# The Patho-Logies of Exclusion: Politics, Media, (New) Fascism

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Given the Nietzschean inspiration of the diagnostic that follows, I might as well start with a personal confession – one that will not surprise mimetic theorists and advocates of mimetic studies. The pathologies of exclusion I set out to diagnose are not completely original; just as the brackets around "(new) fascism" are there to indicate that the phantom of fascist egos is far from being completely new. My general wager, in fact, is that what the Greeks called, enigmatically, *mimēsis*, continues to play a decisive role in the pathologies of exclusion directed against racial, religious, and ethnic minorities, mimetic pathologies that risk escalating during times of crisis – including pandemic crisis – and have striking analogies with what used to be grouped under the rubric of "fascism." Although my thought is not theological in orientation and is rather different from the distinguished figure that gives the name to this honorary lecture, I would like to pick up a question Raymund Schwager poignantly asked in his first book, which, has not lost any of its timeliness today: namely, *Brauchen Wir einen Sündenbock?* (1978)*;* a question that was aptly rendered in the plural in the English translation – *Must There Be Scapegoats*?[1] And if mimetic theory teaches us that scapegoats are perhaps inevitable during times of crisis, what, then, are the discourses or *logoi* that inform the affect or *pathos* of exclusion – what I call patho-*logies*?[2]

Born in the Italian speaking part of Switzerland I know that the accusation, "*fascista!,"* comes with a heavy historical baggage and should not be used lightly,

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1    Raymund Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible,* trans. M. L. Assad. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000).

2    I first articulated the dynamic of mimetic patho(-)logies in Nidesh Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 6-8. More recently I proposed a new theory of imitation that inaugurates the fields of mimetic studies in Nidesh Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus: A New Theory of Imitation* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022).

also because history does not repeat itself. But as a theorist of mimesis I also did not need to wait the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 to see that, if not fascism itself, then at least the phantom or shadow of fascism was looming on the contemporary political scene, casting a shadow in Europe and many parts of the world.[3] If I take a step back to what used to be my main area of investigation, namely, European literary and philosophical modernism, I think it is safe to say that the link between fascism and mimetic behavior was once well-known at the dawn of the twentieth century. Imitation, in its conscious and, especially, unconscious manifestations, was then a popular subject of analysis. It concerned not only literature, philosophy, and psychology but also emerging human sciences such as sociology, anthropology and, especially crowd psychology, a discipline that provided a diagnostic of mimetic contagion fascist leaders like Hitler and Mussolini, were quick to put to political use – and abuse. And yet, as the phantom of fascism eventually dissolved in the second half of the twentieth century, the shadow of mimesis, and its legendary power to trigger unconscious and violent affects among crowds and publics, progressively fell to the background of the theoretical scene. With few exceptions, it was eventually relegated to an aberrant historical anomaly that concerned the few European countries that had openly embraced fascist governments, most notably, Italy and Germany. This, at least, is the story that is often told in school and is likely to be passed on still today, preserving the reassuring feeling that fascism belongs to a dark European past our enlightened age long left behind.

And yet, this theoretical neglect did not prevent the laws of imitation from continuing to operate in political practices. Since humans remain, for better *and* worse, eminently mimetic creatures who are formed, informed, and transformed by dominant models, including political models, it is not surprising to see that as authoritarian leaders on the far-right are elected in times of economic crisis, political instability, intensified displacements of populations across national borders, and exclusions aggravated by a pandemic crisis, the shadow of fascism falls,

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3    While my warnings against (new) fascism started appearing in 2017, I offer a more specific diagnostic of the fascist psychology internal to the storming of the U.S. Capitol in a more recent essay. See Nidesh Lawtoo, "The Power of Myth (Reloaded): From Nazism to (New) Fascism," *L'Esprit Créateur* 57/4 (2017): 64-82; "The Insurrection Moment: Intoxication, Conspiracy, Assault, *Theory & Event* 26/1 (2023): 5-30.

once again, on the political scene. In the process, it generates hypernationalist, militarist, racist, and xenophobic reactions that are not deprived of mass appeal and infect relations between self and others, natives and immigrants, the North and the Global South, those who are considered the same and those who are perceived as different.

Such hierarchical distinctions are constitutive of what Umberto Eco calls "Eternal Fascism," whose distinguishing features include, among other things, "the cult of tradition," "fear of difference," the "appeal to a frustrated middle class," "machismo," and an "impoverished language, or newspeak" we are now all too familiar with.[4] If the term "populism" is often still used to designate these phenomena, recent publications have been pushing for a shift in terminology, which is also a shift in genealogy, to account for the emergence of these far-right movements.[5] Be it under the rubric of tyranny, aspirational fascism, neo-fascism, new fascism, or more simply, fascism, influential historians, political theorists, philosophers and cultural critics have very recently reopened the dossier on fascism from a contemporary perspective. These recent books are currently multiplying approaches to render visible a protean, adaptable, chameleon-like, and in this sense, mimetic phenomenon that may not have a unitary essence or singular definition but takes on different forms and colors to fit different national backgrounds. Mimetic theory, I strongly felt, should be part of this chorus of dissident voices. Having previously diagnosed the affective power of fascist leaders in the past century, I felt somehow the obligation to add a mimetic supplement to diagnostics of contemporary politics in the present century.

As the subtitle of *(New) Fascism* suggests, I propose to revisit three related mimetic concepts – contagion, community, and myth – in order to show that they played a key role in the rise of fascist phantoms that may not be completely new, yet effectively use new media to come to power, galvanize publics, and enforce

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4    Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism," *New York Review of Books*, June 22, 1995.
5    The literature on fascism has exploded since I wrote *(New) Fascism*, and I cannot list it in full here. My diagnostic emerged in conversation with Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2017) and William E. Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism: The Struggle for Multifaceted Democracy under Trumpism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). It also confirms concomitant diagnostics such as, Madeleine Albright, *Fascism: A Warning* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018) and Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York: Random House 2018).

fascist distinctions between us and them. By placing brackets around the "(new)" I intended to introduce a moment of phenomenological suspension, bracketing, or hesitation with respect to books I sensed were soon to come, to remind ourselves that mimesis is an old concept and that what appears to be new at first sight might be a contemporary re-enactment of ancient or modern principles mimetic theorists have long been familiar with – an idea already internal to the genealogy of the Italian concept of *fascio* (the "bundle" constitutive of the Roman axe bound in rods used to decapitate subjects), which harkens back to the imitation of ancient and rather violent Roman power – or will to power.

