolve mimetic crises. In an unfashionable move, Girard postulated that sacrifice should not be considered an old-fashioned anthropological riddle, but an innovative solution to the abyssal problem of the origins of culture, going so far as to propose a hypothesis concerning the birth of religion, humankind, and civilization *tout court*.

In *The Phantom of the Ego*, I have benefited from Girard's insights into the logic of mimesis, the contagious dimension of violence, and the rivalries that ensue from the appropriative nature of desire—a tendency still present in early-modernist authors driven by the ambition to produce an original thought and, thus, haunted by the pathos of their mimetic models qua rivals. I have also adopted some of Girard's vital methodological principles, including his call for an interdisciplinary approach to mimesis that breaks down artificial blinders in an increasingly specialized academic world, the idea that powerful theories emerge from the texts themselves, if one takes the trouble

to read them closely, and, last but not least, the realization that thoughts feed on emotions, emotions on thoughts, in a nonhierarchical, generative movement that admirable writers know how to follow. In this sense, then, the modernist brand of mimetic theory that emerges from our paradigmatic choice of transdisciplinary authors and texts is in line with the spirit of Girard's "mimetic hypothesis."

And yet being in line with this spirit also meant that the task we set ourselves was not simply to "apply" Girard's "mimetic theory" to modernist texts from the outside in, but, rather, to let the texts speak for themselves from the inside out. This hermeneutical choice led us to confront problems that are specifically modernist, to integrate the modernist solutions to these problems, and, if necessary, to reshape our hypotheses in light of new textual, theoretical, and historical evidence. As I set out to track "the phantom of the ego," my goal was thus not to offer an a priori Girardian reading of modernist texts. Nor did I particularly seek to invalidate Girard's mimetic hypothesis. Rather, my goal was to pay close attention to the polymorphous logic of mimesis in the modernist period from an open, flexible, and dynamic interdisciplinary perspective, informed by, but not limited to, Girard's work, in order to continue to further the open field of mimetic theory. As key theoretical figures—from Plato to Nietzsche, Le Bon to Tarde, Bernheim to Burrow, Durkheim to Harrison, Mauss to Janet, Bataille to Baudrillard, Lacoue-Labarthe to Borch-Jacobsen—have shown, this field is always on the move, turned towards a future increasingly haunted by real, all too real, and perhaps even hyperreal, phantoms. Hence, rather than proposing a stabilizing universal structure with unitary ambitions, modernist mimetic theory is attentive to the *movement of becoming other* in a period characterized by intense cultural, scientific, and historical transformations.

As we followed the widening spiral of mimetic patho(-)logy, we have progressively noticed that unconscious, imitative phenomena are so constitutive of the mind of modernism that they not only dissolve the centrality given to the ego and the importance given to the Romantic myth of originality, adding new strength to a project initiated by their novelistic predecessors. They also bracket the role of desire as the privileged door to subjectivity. It is as if the intensification of mimesis on massive scales characteristic of the modernist period—with its hypnotized crowds, thronged theaters, packed streets, ramified mass media, globalized wars, and totalitarian leaders—brings about

a weakening of the ego's ability to passionately desire in the first place, even if this desire is but an imitation of the desire of the other. This does not mean that the modernist subject—if such a unitary fiction exists at all—is less mimetic than its Romantic counterpart. On the contrary, the types of subjects we have repeatedly encountered in fictional and theoretical texts seem *less* fixated on the single desire of the model/mediator because they are *more* (not less) imitative than their Romantic predecessors. As Lacoue-Labarthe also realized, the logic of such an apparent paradox is constitutive of the logic of mimesis.[2] In the case of the imitation of the modernists, it can be formulated as follows: the more mimetic the subject, the less will it stick to one single model, the more will it copy a multiplicity of subjects; the less formative the presence of the model, the more will the subject merge with a multiplicity of figures, the less individuated its desires will be.

In the novelistic, Romantic tradition, mimetic desires initially appear to be a debased copy of passionate, spontaneous, and autonomous desires. But as Girard recognized, mimetic desire, as well as the vanity, coquetry, and snobbism it generates, is still an individualistic, intense, and quite passionate affair; not in the *Romantic* sense that this desire is truly authentic or original, but in the *romanesque* sense that the intense pathos it generates is misrecognized as being one's own, while being directed by the Other.[3] Characters like Don Quixote, Mme de Rênal, Don Juan, and Marcel are *mimetic* individuals, to be sure, but mimetic *individuals* nonetheless whose personal and passionate intrigues occupy the center stage of the romantic novel. In the modernist period, on the other hand, it is the fiction of the individual itself that the experience of mimesis calls into question. It is as if the contagious power of mimesis has swallowed up the ego's capacity to *intensely* desire—even mimetically—in a river of impersonal confusion of affects, leaving but a phantom among phantoms in its place. Whether the focus is on the Wagnerian crowd in *The Case of Wagner*, figures like the Harlequin or Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, Kate Leslie in *The Plumed Serpent*, or what Bataille calls "the man among thousand" in *College de Sociologie*, the modernist subject is intensely subjected to a variety of *impersonal*, contagious phenomena that disperse the ego in the anonymous experience of the mimetic crowd. Rather than directing desire within a linear, triangular, and still familial structure, then, mimesis, for the modernists, has the power to open up the ego to a multiplicity of directions, dissolving the illusion of individuation in a river

of impersonal affects that cannot be contained within the confines of fixed, universal, and still idealist, structural relations.

The modernist subject, as it is represented in the works of key Nietzschean figures in literary and philosophical modernism, is not even given a chance to think about the Romantic *mensonge* of individuality. And quite naturally so; once the ego is part of a crowd or public, there is not much space for the development of mimetic but still egocentric affects, such as vanity, snobbism, and coquetry. The modernist dissolution of the old stable ego draws the conclusion of this mimetic realization and shows that behind the mask of individuation there is no ego left to desire, but a phantom of a phantom of a phantom . . . "the one forever in the head of someone else, and the head of this someone else again in the head of others: a strange world of phantasms" (*D* 105), as Nietzsche puts it. Similarly, Lawrence discusses the effects of the Great War on what he calls "*simulacrum* of a man" in a way that echoes Nietzsche: "Practically every man [is] caught away from himself, as in some horrible flood, and swept away with the ghastly masses of other men, disinclined to speak, or feel for himself, or stand on his own feet" (*K* 213). The modern crowd, then, does not allow for the still egocentric experience of a mimetic rivalry between subject and model, "copy" and "original," but dissolves the ego in a river of simulacra where the copy not only precedes the original, but explodes the very ontology of mimesis, leaving but a strange world of phantasms behind.

