

ANDREW J. MCKENNA
(Loyola University Chicago)

THE ENDS OF VIOLENCE. GIRARD AND DERRIDA

Philosophers and literary critics alike have grown accustomed to consider meaning as something that circulates between and among signs, verbal or written, rather than as a property of any one of them. This is elementary linguistics as advanced by Ferdinand de Saussure, who explains meaning as oppositive, negative, and relative with respect to other meanings rather than a distinctive feature we can isolate from the language as a whole. Jacques Derrida has coined the word «différance», defined minimally as deferral in space and time, to name this rootless, nomadic flow, the «a» in the word suggesting an active participle which connotes movement, interplay, relation, rather than a stable entity¹. Meaning is an effect of différance, every sign being only the trace of others signs in endless, pointless relays.

As I have argued elsewhere², différance as active and passive interplay is a good account of mimetic desire among humans, which is the founding insight upon which René Girard has developed his anthropology. As first revealed in literary works, desire is shown to originate in others' desires rather than in its putative objects or in a selfsame, autonomous, individual subject, who desires and acts independently of other subjects. Violence erupts when these desires converge on an object which is indivisible, unsharable. Instead of being individuals, humans are immersed in a myriad of relations and conflicts of desire, for which Girard has coined the term «interdividuality», his only neologism for the way our desires imitate, replicate, and often oppose one another. For Girard every desire is the trace of another desire, which a subject copies, most often unwittingly, from another subject, who in turn may imitate his imitator,

¹ J. Derrida, *La Différance*, in Id., *Marges – de la philosophie*, Paris, Ed. de Minuit, 1972, pp. 1-30.

² See A.J. McKenna, *Violence and difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction*, Urbana, IL, University of Illinois Press, 1992, and Id., *Philanthropologie: la raison du plus faible*, in M.R. Anspach (ed.), *René Girard*, Paris, Éditions de L'Herne, 2008, pp. 223-228.

whereupon desire circulates through cycles of reciprocity whose origin is virtually irretrievable.

We need to pursue these similarities further in order to more sharply determine their differences – not for their own sake but to appreciate how, amidst current threats of violence, their analyses continue to corroborate and confirm each other.

The universe of meaning for Derrida is Pascalian in its structure, a circle whose circumference is nowhere, whose center is everywhere. There is no uniquely first word on which we could build a rational foundation for our meaning systems, nor any last word towards or from which we could orient our understanding of them; there is no privileged entry or exit from the free play of signs, no origin which is not a repetition, which is not positioned by some relative, negative opposition; no last judgment, in a word.

This is where Girard's mimetic theory parts company with Derrida and it does so radically, since the roots (*radix*) of mimetic theory eventually reach down to a hypothesis of human and cultural origins that deconstruction disqualifies as a metaphysical quest. Derridean *différance* (or dissemination) is self-perpetuating, suggesting upwardly, outwardly, endless spirals of meanings and relations of meanings; mimetic theory is entropic, describing a downward, devastating spiral to the violent path of desire. This narrative dimension would explain what propels Girard's originary hypothesis, which Derridean deconstruction rejects in principle, as a hieratic or theological «*coup d'état*» for a state of affairs without rational foundation.

But that is just the point, a point of intersection between their two lines of argument. Girard hypothesizes human origins as a proto-sacrificial scenario in which mimetic violence results in the war of all against all, that shatters and disperses the proto-human or hominid groups. The remedy to such a disorder is built into the violence that produced it: the very same dynamic of mimetic violence eventually streamlines and narrows down to focus on a single member of the group, with whose destruction the violence ends. Here is the point of human origin: a sudden calm results in a non-instinctual attention to the victim, which is mistaken as the sacred origin of the new found unanimity and harmony for being the unique receptacle of the violence which, up to this point, prevented its coming into existence. The scapegoat victim is the transcendental signifier of all the signifieds, all the basic conceptual differences that accumulate in its wake: before/after violence, inside/outside

