

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Wednesday, July 8

11:00 am-Noon Suite 8005 “Introduction to Mimetic Theory”

Grant Kaplan, St. Louis University

1:00-2:00 pm Suite 8005 Raven Foundation Lecture - “Unveiling Conflicting Narratives through Transformative Community Conferencing”

David Anderson Hooker, Founder, CounterStories Consulting

3:00-4:30pm

Room	Session #	Topic
8002	1	<p>Moderator: Martha J. Reineke, University of Northern Iowa</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Practitioner’s Panel</p> <p>3-4:30 pm</p> <p>“The Meaning of Mimetic Theory in My Life and Career: Past, Present, and Future”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Mack Stirling Vanessa Avery, Sharing Sacred Spaces Felipe Vianna, Brazilian comedy writer</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bridge Builder Awards Suzanne Ross, Raven Foundation Kris Rocke, Nic Hughes, Street Psalms</p>
8009	2	<p>Moderator: Pablo Armando González Ulloa Aguirre</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Measuring Violence</p> <p>3-4:00 pm</p> <p>“Measuring the Scapegoat Mechanism in Temporal Online Networks via Concentration and Relinking Signatures” Carlos Paes, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro</p> <p>“Mexican Government as a “Fourth Transformation:” Myth or Ideology?” Jorge F. Márquez Muñoz, National Autonomous University of Mexico</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pedagogical Challenges of AI</p> <p>4-4:30 pm</p> <p>“Revisiting Composition Pedagogy and Mimesis in the Age of Generative AI” Matthew Packer, Victoria University, Wellington</p>

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

8011	3	<p>Moderator: Hélène Cristini</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Quandaries of External Mediation: Virtuous Elites, Spiritual Aristocrats, and...St. Catherine of Sienna</p> <p>3-4:30 pm</p> <p><u>“Christian Candor, Noble Lies, and the Fragility of Order: Leo Strauss and René Girard in Dialogue”</u> George A. Dunn, Hangzhou City University</p> <p><u>“Directional Power and External Mediation”</u> Griffin Fornell, Independent Scholar</p> <p><u>“Passion, Temptation, and Renunciation: Reconsidering Spiritual Aristocracy in Girard”</u> Peter Y. Paik, Yonsei University</p>
8012	4	<p>Moderator: Maura Junius</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Three H’s: Henriad, Hamlet, and Hamnet</p> <p>3-4:30 pm</p> <p><u>“Mimesis and Microculture in Matthew Gasda's Girardian Henriad”</u> John-Paul Heil, Mount St. Mary's University</p> <p><u>“Who’s there?” The Eschatological Question of Hamlet. Divergent Readings in Girard, Stoppard, and Zhao”</u> Rebecca Pawloski, Loyola University Chicago Rome Center</p> <p><u>“Will Shakespeare, Hamlet, Maggie O’Farrell, Hamnet, and René Girard: The Play, the Novel, and the Film”</u> Sandor Goodhart, Purdue University</p>
8014	5	<p>Moderator: Brian Quaranta</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Iliad and the Rabinal Achi (Xajoj Tun); Gans and Girard</i></p> <p>3-4:30 pm</p> <p><u>“Sharing out The Iliad equally between Gans and Girard”</u> William Johnsen, Michigan State University Press</p> <p><u>“Beyond Oedipus: Girard's Scapegoat Mechanism in the Living Maya Ritual Drama Rabinal Achi”</u> Anton Korenči, PhD</p>

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8203	6	<p>Moderator: Emanuel Muroi</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Spaces: Forbidden, Small, Transparent</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Wednesday 3-4:30 pm</p> <p>“Area 51 and the Sacred Allure of Forbidden Space” Todd M. Thompson, Torrey Honors College, Biola University</p> <p>“Small Ambivalence: Visuals, Spaces & Mediation” Matthew Tan, University of Notre Dame/ Alphacrucis University College</p> <p>“Transparent Toilets: the Desacralization of the Last Frontier of Privacy” Marina Ludwigs, Stockholm University</p>
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5:00-7:00 pm

Room	Session #	Topic
8002	7	<p>Moderator: Grant Kaplan</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Mimetic Theory: Sports Edition</u></p> <p>5:00-6:00 pm</p> <p>“Positive Mimesis in Play: Unified Sports as a Model for Community Transformation” Dennis Feaster and Curtis Gruenler, Hope College</p> <p>6:00-7:00 pm</p> <p>“The Altar at Wrigley Field: The Scapegoating of Steve Bartman” Dominic Pigneri, Immaculata University</p> <p>“Toward a Field of Dream: Mimetic Theory in the Chicago Cubs 2003 World Series” Tyler Graham, Pontifex University</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Respondent: Grant Kaplan, St. Louis University</p>

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8011	8	<p>Moderator: Martha Reineke</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Frame, The Object, The Gallery</p> <p>Wednesday 5-7:00 pm</p> <p><u>“The Origins of Aesthetics in Generative Violence: Towards a Girardian Framing of Cultural Objects”</u> Timothy Long, University of Regina (Canada)</p> <p><u>“Stitching Narratives: Textile and Mimetic Desires”</u> Zexi Zhang, Fudan University, UC Berkeley (Visiting)</p> <p><u>“What the Algorithm Cannot Hold: Mimetic Desire, the Conditioned Gaze, and the Sacrifice of African Artistic Meaning”</u> Kemi Owo-Gbohunmi, Iwalewa Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria</p>
8012	9	<p>Moderator: Sandor Goodhart and Erik Buys</p> <p>5:00-6:00 pm Playwright Session</p> <p><u><i>Oedipus Unrepented</i></u> By Felipe Vianna, comedy writer</p> <p>6:00-7:00 pm Author Session</p> <p><u><i>How Violence Works: An Introduction to René Girard’s Mimetic Theory</i></u> By John Babak Ebrahimi</p>
8203	10	<p>Moderator: Brian Robinette</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Politics Today</p> <p>5-7pm</p> <p><u>“Sacrificial Logic in Contemporary Antizionism”</u> Luis Sokol Mischne, El Colegio de Saberes in Mexico City</p> <p><u>“Populism in Mimetic Theory”</u> Pablo Armando González Ulloa Aguirre, National Autonomous University of Mexico</p>

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8005	11	<p>Moderator: Julia Robinson Moore</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Mimesis, Creativity, and Reconciliation: Impact, Questions, and Potential 20 Years After the 2006 COV&R Conference</p> <p>5-7:00 pm Conference Anniversary Session</p> <p>A Dialogue on the 20th Anniversary of the 2006 COV&R Conference and subsequent publication of <i>René Girard and Creative Mimesis</i> and <i>René Girard and Creative Reconciliation</i>, opening new vistas of mimetic theory in creative, positive, and loving mimesis.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sandor Goodhart, Purdue University Julia Robinson Moore, University of North Carolina, Charlotte Wolfgang Palaver, University of Innsbruck Joel Hodge, Australian Catholic University Kathy Frost Jon Pahl</p>
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7:00-9:00 PM

Suite 8005 - COV&R Welcome Reception

Thursday, July 9, 2026

**Curtis Hall, 10th floor, Fine Arts Building
410 S. Michigan Ave. Chicago**

10:00 am-Noon	<p>Theatre Lecture – “Electra and the Mimetism of Revenge: A Performative Take” Emilio Williams, playwright Actors: Ana Maria Alvarez, Claudia Quesada, and Daniel Suarez</p>
1:30-3:00 pm	<p>Art Lecture--The René Girard Lecture - “Idolatry and Aesthetics: the Sacred Refashioning of Space and Time” Tania Checchi, Universidad Iberoamericana</p>
3:30- 5:00 pm	<p>Art Lecture--“<i>Paradise Lost</i> by Raqib Shaw” Madhuvanti Ghose, Art Institute of Chicago Respondent: Martha J. Reineke, University of Northern Iowa</p>
5:30-8:00 pm	<p>Visit to the Art Institute of Chicago to view “Paradise Lost” and other works</p>

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Friday, July 10, 2026

**Curtis Hall, 10th floor, Fine Arts Building
410 S.Michigan Ave. Chicago**

9:00-10:30 am	Raymund Schwager, SJ Memorial Essay Contest Presentations
11:00 am-Noon	COV&R Business Meeting
1:30-3:00 pm	Architecture Lecture - "Architectural Style, Mimesis, and 'Pastiche:' Architectural Style through the Lens of Mimetic Theory" Francis Morrone, New York University
3:30 -4:45 pm	Architecture Lecture - "The City of Desire: Mimetic Theory and the Production of Space" Ivan Blečić and Emanuel Muroni, University of Cagliari
5:15-7:30 pm	Theatrical Performance and Panel Discussion –“A Steady Rain” by Keith Huff Actors: Johnny Garcia and Robert Tobin Panelists: Betsy Hansbrough and Andrew McKenna

Saturday, July 11

9:00-10:30 am

Room	Session #	Topic
8002	12	Moderator: Matthew Tan Mimetic Insights for Psychology and the Healing Professions 9-9:30 am “Narcissism, Mimetic Theory, and Evil” Thomas Kubarych, Independent Scholar 9:30-10:30 am Author Session “Walk With Me: A Journey Through the Landscape of Trauma,” or The Transformational Power of Loving Mimesis for Trauma Informed Spiritual Care Ellen M. Corcella, Author and Independent Scholar

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8009	13	<p>Moderator: Nikolaus Wandinger</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Maya Hiatus (546-640ce)</p> <p>9-9:30 am</p> <p><u>“Girard and the Maya Hiatus”</u> Marty Aiken</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Theatre in Context</p> <p>9:30-10:30 am</p> <p><u>“A Tale of One City—A Raisin in the Sun and Clybourne Park”</u> Maura Junius</p> <p><u>“A Frenzy of Mediation: Patrick White and the Theatre”</u> Nick Keys, Western Sydney University</p>
8012	14	<p>Moderator: William Andrews</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Storytelling and Film in Popular Culture</p> <p>9:00-10:30 am</p> <p><u>“Spike Lee’s Path to Positive Mimesis in Romantic Relationships”</u> Nicholas Fiorelli, ESL Teacher, Cincinnati Public Schools</p> <p><u>“Dungeons, Dragons & Desire: How Tabletop Roleplaying Games (Dis)incentivize Violence”</u> Lyle Enright, The Raven Foundation</p>
8014	15	<p>Moderator: Raymond Dokupil</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Critical Reflections on Mimetic Theory</p> <p>9:00-10:30 am</p> <p><u>“Why Did Girard Renounce His Arguments in Things Hidden?-A Note on a Footnote Added to De la violence à la divinitè”</u> David Dawson</p> <p><u>“The Triumph of Ideology: 25 Years of I See Satan”</u> Matthew Pattillo, The New School for Social Research</p> <p><u>“Prolegomena to any Girardian consideration on ecumenical dialogue.”</u> Oscar Ortega Espinosa, National Autonomous University of Mexico</p>

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8011	16	<p>Moderator: Tania Checchi</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Say Her Name</p> <p>9-10:30 am</p> <p><u>The “mimetic rape” of Lucretia: A cornerstone of Western cities</u> Susan Wright, Pacifica Graduate Institute</p> <p>Artist Presentation: <u>“La Guernika and the Gunaika: A Triptych of Scapegoating”</u> Reuben Rios, El Camino College</p>
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10 am-11:00 am Refreshments

11 am-12:30 pm

Room	Session #	Topic
8002	17	<p>Moderator: Lyle Enright</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Books and a Book</p> <p>11:00-11:30 am</p> <p><u>“Graywall: Teaching Young People the Principles of Mimetic Theory”</u> Christine Anson, St. Andrew’s Catholic Church, Saline, MI</p> <p>11:30 am-12:30 pm Author Session</p> <p><u>“Third Things First: A Wicked Study Guide to Mimetic Insights for Small Groups”</u> Suzanne Ross, The Raven Foundation</p>

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8012	18	<p>Moderator: Timothy Long</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Art of The Visual, The Visual of Art</p> <p>11:00am -12:30 pm</p> <p><u>“Seeing the Victim: Visual Convergence and the Sacred in Girard”</u> Lana Starkey</p> <p><u>“The Crystal Palace:’ Pissarro, Dostoevsky, Girard”</u> Ann W. Astell, University of Notre Dame</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Diocese as Architecture: The Catholic Church in Algeria</p> <p><u>“The Roman Catholic Church in Algeria”</u> Joseph Fitzpatrick, University of London</p>
8203	19	<p>Moderator: Matthew Packer</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Engaging the World: Girard and Philosophers</p> <p>11:00am -12:30 pm</p> <p><u>“Moral Mediators and the Mimetic Loop of Violence: Reading Lorenzo Magnani with René Girard”</u> Federico Vit, University of Pavia</p> <p><u>“The Logic of Mimetic Alterity: In the Loop of Girard, Levinas, and Peirce”</u> Benjamin Kiderman, Independent Researcher</p> <p><u>Image, Sensation, and God: Sacramental Vision and the Eucharist as Innocent Victim”</u> Brett McLaughlin SJ, Fairfield University</p>

12:30-1:45 pm

11th floor	<p>Practitioners’ Lunch and Discussion</p> <p>Host: Mack Sterling</p>
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CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

2:00-4:00 pm

Room	Session #	Topic
8002	20	<p>Moderator: Maura Junius</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Doing the Work: Loving and Creative Mimesis</p> <p>2-3:30 pm <u>“Walking the Way to Grace in Mimetic Theory: Neuroscience and Christian Spirituality in Racial Healing.”</u> Julia Robinson Moore, University of North Carolina, Charlotte Featuring the COV&R Premiere of <i>Charlotte Seven</i> A Documentary Directed by William Price “Memorializing the Unmarked Graves of Enslaved People in Charlotte”</p> <p>3:30 – 4:00 pm Artist Presentation <u>“Hexagon project: Microdosing Positive Mimesis in a 20-Year Quiltmaking Experience”</u> Catherine Sherman, Artist Practitioner/Community Cultural Worker (University of San Francisco)</p>
8009	21	<p>Moderator: Ann Astell</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Shakespeare Session</p> <p>2-4:00 pm <u>“A Theatre of Grace: Reading Girard from the Viewpoint of Comedy”</u> Mikael S. Brorson, Aarhus University/University of Innsbruck</p> <p><u>“The Wager in Shakespeare’s Cymbeline”</u> Marco Giovanni Stucchi, University of Verona</p> <p><u>“Shakespeare's Theatre as the Temptation of Sorcery: Othello and The Tempest through the Lens of Girard and Levinas”</u> Ján Hreško, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Slovakia</p> <p><u>“Shrieve More, More, More, Shrieve More!: Sir Thomas More, the scapegoat, and the hand of Shakespeare”</u> Brian P. Quaranta, Duke University</p>