To be sure, seemingly individuated, original models are not lacking in the modernist period, especially charismatic, authoritarian models whose origins can be traced back to the Romantic myth of genius and, even further back, to the Platonic myth of divine inspiration. Their hypnotic will to power is not only impressed on the members of the crowd via a process Lacoue-Labarthe, following Plato, calls "typography," but is also mechanically reproduced by new mass media that powerfully echo such voices in order to inform and conform what Tarde calls the "public." Once again, given the massive doses of mimetic subjection, these models are not primarily concerned with directing the desires of individual egos considered as subjects. Rather, they shape, via an impersonal process of psychic and technical *impression*—the effects of which are now proved to mold the neurological structure of the brain—entire crowds considered as malleable raw material.[4] These models are, indeed, too exterior for the subjects of the crowd to function as their mimetic rivals and,

as Girard would say, operate at the level of "external mediation." But even more importantly, the crowd is too numerous for a dialectics of desire to emerge, submerging the ego in an impersonal stream responsible for what we have called *mimetic dissolution*. In the crowd, in the jungle, at collective rituals, at large political meetings, or in the streets, the modernist generation repeatedly tells us that the ego is but a phantom among phantoms, a fluttering shadow cast on a dark screen. Even the locations in which mimetic investigations are carried out in modernist texts are no longer the same as in their novelistic counterparts. The modernist space is no longer the salon but the street; it is no longer transected by individual chivalric heroes, but by mechanical means of mass transportation; it is no longer based on personal confrontations, but on mass communication. Consequently, rather than being a heroic figure in search of an identity, the modernist subject turns out to be a "man without qualities"—to borrow the title of Robert Musil's masterpiece, itself borrowed by Lacoue-Labarthe—all the more vulnerable to the power of leaders who sell ready-made qualities in massive quantities. The modernist dissolution of the "old stable ego," then, brings about a weakening of the personal rivalries, vanities, and familial structures that once still managed to contain the polymorphous logic of mimesis.

This said, the mimetic *différend* between the Romantics and the moderns is not clear cut. What is at stake for modernist authors is not an abrupt theoretical rupture with their predecessors, but the realization that a historical, theoretical, and experiential *shift of emphasis* has gradually taken place. Although mimetic desires continue to operate in the background of modernist texts—in the form of greedy colonial exploitations for material possessions, spellbound fascination for public opinion, mindless submission to charismatic leaders—the protagonists, characters, and conceptual personae that emerge in the foreground of these texts seem less concerned with the truth and lies of the still Hegelian or, as Bataille would say, Kojèvian, master-slave dialectic of "desire" as a starting point for a theory of mimesis. Their brand of mimetic theory seems rather more directly concerned with the experience of mimesis itself, considered as a protean concept that has to be peeled off from the problematic of desire in order to be dissected on its own terms. In fact, for the modernists, it is not only desire that is contagious, but mimesis itself that is mimetic, and quite directly so. It is thus no accident that in what Nietzsche calls "the century of the masses," the modern crowd

and public, as well as postmodern mass media, tend to replace the lonely figure of the Romantic hero as a privileged subject of mimetic inquiry and textual investigation. Nor is it accidental that in the modernist period, theoretical interest turns to dissect the unconscious power of collective affects that include desire, but are far from limited to it: enthusiasm, frenzy, compassion, sympathy, participation, suggestion, hypnosis, and laughter, to name a few, are all part of that sym-*pathos* (feeling with) that, for better or worse, generates phantoms on a massive scale. Rather than restricting mimesis to the specific case of mimetic desire, I thus propose the generalized concept of *mimetic pathos* as a productive starting point to account for mimesis on its own terms, at times in which this protean concept is more than ever on the move, changing form at will in order to adapt to hypermimetic backgrounds. In the modernist period, mimesis is, perhaps, the insurmountable horizon of subjectivity: it not only turns into a subject of intense literary investigations, but occupies center stage in scientific, psychological, sociological, anthropological, and philosophical discussions that are constitutive of the mind of modernism. It is thus on such textual, historical, and interdisciplinary principles that this study attempts to do clinical justice to this histrionic protagonist on the modernist stage. It does so by advocating a generalized theory of mimesis that focuses on different forms of mimetic pathos in order to diagnose its major affective, infective, at times hysterical, but always contagious, symptoms.

It seems, then, that despite their Romantic heritage and the tenaciousness of the myth of autonomy and individualistic self-sufficiency, our modernist authors are beginning to learn the *romanesque* lesson about the *mensonge* of originality. Thus, Nietzsche's still Romantic struggle with his models is progressively replaced by the realization that "actors, all kinds of actors, will be the real masters"; the "glories of exploration" Conrad romantically dreamed of in his youth give way to the impersonal reality of colonial horrors; Lawrence's triangular desires that still informed his first Romantic-oriented novels are replaced by the impersonal crowds that haunt his late, political novels; Bataille's personal concern with his father's "heterology" is replaced by his analysis of the contagious "force" of communicative patho(-)logies. Even the figure of the "universal genius" and charismatic leader, Mr. Kurtz, as Conrad's urged us to consider in *Heart of Darkness*, turns out to be a "hollow" man without opinions to call his own; a "shadow" or "phantom" whose last

penetrating and presumably deep insight beyond the abyss of representation, "The horror! The horror!" turns out to be but an echo of a simple, superficial "fragment of a phrase of newspaper article" (148). What is embryonic in such a modernist realization is the dissolution of a Romantic myth that is hard to extinguish, even in postmodern, hypermimetic times when individuality, more than ever, turns out to be a fiction.

This unmasking of the figure of the Romantic genius is an important theoretical step for which modernists are grateful to their novelistic predecessors. The methodology that informs their mimetic patho-logies reflects this anti-Romantic realization. Although they are at times still complicit with the myth of originality, modernists less feel the need to disguise their disciplinary sources in order to appear truly original. Instead, they multiply references to different mimetic traditions that belong to the modernist Weltanschauung in order to account for the riddle of mimesis. They are not so anxious to differentiate themselves from other theoretical figures, but allow the different fluxes of mimetic theories to freely transect their writings. Aware of the pervasiveness of fin de siècle patho-logical discourses in different disciplinary traditions—from philosophy to crowd psychology, psychophysiology to sociology and religious anthropology—they actively rely on these *logoi* to diagnose mimetic pathos, opening up modernist studies to a transdisciplinary tradition well before the recent turn towards interdisciplinarity. If it is true that insightful novelists continue to unmask the phantom of the ego, it is equally true that we can no longer posit the noble, but somewhat restricted hypothesis that only the "great novelists" (read in the company of the evangelical texts) truly reveal what is at stake in imitation. Rather, in the modernist period, a widening number of investigations emerge to delineate, with great novelists (read in the company of atheological writers), the channels through which mimetic pathos flows. Literature must thus be reconsidered part of a generalized, transdisciplinary, immanent, and hopefully communal effort to continue to map the ever-changing laws of imitation.

