Scandal, Resentment, Idolatry: The Underground Psychology of Terrorism

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> If I read Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* or Dostoevsky's *The Devils* I cannot help reflecting on how the characters in these books have continued to be reincarnated right down to our own times. (Italo Calvino)

After a day of writing, Dostoevsky used to go down to the local newspaper stand to consult the Russian and foreign press in search of incidents, events, *faits divers*, which he could use as material for his novels. This is not because he lacked imagination but because, on the contrary, he regularly found that his moral vision of human relations was being instantiated and validated by history. Occasionally he would find reports of an episode that he had already anticipated in his fiction, which leads us to reflect on the prophetic capabilities of great literary works. Something like this is what we encounter regarding the events of September 11: the author of *Demons*, in which a whole provincial city is set ablaze amidst the romantic and nihilistic synergies befuddling its inhabitants, would have derived grim satisfaction from reading about the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York and the attack on the Pentagon. André Glucksmann grasped this connection when he entitled his recent essay on the wider implications of those events *Dostoevsky in Manhattan*, which he concludes with an "éloge de la littérature" for its capacity to unveil cultural and historical energies that result in acts of nihilistic violence.

Glucksmann's study ranges over a vast political, ideological, and literary territory in order to connect the terrorists' motivations with the complex and contradictory forces active within the culture under siege. He credits Flaubert as much as Dostoevsky with uncovering a more generalized and pandemic nihilism than the one we isolate around the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks. He rightly insists that by construing such violence as an outlandish exception we short-circuit our perception of the common ground we share with our violent antagonists. "Flaubert struggled early on with the difficulty of representing the

ordinary nihilist in his banality. As soon as the latter is identified, he turns into the exception, shifting towards being the Other whose extraordinary otherness is a hedge against our turning back on ourselves" (95). In this essay I shall explore such a necessary return to ourselves as the terrorists' action warrants, as especially illuminated by Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. Because his self-tormenting narrator takes on the entire cultural framework of his time and ours, debating violence and desire as issues for our self-understanding, such an exploration engages us in more general anthropological considerations.

The religious motivation of the terrorist is transparent and, on its own terms, irrefutable, since by definition its sacred inspiration and goal are exempt from all forms of human inquiry; its sanctions transcend all worldly jurisdiction, descending from a hieratic point of reference beyond the pale of human tribunals. Pre- or post-political in the sense of being unavailable to worldly negotiation, its violence is sacred in all that the latter term denotes as absolute, beyond appeal, unanswerable to human reason. So we rightly turn to the anthropological theory developed in René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* to fathom the properly sacrificial–sacred-making–scenario within which such deeds are inscribed. But we also need to go beyond these groundbreaking insights, and to focus on the elemental role of resentment that is provided in Eric Gans's Generative Anthropology in order more fully to grasp the relations between nihilism and religion.

2

In the desacralized, secularized West, we regularly tend to write off the terrorists as religious fanatics whose motivations are alien to our culture, while occasionally recalling the dangers to civil society posed by some of our own indigenous fundamentalisms: Jim Jones, David Koresh, and, most recently, Timothy McVeigh. Uniquely or narrowly religious explanations do not suffice, as if cognitive mastery were achieved by portraying religion as the other and enemy of rationality and civil society. This is a view expressed by such eminent thinkers as Richard Rorty (e.g., *Philosophy and Social Hope*, ch. 11) and Steven Weinberg (*Facing Up: Science and its Cultural Adversaries*), whose only point of agreement, perhaps, is the need to expel religion from the councils of those bent on a scientific understanding of human experience. Yet mainstream Islam has unequivocally denounced the events of September 11. The political leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, President Khatami, has dissociated his religion from such terrorism by labeling it, at a speech at the UN in January 2002, as the work of nihilists with whom no culture can find common ground.

Nihilism is a mode of thinking that, since Nietzsche, we have been constrained to acknowledge as our own homegrown response to all transcendence, to all valuations. Nietzsche described it as the will to nothing as preferable to no will at all. He viewed it as the destiny of Western philosophy, the consequence of a relentless truth-seeking process whose boundless inquiry ultimately erased all grounds for truth of any kind (*On the*

Genealogy of Morals III, 27)–a process we may view as epitomized in the name we give to the New York site of the catastrophe, “ground zero.”

The question prompted by nihilist terrorism, then, is: What do we in the West, or the US, have in common with the suicide bomber as the token of a type of behavior that we can see around us and imagine of ourselves, or in ourselves? What can we recall from our own experience that enables us to understand him and consequently to affiliate his seemingly outlandish impulses with those we can recognize as intimately our own? How, in this context, can we respond anthropo-logically, dispassionately and scientifically, to the cognitive imperative implied by the Roman adage *homo sum et nihil humani alienum puto,”* which remains axiomatic for all interhuman inquiry? How, to borrow from Nietzsche’s own phrasing, can we understand what is all-too-human about this exercise of apocalyptic violence in its appeal to hieratic and unanswerable transcendence?

Rather than go back over the ground covered by Glucksmann, I will focus on a recent article in the *New Yorker* magazine by the sometime Near Eastern specialist Jonathan Raban (he is the author of *Arabia: A Journey through the Labyrinth*), whose frankly autobiographical bias sheds more light on these questions than the notoriously sarcastic indignation of the French intellectual. Published under the rubric “Personal History,” it is entitled “My Holy War: What do a vicar’s son and a suicide bomber have in common?” and it brings jihad home to anyone capable of recalling the cultural stresses of the Vietnam era and its Cold War circumstances. What Raban does not do, and what I shall undertake here, is to connect his observations with significant strands in our Western literary heritage, wherein, as Gans and Girard alike have argued, we find the elements of a coherent anthropology, a “discovery procedure,” as Gans calls it, in correlating human behavior with its cultural foundations. Mimetic anthropology is capacious enough to incorporate historical events and individual experience within its hermeneutic purview, and it owes more to the structural intuitions of tragedy, Greek or Shakespearean, than to the punctual observations of an Aristotle or an anthropological field worker. The theory is initially born of reflections on the novel, that uniquely Western literary genre generated by individualist and egalitarian energies of our society, whose vocation is to explore personal experience in the context of environing cultural forces over a narrative arc that draws meaning from their interaction; whose vocation, in sum, is to explore the meaning of history and culture as intimately experienced by its human participants.