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8011	22	<p>Moderator: H�len� Cristini,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Fiction in Light of Mimetic Theory</p> <p>2:00-3:00 pm</p> <p><u>“Neither Bug nor Feature: Death within Design in Susanna Clarke’s Piranesi”</u> Andrew McRae, Theology & Peace</p> <p><u>“Middlemarch: George Eliot Mimetician”</u> Andrew J. McKenna, Loyola University Chicago</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Thresholds: Human, Animal, Humanoid</p> <p>3:00-4:00 pm</p> <p><u>“Between the Cage and the Cross: Mimetic Crisis and the Human-Animal Threshold in Landolfi’s Le due zittelle”</u> Bianca Nogara Notarianni, University of Palermo</p> <p><u>“The Invisible Violence and the Path to Grace”</u> Helene Cristini, International University of Monaco“</p>
8014	23	<p>Moderator: Woody Belangia</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Justice and Injustice in Politics across Millennia</p> <p>2-4:00 pm</p> <p><u>“The Prophet-as-Prisoner and Scapegoat: A Girardian Reading of Jeremiah 26 and 37-39”</u> William Andrews, North Park University</p> <p><u>“The Scandal of Divine Evil and the Ritual Origins of Justice: The Poetics of Philosophy in Plato’s Republic”</u> Thomas Breidenbach, Pace University</p> <p><u>“Kalila and Dimna: An Analysis from Mimetic Theory”</u> Palmira Arias L�pez, National Autonomous University of Mexico</p> <p><u>“Literary and Visual Fictions Regarding Guilt and Innocence in Albert Camus’s Works”</u> Cossette Galindo Ayala, Iberoamerican University, Mexico City</p>

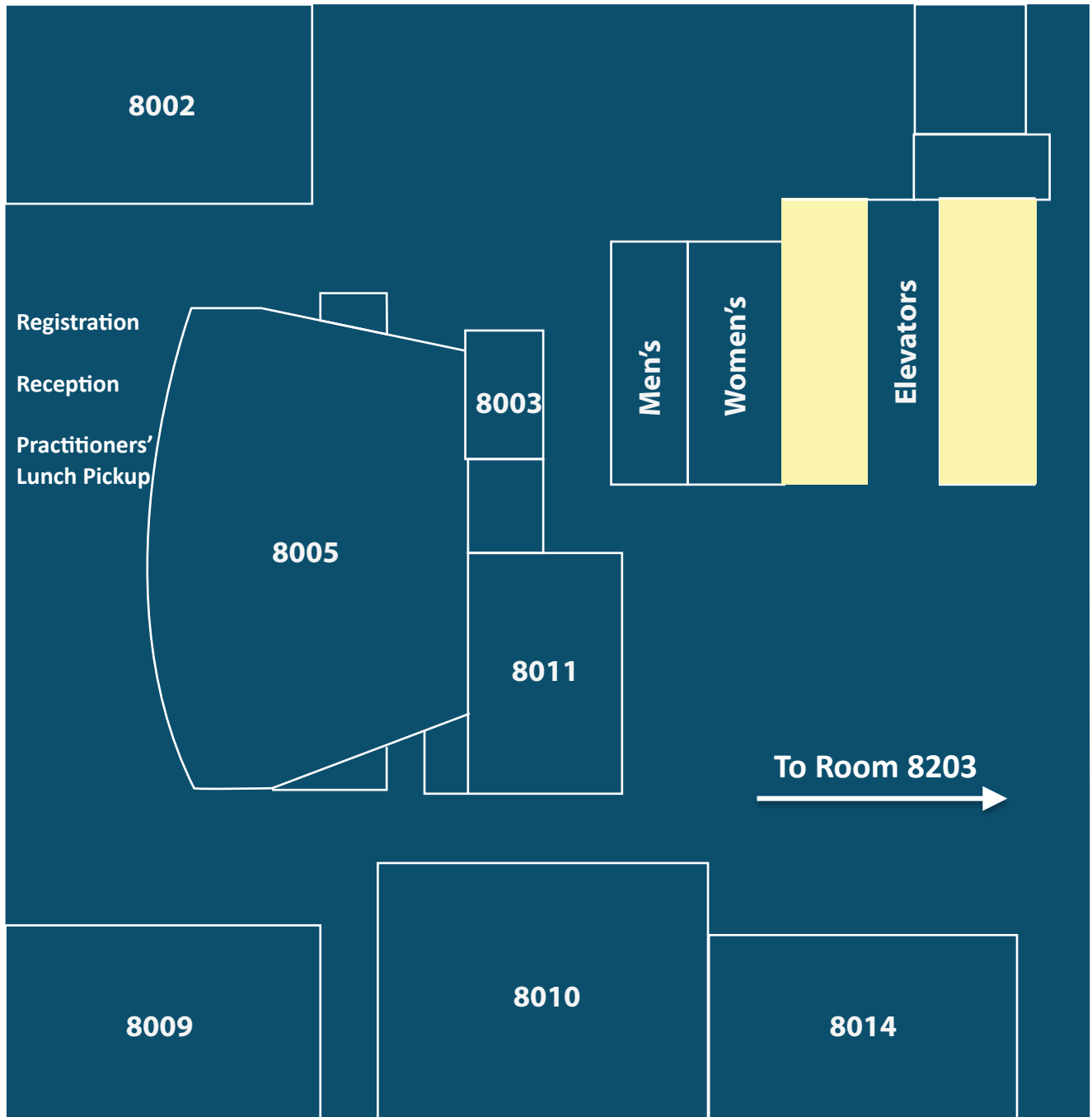
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8203	24	<p>Moderator: Dominic Pigneri</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Perspectives on the Sacred and the Holy</p> <p>2-4:00 pm</p> <p><u>“The Conversion of Desire, Interior Change and Innermost Mediation”</u> Joel Hodge, Australian Catholic University</p> <p><u>“Mimetic Theory and Interreligious Dialogue: Proposing a New Language of the Spirit”</u> Susan McElcheran, University of Toronto</p> <p><u>“Paul’s Conversion as a Turn from the Sacred to the Holy - Illustrated in the Visual Arts and Music”</u> Nikolaus Wandering, University of Innsbruck</p>
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5:30 pm - 7:00pm Chicago Architecture Center River Cruise on *The First Lady*.
Arrive at 5:00 pm
Board at 5:15 pm
 Location: 112 E. Wacker Dr, on the southeast corner of the Michigan Ave. Bridge and Wacker Dr. Descend the stairs to the river.
Accessibility options:
Drop-Off Zone: Arrange for a taxi or vehicle to drop you off on Lower Wacker Drive, which leads directly to the river level.
ADA Ramp: Use the ADA-compliant ramp at Vietnam Veterans Memorial Plaza (Wacker Drive and State Street), then travel two blocks east on the Riverwalk to the ticket window.

7:00 pm - 9:00 pm COV&R Banquet, Chicago Architecture Center, 111 E. Wacker.
 Enter through the front doors of the CAC. The Staff will guide you to the Lecture Hall for dinner. Additional drink tickets can be purchased from Maura Junius during the banquet for \$10 each.

Default Center 8 Floor 1 East Jackson



8002 Meeting room
8003 Loop Student Center & Conference Services Office
8005 Meeting room

8010 Meeting room
8011 Meeting room
8014 Meeting room
8203 Meeting room

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Abstracts

Marty Aiken

Girard and the Maya Hiatus

In Chapter Five of *The Scapegoat*, titled “Teotihuacan,” Girard explains why sacrifice was so fundamental to Aztec and Mayan cultures.

“Only the celestial bodies give man light permanently, but there is no guarantee that they will always do so. To assure their benevolent collaboration, they must be nourished and provided with victims, victims will always be needed.”

Victims were provided. As Girard goes on to note, . . . “As a people they (the Aztec) were constantly occupied with fighting not for the expansion of territory but to obtain the victims necessary for innumerable sacrifices. . . .” But in unusually dire circumstances ordinary victims were not enough, only the most powerful of victims would suffice – captured kings were often kept to be sacrificed, or in the most dire situations, their own king would be sacrificed.

In 536 the volcano El Chichon erupted. It was an extremely powerful eruption. The volcanic eruption occurred more or less slightly before the Maya Hiatus (536- 640) began: **“Maya societies in Southern Mexico, Guatemala and Belize experienced a 'dark age' during the second half of the 6th century. This period, also known as the 'Maya Hiatus', is characterized by cultural downturn, political instability and abandonment of many sites in the Central Maya Lowlands.”**

The article the above quote comes from goes on to say that many theories have been offered to explain the sudden onset of the Hiatus. Naturally, since El Chichon erupted more or less coincident with the beginning of the Hiatus, the volcanic eruption is assumed to have had primary role. There is an extensive literature documenting the environmental and climatic stress that a volcanic eruption can initiate and cause, and it is certainly reasonable to look for what I will call conventional stressors caused by volcanic eruptions.

What has been completely overlooked is that when volcanos erupt, the larger eruptions darken the sun, such that the sun can't be seen. The sun can remain hidden for as much as two weeks, and its light distorted for a much longer period. As I noted above, the Maya believed continual sacrifice was necessary to keep the sun in the sky. What happens, then when that sun disappears? My suggestion is that the Maya could only conclude that their sacrifices had failed and that the gods were demanding a much more extreme sacrifice to put things aright. The king was understood to share kinship with the Sun God, almost to the point that the king was himself an incarnation of the Sun God. I think that it's very probable that the disappearance of the sun would have been interpreted

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as evidence that the current king's relationship with the Sun God had been broken. As a first step in restoring the relationship the current king would need to be sacrificed. This break in the existing political order can only have made a bad situation worse. There is actually an extensive archaeological literature on Maya kings becoming sacrificial victims.

My goal in this paper will be to draw to the attention of the Girardian community to the Maya hiatus. I believe the Maya Hiatus offers a unique opportunity to apply Girardian ideas in a detailed way to an actual historical event. The ultimate goal would be a first step in opening a dialogue with the community of Maya scholars.

William Andrews

The Prophet-as-Prisoner and Scapegoat: A Girardian Reading of Jeremiah 26 and 37-39

Nearly from beginning to end, Jeremiah is a book about imprisonment. In at least five pericopes, the prophet is the subject of legally sanctioned physical confinement, and the book concludes with the imprisonment of Judah's last two kings. Fr. Daniel Berrigan dubs Jeremiah the "prophet-as-prisoner" and declares that Jeremiah is "inviting us... into his cell" to offer a unique perspective on Judah's fall to the Neo-Babylonian empire in the sixth century BCE. Andrew McKenna describes this general phenomenon as the "epistemological privilege of the victim." In this paper, I engage two of those episodes—Jeremiah 26 and 37-39—and read them as narratives of scapegoating in which the prophet is the focus of communal anxiety during a time of political and theological crisis. Jeremiah narrowly escapes one attempted execution, suffers imprisonment, and is again nearly murdered by political officials. According to René Girard, the Bible exposes and critiques the scapegoat mechanism. A Girardian reading demonstrates that the prophet is the innocent victim of collective accusation and from that position reveals the depth of the covenant crisis and political instability that led to the Babylonian Exile.

Christine Ansorge

Graywall: Teaching Young People the Principles of Mimetic Theory

Girard's Mimetic Theory is hard for many people to understand because the mind resists the loss of such a significant tool in the social toolbox as scapegoating. Hopefully we will make it easier for the younger generation by teaching them early how to spot contagion and resist it. I propose that we use children's books to stir up and explain Mimetic Theory to young people.

There would be eight lessons based on eight children's books.

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1. “I want.” *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*
2. “I want what she has.” *May I Please Have a Cookie?*
3. “We all want.” *The Doorbell Rang*
4. “When there isn’t enough to share.” *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*
5. “I will do whatever it takes to have what he has.” *Redwall*
6. “It’s her fault that I want.” *Hunger Games*
7. “I give up my wants.” *The Lord of the Rings*
8. “I give myself.” *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

This could be a slow project starting in the board book years, or it could be a year of reading aloud with your middle-grade student, or a set of assignments for your high school student. I suppose it could even be used with curious adults as a book club. *Redwall* opens up a fascinating look at mirroring. *Hunger Games* is a perfect spring board for scapegoating. Each book opens the door to understanding mimetic theory a little wider in a safe but rich way.

Palmira Arias López

Kalila and Dimna: An Analysis from Mimetic Theory

Kalila and Dimna is a text dating from the late Umayyad Caliphate (661–751). It was adapted from Persian into Arabic by Abdallah Ibn al-Muqaffa (724–757 CE), a Persian-born intellectual, son of a high-ranking fiscal official. Raised in the Mazdean (Zoroastrian) faith and later converted to Islam, he moved to Basra, Iraq, after completing his education, where he produced this adaptation. He served as a counselor and high-ranking courtier. In 757 CE he was sentenced to death—reportedly because *Kalila and Dimna* was interpreted as a critique of the caliph—and was executed by dismemberment.

The work can be considered one of the foundational texts of Arabic literature and is often seen as an early example of the “mirrors for princes” genre, offering ethical and political advice on the art of governance. It is also understood as an ode to reason, shaped by Zoroastrian intellectual traditions and possibly influenced by Stoic thought.

The text is written in a “matryoshka”-like structure—common in Persian literature—in which narratives are embedded within one another. It contains multiple dialogical levels: first, the overarching dialogue between *Kalila and Dimna*; second, the court narrative involving the king, represented by a lion, and his advisor, the ox; and third, the fables told by *Kalila and Dimna*, which conclude with moral lessons articulated in a fourth discursive layer with an explicit ethical intention.

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From the perspective of Mimetic Theory, demythologization involves: (1) the emergence of interiority and self-control that challenges the communal misunderstanding that treats violence as external to the community; (2) the appearance of opposing groups that disrupt the unanimity required for the sacrificial mechanism; and (3) the rise of anti-sacrificial religious, philosophical, and political forms as alternatives to the scapegoat mechanism as a source of social pacification.

These elements can be observed in *Kalila and Dimna*. The entire text exhibits a strong emphasis on calculation; each episode unfolds according to a deliberate purpose, suggesting an attempt to replace the sacrificial mechanism with political reasoning. Second, the sacrificial logic is significantly limited, though not entirely rejected, and remains primarily within the third narrative level—the fables—where only animals participate. The confinement of sacrificial dynamics to animals suggests an emerging renunciation of the mechanism, or at least an explicit effort to distance it from the human political sphere.

