Stretching Girard's hypothesis: road marks for a long-term perspective

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What might those who follow the thought of René Girard have to offer to those currently excavating Çatalhöyük and Göbekli Tepe in Turkey? The answer to this question will depend to a great extent on how followers of Girard's thought, like myself and others in this collection, are able to match the generosity we have been shown by those involved in the discipline. I hope we can do something of this by making Girard's hypothesis available to people working in the area, clarifying it (especially where notorious misapprehensions about it have arisen), filling out some of its many lacunae (for instance, in the eighty thousand or so years between the arrival of *homo sapiens sapiens* and the axial era, from which most of Girard's evidence is derived), and showing that it does at least enable some intelligent questions to be asked of the sort which might lead those working at the "trowel's edge" to look at elements of what they have seen in a different light.

With a view to setting the scene for this, then, I propose to start with some brief comments concerning the nature of Girard's rigorous insight, usually called "mimetic theory" which it seems appropriate to bring out in an archaeological context. Rather than follow these with a full blown exposition of mimetic theory itself, I will refer the reader to Bill Johnsen's précis of Girard's thought in Chapter 1 this volume, adding to that only a few observations which point directly in the line of the argument I wish to follow. I will then fill out some of the questions about terminology which can lead to confusion, given the way different disciplines are accustomed to varying and scarcely-overlapping associations accruing to the same word. By this means I hope I will be able to show that, as is the case in several other disciplines, Girard's insight, even when unknown, or partially known and unappreciated, by the experts in a particular field, brings us remarkably close, in ways which would probably cause them surprise, to the centre of a number of arguments in which those experts are already involved. Finally, and very tentatively, I will attempt to ask some questions of the evidence that we have seen from the period between roughly 12,000 and 7,000 years ago, to show at least what a Girard-inspired question might be, in the face of a particular phase of human existence concerning which we have no spoken or written evidence, as to how our ancestors bound or related this or that artefact to each other.

Mimetic theory, or, an insight made rigorous.

Girard always insisted that he was not the first to discover "mimetic theory". Examples he gives of others who had clearly understood it include Cervantes, Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky. Indeed Girard found other, more or less fully worked out versions, in ancient sources going back to Vedic, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin cultures from as early as we have surviving texts. Girard's claim is to have been the first to try rigorously to thematize and theorize an insight that has typically been arrived at as part of a hard-won, and often dangerous wisdom achieved through the discoverer's own involvement in the issues of desire and violence which the insight describes.

In other words, and I think it important to stress this here: the insight is a self-critical one, and its theorization is about the conditions of possibility of self-criticism at a personal and cultural level going back as far as our ancestors became symbolic and then, as they became unmoored from their instincts, found themselves thrust into the beginnings of an awareness that they had become problems to themselves and to each other.

Because the insight is one about self-criticism, there are any number of "ways in" to unpacking Girard's insight, and he himself constantly wrestled with new and better approaches to presenting it, never satisfied with how he had done so in this or that text. Most descriptions of Girard's thought follow a tripartite model whose three parts are: the mimetic nature of desire; the mechanism of the aleatory victim (commonly called "the scapegoat mechanism"); and the subversion from within of the world created by the first two, coming into operation through the prophetic critique of sacrifice. I refer the reader to Bill Johnsen's exposition of these in Chapter 1 this volume. Here I only expand a little on the second. In the next section I will give a fuller account of some of the questions raised by the third.

For present purposes, it suffices that the reader have grasped the way in which the observation that humans desire according to the desire of others leads directly to the question of how we survived our origins. Girard holds that our ancestors stumbled unawares into the mechanism of the aleatory victim, as the frenzied all against all, deriving from their rivalry was diverted into an all against one. Their consequent and defining socialization is a result of this mechanism, a violent means of protecting themselves against their own violence.

Some of the consequences of this mechanism becoming operative are fairly easy to understand: for these highly imitative animals, who now have both something new to imitate, and a new sense of togetherness in their imitation, repeated imitation of this scenario gives rise to ritual, and eventually myth (as and when language comes into play). And alongside both of these, there arise prohibitions. These work to prevent the kind of behaviour leading to the terror of the original frenzy, but are often systematically infringed when it comes time for the group to re-enact the ritualized elements of the frenzy and its resolution.

Other consequences of the fact that we are dealing here with a *mechanism* are less obvious and demand some filling out. For instance, sometimes this scenario is referred to by Girard, and those associated with his thought, as an, or the, "originary scene". I think it important to point out what this originary scene is *not*, since misunderstanding comes very easily here. In the first place, it is not a claim, of the

sort made by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, of a particular, single act (in Freud's case of group parricide) which happened once, at the threshold of hominization, and therefore affects us all thereafter. Nor is it an "originary scene" in the sense in which the early chapters of Genesis in the Bible have come, in popular (Christian) imagination, to function as a piece of "revealed" palaeontology of origins to which the evidence must be made to conform. The term "originary" is used by Girard to refer to that which brings something into being, and it is as an originary *mechanism* (something eminently replicable) that the scenario he describes enables the emergence of the symbolic sphere. Furthermore the mechanism comes into play through what seems like a systemic "catastrophe" by which an ongoing mimetically-fuelled crisis serves as a springboard between evolutionary processes and symbolic culture. (Girard 2008, 109-110)