These preliminary remarks are meant to indicate that in what follows I will not be primarily concerned in justifying the historical relevance of the concept of "fascism" to account for the racism, hypernationalism, machismo, militarism, denial of facts, big lies, celebration of phallocentric power, and practices of exclusions at play in far-right movements today, both in Europe, Russia, and the U.S. – for the number of growing books on the subject are already doing that effectively. Nor will I discuss in any detail the centrality of the three main concepts I investigate in *(New) fascism* – for the book is now available. Instead, I would like to take the topic of this volume, "Imagining the Other," as a timely occasion to step back to some of the foundational insights of mimetic theory central to diagnosing the irrational trigger of mimetic contagion which, as both René Girard and Raymund Schwager encouraged us to consider, can easily be directed against biblical scapegoats and, we should now add, against immigrants, minorities, and refugees as well. In particular, I establish a genealogical connection between two disciplines that despite striking analogies, are often still considered in isolation – most notably, mimetic theory and crowd psychology – yet benefit from being put in critical dialogue in order to account for the pathologies of exclusions that plague contemporary politics.

On a more personal note, and to explain the choice of my primary case study, I should also say that I started worrying again about fascist phantoms I had diagnosed in *The Phantom of the Ego* (2013), around 2016, as I held a visiting position at The Humanities Center, Johns Hopkins University – a transdisciplinary center Girard had helped set up in the 1960s and rendered internationally famous via a conference that is genealogically entangled with the emergence of his mimetic

theory, titled, "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" in 1966.[6] It is perhaps also due to this genealogical connection that, as Donald Trump, then the host of a popular reality TV show called, *The Apprentice*, was gaining traction in the primaries, at a time many of my colleagues perhaps more attentive to linguistic signs than to bodily mimicry considered his candidacy a source of jokes, I – along with colleagues in political theory, most notably William Connolly – started to take him seriously. Why? For many untimely insights I owe to a genealogy of mimesis constitutive of a thoroughly imitative species I call, *homo mimeticus*, which is currently generating a mimetic turn, or re-turn to mimesis in different areas of critical theory.[7] But perhaps also because never had Friedrich Nietzsche's prophetic diagnostic in *The Gay Science* rang truer than in 2016. Namely, that "the most interesting ages of history always occur when 'actors,' *all* kinds of actors, will be the real masters [alle *Arten Schauspieler, die eigentlichen Herren sind*]"[8] – he writes, using the present tense in the German original. We live, I'm afraid, in these interesting, but also extremely dangerous ages. Hence, if I had previously considered how Nietzsche took the case of Wagner as his paradigmatic case to critique the pathologies of modern mass behavior,[9] I could now not resist the temptation to zoom in on the case of Trump to diagnose the pathologies of mass exclusion at play in (new) fascist behavior.

I thus put my double training as a literary critic and philosopher to unorthodox use to diagnose this actor's contagious rhetoric but also to further what I started to call mimetic studies from a political perspective that has not been traditionally central to Girard's mimetic theory. Building on Nietzsche, Girard, but also Georges Bataille, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, and other thinkers of mimesis, I wanted to better understand how in a post-Romantic era in which novelistic truth progressively gives way to digital and rather alternative

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6   See Nidesh Lawtoo, "The Shadow of the Symposium: Sameness and Difference Replayed," *MLN* 134/5 (2019): 898-909. See also the special issue, *Poetics and Politics: with Lacoue-Labarthe*, *MLN* 132/5 (2017): 1133–1139.

7   In addition to mimetic theory (Girard) and political theory (William Connolly, Jane Bennett), the mimetic turn includes major representatives in literary theory (J. Hillis Miller), continental philosophy (Jean-Luc Nancy), anthropology (Christoph Wulf), feminist philosophy (Adriana Cavarero), and posthuman studies (Katherine Hayles), among other perspectives. See www.homomimeticus.eu.

8   Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 303.

9   See Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego*, 52-83.

truths, or lies, shadows far removed from reality could produce unconscious and quite mimetic effects in real life, nonetheless. While the thinkers I mentioned provided the foundations on which I built my case, I also needed new concepts to account for the new manifestations of mimesis in the 21ˢᵗ century. Girard's focus on mimetic desire and the rivalries and scapegoating mechanisms that ensue remain eminently relevant to account for fascist exclusion. At the same time, I also sensed that in the digital age, not only desire but all kinds of heterogeneous affects are generative of mimetic contagion triggering unconscious movements of attraction and repulsion that do not always fit within triangular structures. The related concepts of mimetic pathos, the mimetic unconscious, pathos of distance, patho-logies, mimetic racism, and hypermimesis are some of the new concepts I propose to further mimetic studies in the twenty-first century.[10] If I had been developing them over the past decade, I now had the occasion to put them to the test via a case study that not only galvanized the public opinion but was elected President of the Free World from 2016-2020, attempted to overturn the results of the elections, instigated a (new) fascist coup on January 6, 2021, and threatens to return under different masks in the near future. The new concepts I propose to take hold of this case will inform the diagnostic of *homo mimeticus* that follows, and I will do my best to clarify them as I go along.

But let us proceed by tracing a genealogical connection first.

## A Genealogical Connection: The Mimetic Crowd

Many of the far-right movements on display on the political scene, in Europe, South America, Asia, and, from 2016 to 2020, spectacularly in the U.S. as well, do not sound completely new to mimetic theorists. From the pathological narcissism of mediatized leader figures to the mimetic desires of followers modelled on such figures, from violent rivalries with political adversaries to scapegoating mechanisms against minorities, from the readiness to sacrifice innocent victims, including children, to aggressive anti-immigration policies that deprive victims of

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10  See Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus*, 11-40 and the special issue on *The Mimetic Condition* in *CounterText* 8.1 (2022).

basic human rights, to the menace of nuclear wars that threaten to escalate to extremes, I think it is safe to say, that the central mimetic mechanisms René Girard described in his influential books, from *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1961) to *Achever Clausewitz* (2007), can no longer be considered only as part of a theory of the violent origins of culture – though it remains that. In a mirroring inversion of perspectives, mimetic theory now directly informs contemporary political practices that, as Girard began to indicate in his later work, are currently accelerating our progress toward potentially, but not inevitable, catastrophic destinations.