I suggest that what is true for the modernist theorist of mimesis should equally apply to the contemporary mimetic theorist. Within the scope of my abilities, I have attempted to further this characteristically modernist, interdisciplinary spirit, rendering its sources fully visible when they were still masked. This involved opening up mimetic theory to central figures in the modernist tradition that have so far been neglected, or relegated to the

background of the theoretical stage: From Bernheim to Janet, Le Bon to Tarde, Burrow to Harrison, Frazer to Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl to Mauss, and, more recently, Morin to Baudrillard, Lacoue-Labarthe to Borch-Jacobsen, and many others still to be discovered, we have consistently seen that these figures, read in the company of Girard, are vital to opening up mimetic theory to a wider interdisciplinary perspective so as to account for the disconcerting power of mimetic contagion in the twenty-first century.

Furthering mimetic theory on such an open, interdisciplinary base is, indeed, more urgent than ever, if only because mimetic contagion is, perhaps, the central problem of modernity. Charismatic leaders, as we have repeatedly seen, have the will to power to subject the masses to hollow models, via a hypnotic, unconscious mechanism that communicates itself directly, through contagious affects that flow in a spiraling, cumulative movement, from the leader to the crowd, the crowd to the leader. As these ideologies are put into practice, sacrificial victims are indeed destroyed, in massive, impersonal forms, from a premeditated distance—colonial distance, but also the distance that divides invisible "enemies" at the front and, later, in camps at the margins of the totalitarian body politic, up until our hyperreal wars and contemporary versions of camps that render the ego, or better, life, as it is now called in the wake of the death of man, both "naked" and "precarious."[5] This distance not only strips life of its juridical status that renders it human; it is also intended to prevent the emergence of human sympathy in the Lawrentian sense of "feeling with," a sym-pathos still necessary, even in a posthuman world, for these rights to be recognized and granted in the first place.

In the modernist period, the violence of mimesis already fails to generate the pathos that was the necessary condition for cathartic social efficacy; violence is no longer considered sacred but profane. Modernist mimetic theory, then, challenges nothing less and nothing more than the central thesis of *Violence and the Sacred* and proposes an account of violence that is more in line with the horror, or as Adriana Cavarero calls it, "horrorism" of modernity,[6] without giving in to the temptation of apocalyptic despair. Modernists also add that if new mass media do not hesitate to reveal spectacular forms of sacrificial violence in order to "inform" public opinion, the ethical and political effects of such visual representations could not be feebler. In fact, showing the pathos of anthropogenic catastrophes from a distance has the effect of absorbing the horrors of useless forms of sacrificial carnage (World War

I being the first paradigmatic example) in the transcendental realm of the hyperreal. Modernists do not have ready-made solutions that would contain, once and for all, massive outbreaks of "hyperreal contagion" (Baudrillard's term). What they tell us is that the battles of modernity are played out on mimetic fronts whose mass media must be studied if we want to keep up with the phantom of the ego that continues to haunt our contemporary times.

In sum, the modernist brand of mimetic theory is situated in a relation of both continuity and discontinuity with its Romantic counterpart, as modernism entails both a continuation and a discontinuation of romanticism. On the one hand, mimesis remains an affective source of tremendous struggles in the modernist period, threatening more than ever the social structures of society with massive forms of sacrificial horrors. Mimesis, as Girard—read in the company of a long tradition in psychology, anthropology, and philosophy—taught us, is contagious, irrational, and potentially violent and has the power to unconsciously electrify entire crowds. In modernist times of "hyperreal contagion" it spreads even more massively through all kinds of mass media, endowed with a ramified power of suggestion that cuts across borders at an uncontrollable speed. Indeed, this is a world in which the medium of mimetic messages has the power to accentuate the pathological "escalation" of violence, as Girard explains in *Battling to the End*. On the other hand, modernist mimetic theory decenters the question of desire central to the Romantic period in order to give center stage to mimesis as the main, polymorphous conceptual protagonist of mimetic theory. For the modernists, the starting point is no longer desire, nor mimetic desire, but mimesis itself. This does not mean that the modernist tradition, in a heroic mood, attempts to *achever* its predecessors (just as I am not attempting to *achever* Girard), if only because such a move would still be in line with the Hegelian, historical spirit it seeks to overcome. Rather, it builds on them, in a constructive mood, in order to further diagnostic investigations from the angle of a generalized theory of mimesis that has the heterogeneous concept of mimetic pathos as its ultimate focus. As a consequence of this shift of perspective from mimetic *desire* to mimetic *pathos*, from an ideal triangular structure to an immanent psycho-physiological movement, a new, but not necessarily original, brand of mimetic theory emerges in order to account for the turbulent, spiraling, and infectious movement of contagious patho(-)logies in which, *volens nolens*, the moderns continue to be caught.

What we must add now is that since this spiraling movement has both disruptive and affirmative consequences, the modernist brand of mimetic theory strives to go beyond the evil implications of affective contagion in order to also account for its vitalizing, Dionysian counterpart.