3

After drawing numerous parallels between the actions and attitudes of Islamist terrorists and his own experience as the rebellious son of an Anglican vicar, Raban slyly proposes that John Walker Lindh, the wayward American convert to radical Islam who was captured while fighting for the Taliban against US forces in Afghanistan, should not be executed for treason–as McVeigh was, to the permanent loss of any fuller understanding of him–but

installed instead as the focus of a multidisciplinary university research project involving "psychologists, theologians, political scientists, and cultural historians." The project would aim at explaining "why the call to jihad answers so resonantly the yearnings of clever, unhappy, well-heeled young men, from Mill Valley and Luton as well as from Cairo and Jidda" (36), that is, from the "low rent, rootless, multilingual suburbs" (30) of Western cities no less than from Middle Eastern capitals. Raban's qualifiers designate a marginal and ambiguous space that can remind us of the underground from which Dostoevsky's narrator addresses us, while insisting that he has only "carried to extremes in my life what [we, his readers] have not dared to carry even half-way" (240).

Raban connects strands from his own antinuclear, antireligious, and antipaternal ("Oedipal," as he calls it) rage as a youth to the bitter anti-Western sentiments roiling on the margins of our culture on the part of certain ambivalent and ambiguous participants who have been in it but not *of* it. For what is striking in what we have learned so far about the hijack suspects is their strategic immersion in our culture and their tactical exploitation of its resources. They have benefited from its unique educational and technological opportunities and from its middle-class standard of living available only to a minority in their world, and have amply partaken of its consumerist amenities, as borne out by their credit card traces among us, "a forensic spoor," as Raban states, "of brand names across the length and breadth of the United States" (36).

The marginality we are dealing with here is not that of the oppressed themselves, but of those who, like many an American campus radical, seek their own identity and justification, and a sacralizing vocation, in taking up the cause of the oppressed from a position that is materially underwritten by the society of the oppressors, whom they effectively resemble in their cultural and socio-economic circumstances. This marginality is handily conceivable in terms of the foundational structure of Generative Anthropology, which configures social organization as a sacred center whose peripheral beholders are all rivals for its occupation or appropriation. Girard apprehends this symmetry in his own way, when, in his interview on *Le Monde* (November 6, 2001), he observes, "By their effectiveness, by the sophistication of the means employed, by the knowledge that they had of the United States, by their training, were not the authors of the attack at least somewhat American? Here we are in the middle of mimetic contagion." To analyze this contagion, I shall rely on Dostoevsky's *Notes*, which Glucksmann barely alludes to, although this seminal portrayal of an obscure conflict of rival doubles explores the ambivalence of mimesis in a manner that lends greater coherence to Raban's autobiographical observations.

The thematic content of the cultural center–Koranic paradise or material well-being, which is unmistakably held up as sacred for Americans–is less significant than the forces of attraction and repulsion deployed around it as the locus of significance in general. What maintains these forces in place, in dynamic equilibrium, is resentment, which, in Generative Anthropology's structural conception, names a double bind, a bond of doubles organizing

social space. For, past the satisfaction of natural appetites in more “primitive” or originary circumstances, resentment continues to name both the attraction of the center as mediated by all the desires surrounding it–there is no original, immediate sentiment on their part, nor anything essential about the center to arouse strong feeling in and of itself, such feeling being but a reaction to those in its vicinity–and its repulsion, which is experienced as a deprivation caused by all rivaling for it and therefore forbidding its attainment to one and all. Desire is deferred or imaginary appropriation, and resentment is the discomforting experience of deferred revenge against those who thwart the satisfaction of desire by obstructing that appropriation. Another name for the structural tension in these dynamics, one crucial to understanding the admixture of sacred and profane, of transcendent aspirations amidst the imminence of worldly desire, is *scandal*, which designates the neighbor-rival on the periphery as both model and obstacle to the fulfillment of desire.

4

Scandal is a term that has become more focal in Girard’s later reflections on his own theory, as witness his most recent book, *Celui par qui le scandale arrive*. It derives from religious discourse, that of the Christian Bible. It applies generally to all phenomena of mimetic contagion and it communicates dialectically and sometimes synonymously with the notion of idolatry, as emphasized by Dawn Perlmutter in “Skandalon 2001: The Religious Practices of Modern Satanists and Terrorists” (*Anthropoetics* 7, 2). Idolatry names what the West’s ineradicable Judaic heritage has taught us to repudiate as the worship of false gods, of ersatz divinity. It names at the institutional level what scandal names at the interpersonal level, something that we readily deplore in our neighbors’ conduct, but that blinds us to our own mimetic contagion by it, our own involvement and complicity with it. We can describe scandal metaphorically as idolatry’s dirty little secret, as it enables us to denounce the other’s idolatry without any sense of its symmetry with our own. The skewed relations between idolatry, which is public, and scandal, which begins as a personal, affective reaction, help explain how our attention to visible and more spectacular institutional practices can hinder us from understanding our own relation to them.