the group, sacred center/profane periphery³. The point is that the foundation of human culture is not rational but religious; it is not born out of reason but rather out of the violent expulsion of an arbitrary victim to whose polarizing attraction and unanimous destruction it awards sacred, foundational power. Yet this divinity is only the projection of the group's own violence that is rejected upon another. As Giuseppe Fornari notes, the scapegoat mechanism is a «meccanismo adattativo di origine e di evoluzione della cultura»⁴. Girard's hypothesis argues that origin and violence, origin and mimesis, origin and repetition (which is how mimetic desire operates) are one with the origin of religion: «Senza religioni l'uomo non sarebbe sopravvissuto a se stesso, non sarebbe nemmeno nato, perché non sarebbe riuscito a fronteggiare i fattori competitivi e conflittuali che derivano dai comportamenti imitativi, e che si formano in qualunque comunità umana»⁵.

There is another aspect of *différance* that leads to further correlations between Derrida and Girard. It consists in the mere fact that a word is pronounced the same with either letter «e» or «a». For Plato this is reason enough to denounce writing as a poison (*pharmakon*) to memory for whose failings it is offered as a remedy (*pharmakon*). As such it is held to be alien to the presence of mind with which we associate living thought and the quest for truth. In *La Pharmacie de Platon*⁶ Derrida analyzes the *Phaedrus* in order to inquire into the origin of philosophy, where he demonstrates that writing is expelled for its very resemblance to truth in its iterability, its availability to repetition by anyone anywhere if it is true at all. What writing represents in the mute, mindless opacity of its arbitrary marks, is formal, artificial representation, which must be expelled in order for the transparency of conceptual differences to take root in the mind. What is expelled, in sum, is mimesis: form without content, without any originating or originary substance, whence Plato's equation of writing to the work of the Sophists.

Turning to Girard we find that the fate of writing in Plato is the same of twins in mythology and some ritual practices, where they come to symbolize the dissolution of family differences, whe-

³R. Girard, *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondations du monde*, Paris, Grasset, 1978, pp. 108-113.

⁴G. Fornari - M. Ceruti, *Le due paci. Cristianesimo e morte di Dio nel mondo globalizzato*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2005, p. 106.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

⁶J. Derrida, *La Pharmacie de Platon*, in Id., *La Dissemination*, Paris, Seuil, 1972.

reby they desymbolize altogether⁷. This is, for Plato, as later for Rousseau and Husserl, what writing represents in its indifference to the meaning it allegedly re-presents. Twins, like writing, generate a crisis of difference, and then of all meaning, order, and value, which their expulsion is averred to resolve. Accordingly, Girard's interpretation of sacrifice finds apt re-formulation in Derrida's analysis of writing, whose exclusion underlies the economy of differences. As the revelation of *différance*, of dissemination, deconstruction is a critique of difference and a critique of violence, and specifically of sacrificial violence.

In sum Derrida reads the history of philosophy in its Platonic origins and in its subsequent efforts of self-renewal as a sacrificial scenario, where systems owe their conceptual constructions to the violent expulsion of an arbitrary feature of representation that they refuse to acknowledge, and acknowledge as their own: not merely by virtue of the performative contradiction whereby these critiques of writing are written down to be disseminated and (re)read, but, more seminally, by virtue of the fact that the endlessly negative, relative, oppositive character of language must be arbitrarily denied, discredited, disavowed, or repressed for the system to be able to confide in its conceptual constructs. This, at the very least, is what de-construction means.

What conjoins Girard and Derrida is their suspicion of Western rationality in its fundamental structure, philosophy owing its origins to the covert violence underlying conceptuality, and culture to the overt violence of sacrificial expulsion, of scapegoating murder. When we examine their later writings, we find a comparable critique of violence as it is writ large on the pages of history.