The morally charged lessons offer a third element of demythologization: the emergence of an anti-sacrificial political and ethical framework. These moral teachings also call the individual toward self-limitation, reflexivity, and ethical self-regulation. Throughout the narrative, there is a clear intention to distance politics from sacrificial violence.

Kalila and Dimna represent a transitional moment in the political understanding of violence. Without eliminating sacrificial logic, the text displaces it into a narrative and allegorical domain, while placing prudence, calculation, and self-control at the center of political action. From a mimetic perspective, the work can be read as an early form of partial demythologization, in which rivalry is no longer resolved through violent unanimity but instead contained through ethical mediations.

Ann W. Astell

“The Crystal Palace”: Pissarro, Dostoevsky, Girard

The Art Institute of Chicago houses a small oil painting by the utopian, anarchist Impressionist Camille Pissarro (1830–1903). Pissarro painted it in Sydenham, England, in 1871, while an emigree from France during the Prussian invasion and the anarchist civil uprising there. The painting shows people walking beside the Crystal Palace, which had been relocated from London to Sydenham after the Great Exhibition of 1851. An astonishing structure of plate-glass and cast iron, the Crystal Palace, billed as the largest building in the world, was constructed to showcase the technological achievements of modern, industrial Europe. Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) visited the Crystal Palace during a European tour in 1862, recording his horrified impression of it in *Winter Notes and Summer Impressions* (1863). Two years later, in *Notes from Underground* (1864),

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Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, responding to Nikolay Chernyshevsky's glorification of the Crystal Palace in *What Is To Be Done?* (1863), describes the Crystal Palace as a mythological place of enlightened self-interest where suffering is impossible. In *Crime and Punishment* (1866) Raskolnikov haunts a tavern called the Crystal Palace. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky does not refer explicitly to the Crystal Palace, but it reappears as the "Tower of Babel" in Ivan's parable of the Grand Inquisitor. In his book *Feodor Dostoevsky: Resurrection from the Underground* (1963) René Girard only once mentions Dostoevsky's symbolic use of the Crystal Palace in *Notes from Underground*, but Girard upholds Dostoevsky's prophetic critique of the utopian dreams of his nineteenth-century contemporaries.

Cossette Galindo Ayala, PhD

Literary and Visual Fictions regarding Guilt and Innocence in Albert Camus's Works

The biblical account of the «Fall» in the Book of Genesis demonstrates a mythical ambiguity regarding whether evil is the result of free will or stems from natural or social determinism. According to the story, the inhabitants of paradise look at the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and find it appealing; the serpent (an external agent) advises them to eat it because, in doing so, they will be «like gods», that is, knowledgeable of good and evil. In secular terms, those who know good and evil would be judges and magistrates. Secular society operates through this same mythical ambiguity, given that criminality can be both the result of free will and determined by the social environment. However, the prison system carries out its sentences on criminals, treating them as harmful agents alien to society itself. Hence, modern society operates under the same mechanisms of expiation as primitive societies, condemning to prison and even eliminating individuals who function as sacrificial victims. Albert Camus was passionate about ethical questions concerning guilt and innocence, and René Girard himself dedicated some reflections to his work. This presentation aims to consider the modern judicial system, as interpreted by Camus, through the mechanisms of the propitiatory and sacrificial victim from the perspective of Girard's theory, taking into account the presence of certain engravings depicting the Fall of Adam and Eve within the collection of The Art Institute of Chicago, and also in relation to the painting *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* by Jean van Eyck, which is a constitutive element in Albert Camus's novel *The Fall*.

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Thomas Breidenbach

The Scandal of Divine Evil and the Ritual Origins of Justice: the Poetics of Philosophy in Plato's Republic

In *Charmides* Plato signals his descent from philosophers and poets (154d-155a), a biographical detail suggesting the poetic aspect of his *Republic*, whose dramatic nature proves key to its esoteric dimension, which the character of Socrates indicates by alerting his listener to what he lies about: the forbidden truth of what he calls poetry's lie, and that truth's hidden meaning. It is a truth that, for Socrates, may only be told to the few upon necessity, and this by way of the sacrifice of an exceptional victim, a sacred killing which proves to *be* the secret the few share, and whose hidden meaning philosophy intimates by way of poetry.

As its first word implies, the dialogue is a *catabasis*, its dramatic setting being the underworld of the disordered soul of both man and city, wherein spirit (the companions) contends with reason (Socrates) for captaincy of the ship of state, and this within a social context wherein the Athenian slave caste (Thracians, themselves synonymous with spirit) is being ritually acknowledged as having attained—or asserted—a degree of parity with the elite youths who, in their resistance to persuasion on this fraught occasion, have arrested Socrates upon point of threat.

Socrates is acutely aware of the companion's desire for a victim, and of their intent that he be that victim; he is equally aware of his own machinations in substituting Homer for himself. No longer the Apollonian Socrates familiar from other dialogues, he self-consciously dons the guise of a satanic twin, Artemisian Socrates of the underworld. Yet having convicted poetry of the crimes of which he himself would be convicted—impiety and corrupting the youth—Socrates issues an open challenge to defend poetry, a challenge he has subtly equipped his listener to mount, with poetry's inferable exoneration finally appearing as his own.

Mikael Stæhr Brorson, Ph.D.

A Theatre of Grace: Reading Girard from the Viewpoint of Comedy

Is René Girard a tragic thinker? The dramatic genre of tragedy, especially that of ancient Greece, plays a tremendous role in Girard's thinking. Not only does Girard share a range of key terms with tragedy (*mimesis*, *katharsis*). In tragedy, Girard sees an unveiling of the contagious mimetic rivalry propelling human violence forth in an almost unstoppable spiral, alongside with the scapegoat mechanism (*pharmakos*) intended as a violent means to stop said violence. However, comedy's role in Girard's *oeuvre* seems underexposed.

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With this paper, I seek to actively combine mimetic theory and comedy. From the viewpoint of systematic theology, and with a special interest in the theological aspects of mimetic theory, I argue that tragedy is ill-fit for formulating the positive aspects of Girard's theory, since it is closely linked to *exclusion*. Comedy, on the other hand, is characterized by its affinity to grace and universal *inclusion*, making it suitable for formulating a Girardian alternative to human violence and exclusion.

I begin by (i) accounting for the role of tragedy and comedy in Girard's work. Afterwards, I proceed to (ii) highlighting aspects of dramatic genre theory on comedy relevant to mimetic theory. Lastly, I (iii) discuss the potential of combining comedy and mimetic theory through a reading of William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. As we shall see, comedy reveals to us not only a theatre of envy, but rather a theatre of grace. In the words of Lucio: "Grace is grace, despite all controversy" (*Measure for Measure*, 1.2.24).

Ellen M. Corcella, J.D., M.T.S., M.Div.

The Transformational Power of Loving Mimesis for Trauma Informed Spiritual Care

In his well-known conversation with Rebecca Adams, René Girard observed that where there is a deeply positive desire for the other, one also finds divine grace. In turn, Adams constructed a theory of "loving mimesis" proposing that we can adopt a genuine desire for others in their full humanity (Adams, R. 2000. *Loving Mimesis and Girard's "Scapegoat of the Text": A Creative Reassessment of Mimetic Desire*. In *Violence Renounced: Rene' Girard, Biblical Studies and Peacemaking* (277-307)). Although "loving mimesis" articulates a paradigm for desire that resists conflict, it lacks a framework for providing care to others traumatized by violence generated by rivalry and scapegoating. On the other hand, the practice of trauma-informed spiritual care would benefit from Adams' insights about creating human encounters that result in genuinely transformative human relationships. This paper proposes integrating loving mimesis with principals of trauma informed care to build a better foundation for working with traumatized individuals. The paper places Adams' loving mimesis in conversation with psychiatrist Judith Herman's insights for trauma recovery, Dr. Shelly Rambo's trauma theology and theologian Henri Nouwen's pastoral paradigm of the wounded healer. The promise of an integrated approach is creation of new pathways for caring for the traumatized other.

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Hélène Cristini

The invisible violence and the path to grace

This paper proposes an invisible (metaphysical) reading of contemporary violence, arguing that the crises of the Anthropocene and the rise of “new wars” express a deeper nihilistic disorder. Ideologies shaped by positivism, neoliberalism, and scientism suppress concern for the other and hollow out interiority. Drawing on Arendt, Weil, de Certeau, Dostoyevsky, and especially Girard, the analysis shows how Enlightenment rationality, having lost transcendence, produces an uprooted subject governed by force and mimetic escalation rather than conscience.

This uprootedness manifests ecologically through an unrestrained desire to consume and dominate the non-human world, and socially through processual, self-replicating violence that seeks no end beyond its own perpetuation. Girard’s notion of *transcendance illusoire* clarifies how misdirected desire fuels both ecological destruction and the resentment underlying today’s “new wars.” The modern subject, emptied of depth, becomes increasingly available to the mimetic spiral of rivalry, fear, and sacrificial substitution.

As a counter-ontology, the paper turns to metaphysical remedies: read through a Girardian lens, Christ’s “sacrifice of sacrifice” reveals a non-violent logic of gift capable of reorienting desire, restoring interiority, and grounding a spiritually renewed response to the Anthropocene.

David Dawson

Why Girard Renounced his Arguments in Things Hidden: A Note on a Footnote Added to De la violence à la divinité

How are we to understand Girard’s concession to Schwager in the matter of the Epistle to the Hebrews? At stake is quite plainly to what degree sacrifice may be credibly rehabilitated, given the wholly annihilating critique mounted against it in the pages of *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (TH). Of the concession itself, Girard sometimes writes as though it involved little more than a lexical imprecision on his part, gratefully amended thanks to Schwager’s tireless importunities; at others, as though his overhasty repudiation of sacrifice came close to openly fomenting “bad contagion” in a totalitarian spirit, at once “deaf and blind” to the love of God. This presentation revisits the long footnote on page 1001 of *De la violence à la divinité*, along with a handful of passages in “The One by Whom Scandal Comes” and “Evolution and Conversion,” that illuminate Girard’s final capitulation to sacrificial theology in ways the feebly argued concession piece—1995’s “Theology and Mimetic Theory”—little manages to do. We

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juxtapose these with forewarnings in the pages of TH to avoid this very capitulation at all costs. In so doing, we seek a fresh assessment of the arguments for and against Girard's embrace of sacrifice, precisely in terms of their critical rigor, or lack thereof.

George A. Dunn

Christian Candor, Noble Lies, and the Fragility of Order: Leo Strauss and René Girard in Dialogue

Despite their divergent methods and commitments, Leo Strauss and René Girard converge on a common diagnosis of the fragility of social order and the latent violence at its core. Both thinkers recognize that societies depend on shared opinions, myths, and hierarchies that are in an important sense arbitrary yet indispensable for containing conflict. Yet their agreement goes only so far, as they part ways on the question of truth and the political order.

Girard credits biblical revelation with exposing the violent mechanisms that found culture, thereby inaugurating a historical process that discredits myth and destabilizes traditional hierarchies. Revelation is needed because philosophical reason alone can never distance itself sufficiently from its own historical setting to examine these hidden foundations. Strauss resists such historicism and defends the transhistorical possibility of philosophy, insisting that it need not serve as merely a ventriloquist of the spirit of its age. At the same time, he emphasizes the political dangers of disclosing unsettling truths.

These differences shape their responses to the crisis of modernity with its incipient nihilism and mounting cultural and political disorder. Where Strauss defends a qualified return to forms of external mediation through liberal education and the formation of a virtuous elite, Girard places his hope in the transformative power of Christian conversion and the imitation of Christ. Together, they sharpen our understanding of the spiritual and political crisis of our time, while illuminating the perennial tension between truth and order at the heart of the Western tradition.

John Babak Ebrahimian

How Violence Works: An Introduction to René Girard's Mimetic Theory

The PowerPoint presentation, "How Violence Works: An Introduction to René Girard's Mimetic Theory," introduces René Girard's mimetic theory to a wide audience of different backgrounds. The presentation begins with a short biography of Girard, after which, using Girard's main books in chronological order, from *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1965) to his last book, *Battling to the End* (2007), it proceeds to explain how the mimetic theory works.

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Girard first discovered the mimetic theory by doing a close reading of five great European novelists. He discovered that the characters, may they have been comic or tragic, desired through another person's desire. This was mimetic desire, which ruled and governed all human behavior. With his next books, he developed the different mechanisms of mimetic desire, or what came to be known as mimetic theory.

In his second book, *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard explores ancient myths and how archaic societies functioned. Here, Girard clearly lays out how and why doubles eventually lead to the crisis of undifferentiation, or the sacrificial crisis. Once this crisis is formed, an arbitrary victim, or a scapegoat, is found, lynched and/or expelled from the community to restore peace and order to the community and society.

His third book, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, is a book written in three parts, each conceived as a separate book, and is presented as a dialogue with two French psychiatrists, Jean-Micheal Oughourlian and Guy Leford: (BOOK I) Fundamental Anthropology is a continuation of his anthropological discoveries, (BOOK II) the Judeo-Christian Scriptures is a close reading of the Bible, and (BOOK III) is a new form of psychology—the Interindividual Psychology, or the psychology between individuals. The presentation ends with quotes from *Battling to the End*, a book he wrote after 9/11, where he himself considered his most apocalyptic book.

Lyle Enright

Dungeons, Dragons & Desire: How Tabletop Roleplaying Games (Dis)incentivize Violence

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the niche hobby of “tabletop roleplaying games” (TTRPGs) suddenly entered the mainstream. A TTRPG is **a collaborative storytelling game where players act as characters in a fictional world, guided by a narrator who also referees the game**. Outcomes are often decided by rolling dice, adding an element of chance to the story. The games are often described as “improv theater with rules.” Helped along by Netflix's *Stranger Things* and the popular web series *Critical Role*, the hobby grew from an \$80 million industry to almost \$2 billion overnight, and remains strong post-pandemic.

The inherently social nature of TTRPGs invites mimetic analysis (especially if one considers the narrator/referee as a sort of “sovereign” in the group and thus potentially a scapegoat). As one might expect from a game called *Dungeons & Dragons*, this hobby contains many, *many* variations on the theme of heroically slaying monsters in a fantasy world. Indeed, violence is a near-ubiquitous theme in TTRPGs across genres.

