of sacrifice based on the _Hingabe_, the self-offering of Christ. He was also indebted to him for helping him to rethink the quandary of the overwhelming determinism of the sacrificial mechanism. Eventually both men “saw their concerns basically affirmed” (362). Whether GIRARD completely internalized and preserved the insights of his Innsbruck friend, who died in 2004, is a question that this book could not pursue.

MOOSBRUGGER’s work provides both extensive, often new information and rich insights. It is an outstanding volume of research and writing that should be a key work of reference for scholars concerned with the mimetic theory, especially in its theological ramifications, for a long time to come. It would be highly desirable to make it available in English translation.

_James G. Williams_


In _Phantom of the Ego_, Nidesh LAWTOO breathes new life into the study of mimesis and the modern subject with a rereading of several 19th and 20th century authors not necessarily known as mimetic theorists. If mimesis is that unconscious communication that spreads contagiously from one being to another, where do we now stand in our theorizing and discourse about the human “boundaries of individuation” in a post-Nietzschean, Girardian world? If, as NIETZSCHE suggested, there is a phantom “in our head” determining who we are, where does this phantom originate and what is its role in self-other communication? To what life-negating or life-generating properties does it contribute? LAWTOO uses these guiding questions and a reassessment of the pre-Freudian unconscious to uncover a structural framework for the modern identity.

Structural analyses of the modernist subject have not generally been a predominant focus for students of GIRARD’s mimetic theory. Since his work with OUGHOURLIAN and LEFORT on “interindividuality”—an intersubjectivity informed by mimesis, GIRARD himself, has generally avoided discussions of identity so as not to slip into a [Freudian] psychology of the subject. OUGHOURLIAN’s theorizing since then, informed by a historical rendering of “otherness,” has been aimed primarily at the acceptance of the mimetic primacy of the ego as the lynchpin of a mimetic psychotherapy. Eugene WEBB’s work toward a deeply relational “self-between” drew on several French thinkers including GIRARD and Jean-Pierre DUPUY, to give further constitution to this malleable, other-dependent self. Andrew O’SHEA has offered a serious critique of the modern subject by putting GIRARD in conversation with Charles TAYLOR. Still others operating out of the mimetic theory framework have wrestled with various aspects of the self-other, interior-exterior, origin-copy dichotomies of mimetic theory, but few have drilled down into these messy entanglements at the ontological level.

LAWTOO does so using the work of NIETZSCHE, CONRAD, LAWRENCE, and especially, BATAILLE, authors with extensive personal and familial histories of what he calls “mimetic sickness,” and brings unique sensitivity to an understanding of the individual in the midst of a “socius.” He further embarks on crowd psychology, contagion research, and hypnotic suggestion by pre-Freudian psychologists, like Pierre JANET, whose theoretical inclinations LAWTOO finds justified by current research in infant psychology.

As a scholar of comparative literature, LAWTOO bravely ventures into infant research to support philosophical and literary theorists who show that we come into the world with a psycho-physiological property awaiting mimetic stimulation from the other. Access to an-other’s psychic life, available due to “involuntary communicative reflexes … not under volitional control of consciousness,” offers our initial connection to the larger world of understanding. With this suggestion that consciousness or ego follows mimetic communication, LAWTOO sees reason to question whether we are dealing with a “phantom of the ego” or more accurately, an “ego of the phantom.”

Much emphasis in this book is placed on subject formation or genesis of the self because LAWTOO, following BATAILLE, sees it as linked to our tendency toward mimetic contagion throughout life. The property or reflex present
at birth that opens us up to the affect of the social is the same propensity that makes the ego subject to ongoing mimetic communication. BATAILLE is used to give specificity to that for which we are open, namely “laughter,” which has the ability to “tickle the ego into being (‘I feel—I am’).” More importantly, though, is the communication of joy that is expressed in the exchange of laughter. The reference to joy is perhaps not unlike the concept of “delight” that infant psychologists often point to as key to parent-infant communication. LAWTOO shows how BATAILLE was convinced that this joy that brings the ego into being has such intensity that it sets the course for a lifetime of mimetic vulnerability.

LAWTOO’s ego of the phantom is “con-divided (both united and divided) with a multiplicity of others that are both interior and exterior to ipse.” He revives and refreshes our understanding of NIETZSCHE’s “soul hypothesis” to show that the groundwork was laid for what BATAILLE (following NIETZSCHE) would call “being multiple singular.” In doing so, LAWTOO recovers a “life-affirming” stance to NIETZSCHE’s view of mimesis, arguing by way of appreciation for infant-mother mimicking, that it is the grounding of interpersonal understanding.

What, however, does it mean that the modern subject is both “united and divided” or “a community of multiple, yet singular souls?” LAWTOO assures us that we have not slipped into a “fusion” of self-other sameness, nor is it con-fusion of self and other as described by JANET in his clinical description of patients who felt possessed. Rather LAWTOO uses a reading of BATAILLE by BORCH-JACOBSen offering that mimetic communication “bends me in two but, in the end, leaves me standing, at a distance.” The fact that we always at least partially fail to identify with the other “keeps the subject on the solid ground of life” and prevents what would otherwise be a possession (a la JANET) or a reproduction of identity. Instead, our partial failure allows us to experience “being with the other as other.” And yet, the phantom or mimesis cannot be “dissociated from what the ego is” and does not communicate “with me, but through me” because it is “chained into me—part of the experience of ‘being multiple singular.’” This interplay is reminiscent of BAKHTIN’s consciousness that lives on the border between self and other, though LAWTOO does well to keep his focus on those writers who emphasize the pre-linguistic and affective nature of interindividuality.

LAWTOO’s work brings new considerations to the discourse of the modern identity after mimetic realization where we can speak about “the self,” “ego,” “a Life,” “the I” without the presumption of lapsing into a Romantic, ego-centric psychology of the autonomous subject. And by invoking BATAILLE, LAWTOO opens another pathway to the positive mimesis discussion with his emphasis on life-affirming, healthy and associative forms of mimesis (laughter, joy) juxtaposed to GIRARD’s conflictual, life-negating forms. He sees laughter as having many of the same properties that Girard gives to mimetic rivalry—intersubjective, contagious, and borrowed from the other. Just as mimetic desire leads to envy, jealousy and the like, LAWTOO offers that laughter leads to life-affirming emotions such as sympathy and friendship. This point is arguable as there are many ways to see how laughter does not lead to positive emotions (sarcasm, mocking) and LAWTOO would do better to stick to the experience of what is communicated (joy, delight).

LAWTOO further seeks to expand mimesis beyond its association with desire and by recovering a Platonian mimetic pathos. His hope is to capture the twenty-first century move away from snobbery, coquetry, and narcissism and toward the effects of mass communication with its hypermimetic emphasis on the medium and its “turbulent, spiraling, and infectious” properties. Unlike the significant theoretical contributions that LAWTOO makes to the formation and structural aspects of the modern identity, more support is needed to justify why and how mimetic pathos accounts for more than a shift in emphasis away from the violence of mimetic desire. As GIRARD has long claimed, a positive mimesis surely flows from mimetic desire, even if GIRARD himself has focused less on its affective qualities (e.g., love) than its cognitive and anthropological ones (learning, culture formation). Whether or not LAWTOO’s mimetic pathos offers enough distinction from mimetic desire, Phantom of the Ego stands as a significant contribution to the study of interdividual ontology.

Kathy Frost