Girard is well aware that the scapegoat mechanism did not come suddenly from nowhere. While there are hints of it among many animals (he cites, for instance, Lorenz's geese who redirect their aggression, bonding over and against a third party) it is not until you get a sufficiently social horde, pack or cohort that the imitation can become contagious and frenzied enough for the scapegoat mechanism to kick in and be learned from:

In the process of the emergence of cultural elements, one also needs to stress that there is no absolute beginning. (ibid., 97)

I should, for the sake of clarity, point out here that Girard is well aware of the ways in which different disciplines use the word "culture", so that he is not tied either to the way that the word, etymologically, derives from the Latin *colēre* (to till the soil or tend) and thus from the invention of agri*culture* and the beginning of sedentary humanity. Nor does he restrict the word to the arrival of the fully-fledged symbolic culture characteristic of *homo sapiens sapiens*, though this is his main use of the word. He is happy, for instance, to point to elements of culture in the ways in which *homo habilis* used tools as weapons, by contrast with simpler Australopithecine tool use, suggesting that some dimensions of what would later empower the mimetic crisis were already present around two million years ago (ibid., 113).

Nevertheless, Girard's principal point is to emphasize that:

...the creation of culture is engendered by religion through the victimary mechanism, which is in fact contingent and mechanistic…This is the result of a form of systemic selection, which lasted thousands of years (ibid., 98-99)

And again:

*By defining the scapegoat mechanism as a random process, one has to see it as a series of incremental steps. One cannot point out the exact isolated moment when it happens and, finally, culture emerges. It has to be seen in a time-frame of dozens or even hundreds, of thousands, of years. In this long history of the 'discovery' of the scapegoat mechanism…animal redirection of aggression (*may be included*) as a first step in this evolution, like a sort of infra-scapegoat ritual. It is a very complex process. It is necessary to have a group, a pack, as a prerequisite for the full development of the scapegoat mechanism….* (ibid., 105).

What, finally, is offered, by this multi-millennial originary scenario is an account of the development of symbolicity as the force behind the discontinuity between other animals and humans: not merely a form of evolution, but also a systemic "catastrophe" or upheaval which breaks the link between "pointing" and "things" such that something starts to stand for something else. A surrogate victim is no longer killed in purely aleatory fashion, but the group imitates its own earlier behaviour so that there is some degree of staging, such that a real victim is killed who is also symbol, or substitute, for a previously effective cadaver (ibid., 106-107)

In this way, Girard insists that it is religion, sacrifice, that has domesticated humans:

Religion is structure without a subject, because the subject is the mimetic principle. I think one can have a purely realistic and materialistic interpretation of it. What I am suggesting is an integration of culture and biology through the scapegoat mechanism (ibid., 125).

The subversion from within of the sacrificial mechanism

Before moving on to examining difficult words like "religion", I need to spend some time making more complex the third element of Girard's mimetic insight: the way in which the long running symbol-producing "catastrophe" which inflected our evolutionary origins began to be subverted from within, as the gateway to modern humanity.

Fundamental to the working of the mechanism of the aleatory, or surrogate victim, is a certain sort of ignorance or miscognition (called by Girard "méconnaissance"). For, naturally enough, where there is doubt, and thus dissent, concerning whether or not the right person (or group) has been "got", as the coming together of all against all yields to the unanimity of all against one, then unanimity and peace are never reached. Where unanimity and peace are reached, these are themselves sufficient, from the surviving participants' perspective, to indicate that the right one was expelled. But what would be intolerable is the suggestion that the selection of the expelled one was in fact arbitrary, the result of a mechanism. And that neither is the obvious deadness of the dead one any indication of malfeasance, nor are the peace and unanimity of the survivors any indication of righteousness. For in that way no decision could be made, no order could be founded.

So Girard studied an enormous number of myths and rituals from all over the world, as well as accounts of life from ancient axial-age texts and perceived that all the elements of the scapegoat mechanism are to be found present in very large numbers of those texts, but always as *structure*, never as theme. By this he meant that different moments in the originary scenario are described – the imitative build up to frenzy, the loss of order, the ganging together against one, the resulting peace and fruitfulness of what followed, the gradual breakdown of the same (which he refers to as the "sacrificial crisis") and the starting up of the mechanism again. But the accounts are always muddled, with different moments attributed to different agencies, responsibilities shared with improbably anthropomorphic or theriomorphic figures and so on. In other words, the account is a mendacious account given by the survivors

of just such scapegoating scenarios, and their heirs, in which group responsibility is clearly diminished, and other forces are brought in to account for the successful establishment, through expulsion, of peace, order, and fruitfulness in their land.