With the appearance of *Achever Clausewitz*⁸, we find Girard expanding the implications of mimetic theory through a close reading of the Prussian general's unfinished treatise *Vom Kriege*⁹. Girard's reasoning follows upon the argument deployed in *Des Choses cachées* and subsequent books that, as stated most recently, «la Passion a dévoilé une fois pour toutes l'origine sacrificielle de l'humanité. Elle a défait le sacré en révélant sa violence»¹⁰. By proclaiming the innocence of the victim of mob violence, by thematizing

⁷R. Girard, *La Violence et le sacré*, Paris, Grasset, 1972, p. 95.

⁸Id., *Achever Clausewitz. Entretiens avec Benoît Chantre*, Paris, Carnets Nord, 2007.

⁹C. von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, Bd. 1-3, hrsg. von M. von Clausewitz, Berlin, Ferdinand Dümmler, 1832-1834.

¹⁰R. Girard, *Achever Clausewitz* cit., p. 12.

the scapegoat as the unanimous target of ubiquitously mimetic violence that is sacrificially discharged onto the victim, Biblical revelation deprives culture of a mechanism behind which it veiled its own, all-too-human violence. Sacrifice realizes an economy of violence as pronounced succinctly by Caïphas in arguing for the execution of Jesus: «it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation should not perish» (Jn 11, 49-50). That is an economy which Western religious tradition, in its Judaic and Christian strains, has educated its culture – slowly and ever so painfully – to reject, to denounce in its every instance. For Girard, the Dreyfus affair is a cardinal occurrence of this moral impulse.

Once broadcast, the sacred alibi for human violence is abrogated. The responsibility of humans to one another, as proclaimed in Israel's Mosaic and prophetic tradition and confirmed by the Gospels, trumps ritual obligations and hieratic prohibitions of all sorts, including and especially ethnic and racial exclusivities; in sum all forms of «appartenenze violente»¹¹. A culture's resistance to this revelation only brings out its truth more transparently in the violence engaged to repress it. The demystifying propensities of Western culture, which is irresistibly becoming world culture, is the bearer of scientific discovery and economic expansion unfettered by sacred prohibitions; but it is also the agent of unprecedented, potentially world-destroying, apocalyptic violence, since rituals invented to contain it have been discredited. This is what Jesus is to be understood as revealing when he says «I bring not peace but a sword» (Mt 10, 34). He is declaring the end of traditional relations of belonging, of obligation. Set relations of whom to help and whom to hate are abrogated by those of charity and forgiveness¹². History is witness to the gradual and relentless erosion of sacrificial practices whose mystifying role was to immunize cultures against the mimetically contagious effects of their own violence by discharging it upon an arbitrary victim; as a result, human violence knows no bounds. This is a fact that we can no longer ignore amidst the existential threat of nuclear annihilation as presaged by the uncontrolled proliferation of atomic weapons.

Christianity in this sense has functioned like an auto-immune

¹¹G. Fornari - M. Ceruti, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

¹² P. Dumouchel, *Le Sacrifice inutile. Essai sur la violence politique*, Paris, Flammarion, 2011, pp. 31-35, 225-233.

system, as described by Derrida in *Voyous*¹³, where he meditates at length on a post-Cold War world whose political structures are threatened by the emergence of rootless terrorism and rogue states. By «s'auto-immuniser» he means «cette étrange logique illogique par laquelle un vivant peut spontanément détruire, de façon autonome, cela même qui, en lui, se destine à le protéger contre l'autre, à l'immuniser contre l'intrusion agressive de l'autre»¹⁴. This devolution or dissolution of the autonomy of the self, the ipseity of a self, is described by Girard as the structural effect of a ubiquitous violence in which the identity of self and other, of model and imitator, disintegrates into an omnivorous violence which for all intents and purposes becomes the true subject of human interaction. Individuality and identity are obliterated in the ubiquitous proliferation of mimetic doubles, where *autos* and *allos* are all caught up in a mêlée of violent reciprocity. For Girard, the agency of this auto-immunizing dynamic is Christian revelation, «la victime paradoxale du savoir qu'elle apporte»¹⁵. It is the only religion which will have foreseen its own failure¹⁶.