There are thus ample reasons to justify a mimetic approach to contemporary politics, especially since politics remained marginal in Girard's theoretical investigations and it is only in recent years that his theory has been applied to "mimetic politics."[11] This neglect concerns the heterogeneous type of mimetic communication specifically at play in fascist politics as well. For instance, amongst scholars of fascism it is well-known that fascist leaders, old and new, appeal to emotions rather than reason, *pathos* rather than *logos*, in order to generate outbreaks of enthusiastic frenzy that spreads contagiously among potential voters assembled in what used to be called a "crowd" (*foule, Masse, folla*). Robert Paxton, for instance, in *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004) perceptively diagnoses what he calls "the emotional lava that set fascism's foundations."[12] These affective foundations, he continues, include the "sense of overwhelming crisis," "the belief that one's group is a victim," the desire for a "purer community," the belief in "the superiority of the leader's instinct," and above all "the right of the chosen people to dominate others," among other distinctive features which, he specifies, "belong more to the realm of visceral feelings than to the realm of reasoned propositions,"[13] all of which are constitutive of what Umberto Eco called "Ur-Fascism" or "Eternal fascism." Furthermore, more recent historians like Timothy Snyder and political theorists like William Connolly have convoked the mimetic register of hypnotic "spells," "collective trance," "affective contagion," "identification," and "mimetic

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11  See for instance, Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 275-96; Roberto Farneti, *Mimetic Politics: Dyadic Patterns in Global Politics* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015).

12  Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 41.

13  Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism,* 219.

communication"[14] to account for the contaminating power of these feelings, that is, psychological concepts that are genealogically connected to mimesis in general and the tradition of the mimetic unconscious in particular.

What we can add is that the contagious and hypnotic nature of these feelings has been diagnosed in detail well before the rise of historical fascism. The paradigm of hypnosis to account for mimetic contagion was in the air in fin de siècle Europe. Advocates of the then newly founded discipline of crowd psychology, such as Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde in France wanted to account for a psychological transformation that overcame people assembled in a crowd. Otherwise rational individuals, they observed, were suddenly easily affected by emotions, especially violent emotions that they noted, adopting a concept of the then new discovery of microbes, would spread "contagiously," and in this sense mimetically, in the crowd. As Gustave Le Bon puts it in *Psychologie des foules* (1895), "in a crowd, every feeling, every act is contagious [*tout acte est contagieux*]."[15] Note that he doesn't say, *tout désir*, opening up a broader perspective on affective contagion that will later be divided by Sigmund Freud in two distinct "emotional ties" (desire and identification). Still, the contagious acts and emotions he considers are certainly mimetic. Thus, to make the link between contagion and imitation clear, Le Bon adds: "imitation, a phenomenon which is considered so influential on social behavior, is a simple effect of contagion."[16]

Now given that Girard is one of the few contemporary thinkers who has furthered the connection between mimesis and contagion, the connection between mimetic theory and crowd psychology should be obvious, direct, and well-established. Still, this is not the case. With few exceptions, this crucial genealogy concerning the psychology of mimesis has remained little explored. I suggest there are at least three reasons for pursuing it. First, crowd psychology emerges in critical dialogue with emerging social sciences such as sociology, anthropology of religion and psychoanalysis, that is, human sciences central to mimetic theory

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14  Snyder, *On Tyranny*, 51, 61; Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*, 21, 37.

15  Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 13 (all translations from this work are mine). I have given an account of the relation between affective contagion and viral contagion in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis in Nidesh Lawtoo, "Viral Mimesis: The Patho-Logies of the Coronavirus," *Paragrana* 30 (2021): 155-68.

16  Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, 74.

as well. Second, both perspectives share an interest in challenging a solipsistic view of subjectivity in order to call attention to the relational, affective, and interpersonal power of mimetic affects, including violent affects. And third, both are in line with a pre-Freudian tradition of the unconscious that is not based on a repressive or Oedipal hypothesis but, rather opens up a mimetic or contagious hypothesis attentive to mirroring reflexes that are currently contributing to the mimetic turn, or re-turn to *homo mimeticus*. I group these involuntary mirroring reflexes that open a porous or relational ego qua phantom ego to external influences under the rubric of "the mimetic unconscious."[17] I do so, to differentiate it from the psychoanalytical variant, but also to indicate that imitation provides a more direct door to access the unconscious, both at the personal and collective level – a view that is receiving growing empirical support in the neurosciences as well. These are but some of the reasons I adopt a Janus-faced perspective to open up new perspectives for mimetic studies and bring its insights into closer collaboration with some of the disciplines that contributed to its genealogy.

Let us briefly recall that crowd psychology is a discipline that emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century specifically to study the mimetic and contagious behavior of crowds in increasingly populated cities. It is linked to founding texts like Gustave Le Bon's *Psychologie des foules* (1895) and Gabriel Tarde's *Les Lois de l'imitation* (1890) and found adherents in England (Wilfred Trotter), Italy (Scipio Sighele) and Austria (Sigmund Freud, Elias Canetti), among other countries. After a long period of marginalization in the second half of the past century crowd psychology is recently receiving renewed attention in social theory.[18] It also deserves recognition in mimetic studies for it adds a political perspective that was central to the rise of historical fascism and, via new media, is now reloaded in (new) fascism as well.

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17  I first discussed the "mimetic unconscious" in *The Phantom of the Ego* and furthered its genealogy in "The Mimetic Unconscious: A Genealogy," in *Imitation, Contagion, Suggestion: On Mimesis and Society*, ed. Christian Borch (New York: Routledge, 2019), 37-53. The entire collection offers new perspectives on mimetic contagion.

18  See Christian Borch, *The Politics of Crowds: An Alternative History of Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Gunter Gebauer and Sven Rücker, *Vom Sog der Massen und der neuen Macht der Einzelnen* (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2019).

The laws of imitation, in fact, are psycho-sociological in nature, but the founders of crowd psychology were quick to sense their direct political applications. Both Le Bon and Tarde, in fact, pointed out that "leaders" (*meneurs*) endowed with "prestige" rely on mimetic contagion or *pathos* rather than logical arguments or *logos* in order to cast a spell on the psychic life of crowds. Comparing the power of prestigious leaders to the power of hypnotists, they drew from a psychological tradition that was attentive to the power of unconscious imitation to introduce collective sameness in place of individual difference. In particular, they relied on the notion of "suggestion (*suggestion*)" understood as a psychological propensity to unconsciously or semiconsciously mimic gestures and expressions of others, and thus adopt, by a form of contagion, their ideas and opinions, especially those of respected, dominant, or prestigious others.