The one thing you do not see in these accounts is the scapegoat mechanism as *theme*. That is to say: described as such. For the more clearly what had really happened in the particular variant of the originary scenario lived by this particular group is seen, the more impossible would have been living with the knowledge derived therefrom: that their order and stability depended on a random murder, and that all that they considered to be good, just, fair and so on rested on a guilty secret.

What Girard noted, emerging in the axial period, is the possibility of what had previously only been available as *structure* (driving its participants to behave according to its dictates unawares), starting to become available as *theme*. The most sustained evidence of this is to be found in the Hebrew scriptures. There, time and again, far more ancient stories are to be found in re-edited form, but with elements of the scapegoat mechanism brought more and more clearly into focus, depicted with ever more straightforward, we might say, anthropological clarity, and with the cast-out one being given a voice as the one who has told the truth, by comparison with the mendacity of those whose fake peace and unanimity would be constructed through his murder. This is accompanied, of course by the critique, which runs throughout the Bible's prophetic literature, of sacrifice as being not far-removed from murder, somehow involved in cover-up and fake goodness, always ineffective, and not really having anything to do with God.

Outside the Biblical sphere Girard points out how Sophocles comes, in *"Oedipus Rex"* to introduce into his account of the expulsion, and to tolerate, some suggestions that maybe the accusations against Oedipus were mythical, and that only partisanship decided between Oedipus and Creon, even though Sophocles then steps back to give the "right" answer for a prize-winning dramatist, and does not break the mythic illusion (Girard 1977, 68-80). Following Girard, Cesáreo Bandera has made the same observation concerning the end of the Aeneid, where Virgil, somewhat despairingly, appears to intuit the randomly murderous structure of Roman society, without glimpsing a way beyond it (Bandera 1994, 130-174).

Nevertheless it is in the accounts of Christ's Passion from the four canonical Gospels that Girard sees the most complete culmination of the process of the subversion from within of the scapegoat mechanism. Each in their own way insists that what Jesus was doing in going to his death was of fundamental anthropological significance; that the murdered one was innocent; and that in the light of these events, all sacrifice would hereafter be put into question, and become impossible to carry out in good conscience. Along with this, any cultural structure that depends on some sort of unanimous "we" over against a wicked "they" would start to crumble, since its justifications would lose credibility.

Girard lays particular emphasis on the work of the Biblical *texts* as having brought the intolerable knowledge of what structured the "méconnaisssance" into the open. He claims that modern western history, exposed at length to the instantiated possibility that our victim is innocent, has been culturally marked at depth by the loss of the ability to sacrifice with a good conscience. The loss of sacred mechanisms for

controlling desire has led, on the one hand, to the potential for both freedom and responsibility, and on the other, to the ever increasing unleashing of imitative desire without any external means to check our potential for rivalry. Girard, although himself, from the time of his late thirties, a practicing Catholic, was perfectly clear that the ecclesiastical institution has functioned at least as much to block or attenuate the insight upon which it was founded, as to disseminate it, and that the prophetic critique of sacrifice has often been kept alive independently of, and often enough in opposition to, those with a confessional attachment to it.

A reasonable question.

Given that I am both a Catholic and a confessional theologian, it does seem fair that I should have to satisfy the curiosity of any modern archaeologist who, whether or not they have any personal confessional attachment, would be properly allergic to any apparently scientific approach to their field which seems to mask a partisan religious agenda. So, is Girard's hypothesis too "Christian" to be taken seriously? Is it, for instance, a sophisticated-seeming attempt to use the tools of modern archaeology and palaeontology to recover "evidence" that might defend dogmatic formulations concerning "original sin"?

Here I would say that Girard himself saw no rivalry between the theological consequences of his thought and his anthropological insight and field of study. But he was very concerned that the anthropological insight be treated as just that, and developed and studied anthropologically, without any extrinsic other-worldly elements being brought to bear. He was, indeed, excited by the capacity for scientific truthfulness, understood in a fairly positivist way, that the overcoming of the scapegoat mechanism in the modern world has made available. He begins his book *The Scapegoat* with a French poem from the time when the Black Death swept Europe. A particular outburst of the plague is described, its cause attributed to the local Jews (by a timely revelation from heaven). These are then massacred, at which point the plague comes to an end. The poem is no great work of art, and in quoting it Girard seeks to bring out something that is both obvious and raises a question.

When any modern reader reads this poem, they engage, without even thinking about it, in a very subtle hermeneutic. For none of us think the poem entirely true ("the plague happened as described, caused in the way the poet described, and was brought to an end in the same way"). Nor entirely false ("the plague did not happen, events are not caused in the way described, and no Jews were massacred"). On the contrary, we realise immediately that there is a very particular mixture of truth and falsehood in the account: the plague did happen, but was not caused by the local Jews; the local Jews were murdered, but this was not what caused the plague to stop. In other words, we automatically determine what in the account is true and what is false, aware that we are reading a description of something that did happen, a certain sort of lynching, as recounted from the mendacious perspective of the lynchers. And we would certainly regard as untrue, partisan, and anti-scientific, any attempt to defend the truthfulness of the lynchers' account of causality.