In such a world as this, that of irreversible globalization and of the commensurate threat of terrorism that goes with it, Derrida argues that we are faced with the end of war as an institution, «une fin de la guerre, la fin du concept même de guerre, du concept européen, du concept juridique de guerre»¹⁷. This is what is meant by the ambiguous title of the concluding chapter of his book: «Arriver – aux fins de l'état (et de la guerre et de la guerre mondiale)»: the end of the state is achieved by wars that put an end to states and to war. What he is evoking here is described by Paul Dumouchel as «états de violence» in which the differences between political and criminal acts have eroded – just about everywhere¹⁸. Such anti-terrorist innovations as black sites, extraordinary rendition, enhanced interrogation, special ops, and drone-targeted assassinations, not to mention pre-emptive war, Guantanamo and Abu Graib, are ample evidence for this, as is the unprecedented latitude granted to the prosecution of «enemy non-combatants». Derrida's post-structural intuitions of nearly ten years ago are corroborated by Girard in his reading of history through the eyes of Clausewitz – and in his re-

¹³ J. Derrida, *Voyous: Deux essais sur la raison*, Paris, Gallilée, 2003.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁵ R. Girard, *Achever Clausewitz* cit., p. 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁷ J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., p. 174.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

reading Clausewitz from the retrospective view of the wars (1870, 1914-18, 1939-45, 2002-, 2003-) that have succeeded him. War, he says, has disappeared as an institution¹⁹, paradoxically, by virtue of its ubiquitous spread: «Nous sommes donc plus que jamais en guerre, à l'heure où la guerre elle-même n'existe plus. Nous avons à combattre une violence que plus rien ne contraint ni ne maîtrise»²⁰.

This is the case because, as Clausewitz intuited from his experience of the Napoleonic wars, which he fought with Prussia and then with Russia when Prussian sovereignty capitulated in the wake of Jena (1806), the «trend to extremes» («Streben nach dem Äussersten»²¹) in the deployment of violence has become «the unique law of history»²². This is not a law imposed from without, but from within the internecine energies of technological progress and institutional devolution that over the past two centuries has engaged ever larger alliances and ever more devastating violence. The eighteenth century saw the last of conventional wars, of war as an institution, where the rituals of dueling prevailed among sovereign nation states. With universal conscription and total mobilization inaugurated by Napoleonic wars, which in Spain also first witnessed the terrorism of partisan and guerrilla warfare, the structure of the duel persists but without its ceremonial constraints, in the same way that sacrificial, scapegoating violence is on the loose, shorn of rituals that contained it. Clausewitz exhibits a nostalgia for the etiquette governing the ancien régime's «guerre en dentelles», while foreseeing that belligerence had enlarged and accelerated the devastations of total war. In the twentieth century the existence of entire populations has been targeted, and with atomic weapons the population of the earth as a whole is at risk. However much Clausewitz recoiled against the implications of his intuitions, he saw «wars of extermination» («Vernichtungskriege» [1832, 1.11]) as an inevitable, logical extension of the violence he witnessed firsthand. Girard pursues the «logique apocalyptique de son esprit»²³ that in his unfinished treatise he sought at once to elucidate and to deny (very like, I would add, Plato confronted by the evidence of mimetic doubling that he unveils and expels in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Republic*).

¹⁹ R. Girard, *Achever Clausewitz* cit., p. 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²¹ C. Von Clausewitz, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

²² R. Girard, *Achever Clausewitz* cit., p. 20.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

In his attempt to reduce war once again to issues of strategy and tactics subordinated to political reasoning, we find Clausewitz endeavoring to produce a technical manual of the sort that would gratify the interests of rationalist political thinkers such as Raymond Aron, who dedicated two volumes to *Von Krieg* in a failed effort, as Girard sees it²⁴, to align the geopolitical strategies of the Cold War with traditional conceptions of aggression and defense. For Girard those conceptions are defunct. What is meant by the title *Achever Clausewitz* is the project to fully articulate the implications of its author's fundamental intuition about the «trend to extremes»:

auch die gebildetsten Völker können gegeneinander leidenschaftlich entbrennen... Wir wiederholen also unseren Satz: der Krieg ist ein Akt der Gewalt, und es gibt in der Anwendung derselben keine Grenzen; so gibt jeder dem anderen das Gesetz, es entsteht eine Wechselwirkung, die dem Begriff nach zum äussersten führen muss. Dies ist die erste Wechselwirkung und das erste Äusserste, worauf wir stossen. (1832, 1.3)