Terrorist violence is a large-scale scandal in the sense that Girard has emphasized in that notion: because of its sacrificial, scapegoating indifference to the identity of its victims, it works as a mimetic entrapment, authorizing a vengeful reciprocity equally unnuanced in its wrath and symmetrically indifferent to its victims. This apprehension was widespread immediately after the terrorist attacks, as witnessed by the maxim widely circulated in email correspondence, and by the press as well, cautioning that “an eye for an eye is a recipe for blindness.” The extensive circulation of this maxim suggests that the dangers of violent reciprocity are apparent to common-sense observers. What is counter-intuitive about Girard’s basic insight is the well-nigh irresistible force of mimetic contagion that can convert observers into participants in a violence they formally deplore.

Mimetic reciprocity is a force so potent and pervasive as to require, in Girard's Dostoevskian view, something like a religious conversion, a radical change in disposition, to evade it, something resembling the pattern of fall and redemption that Western Christianity holds up as paradigmatic for all creation.(1) It is a view worth serious consideration when we consider the alternative advised by Glucksmann, who counsels the virtues of self-control, *autolimitation*, as guided by the Greek notion of *aidos*, distanced recollection, whereby he disputes Soljenitsyn's religious exhortation for a *sentiment totalement perdu: l'humilité devant Dieu*. "Homer is more direct. It is in the face of noise and tears, blood and fury, that a sense of decency [la pudeur] recoils; it is from such naked horror that Achilles, Priam, and Homer himself take their distance" (243). But such a distance is only achieved after the carnage, when, among the ruins, it's too late, noise and tears, blood and fury being, as Homer clearly shows in the berserker rage of his combatants, the least likely climate for recollection or reflection of any kind whatsoever.(2) There is a fundamental misunderstanding here as to what propels annihilating violence, which Glucksmann typifies when, in his syncretic recourse to conflicting vocabularies, he cites Agamemnon's genocidal fury as expressing the "the death drive." "Let all Trojans disappear together, without mourning, without a trace. Let not one of them escape the thunder of death at our hand, not even the child in his mother's lap, not even those who flee" (19). The wrath of Achilles, driven by resentment against Agamemnon, is still more indiscriminate and devastating in its appeal to all divinities in destroying Greeks and Trojans alike, which Gans cites as a kind of "utopia" of violence: "Ah Father Zeus! Athena! Apollo! Let not one Trojan, not on Argive escape death, so that we two [Achilles and Patroclus] may emerge from the ruin to undo the sacred veil of Troy" (*Iliad* 16.95-100, cited in *The End of Culture* 247).

5

Raban's knowledge-oriented project is not likely to win over the retributionist and retaliatory mindset of our current Justice Department, as witness the vengeful and pointless execution of Timothy McVeigh, who might have served as a similar resource for human self-understanding. But the project is worth entertaining at greater length by readers of *Anthropoetics*, for which resentment, as thematized in the *Chronicles of Love and Resentment*, is a fundamental category of human relations. Absent the research opportunity proposed by Raban, we should recall that our university libraries, and any good bookstore, already dispose of a rich and telling archive on the subject of the "unearned righteousness" (33) that issues in anarchic violence on the part of ambivalently–which is to say, resentfully–marginal participants in Western culture. Raban does not appoint any literary critics, nor philosophers for that matter, to his research group (although that oversight is perhaps made up for by his inclusion of cultural historians). Nevertheless, it is particularly in the novel's interrogation of human interaction over time that we may expect to find significant parallels and explanatory keys for cognizance of this crisis-laden juncture in social relations. The life and works of Dostoevsky are very much to the point here. Like Raban's semi-confessional essay, they offer probing studies and a powerful critique of

resentment as first-hand experience.

The same dynamics of resentment and self-hatred fueling a desire for retributive and, especially, redemptive violence that Raban uncovers in his own youthful rebellion and in the apocalyptic fantasies of radical Islamism are to be found in the young Dostoevsky.(3) His rejection by St. Petersburg literary circles inspired him to flirt with anarchist cells and won him arrest, mock-execution, and exile, from which he emerged as a clairvoyant, even prophetic critic of romantic revolt and the nihilism it favors. The essential difference here lies in the redemption that the novelist gleaned from his catastrophic fall and his consequent painful and soul-wrenching sojourn among "the insulted and the injured." In *The House of the Dead*, Dostoevsky recorded his exile amidst common-law criminals whose cruelty and boorishness and just as stunning magnanimities must have quickened his sense of a common and complex humanity that the simplistic us/them schema of romantic revolt does not account for. As a result, he was able, beginning with *Notes from Underground*, to see and fully analyze the self-glorifying and self-defeating absurdity of his resentment, much as Raban reveals his own adolescent hubris. He saw it, moreover, as his introductory footnote to *Notes* insists, as a real function of historical circumstances, urging the reader to acknowledge the plausibility, the necessity, of his fictitious character "if we take into consideration the circumstances which lead to the formation of our society" (107). He meant, that is, his fiction as true to life: "don't tell me you don't know it!" the narrator admonishes the reader about his own fantasies (164). Granted, most realist fiction assumes this correspondence to actuality, but Dostoevsky's added emphasis, his thematic insistence here, adds a deliberately epistemic charge to his writing that calls for historical verification. His fiction, I think, diagnoses the disposition monitored by Raban in his own past and in the composite portrait he draws of the suicide bomber.

