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Fabio Bacchini[*], *Ivan Blečić*[**], *Paul Dumouchel*[***], *Emanuel Muroni*[****]

Carving Spaces: Violence and the Sacred

Introduction

Violence and the Sacred is René Girard's first engagement outside of the domain of literary studies in which he examines the generative potential of mimetic processes of rivalry and violence, showing how cultural institutions can emerge from the local repetition of a spontaneous self-regulating mechanism of violence, and from the "misunderstanding" (or *méconnaissance*) of how it functioned by those who acted it out[1].

The book is remarkable for displaying the scientific fecundity of the mimetic theory in its morphogenetic dimension. Indeed, in Girard's thought, mimetic desire is the spark igniting a panoply of social dynamics, the *primum movens* of an evolution where intricate micro-social interactions of rivalry, conflict, and violence can lead not only back to peace, but also to the creation of cultural institutions. Here, the properly morphogenetic nature of mimetic theory arises from relatively simple mechanisms engendering complex, often counter-intuitive outcomes, with small changes capable of bringing about major transformations and shifts in evolutionary trajectories. The great significance of Girard's work is to propose intelligible, in principle empirically testable, mechanisms shedding light on why and how such evolutions may progress and branch into different trajectories of social dynamics and cultural creation.

Given its breath and morphogenetic nature, mimetic theory would prove relevant outside the domains of literature, early institutions and of

[*] Professor of Logic and Philosophy of Science at the Department of Architecture, Design and Urbanism University of Sassari, Italy
[**] Professor at the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering and Architecture, University of Cagliari, Italy
[***] Professor, Departement de philosophie, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada
[****] Researcher, at the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering and Architecture, University of Cagliari, Italy
[1] P. Dumouchel, *De la méconnaissance*, *The Ambivalence of Scarcity and Other Essays*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing (MI) 2014, pp. 209–224.

religious phenomena where Girard himself mainly applied it[2]. Though others have used mimetic approach for empirical research and analysis[3], it is surprising that little attention has been given to the mimetic perspective on spatial phenomena in urban studies and political geography, in the fields studying the emergence and transformation of spatial objects and institutions, or to explore the possible implications and explanatory power of the mimetic hypothesis for the *social production of space*[4]. Our goal in this paper is to suggest the possible interest and wealth of the mimetic analyses of spatial objects and institutions.

Objects and space

Following Girard, scholars of mimetic theory usually focus on the agents involved in the triangular relations of desire. The third vertex of the triangle, the object of desire, is usually considered inert, passive, immutable, hence uninteresting. This may be in part because Girard himself observed that often, as the rivalry progresses and intensifies, interest for the object may fade away: the antagonists obsessed by each other progressively lose sight of what originally seemed to be at stake, or are prepared to "do away" with the object if necessary to pursue their violent conflict. Furthermore, Girard brilliantly showed and analysed how the object of desire may be born out of fiction. For example, how in *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Julien Sorel turns into desirable as tutor of Mr. de Reynal's children only because Vallenod is interested in hiring him for his own children, or how in *Don Quixote* a barber's washbasin becomes a famous knight's helmet. In all these cases, the object itself in its materiality seems nearly irrelevant, as it is either shaped or destroyed by the mimetic rivalry which alone is viewed as dynamic.

However, these transformations of the object are far from trivial and if the object undergoes an evolution because it is *part of a mimetic triangle* we should not assume that the evolution of the rivalry is not in turn influenced by these evolutions of the object. Is it not one of the central theses of *Violence and the sacred* that the fictive object *par excellence* – the gods

[2] Mainly, but not exclusively; among others he also applied it to international conflicts in the modern world in his last book *Battling to the End: Conversations With Benoit Chantre*, Michigan State University Press, Michigan 2010.

[3] Exemplary in this regard is Simon Simonse's *Kings of Disaster: Dualism, Centralism and the Scapegoat King in Southeastern Sudan*, Fountain Publishers, Kampala 2017.