The Laughter of Community

Modernist writers are, indeed, severely critical of the modern, impersonal, hypermimetic times they live in, and of the horrors these times generate. Hence, they account for the formation of phantoms in terms of a sickness that needs to be, if not completely cured, at least accurately diagnosed. And yet it is important to stress that Nietzschean modernists intent on making mimetic theory new do not forget the old Platonic lesson that mimesis is at least two faced, like the god Janus, and that mimetic patho(-)logies can quickly turn from disease into remedy, remedy into disease.[7] From Nietzsche to Bernheim, Conrad to Tarde, Lawrence to Harrison, Bataille to Janet, we have repeatedly seen that in addition to the violence of disruptive forms of contagion (what Girard calls "violent mimesis") mimetic interactions such as sympathy, imitation, participation, dance, music, and, last but not least, laughter (what Bataille calls contagious "effusions") can be turned to positive affective and social ends. In line with this balancing operation, the modernist brand of mimetic theory proposes that a critique of violent, life-negating, and dissociative forms of mimetic pathologies must be supplemented by an analysis of the healthy, life-affirming, and ultimately associative forms of mimetic communication.[8]

Laughter is a relational, communal affect that occupies a privileged position in the Nietzschean axis of modernism we have been following. I have picked that affect as a main medium by which to rethink the affective foundations of the ego for reasons that are directly in line with the theoretical message of this study. I shall just flesh out three. First, laughter is an affirmative, joyful, Dionysian effusion that has the potential to balance the critical side of mimetic theory in the spirit of a "gay science" of mimesis Nietzsche encouraged us to pursue. Second, laughter is a contagious, reciprocal affect that, well before the discovery of mirror neurons and newborns' immediate responsiveness to mimicry, offers a theoretical starting point from

which to confirm the presence, efficacy, and theoretical timeliness of what we have called, for lack of a better term, "the mimetic unconscious." And third, laughter is an immanent, psychosomatic, and quite common affective experience that, from childhood on, does not take place in isolation but in the company of privileged others—what Pierre Janet calls *socii*. We have seen that the contagious experience of laughter can serve as a productive starting point for rethinking the *relational* foundations of the ego along lines that have mimesis as its generative principle. What we must add now is that this ticklish affect can equally account for the intersubjective, social, and ethical bonds that are constitutive of the experience of communal feelings as a whole. Indeed, the experience of laughter, and other gay effusions, opens up the ego to the pathos of the other, tying the other into the very tissue of the self. This realization offers an alternative, intersubjective, theoretical ground on which to reimagine the foundations of community along lines that supplement the *critical* dimension of mimetic theory from an *ethical* perspective that is attentive to the primacy of the other.[9] In short, the experience of mimesis might not only be at the origins of *historical* pathologies responsible for the crisis of modernity, but also of *theoretical* patho-logies that can help us reimagine a communal ethos the modernist generation still believed in.

Although Girard consistently emphasizes the violent, apocalyptic dimension of mimesis, he is the first to admit that the positive dimension of mimesis is "even more important,"[10] encouraging future theorists to develop this perspective as well. The modernist brand of mimetic theory proposes to further this neglected side. Indeed, the contagious reflex of an affect like laughter offers a productive starting point from which to analyze the vitalizing effects of contagion from an intersubjective, reciprocal perspective that can both benefit from and supplement Girard's theory. Many of the mechanisms Girard minutely describes are still at work in this mimetic affect par excellence; yet their effects and diagnostic conclusions are radically inverted. For instance, not unlike desire, laughter is intersubjective, contagious, and thus essentially mimetic; it does not belong originally to the self, but one catches it from another, usually an intimate, friendly other. And yet unlike mimetic desire, laughter is not confined within triangular structures, but easily affects a multiplicity of subjects. If mimetic desire generates life-negating emotions (like envy, jealousy, and ressentiment), leading to violent rivalries that culminate in dialectical struggles for pure prestige, the unconscious

reflex of laughter, on the other hand, generates life-affirming emotions (like sympathy, enthusiasm, and friendship) that are as constitutive of the ego as of the other and can be shared on a non-rivalrous, joyful basis. Furthermore, not unlike violence, laughter is relational, reciprocal, and leads to uncontrollable, irrational escalations that shake the foundations of subjects to the point of tears. And yet, unlike violence, the escalation of laughter does not threaten the stability of social bonds, but opens up the boundaries of the ego to the other in order to create, vitalize, and solidify these bonds. And if laughter, like violence, has cathartic social effects that generate increasing forms of social cohesion, it does not need the mediation of tragic spectacles, but of comic spectacles instead! In this sense, the escalation of laughter goes beyond bad mimesis and proposes an alternative account of mimetic reciprocity that is rooted in the formation of subjectivity itself. As Bataille puts it, as a coda to his discussion of "the contagious movement of laughter": the members who partake in it "find again their communion by laughing with a single laughter [*en riant d'un seul rire*]" (II, 338). One of the key modernist operations was to account for a process of affective *circulation* of communicative affects, where the mimetic flux is more important than the sum of the individual molecules that compose it.

Without invalidating the *disruptive* power of mimetic desire in competitive, rivalrous situations, or challenging the *cathartic* function of violent sacrifices in religious and nonreligious contexts,[11] an account of the *unifying* dimension of contagion furthers mimetic theory by addressing the positive, affective, and theoretical reasons responsible for the formation of social bonds. This realization has important theoretical consequences: it offers an alternative solution to the riddle of group formation that sidesteps the "economy of violence"[12] in favor of an economy of laughter.[13] Let us recall that, for Girard, social cohesion is never immediate and spontaneous, but is mediated and derived; it is not a first cause, but a secondary effect; it does not stem from the experience of communication, but is at least three times removed from the immediacy of communal experiences. In fact, for Girard, social unity emerges as a last step in a long chain that leads from mimetic desire to rivalry, from rivalry to violence, from violence to a crisis of differences, and it is only once a scapegoat has been designated and collectively sacrificed—that is, only once men follow what Girard calls, in a Freudian mood, "the royal road [*voie royale*] of violence"—that the "harmony of the

community" is restored and "the social fabric" reinforced.[14] In short, for Girard, social cohesion is born out of the cathartic effects of ritual violence.

Given the importance attributed to mimetic desire as the primary structuring feature for a theory of sociality, a long and laborious sequence of theoretical steps is necessary before humans can finally assemble in a spontaneous, communal spirit. This road is definitively a well-trodden one, especially in contemporary capitalistic societies characterized by radical individualism, fierce competitiveness, and a generalized consumerism on a globalized scale.[15] But this is not the only road. In view of the Girardian realization that in these societies the logic of sacrifice has lost its cathartic and thus unifying efficacy, there is an urgent need, if not to look for prepackaged alternatives, at least to contribute to reimagining them on an alternative theoretical basis.[16] Modernist theorists of mimesis help us to do so by opening up a theoretical short-cut to the royal road of violence. For them, in fact, it is not only desire that is mimetic, or violence that is contagious, but also mimesis itself that is both mimetic and contagious. Bataille, for instance, in his "Two Fragments on Laughter" that conclude *Guilty*, does not hesitate to risk a tautology in order to stress this crucial point: "*contagion* (the intimate interpenetration of two beings) *is contagious* (susceptible of infinite repercussions)" (V, 391). Hence, Bataille, in a Nietzschean spirit, posits that the experience of "communication" in laughter has the power to trigger an intimate, immediate, and cohesive "interpenetration" that spreads contagiously across the entire social body, generating what he calls "affective unification." In this he is close to Émile Durkheim, who, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, had given an account of the feeling of "communion" and "moral unity" that ensues from what he calls "collective effervescence" generated by ritual forms of totemic communion.[17] Along similar lines, speaking of "the subjectivity of laughter" in *La Souveraineté*, Bataille writes that it is not "expressible discursively, but the laughers feel, from one to the other, an unexpected and destabilizing transparency, as if the same laughter would generate a unique interior surge" (VIII, 288). This surge creates what he calls "participants in a community" predicated on the "the communication from *subject* to *subject*" (288). Indeed, as Charles Baudelaire also put it at the dawn of modernism, for the outburst of laughter to surge forth, "the presence of two beings is needed."[18] Laughter, then, occupies a privileged place among Dionysian thinkers because it allows them to rethink the relational foundations of subjectivity from a