The decisive flaw in romantic rebellion, as Raban points out about himself and as a Muhammad Atta or a John Walker Lindh could never see, is the self-exiling rebel's need of his oppressors as a prop for his victimary theology, his symbiotic dependence on real or imagined persecution to authenticate his sacred identity, to consecrate his destiny:

> A consciousness forged in conditions of tyranny [such as that of the terrorist students from Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and of Dostoevsky in tsarist Russia] is often liable to find tyranny wherever in the world it settles. Islamism–which by no means signifies Islam at large–needs oppression. A powerful sense of *kufr* [unbelief surrounding him] helps the believer to live in Western exile in the necessary state of chronic persecution, from which his theology was born, and on which its survival depends. (32-33)

The environing climate of unbelief is the shroud for a glorified body of convictions. This symbiosis, the opponent's need of a hostile milieu to sustain his belief, is a point brought out long ago by Sartre, when he distinguished, in his essay on Baudelaire and in *What is Literature*, the revolutionary from the rebel, who depends on the system in place to consolidate his oppositional and largely derivative identity that is forged over against it. This construction of an identity "over against," rather than on a free-standing foundation of its own, is how Dostoevsky presents the forging of modern self-consciousness, from the underground man's assertion, "Every decent man of our age is, and indeed has to be, a coward and a slave" (149), through Raskolnikov's somber broodings over his Napoleonic destiny in *Crime and Punishment*.

The pathology–literally: logos of suffering–we observe here is the one Nietzsche first observed of resentment as the basis of moral valuation: "the value-positing eye . . . needs a hostile external world" (*Genealogy* I, 10). That very hostility guarantees the integrity of his credo, which in turn protects the subject from feelings of inferiority, of self-hatred that Dostoevsky's narrator confesses (147) in his own failed rivalry with everyone around him. Whether or not we accept Nietzsche's genealogy–for Girard, Judaeo-Christianity provides a critique rather than a wellspring of resentment, which is ever more loosed upon the world with the discredit sown by our religious tradition on sacrificial solutions to mimetic violence–his description holds as a structural analysis, and in particular of the "priestly vengefulness" of the terrorist, "a *grand* politics of revenge, of a farseeing, subterranean, slowly advancing and premeditated revenge" of the kind that can lead up to explosive results. The sleeper cells are the natural habitat of "the man of *ressentiment*," whose "spirit loves hiding places, secret paths and back doors, everything covert entices him as *his* world, *his* security, *his* refreshment; he understands how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble."

Self-effacement as a tactic is a recipe for conformity, such as the underground man exhibits in his irreproachable dress code, and the terrorists in theirs. But its pressures can also, and of necessity, result in eruptions of incivility, such as the underground man recalls in dealing nastily with his clients as a petty bureaucrat (I, i). Raban describes the rude behavior recorded of the terrorists living among us, such as the famous row over a bill at Shuckum's Raw Bar and Grill, in terms that doubtless draw from his retrospective self-knowledge:

> These are not displays of sullen adolescent aggression; they're moral gestures, designed to put the *kuffar* [unbelievers] in their rightful place. It's what certain angry, frustrated young men have always secretly dreamed of–a theology of rebellion, rooted in hostility and contempt. It also confers a heroic glamour on the everyday alienation felt by the immigrant–especially the male immigrant–who struggles to keep his head up in a foreign culture. (33)

To the underground man, culture or society as such is foreign to the extent that it fails to assent to his "moral superiority" (174), as he complains of his experience in school. So I think that considerable irony informs the disclaimer in Raban's first clause here, which I read somewhat as free indirect discourse. Elsewhere he describes his own youthful impudence in the same way he does here, and as flaunting the same sort of religious sanction. What is meant as moral gesture is no different from sullen adolescent aggression, (or, in other cases, of senescent aggression, such as we find in Sartre's rejection of the Nobel prize for literature, a gesture we can understand in terms of antibourgeois solidarity with the oppressed, as averred by the author, or, just as probably, as a display of his heroically oppositional posturing).

7

Claims of intention must give way to the evidence of structural effects. Resentment's sacralizing isolation masks an intraworldy grievance, which the narrator of *Notes* captures succinctly in the complaint, "I am one and they are all" (149). Heroic glamour as the inverted image of everyday alienation is just how Dostoevsky's narrator vaunts his own "moral superiority" to those he seeks to despise, which resonates in turn with the attitude that Raban impersonates in the Islamist visitor: "Your corrosive solitude is the measure of your invincible superiority to the *kuffar*, in their hell-bound ignorance and corruption" (33). In other words, as Dostoevsky's narrator affirms of his schoolmates, "They understood nothing. They had not the faintest idea of real life" (173). He will consecrate his superiority with appeals for "a more, so to speak, *literary* quarrel" with his social antagonists, his rivals for recognition, the "so to speak" qualifier betraying "literary" as a metaphor of transcendence (154). As a young man, he pursues his former schoolmates both despite and because of their indifference to him; he craves their approval, but he goads them to exclude him in mutual contempt, so that his allegiance to the "sublime and beautiful" (112) will be hallowed by the solitude in which he alone venerates it. The "sublime and beautiful"–always in quotes in the narrative, as befits a consciously mediated value–is a placeholder for the sacred, the esthetically disembodied remains of theological transcendence that Enlightenment desacralization has bequeathed to its Romantic successors.

In reconstructing the terrorist's conversion from hostile observer to belligerent participant against our culture in his resolution "to contribute his life to the cause of Allah," Raban has recourse to a time-honored formula for irrationality: "It's the business of religion to put two and two together and make five. The dialectic of purity and pollution led him to the 'noble obligation' of martyrdom" (34). In arguing desire's resistance to common sense, the underground man has recourse to the same arithmetic figure: while admitting "twice-two-makes-four" as irrefutable, he concludes with seeming whimsy that "twice-two-makes-five is sometimes a most charming little thing, too" (139). However, in matters of mimetic rivalry at issue here, the best equation is the loss of difference indicated by the formula "one plus one equals one" that designates the rivalry of mimetic doubles and that Sartre spelled out in

The Condemned of Altona in his effort to describe violent symmetry.