Not unlike mimetic theory, then, crowd psychology does not set up a flattering, narcissistic picture to the psychic life of the ego in a crowd. It is perhaps also for this reason that, even in a post-romantic period in which originality has been proved to be a *mensonge*, as Girard put it, its major insights tend to be ignored. Le Bon summarizes the major psychological characteristics of the crowd as follows:

> Dissolution of conscious personality, dominance of the unconscious personality (*personnalité inconsciente*), orientation by way of suggestion and contagion of feelings and ideas toward the same direction; tendency to transform suggested ideas immediately into actions: these are the principal characteristics of the individual who is part of a crowd. He is no longer himself but an automaton whose will no longer has the power to lead.[19]

Thus reframed, the subject is no longer an autonomous, rational, and volitional ego (or *Homo sapiens*) but a suggestible, irrational, and porous phantom ego (or *homo mimeticus*). This is, indeed, a troubling image not only for the mimetic psychology it presupposes but also for the politics it can lead to. If we take this diagnostic of the subject of the "lonely crowd" literally – to echo David Riesman – the politics that ensues can in fact be potentially complicit with, rather than

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19   Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, 14.

critical of, fascism. In fact, it can be used as a manual to cast a spell on the *demos* and provide the body politic with a *meneur*, *duce* or *Führe*r – these being Mussolini's and Hitler's translations of Le Bon's *meneur*.

It would be useless to deny it. The shadow of fascist politics haunts crowd psychology, if only because this mimetic psychology was effectively put into practice by fascist leaders. Considered from a political perspective, then, Le Bon is far from being the most obvious candidate to convoke in a *critique* of fascist exclusion, be it old or new. His conservative politics, his fear of the specter of socialism (rather than of fascism), and above all, his openly racist, sexist, and classist assumptions of crowds as "feminine," "primitive," "savage" etc. contribute to the pathologies of exclusion we are denouncing, and deserve to be diagnosed in terms of what I called, in the context of an account of a tale that has haunted me for a long time, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, "mimetic racism."[20] That is, the ethnocentric tendency to project the shared burden of mimetic irrational behavior onto subaltern racial others so as to better justify their violent exploitation, exclusion, and, as in the case of the Belgian Congo and the German Holocaust, "extermination" – as the ominous phrase scribbled at the end of Kurtz's pamphlet, "Exterminate all the brutes!,"[21] horribly foreshadows. Clearly, "the horror" Conrad denounced with respect to colonial leaders who are "hollow at the core" at the heart of Africa is now returning to haunt neoliberal Europe, the U. S., and the world more generally. The moral darkness is pervasive, like the halo of a moon, and is rendered visible in the way we continue to treat others, from children detention camps in the U.S. to anti-immigration policies in Europe that lead to what Conrad would have designated groves of deaths, or catastrophic crossings that generate unspeakable horrors. This *is* indeed a contemporary manifestation of what Conrad called "heart of darkness."

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20  Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego*, 117-130 and *Conrad's Shadow: Catastrophe, Mimesis, Theory* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 129-207.

21  Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 5th Norton Critical Edition, ed. Paul B. Armstrong (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017), 50; see also Nidesh Lawtoo, "*Heart of Darkness* and the Horror of Mimesis," in *Heart of Darkness,* 434-446.

To return to Le Bon, then, his racist, sexist, and nationalist account of crowds that demonize others will certainly not serve as our *political* guide in the diagnostic of the *pathologies* of exclusion internal to new fascism. And yet, we should not hasten to throw out the baby of crowd psychology with the conservative political water in which it was born – at least if we want to understand how a mimetic affect, or *pathos*, be it desire, fear, anger, or *ressentiment,* can be used to manipulate public opinion *contra* vulnerable others. The fact that I radically disagree with Le Bon's *political* conclusions against crowds as savage and pathological does not mean that we should automatically reject his patho-*logical* insights in crowd behavior tout court. Le Bon had, in fact, identified distinctive rhetorical mechanisms that fascist leaders will use to trigger mimetic contagion in the crowd, mimetic mechanisms that are particularly useful to foster a violent politics of exclusion. They included, among other things, the power of repetition, the affective role of gestures and facial mimicry, the use of images rather than thoughts, of concise affirmations rather than rational explanations, the adoption of an authoritarian tone and posture, and the reliance on racial discrimination as a factor of hierarchical differentiation, all of which, he specified, have the power to impress the imaginations of crowds – and, with the benefit of hindsight, we should add, the imagination of authoritarian leaders as well. As Le Bon puts it:

"The crowd being only impressed by excessive feelings, the orator who wants to seduce it must rely excessively on violent affirmations [*des affirmations violentes*]: exaggerating, affirming, repeating and never attempting to demonstrate anything through reason."[22] Now, Hitler is not the same as Mussolini, who is not the same as Trump; the latter is not a Nazi, or even a fascist, but a phantom of a fascist, as his rhetorical incitation of the crowd to storm the Capitol on January 6, 2021 in view of overturning a lawful democratic election made clear for those who still had doubts. Still, their mimetic posture and rhetoric is eerily similar, the (new) fascist echoes had been strong during Trump's entire presidency, and the insurrection should not have come as a surprise. Of particular importance, were the following elements: the repetition of a simple nationalist "slogan" (say, a country made "great again"), accompanied by a "captivating and clear image" (say, a "wall"), and the "magic" of a simple accusation (say "rapists") that already sets up an *imaginary* but rather effective border in the mind of voters, dividing insider and outside, self and other, us and them.

Studies on the mimetic effectiveness of this rhetoric have not been popular in the second half of the past century dominated by the linguistic turn, but the rhetoric of fascist exclusion continues to cast a suggestive spell on the present century as a proliferation of crisis – from pandemic, environmental, migratory – can easily lead to hypernationalist exclusionary reactions directed against "others" that proliferate online first before generating effects offline. Historically, it is thus useful to note that Le Bon was not alone in his diagnostic of the irrational side of the crowd – he was simply the most popular divulgator. Before Le Bon, in his sociological classic *Les Lois de l'imitation* (1890), Gabriel Tarde provided sociological foundations to the connection between imitation and crowd behavior, stretching to define not only the crowd but society as a whole in terms of contagious imitation.