For Girard, «l'action réciproque» (*Wechselwirkung*) translates as «le principe mimétique»²⁵. What triggers and fairly guarantees this trend is a mimetically driven escalation of violence, the behavior of each belligerent tending to copy that of his rival, but in extra measure so as to defeat him absolutely, such that the law of mimetic reciprocity displaces or replaces the agency of an autonomous subjects, the presumed and evanescent *autos* of modern individualism – and of sovereign nation states. «C'est toujours l'autre», Girard writes, «qui décide à ma place et m'oblige à lui répondre. Et le groupe décide toujours pour l'individu»²⁶. Self and other are captive of a mimetic dynamic in which the difference between self and other dissolves.

Girard describes this anthropological view as a «pensée du continu», by contrast with thinking processes which confide in discrete entities, in conceptual and institutional differences and orderly hierarchies of class and members, genus and species. «Only a religious interpretation will grasp the essential»²⁷, for he sees Clausewitz's insights as continuous with the sacrificial origins of culture:

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 146.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 15.

Clausewitz apporte davantage à l'anthropologie qu'à la science politique. C'est pourquoi je trouve chez lui, en puissance, ce qui m'intéresse depuis toujours, en tant qu'anthropologue: une pensée du continu, non du discontinu; de l'indifférenciation et non des différences.²⁸

The looming apocalypse replicates our violent origins but without a scapegoat mechanism to contain our destructiveness. Girard reads the early chapters of *Vom Kriege* as an incipient deconstruction of the differences (aggression/defense, armed observation/ extermination, partisan/military confrontation, war/peace – which today only means preparedness for war, as armed observation), in which rationalist political scientists have confided in explaining our world. Thereby they miss Clausewitz's stunning insight into the mimetically driven acceleration of violence: every violence generates its double, as «dasselbe tut der Gegner; also neue gegenseitige Steigerung, die in der blossen Vorstellung wieder das Bestreben zum Äussersten haben muss» (1.2).

With the entire human species at risk by our own hand, traditional academic differentiations are pointless, irrelevant. Clausewitz himself is striving to maintain such differences with his famous definition of «war as an extension of politics by other means» (VIII.6.B). Against the view of war as an instrument of policy («der politik»), and subordinate to it, Girard insists here, as he had already in *La Violence et le sacré*²⁹, that those seeking to use violence, to instrumentalize it, are in turn used by it³⁰. The lives it consumes only fuels the mimetically triggered appetite for more carnage. As Benoît Chantre remarks of Clausewitz's famous axiom, «Quand on creuse un peu cette réalité de la guerre, telle que Clausewitz la donne à penser, on découvre que c'est la politique qui appartient à la violence et non la violence à la politique»³¹. In the classic conception as defined by Clausewitz, policy presides hierarchically over the difference between policy or politics and war. This amounts to what Jean-Pierre Dupuy has identified as a «tangled hierarchy»³², in which one term names a class of which it is a member, and it is just this hierarchy that modern violence at once re-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁹ R. Girard, *La violence et le sacré* cit., p. 191.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³¹ *Id.*, *Achever Clausewitz* cit., p. 19.

³² See J.P. Dupuy, *Ordres et Désordres. Enquête sur un nouveau paradigme*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, ch. VII.

veals and obliterates. What occurs here is what Derrida has described as a «décapitation», a «double invagination chiasmatisque des bords»³³, whereby it is war rather than policy that presides over the difference between them and ultimately demolishes politics altogether. As Derrida observes, we are, with globalized commerce and global terrorism in its wake, «en mal de souveraineté», where «ce qui perd alors sa pertinence, en cette phase de ce qu'on appelle si obscurément la 'mondialisation', c'est le concept de guerre, et donc de guerre mondiale, d'ennemi et même de terrorisme, avec l'opposition entre civil et militaire, comme entre armée, police et milice»³⁴.