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This paper will examine a handful of TTRPG designs and evidence that their creators tacitly understand how mimetic dynamics implicate players in spirals of mimetic violence, or else present them with the tools to out-think it. We'll also see examples of how aesthetics often belie the level of violence present in many of these games: In more “heroic” games, many pages of rules text are devoted to teaching players how to use violence against “evil,” implying that righteous violence is the primary way to enjoy the game. Meanwhile, games that are presented as darker, amoral, and *more* violent often have rules that *discourage* violence, treating it as a “fail state” and emphasizing trickery or diplomacy instead.

Nicholas Fiorelli

Spike Lee's Path to Positive Mimesis in Romantic Relationships

This paper explores the application of René Girard's theory of mimetic desire to Spike Lee's 2015 film *Chi-Raq*, which takes place in present-day Chicago. The film provides a blueprint for transcending destructive patterns of imitation in romantic relationships without overt lecturing or moralizing to the audience. In Girardian theory, human desire is not autonomous but mimetic, meaning that desire is learned by imitating models. In many contemporary urban settings, young Americans imitate the sexual norms of hookup culture. In the context of *Chi-Raq*, a modern adaptation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, the cycle of gang violence in Chicago is presented as a manifestation of mimetic rivalry, in which reciprocal violence is fueled by imitation of the "other". A sex strike led by *Lysistrata* serves as a radical interruption of this negative mimetic loop. Exhausted by ongoing violence, the women collectively withdraw sex, and force their partners to confront the underlying violence of their reality. Through satire and comedy, *Chi-Raq* shows women leveraging their collective power to demand a higher standard from their male counterparts. It raises a compelling question for contemporary discourse: can the pursuit of radical commitment and relational stability serve as a foundational tool for community healing and long-term social equity? *Chi-Raq* offers a cinematic path toward the stable family structure that Daniel Patrick Moynihan argued was essential for social and economic progress. My goal is to show how artists like Spike Lee can help provide a pathway for changing the negative mimetic patterns in parts of our culture.

Joseph Fitzpatrick

The Roman Catholic Church in Algeria

This essay looks at the Architecture of the Catholic Church in Algeria from the nineteenth century to the present as representing the persons of the Church. From the viewpoint of

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Rene Girard it represents construction, corruption, death, rebuilding and resurrection of the Church as a living community led at present by the four bishops of Algeria in the four dioceses: Algiers, Oran, Annaba and Laghouat as the four pillars on which the church was constructed and how at present, especially in light of the interest of Pope Leo XIV, an Augustinian native of Chicago, following his recent Apostolic Visit, devoted to the legacy of Saint Augustine of Hippo, the Architecture of the Algerian Juridical Properties occupies a special place in the Catholic Church on the world stage. The four episcopal chairs will be considered from the point of view of architecture and the essay will refer to Girard to illustrate how mimetic theory links the persons of the church to the material and spiritual of the Architecture and how it runs through the history of the church showing bloody conflict and peaceful cooperation with the people of Algeria from colonisation through the War of Independence and the Civil War of the 1990s to demonstrate the difficulties and the glory of the presence of the Church in Algeria for both Christians and Muslims. It is a very colourful voyage rich in visual attraction and will take us through the countryside to see the living Church in the film 'Of Gods and Men' about the martyred Cistercian monks of Thibhirine and will consider how the living persons of the Church are witnesses and martyrs of the presence of Christ in Algeria and in their place in Africa and the whole world and their links with Rome.

Griffin Fornell

Directional Power and External Mediation: The Case of St. Catherine of Siena

René Girard's theory of mimetic desire provides a powerful explanation of how rivalry escalates into crisis, and ultimately violence. Yet his framework remains underdeveloped at the level of crisis interruption: how mimetic contagion might be arrested without recourse to sacrificial violence. I propose the concept of directional power to name a non-sacrificial mechanism of institutional re-stabilization.

Directional power builds on Girard's external mediator, maintaining sufficient distance to avoid mimetic doubling while remaining just proximate enough to be a model. Unlike Weberian charisma or forms of symbolic power grounded in institutional recognition, directional power depends upon what may be termed *auctoritas Veritatis*--an authority grounded not in office, consensus, nor personal magnetism, but in an evaluative order that institutions cannot generate internally. Its efficacy requires only minimal recognition and operates by reorienting an institution back toward norms that precede its own legitimacy.

I develop this concept through the case of St. Catherine of Siena and her interventions in the Avignon Papacy. Lacking formal authority yet addressing and influencing the papacy

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directly, Catherine exemplifies a mode of non-rivalrous correction that remains structurally exposed to rejection or scapegoating. Directional power thus names a precarious but intelligible form of authority capable of interrupting a mimetic crisis before it reaches terminal violence.

Pablo Armando González Ulloa Aguirre

Populism in Mimetic Theory

This paper aims to analyze populism through the lens of René Girard's mimetic theory. Within this framework, populism is understood as a mode of reorganizing social rivalry in contexts characterized by crises of institutional mediation. Mimetic theory posits that human desire is fundamentally imitative, generating dynamics of competition, conflict, and, in extreme cases, crises of undifferentiation. Historically, such crises have been resolved through the scapegoat mechanism, a process capable of restoring order by channeling collective violence onto a victim.

This study seeks to demonstrate that populism constitutes, according to literature, intrinsic to mimetic theory, a form of re-creation of sacrificial structures. To this end, populism constructs a homogeneous identity termed "the people," which opposes a common enemy and simplifies conflicts into a dichotomy of innocence and guilt. Through this analysis, the concept of populism will be understood as a phenomenon involving fear or emotional contagion, an outcome stemming from tensions inherent in liberalism and a re-sacralization of politics.

In the presentation, I will also elaborate on the distinctions between populism and liberal democracy. Populism is inherently anti-pluralistic, undermines the mediation of institutions, and embodies collective resentment channeled through the figure of a leader. It transcends merely being an anti-democratic or ideological political dynamic; rather, it constitutes a characteristic of contemporary society in which there is a tendency toward collective exclusion as a means to contain mimetic rivalry.

Sandor Goodhart

Will Shakespeare, Hamlet, Maggie O'Farrell, Hamnet, and René Girard: The Play, the Novel, and the Film

Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* (in 1600) has long remained a mystery for critics who have tried strenuously to align it with a "revenge drama" in the popular mold of the time, for example, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. Coleridge, Goethe, A. C. Bradley, and a plethora of

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others have tried in a variety of ways to explain the hero's delay in fulfilling narrative expectations involving a father, a son, and a ghost with the same name. Even Hamlet himself says, "I do not know / why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do,' / sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means / to do't." (4/4/46-49). Freud famously argued that oedipal dramas involving rivalries and desires within the unconscious had something significant to do with it.

Then, René Girard came along, in *A Theater of Envy*. William Shakespeare (1990) and elsewhere, to argue that this play was Shakespeare's literary criticism of his Elizabethan audience's expectations and that the dynamics of mimetic desire were at play here as elsewhere in great European works (Cervantes's *Don Quixote* [1605], for example, and other works).

More recently, Maggie O'Farrell brings a new context into play—in her novel, *Hamnet*, and the film, *Hamnet*, for which she contributed to the screenplay—and asks if it is in fact about Will Shakespeare's and Anne (or Agnes) Hathaway Shakespeare's mourning for the death of their son, Hamnet, just a few years earlier (in 1596) under somewhat obscure circumstances.

In my paper for COV&R this year, I would like to explore this new historical context and ask whether O'Farrell's thesis introduces a new idea to Girard's discussion of the play and enables us to understand the play more clearly.

Tyler Graham

Toward a Field of Dream: Mimetic Theory in the Chicago Cubs 2003 World Series

Who is Steve Bartman? For some, the name means nothing. For Chicagoans and Cubs fans in particular – and baseball fans in general – the name means only two things: 1) The guy who lost the World Series for the Cubs in 2003 and, thus, 2) the scapegoat. Any interest in mimetic theory and Chicago must pass through the Steve Bartman incident.

This paper proposes a brief summary of the historical build-up to World Series game on October 14, 2003, the event, and the aftermath as well as a documentation of multiple sources – even today – which simply and bluntly state (along with Bartman's own press release) that he was a scapegoat.

Next, I will examine this historical reality in light of the conference themes. To speak of theater and architecture at Wrigley field in light of the scapegoat mechanism unleashed in Bartman's story realizes that the professional exaltation of America's favorite pastime is

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not far from the gladiatorial sacrifices of ancient times. To what extent was Bartman a scapegoat of old and to what extent did the various cultural anti-scapegoating forces come to his defense?

Finally, I will ask what role architecture and theatricality in professional sports can play in healing the culture. This will entail a brief review of Girard's theory of modernity as well as James G. Williams' analysis of culture as addiction in *The Bible, Violence and the Sacred*.

After the Cubs finally won the world series and ended their century-long slump, they offered Bartman a World series ring and said, "We hope this provides closure on an unfortunate chapter of the story that has perpetuated throughout our quest to win a long-awaited World Series. While no gesture can fully lift the public burden he has endured for more than a decade, we felt it was important Steve knows he has been and continues to be fully embraced by this organization. After all he has sacrificed, we are proud to recognize Steve Bartman with this gift today."

Bartman's own press release stated, "My hope is that we all can learn from my experience to view sports as entertainment and prevent harsh scapegoating." Since sacrifice and scapegoating are the words chosen, it is helpful to bring this to a COV&R conference in Chicago and ask: What might this look like? How can we turn the potter's field into a field of dreams?

Dennis Feaster and Curtis Gruenler

Positive Mimesis in Play: Unified Sports as a Model for Community Transformation

In Unified Sports, a program of Special Olympics, those with and without disabilities play on teams together. For the players, the goal is to enjoy competitive team sports together. For Special Olympics, this program has become its central initiative toward fuller inclusion of those with disabilities in school communities. In our experience, the evident success of Unified Sports offers a prime case for better understanding how mimetic dynamics can be intentionally oriented toward building better communities, including especially those whose understanding of those dynamics will only ever be tacit. We are only at the beginning of our study of Unified Sports through the lens of mimetic theory, but we would like to share our hypothetical model for understanding and some preliminary findings about what seems to happen here so naturally.

Girard's focus on how mimetic desire leads to violence has left the mimetic theory community with the task of articulating how its principles can also help us work toward

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more positive relationships. The terms positive and negative suggest a polarity in which one pole is usually subordinated to the other. One aspect of such a polarity is between cooperation on one hand or rivalry on the other. Sports make these poles particularly apparent, and the theory of play offers further tools for understanding how this polarity works. The genius of Unified Sports has to do with keeping rivalry clearly subordinated to a cooperative goal by distinguishing the roles of athlete, taken by those with intellectual disabilities, and partners, usually taken by those without disabilities. The fully embodied modes of communication through which play happens enable a powerful modelling of desires oriented toward ultimately cooperative intentions that open the field of play for the athletes to learn and enjoy greater competitive agency, while the partners learn a restraint of power and redirection of desire that serve the cooperative goal. Within this context, both are empowered and friendships bloom across what are often difficult barriers.

John-Paul Heil

Mimesis and Microculture in Matthew Gasda's Girardian Henriad

Girard saw Shakespeare as a master of depicting mimetic rivalry, but in his *Theater of Envy*, "the histories are almost completely absent." Though "aware of much mimetic material in them," Girard thought that "with respect to what interests me...they are rather meager works."

New York playwright Matthew Gasda rejects Girard's claim, using the Henriad as a model for his Dimes Square Trilogy of plays. Explicitly inspired by Girard, Gasda's plays shift their theatrical architecture from Homildon Hill and Harfleur to "the eastern edge" of New York's "Chinatown, by the juncture of Canal and Division." But the modelling of the Trilogy on the Henriad is clear, its shrinking of political scope purposeful.

Gasda sees widespread mimetic crisis as shifting the crucible of virtue and character formation from the battlefield to the loft, as the tension Prince Hal suffers in Henry IV, parts 1 and 2 between the greatness he knows he is called to and the life of dissipation he undertakes becomes diffuse across the New York and Chicago-based creatives Gasda depicts. Almost all of Gasda's characters believe themselves to be slumming Prince Hals, preparing for the moment they will cast off their friends and ascend to a life well-lived, but in the absence of a clear artistic and moral model to imitate, they mimic each other, transforming their magnanimous ambitions into Falstaffian excess — or worse, total anhedonia.

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But for Gasda, there is hope. A renewal of culture in small places – Gasda’s plays became famous post-Covid for taking place in Brooklyn living rooms rather than traditional theatrical venues – is connected to a renewal of virtue in these places. Only a few of Gasda’s characters survive the hypermimesis of Dimes Square morally intact, by returning to Prince Hal’s true heroism in the internal reorientation of their hearts towards the transcendent good.

Joel Hodge

The conversion of desire, interior change and innermost mediation

This paper reflects on the interior dimension of reforming or undistorting mimetic desire and what occurs that is different from the process of mimetic rivalry and metaphysical desire. Much of René Girard’s focus was on the stages and effects of mimetic rivalry, while much recent work in mimetic theory has focused how positive mimesis changes the ways in which humans relate to each other (the exterior dimension). This paper, however, focuses on what happens in the interior life of the human person or subject, particularly through the positive imitation of a transcendent model (e.g., of Christ) and the effect of God (the transcendent *and* immanent Other). It draws out the anthropological and theological implications of Girard’s suggestive but brief reference to “innermost mediation” in *Battling to the End* as integral to the healthy mimetic relationality that Girard referred to as “the holy” (in contrast to “the sacred”). It does so in conjunction with Girard’s earlier references to mimetic/creative renunciation, positive mimesis, vertical transcendence, imitation of Christ, the desire for God, and other ideas about the change or conversion of desire. It examines the anthropological and theological character of innermost mediation, with two important implications for mimetic theory: 1) an identification of an implicit sense of the desire for God in Girard’s work; and 2) the necessity for such a desire (or divine immanence/presence), and its proper orientation, for the reform or conversion of mimetic desire and identity. I will demonstrate the movement of innermost mediation with reference to the imaginative prayer of St Ignatius that explicitly centres on stories, images and objects.

Ján Hreško

Shakespeare's Theatre as the Temptation of Sorcery: Othello and The Tempest through the Lens of Girard and Levinas

Girard considered Shakespeare an early theorist of mimetic desire because of the precision with which he portrayed the unconscious need to adopt the desires of others. In *A Theater of Envy*, Girard compared *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, but other

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connections become apparent when we compare *Othello* with *The Tempest*; they share patterns of mimetic rivalry associated with the magic of speech that stabilises illusion by giving a sense of meaning and inevitability to violence. This paper explores the plays simultaneously through the lens of Levinas' concept of *sorcery* as a degraded form of the sacred that conjures illusions to exert power over others.