While politically moderate, Tarde's diagnostic of imitation was no less severe, for he extends the laws of imitation from the crowd to account for society as a whole. Thus, he defines the social group as "a collection of individuals who are imitating each other [...] insofar as their common traits are ancient copies of the

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22   Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, 26.

same model"[23]. And stressing the role of "unconscious imitation (*imitation inconsciente*)" in the formation of the social bond, he specifies: "having only suggested ideas and believing them to be spontaneous: this is the illusion proper to the somnambulist and to the social man."[24] Like Le Bon, Tarde relies on the psychological notion of hypnotic "suggestion" in order to account for the mimetic tendency of social beings to adopt ideas – including racist, exclusionary ideas – that are originally external to the self, as one's own, as if in a kind of somnambulistic sleep.

Again, the image is not flattering but does it mean that it is false? Crowd psychology confirms mimetic theory as it urges us to consider that our ideas, emotions, opinions, goals, and actions might not always be as original as they appear to be, especially if we are caught in a broader social movement. They may at least be partially shaped mimetically, hypnotically, and thus unconsciously by the models or leaders that surround us. Joining the insights of mimetic theory and crowd psychology in a way characteristic of mimetic studies, I call this pre-Freudian unconscious the *mimetic* unconscious. It designates a relational, embodied, and intersubjective unconscious that does not set up a clear split between self and other, the personal and the collective, consciousness and the unconscious. Rather, it calls attention to the different degrees of consciousness that are at play as we mimic others, often without being fully conscious of doing so and in this sense, *un*-consciously. Since it has hypnotic forms of involuntary imitation, more than repressed Oedipal desires, as a via regia, the mimetic unconscious does not rest on a repressive hypothesis but on a mimetic hypothesis instead.

As we moved from the crowd to unconscious imitation, a second genealogical connection is now in order to further our diagnostic of the pathologies of exclusion.

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23   Gabriel Tarde, *Les Lois de l'imitation* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 128 (all translations mine).
24   Tarde, *Les Lois*, 137.

## Suggestion and Desire: Girard *avec* Freud

At first sight, fin-de-siècle statements about hypnotic crowds could indeed be seen as the product of a past generation of social theorists who relied on an old-fashioned, and long disproved model of suggestion to account for the magnetizing power of leaders. This view is much influenced by Sigmund Freud, who was himself a theorist of crowd behavior. In *Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego* (1921), the father of psychoanalysis, in fact, dismissed hypnotic suggestion as a "magical" concept that "explains everything [and] was itself to be exempt from explanation"[25]. Freud's metapsychology, with its focus on triangular desire that leads to rivalry and violence, continues to latently influence mimetic theory.[26] Despite its many merits, it might also restrict our understanding of the unconscious to individual complexes and, by doing so, cast a shadow on mirroring intersubjective reflexes constitutive of the mimetic unconscious. Let us take a closer look.

Freud's diagnostic of what he called "crowd psychology" (a better translation of *Massenpsychologie*) rests on the shoulders of the tradition in crowd psychology we have just considered. In fact, he explicitly echoed Le Bon's and Tarde's question as he asked: "Why […] do we invariably give way to this contagion when we are in a group?"[27] The answer, however, proved originally different. Freud, in fact, broke with the mimetic tradition, which had suggestion as a main door to the unconscious. He did so by establishing a distinction between two "emotional ties" (*Gefühlsbindungen*) that bind the crowd to the leader: most notably "desire" and "identification;" or as Freud also puts it, wanting to "*have*" as opposed to wanting to "*be*" the other (*GP* 38). This is a conceptual distinction that was not present in the tradition of the mimetic unconscious and will have significant influences for Girard's mimetic theory.

Schematically put, Freud stretched his personal, Oedipal psychology to account for crowd psychology via three, structurally related theoretical steps. First, he posits that "love" (wanting to have) is what constitutes "the essence of the

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25  Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1959), 21.

26  See Nidesh Lawtoo, *Violence and the Oedipal Unconscious, vol. 1: The Catharsis Hypothesis* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2023), 33-80.

27  Freud, *Group Psychology*, 21. Hereafter *GP* in the text.

group mind" (*GP* 23) in the sense that members of the crowd love the leader, just as members of an army love their Commander, and members of the Church love Christ – hence the primacy of desire. Second, he complicates this account by inserting a second emotional tie, namely "identification" (wanting to be) by saying in a more recognizably mimetic language that "identification endeavours to mould a person own's ego after the fashion of the one that has been taken as a model" (*GP* 38) – hence mimesis turns out to be part of group formation as well. And finally, he triangulates these two emotional ties by stating that "identification is based on the possibility or *desire* of putting oneself in the same situation." (*GP* 39) Desire, in other words, comes first for it paves the way for identification or mimesis; wanting to *have* what the model has leads to wanting to *be* the model.

So far, so good. But we might also wonder: could it be the other way around? This is, indeed, Girard's fundamental question. While he had avoided mentioning Freud in his first account of mimetic triangles, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1961), by the time he is writing his second major book, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), an agonistic yet still mimetic confrontation with the father of psychoanalysis can no longer be avoided. In a chapter titled "Freud and the Oedipus Complex," Girard in fact zeroes in on a structural ambivalence in Freud's metapsychology, thereby aligning mimetic theory with the tradition of crowd psychology that concerns us. Schematically put, his move is double. On the one hand, Girard points out that Freud posits the primacy of desire (or object cathexis) over identification (or mimesis); on the other hand, he also notices that Freud sometimes defines identification as "the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person." (*GP* 37) Which version is true? As Girard argued "Freud saw that path of mimetic desire stretching out before him and deliberately turned aside"[28]. In Girard's exploration of the path Freud saw but did not pursue, it is in fact because the subject of the crowd identifies with the model qua leader *first* that he or she ends up desiring what he desires, in a move that paves the way for mimetic rivalry. Hence, in his view, "the mimetic model directs the disciple's desire to a particular object by desiring it himself" (*VS* 170). This is a powerful mirroring inversion of

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28  René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* [La violence et le sacré], trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 171. Hereafter *VS*.

perspectives that is as opposed to the influential predecessor as it is dependent on its fundamental triangular structure and is constitutive of a form of intellectual rivalry I call "mimetic agonism."[29] For our purpose it suffices to say that mimesis, for Girard, is not only central to personal psychology but to crowd psychology as well for it accounts for the contagious violence that triggers mob behavior and for the scapegoating mechanism that unifies the social body.