What also implodes amidst this pandemic con-fusion, a fusion of contraries, is the difference between the sovereignty claimed by the modern security state and what we denounce everywhere as «rogue states». Derrida remarks that all our armaments, chemical, biological, nuclear, digital («cyberattaques»), etc., are poised to «déstabiliser ou détruire les plus puissants appareils d'Etat»³⁵. The very notion of sovereign states disintegrates amidst the multiplication and proliferation of armaments: «Tout cela est fini», he states. The apocalyptic thematics of Girard's exploration of Clausewitz resonate sharply with Derrida's dire prognostic:

Une nouvelle violence se prépare et en vérité se déchaîne pour longtemps, de façon plus visiblement suicidaire ou auto-immunitaire que jamais. Cette violence ne relève plus de la guerre mondiale ni même de la guerre, encore moins de quelque droit de la guerre. Et cela n'a rien d'assurant, au contraire. Il ne s'agit pour l'essentiel, ni d'une guerre classique et internationale déclarée selon le vieux jus europeanus, ni d'une guerre civile intra-nationale, ni même de ce que Schmitt appela la «guerre des partisans».³⁶

This new violence is not an extension of politics, not a form of aggression or insurgency undertaken for the sake of the liberation of a people or foundation of a state. Efforts to label our current situation with the old vocabulary is put down as rationalization of the kind that Girard attributes to Aron's reading of Clausewitz. «Elle consiste», writes Derrida,

³³J. Derrida, *Jacques Derrida par Geoffrey Bennington et Jacques Derrida*, Paris, Seuil, 1991, p. 73.

³⁴Id., *Voyous* cit., p. 212.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 213.

³⁶R. Girard, *Achever Clausewitz* cit., p. 214.

à accuser et à partir en campagne contre des Etats dits voyous (rogue States) et en effet peu soucieux du droit international. Cette rationalisation est manoeuvrée par des Etats hégémoniques, à commencer par les Etats-Unis, dont on a tôt et bien fait de démontrer [...] qu'ils se comportent eux-mêmes depuis longtemps comme des rogue States.³⁷

In effect, Derrida is indicting the mimetic behavior of the US in its response to terrorism. A manifestly Girardian crisis of difference is being described when Girard concerning «le droit», which translates as Right, as international law, «le droit des gens», states: «Le droit lui-même est fini, il échoue dans tous les coins; même d'excellents juristes, que je connais bien, n'y croient plus. Ils voient que cela s'effondre, s'effrite. Pascal déjà n'y croyait plus»³⁸.

Nor does Derrida, for whom this crisis is endemic to national sovereignty. Girard is thinking doubtless of Pascal's notorious meditations – veritable deconstructions – on force and justice, the latter always losing to force (*Pensées* 298, 299). For Derrida, the destiny, the trend, of sovereignty, is not law or right but empire:

Dès qu'il y a souveraineté, il y a abus de pouvoir et rogue State. L'abus est la loi de l'usage, telle est la loi même, telle est la «logique» d'une souveraineté qui ne peut régner que sans partage. Plus précisément, car elle n'y arrive jamais que de façon critique, précaire, instable, la souveraineté ne peut que tendre à l'hégémonie impériale. User de ce temps, c'est déjà abuser... Il n'y a donc que des Etats voyous. En puissance ou en acte. L'Etat est voyou. Il y a toujours plus d'Etats voyous qu'on ne pense.³⁹

The key phrase here is «régner sans partage», meaning undivided, uncontested rule, which is only achieved by triumph over rival contestants for hegemony; the empire that is sovereignty's trend to extremes is driven by mimetic conflict. Nothing else can explain Derrida's (re)definition of sovereignty, nothing else than mimetic rivalry is necessary to explain it. Derrida goes on to observe that if every sovereign state is in fact a «voyoucratie», then the unsavory notion of rogue state loses its savor: «Là où il y a toujours plus de voyous qu'on ne le dit ou le fait accroire, il n'y a plus de voyous», such that the word loses «le sens et la portée»: the more of them there are, the fewer of them there are⁴⁰. A putatively foundational distinction of political science dissolves in what Girard identifies as

³⁷ J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., pp. 214-215.