What is dialectical about purity and pollution here is their interdependence and mutual reinforcement, each pole enhancing the pressure exerted by other. It is a dynamic comically illustrated throughout the *Notes* in the form of the narrator's cyclothymic bouts of self-exaltation and self-loathing, which only replicate intrapsychically his desire to dominate others and his consequent abasement before them, his abject appeal to their regard. Part I of the *Notes* is accordingly concerned with the narrator's internal contradictions, which Part II reveals as the corollary of his failed rivalry with others; the nihilism in Part I is shown in Part II to be a function of this rueful capitulation, his bungled rivalry with absolutely everyone–clients and classmates, peers and prostitutes, servants and Sunday strollers–whom he encounters in his social world.

Dostoevsky's failure as a terrorist made him a novelist, and the author of *Demons*–lately translated with a foreword recommending Girard's book on the author as the best we have for correlating his life and works–has fully dramatized and diagnosed the nihilistic pathologies that we find confronting us today. A provincial town goes up in flames in the wake of delusional idealisms that are vengefully manipulated by the self-appointed head of a sleeper cell, whose revolutionary ideology masks the worshipful emulation of the local celebrity, Stavrogin. In the unlikely event that any of our Intelligence agencies award funding for Raban's research project, the Russian novelist's *Notes* and *Demons* should be required reading for all concerned.

8

Of course many journalists and commentators have cited resentment as chief among the factors motivating terrorist groups, but not in a way that opens up to fuller analysis or to generalizable conclusions about this peculiar kind of violence in our world, in which highly sophisticated weapons of mass destruction are available to tiny segments of its population, in which Western economic and scientific progress is hostage to its own technological genius. Glucksmann comes closer than most to the symmetry involved when he draws into proximity the Western pride our cities exhibit and a *hybris anti-cité* that draws its energies from its model (46). "The proud state and anti-statist pride devour each other," he states of *le double nihilisme* of enemy brothers that is redolent with *rivalité mimétique* (239-40). Glucksmann does not elaborate on the insight that Girard's vocabulary makes available to him. Yet we feel he is evoking the underground man when he describes the nihilist terrorist as wallowing "dans la nauséabonde et glauque jouissance du souffre-douleur" [in the nauseating, sea-green pleasure of the whipping-boy] (151).

Most journalistic commentary on resentment generally reads as follows: they resent us because we've got it so great and they do not, and, since it is a good thing to have it so great, they are the bad guys and must be destroyed wherever we can find them. Of course

this begs the question of how to find them, since they can make themselves over to resemble us so well. But the main problem with this one-dimensional logic is that it expresses equally well how the terrorists, out of the spectacle of misery they identify with, see us, namely, as the bad guys. As long as this rigid good guy/bad guy scenario obtains, no cognitive progress can be made, and even military, political, and diplomatic solutions are susceptible to the mimetic contagion of scandal.

Journalistic evidence bears this out. Larry George documents presidential pronouncements on "the Evil One" with reference to Osama bin Laden that match the latter's statements about us almost word for word. The American president's Manichaean gloss on Evil places him in a worrying symmetry with his adversaries. This impression is reinforced by the consultation of certain Islamist websites, such as the one that is host to an authority, Sayyid Qutb, whom Raban has consulted at length, and whom Walter Laqueur, a major historian of terrorism, has described as "a man of mediocre intelligence who did not produce a single new idea . . . [and who] preached a fanatic obscurantism" (127):

> In the world there is only one party of God; all others are parties of Satan and rebellion. Those who believe fight in the cause of God, and those who disbelieve fight in the cause of rebellion. Then fight the allies of Satan; indeed, Satan's strategy is weak (3:78). (*Milestones*, Internet)

"God," we heard from the pulpit of the National Cathedral occupied by the president, "is not neutral" in this conflict. And we read in his remarks to the FBI, "the people who did this act on America . . . are evil people. They don't represent an ideology; they don't represent a legitimate political group of people. They are flat evil. That's all they can think about, is evil. As a nation of good folks, we're going to hunt them down" (cited by George). It is certainly good to hunt the terrorists down and make them answer for the horror they have wrought, but there is real moral danger in the terms vindicating the hunt, the danger of depending on their malefactions as presumptions of our own moral purity, as Nietzsche points out of resentment's derivative self-construction: "he has conceived 'the evil enemy,' '*the Evil one,*' and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a 'good one'–himself!"

There is no dearth, we know, of examples of this kind of rhetorical counterpoint. Structural analysis of the kind afforded by generative or mimetic anthropology allows us to see this evidence of parity, bifocally as it were, rather than to see the world through the unique lens of resentment, whose monocular vision flattens the world and blinds us to perspective on symmetries within it. Like the mimetic contagion of scandal, terrorist violence contaminates its survivors, encouraging violent reciprocity at the expense of the all-too-human messiness of politics or diplomacy.

Resentment as a structural concept is a powerful tool for understanding human relations. As an affect, a personal experience, it has a mostly negative valence; like envy, it is what we deplore on the part of others, of the losers in a competition we see as free, fair, and open. But within the global economic system–and the September 11 events establish irrevocably that we and our antagonists no less than our allies are in a one-world system, all of whose economic and social machinery is in play–the only thing that is open to appropriation on the part of some is the technological means of destroying the game entirely, as justified by raising the stakes to an absolute, transcendent level beyond this-worldly appeal. The very mobility of our technology, as it miniaturizes the means of massive destructiveness, has the inconvenient and ironic result of leveling the playing field, not in terms of economic redistribution but solely in those of colossal destructiveness. In sum, we live in a world, as Robert Kaplan sums it up, "that is closer and more dangerous than ever" (56). To the extent that a "global village" is in the making, the same principles and techniques of interpretation apply to its analysis as to the relatively more circumscribed and self-contained communities that anthropologists have studied in remoter and more traditional societies. Interpretation would focus on sacrificial practices, as countless earlier studies have done.