In the wake of Girard's reframing of Freud's account of crowd psychology, the problematic of identification and its link to hypnosis has been amply discussed in mimetic theory. Jean-Michel Oughorlian brought mimetic theory in connection with hypnosis, as he noticed that "The hypnotic rapport […] is an exceptional condensation of all the potentialities of mimesis."[30] The connection with fascist politics has also been noticed, most notably by Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen who, furthering both Lacoue-Labarthe and Girard's critiques of Freud, exposed the narcissistic nature of Freudian politics. As Borch-Jacobsen states at the end of a detailed reading of *Group Psychology*: "the leader is a narcissistic object: the group members love *themselves* in him, they recognize him as their master because they recognize *themselves* in him."[31] This dynamic of recognition should now be familiar. Mirroring reflections are all too visibly exploited by narcissistic leaders qua masters who turn this desire for recognition to new dramatic uses.

This is the moment to recognize that crowd psychology and the mimetic unconscious it relies on allow us to add a decisive empirical supplement to this psychic genealogy in mimetic theory. In fact, crowd psychologists were already attentive to mirroring reflexes that were much neglected in the past Freudian century but that are currently returning to the foreground in the twenty-first century. An important scientific discovery is in fact lending empirical support to the pre-Freudian realization that not only desire, but all affects, be they good or bad, are mimetic and generate unconscious mirroring reactions. A group of Italian neuroscientists led by Giacomo Rizzolatti and Vittorio Gallese in the 1990s discovered so-called "mirror neurons" in macaque monkeys with striking

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29  On Girard's mimetic agonism with Freud see Lawtoo, *Violence and Oedipal Unconscious,* 45-57.

30  René Girard, *Des Choses Cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Edition Grasset, 1978), 455 (all translations mine).

31  Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 208.

implications to understand human mimetic behavior as well, including, as we shall see, political behavior.[32]

Due to the popularity of this discovery, it is now well-known to mimetic theorists that mirror neurons are motor neurons, that is, neurons responsible for motion, that fire not only when we move but also at the sight of movements, such as gestures and facial expressions performed by others. Thus, the mirror neuron system (MNS), as it is now called in humans, "triggers" in the subject the unconscious reflex of reproducing the gestures or expressions of others, generating mirroring effects that are not under the full control of consciousness and are in this sense *un*-conscious. Less known is that mirror neurons are actually a *re*-discovery of the *pre*-Freudian tradition of the mimetic unconscious, a minor tradition that postulated, already in the 1890s – that is, a *century* before the discovery of mirror neurons – an innate tendency to imitate in the nervous system.[33] For our purpose it suffices to quote Tarde's untimely realization that "'in the nervous system there is an innate tendency to imitate'" (*il y a dans le système nerveux une tendance innée à l'imitation*).[34] Along similar lines, Nietzsche speaks of a type of non-linguistic communication that is based on the unconscious mimicry of gestures and expressions as he says in a 1888 fragment of *Will to Power*: "one communicates movements, mimics signs, which we then trace back to thoughts."[35] This mimetic will to power – what Nietzsche also calls a *pathos* – crosses the boundaries dividing self and others on the basis of an all too human tendency to mimic others that includes desire but also stretches to encompass all affects, be they good or evil. I thus call this (will to) power, "mimetic *pathos*."[36] And it is on this ancient, yet also modernist, concept imperfectly translated as "affect" which designates an impersonal force that has the power to take possession of the subject, that I provide a different starting point for my contemporary theory of *homo mimeticus*. That is, one based on the realization that all affects are mimetic, for both good and ill,

32  See Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain: How our Minds Share Actions and Emotions,* trans. Frances Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

33  See Lawtoo, *The Mimetic Unconscious.*

34  Tarde, *Les Lois,* 148.

35  Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 428.

36  Cf. Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego*, 3-8.

individually and collectively, generating movements of attraction and repulsion, pathos and distance that do not allow for familial triangulations yet galvanize the body politic, often via violent exclusions, nonetheless. It follows that since mimetic pathos opens the ego to the outside, again for better and worse, the mimetic unconscious is not simply a personal or intersubjective unconscious; it is already a political unconscious.

Mirroring mechanisms that are not under the full control of rational consciousness can, in fact, be linked to rationality, logical understanding, and sympathy, as neuroscientists routinely point out. And yet, they can also provide a breeding ground for irrational misunderstandings, not to speak of deception, manipulation, and violence against others, as a long genealogy that goes all the way back to Plato and reaches into the present via Girard, reminds us. (New) fascist leaders may thus not promote logical understanding in their speeches, and yet they know how to channel mimetic pathos into crowds and publics, making mirror neurons fire via their gestures and expressions that can be effectively turned to violent and exclusionary uses and abuses. It is this mimetic pathos and the unconscious pathologies it triggers, I contend, that not only played a major role in the election of an apprentice president driven by a pathological narcissism that predictably culminated in a (new) fascist insurrection; it also triggered imaginary but quite effective hierarchical distinctions between us and them, inside and outside, self and others, generating exclusions that are effectively mediated by new and increasingly affecting media.

## New Media Exclusions: From Reality Show to Political Reality

If we now return to our political case study on the joint shoulders of mimetic theory and crowd psychology constitutive of mimetic studies, it is apparent that the mimetic unconscious played a key role in the 2016 election of Donald Trump. In times of identity crisis, economic instability, political division, racist and sexist oppression, class inequality, environmental catastrophe and, last but not least, pandemic contagion, it is no wonder that rhetorical exclusions – from the "Muslim Ban" to "build the wall" to the "China virus" – generated physical oppressions against minorities and immigrants. This mechanism is likely to

remain center-stage in the rise of (new) fascist leaders in the future who can promote simple scapegoating mechanisms to give the illusion of solving complex social, economic, political, and health crises, not to speak of environmental anthropogenetic catastrophes that will amplify the severity of what William E. Connolly calls "planetary" crises.[37] The case of Trump is thus a singular case and he is now no longer president of the largest democracy. Still, he surprised many. And even after four years of aggressive anti-democratic government, the foreseeable (new) fascist insurrection with which he ended his presidency was not foreseen. Let us thus replay some scenes of his rhetoric of exclusion in slow motion in light of genealogy we mapped so far to be prepared in the future.