[4] There is towards the end of Henri Lefebvre classic *La production de l'espace*, Editions Anthropos, Paris 1974, p. 454 a brief reference to Girard and the importance of the mimetic hypothesis to understand the "dialectical relationship between *need* and *desire*". To our knowledge Lefebvre never further explored that suggestion.

of the sacred as the "outcome" of (self-regulating mechanisms) of exacerbated mimetic violence – transformed the course of human history? If the transformation of the object by mimetic rivalry can act in return on the evolution of the conflict that transformed it, is it really the case that the nature of the object has no effect on to the development and trajectory of mimetic desire and conflicts?[5]

No matter what the evolution of mimetic rivalries may be from case to case, it seems to us important to explore *what actually happens to the objects* that occasioned the conflict. Whether they "fade away", or their value changes dramatically, what type of evolution and transformation do they undergo? Mimetic mechanisms of conflicts, including their victimary "resolution", do not only bring about rich interindividual[6] dynamics. In the course of the rivalry the object is also transformed, physically and symbolically. Changes in this third vertex of the triangle, we argue, influence in turn the evolution of the mimetic dynamic. What we propose in short is that the object should not be seen merely as dispensable and external to mimetic conflict and rivalries. To the opposite, its characteristics may have momentous sway on their trajectory, evolution, and resolution.

Space may be an exemplary case in point. Space, urban land, territory, are a fascinating special kind of objects. They may not only become the exclusive possession of one party, nor is the Solomonian solution of cutting the baby in half the only other possible resolution of a dispute. Space is a particularly malleable object. It can be moulded, reshaped, transformed, reorganised, and adapted – physically, normatively, symbolically. It can evolve and acquire new meanings and values. Through formal and informal norms, social practices, or by its very form and design space can be made public to a different degree, devised to selectively exclude or

[5] In fact, very early on many scholars argued that particular characteristics of different economic objects influenced the structure of mimetic relations surrounding them: scarcity and merchandise (P. Dumouchel, *The Ambivalence of Scarcity and Other Essays*, *op. cit.*; P. Dumouchel, J.-P. Dupuy, *L'Enfer des choses: René Girard et la logique de l'économie*, Seuil, Paris 1979), money (M. Aglietta, A. Orléan, *La Violence de la monnaie*, PUF, Paris 1982; M. R. Anspach, *Les fondements rituels de la transaction monétaire, ou comment remercier un bourreau*, *La Monnaie souveraine*, Odile Jacob, Paris 1998, pp. 53–83), financial markets (A. Orléan, *The Empire of Value: A New Foundation for Economics*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2014), or markets in general (P. Lantz, *Monaie archaïque et monaie moderne*, in P. Dumouchel (Ed.), *Violence et vérité*, Grasset, Paris 1985, pp. 159–181; G.-H. de Radkowski, *Les jeux du désir: De la technique à l'économie*, PUF, Paris 1980). In all these cases mimetic conflicts were shown to have a different evolution and form than when they centre on objects that can neither be shared, divided nor replaced, like a person or a prize, or 'being the first one'.

[6] In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (1987, pp. 299-325), Girard proposes to replace the term *inter-individual* with *interdividual*.

include. Elaborated norms may be agreed upon for its use. Entitlements, access rights and prohibitions may be established. Or pacification may also be obtained by declaring it outright as "belonging to no one and everyone" (a public space, *a piazza*, a protected park, and so on). This particular malleability makes it possible for space to brew special flavours of rivalry – for example there can be contrasting projects, visions, competing appropriative and transformative intentions for the same place –, but because of it, we argue, space also makes possible peculiar means of "resolution" of rivalries and conflicts.

Given its ubiquity – space is everywhere –, and inevitability – we can never be outside space –, space constitutes both a need and an object of desire. It is also the most material and the most abstract of all objects. Everything that is a material object is a spatial reality, yet space itself is either nothing, emptiness, the universal container, or any abstract system of relations that allows the measurement of distance. Space and spatial metaphors structure our way of thinking[7]. However, the spaces (in plural) where we live are all constituted as particular cultural objects: the territory, pastures, the place of my childhood, a *piazza*, a tourist destination, a sacred space, a wasteland, an empty lot. In these, space is divided, carved out, portions of space are individualised as specific object which have definite characteristics. Such is the production of space, its becoming various objects that we inhabit, value, share, buy and sell and over which we often fight. Mimetic desire and rivalries, how the conflicts to which they lead are resolved, the rules that we make to avoid them, or at least to limit their destructive consequences play a fundamental role in the way space is instituted as particular objects and in the type of objects instituted.