life-affirming, immanent, and bodily perspective. It opens up the channels of communication in childhood through which other Dionysian affects (such as eroticism, dance, ecstasy, drunkenness, and friendship) will continue to flow in adulthood among consensual, egalitarian subjects who are part of what Bataille calls "elective community" (*communauté élective*) (II, 354). For Bataille, and Nietzschean modernists before him, laughter is a ticklish affect that opens up the boundaries of the ego to the pathos of the other(s) and galvanizes, on an immanent, horizontal base, the larger social body.

The modernist take on the "phantom of the ego," then, is not only important for psychological reasons; it also has larger ethical and political implications that can help us give an account of the intersubjective foundations that hold a multiplicity of subjects together.[19] Such a community is never a simple assemblage of individual egos; nor can it be considered as already given in an increasingly individualized, disembodied, and mediatized world. Rather, it emerges from the very process of alternative forms of communication that are more fundamental to the formation of the ego than previous egocentric accounts actually realized. Rethinking the foundations of subjectivity in mimetic terms in order to reimagine the foundations of community is, among other things, what the modernist tradition of the mimetic unconscious can help us do, and for at least three reasons. First, this tradition breaks free of monadic accounts of the ego that see narcissistic figures imprisoned in solipsistic repressive hypotheses and static specular reflections as the ultimate ontological horizon of subjectivity. Instead, it proposes an account of the immediate, mimetic *bonds* that, even in our mediated world, continue to be constitutive of human relations. Second, this untimely tradition of the mimetic unconscious anticipates, by more than a century, the recent discovery of involuntary reflexes and mirror neurons. In this, they are scientifically ahead of their times, but they also go beyond contemporary scientific investigations in the hard sciences. In fact, a modernist theoretical model of the foundations of subjectivity offers an account of subject formation that reveals the psychic, social, and ethico-political forms of mimetic communication responsible for generating embodied, human subjects who are themselves while being someone other. And third, a patho-logical account of immanent forms of communication invites us to think through the specific, intersubjective dynamic that gives birth to a "phantom of the ego." This phantom is not only a devalued copy of the ego but is also constitutive

of it; as Nietzsche puts it, it is "communicated" (*mitgeteilt*)—con-divided, both united and divided—with the other. This ego emerges with the other as an *ipse* that is not identical to itself, but functions as a place of communication between subjects who are ready to reimagine the possibility of future communities yet to come.

The fact that the recent theoretical turn to rethinking the foundations of "community" is directly in line with Bataille's thought testifies to the timeliness of his theory of mimetic communication. We are in fact told that "Bataille has gone furthest into the crucial experience of the modern destiny of community."[20] And figures as diverse as Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Giorgio Agamben have attempted to further Bataille's experience by emphasizing the primacy of the relation with the other and the sharing (*partage*) it entails—though these others tend to be dead rather than living others.[21] They have also opened up a "singular-plural" account of subjectivity to a relational, intersubjective perspective to account for an increasingly depersonalized, yet still singular "whatever" (*qualunque*) subjectivity that is not without echoes in the modernist account of the phantom of the ego—though these relations tend to focus on a philosophy of Being rather than on a patho(-)logy of human beings.[22] What we can add is that a Bataillean approach informed by a Nietzschean genealogy of the subject can help us account for the thus far neglected *mimetic dynamic* that renders a subject "plural-singular" in the first place. Although mimesis is rarely discussed in contemporary accounts of community, it is perhaps the singular, impersonal, yet relational pathos that is most crucial in accounting for the forces that render the ego open to a plurality of subjects, and that open up what has already been called "an *ethical* 'beyond' of the subject."[23]

Plurality, for the modernists, comes before the ego because it is through a mimetic communication with plural *socii* that a singular multiple ego can emerge; and it is through the unconscious reflex of imitation that access to the psychic life of the other can take place. This, at least, is what Nietzsche suggests as he says that it is through "the mimicking of gestures, which takes place involuntarily" that "the child still learns to understand its mother" and "people learned to understand one another" (*HH* 216). Diagnostic arrows like this one make clear that Nietzsche is not only a fierce critic of the life-negating side of the phantom of the ego; he is also one of the foremost advocates of the life-affirming side of the ego of the phantom. While destabilizing

the ontology of the subject understood as a unitary, self-identical, monadic substance, this imitative process does not entail an undifferentiated "fusion" between self and other. Nor does it dissolve the otherness of the other in favor of an epistemology of "the same." Rather, this mimetic communication (*Mit-teilung*) opens up those first communicative routes (*parcours*) whereby the phantom of the ego is *con*-divided (both united and divided) with a multiplicity of others that are both interior and exterior to *ipse*.

Contemporary theorists who have turned to Nietzsche's Dionysian thought in order to rethink "the force of morality in the production of the subject" from a relational perspective tend to be critical of its violent foundations.[24] And quite rightly so since, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche thinks of the affective foundations of the moral subject in terms of violent forms of mimetic will to power typographically impressed on a multiplicity of subjects along lines we have considered as socially pathological. And yet the movement of mimetic patho(-)logy has also taught us that Nietzsche's account of morality, and the type of subjectivity that emerges from it, cannot be reduced to a unitary genealogical perspective. Instead, we must be ready to trace its mimetic countermovements as they appear in his protean work. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for instance, Nietzsche offers an account of the "inner experience" that casts new light on the "history of the human soul" (*BGE* 45) along lines Bataille will later develop. Thus, Nietzsche focuses on the relational structure of the soul understood as "multiplicity" that opens up a theoretical alternative to rethink the foundations of morality on a relational, egalitarian, and nonaggressive basis. Opening what he calls "the road to new forms and refinements of the soul-hypothesis" (*BGE* 12), he proposes the hypothesis of what he calls "'soul as multiplicity of the subject' and 'soul as social structure of the drives and emotions'" (12). This soul hypothesis rests on a deeper, mimetic hypothesis we have been concerned with all along. For Nietzsche, the soul is, in fact, multiple because the mimetic unconscious posits the presence of privileged others as formative of the very structure of subjectivity. It is, in fact, through the experience of mimesis that the ego is initially traversed by the formative pathos of a multiplicity of others/socii, predisposing it for the communal experience of what Bataille will later call, echoing Nietzsche, "being multiple singular." The door Nietzsche opens up, then, is perfectly in line with the modernist realization that the ego comes into being in a relation of communication with the other qua socius, as a