Trump's rhetoric was emotionally effective because he did not simply report a political program from a rational diegetic distance. Rather, he aggressively impersonated his role with mimetic *pathos* in view of triggering the mimetic unconscious. Thus, when Trump condemned the media as fake, pointing at them as if he could fire them, when he induced fear of minorities by calling them "rapist," when he convoked the image of a "wall" raising his hand to protect the nation from the so-called "caravan" of immigrants, when he performatively proclaimed the ban of Muslims, or when he called Covid-19 the "China virus" – when he did these things, he spoke as what Nietzsche would have call an "actor." Or, as Plato would have put it in book 3 of the *Republic*, he spoke in a *mimetic* rather than in a *diegetic* register impersonating his role in speech but also body, mimicry, and gestures. Consequently, his rhetoric should be taken seriously not only for *what* it says (the message and the ultra-nationalism, racism, militarism and anti-immigration policies it conveys) but also for *how* he says it (the medium and the use of gestures, expressions, shouts it mediates), a mimetic mass-medium that communicates pathos directly, by affective contagion, to the mimetic unconscious of an already aroused crowd or public.

In addition to Trump's embodiment of traditional elements of the American dream, his mediatized persona staged in TV shows like *The Apprentice* amplified his power of mimetic fascination in the sphere of fiction among the *public* first, thereby paving the way for his political success in the *crowd* of supporters as

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37  William E. Connolly, *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017). For a connection between entangled humanism and mimetic theory, see Lawtoo, *(New) Fascism*, 179-242.

well. In guise of conclusion, I consider the rhetoric of exclusion internal to *The Apprentice* for a Janus-faced reason: first, to further our diagnostic of the patho-*logies* of exclusion in the age of actors turned masters: and second, as a case study to revisit the classical psychoanalytical distinction between identification and desire, whose triangular structure continues to inform mimetic theory as well – albeit in an inverted form. I articulate my suspicion as innocently and directly as possible, but the answer may have important consequence for the future of mimetic studies: does this structural opposition between desire and mimesis still apply in the digital age, or does it require new foundations in a mirroring *pathos* at play in the mimetic unconscious?

What is certain is that in *The Apprentice* mimesis is center stage for identification is at least double as it operates both inside the show and outside, in the real world – because the show is generating exclusions that will spill over in the real world as well. Inside the show, the carefully selected candidates that tightly fit normative standards of beauty, conform to aggressive neoliberal values (radical individualism, ruthless ambition, competitive rivalry, etc.), serve as models that attract identification of viewers outside the show as well. Spectators of *The Apprentice* must in fact have a desire to be (like) the potential apprentices and, as in all agonistic contests, are likely to identify with one of the two competing teams.

And yet, since these competing candidates are themselves subjects motivated by the desire to be a successful businessperson of which Trump sets himself up as an ideal, a hierarchy of models is already in place that situates spectators at two removes from the ideal model. The mimetic logic is simple, hierarchical and effective: spectators identify with the apprentices who identify with the master. From such a distance, the spectators' mimetic pathos is first and foremost shared with the apprentice candidates and their efforts to fulfill a given business-related task.

This identification, however, is limited; it usually lasts until the much-coveted spectacle at the culmination of each episode. As the losing team needs to face the boardroom chaired by Trump in order to account for their failure, a predictable quasi-sacrificial turn ensues: the members of the team usually gang up against a single and rather arbitrary victim and designate a scapegoat. Responsibility for violence is thus structurally located within the mimetic team, thereby clearing the way for the sacrificer, in all good conscience, to point his finger and pull the trigger of his notorious symbolic execution expressed with pathos: "You're fired!"

The desire of the candidate to become an apprentice millionaire in a material-ist-oriented culture that promotes models like Trump is of course not original; it is dictated by real and fictional models that are already pervasive in the culture and are visibly at play in shows like *The Apprentice.* That this desire leads to rivalry, not with the mediator as such, who remains at the superior level of what Girard calls "external mediation,"[38] but with the other members of the "team" is equally inevitable given the rivalrous dimensions of the show based on a process of progressive elimination itself modeled on the competitive structure of neoliberal capitalism amplified by economic crisis. Hence, the need for a violent exclusion already emerges from within the rivalrous community itself.

It's a basic and rather crude strategy of survival that allows the firing to be directed against what Girard calls a "single victim [that] can be substituted for all the potential victims" (*VS* 79). That spectators enjoy watching such a show is itself confirmation of the public appeal for violence in which one or more victims are "fired" allowing the other members of the "team" to continue the show – at least until the next ritual firing takes place. The dynamic perfectly conforms to the Girardian schema: the desire for the same object inevitably leads to rivalry, violence, and ultimately sacrifice as a cathartic resolution for the spectator to enjoy at a distance. It is in fact difficult to find a clearer and most condensed illustration of Girard's mimetic theory.

And yet, at the same time, we may also wonder: who is the "you" who is being "fired" here? And why should spectators identify with the sacrificer in the first place? Here the patho-*logical* dynamic of exclusion is less clear but might allow us to further our diagnostic of the mimetic unconscious. Within the show, the victim is the fired apprentice, of course. But if we happened to identify with his/her position – why watch the show otherwise? – there is a psychic side of the public that vicariously experiences being fired as well. The finger/gun pointing at the failed apprentice framed in a medium shot that breaks the fourth wall comes awfully close to pointing to us as well; and as the apprentice's dreams of success fails within the reality show, so do ours – at one remove from the show, in real life.

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38  René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* [Mensonge roman-tique et vérité romanesque]*,* trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 9.

After the firing, then, spectators' identificatory allegiances inevitably shift from the now (symbolically) dead apprentice qua sacrificial victim toward the narcissistic business model qua sacrificer. An interesting mimetic shift from the (failed) apprentice to the (ideal) model has thus just taken place. And importantly, this shift cuts across the distinction between show and reality.