Iago's deceitful speech unleashes a sequence of conflicts, awakening Othello's magical thinking and leading, in turn, to the punishment of an innocent woman. In contrast, Prospero ultimately declines to wield his magical power against his rivals, opting instead to abrogate the conflict by non-violent means before renouncing the use of magic entirely. Othello's uncompromising belief in restoring order through self-proclaimed "justice" and Desdemona's misdirected obedience are thus contrasted with Prospero's efforts to overcome his desire for vengeance and Miranda's ability to combine filial loyalty with conjugal desire.

Levinas distinguished between sorcery that procures illusions and that which procures profit. I argue that Shakespeare's theatre was a form of sorcery that produces a play of illusions, while at the same time warning against manifestations of sorcery that lead to destruction. *Othello* demonstrates how a playwright can transform reality into a fabricated fiction through the power of words, whereas *The Tempest* shows how an experienced author can look back on his own literary creations and willingly relinquish his position as orchestrator of a world. Shakespeare's plays demonstrate the role that magical speech – and its renunciation – play in his theatre, constructed around the spoken word and the audience's imagination.

William A Johnsen

Sharing out The Iliad equally between Gans and Girard

δαίνυντο , οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδέετο δαιτὸς εἰσης.

Mais rien de ce qu'ont produit les peuples d'Europe ne vaut le premier poème connu qui soit apparu chez l'un d'eux. Ils retrouveront peut-être le génie épique quand ils sauront ne rien croire à l'abri du sort, ne jamais admirer la force, ne pas haïr les ennemis et ne pas mépriser les malheureux. Il est douteux que ce soit pour bientôt.

It would surprise no one who has read René Girard and Eric Gans that their manner of referring to *The Iliad* would very different. In *la Violence* Girard is sparing in his references to certain 'key words' (thumos, etc) used in *The Iliad*, primarily those which are picked up by Emile Benveniste and Jean-Pierre Vernant; Girard takes their

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interpretation of religion and culture based on these words further, beyond ambivalence. But of course his main preoccupation is Greek Tragedy, not the epic.

Anyone who has read Gans's three-chronicle campaign march through the central texts of western philosophy would recognise the same robust manner in *The End of Culture*; in eighty pages he gathers in the major figures of Classical Greece, not over-dependent on the standard sources but certainly aware of them. If not a Shermanesque march, surely a tour de force (as we say in English).

The Iliad is filled with episodes to share between them. As Gans notes, μῆνις is the first word of the poem. Achilles is angry because Agamemnon is angry, and Chryses becomes angry because of Agamemnon's anger against him caused by all the Achaians insisting that Agamemnon alone give up his prize, especially Achilles. Apollo is made angry because of Chryses's anger. When Chryses 'makes his wish' to Apollo, he says nothing about getting his daughter back, the object of desire forgotten, at least temporarily.

I will focus on commensal rituals for Gans, and the failure of ritual with Girard, especially the burial ritual for Patroklos which degenerates into bloodthirsty revenge.

Maura Junius

A Tale of One City - A Raisin in the Sun and Clybourne Park

These two award winning dramas focus on the sale of a house in a white neighborhood of Chicago to a black family. *A Raisin in the Sun* reveals the family dynamics surrounding the move of three generations of the Younger family from a crowded apartment to a house in a white neighborhood. *Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris brackets Lorraine Hansberry's play with the first act exploring why the white family placed their house up for sale without regard to the neighbors' concerns and the second act (set 50 years later) confronting current community's resistance to the threat of gentrification. Both plays address the disruption of communities through acts of betrayal and highlight the need for forgiveness.

Nick Keys

A Frenzy of Mediation: Patrick White and the Theatre

The Australian Nobel laureate Patrick White, known primarily for his novels, had an intense and lifelong passion for the theatre, both as a playgoer and as a playwright. This paper explains White's relationship to the theatre as a mimetic frenzy and connects it to the evolution of mimetic desire in the modern world. As a solitary child, the theatre was a place for magic and imagination for Patrick White. As an alienated teenager it was a place

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of refuge and emotional identification. As a young writer it was a place for frustrated ambition and ambivalence. As a successful novelist it was a cultural battleground for smiting enemies and glorying in acclaim. As an venerated artist it was a lifeline to the passions of youth and a public platform in which to vent his infinite spleen. What links all these phases of White's passion for the theatre is mimeticism. The theatre provided White with an endless supply of mediators in prestigious arenas of frenzied mediation. A frenzy results when the volume of mediators in the same mimetic vortex is such that every shade and stage of mediation is to be found, not only sequentially, but simultaneously. On account of this mimetic frenzy, the case of Patrick White and the theatre helps us further understand the evolution of mimetic desire in the modern world. In White's time, the frenzy was still somewhat contained within the performing arts, whereas now it is becoming the norm of the information age. We all live in the midst of the mediation frenzy now.

Benjamin Kiderman

The Logic of Mimetic Alterity: In the Loop of Girard, Levinas, and Peirce

Mimetic theory is, at its core, a claim about the structure of desire — yet one that has remained logically underdeveloped. Its central thesis — that desire is no linear connection to its object, but consists rather in triangular relation — is here interpreted as nothing other than the triadic structure of signification in general.

To desire according to the desire of another is, in Peirce's precise sense, to interpret (and become) a sign — which means that the coveted 'being' of the mimetic model was never a possessable thing at all, but the relational, self-giving mode of being proper to a sign, inherently ungraspable.

Failing to grasp this, a dyadic or nominalistic logic only multiplies doubles, whereas a triadic or realist logic reveals how the mimetic model comes already bearing relationality that calls for a response which the world of rivalry cannot give. Levinas's ethics of alterity makes this palpable: the other is encountered as sign to me of an otherness which neither of us possesses or commands, signifying the very love — rather than sacrifice — of its human messengers.

For Peirce, giving is paradigmatic of triadic logic because what passes between giver and receiver is not merely an object but a relation, and in receiving that relation the recipient is drawn into its movement, becoming in turn a source of the same generativity. Tracing this logic from the open tent of Abrahamic hospitality to the new commandment of John's gospel, we see with Girard how the duel might expose what a sacrificially-resolved

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mimetic crisis conceals: the being – or significance – I covet in the other gives me to likewise be/signify, whereby loving my enemy is not so much a moral achievement as a gift, and indeed logicity itself. This talk traces the semiotic path through agonal mimeticism toward an open, eschatological reality signified by the living community of faithful signs.

Anton Korenči, PhD

Beyond Oedipus: Girard's Scapegoat Mechanism in the Living Maya Ritual Drama Rabinal Achi

Girardian scholarship has drawn almost exclusively on Greco-Christian sources to illustrate the scapegoat mechanism. This paper argues that a strikingly complete configuration of Girard's theory — one that has gone unnoticed by the mimetic theory community — can be found in Rabinal Achi (Xajoj Tun), the only surviving pre-Columbian drama, still performed annually as a living sacrificial ritual in Rabinal, Guatemala.

Drawing on field research during the 2018 performance cycle, on the first Central European translation of the K'iche' text, and on my experience directing a Girardian staging of Sophocles' Oedipus (National Theatre Košice, 2022), I demonstrate that this single ritual contains every core element of Girard's theory: mimetic desire (Kaweq covets the land and people promised then denied to him); mimetic doubles (Kaweq and his captor Rabinal are twinned warriors exchanging parallel speeches); escalating crisis; collective violence (tous contre un); and post-mortem sacralization (the executed victim rises to join the closing dance as ancestor spirit).

Yet the drama also poses a question. Unlike Oedipus, whose self-recognition begins the tragic demystification of sacrifice, Kaweq understands, accepts, and actively co-performs his own death. His confession does not dissolve the mechanism but sustains it. The community annually re-enacts his execution not as exposure but as cosmological renewal — the very word tun signifying drum, stone, year, and the mountain whose breaking restarts the world. What does it mean for Girardian anthropology when the victim co-performs his own sacrifice?

If tragedy is the memory of sacrifice, Rabinal Achi allows us to witness sacrifice itself — with the same structure as Oedipus, but still functioning. This paper seeks to expand mimetic theory's comparative horizon, in dialogue with Edgar Cael's Corn Mountain of Life, whose Maya-Kaqchikel engagement with the same ritual cosmology is exhibited at this conference.

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Thomas Kubarych

Narcissism, Mimetic Theory, and Evil

There have been several proposals for serious scientific research on evil. One proposal draws a distinction between *absence of morality* and *perversion of morality*. This proposal can profitably be combined with research on mimetic theory.

The first personality disorder recognized by psychiatry was the psychopath, an individual with no conscience. The psychopathic serial killer Ted Bundy murdered 30 women in the 1970s, without remorse, but his evil did not spread to an entire society. In contrast, a proposed 'evil' subtype of narcissistic personality disorder has a corrupt conscience formed by self-deception. Self-deception makes people better able to deceive others; thus, it can become contagious, as the examples of Nazism and Communism show. Then the murders are measured in the millions.

At the individual level, scapegoating is the first diagnostic criteria for this 'evil' subtype of NPD directly connecting with scapegoating in mimetic theory. Self-deception is not unrelated to what Girard calls misrecognition, and scapegoaters in mimetic theory are unaware that they are scapegoating, so the relationship between self-deception and misrecognition is warranted.

There are two other concepts in the narcissism literature which seem to overlap with mimetic theory: According to Narcissism of Small Differences theory, the more people are forced to be the same, the more they will fight over smaller and smaller differences; according to mimetic theory, people fight not because they are different, but because they are the same. Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry also seems related to imitation of models, which can become rivalries.

Timothy Long

The Origins of Aesthetics in Generative Violence: Towards a Girardian Framing of Cultural Objects

How do the aesthetics of cultural objects originate in generative violence? How might these objects mediate rivalrous appropriation and maintain a differentiated social order in their manufacture, form, and frame? This paper proposes a Girardian framing that shows how the signifying processes of the scapegoat mechanism are transferred to and embedded in cultural objects, and how, in turn, they function to contain and redirect violence. Reading René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* through the lens of Roman Jakobson's essay "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles" reveals that in the passage from sacrificial crisis to generative unanimity, violence is simultaneously

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projected along a metaphoric axis, transforming monstrous apparition into divine likeness; and displaced along a metonymic axis, transforming contaminating contiguity into sacred presence. Identification of these axes is critical for understanding how objects with roots in sacrificial ritual (art, craft, architecture, etc.) incorporate the diachronic processes of generative violence in synchronic form. Furthermore, it helps articulate the metaphoric and metonymic functions of what French philosopher Jacques Derrida, in his deconstruction of Kantian aesthetics, has termed the *parergon* (frame) and “the *sans* of the pure cut.” These two concepts, I will argue, describe aesthetic structures which replicate sacrificial substitution (via the frame), and reactivate violent expulsion in attenuated form (via the cut). Finally, this schema will be proposed as a starting point for exploring the manifold appearance and function of cultural objects both inside and outside the modern Western frame. The *parergon*, the product of what I identify as an excisional cut, will be shown to be but one among several non-exclusive and overlapping aesthetic frames, which include: the umbilical cut/*synergon* of textile-based cultural paradigms; the segmental cut/*diergon* of many East Asian cultures; the integumental cut/*epergon* of land-based Indigenous cultures; and the incisional cut/*energon* of architecture, the obverse of the *parergon* in the West.

Marina Ludwigs

Transparent Toilets: the Desacralization of the Last Frontier of Privacy

Recent decades have seen the rise of transparent bathrooms and toilets in the West and Japan. The first one was reportedly sighted in Park Hyatt Hotel in Tokyo 30 years ago. While designers, according to one hotel branch executive, were “gushing on about how avant-garde the bathroom was . . . so fresh and different,” regular travellers have expressed frustration and incomprehension on internet forums, saying that no one would want to share a room with a transparent bathroom even with a spouse. People speculate that additional reasons behind this striking design choice could also have to do with letting more light into the room, making the room appear bigger, as well as decreasing the cost and increasing the usable area because the glass is both cheaper and thinner than a regular wall. Still, the resistance to this design is strong because of a perceived transgression of privacy. Are we witnessing a cultural shift regarding our attitudes toward privacy? Is our desire for privacy on the decline? To investigate this question, I will stage a dialogue between Gregory Bateson’s and René Girard’s theories of the *sacred*. Bateson’s *sacred*, which has a topological dimension, is directly related to the concept of privacy understood as something delimited by a boundary. Boundaries, which institute breaks in communication and obscure transparency, are essential to the Batesonian view of organization and complexity. In a functional sense, the *sacred* serves as the guarantor of the inviolability and non-transparency of boundaries. In mimetic theory, I will argue, bathrooms and toilets, by being treated as private enclosures, designate sacred spaces that

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protect the vulnerable occupant, who, through an associated with the abject, can be singled out as a scapegoat. Does the trend of transparency in bathroom design indicate the desacralization of private spaces? I will discuss the potential implications of this hypothesis.

Jorge Federico Márquez Muñoz

Mexican Governement as a “Fourth Transformation”, ¿Myth or Ideology?

In this presentation I will analyse the political discourse surrounding Mexico’s so-called Fourth Transformation, that pretends to be “myth” structured around symbolic and sacrificial logic. It argues that the narrative presented by the government since 2018 frames the political project not as a normal change of administration but as a foundational historical rupture comparable to Independence, the Reform and the Revolution. This narrative functions mythologically by organising political reality through a moral opposition between good and evil, represented respectively by “the people”, and “corruption.”

Myths follow a recurring structure: mimetic chaos, identification of a victim, sacrifice of the victim, restoration of order and institutionalisation of the sacrifice. In modern democratic societies, however, the sacrificial mechanism does not disappear but becomes symbolic rather than physical. Political adversaries become discursive scapegoats who are blamed for social problems and defeated through elections rather than eliminated physically. Democracy is thus interpreted as a ritualised and institutionalised form of conflict that substitutes symbolic sacrifice for violence.

The presentation further argue that in contemporary pluralistic societies myth tends to transform into ideology, since unanimity around the guilt of a victim is no longer possible. Competing political groups produce rival narratives that blame different actors for social problems. Nevertheless, the scapegoat mechanism persists in ideological discourse through the construction of political enemies.

In the presentation I will expose an empirical study that consists of a content analysis of 150 phrases from presidential morning press conferences between 2019 and 2021. The analysis shows that presidential discourse constructs corruption as the central political symbol and identifies specific actors—such as neoliberals, private companies, intellectuals, former presidents and conservatives—as responsible for the country’s problems. The narrative devotes more attention to identifying culprits than to presenting concrete achievements of government policy.