Girard's question is: where does this scientific certainty (and it is both scientific and certain) come from? His answer is: from the slow work of the Biblical texts, and in

particular the texts of the Passion, in making available, as central to any form of truth-telling, the reverse perspective on exactly the same scenario: that the lynchers lie, that their victim is falsely accused, and that those who hate him or her do so without any cause beyond their own mimetic entanglement.

My answer, then to the question concerning whether Girard's Christianity is a disqualifying factor in his being taken seriously in a scientific endeavour is this: the thesis that Christian texts and accompanying representations (for instance, Grünewald's *The Isenheim Altarpiece*) have had a cultural impact in exactly the way described, as tending to cast doubt on the righteousness of persecutors, and tending to raise the question of the possible innocence, especially of unanimously hated victims, is a thesis which is able to be defended or attacked independently of the confessional stance of those involved.

Indeed, flowing from the same insight as above, Girard's thought offers a particular account of western (and now global) secularization, and the way in which that secularization is positively dependent on Christianity (rather than something happening in reaction, or opposition, to Christianity). This has much in common with the understanding of secularization in thinkers like Marcel Gauchet and Charles Taylor, the value of whose insights are appreciated independently of confessional attachment or its lack. And of course it is the case that many of those who follow Girard's thought and have contributed actively in its development have no confessional commitment to Christianity, either because they have no confessional commitment at all, or because they do not find their Girardian studies to be in conflict with their e.g. Jewish or Buddhist commitments.

For reasons of time and space, I have chosen not to go here into the question of the doctrine of Original Sin and its relation, if any, to palaeontology. For those interested, two Girardian thinkers have independently published book-length treatments of this issue (Schwager 2006, Alison 1998). The latter treatment regards sin as an ancillary and not a defining reality: something known *in its being forgiven*. This makes "exactly how we came to be the sort of animal that finds itself undergoing being set free from something" much less crucial for doctrine. And at the same time, much more a matter of open-ended study than of dogmatic assertion of privileged insight into an irrecoverable element of prehistory.

Before leaving the question of Girard's Christianity, however, a further point is in order. Immediately after Girard raises the question, with relation to Guillaume de Machaut's plague poem described above, as to where we get our automatic interpretative lens from, he goes on to point out that the Oedipus story, in both its mythical and its dramatized forms, is structurally identical with that same poem. Why, Girard asks, should we not treat the ancient Greek story to the same interpretative reading as the mediaeval Christian one? If we do, we find that the people of Thebes resolved a crisis which included some form of plague by expelling the swollen-footed foreigner who'd married their richest lady, following accusations of parricide and incest which were every bit as firmly believed, and every bit as mendacious, as the mediaeval accusations against the Jews.

In other words, the very same insight that Girard sets out can be read forward into an account of secular modernity and backwards into what we learn about people from

much earlier periods, derived from their own accounts. This yields a very dynamic hermeneutic, since it sees nothing in a linear fashion. At any stage of history, any literary artefact, and indeed, with much greater difficulty, any artefact at all, can be looked at as a particular trace of where humans had reached in their being structured from within by the scapegoat mechanism, with all the many, and entirely unexpected collateral discoveries which have, themselves, enriched a feedback loop to other discoveries. Furthermore that our ability to read those traces, where murder and mendacity are commonplace, is itself made available by a certain undoing of the same scapegoat mechanism, such that we, and our capacity to analyse, are simultaneously the beneficiaries of the mechanism and of its undoing. Because of this we are not entirely foreigners with relation to our predecessors, and so are able to be somewhat more empathetic to, and less dismissive of, their logic and their explanations, where these are available.

So, this is an hypothesis about religion?

The reader thus far might be forgiven for thinking so, but I hope to disabuse you, and would like to do so in conversation with Maurice Bloch (2010), whose paper "Is there religion at Çatalhöyük…or are there just houses?" is of exemplary clarity and insight. But first, some definitional issues.

The words "religion" and "religious" are notoriously slippery. This is so whether used in the mediaeval European sense of someone's "*religio*", the canonically defined order or community (e.g. Franciscan, Benedictine, Carmelite) to which, unlike the vast majority of the population, or even of priests, some few might belong as an act of individual commitment; or in the early modern sense of an "especially" violent sphere of ideological and partisan discord subsequent on the European Reformation over against which nascent nation states could define themselves, self-flatteringly, as somehow bearers of peace; or in the sense of large socio-cultural groupings of a confessional or semi-confessional nature; or in the more recent sense, of a specific, but supposedly universal set of adaptive behaviours that are somehow part of what has made us viable as humans and have something to do with (positive) human values.

Girard's hypothesis concerning desire and violence offers what appears, at first sight, to be a firm underpinning for a strengthened account of the importance of religion in the human sciences. After all, the Girardian hypothesis does not see "religion", "sacrifice" or other elements of "sacrality" as epiphenomena to a humanity springing from a fundamentally e.g. economic generative matrix, epiphenomena which might either be illusory and alienating, or, just conceivably, mildly helpful. It describes our ancestors as having learnt how to protect themselves on a regular basis against their own violence through stumbling into a repetitive mechanism bringing all group members violently against one, and thus to temporary concord. In this way a mechanism repeated by our ancestors gradually became sacrifice and birthed symbolic culture, making humanity as we know it possible. So it could be said that Girard reverses the previous, enlightenment, picture by making "religion" the matrix and all other human institutions the epiphenomena.