What important insights can mimetic theory offer in accounts of these processes? Can it shed light on the phenomena of attachment to territory, ethno-geographies [8] and territorial rights? Can we find traces of mimetic rivalry, even scapegoating (symbolic and real), and therefore the "mark of the sacred"[9] in practices of the production of spaces? To what extent do the trajectories of such mimetic conflicts depend on the particular characteristics of spatial objects?

[7] G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2008; M. Tovey, *Spatial Metaphors as Linguistic Primitives: A Comparison of UP-DOWN Metaphors in Three Languages*, in "Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology", no. 2, 1, 2011.
[8] A. Kolers, *Land, Conflict, and Justice. A political Theory of Territory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK 2009.
[9] J.-P. Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred*, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto (CA) 2013.

The mimetic evolution of space

It is not difficult to identify situations in the real world, in the everyday practices and episodes frequent in urban contexts, showing that spaces constitute a hotbed for *mimetic* rivalries. The morphogenetic dimension of mimetic theory implies that the generative mechanisms it studies may branch into numerous possible trajectories of mimetic desire, rivalry, conflict, and violence, as well as possible modes of resolution. Our agenda for the empirical research should thus aim to document, record, and reconstruct many such different trajectories, and to accumulate evidence indicative of the efficiency and the effectiveness of a mimetic interpretation.

As mimetic studies on economic objects have shown[10], the evolution of a mimetic rivalry depends in part on whether the 'object' is exclusive – singular, unique, indivisible, irreproducible –, or somehow non-exclusive – plural, shareable, divisible, reproducible. A distinction akin to that in economics between rivalrous and non-rivalrous goods. Note that this is not a strict dichotomy: depending on their features, objects may occupy a place along the spectrum from exclusive to non-exclusive.

Public spaces, a square, a park, a street in a neighbourhood, any space capable of hosting some form of collective life are often non-exclusive in the above sense, and in economic terms they are non-rivalrous goods, at least below a certain threshold of crowding. An emblematic case of highly desired spaces are the main promenades of urban centres, subject to the invasion of tables and chairs from the nearby cafés and restaurants. At least in our experience of observing city centres in Italy, besides the purely economic competition for a "scarce resource", aspects of mimetic rivalry and processes can be detected. In what is often called "*la guerra dei tavolini*" (the war of the tables), it is the dynamics of mimesis of appropriation – among commercial activities, and between, on the one hand, commercial activities, and on the other, residents and city users – that which confers the *excess of value to* those contested spaces, and can explain the *relentless intensity* of the conflicts surrounding them. Up to symptomatic cases we observed of bars and restaurants demanding local authorities for *tighter* regulation and control, in a twist only apparently paradoxical, and worthy of *El perro del hortelano*[11]*,* the gardener's dog who does not eat cabbage and does not let anyone else eat some.

Mimetic dynamics may also be relevant for the mutation and the history of "non-desired" spaces (spaces that are abandoned, not used, on which nobody apparently has any appropriative or transformative project or in-

[10] See note 4.
[11] A comedy by the Spanish author Lope de la Vega, first published in 1618.

tention to use). Often in the effort to revitalise such "non-desired spaces", "successful" urban design projects first give rise to rivalries and conflicts, by arousing and kindling mimetic desires. By presenting a scheme of transformation, use, and appropriation, such projects unsettle the established order (even an apparent absence of use is an established order). The idea that urban projects simply "solve problems" that are already there is naïve, especially in a pluralistic social context where there are contesting and conflicting interests, needs and desires. Mimetic theory helps us understand why, before solving anything, effective projects may first have to upset things, causing conflicts, at times risking to lacerate the polity.

This furthermore helps us see the illusory nature of an often-tacit assumption in many so-called participatory processes: the uncritical mechanical practice to first "ask people what they want", and then to elaborate a project which would accommodate those wants within given technical and financial constraints. If anything, mimetic theory forces us to radically question the assumption that "people" from the outset would know what they desire, let alone that they are able to express it with fidelity. This is likely the reason why opinion surveys so often yield unconvincing or conformist answers tainted by a social desirability bias. Even if there is a formed desire, or an apparently deeply held belief, that desire should not be taken as fixed and immutable.