relational, plural and fundamentally open *ipse* that is dependent on the affects of the socius in order to emerge. Moreover, if the child automatically mimics the mother's gestures, this unconscious mimesis gives access not only to the psychic life of the other but also to the psychic life of the ego. Consequently mimetic forms of communication, as Nietzsche understands them, are constitutive of relational bonds that posit a dependency on, and openness to, the mimetic pathos of the other as primary. This anchorage of the pathos of the other in the self is not necessarily "traumatic," nor is it based on a "linguistic" form communication[25] but, rather, takes place through the laughter of the other/socius that tickles the ego into being as an immanent, embodied, and above all communal being.

Given the primacy it gives to others in the formation of the ego, and given the consideration of the ego as a crossroads where a multiplicity of communicative experiences can take place, Nietzsche's soul/mimetic hypothesis opens up an imaginative, immanent perspective on the ethical ties that structure a community of multiple, yet singular souls. There is considerable ethical potential in this theoretical realization. Insofar as this dependency on the other/socius in order to emerge as subject is anchored in the very tissue of intersubjectivity, opening those passages through which communication will continue to flow, it becomes a livable condition not only to imagine but also to develop future relations based on mimetic interdependency.[26] Put differently, if a multiplicity already structures the soul, as Nietzsche suggests, then, a microanalysis of the affective forms of communication that brings this soul into being as singular multiple can help us account for the ties that are constitutive of a community made of multiple singular souls. What is clear, in any case, is that the psychology of the socius and the mimetic unconscious that informs it does not stop at the limits of the ego, but transgresses these limits to open up the ego to the ethos of the other along lines that will require further development. I can only suggest here that in order to further this line of inquiry along the lines opened up by Nietzschean figures, attention should be given less to the restricted principle of insufficiency, narcissistic identifications, or linguistic ontological principles, and more to the general economy characteristic of a sovereign, Dionysian excess that generates those living bonds constitutive of elective communities yet to come.

Finally, although this process of mimetic communication blurs solid distinctions between interior and exterior, self and other, private and public,

this does not mean that the subject is homogeneous with the other, but that the other provides a starting point for the ego to emerge as a heterogeneous, relational subject. What is at stake in this communication is not experienced in terms of fusion, or confusion, and not even infusion, but in terms of a bodily experience that Bataille qualifies in terms of "effusion" instead. To be sure, this effusive communication is of anti-Platonic inspiration; it is in line with the Nietzschean, antimetaphysical imperative to remain faithful to the earth. And yet the idealism this immanent model attempts to counter is perhaps not directly Platonic or Christian. After all, in the wake of the death of god, the force of the "old phantom" (VI, 72), as Bataille ironically calls it, is already waning in the modernist period. Rather, it confronts the contemporary avatars of these transcendental traditions as they appear in the increasing postmodern (but still Platonic) tendency to upload embodied human subjects in the hyperreal (but still ideal) sphere of virtual "reality," a sphere where disembodied simulacra are progressively replacing what Lawrence called "solid" reality with what Nietzsche already called a "strange world of phantoms." It is because new avatars of Platonism are more alive than ever, typographically informing and conforming future generations on a massive scale, that balanced immanent perspectives are urgently needed. Tracing the process of emergence of the ego through the experience of laughter calls for a gay science of mimetic, embodied, communicative relations that take place on a horizontal plane of immanence. This, at least, is what the figures we have encountered along the path of this Nietzschean journey suggest, as they continue to open up solipsistic accounts of the psyche to the immanent social and communal forces that compose a subject that is not one.

The fact that this subject is not one does not mean that she is no one. On the contrary, the openness of communicating *passages* that structure the soul as multiplicity offers a microscopic example of the types of mimetic "drives" and "emotions" that can be reenacted, reimagined, and perhaps even performed, at the social, macroscopic level. At least in the context of a community of subjects composed by a multiplicity of chosen others ready to experience what Bataille, thinking of laughter, calls the "specific form of human interaction" (*Coll.* 108). These communities might not be *quantitatively* dominant. They never were and are certainly not so in market-oriented, capitalist, digitalized societies still driven by the fiction of the "old stable ego." But as Bataille suggests, and every subject lucky enough

to be in touch with its socii—parents, lovers, teachers, friends, and, last but not least, children—knows, this mimetic communication is *qualitatively* constitutive of those fluxes of affects that have the power to give form to a life—among others.

The Center Does Not Hold

What are the psychic, ethical, political consequences of the mimetic realization that the socius generates an ego that is not one? Does this mean that stronger "ethical connection with others" should emerge from the realization that the other is already internal to the ego, as Judith Butler suggests?[27] Or does it indicate that the mimetic interpenetration of the other into the ego engenders apocalyptic cycles of "escalating" violence that lead to a "battle to the end," as René Girard prophesizes?[28] As far as I can see, there are no single, homogeneous answers to such heterogeneous theoretical alternatives. Each case of infective contagion deserves, in my view, a specific diagnostic inquiry that is attentive not only to the disruptive and productive effects of pathos, but also to the fact that pathology can quickly turn into patho-logy, and vice versa. Accounting for this movement, in both its microscopic and macroscopic loops, is what the spiral of mimetic patho(-)logy has attempted to do.

The mimetic spiral does not stop turning at the end of modernism, but it has in modernism its starting point. The writers we have been following are part of a generation of thinkers who are beginning to sense, with increasing intensity, that the power of their own medium is perhaps no longer the strongest in town to convey mimetic messages to the public. And yet this medium remains extremely sensitive to register this shift of emphasis: Nietzsche's late fascination with the actor's "will to power," Conrad's account of a "universal genius" qua journalist, the increasing fragmentation of Lawrence's "political novels," and Bataille's heterogeneous account of nonlinguistic forms of communication are symptomatic of a characteristically modernist realization that traditional artistic forms and genres, as well as the ethical, political, religious, and metaphysical certitudes they entail, are, if not entirely falling apart, at least progressively giving way to the turbulent spirit that is characteristic of the crisis of modernity.