It may suffice at a certain level of analysis to observe, as Girard does in his interview in *Le Monde*, that terrorists resent us because we hold, as it were, all the high cards in the economic and industrial game, so that the only alternative that can occur to them is to overturn–or blow up–the gaming table, in a move induced by the superadditive of eternal reward for the purifying violence they engage. But such a remark can be unpacked with more specific attention to the dynamics of resentment as explored by Nietzsche and more fully by Dostoevsky.

The terrorist's vengeful strategy reflects clearly enough the psychology of "loser wins," whereby the winnings at the table are discounted by the loser as worthless by contrast with gains to be won at another, higher, ideal or transcendent level. The pathos of defeat in this world is ennobled by appeal to an eternal, unworldly set of values, much like the underground man's appeal to the "sublime and beautiful" or his pathetic yearning for "a more *literary* quarrel." It was Nietzsche's genius to detect the imposture, and later on to honor Dostoevsky as its narrator: moral victory is won at the price of this-worldly defeat that is fervently and eagerly paid by the losers, who would otherwise be mired in the contemplation of their own defeat, marooned in the narrator's "stink hole."

Imaginary victory over one's oppressors is for Nietzsche the genealogy of morals in general, the wellspring of transcendent values and of all religiosity, the metaphysically deferred vengeance of the defeated against their vanquishers. But Dostoevsky's text is more telling. The word for underground indicated by the title translates a space not exactly below the social plane but between the floorboards separating one plane from another, rather like the

suburban space inhabited by the terrorists in the West. The genius of Dostoevsky's metaphor undoes the structural opposition–deconstructs it, literally–between high and low, between intellectual solitude and social promiscuity, upon which the narrator depends to nurture his resentments. A drama as imagined between hieratic transcendence and worldly imminence is revealed at the outset as taking place within the confines of the latter.

In his book on the novelist, Girard describes Dostoevsky's choice before the impasses of mimetic rivalry as either madness or genius (46); unfortunately, as we have learned, there is a third, suicidal, outlet for underground psychology, which is to lash out against the world in feats of more or less spectacular violence. This is what the narrator of *Notes* portrays *in petto*, in caricatural miniature, in his ludicrously long deferred clash on the street with an officer who unwittingly insulted him (II, i). Suicidal violence is more exactly or realistically portrayed in *Demons*, variously translated elsewhere as *The Devils*, and *The Possessed*, in the form of Kirilov's self-immolation, which is necessarily botched because it is parasitic upon the theism it repudiates. The novel's title, shorn of a definite article, does not refer explicitly to the perpetrators themselves but to demonic possession as a social phenomenon, as a collective dynamic, according to its Gospel accounts (see Girard, *The Scapegoat* XIII); it is a metaphor of interpersonal pathologies that lead to violence, possibly even cultural meltdown, in which all the energies of a society are complicit.

10

The genius of Nietzsche's analysis of resentment lies in its flexibility as an instrument of interpretation, even its reversibility. For it can be shown to apply to the philosopher as well. His painful failure to disenthrall his own culture from its adherence to Christianity, and, more specifically, its reverence for Wagner, results in ever more shrill denunciations and parodic emulations of his successful rivals–witness the neo-prophetic style of Zarathustra–so that his last work, *Ecce Homo*, reads as an appeal to exalted identity as Christianity's (and Wagner's) vanquisher–"Hear me, do not mistake me for another" (Preface)–that is parasitic upon the sacred identity it would displace.

I add this excursus as evidence once again that the thematic content of desired–and thwarted–centrality is indifferent, at least in the modern world, which has mostly drained the center of its sacred content without being able to erase its positional attraction, the center being the necessary point around and in reference to which meaning and value–what is good or not good to desire–are established and organized. Anything can signify the object of desire. Western consumerist culture, with the US in the vanguard, does all it can to eroticize commodities so as to universalize their appeal to the consumer, who is induced to aspire to become the object of the desire that their possession is alleged to ensure. However much we may decry this process, it is a sound marketing strategy that owes more to the dynamic of desire itself than to any genius on the part of the strategists. The implicit motto is: "If it titillates, it retails," just as journalists obey the maxim: "If it bleeds, it leads" when

they highlight news of violence as a sure way of attracting readers. In his preface to the English translation of his book on Dostoevsky, Girard describes as "obstacle addiction" (146, 152) the simultaneous attraction and repulsion exercised by mimetic models. It can just as well be called "scandal addiction." Scandal gratifies our craving for a sense of our own worth, a moral rectitude that is fashioned over against its transgressors rather than requiring any foundation of its own. Sex and violence, desire and destructiveness are anthropological constants, not topical issues for cultural reflection, and scandal is the form resentment takes in our attention to others' illicit participation in them.(4) For it is easy, and personally edifying, to decry evils and abuses from the armchair tribunal provided by the press; it is also hypocritical, properly pharisaical, as that word has come to describe the judgment applied exclusively to others that may nonetheless redound to our own blame as well.