Likely, to revitalise an abandoned space first requires arousing "collective" desire for it, possibly by fostering rivalries which eventually could be successfully resolved through a (should we say "cathartic"?) project. That is where may be located the effectiveness of some forms of tactical urbanism[12] as "a means of testing relational processes in space"[13]: rather than first "asking people" and then manipulating space, tactical urbanism inverts the sequence and begins with the manipulation by introducing a "spatial perturbation" that suggests uses, intentions and appropriative drives, mimetically arousing such drives in others. Therefore, rather than a straightforward problem-solving, we could think of "successful" projects of public spaces more as a properly political process with a series of dialectical reversals: first unsettling, possibly kindling desires (appropriative, transformative, of possible alternative uses) for undesired or little desired places, then the ignition of rivalries, and finally the eventual resolution, which may not always be granted or obtained, in the form of a new established order. A scheme of shared uses and appropriations, or a "sacrifice" of the space in the form of a renunciation from appropriation

[12] P. Silva, *Tactical urbanism: Towards an evolutionary cities' approach?*, in "Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design", no. 43, 6, 2016, pp. 1040–1051.
[13] S. Wohl, *Tactical urbanism as a means of testing relational processes in space: A complex systems perspective*, in "Planning Theory", no. 17, 4, 2018, pp. 472–493.

by all parties, for example through a conventional figure of public spaces (a *piazza*, a boulevard, a public park, and so on).

The reference to a "sacrifice" of space suggests that the mimetic looking glasses may help us to discover a form of *mensonge romantique* surrounding public spaces, and to recognise their violent origin. A piece of land becomes and symbolically functions as an *effective* public space, not because of its residual character, or because of the lack of interest and rivalries around it, but to the opposite in reason of excess of mimetic appropriative drives converging on it. So that the communal value of a public space resides in declaring it public as a way of resolution of mimetic rivalries and a means of warding off future mimetic crises. A public space as a silent permanent "ritual", a tangible outcome of a successful resolution of conflicts, hence bearing the "mark of the sacred".

In the following sections we look in more details into one specific way in which space may be turned into such a silent but permanent ritual structuring the community.

Sacrificing spaces

In this section we want to examine in more detail scenarios in which space can itself become the target of violence, and the extent to which it makes sense to talk about the sacrifice of spaces. This seems to be at first a rather controversial claim, since not only foundational scapegoats, but also sacrificial victims are usually thought of as either humans or animals. However, we should remember that there are also many rituals where plants or even man-made objects are sacrificed[14]. While our exposition of these scenarios may not conclusively settle the question, we believe it will assist us in showing the scientific vitality, fecundity, and relevance of mimetic theory whose groundwork was laid out by René Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* 50 years ago and its particular relevance to urban studies.

We could call *spatial mimetic rivalry* a specific kind of mimetic rivalry where the target of the rival desires "alert[ing] the subject to the desirability of the object"[15], is a space. Accordingly, *spatial mimetic violence* is violence caused by spatial mimetic rivalry. It is directed at the space the rival possesses, and aims at ransacking, raiding, demolishing, burning, devastating, or otherwise destroying it. We conjecture that, especially in sedentary communities, spatial mimetic rivalry frequently and easily had

[14] Especially in the hindu tradition, see B. Collins, *The Head Beneath the Altar: Hindu Mythology and the Critique of Sacrifice*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing (MI) 2014.

[15] R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Johns Hopkins University Press 1977, p. 155.

occasions to break out. The outcome of such conflict was not only the appropriation of the space by one party, but in many cases lead to the destruction or annihilation of the rival. The desired space identified with the rival becomes the object of mimetic violence, because destroying it can be seen as a surrogate of destroying the rival him/herself.

In a community convulsed by a crisis of spatial mimetic rivalry where spatial mimetic violence breaks out, arises the danger of interminable escalation. We claim that, just as a collective murder can restore peace in the community shaken by mimetic violence, a unanimous, collective act of "spatial violence" may stop all spatial mimetic violence, especially if the members of the community are not aware of this hidden result. In other words, we argue that in this case also a form of "méconnaissance", misunderstanding, plays an important role. When mimetic violence is specifically spatial, the victim can be a space, thus satisfying one of the fundamental requirements of sacrifice according to Girard. "Society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a "sacrificeable" victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect"[16].

The notion of a spatial sacrifice should also pass the test of other sacrificial rites in which the initial murder is repeated.