The show, in other words, is *not* about the apprentice; it is about the master. Trump is visibly the original narcissistic model the apprentice is supposed to mimic within the reality *show*. At one remove, in *reality* spectators may initially identify with the sacrificial apprentice, until the firing devalues the apprentice and glorifies the power of Trump. Put in more classical terms, identification with Trump is a dramatic *effect* of the tragic structure (or *mythos*) of this sacrificial TV show. Hence, a perverse desire to be Trump, to identify with the sacrificer rather than the victim is automatically triggered by the mimetic plot of the show every time that a firing takes place generating mimetic pathos. The show ran for fifteen seasons; it was still ongoing at the time Trump decided to enter another reality television show and run for the presidency. The step from TV reality show to the reality of political TV shows was but a short one.

We were wondering why the victim identifies with the oppressor not only in reality shows but also in political fictions? *The Apprentice* illustrates a perverse hypermimetic dynamic that is now at play in political spectacles as well. In their social *reality*, the working-class voters who supported Trump are actually on the side of the sacrificial victims. Living in miserable social conditions, deprived of basic social services, not sustained by unions, driven by fear of others, and subjected to real forms of deprivation that render their lives precarious, they are not likely to fire anyone anytime soon in real life – but can always potentially be fired instead. And, paradoxically, for this reason they are deeply impressed by the power they lack and wish to have.

This mimetic paradox is then aggravated by an increasingly mediatized political world modeled on a form of aggressive, rivalrous, and violent entertainment in which it is becoming difficult to distinguish between life and fiction, the show and the reality, especially in a population that has been deprived of a basic education in the humanities – let alone mimetic theory – central for the development of critical thought and practices. Hence, if members of a public have already identified with Trump in a mass-mediatized fictional reality *show* they are also

likely to identify with him in an equally mediatized political *reality* show; if they enjoyed a violent rhetoric within the show, they are likely to enjoy the same rhetoric in real life; if they were suggestible to the pathologies of exclusion as a public they are likely to have their suggestibility amplified in a crowd.

The fact that the medium remains the same in the shift from entertainment to politics and that politics is itself modelled on entertainment, confuses the reality and the show, politics and fiction. Hence as politics is experienced as a fiction, politicians are evaluated according to their dramatic performance – rather than their political message. Spectators of the reality show at Trump's rallies might thus have had aesthetic, rather than political criteria in mind as their mimetic unconscious might lead them to ask: could I identify with the protagonist? Did he make me feel good? Or if I feel far from good, did his accusations against minorities at least make me feel better – and subordinate others worse? Above all, would I want to watch this show on TV again tomorrow? And as I think of the next show, doesn't America already begin to *feel* great again? Perhaps then, shows like *The Apprentice*, amplified by new media like Twitter and Facebook that rely on algorithms to generate hypermimetic effects requiring more attention,[39] paved the way for the election of an apprentice president in real life.

Lastly, we might still wonder: Was the desire to be Trump triggered by what he has, or is it the other way around: identification directing desire? If Freud argued that desire for an "object" (his term for a woman, most notably the mother) precedes identification with a model qua father figure, and Girard, in a mirroring inversion of perspectives characteristic of his mimetic agonism, stressed that identification with the model actually directs the desire toward the object, the case of Trump seems to me to blur the line between these two distinct "emotional ties" as Freud called them, insofar as both the desire to be and to have are simultaneously constitutive of the mimetic *pathos* he triggers.

As the name capitalized on his towers makes visible for all to see, Trump is indeed *both* the name of a subject *and* of an object. The brand plastered on objects being so constitutive of the subject that it cannot be dissociated from what

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39   On the role of (new) media in amplifying Trump's rhetoric, see Lawtoo, "The Insurrection Moment;" on the role of Peter Thiel, a former student of Trump and major investor in Facebook in undermining democracy, see Kieran Keohane, "La Liberté contra la démocratie," *Le Grand Continent*, 2019, https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2019/02/16/par-dela-la-democratie/.

he "is." Why identify with such a figure otherwise? Spectators qua voters who identify with Trump do so because of what he has, which already defines what he is, and who/what they would like to be/have as well.



From Trump Tower to Trump Golf Courses, Trump Casinos to Trump Beauty Pageants, Trump Wine to Trump Stakes to whatever other "objects" he owns, an untidy intermixture of wanting to be and wanting to have, is at play in the mimetic *pathos* that ties the leader to his crowd of supporters, trumping the fundamental distinction on which Freud's account of mass psychology rests. There is logical potential in this pathological case, after all.

The case of Trump was worth diagnosing. It indicates that both wanting to have and wanting to be are at play in emerging forms of mass-mediatized suggestibility to pathos that rest on the interplay between the public and the crowd. To answer Raymund Schwager's timely question, then, we may not need scapegoats individually, if we are endowed with a basic sense of moral respect for human,

all too human, others; but collectively, and in times of crisis (new) fascist leaders will continue to steer violent mass-emotions against innocent scapegoats as a short-cut to rise to power. Counting on the mirroring reflexes that lead humans to affectively respond to the mimetic pathos of actors, all kinds of actors turned masters can now rely on *new media* in order to cast a spell on the public and disseminate the pathologies of exclusion with an increasing speed and power of infection. If scapegoating mechanisms are far from new and, as Girard argued, harken back to the origins of culture, this interplay between hyperreal simulations and mimetic hypnotization may actually be the *new* side of (new) fascism that opens up violent destinations in the future. In fact, in this process of spiraling circulation, the distinction between reality and show, fiction and politics, but also truth and lies, origin and copy, digital simulation and embodied imitation becomes part of what I call a *hypermimetic* dynamic that thrives on simulations that may appear comic from a virtual *distance*; yet, as any witness of children imprisoned in detention camps, both in the US and Europe, can experience, trigger tragic *pathos* in real life.

To conclude, despite the innovation in the media, the old concept of mimesis remains strikingly relevant to account for the violent messages against others that are currently at play in contemporary politics. It calls for a mimetic turn or re-turn of attention to mimesis that is already underway in different strands of critical theory in general and now inform mimetic studies in particular. If, as I have argued, *all countries* are vulnerable to the pathologies of exclusion, then it is urgent for mimetic theorists to continue developing critical patho-*logies* to diagnose and counter (new) fascist phantoms looming on the horizon and the violence they generate. At the same time – and our very humanity may hinge on this—we should also promote communal movements of solidarity across national, cultural and religious differences, a mimetic solidarity, which, I did not stress it enough in this essay, is also constitutive of *homo mimeticus*.

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