³⁸ R. Girard, *Achever Clausewitz* cit., p. 196.

³⁹ J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., p. 146.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

«la différence oscillante, la perte conflictuelle des différences»⁴¹.

We need mimetic theory here to supplement or compliment Derrida, to «achever» Derrida, because there is a tendency in his analyses, which is endemic to philosophical tradition, to ignore, or at least not to adequately thematize, the role of others, of mimetic rivals in the establishment of institutions as in the institution of conceptuality. This is, in my view, the tragic flaw or original sin of philosophy, in whose analyses the other rarely appears, or only appears as a theme (a bloodless «alterity») rather than an (inter)-agent. Absent this interactive dimension, deconstruction deprives itself of any access to genetic explanations – which it is happy to do, since it is a critique of origins. Derrida, to his credit, retrieves a genetic strain in his account of the violent origins of philosophy, but it is usually absent from his writings. He unveils structural anomalies, in the strong sense of a-nomos, terrifying to Greek thought; he unveils the auto-immunitary impulses inhabiting institutions: from the relatively harmless discourses of philosophy to the baleful, even horrific, trends inhabiting the modern nation state. Girard's genetic hypothesis of violent cultural origins allows us to understand why these anomalies have surfaced, providing a narrative arc for human interaction in which the paradoxes and aporia uncovered by deconstruction are legibly inscribed in events. *Voyous*, with its many references to American political discourse in its legislative and executive branches, and to «le 11 septembre»⁴², is firmly planted in contemporary history. On this plane, his analysis correlate more decisively with those of Girard.

For Derrida as for much of the democratic left in the US, the present embodiment of empire is American global hegemony, commercial and military. For Girard as for Derrida, the state is founded on violence (democracy is always yet to come, «à venir»⁴³), a fact which in our time has come irrefutably to the forefront as ubiquitous «voyoucratie». Girard succinctly qualifies the politics and policies governing Cold War deterrence, with its cynical trade-off of proxy wars alternating with threats of «massive retaliation», as barely disguised thuggery on the model of crime syndicate gang wars, «une espèce d'accords entre mafias plutôt qu'au niveau du droit. C'est-à-dire que rien n'a été légalisé, rien n'est passé par les Nations Unies. Pour que la dissuasion fonctionne, il ne fallait pas qu'on s'en

⁴¹R. Girard, *Achever Clausewitz* cit., p. 96.

⁴²J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., p. 212.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 62.

mêlât. C'était donc une sorte de système mafieux»⁴⁴.

No wonder, then, that both authors call for a different rationality than the one governed by the logical-mathematical calculus of differences («la raison calculatrice [la ratio, l'intellect, l'entendement]»⁴⁵) amidst an emergent catastrophe Derrida evoked in 2003 and which is even more transparent today, when, as he stated that «la pensée du monde à venir et d'abord de ladite terre humaine traverse la terreur»⁴⁶. The collapse of sovereignty opens up on what Girard names «une raison apocalyptique», over against a failed «rationalité politique, dernière forme des vieux rituels»⁴⁷: «Le rationalisme [...] n'était donc pas une vraie mise à distance [from religion], mais une digue dont nous voyons qu'elle est en train de céder. En cela, il aura peut-être été notre dernière mythologie. On a cru à la raison, comme jadis on croyait aux dieux...»⁴⁸. This other rationality is warranted, authorized, by the hegemony of violence that he evokes in a neo-Hegelian formulation as «l'adéquation de la guerre à son concept, l'unité réalisée entre l'alternance et la réciprocité: une oscillation accéléré des différences, un passage à l'abstraction, en quelque sorte»⁴⁹. «Abstraction» because the cherished differences between adversaries are void of any other content than violence itself: «Les hommes sont donc toujours à la fois dans l'ordre et dans le désordre, dans la guerre et dans la paix. On peut donc de moins en moins trancher entre ces deux réalités qui, jusqu'à la Révolution française, étaient codifiées, ritualisées. Il n'y a plus de différence aujourd'hui»⁵⁰. Violence always has a head start («une longueur d'avance») on our rationalizations, outstripping the uses to which we would subordinate it. Apocalyptic rationality is called for by reason of the fact that «Le principe mimétique n'est désormais plus caché, mais apparu au grand jour»⁵¹; it is revealed, unveiled, which is the etymon of apo-calyptic.