> All the dangers, real and imaginary, that threaten the community are subsumed in the most terrible danger that can confront a society: the sacrificial crisis. The rite is therefore a repetition of the original, spontaneous "lynching" that restored order in the community by re-establishing, around the figure of the surrogate victim, that sentiment of social accord that had been destroyed in the onslaught of reciprocal violence.[17]

Here, when looking for a spatial sacrificial rite, we do not need to search for some explosive or untidy spatial destruction. Quite the contrary, the violence of sacrificial rites is organised and done by the community members together in a structured and controlled way given that "society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a 'sacrificeable' victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members".

Let us first try to identify the appropriate kind of ritual victims in this case. They must be spaces, for sure. But what kind of spaces? Possessing which characteristics? In analogy with human victims of ritual sacrifices, these spaces should have no "proper place in the community". Just as children, who have not yet undergone the rites of initiation, or marginal

[16] Ivi, p. 4.
[17] Ivi, p. 100.

members of the community who are difficult to classify or the king whose position at the centre that serves to isolate him from his fellow men, to render him casteless"[18], these spaces could be "on the fringes of society" or, vice versa, of exceptional centrality. In any case, they can be expected to be uncommon and nonconforming spaces – spaces which we may identify as *singularities* of the more extended space of the city or territory inhabited by the community.

The hypothesis of "spatial carving"

Mimetic violence, either reciprocal or the unanimous violence of the foundational lynching, is messy, slovenly, and spontaneous. The violent component of the ritual sacrifice is planned and under the control of the community. Just like the living victim is "a substitute for all the members of the community, offered up by the members themselves"[19], the spatial victim would be a substitute for all the spaces of the community otherwise threatened by spatial violence, and violence against the spatial victim is domesticated violence. While in part *it is* real violence – it is the original mimetic violence deflected onto the victim – in part it is no longer violence – it *represents* the violence of the original lynching, symbolically repeating it, at the same time celebrating the miracle of newfound peace. "Men's minds turn back to the miracle in order to perpetuate or renew it; and in order to accomplish this they need to reflect upon that miracle, to rethink it. Myths, rituals, and kinship systems are the first fruits of this endeavour"[20].

So, on the one hand, we must expect that in the ritual spatial sacrifice "some space actually dies". On the other hand, that murder must display marks of a "*good violence*":

> In the primitive ritual view, sacrifice fights violence not with ordinary violence, which would simply cause the crisis to escalate, but with a good violence that seems and therefore is mysteriously different from the bad violence of the crisis, because of its foundation in an unanimity that religion – that which binds men together – tends to perpetuate. If used wisely and piously, this good violence can stop the bad one from spreading whenever the latter reappears, as it necessarily must. Sacrifice is the violence that heals, unites, and reconciles, in opposition to the bad violence that corrupts, divides, disintegrates, undifferentiates.[21]

[18] Ivi, p. 12.
[19] Ivi, p. 8.
[20] Ivi, p. 248.
[21] R. Girard, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK 1991, p. 214.

One key feature of good violence, which is "mysteriously different from the bad violence of the crisis", can be found in the words of Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, analysed by Girard[22]. Brutus wants to persuade the conspirators that sacrificing Caesar is a good thing, basically because the violence of their act is a good violence that will not revert to the bad violence of the crisis, and that will bring peace:

> *Let's be sacrificers but not butchers, Caius.*
> *We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar,*
> *And in the spirit of men there is no blood;*
> *O that we then could come by Caesar's spirit,*
> *And not dismember Caesar! But, alas,*
> *Caesar must bleed for it! And, gentle friends,*
> *Let's kill him boldly but not wrathfully;*
> *Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,*
> *Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds*
> (Julius Caesar, II, 1, 166-174)[23]

Brutus demands his co-conspirators to *carve* Caesar's body rather than to *dismember* it. Carving the flesh of the victim stands to dismembering as good violence stands to bad violence. Note that this opposition between two types of violence is eminently spatial. "Carving" basically means dissimulating violence and its effects, death, by manipulating the victim in a way that has to do with mereology and topology. Carving takes place in consideration of the relations between the body parts and the whole, as well as in view of the properties that are preserved through deformations, such as twisting or stretching both the whole and its parts.

The notion of carving elected by Girard as fundamental to separate good from bad violence, and hence, to identify what is essential to ritual sacrifice is partly metaphorical (violence and its effects must be dissimulated) and, when we come to its literal part, spatial. It is, therefore, a very promising notion to apply to a spatial victim. As Girard explains:

> [B]eing rooted in sacrificial practice, carving is a powerful metaphor and really more than a metaphor. When a communion meal follows the immolation

[22] Ivi, p. 212.