However, while this formulation is polemically valid (i.e. truer than its reverse), it has a more drastic consequence than might meet the eye. And that is that the word "religion" ceases to have any explanatory power. For where everything has a religious matrix then nothing is specifically religious, with the result that the word "religion" no longer has any bite on any specific reality.

It is this that seems to me to be the strength of Girard's hypothesis (and I say this as a confessional theologian): the tools it offers are methodologically entirely atheistic, and have no need for any special sphere of the mysterious, the sacred, or the religious, which are somehow to be respected in their ambivalence and are thus off-limits to the normal workings of reason. As a matter of fact, the typical reaction of Girardian thought faced with anything mysterious, sacred, religious or ambivalent is to seek out the quite straightforward anthropological relational processes that might underlie the behaviours in question, and which give a rational account of both the valences in evidence. It is what makes us *relational* in the ways that we now discover to have formed us which are important in any discussion of how humans have come to be what they are. The fact that all human relations are structured in certain ways could only usefully be described as "religious" where there is an alternative - a "non-religious" way of being human – on offer. There isn't, except eschatologically (for there is no Temple in the New Jerusalem of The Apocalypse of St John).

In this sense, I suggest that Girard's thought encourages us to do with the words "religion" and "religious" something of what Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory does with the words "social" and "society". Latour invites his readers to do, in effect, what Wittgenstein recommended when he pointed out that sometimes, certain words need to be taken to the laundry. There is indeed in Latour's approach a quality recognisable to a theologian as a strongly apophatic approach to the words in question, seeking to weed out and exorcise all of the many idols and phantasms by which "social" has acquired elements of causation which are not its own. These then tend to mask, or prevent the need for the study of, the much smaller dynamic movements by which that which is (genuinely) social is in fact constantly created and transmogrified (Latour 2005). I will hope to propose something of the same concerning the word "religion" when coming alongside what Bloch proposes is "there" and "not there" in Çatalhöyük.

Having then cleared out the mental detritus that accrues when "religion" has acquired elements of causation not its own, Girard's thought would press us towards a relational account of the emergence of any particular entity, hence very much swimming alongside the call for relational archaeology by Christopher Watts and his colleagues (Watts, 2013). This follows very directly from Girard's insight that we desire according to the desire of the other, for it would mean that entities, both simple objects, and more complex constructs, become what they are by designation that can be imitated over time, and that their designation is very strictly the work of networks, themselves in constant flux as they work to produce both the desirers and the desired. That there is a constant, and often adventitious, feedback network between things and their users, each altering each other over time is part of what we see in the process of the domestication of animals. I suspect, given time, that relational archaeology of this sort, aware of the long term effects of the scapegoat mechanism, might show how elements of animism and other forms of human and animal imbrication (Whitridge 2013) were elements in our slow path to self-reflexive human discovery. Furthermore,

as I shall suggest later, other animals were not merely passive partners in our domestication (nor we merely active partners in theirs), but were given a certain agency in our becoming who we are by their entanglement with us in the outworkings of the scapegoat mechanism over time.

So, this aside on the word "religion" has left us with the methodological atheism that becomes both the believer and the atheist (who can agree that God or not-God are not one of the gods, not something extra in the universe, and that therefore the interesting discussion here is one concerning the shape of *idolatry*, a matter that is purely anthropological, relational and this-worldly). Thereafter the question becomes one of a sympathetic description of the route(s) by which a relatively small number of dangerously unmoored simians had the good fortune to stumble into the possibility, and survive the upheaval, of becoming the incipiently self-critical beings that we imagine ourselves to be.

For and against Bloch (but almost entirely for).

In his paper quoted at the beginning of the last section, Bloch summarizes a programmatic essay in which he sets out what he means by the "transcendental social":

Many aspects of the social organisation of animals closely related to our species such as the chimpanzees or bonobos are reminiscent of humans. In all three species there is continual politicking and competition for power, rank and alliance. This side of things I call the transactional. However there is also, at least, one fundamental difference between non-humans and us. Humans phenomenologically create what have been called roles and corporate groups. These, in some way, have an existence that transcends the people who are endowed with these roles or who belong to these groups. What I mean by "transcend" here is that these roles and groups seem to exist independently of people and on a very different timescale (Gluckman 1962)

…Furthermore, roles and corporate groups link up to form apparent patterns, which some earlier anthropologists called, somewhat misleadingly, "social structures". This largely invisible transcendental social, separate from people and the strategies of their lives, is something quite absent from the social of animals other than humans.

