

GLOSSARY OF GIRARDIAN TERMS¹

Difference: Distinction arising from victimage, the “they” and “us” syndrome, which could have been originally a mere gesture or sign. All other distinctions (language, roles, cultural institutions and rules) have their origin in this first victimary distinction.

Double Bind: This term relates to the experience of conflict or paradox when mimesis is blocked by prohibition (“imitate me in this but not in that”). The same experience arises when the desire of two subjects converges upon the same object and the mimetic process turns the mediator/model into a rival. This is also referred to as Mimetic Double (see also *Mimesis* and *Model*).

Culture: All structures and arrangements as well as the common ideas and rules, which allow people to live together without being consumed by chaos, violence and random killing. It is the result of the functioning of the non-conscious mechanism of scapegoating that actually maintains the system.

Mimesis: Synonymous with mimetic desire, i.e. the non-conscious imitation of others, which in mimetic theory always carries the connotation of “acquisitive” or “appropriative”. As a “dynamic enabling” that allows human beings to open themselves up to the world and engage in loving relationships, mimesis is not inherently destructive. Mimetic desire is mediated desire. The desirability of an object is not vested in the object but in the model that desires it. It is the function of culture to regulate the potential conflict between rivals who desire the same object. Since human beings are constituted as “interdividuals”, they live from the reality of the model or mediator. This involves them in the mimetic paradox where they become so fascinated with the model that they desire its very being, which results in the experience of the *mimetic double*. It occurs when the other becomes either an

¹ Adapted from Williams, *Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 40, 289-294.

obstacle that needs to be eliminated or so internalized that the distinction between the self and the other is no longer experienced. The possibilities range from murder and schizophrenia to conversion through love and forgiveness. In the latter case, Girard speaks of “good mimesis”.

Model/Mediator: Whatever or whoever we are in a mimetic relationship with. It may be an individual, a group, cultural assumptions or settings with which we resonate. The model mediates reality for us and we are constituted by the model such that the self is a set of past and present mimetic relations. If the model is a person (authority figure, parent, or an important peer) the model and the one imitating are also potentially rivals. At the same time, every rival may be also a model who begins to entice our desire for imitation.

Religion: The cultic expression of mimetic desire, which in archaic societies regulates its rivalistic form through ritual prohibition and sacrificial violence associated with sacrifice; a mechanism for preserving order by protecting society from destructive mimetic crises.

Resentment: For Girard, resentment is the result of mimetic pressure. It may be called “vengeance interiorized” or “psychological self-poisoning”. Since the English does not adequately account for the underlying imitation of the ‘other’ which recoils on the imitator, the French *ressentiment* is preferable.

Sacrifice: Originally the cultic immolation of humans or animals (as substitutes for humans) during religious victimization. In the negative sense sacrifice means scapegoating, in the positive sense understood as costly and loving self-giving as in the case of Christ.

Scapegoating: The mechanism by which societies obtain unanimity and/or surrogate peace or release from mimetic violence through the killing of an arbitrarily chosen victim. It involves always the non-conscious convergence upon the victim as an object of collective “wrath”, retaliation or vengeance.