[23] Of course, this is not what happens in the play (or historically), illustrating the point which Girard makes in the first chapter of *Violence and the Sacred*, the ease with which sacrificial violence can slide into murderous criminal violence. However, the important point for us here is Brutus's claim that there is a fundamental difference between the two forms of violence and that the conspirator should construe the assassination of Caesar as a sacrifice, not as a crime, insisting on the visual, quasi aesthetic difference between the two forms of violence.

> of an edible animal, the carving is done with great care, according to traditional rules. To carve is to dismember gently, to cut delicately and artistically. As it reaches the joints effortlessly, the carver's knife separates the bones with no visible damage. Expert carving is pleasing to the eyes; it does not tear or crush any part of the body; it does not create artificial discontinuities. Its moral and aesthetic beauty consists in revealing existing differences.
>
> Envy and wrath do not know how to carve; their avidity and brutality can only mangle their victims. Behind the opposition between carving and hacking, we recognize a familiar theme: mimetic violence is the principle of a false differentiation that eventually turns to outright undifferentiation in a violent dissolving of the community. In the carving metaphor all aspects of culture seem harmoniously blended, the differential and the spiritual, the spatial, the ethical, and the aesthetic. This metaphor illustrates what we may call the "classical moment" of sacrifice.[24]

Carving a living body means killing it, turning it into a corpse. Yet, at the end of the process there is no external evidence of the violence that the victim suffered. Its look reveals nothing about the violence it has been subjected to.

What condition of a space could correspond to the carved body of a human or animal victim? The space must be dead, but it must visually appear to be in good shape. For space, this is tantamount for it to be no longer used, to become closed off and inaccessible. While anthropic spaces can tolerate temporary lack of use without dying, permanent disuse "kills" them. However, we are not speaking of forms of abandonment that make the space visually worse, an abandoned factory or empty lot. The invisible killing involved must be such that it preserves the invisibility of the violence and in that sense of the death of the space.

"Killing" a space in that sense, turning it into a sacrificial victim and carving it is to make it unreachable, to lock it down, or in some way to isolate it, prohibiting people to use it as before, a way of projecting upon it the "mark of the sacred". That space becomes the object of the "transference of deification"[25] because it has been touched by the violence that can destroy the community as well as restore peace, by virtue of this touch it becomes a *sacred enclosure*. "Everything touched by the sacred violence belongs to the gods; as such, it becomes the object of a most solemn prohibition"[26]. So, a space that has been sacrificed is a space whose use is prohibited or highly regulated and ritualised – although its death remains somehow concealed, while being, in another

[24] R. Girard, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare*, cit. p. 213,
[25] Id., *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, Orbis Books, Ossining (NY) 2001, p. 123.
[26] Id., *Violence and the Sacred*, cit., p. 230.

sense, *before the eyes of all*. We advance the hypothesis that the sacred character of a place can not only come from being where the founding murder happened, but may also arise from its being the victim of a spatial murder. There is thus a deep relationship between what it is for a space to become sacred and its becoming unattainable in a variety of respects. As in any ritual sacrifice, the victim must be dead, and everybody must know it – while the violence responsible for its death and often the fact that it is dead are, so to speak, *spectacularly dissimulated*.

Among contemporary ways of sacrificing a space in this particular sense, we classify secular *marks of the sacred* secured by national and international organisations and agencies automatically providing legal and material protection from human use. For example, when becoming a listed building entails for it to be no longer available for traditional functional usage. The protection it receives can be seen as a death which, in Girard's sense of the term, is a way of carving it. In this respect, it would be interesting to distinguish between symmetrical and asymmetrical violence in the sacrifice of space, depending on whether the community or a third part is the perpetrator of the killing. The same can be said of all forms of expropriation and musealisation, i.e. the bringing an anthropic space, constructed or not, to end its human employment and be exposed in a museum-like manner to members of the community and the tourists[27]. Indeed, what the tourists continue to see, beyond the trace of the space's former life, is just a corpse: the cadaver as the spectacle of both the death and the appeasing violence that caused it. In our perspective, adding a building to the list of World Heritage can be tantamount to carving it in Brutus's sense. It is now destined to a form of embalming purpose such as hosting of some impalpable and ephemeral national agency, foundation, or political organisation. The invariable result is for the enclosed and fenced off space to mummify and fossilise, condemned to the illusorily use of people visiting it on Sunday mornings from 10.00 to 12.00. It appears clear to us that such a touristic traffic can be compared to a flow of the bystanders looking at the cadaver of the sacrificial victim.