An obvious question about this transcendental imagination is how it is that it can be given phenomenological reality. Probably the most important mechanism for doing this is ritual. (Bloch 2010, 156-7)

What a pleasure to find oneself on the same page as such a distinguished source! For while Bloch does not seek to give more than a synchronic account of the operation of the transcendental imagination, Girard's scapegoat mechanism is very exactly a highly ambitious hypothesis, albeit an extraordinarily parsimonious one, yielding a *diachronic account* of how "*this transcendental imagination…can be given phenomenological reality*". It is this that I would like to flesh out here.

Now that we have removed some of the misconceptions surrounding Girard's originary scene, we can examine it in more detail as an account of the runaway

feedback loop that was accidentally creative of humanity. Or, in the language of Jean-Pierre Dupuy, an account of how we unknowingly bootstrapped ourselves into existence. I'd like to go slowly here, since what is involved is so foreign to our normal individualist and cognitivist presuppositions concerning "selves", and our assumption that something recognisable as a modern "self" must have been "available" if we are talking about humans, that it can be difficult to show the mechanism whose working gave structure to the group relationality which only over a very, very long time would begin to yield something like the "self".

The key "moment" in this emergence of a transcendental imagination is where, in the originary scene, the frenzied all-against-all has yielded to the all-against-one. At the moment that the "one" becomes a cadaver and the group finds itself at peace, a shared peaceful attention to that cadaver emerges. That shared peaceful attention to the cadaver, emerging from a violent terror made more fearful as it is remembered, is exactly the space in which something the group has in fact done *themselves* (brought themselves to unanimity by killing one of their members who is in principle indistinguishable from themselves) appears to them under the guise of something that *has been done to them*. What has been done to them? "Well, somehow this mysterious cadaver must have been more important than it seemed: the very fact that it was able to produce peace among us in being killed, means that we must have been right to consider it to have been responsible for causing the rivalry among us when alive."

What this means is that who "we" are is *and has always been*, automatically, and constitutively in a relationship to "another" who is seen as in some way exercising a protagonism amongst and upon us. I think it vital to stress this. When Girard talks of the "méconnaissance" or miscognition surrounding the lynch death, he is not only referring to the question of the group's ignorance of the random nature of what they consider to be culpability, and so of the victim's responsibility in the *moral* sense; they also misplace responsibility in the *causal* sense – the victim is perceived as in some sense causative both before the group knew it (during the build up to the frenzy) and after it, in bringing about the peace. Hence the tendency to divinisation of the victim in some accounts.

What drives the ritual repetition of this is the sense, one which is simultaneously both true and false, that there is "another" moving the group to do this, so as to produce the same outcome as before. The account of the birth of social transcendence, and hence of our humanity as we know it, is the same as the birth of this "other" who moves us. And from the moment this "other" came into being, we have had no access to each other or to anything else except through it. All our relationships – to each other, to other animals, to space, to time – are hereafter structured from within by this "other" *without our knowing it*. And this means that all of the group's wrestling with any problem we have is in fact going to be a wrestling with ourselves, projected and misplaced onto animals, trees, mountains, stars, years and months.

This means that for humans, idolatry (unwitting self-formation by means of self-reinforcement perceived as and attributed to the self-mystificatory "other") is the pre-condition of objectivity, not some sort of defection from a prior objectivity. There is no linear path from instinctual objectivity to cultural objectivity. The extraordinary path towards being able to appreciate *what is* as relatively indifferent, independent of our instincts, group needs, mechanisms of togetherness and so on is itself an amazing

path in which *being wrong, being confused* was an absolutely essential part of our road towards *being right*.

I stress this since what Girard offers is, among other things, an account of the inner structure of idolatry; or to use Bloch's language the invisible transcendental social, as it formed us. If this is the case then, at every single stage along the way towards our becoming self-critical with relation to the originary scene, and thus incipiently objective, the reality which we now see as human, has been structured from within by our being moved by this dynamic.

Let me point briefly to three of the many areas in which we can imagine just this mechanism at work, each from the cusp of the shift from hunter-gatherers to sedentarism available to study in or close to Neolithic Anatolia: shamans, domestication and planting. In the case of the first, we can get some sense of what it might have been like for those whose gender dysphoria, intersexed nature, sexual orientation, or other distinction might have set them up to take a particularly visible part in the way a small group wrestled with itself via its "other". Such people are likely to have had elements of the "prophetic" (in the sense of being able to point out to the group the sort of truths that become visible from someone who has both insider and outsider status); of the "priestly" both as necessarily skilled avoiders of being sacrificed through developing their capacity convincingly to point their fingers accusingly at others, and occasionally as sacrifices themselves; and of the "royal" in the sense of some of them managing to live with the suspended sentence of victimhood for long enough that they became the visible symbol of some sort of order.