W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming"[29] catches, with extreme visionary precision, the spiraling, centrifugal movement away from a stabilizing human, all too human center that is characteristic of modernist times. As we have seen, in such a period of transformation, there is no longer a stationary axis that can hold the modernist worldview together, providing stabilizing solutions to the unsettling riddles of mimesis. And yet this does not mean that mimetic patho(-)logies cannot be developed in order to keep up with the "widening gyre" characteristic of the modernist flight into the future. Nor does the "anarchy [that] is loosed upon the world" suggest that a single "revelation is at hand," no matter how strong the desire for a "second coming" is, or may be, at times of decline of the West.[30] What modernist physicians of the soul propose is perhaps less a transcendental, mythic revelation than an immanent and untimely indication: namely, that "the best" should regain their "conviction" in order to propose, with and against the current of our hypermimetic times, alternative models, types, and, above all patho-*logical* forms of inquiry that continue to critically reflect on the affective and infective power of mimetic (dis)possession. Regaining the conviction that mimesis is at the center of the crisis of modernity is the key step for continuing to follow the widening spiral that, for better or worse, is currently turning phantoms into egos—egos into phantoms.

Having begun with Nietzsche, we shall conclude this book with Nietzsche. In *Twilight of the Idols* this self-proclaimed philosophical physician sums up his mimetic diagnostic about the ego along lines that modernist physicians of the soul will be quick to echo. He restates his clinical conclusion thus: "This 'inner world' is full of phantoms. . . . And as for the *ego*! That has become a fable, a fiction, a play on words" (*TI* 3; 495). *The Phantom of the Ego* has told the story of how the ego become a fable. If our ambition was to unmask metaphysical fictions—revealing them as fascinating plays on words—it is not for us to predict how this fable will end.

shown that the conflict between 'mine and yours' [*'le mien et le tien'*] forms the central problem of every psychological problem" (T 162).

103. Janet is here intuiting more recent postmodern developments in mimetic theory whereby the logic of mimesis is supplemented by the logic of the simulacrum. For a theoretical extension of this theory of simulacra or artifacts within the sphere of psychology proper, see Borch-Jacobsen's *Folies à plusieurs*.

104. See Meltzoff and Moore, "Persons and Representation, 9–12; Meltzoff, "Out of the Mouths of Babes," 55–74; Braten Stein, "Introduction," in *Intersubjective Communication and Emotion in Early Ontogeny*, ed. Stein Braten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–11.

105. Gallese, "Shared Manifold Hypothesis," 39. See also Gallese, "The Two Sides of Mimesis: Mimetic Theory, Embodied Simulation, and Social Identification," in *Mimesis and Science*, 87–108.

106. Gallese, "The Two Sides of Mimesis," 97.

107. Bataille is right to mention that Janet is not uncritical of nineteenth-century psychology, but Janet's objections do not concern his precursors' emphasis on immediate reflexes. What Janet objects to is the fact that nineteenth-century psychologists believe that "man knows immediately, *from his own personality*" rather than from a no less immediate and reflexive "knowledge of the *personality of others*" (T 161; my emphasis). Janet, on the other hand, argues that the subject knows on the basis of the affective knowledge of the other/socius. In this sense, he is sympathetic to a modernist writer like Proust, who, like Nietzsche, Conrad and Lawrence, recognizes that it is through mimesis of others' feelings that we have access not only to the psychic life of the other but to our own affects as well. "Marcel Proust said it very well: 'We only know the passions of others. What we manage to know about our own passions, we learned from others. We understand others by becoming like them, we guess others' thoughts, by imitation" (T 167).

108. Following Henri Wallon, Janet writes that "the child participate in everything that surrounds him, people and things, and we constantly observe confusions of a multiplicity of people in a single one" (T 176).

109. Bataille specifies in a note: "In a meeting at the *Collège de sociologie*, Roger Caillois . . . expressed a reserve on the meaning of this line. It is possible to translate it: 'start, little child, to recognize your mother through your laughter [*par ton rire*]' but also, 'by her laughter [*à son rire*]'" (V 389–390).

110. Lacan confidently states: "It is this captation of the human form by the *imago*, more than an *Einfühlung* demonstrably absent during early childhood [*une* Einfühlung *dont tout démontre l'absence dans la prime enfance*] which dominates the entire dialectic of the child's behavior in the presence of the other [*semblable*] between six months and two years." Jacques Lacan, "L'agressivité en psychanalyse," in *Écrits*, 101–124, 113. Recent research in the field of developmental psychology demonstrates that the opposite is true, and that newborns, from their early days of life, are receptive to the affect of the other/socius. Since Bataille's conception of mimetic communication is in line with these discoveries, he offers a more promising starting point to rethink the process of formation of the ego and to foresee who comes after the subject.

111. Hill, *Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot*, 53.

112. François Warin, *Nietzsche et Bataille: La parodie à l'infini* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 254.

113. In the context of his account of the psychology of the socius, Janet notices that the "confusions between the consciousness of the subject and the one of the socius" questions what he calls "too abstract and general philosophical notions" about subject formation (T 161). Along similar lines, Nietzsche, in his account of the origins of communication writes: "You will guess that it is not the opposition of subject and object that concerns me here: This distinction I leave to the epistemologists who have become entangled in the snares of grammar (the metaphysics of the people)" (*GS* 354).

114. As Bataille puts it, "laughter, while unquestionably mediated, retains an aspect of pronounced immediacy in the human relations it controls" (*Coll.* 112). Bataille will continue to stick to the immediacy of laughter to the very end. Thus, he writes in *Erotism*: "we have an immediate knowledge of the other person's laughter when we laugh ourselves or of an excitement when we share it" (153).

115. Supporting Sartre's indication that the laughter in question is not funny, Bataille, writes: "It is always a distress; it is always something dispiriting that causes advanced laughter" (*Coll.* 110). The laughter he describes involves a psycho-physiological response which, like a hiccup, surprises the subject as it is confronted to an extreme fright. Yet, as Borch-Jacobsen suggests, there is an affirmative, Dionysian dimension that leads Bataille to accept and, ultimately, affirm this meaningless, involuntary laughter. Thus, Bataille is fond of quoting the following note from Nietzsche's fragments: "To see tragic natures sink and *to be able to laugh at them*, despite the profound understanding, the emotion and the sympathy—that is divine" (*IE* xxxi).