Note that spaces that are musealised or destined to mere contemplation often, if not always, are those we identify as exceptional or corresponding to *singularities* in the more extended space of the community. This way of carving a space, de-functionalising it and preserving it in formalin, so to speak, is also a way of taking it away from the set of goods that people can fight over for control or appropriation. Carving space in observance of Girard's idea that sacrificial rites are "preven-

[27] P. Osterlund, *Contestation of Space and Identity in Istanbul: Musealization as an Urban Strategy*, in "Turkey and the Politics of National Identity", 2014, pp. 169–193.

tive measures" aimed at pre-empting the spread of reciprocal violence: "wherever violence occurs, a prohibition is proclaimed"[28].

Thus, the hypothesis we advance is that preserving a space while making it lifeless is a way of sacrificing it, of unwittingly making it the victim of a ritual sacrifice. The core of the mechanism is essentially violent and sacrificial, in the sense established by *Violence and the Sacred*.

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Extending Girard's theory in this way may seem problematic. Despite the existence of ritual sacrifice of plants or inanimate objects in some traditions as mentioned above, it seems that an essential requirement of a potential sacrificial victim is that of being a living being, ideally a *human* being, in order to be a good *substitute* of the violence of all-against-all and for the violence of all-against-one. "Violence is not to be denied, but it can be diverted to another object, something it can sink its teeth into"[29]. Can an inanimate object be "something violence can sink its teeth into"?

One possible "structural" answer to this objection may be that, when mimetic violence is *spatial*, then the suppression of a space may be the right kind of surrogate for the suppression of the primary targets of that violence. The absence of an authentic murder may not be a serious lack, because what is needed is not real blood, but a violent and peace-restoring elimination of a single, vulnerable, and close-at-hand item *of the same kind as* the items of the community menaced by the crisis. Since normally these items are exclusively or primarily the members of the community themselves, the victim is typically a human being. But when the violence is spatial, that is, it is importantly though derivatively directed at the spaces possessed or controlled by the members of the community, the victim – which will be killed of course only metaphorically – could well be a space. Provided that we put the word "individual" in quotation marks, for example, we can appreciate how the truth of all the crucial statements in the following passage from *Violence and the Sacred* is preserved under such a hypothesis of space as a possible surrogate victim:

> Any community that has fallen prey to violence or has been stricken by some overwhelming catastrophe hurls itself blindly into the search for a scapegoat. Its members instinctively seek an immediate and violent cure for the onslaught of unbearable violence and strive desperately to convince themselves that all their ills are the fault of a lone individual who can be easily disposed of.[30]

[28] R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 130, cit.
[29] Ivi, p. 4.
[30] Ivi, p. 84.

Here we arrive at the crux of the matter. The key theoretical question is if inanimate objects of rivalry can play an effective function in uniting a community and (mimetically) producing unanimity. As we saw above, some practices seem to point in that direction. For instance, maybe we can see in the practice of turning spaces and architectures into museums and monuments, a form of sacrifice. Or, to draw from another notable example, in *potlatch*, quite obviously material objects are destroyed, and in that common sense they may be said to be sacrificed. All these practices present us with cases of objects being wasted, "sacrificed" in one way or another.

Paraphrasing the above citation from *Violence and the Sacred*, what could it possibly mean for the members of a community to "convince themselves that all their ills are the fault of a lone space"? This is clearly possible when the target space is external to the community. The destruction of such a space, a country that is invaded, a city is that is plundered, or where the earth is salted, could be supported by the idea, diffused among the members of the community, that the contagious, reciprocal spatial violence spreading throughout the community was due to *a lack of space*, the lack of *Lebensraum*, and notably to the fact that *that space* was not in the possession of the community. Therefore, the spontaneously unanimous victimisation of a specific external space could, in a sense, go together with the member of the community's blaming it for the evil aspect of the crisis.