Derrida's call for a new rationality is phrased as «l'exigence déconstructrice de la raison. Au nom de la raison». «[D]e» is underlined by the author to insist on both the objective and subjective sense of the genitive:

⁴⁴ R. Girard, *Achever Clausewitz* cit., p. 130.

⁴⁵ J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., p. 195.

⁴⁶ R. Girard, *Achever Clausewitz* cit., p. 196.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Car la déconstruction, si quelque chose de telle existait, cela resterait à mes yeux, avant tout un rationalisme incondtionnel qui ne renonce jamais, précisément au nom des Lumières à venir, dans l'espace à ouvrir d'une démocratie à venir, à suspendre de façon argumentée, discutée, rationnelle, toutes les conditions, les hypothèses, les conventions et les présuppositions, à critiquer incondtionnelment toutes les conditionalités, y compris celles qui fondent encore l'idée critique, à savoir celle du krinein, de la krisis, de la décision et du jugement binaire ou dialectique.⁵²

The binary logic presumed to preside over differences between legitimate and rogue states, between war and peace, between us and them, right and right, etc., is suspended because suspected of a violence it occludes. As Girard states, the old Enlightenment rationalism remythifies what it pretends to demystify⁵³.

Let's look again at Derrida's deconstructive solution. Everything is suspended, argued, criticized unconditionally; the notion of critique, of crisis itself, is in crisis: what he is calling for, à son insu, is undifferentiating oscillation described by Girard. Deconstruction is not a solution to the crisis, but its symptomatology; what it prescribes is the very disease it seeks to cure. It only mirrors the crisis, the conceptual and institutional meltdown that it seeks to resolve. In Derridean deconstruction, philosophy immunizes itself from any practical implications or applications whatsoever.

Where Derrida wants to suspend, hold off, defer judgment and choices, Girard urges a decisive choice between trusting in and renouncing violence: «Nous sommes donc à l'heure des choix décisifs: il n'y aura bientôt plus aucune institution, plus aucun rite, plus aucune 'différence' pour régler nos comportements»⁵⁴. His sense of urgency draws strength from Derridean deconstruction.

New violence calls for new rationality, which for Girard is anthropological and Biblical, a call to unconditional love, to «la grâce»⁵⁵; and for Derrida, it calls for deconstructive reasoning that is unconditionally self-questioning. Derrida is concerned with structural effects underlying and undermining our institutions in a manner that authorizes, I think, Girard's appeal to an affective response to our crisis. Derrida does not get us that far; he is a philosopher after all, who limits his inquiry to challenging our ratio-

⁵² J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., pp. 196-197.

⁵³ R. Girard, *Achever Clausewitz* cit., p. 104.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. VIII.

nalizations: «il faut, au nom de la raison, se méfier parfois des rationalisations»⁵⁶. But his independent testimony to the crisis of difference that threatens to engulf the world in violence is reason enough for adherents of mimetic theory to attend to his writings. And such philosophers as remain among us in what some consider our post-philosophical age need to read Girard to understand more concretely the real historical developments, the terrible dynamics, to which deconstruction has timely reference.

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⁵⁶ J. Derrida, *Voyous* cit., p. 215.