The presentation will conclude that the symbol of corruption functions as the organising centre of the myth of the Fourth Transformation. It legitimises political power, mobilises moral support and structures political conflict through the identification of

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enemies, while simultaneously obscuring the lack of tangible results in solving concrete social and economic problems.

Susan McElcheran

Mimetic Theory and Interreligious Dialogue: Proposing a New Language of the Spirit

Girard's claim for the uniqueness of Christianity has often been an obstacle to the application of mimetic theory in interreligious dialogue. His early claim that the Judeo-Christian scriptures are distinct in recognizing and proclaiming the innocence of the scapegoat and undoing the mechanism of violence that pervades religion (Girard, 1987) has been recognized as a narrowing factor that limits the range of mimetic theory (Palaver and Schenk 2018). Even though mimetic theorists have sought to redress this limitation, these efforts have often been framed in Christological terms, resulting in calls for a less Western and Christ-focused language in applying mimetic theory to other religions (Kirwan, 2009). I propose that a Christological focus has obscured the role of the Holy Spirit in mimetic theory. In this paper I argue that an investigation of the role of the Spirit can reveal a non-exclusive language for relating the dynamics of mimetic theory to world religions, even to atheism. This possibility has been inherent in mimetic theory since Girard wrote in *The Scapegoat*, "it is not the explicit reference to Jesus that counts. Only our actual attitude when confronted with victims determines our relationship with the exigencies brought about by the revelation which can become effective without any mention of Christ himself" (Girard, 1986). A change in our attitude to victims is, according to Girard, accomplished by the Holy Spirit (Girard, 2001). In this paper I investigate the changes in attitude and behaviour that, in mimetic theory, indicate the presence of the Spirit even where there is no Christ-centered articulation of faith. These signs of the Spirit can contribute to the development of an alternate language with which to approach a dialogue of mimetic theory with world religions.

Andrew J McKenna

Middlemarch: George Eliot Mimetician

George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is a panoramic and profound study of relationships, social, political, and personal. It answers to René Girard's expectation that the insights of great fiction can be shown to be systemic rather than merely episodic or idiosyncratic. Eliot's narrative of two marriages exhibit the misdirections of mediated desire as to worldly and unworldly aspirations. Dorothea Brooke marries the reclusive scholar Casaubon in expectation of "a higher life," an idealized role in contributing importantly the pursuit of knowledge. She sees in him a "modern Augustine," and herself as "marrying Pascal,"

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while her mordant husband pursues endless research into “the key to all mythologies,” which he cannot bring to fruition before dying of a stroke. Rosamond Vincy traps the scientifically ambitious Dr. Lydgate into marriage “with a great sense of being a romantic heroine and playing the part prettily” in expectations of social prestige and bourgeois luxuries, because, among other reasons, he emerges on the scene from outside here known milieu. Antithetical in their ambitions and temperament, the one self-effacingly earnest and the other vainly flighty. Dorothea and Rosamond are structural variants of Bovarysme, though with different outcomes in their lives, which are studied in parallel tracks. Mimetic theory provides the key to these personal mythologies, as of so many others studied by other novelists. Telling epigraphs from Cervantes and Shakespeare, along with ample reflections on recurrent patterns and points of view, of prejudices and perceptions, guide the reader’s structural and epistemic understanding of human interaction.

Rev Dr Brett McLaughlin SJ

Image, Sensation, and God: Sacramental Vision and the Eucharist as Innocent Victim

Unlike his philosopher contemporaries, Maurice Merleau-Ponty never fully subscribed to Atheism. He would step aside from his childhood Roman Catholicism, but its cognitive-framework greatly influenced his thought and writing. Merleau-Ponty protests that theism occasionally removes God from the world, an “acosmism” or antiworldliness. For him, it menaces to hurl human beings into utter nothingness. “For to equate God with a timeless, otherworldly Being that is sovereign cause of itself and has no desire for nature or humanity—as Descartes and the rationalists did—is to reject the sanctity of the flesh.” Instead the image and sensory meeting with the world is a “natal pact” for each person. Richard Kearney describes, “Sacramental sensation is a reversible rapport between myself and things, wherein the sensible gives birth to itself through me.” For the French phenomenologist, there is a eucharistic power of the sensible.

Rene Girard’s liturgical sensibility centered on the victim, Jesus who offers himself and willingly forgives. Sean Salai articulates such ceremonies as “spiritualized ritual of sacred violence told from the perspective of Jesus who is the innocent victim.” This becomes the normative mode of remembrance. Ryan J. Marr explains “in this case the victim is the incarnate son of God, who has freely offered himself in loving obedience to the Father, and thereby made possible the realization of authentic community, founded as it is upon a process of reconciliation rather than coercion.”

This paper will bring Girard into dialogue with French ressourcement theologian Henri de Lubac on the sacramental vision of God, human beings, and the world. Given his immense knowledge of the Church Fathers and medieval theologians, it was de Lubac who set the groundwork for Church as Sacrament in the Second Vatican Council. This

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vision would be postulated by Rahner, Semmelroth, Congar, Schillebeeckx, Smulders, Groot, and Martelet. The Constitution on the Liturgy would promulgate this all-encompassing notion of God's engagement with the world and humanity through Church. In mimetic theology, Jesus' sacrifice is indeed a focal theological loci for God's engagement with the world. Girard's concept of the innocent revealing sacred violence and reconstituted community augments Sacramental Vision, a dominant vision of Ecclesiology since Vatican II.

Andrew McRae

Neither Bug Nor Feature: Death Within Design in Susanna Clarke's Piranesi

By assuming death is forever in opposition to life, we provide rope for the tug-of-wars between innumerable villains and heroes. At one end, scoundrels wreak death in pursuit of some good that's good for them; at the other end, righteous avengers affirm life as the supreme good for all. The former buck and bray, while the later reign them in with justice. Plots steered by this back-and-forth run smoothly and there is ample room for complexity, e.g., a hero avails themselves of a pragmatic death, or a reflective villain laments being a pawn in some else's cold calculation. Across infinite variations, heroes blur toward villains and vice-versa, and yet the life/death opposition stands resolute. Either death is an intolerable bug in life's design, or death is an unfortunate feature of being alive. The only interesting question is: when exactly is it one and not the other?

Totally uninteresting are those irredeemable stinkers who set out to do bad just because. They are a foil for a hero—nothing more. Who's interested in dastardly ne'er-do-wells who see death as both a bug and a feature? To be transgressive just for the sake of being transgressive is vapid and hardly susceptible to character development. Nevertheless, the question remains: who could possess genuine curiosity about moustache-twirlers? Meet Piranesi, protagonist (neither hero nor villain) of the eponymously titled 2020 book by Susanna Clarke. He accepts death as elemental. He sees it clearly, but he doesn't see it as a wrench in the gears, nor does he ever weigh its potential for functionality.

Following Piranesi, this essay asserts that life transcends death, such that there is no oppositional position for death to take against it. Anthropomorphizing life and death and adopting Girardian triangles, I diagram how it happens that one shall never affront the other.

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Julia Robinson Moore, Associate Professor of Religion, University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Walking the Way of Grace in Mimetic Theory: Neuroscience and Christian Spirituality in Racial Healing

Julia Robinson Moore explores the intersection of mimetic theory, neuroscience, and Christian spiritual formation as resources for understanding and healing ethnic and racial trauma. Drawing upon René Girard's analysis of mimetic desire, scapegoating, and collective violence, her paper examines how racial and ethnic trauma is transmitted across generations through patterns of fear, shame, exclusion, and identity formation. Recent developments in brain science illuminate the ways traumatic experiences become embodied in neural pathways, shaping emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and collective memory. While these insights help explain the persistence of racialized suffering, they also point toward pathways of healing.

Moore opens her discussion by showing a short documentary connected to the work she and her husband, Ricky D. Moore, are doing in the city of Charlotte. Titled, *Charlotte Seven*, under the direction of William Price, and screened at the 2025 Justice Film Festival in New York last year, the film documents how Black and White Charlotteans are partnering to memorialize unmarked burials grounds—slave cemeteries, while building relational attachment with one another in order to envision a more unified future together.

Moore follows this documentary with a paper that proposes the Immanuel Approach as a relational and spiritually informed model for trauma recovery. By cultivating an awareness of God's compassionate presence within painful memories and emotional experiences, individuals and communities can begin to process traumatic wounds without becoming overwhelmed by them. Integrating neuroscientific research on attachment, memory reconsolidation, and affect regulation with theological reflections on grace, presence, and reconciliation, the paper argues that healing occurs through the transformation of both individual and communal patterns of desire.

Ultimately, this interdisciplinary approach moves beyond diagnosing the mechanisms of violence toward practices that foster resilience, restoration, and compassionate engagement. By bringing Girardian anthropology into conversation with contemporary trauma research and contemplative Christian practice, the paper offers a constructive framework for addressing the enduring effects of ethnic and racial trauma and cultivating pathways toward personal and collective healing.

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Bianca Nogara Notarianni

Between the Cage and the Cross: Mimetic Crisis and the Human-Animal Threshold in Landolfi's Le due zittelle

In many of Tommaso Landolfi's short stories, rural communities exhibit a verticalized structure of vision and desire reminiscent of the *mondanité* of Proust's Combray. An elderly figure, immobilized by age, radiates the sense of the household and the familial, regulating the relationships of the living and shaping desires and hierarchies through the mediation of her gaze. In *Le due zittelle* (The Two Spinsters), following the death of this elder, Tombo—a small monkey adopted by the two sisters in memory of their deceased brother—emerges as the opaque object of a new mimetic dynamic, channeling the ambiguous, simultaneously incestuous and bestial desires of the sisters. By day confined to his cage, at night Tombo enters the church, mimicking the priest's gestures during mass—a gesture that enacts hominization through the quintessentially human acts of the sacred, and by extension the profane, in a mode that echoes Kafka's *A Report to an Academy*. The community reads this indeterminate mimetic behavior as sacrilegious contamination, triggering a collective crisis in which the question of what can be *seen*—and by whom—becomes the pivot of sacrificial violence. The ensuing trial is analyzed as a theatrical apparatus whose function is less juridical than perceptual: to finally render Tombo culpable and, above all, to make this culpability *visible* to the sisters, who are incredulous and reluctant to recognize the monstrous in their beloved object of desire. In the tragic finale, the monkey's execution in a parodic crucifixion simultaneously enacts and subverts the scapegoat mechanism, both manifesting its sacrificial function and revealing the limits of its logic. By analyzing the story in its spatial and performative dimensions—already staged by Emma Dante in *La Scimmia* (2015)—this paper argues that Landolfi stages the scapegoat mechanism at the very boundary where the human and the animal become indistinguishable—a threshold that mimetic violence simultaneously exploits and cannot afford to leave open, and that the parodic crucifixion of Tombo both consecrates and exposes.

Oscar Ortega Espinosa

Prolegomena to any Girardian consideration on ecumenical dialogue

According to a challenging reading of both Girardian and Catholic books, I want to draft a critique of both ecumenical dialogue and of religions worldwide. Rene Girard, by making the statement that Christianity had denounced the violence implicit in the societies and also, I can add it, in other religions and by emphasizing that wherever Christianity took roots itself deeply, there would not be a return of Paganism, he expressed his inner feeling Christianity is the most relevant religion, the true “Religion”.

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The ecumenical dialogue has misled this idea. In fact, if someone is congruent with Girardian's point of view, there is no possible ecumenical dialogue. Both traditionalists and modernists Catholics fail to understand accurately the main issue: As soon as the Christianity spreads, the violence of all religions will disappear, so, the interlocutors became irrelevant, futile. Finally, non-Christian religions will disappear. Otherwise, Christianity will avoid its mission: to save all humankind from death and sin.

In this paper I want to underline firstly, the first relationships of Christianity with other religions were controversial and violent, secondly, that the Western colonization spread good behaviors, that were not deeply engrained, thirdly, that the ecumenical dialogue created the false feeling that religious grievances had been disregarded and fourthly and lastly, that there is not a permanent basis for the ecumenical dialogue. As soon Western countries leave Christianity, other religions will start to reclaim their ground and, they will try to throw away all the limits Christianity imposed on them.

Kemi Owo-Gbohunmi

What the Algorithm Cannot Hold: Mimetic Desire, the Conditioned Gaze, and the Sacrifice of African Artistic Meaning

The algorithm did not create the problem. It inherited it. The colonial gaze, the one that has always received African cultural production as raw material rather than argument, as exotic affect rather than living epistemology, has been running for centuries. What the digital economy did was democratize it, accelerate it, and embed it so deeply into the subconscious architecture of daily visual experience that it now operates without anyone having to choose it. The collector standing before a West African work in a gallery has already been trained, by ten thousand scrolls, ten thousand likes, ten thousand algorithmic decisions about what deserves to be seen, to receive only what resolves quickly into legible desire. This is not a media problem. It is an anthropological crisis, and it is running at a scale and through a medium that has no historical precedent.

What gets lost in this is not just nuance. Robert Farris Thompson's concept of *ashe*, the force that inheres in African art objects when they are made rightly and in right relation, names precisely what the conditioned gaze deactivates. African art does not represent. It transmits. It carries living force across community, across time, across the distance between the world of the living and what precedes and exceeds it. The scroll-trained collector does not misread this. They foreclose it. The surface arrives; the transmission does not travel. And this is true whether the work is explicitly sacred or not, because the epistemological density that Thompson identifies is not confined to ritual objects. It is structural to the tradition. Eziaku Nwokocho makes

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this plain: in African and diasporic aesthetic practice, form carries argument and material carries history. To receive such work through a gaze organized around what is immediately likeable is not to receive less of it. It is to receive something else entirely, and to call that something else the work.

This is where diagnosis becomes imperative. Okot p'Bitek was unambiguous: African artists and intellectuals who produce without consciousness of the dominant cultural logic do not simply fail to resist it. They disappear into it. The archive we are building right now, through every exhibition, every acquisition, every curatorial decision, is the historical record of this moment in African art. We are producing for the time itself. There is no neutral position available. Girard's framework makes this structurally clear: there is no unmediated encounter, no view from nowhere, only the question of which mediating structure you inhabit. The conditioned gaze is one answer to that question. It is not the only one. The artist, the curator, and the gallery must now operate as an intentional counter-positioning, not because purity is possible, but because the alternative is complicity in a silencing that is accelerating faster than any previous generation has had to contend with. This paper names that counter-positioning curatorial hospitality: the conscious creation of conditions under which the transmission can actually travel, grounded in Glissant's insistence on the right to opacity, p'Bitek's demand for cultural self-determination, and a praxis this author calls building from humus, because what we are trying to grow requires the right ground, and the ground has to be made.