This insistent recourse to sex appeal will be important to remember when considering the reaction to our consumerism on the part of non-Western sojourners. But the object need not be erotic: brutally profane triumph is a scandal to the religious dissenter, the priestly ascetic in Nietzsche's original scenario, just as religious consensus is to Nietzsche's militant demystifier, or to any convinced atheist. This is what Raban describes in himself as the bearer of "a dissident creed, full of furious conviction and an inchoate, adolescent hunger for the battlefield . . . standing shoulder to shoulder with the world's oppressed, voicing our hatred of the belligerent power of the US and its puppet nations in the NATO alliance, we were bathed in personal glory" (33). Armored in the "steel of true zealotry" against his vicar father's Anglo-Catholic theology, he describes his unbelief as that of "an angry fundamentalist with a lock on truth, and as militant in my own way as any fanatic with a holy book" (29). Substantive difference cedes to perceptions of structural symmetry in Raban's self-revelations. This is indeed what Nietzsche calls a transvaluation of values, but only as the metamorphosis of one form of hieratic centrality into another. On Raban's part, it is more properly a translation of antagonism into the perception of mimetic doubles–a perception, we note, that ever eluded the author of *Ecce Homo*.

When we turn to Raban's consultation of the foundational texts of Islamist terrorism, we find the same thematic dualism disguising mimetic contagion, the very fear of contagion by Western culture's impurities being the motor of antagonism here. He quotes from what he calls the "essential charter" (30) of the jihad movement, its "Mein Kampf," entitled *Milestones* (1964), by Sayyhid Qutb, who toured the US between 1948 and 1950 before returning to Egypt to spread his ideas among the Muslim Brotherhood until his execution by Nasser in 1966 fairly canonized his writings with the crown of martyrdom.

11

Raban identifies the kernel of Qutb's thought as the historical parallel between the saving emergence of Islam amidst the reviled imperium of Rome and Persia in the Arab peninsula

and the marginal place of Islam in the modern world:

Drinking, fornication, shopping, and vulgar entertainment were the chief pursuits of a morally bankrupt society sunk in *jahiliyyah*, the condition of ignorance, barbarism, and chaos from which the Arabs were providentially rescued by the gift of the Koran. . . . The twentieth century was a new *jahiliyyah*, and the great project of the Islamic revival was the restoration of the rule of Allah by force of arms. The coming jihad must be global in scale. Qutb wrote, "This religion is really a universal declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men and from servitude to his own desires. It is a declaration that sovereignty belongs to God alone and that He is the Lord of all the worlds." (30-31)Victory over one's own desires is a leitmotiv of Qutb's admonitions; it is conceived as inseparable from victory in other domains, as Qutb describes it in another programmatic text:

Before a Muslim steps into the battlefield, he has already fought a great battle within himself against Satan–against his own desires and ambitions, his personal interests and inclinations, the interests of his own family and of his nation; against anything which is not from Islam; against every obstacle which comes into the way of worshiping Allah and the implementation of the Divine authority on earth, returning this authority to Allah and taking it away from the rebellious usurpers. ("Paving the way")A lot of this harmonizes with the proscriptions uttered by Jesus about family and friends, the world of the flesh, that we find in Gospel accounts, which we know were obscurely influential in the articulation of Islam as a religious creed (Armstrong 8). But this emphasis on one's own desires is distinct from the Gospel's social focus, in which we find few examples of isolated sinfulness. As Raban notes, such wariness is more in line with the dissident Christianity of puritanism (30). From the perspective of mimetic theory, it is highly problematic, since this theory argues that our desires come to us from others as models. I shall return to this emphasis on Qutb's part, and to the misperceptions it foments.

Everywhere that God's unique sovereignty is not acknowledged and enforced is pervaded by Jahiliyyah, and ripe for burning, or at least for vehement spurning. The sense of this parallel with the former glories of Islam is especially pronounced in a brief text entitled "What are Arabs without Islam," where the aim of Jihad is "to save humanity from worshiping creatures," from idolatry, in sum:

> There is only one place on earth which can be called the house of Islam, and it is that place where an Islamic state is established and the Sharia'ah [Koranic law] is the authority and God's laws are observed. . . . The rest of the world is the house of war. (cited by Raban 32)

Or "hostility," as another Web-based text translates the condition of living in *Dur ul Harb*, whose preferable opposite is *Dur ul Islam*, life under Koranic rule. What is meant here is not

necessarily the actual clash of arms but the virtual ubiquity of corruption, pollution, impurity, disorder. The entire world where Islam is not practiced faithfully is an occasion of scandal, of offense, as the word scandal is frequently translated.(5)Such occasions are limitless for the confirmed Muslim vanguard which finds itself "marching through the vast ocean of Jahiliyyah which has encompassed the entire world. During its course, it should keep itself somewhat aloof from this all-encompassing Jahiliyyah and should also keep some ties with it" ("A Muslim's Nationality and his Belief")–because of the benefits that its scientific progress affords, and in terms of formal "contracts," treaties with non-Islamic states, for the sake of being able to be left alone and live in peace.

12

But these are the ties of a double bind. For the struggle, and the vigilance, required of the Islamic traveler is arduous and unrelenting; the danger of contagion is omnipresent, awesome: "it takes only a drop of the filth of disbelief to contaminate Islam in the West" (cited by Raban 32). Raban observes that "the word 'desire' ripples through 'Milestones,' and always, it seems, meaning the same thing:" sexual temptation, as instanced by some of the anecdotes in the narrative. The traveling Muslim sojourning in the land of disbelief and dutifully seeking to maintain his soul intact is surrounded by ubiquitous corruptions to whose appeal he has, for the sake of his own salvation, developed a heightened sensitivity, an acute, even fierce attention. The journal *Nida'ul Islam*, which is published in a suburb of Sydney and which aims at expressing "the Jihad stream" amongst Islamic movements, warns against baby sitters, Christmas cards, an invitation for a drink after work (Raban 32).