116. For an exhaustive list of the affective "effusions" that traverse Bataille's conception of sovereign communication, see *La souveraineté* VIII, 277.

117. Even later in his career, Bataille continues to have Janet explicitly in mind. For instance, he writes in a note to the introduction to *Inner Experience*: "Then I started reading Janet, imagining it necessary to use his subtlety in order to go further" (V, 430). And he specifies: "Contrary to usual tendencies in mystical studies, Janet does not confine himself to the knowledge that comes from books. He had the chance to cure an 'ecstatic' woman in a medical institution" (V, 429).

118. Bataille aligns his account of dramatization with the mystical exercises of Saint Ignace. Notoriously, Bataille tries to achieve a state of psychic depersonalization via a hypnotic identification with images of the *supplicié Chinois* Fou-Tchou-Li, a modern and real Christ/Dionysos, literally torn to pieces. In this sense, Bataille consciously pushes to the limit the Nietzschean experience of identification with the Dionysian *sparagamos*. Both the experiences of mimetic dramatization and hypnotic depersonalization are responsible for generating a state of total dispossession whereby the ego is no longer present to itself: "I felt this state with more intensity than one normally does and as if another and not I had experienced it [*comme si un autre et non moi l'éprouvait*]" (*IE* 112).

119. Commenting on Janet's psychology of the socius, Henri Wallon writes: "these relations themselves [with others] seem to be mediated by the phantom of the other [*fantôme d'autrui*] that everyone carries within himself. The variations in intensity affecting this phantom [*fantôme*] are what govern the level of our relations with others." Henri Wallon, "The Role of the Other in the Consciousness of the Ego," in *The World of Henri Wallon*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Jason Aaronson, 1946). Http://www.marxists.org/archive/wallon/works/1946/ch7.htm.

Coda. Mimetic Theory Revisited

I would like to thank Gary Handwerk for asking a series of Nietzschean, ethical questions that provided just the right stimulus to write this coda. This last chapter is gratefully dedicated to him.

1. See Girard, "Master Slave," in *Deceit*, 96–112. Early in his career, Girard downplayed the importance of Kojève's anthropomorphic reading of Hegel in the genesis of his theory. More recently, however, he writes: "I cannot deny that Hegel was in the background. Kojève's influence

was huge in France. . . . Like Hegel, I was saying that we desire things less than we desire for ourselves the desire that others have for things; I was talking about *a desire for the other's desire*, in a way." Girard, *Battling to the End*, 30.

2. See Lacoue-Labarthe, "Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis," in *Typography*, 248–266.

3. See Girard, *Deceit*, 20–22.

4. As Nicholas Carr summarizes it, "Extensive, perpetual plasticity has been documented in healthy, normally functioning nervous systems, leading neuroscientists to conclude that our brains are always in flux, adapting to even small shifts in our circumstances and behavior." Carr, *The Shallows*, 31. And echoing a realization that is as old as Plato, Norman Doidge specifies that plasticity "produces effects we think of as both bad and good." Doidge, *Brain that Changes Itself*, 317.

5. See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004); Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005).

6. On the "horrorism" that informs contemporary violence see Cavarero, *Horrorism*.

7. As Jacques Derrida has famously shown, in Plato's thought mimesis already operates as a *pharmakon*, understood in the dual sense of disease and remedy. Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, 61–171.

8. See also Andreas Oberprantacher, "Beyond Rivalry? Rethinking Community in View of Apocalyptical Violence," *Contagion* 17 (2010): 175–187.

9. For an account of the role of shared mimetic experiences in childhood for the creation of a "'we-centric' space" essential for establishing a feeling of "communion," see Kruger, "Imitation, Communion, and Culture."

10. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 76.

11. Bataille distinguishes between "communication binding *two* beings (the laughter of the child with the mother, tickling, etc.)" and "communication through death, with a beyond of beings (essentially in sacrifice)" (V, 388).

12. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 7.

13. Bataille famously speaks of "general economy" in order to account for a Dionysian squandering of energy that tightens social cohesion. Following Marcel Mauss's *The Gift*, he reminds us that "each act of generosity contributes to the cycle of generosity in general." And he adds: "Thus, throughout a limited group based on generosity there is an organic and pre-arranged communication like the multiple movements of a dance or a piece of orchestral music." Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, 206.

14. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 8.

15. We should not forget that Girard's mimetic theory emerged in the context of U.S. academia in a period in which the "theory wars" were at their apex, generating a breeding ground for mimetic rivalry. Unfortunately, this academic, "humanistic" context all too often mimics the competitive, rivalrous, and violent spirit of the capitalist societies it is supposed to critique.

16. Benedict Anderson is right to point out that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined." Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6. What we must add is that the source of this imagination is rooted in immanent, bodily reflexes that can be traced back to real face-to-face contacts with the other qua socius.

17. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 175, 171. Speaking of the "inner experience" of "moral forces," Durkheim writes: "nothing is more contagious and, as a result, more communicable" (271).

18. Charles Baudelaire, "De l'essence du rire," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 975–993, 993 (my transl.).

19. Judith Butler writes that "speculations on the formation of the subject are crucial to understanding the basis of non-violent responses to injury and, perhaps most important, to a theory of collective responsibility." Butler, *Precarious Life*, 44. Butler's realization that the subject is not autonomous but is "given over to some set of primary others" (31) is indicative of a recent turn to a mimetic principle that was well known among modernists.

20. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. and tr. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 16.

21. Maurice Blanchot writes that "the existence of every being is addressed to the other [*appelle l'autre*] or a plurality of others." And he adds that such a community has its "principle in the finitude of the members that compose it." Blanchot, *La communauté inavouable* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1983), 16–17 (my transl.). Jean-Luc Nancy states that community "is not the space of the egos . . . but of *I*'s, who are always *others*." And he adds: "If community is revealed in the death of others, it is because death itself is the true community of *I*'s that are not *egos*." Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 15.

22. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, tr. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Bryne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, tr. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

23. Borch-Jacobsen, *The Emotional Tie*, 16.

24. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 10. See also 10–16.

25. See Butler, *Giving an Account*, 69–87.

26. For an illuminating account of the bonds generated by what we have called, following Janet, "the psychology of the socius," see François Roustang, *Influence* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1990), 149–160.

27. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 46.

28. Girard, *Battling to the End*.

29. William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming," *Selected Poems*, ed. Richard Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26.

30. Yeats, "Second Coming," 26.