Such shamanistic roles, as well as the likelihood that frequently enough, shamans would be wanderers (both for psychological reasons, and often enough, out of imposition), and might end up as bands of "prophets", could have inclined to what we would call charismatic and enthusiastic trances, as they acted out the social dynamics of their groups-of-origin among themselves. However if enough of them spent long enough together such that they were able to share what one might call their "liminal" knowledge, then they might start to formalize among themselves the sort of order emerging from spontaneous "sacrifice" which they had only known previously as its half-terrified, half-sacralised recipients. And so you might get sanctuaries developing (Göbekli Tepe and other T-pillar sites), which by becoming symbols of "outside" to so many smaller and more disparate groups, may actually have allowed those groups to draw near and share time and space with each other for a while, thus beginning the phase of precarious shared group wrestling with the "other" which we call sedentarism.

Please note however, that this is the unintended consequence of something that could not possibly have been imagined by its early participants. Sometimes wheels just spin, sometimes they hit enough other spinning wheels for something to turn into a gear and then something completely different is born which in retrospect seems an obvious outcome, as which it could never have appeared at the time.

The birth of agriculture can be described following the same pattern. Wild grains were clearly eaten by humans for millennia before they were cultivated deliberately. It seems no great feat of the imagination to posit some such seeds being thrown, as part

of funeral rites, onto or into the burial places of significant dead people or animals. That it was the turning of the soil and the decomposing flesh beneath that in fact caused the grain to grow with greater abundance will have been a much later lesson than the observation that, as part of the group's wrestling with its "other", certain deaths led to greater fertility, and that if you acted repeatedly as though you were burying the dead (by turning the earth) and invoked the mysterious, and eventually divinized protagonist of the fertility, you could, at least some of the time get the same results. Once again, spin the wheel often enough (which is what ritual is) and just sometimes, it will lead to an interaction that will in fact invent something world-changing. We will have done it, but it will seem to us, for the longest time, that "another" did something to and for us.

And finally, the domestication of animals, starting with wolves. These first were, I suspect, (slightly against Girard) not enfolded into our sense of "other" so much as victims, but as runners alongside us in a victimary hunt, where we could imitate them: they were the first animal to become "we" not "they" in our wrestling with our "other". That they could also imitate us, starting from cub/puppyhood, to the point that their need for an alpha could be fixated on us, and they become part-sharers in a human pattern of desire, is probably our race's earliest love story. That they have shorter lifespans than ours could have been vital in offering us evidence of what worked or not in bringing up our own offspring – part of the process by which they domesticated us. Other animals, bovine, caprine, ovine and porcine, were perhaps first kept in small numbers as "sacrificanda" until growing numbers caused what could have been just a spinning wheel of ritual to bump into the reality that their imitative capacity is such that they can, in fact (and with canine help) be herded, and tended peacefully. With that there developed a knowledge of the waterways and uses of compost which will have both fed in to, and needed to be kept separate from, the growing accidental knowledge about grains.

This picture of the unintended ritual-borne consequences of the victimary structure of the transcendental social imagination over time coincides very fruitfully with Descola's four "ontological" stages (Descola 2013), as brilliantly demonstrated by my colleague Benoît Chantre in Chapter 8 of this present work. First the *animist*, corresponding to the world of shamans where the wrestling with the social other projected shared interiority into the non-human world while being aware of a difference of bodies; the *totemic* where the distinction between interiorities and bodies shifts into a continuum such that humans, non-human animals and places can share the transcendental imagination, including protagonism; the *analogical*, where identifications are breaking down, interiorities and physicalities are perceived as different, and what we might call lateral thinking is at work detecting likenesses and relationships between things that are losing a certain transcendence and protagonism; and finally the *naturalist*, where the separation between the human and the non-human is increasingly absolute, and with it there is installed that domination of "nature" by "culture" whose heirs we are.

By bringing together Bloch's synchronic transcendental imagination, Descola's ontological stages and Girard's positing of an omnipresent structuring ritual-borne victimary mechanism with unintended consequences, it seems that we have a comparatively finely tuned dynamic model by which to give richly complex and open-ended interpretations to many particular phenomena in the pre-literate era. I

mention "open-ended" since unlike models which suppose our ancestors "knowing what they were doing" in some very determined and rational way, this interpretation leaves plenty of room for futility – things going round in circles without ever leading to anything, and just occasionally, and spectacularly, forging a path towards learning which changed us from within.

Back to Anatolia.

In this last section, I would like to step back from the "big picture" to concentrate on a much smaller question: an attempt at a very amateurish application of the foregoing to a matter of curiosity for me at Çatalhöyük: why the constant very fine replastering of inside walls? With such exactitude, and deliberate variations in exactitude as regards what was covered over and re-painted? And why the regular half-life fill-ins of houses, after maybe forty years of an eighty year cycle? I first came to the site in 2013, armed with the (typically Girardian) question: "how did the denizens of this place protect themselves against the risks of their own violence?" But in fact the question about Çatalhöyük that the place spontaneously elicited from me, and the one I have kept asking since, was "what was its "other"?" I couldn't conceive of a village that was a lone *holon*, not part of some network of similar *holoi* interaction between which gave each other to be. And of course Çatalhöyük was inserted into networks: *homo sapiens* is an inveterate wanderer – shell from the Red Sea region has been found at the site; obsidian used at Çatalhöyük was mined in mountains at least 120 km. from the site; and as DNA decoding advances, it becomes likely that Çatalhöyük was at least at some stage, virilocal, with non-related women brought in from elsewhere (sometimes, perhaps, violently, or maybe the violence was "ludic"). But from where?