The initial expulsion of a space internal to the community may also have some features in common with a human victim. It will be "chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand", although its innocence remains unperceived, and it may be the space, i.e., house, small farm, or property of the designated human victim, who will perhaps survive the unanimous act of violence by virtue of this spatial surrogation[31].

By pursuing the idea that manipulating, re-designing, carving, even destroying spatial objects may result in pacifying and uniting the community, we envisage the possibility to "extend", or better to fully embrace and explore the morphogenetic nature of mimetic theory. Quite

[31] All this may induce us to think of the possibility to extend the Girardian terminology and consider these practices as scapegoating of objects. That is to say, to question if we could, and if we should, consider these practices under the tent of scapegoating proper, extending it beyond living victims. The hypothesis may sound interesting, and the four of us have nuanced and at the moment somewhat different attitudes towards making such a step. Since it certainly deserves to be explored and discussed more extensively in all its niceties and implications, we take the commitment to return onto it in near future. Sufficient for our purposes here is that it again shows the fecundity of the mimetic frame of interpretation by assisting us in conjecturing the emergence of different "new" kinds of (sacrificial) institutions.

directly deriving from Girard's fundamental intuition that the primary "problem" of any culture is how to manage and contain internal violence[32], we could assume as fundamental the drive for pacifying, uniting, that is, for the expulsion of violence and the appeasement of mimetic tensions. And then go onto observing how that may be obtained by many different "means" in different concrete circumstances: through scapegoating proper, through forms of prohibitions and regulations, through spatial carving, through potlatch-like ritual destruction of the objects, and through other cultural practices and institutions. In particular, we want to suggest that when the contended object is malleable, carvable, divisible, transformable as is space, different pacifying, even "cathartic", resolutions are possible and can be reached sometimes simply by intervening on that object.

This is not to say that all such forms of appeasement of mimetic tensions are functionally equivalent and equally effective. The lack of a proper sacrificial progression may be a reason why many "spatial solutions" are not as effective – at times only temporary and contingent hacks for a precarious, fragile appeasement of rivalries – because they are not based on the "canonical" progression of accusation-*cum*-expulsion-*cum*-misrecognition resulting in stable communion, and its regeneration through rituals.

Conclusions

Cities are places of highest human density, and their organisation must, and cannot but, be related to the core social problem of how to manage mimetic rivalries and violence. If Girard is right, such density of interactions, sharing, closeness, must pose the threat of a runway violence, which hence cannot but constitute a primary problem of the social organisation of space. The city of desire, to exist, needs mechanisms both to keep desires alive and to contain the violence flowing from mimetic rivalries. Indeed, when Girard talks about the growing proximity of models, mediators, rivals, in our case we need to take him quite literally, as if he was talking about space and spatial relations, geography and territory.

We believe that our hypotheses on the role of mimesis in the social production of space can also be of a more general interest for the application of mimetic theory. Indeed, once we acknowledge that space as object of desire can evolve, mutate, and be transformed by mimetic rivalries,

[32] This is the primary "problem" of a culture in an almost evolutionary sense that without some, even precarious, mechanisms of governing internal violence, that culture would simply not be fit to survive.

also as a means of their resolution (no matter how temporary and provisional), a more general theoretical hypothesis emerges that many other objects, not only space, can undertake transformations of many kinds. It is of course a question of objects' specific plasticity, malleability, carveability, but may we not still be able to acknowledge mimetic forces at work driving the evolution of objects, not only that of the rivalrous subjects? This is so much so evident if we admit that we can also talk about symbolic, and not merely physical transformations (What else, in Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo, is Jimmy Stewart's character Scottie doing when he obsessively tries to turn Judy into Madeleine?).

Such a research agenda on the mimetic evolution of objects seems to us promising also as a methodological guidance for empirical research by coupling the analysis of two different types of "objects", on one hand the action, intentions, moves, and decisions of agents in mimetic interactions, and on the second hand the spatial objects and places that change and evolve through time as a result of conflicts, rivalries, and other forms of mimetic entanglements. So that on the one hand we write case histories of particular conflicts and social episodes, and on the other something that resembles "the social life of things[33] or "biographies of scientific objects [34], in our case of spatial objects. The main point however is to discover and reveal how these two are related, how they interact, and *co-evolve*. How mimetic rivalries and conflicts transform the objects on which they bear and how these objects in turn can play a role in appeasing and resolving the conflicts, or to the contrary in aggravating the opposition surrounding them.

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