Matthew Packer

Revisiting Composition Pedagogy and Mimesis in the Age of Generative AI

One of the less examined benefits of generative artificial intelligence is what this technology reveals about the key role of mimesis in education, and in particular the roles of imitation and desire in the writing classroom. The growing contest between GenAI and human writers, for a start, itself appears to be a kind of mimetic rivalry. Just as GenAI trains on large – human – language models to achieve its prodigious feats of composition, so too are human writers in turn studying AI's every move, and em dash, in an attempt to out-fox the newcomer. But it is also a contest revealing, in the field of composition studies, just how much writing education and pedagogy more generally depend on imitation at least as much as innovation. René Girard exposed this problem in his 1990 essay "Innovation and Repetition," and it now seems even more vital that we overcome the myths about innovation, especially in regard to the practice of writing. Only then might we grapple with the opportunities and risks of the varieties of modeling required for teaching and learning to write – in part by identifying the desires, rivalries, and sacrificial dynamics at work in the writing classroom. This presentation revisits the

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inquiry about mimetic theory and composition pedagogy earlier led by scholars Richard Boyd and Richard Brooke, and more recently by Kathleen Vandenberg in her 2011 *Contagion* essay on imitation pedagogies from a Girardian perspective. It also touches on the extent to which writing pedagogies can be studied via empirical methods – an approach long considered notoriously difficult by mimetic theoreticians.

Carlos Paes

Measuring the Scapegoat Mechanism in Temporal Online Networks via Concentration and Relinking Signatures

René Girard's scapegoat mechanism describes how mimetic escalation can collapse into a convergent accusation that concentrates violence on a single victim, restoring a fragile and temporary peace. In contemporary digital publics, this dynamic is inseparable from visibility: attention abruptly focuses on a target, interaction networks reorganize around accusations, and, after the "rite," ties and alliances are rewired. This paper operationalizes these Girardian dynamics in temporal online networks through a compact set of measurable signatures.

Using four Brazilian cancellation episodes on X/Twitter (2017–2025), we construct directed temporal interaction graphs from retweets, replies, quotes, and mentions, and distinguish accuser vs. skeptic/defender engagement patterns. We then extract temporal "bridge signatures" capturing (i) concentration of attention (e.g., engagement inequality and centralization), (ii) coalition reorganization and cross-community flow (e.g., assortativity/modularity shifts), and (iii) isolation residues around the victim (e.g., distance-to-victim trajectories). To connect measurement to theory, we also implement a parsimonious small-world agent-based model of mimetic escalation in which collective tension grows endogenously, leaders emerge, a victim is selected, and a ritual event both reduces tension and rewires ties. Aligning empirical time series at the event peak allows a direct comparison between observed and simulated regime shifts.

The proposed framework makes scapegoating dynamics empirically testable, supports comparative case analysis, and suggests monitoring cues for early detection of online harassment cascades.

Peter Y. Paik

Passion, Temptation, and Renunciation: Reconsidering Spiritual Aristocracy in Girard

This paper takes up the question of whether a passionate nature is necessary for the overcoming of metaphysical desire. In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard opposes the passionate individual to the *vaniteux*, who is stricken by envy, jealousy, and self-hatred. The man whose desires are spontaneous and who wishes only to be himself appears

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largely immune to mimetic desire, since he lacks any real inclination to copy the desires and ambitions of others. Girard however does not champion this figure of the “natural aristocrat” as the solution to metaphysical desire, instead advocating that one take Christ as one’s mediator. But the idea that the solution to metaphysical desire lies in Christian ethics has revealed a dismaying lack of symbolic efficacy. The idea of following Christ is often subsumed by the injunction, “do not scapegoat,” which all too often rests at the level of a *gnosis* in which the enunciation of a moral commandment is offered as proof of one’s moral goodness and decency. In this paper, I will look more closely at the role of passion in Girard’s work, and how reliant Girard is on this category in formulating a spiritual remedy for the contagion of mimetic desire. To renounce one’s desires, mimetic or not, requires force and strength, which means that what makes the act of renunciation authentic is the fact that one is tempted by mighty forces. Only a great warrior – or a great lover – is truly capable of rising to such a decision. The importance of passion in Girard’s work thus brings him into proximity of his foremost adversary, and perhaps one might be so indiscreet as to add, rival, Nietzsche. I will close with a reflection as to whether only a spiritual aristocracy is capable of defeating the metaphysical desire that rules the modern world.

Rebecca Pawloski, S.Th.D.

“Who’s there?” The Eschatological Question of Hamlet. Divergent Readings in Girard, Stoppard, and Zhao

The opening line of Hamlet is a clue to the question at its heart its enduring popularity as an examination of personal identity. Hamlet also says to Guildenstern: “you would play upon me”, and he intends not only the tragedians of the play who mimic his misfortunes. He realizes he is at the mercy of dynamics far more powerful than his own strength to resist. His predicament questions the audience: What is truly personal for a person being “played”? What is the personal essence which survives exploitation, survives reduction to an expendable instrument, survives the condition of being played upon?

In *A Theater of Envy*, Girard reads Hamlet as a man grappling with the awareness of mimetic dynamics. He sees the vengeful mechanism as obvious enough to be paralyzed by it, yet “procrastinates” to perform the revenge the vision demands. In the end, is his stance passive or an echo of the *fiat*?: “Since no man of aught he leaves knows what is't to leave betimes, let be.” The medieval Franciscan John Duns Scotus offers a name for that which lies beyond the strain of mimetic forces and constitutes the person. For Scotus, each person possesses a *haecceitas*, a “thisness” irreducible to species or genus.

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Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* makes an entrance of Hamlet's exit scenes, making two minor characters of Hamlet the protagonists of an absurdist comedy exploring radical interchangeability. Murders multiply yet no one grieves. There is nothing enduring within relationship. The expert banter increases yet the sense of the "thisness" of the players does not --they end by vanishing.

In "Hamnet" Chloe Zhao's Agnes confronts the viewer with a radically facet of the question of personal identity. Is the real Hamlet, "Hamnet," made present by way of art or consumed by it?

Dominic Pigneri, Ph.D.

The Altar at Wrigley Field: The Scapegoating of Steve Bartman

On Chicago's North Side, for more than a century, has stood one of the city's most prominent cultural institutions, Wrigley Field, the home of the Chicago Cubs, a professional baseball team in Major League Baseball. In 2003, this venue became the scene for one of the greatest acts of scapegoating in American sports history. During the sixth game of the league championship series, a Cubs fan, named Steve Bartman, who was sitting next to the left field wall, prevented a Cubs player from making an "out." Because of this, the eventual Cubs' loss was blamed on Bartman by the entirety of the team's fandom. What is so fascinating about this event is how much it has in common with Girard's schematic of anthropological and social behaviors. Using Girard's theory as a hermeneutic, this paper analyzes this historic event in the history of Chicago's culture. It examines: the mimesis of baseball fandom, the "sacrificial crisis" of the longest championship drought (108 years) in Major League Baseball's history, this crisis's corresponding mythology, the widespread scapegoating of one peripheral individual (Bartman), the ritualistic sacrifice of the "offending" baseball, how the ball was then eaten by the community, and the elevation of Bartman from villain to honorific status, once the team finally did achieve the championship in 2016. What this paper finds is an uncanny series of parallels between this historic event and Girard's theory of the basis of social structure. This case study gives compelling evidence which works to offer more credibility to his mimetic theory, as well as indications of how Girard's theoretical process plays out today.

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Brian P. Quaranta, MD, MA

Shrieve More, More, More, Shrieve More!"; Sir Thomas More, *the scapegoat, and the hand of Shakespeare*.

In his *Theory of Envy*, as well as in other essays, Rene Girard claimed that Shakespeare's writings were consistent with the principles of his mimetic theory, as explicated in his earlier works. He emphasized the presence of mimetic desire leading to rivalry in such plays as *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the progression to scapegoating and sacrifice in *Julius Caesar* and *Troilus & Cressida (T&C)*. In a 2023 paper in *Contagion*, I compared two of Shakespeare's plays, *The Comedy of Errors (COE)* and *T&C*, showing how the playwright contrasted the violent group murder of Hector in *T&C* with the miraculous resolution of mimetic contagion in *COE* through the intervention of a Christian abbess. The intent, I argued, was to show how the Christian world, post-exposure of the scapegoating mechanism, offered an alternative to violent scapegoating that was unavailable to the Homeric/pagan world.

In this paper, I will demonstrate that Shakespeare brings a similar theme to a much lesser-known work: the jointly written early modern play *Sir Thomas More*. This play was written primarily by Anthony Munday but edited extensively by a number of other authors including Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood, and most importantly, William Shakespeare. This fascinating play was subject to official government censorship, and, as far as we know, never performed in the era of its writing; but it holds great interest due its subject, the philosopher/statesman Thomas More, as well as its status as the only known example of Shakespeare's dramatic work written in his own hand. I will briefly review the authorship of the play, including the evidence for Shakespeare's participation, including analyses of word choice, theme, and comparison of the handwriting to known signatures. I will then focus on the point of most interest to Girardians; the development of mimetic theory themes in Shakespeare's hand.

Shakespeare's primary contribution to the play includes a scene in which the citizens of London make accusations of crimes against the local immigrant population, claim that they have "infected" them, and gather in a mob to bring about their violent expulsion from the city. More, the Sheriff (here "Shrieve," in a double-entendre) of the city, addresses the crowd and defuses their rage, by reprimanding them for their failure in their duty to follow the King, God's appointed one (the "crisis of degree"), and pointing out that their violence against these immigrants will only lead to reciprocal violence. He urges mercy and tolerance of the immigrant population, and in the end, his words, judged "as true as the gospel" by the crowd, "preserve the city from a most dangerous fierce commotion" that "much murder would have fed."

If Girard is correct about Shakespeare's prefiguring of mimetic theory, one would expect his work to demonstrate these themes to a greater extent than that seen in the his

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contemporaries. *Sir Thomas More* provides a unique opportunity to see Shakespeare's hand at work in the midst of a crowd of his fellow playwrights, and the results serve as confirmatory evidence, both of the hypothesis that Shakespeare understood mimesis, and in turn, that the play's "hand D" does indeed belong to William Shakespeare.

Reuben Mark Rios

La Guernika and the Gunaika: A Triptych of Scapegoating

This presentation focuses on the presenter's original painting titled "La Guernika and the Gunaika". A Girardian understanding, focusing on the scapegoat mechanism and hominization, will be applied to the canvas's *mise en scène* drawn from the Johannine narrative of the woman caught in adultery overlaid with the three temptations of Christ. I will attempt to address the following questions:

1. How are seeing and knowing related in human cultural experience?
2. The sacred transcends the visible but remains tethered to it. How does that connection influence what humans perceive as the sacred?

In *Gernika* and *Gunaika*, both Guernica, the city and the *gunaika* (Greek for woman) are the protagonist victims of the scapegoat mechanism. Only in the Gospel of John is the story of the adulteress present where the religious leaders cite a mandate that commands stoning persons accused of marital infidelity. They prompt Jesus to do likewise. According to René Girard, ritualized killing of the innocent victim in the name of the deity/religion is sacred violence and evidentiary unveiling of the scapegoat mechanism. However, the writer of the Gospel of John undoes the scapegoat mechanism by exposing that the religious leaders are scapegoating the woman as a means to silence and murder Jesus. The Johannine *gurnaika* is, in fact, the innocent scapegoat, as was the city of Guernica, the target of Nazi bomber planes. Referring to Picasso's painting, art theorist Rudolf Arnheim writes: "The women and children make *Guernica* the image of innocent, defenseless humanity victimized. Also, women and children have often been presented by Picasso as the very perfection of mankind. An assault on women and children is, in Picasso's view, directed at the core of mankind." Presentation participants will see and know the anthropological underpinnings used to create this imaginative and pedagogical triptych.

Suzanne Ross

Third Things First: A Wicked Study Guide to Mimetic Insights for Small Groups

A "third thing" is a term from conflict resolution. It refers to a work of art like a movie or play which rivals view together that indirectly relates to the conflict situation. Because

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the world depicted in the third thing is at a distance from the specific conflict, when the third thing comes first a safe space is created for dialogue across differences.

However, Dr. David Anderson Hooker has concluded that “dialogue is almost always necessary but never sufficient to achieve transformation.” Beyond a change of heart, systemic structures, especially those underpinned by sacrificial or scapegoating logic, will need to be transformed if the longing for a more peaceful future can be realized. Dr. Hooker developed a process to move communities beyond dialogue to action plans for change. Called Transformation Community Conferencing, it begins with a practice session that puts a third thing first.

In this session, I will explore the value of *Wicked* as a third thing that dramatizes the system of sacrifice, creates space for dialogue, and offers a framework for transformation. Participants will be introduced to the study guide based on Dr. Hooker’s process created for the second edition of my introduction to mimetic theory *The Wicked Truth: When Good People Do Bad Things* (2007).

Catherine Sherman

The HEXAGON PROJECT

The HEXAGON PROJECT is more than a patchwork quilt in progress. It is a slow growing artifact of empathy linking visual culture to mimetic theory through embodied experience. The work has already been shared with people of all ages at museums, community events and academic settings and will continue traveling through 2039.

I propose an installation and workshop functioning as a "third space" for practitioners to explore how mimetic rivalry applies to individuals engaged in rituals of communal making.

What Makes This Project Unique?

This longitudinal study with distributive praxis, generative mimicry and social scaffolding, began in 2019 as a personal challenge:

- Combine process, purpose and pieces to share skills, materials and inspiration
- Remove the burden of a prescribed outcome and pressure of a looming deadline
- Build something simple but extraordinary by hand
- Connect people from many places, backgrounds and perspectives

While traditional quilting often seeks mathematical perfection, this project does not require perfect shapes or stitches. It welcomes beginners. Supplies are shared generously. People are welcome to keep what they make or contribute it to the project. The quilt

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emerges as a resurrected corpus made by unforeseen intersections of people, memory and material.