There is no obvious "Paris" to this "London", no obvious "Barça" tribe close at hand to this "Real Madrid", a "them", rivalry with whom makes "us" proud to be who we are. No obvious family structure seems either to have been known, observed, or celebrated. The relationship between infants buried in floors and the buildings that arose is such that it is not clear whether it was typical infant mortality or some sort of sacrifice that was at work. Just as it is not clear whether the frequent foundation burials point to people being buried in the houses of the living, or whether they point rather to living people having opted to dwell in the houses of the dead. Tombs with add-ons, or houses with sunk-ins?

The question then became for me: at what stage were the inhabitants of Çatalhöyük in their wrestling with the victimarily structured social other, such that they had what we can call houses to begin with? And that these were organised and decorated in the ways they were? In Bloch's suggestion that at Çatalhöyük, there was "no religion, just houses" the only word which seems to me out of place is "just". Houses are not obvious. Bloch is happy to see the transcendental imagination at work in the phases of decoration (bucrania et al) in the houses, but seems to me to underestimate the way in which the group dynamic which is impelled by the transcendental imagination – wrestling with its "other" - is what is at work in producing houses *at all*, let alone such closely packed ones, ones with no apparent "on site" public spaces. In other words, I wonder whether part of my answer to the question "what is the "other" at

Çatalhöyük?" might be: "It is to be found as a changing, and indeed inventive relationship with housing".

One of the factors which I posit might have been at work here is the development of memory. We are so used to an individualized account of memory that it is difficult to take on board the movement by which, as Jan Assmann has illuminatingly developed, it is culture that gives us a memory, stretches and reinforces it (Assmann 1992), so that it becomes part of the "other" which runs us from within, and with which we wrestle. As Assmann points out, we are used to an approximately forty year "living memory" span – in other words, we take as good evidence the memories of sixty-something year olds, concerning events that happened as far back as their twenties; from witnesses much older than seventy looking back to when they were younger than eighteen, not so much. And of course this is changing now, with healthy longevity, and memories reinforced by film, archive material and so forth. Not so the ancient world – even after the advent of literacy made relatively time-independent acts of communication from yesteryear available. Anthropologists point out that typically pre-literate peoples have accurate memories of two or three generations of their own families, but that *even after the advent of literacy* their memories of what we would call "historical events" – things that happened, but were not directly related to their kin, went back no further than twenty years (cf Meskell, with reference to McDowell, on the remains of Deir el Medina, in Van Dyke and Alcock 2003).

It beggars the imagination (and I mean that somewhat literally) how little stretched the memory span might have been among hunter-gatherers before the first monumental "sanctuaries" with their T-stone structures in Eastern Anatolia became evidence of a living human past beyond their own generations. It is astounding also to think of how, within the first hundred years of their existence, the monuments of Göbekli Tepe will have already been considered unfathomably ancient by those who partook of whatever happened there. While their constantly changing feedback on projected memories over the remaining thirteen enturies in which they were living reference points is unimaginable

By the time we come to Çatalhöyük, fully two thousand years after the end of Göbekli Tepe, I wonder whether the issue of the formation of memory as part of the "other", which would be to some extent given new direction with the invention of literacy a few thousand years after the end of Çatalhöyük, had not become acute. And I mean this in the sense that with the increasing complexity of living together as both animal domestication and grain cultivation advanced (which it did throughout the Çatalhöyük period), memory span and accuracy, not only of the seasons (for which the moon and the stars work well) but also of narrative possibilities of belonging (simultaneously both what we belong to and what belongs to us), family, and living together, became increasingly insufficient for what was required of it. Faced with this insufficiency of memory, and before the arrival of the first scratchings of literacy which allowed vengeance to be deferred over time (thus inventing debt and projected time for repayment), the wrestling with the "other" may well have taken the form of a hyper-ritualistic attitude towards housing as a way of stretching time.

Thus what Ian Hodder once referred to as the "aggressive egalitarianism" seemingly present at Çatalhöyük, might be less about egalitarianism and more about a need to remember belonging in order to cope with the growing complexity of togetherness,

and the risks of serious inter-group violence that this may have engendered. If this were the case, then the constant ritualised replastering of walls, the regular half fill-ins of houses, the accuracy of access to buried ones beneath floors, and their retrieval and possible circulation may very well have functioned as an incipient internal mnemonic system, itself part of the keeping of the peace given how many other possible sources of discord might erupt.

In this sense, I wonder whether referring to those houses at Çatalhöyük which seem to contain strong links with their own past layers as "history houses" isn't rather truer than might have been thought when the term was coined. It is not that they were houses which, as it happened, contained histories and memories: they were a ritual system, and maybe not an entirely successful one, of extending memory under pressure that took the form of, a perhaps somewhat insistent, (maybe even "aggressive"), creation, placement, maintenance and recreation of houses.

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