Workshop Goals, Scope or Questions: Positive Mimesis and the Social Imagination

- Can the scapegoat mechanism be bypassed through collective attachment to shared experiences grounded in empathy?
- What role does art play in transmitting truth from past experience to viewers/partakers now and in the future?
- In a fractured world, what role do museums, parks, libraries and other public facing institutions play in perpetuating social alienation or nurturing empathy through providing shared spaces for mutual experiences of being human?
- How do these spaces differ from or complement religious communities?

[Hexagon Project Portfolio](#) Link to images and additional information.

Luis Sokol Mischne

Sacrificial Logic in Contemporary Antizionism

This essay aims to identify the sacrificial logic embedded in contemporary antizionism. Many contemporary antizionist discourses posit a common enemy—Zionism, often inseparable in practice from Jewish identity—that must be eliminated in order to restore what is imagined as a prior and legitimate order. This imagined order is frequently presented as historical justice, though it often carries the structure of a mythical return: a vision of restored balance achieved through the expulsion or erasure of a designated culprit. The essay examines several cases in which the conceptual separation between Zionist and Jewish identities proves unstable, revealing how the designation of a collective adversary risks reproducing the classic dynamics of scapegoating.

Rather than reproducing the same accusatory logic by simply identifying a new culprit, the analysis seeks to explore possibilities for nonviolent conflict resolution. Three thinkers will guide this exploration. First, René Girard's theory of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism provides the conceptual framework for identifying sacrificial structures within political discourse. Second, Walter Benjamin's notion of "pure means," developed in *Critique of Violence*, introduces the possibility of action that is not subordinated to instrumental ends, thereby opening a path beyond what he calls mythical violence. This perspective resonates with Girard's view of violence as both foundational and cyclical, yet not ontological—meaning that it is historically produced and therefore potentially interruptible. Finally, Vladimir Jankélévitch's concept of pure forgiveness—an act that expects nothing from

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the pardoned—extends Benjamin’s idea by imagining a gesture that breaks the reciprocal logic of violence.

The essay concludes by proposing several practical steps for moving away from the sacrificial logic surrounding the Israeli–Arab conflict: first, recognizing the mechanism itself; second, reconsidering the closed grammatical frameworks often used to describe the conflict (oppressor vs. oppressed, colonizer vs. colonized); and third, not prescribing forgiveness while violence remains ongoing, but maintaining the possibility of forgiveness—however faint—as a horizon that interrupts cycles of retaliation.

Lana Starkey

Seeing the Victim: Visual Convergence and the Sacred in Girard

Girard’s account of the sacred centres on the convergence of violence upon a single victim, producing unanimity and transforming conflict into order. While his analyses of ritual objects suggest that images can reproduce this process rather than merely represent it, his treatment of artworks remains largely narrative. He explains how the victim is produced, but says less about how it becomes perceptually available as a focal point of convergence.

This paper asks how a victim comes into view. If convergence depends on the elimination of difference, it also depends on how vision is organised. Artworks do not simply depict victims; they direct and organise perception, structuring how attention gathers, strains, and disperses around a body. Convergence is therefore not only social but perceptual: the emergence of the victim as a focal point of unanimity depends on the visual field in which it appears, and on the conditions under which a figure comes to occupy that position.

Tracing these dynamics across a series of works that structure attention around the body in different ways, this paper argues that Jacques-Louis David’s *The Death of Marat* gathers attention and invites agreement; Andrea Mantegna’s *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* draws the viewer in but makes the body difficult to grasp as a stable whole; and Hans Holbein’s *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* resists being taken up into a unified response. Auguste Rodin’s *The Burghers of Calais*, a sculptural group of six figures, multiplies points of focus and prevents attention from settling on a single figure, a dynamic that is reconfigured when we turn to *Jean d’Aire*, one of the figures, exhibited at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition and now at the *Art Institute of Chicago*.

Taken together, these works show that visual organisation can enable, destabilise, or prevent the convergence on which the sacred depends. By shifting attention from

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narrative meaning to visual organisation, this paper argues that the sacred is bound not only to collective violence, but to the structuring of sight.

Marco Giovanni Stucchi

The Wager in Shakespeare's Cymbeline

Cymbeline is widely regarded as one of Shakespeare's most complex and least successful plays. In *A Theater of Envy*, René Girard briefly addresses this work, largely concurring with such a critical consensus. This paper intends to demonstrate how this judgment can be re-evaluated particularly through a rigorous comparison with two primary sources: Boccaccio's *Decameron* (II, 9), a well-documented and established source, and the *Book of Job*, with which the play shares textual affinities that remain largely unexplored. By meticulously analysing the mimetic dynamics between the characters, this study seeks to reveal a significant degree of internal coherence within the play.

Furthermore, by drawing a parallel with the *Book of Job* – specifically the opening scene involving the wager between God and Satan – this research aims to challenge the Girardian interpretation set forth in *Job: The Victim of His People*.

Dr Matthew Tan

Small Ambivalence: Visuals, Spaces & Mediation

This paper considers the role of small spaces and their relationship to internal and external mediation, as visualised in movies (exemplified by Robert Zemeckis' *Here* and Wim Wenders' *Perfect Days*) and television series (exemplified by *Midnight Diner*). These artifacts of visual culture propose an inverse relationship between the size of the space on the one hand, and the chances of cultivating cultures of external mediation on the other. In contrast to the large public places as potential flashpoints of internal mediation (and from that, mimetic escalation), small spaces are presented as potential loci for the cultivation of external mediation. The paper explores the extent of the veracity of these artifacts' proposals by interfacing Girard's thought on internal and external mediation with Michel de Certeau's conception of space and place. On the one hand, the paper suggests that Girard and de Certeau can mutually reinforce each other on this very couplet of space and mediation. On the other hand, the paper is also wary of the extent the artifacts of visual culture that propose the virtues of small contexts might themselves be caught up in mimetic rivalry with the large urban settings that spawned such artifacts,

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and in so doing, might themselves be victim of the very internal mediation they propose to correct.

Todd M. Thompson

Area 51 and the Sacred Allure of Forbidden Space

In their article “Carving Spaces,” (2022) Fabio Bacchini, et. al, have shown how mimetic rivalry shapes the production and objectification of space. While they consider public, non-rivalrous spaces at great length, their account also invites discussion of the kinds of rivalry that shape exclusive and not just non-exclusive spaces. This paper builds on their account by considering Area 51 in the United States as an exemplary case of the most exclusive kind of space: secret/forbidden space. This paper will consider instances of contemporary fascination with this famous classified military facility in the light of René Girard's theory ranging from Timothy McVeigh, who claimed to have paid a visit to the outskirts of the facility as a prelude to his bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, to the viral “Storm Area 51” movement of 2019, which morphed into a musical festival-like gathering that did not result in bloodshed. In Girardian terms, forbidden space works like the masochist's ideal object of desire, which resists all attempts at possession and thereby becomes all the more desirable. The paper will explore how secrecy and the restriction of access invest space with a powerful sacred allure that provokes desire and consider why that desire has led to violence in some cases, but not others.

Felipe Vianna

Oedipus Unrepented: A Micro-Reading of a Tragedy turned Comedy

This presentation proposes a 30-minutes reading of selected excerpts from the play *Oedipus Unrepented*, an absurdist musical satire that re-imagines Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a comedy, starting precisely where the old tragedy ends.

Just when Oedipus discovers his crimes, when he is expected to blind himself and submit to exile, *this* version introduces a rupture: *the king refuses to repent*. Declaring himself innocent — after all, he acted in ignorance and actively attempted to avoid the crimes — Oedipus seeks to preserve both the throne of Thebes and his marriage to Jocasta. The play functions as a dramatic thought experiment: what becomes of tragedy when the scapegoat does *not* consent to sacrifice?

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After reading a few scenes (including musical performances), the author will summarize the rest of the action and share about his creative process. This micro-reading therefore places theatrical performance in dialogue with mimetic theory, suggesting that drama (or more precisely, modern comedy and humor) can serve not merely as an object of analysis but as a site of theoretical discovery.

Federico Vit

Moral Mediators and the Mimetic Loop of Violence: Reading Lorenzo Magnani with René Girard

This paper investigates the intertwining of morality and violence by placing Lorenzo Magnani's theory of **moral and violent mediators** (*Understanding Violence*, Springer, 2011) in dialogue with René Girard's mimetic theory. Girard's framework is essential as it uncovers the core anthropological mechanism of human violence: **mimetic desire** leads to rivalry and undifferentiation, resolved by societies through the **scapegoat mechanism** — the collective expulsion of a victim that restores peace and grounds culture, religion, and morality. While powerful, Girard's model is largely anthropological. Magnani complements it with a naturalistic, cognitive, and ecological approach.

Humans act as “ecological engineers” who, facing incomplete information, build **cognitive and moral niches** as *satisficing* solutions. These niches foster intra-group cooperation yet predispose the group to external aggression or the expulsion of “social parasites” via coalition enforcement. Drawing on distributed cognition and the extended mind, morality emerges through external **moral mediators** (artefacts, symbols, institutions, built environments). These mediators gain intrinsic value, enabling the paradox of “respecting persons as things”: dignity is granted to humans by first investing value in material and symbolic objects. This process can mitigate structural violence but risks **hypermoralization** and new mimetic conflicts.

The paper distinguishes “hot” (emotional) from “cold” (technical, bureaucratic) violence, showing how civilization refines rather than eliminates aggression. Even nonviolence and practices like **bullshitting** may become tools of domination. Ethnographic examples, such as the Wachandi ritual, demonstrate how objects anchor collective moral memory.

Reading Magnani with Girard reveals how mimetic desire circulates through artefacts and architectural spaces. In our mediated technological society, a Stoic-inspired reduction of hypermorality and passions offers a necessary strategy to curb mimetic rivalries and scapegoating.

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Nikolaus Wandinger

Paul's Conversion as a Turn from the Sacred to the Holy Illustrated in the Visual Arts and Music

René Girard has written extensively about the betrayal and conversion of Peter, but interestingly very little on the Paul's conversion. That is the more astonishing as Paul's conversion is not just from being a Jew to being a Jewish Christian, but also from defending his convictions by persecutory violence to spreading them non-violently, in the end from having been a victimizer to agreeing to rather be a victim. Thus, Paul understood the implications of his change of religious adherence much better than later Roman emperors who had become Christian: they changed their religion but not the violent ways of spreading it. St. Paul realized that accepting Christ as your Lord clearly implies that the spread of this faith must correspond to the ways of this Lord. Keeping that in mind is especially important nowadays, as some recommend a return to a violent Christianity.

Following the analyses of Mimetic Theory, Paul's conversion can be seen as a conversion from the mimetically induced Sacred to the Holy, which comes from a different kind of mimesis: a receptive mimesis, which was theologically expressed as a theology of grace.

I will elaborate on this distinction. As the theme of this year's conference centers around the arts, with an emphasis on the visual arts, I will try to do this with the help of artworks from the Chicago Institute of Arts, the conversion of Paul being a common theme for paintings and drawings. I will, however venture beyond Chicago in my selection of paintings and beyond the visual arts, as I will come to a musical conclusion: Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy's rendering of Paul's conversion is his oratorio on the saint.

Susan M. Wright, MA

The "mimetic rape" of Lucretia: A cornerstone of Western cities

In *Ab urbe condita*, the Roman historian, Livy, elevated exemplary figures, who played key roles at critical moments in Rome's history. Of these, Lucretia, despite being a woman, has long been considered one of the most significant. A Roman matron, known for her beauty and chastity, her rape by king's son, Sextus Tarquinius, and her subsequent suicide led to the overthrow of the monarchy and the foundation of the Roman Republic.

In an essay on Shakespeare's adaptation of Livy's Lucretia, René Girard (1991) used the phrase "*mimetic rape*," to describe the heavy-handed way Shakespeare exposed the overwhelming nature of imitative desire (p. 21). Contrasting this to Livy's quasi-mythical

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narrative, Girard claimed the expulsion of Tarquin, the king, was the victimage that founded the Republic (p. 26). No mention is made of Lucretia's suicide.

In 1990, Patricia Klindienst, a feminist scholar familiar with Girard's thought, criticized Livy's tendency to pair founding murders with founding rapes, insisting that these victimizations relied on a "sacralized chastity... which is one of the 'things hidden since the foundation of the world' (p. 55). Other feminists have echoed Klindienst, including Roman historian Mary Beard and political theorist Melissa Matthes, who investigated Lucretia's role in the reinvention of republican politics by both Machiavelli and Rousseau.

Focused on male rivalry, Girard has neglected Lucretia's significance in favor of Tarquin. Compared to Girard's treatment of Julius Caesar's apotheosis, Tarquin is no match. Lucretia's elevation comes much closer. Evidence abounds in the iconography of West, especially during the Renaissance resurgence of republican values, when artists produced hundreds of images of Lucretia. Today, fine art museums in most major Western cities house at least one Lucretia from that period. The Chicago Art Institute has nine portraits of Lucretia in its collection, including Tintoretto's famous portrait, *Tarquin and Lucretia* (1578–80). They are hidden cornerstones, displayed in plain sight.

Zexi Zhang

Stitching Narratives: Textile and Mimetic Desires

In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard advances a productive model wherein ritual objects—such as masks—do not merely depict meaning but produce it through their material medium and cultural operation. This understanding aligns with art-historical emphases on the eventful encounter between work, material, context, and viewer. Yet when Girard turns to sculpture and painting, he often reduces art to narrative illustration, treating visual works as literary analogs that transparently represent themes of mimetic rivalry, sacrifice, and victimhood. Textile arts, particularly within African American quilting traditions, challenge this reduction. As scholars like Gladys-Marie Fry, bell hooks, and Faith Ringgold demonstrate, quilts are not illustrations of antecedent ideas but operative objects—mediums that perform cultural memory, physical embodiment, resistance, and community negotiation. Based on the exhibition *Routed West* in BAMPFA, drawing on Girard's own insight that ritual objects mediate desire and diffuse rivalry, and specific collaborative works such as Lily Mae Chiles' and Elizabeth Munn's, I argue that quilting embodies mimetic desire materially: patterns, stitches, and fabrics are copied and transformed across generations, generating both creative continuity and concealed competition. At the same time, the collaborative quilting bee functions as a Girardian mechanism for scapegoating or reconciliation, where shared making can resolve or

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reproduce mimetic crises. By foregrounding textile art as an eventful medium—where meaning unfolds in tactile, visual, and historical encounter—this paper reclaims Girard’s underdeveloped notion of art’s material efficacy. It proposes that African American quilting, far from illustrating mimesis, enacts it, offering a paradigm where ritual object and visual art converge, and where the victim’s perspective is stitched into the very fabric of cultural survival.