Western secularization has meant the juridical separation of the private from the public as much as of the religious from the political. For the purist, this separation is a scandal everywhere it is encountered, which is to say everywhere in the West, with the result that "the personal is political," as the radical feminist slogan goes; the private is experienced as a forum of religious and cultural affront. This countercultural *hybris anti-cité*, as Glucksmann calls it, runs through Western culture (think of Rousseau, or Pol Pot, educated in Paris); it is ably formulated by a pair of journalists as a feature of what they call "Occidentalism," the anti-Western counterpart of a denigrating Orientialism that figures as largely in the texts of Spengler and Toynbee–and *Mein Kampf*–as it does in Islamic radicalism: "In big, anonymous cities, separation between the private and the public makes hypocrisy possible. . . . To an Islamic radical, then, urban hypocrisy is like keeping the West inside one like a worm rotting the apple from within" (Buruma and Margalit 5). The anonymity of cities is the result of demographics, of massive population density, but equally as much of their hospitality to the open and impersonal market forces which gave rise to them. This explains why "Occidentalism" is so much a feature of academic Humanities departments, heirs to an anti-market romanticism that is spelled out as a critique of hegemony, Eurocentrism, and so on.(6)Here the authors are describing a reaction to cosmopolitan features of Near Eastern capital cities. For the Islamic sojourner in the West,

the worm is the apple in its entirety, devouring identity with the tip of a hat.

This all-or-nothing alternative is a recipe for defeat and self-destruction. Since there is nothing between all and nothing, anything, everything is a cause for alarm that cannot fail to engross the alarmist. Everything not the occasion of victory is one of defeat. Here we see scandal as the obverse rather than antagonist of idolatry, which is its partner and underwriter. This is a recipe for nihilism whose religious sanction, I think, is subordinate in its content to the apocalyptic violence it authorizes. Raban cites an exhortation of the Muslim Brotherhood's Hassan-al-Banna to "prepare for jihad and be lovers of death" (31) and ascribes "death's erotic allure" to the "Koran's worldly and sensual depiction of the hereafter," in a politically incorrect way that is bound to stir the ire of devout Muslims. But erotic allure is unnecessary to this zero-sum game, which in its own absolutist terms destines everything in the world to destruction in the name of a purity and innocence that no world can gratify. It is in this sense that the Islamist needs the impurity around him as a foil.

In many discussions of Jihad, an ambiguity surfaces as to whether the term refers to internal or external struggle, with Islamic apologists insisting that it only involves external aggression when the faith is outright menaced or aggressed. But for the Islamist abroad, the difference between internal and external collapses: everything without is an assault on religious interiority, everything within is experienced as a protest, a challenge, a wound. We need to imagine him as Dostoevsky's narrator endlessly roaming the streets of St. Petersburg, all the while scurrying between floorboards, fantasizing deliriously implausible triumphs.

13

The simultaneous and mutually augmenting forces of attraction and repulsion exercising the psyche of the Muslim expatriate are nicely captured by Raban's description of *Milestones*' "intense, prurient disgust at the fallen morals of the modern city" (36). This is another way of describing how the object of desire, as designated by others, is an occasion of offense, or scandal, whose magnetic force is multiplied by the limitless number of models designating it, and where, as a result, the taboo operates as an incentive. To consciously forbid an object is a sure way of attending to it in all its allurements. As the narrator of *Notes* observes, if you tell yourself to stop thinking about polar bears, you will only think about polar bears. Desire so relentless and ardently deferred is desire intensified.

We noted earlier that the aim of Jihad in its earliest emergence is described by Qutb as a struggle against idolatry, an effort to "save humanity from worship of creatures." It is especially in the experience of the Muslim abroad that we perceive the synergy of idolatry and scandal as the proliferation of immoral objects–and models–of desire. Scandal is the unwitting face and voice of the idolater, ubiquitous in the media and in the commodities

they purvey. To destroy the idolater and to destroy oneself are one and the same nihilistic consummation of the apple and the worm, especially when we see–as the terrorist does not–that the scandalized self mirrors the idolater he destroys.

I think we in the West should be grateful for the record of a foreigner's experience among us as an opportunity to perceive forces in our culture to which we are accustomed and therefore insensitive, forces hidden to us because we accept them as natural, not cultural. This is ever the anthropological appeal of travelogue fiction in which we are the exotica, in the tradition of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, which, too, sheds light on the promiscuity of desire among us, by contrast with the chastity secured in the seraglio, to which Usbek directs his astonished observations. Dostoevsky's *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* is just such an ethnographic treasure, as it portrays to Western Europeans their ideological complacencies. But Montesquieu's masterpiece differs by another order of magnitude from the travel monologues of Dostoevsky and Qutb (the latter makes the West seem repulsive and threatening; the former's monologues in *Diary of a Writer* reflect political and cultural views bordering on the xenophobic). Its epistolary form conveys a contrasting interplay of viewpoints, through which it undermines the reliability of all its narrative voices. Its "objectivity," chimerical in our self-deprecating philosophy, is dialectical and performative rather than declarative and constative. Montesquieu's discourse does not, like philosophy since Descartes, obsess over the subject's relation to objects outside it, but analyzes the interaction of subjects in competition for objects, variously represented as cultural ascendancy and as satisfied desire. It culminates in a critique of ethnocentrism as such, in a methodology on skewed perspectives rather than in the expression of any one of them in particular. This is doubtless the epistemological advantage that prompted the author to indulge his sense of irony with the announcement, in a later preface to his work, of his satisfaction that his bundle of letters was being perceived as a novel, an emerging genre which in his time was held inferior to most other forms of writing.

There is nothing essentially Islamic or Islamist about the dynamics of scandal as they issue in mimetic contagion, except perhaps in the purity of its dialectic. It is all too human in its obedience to the laws of mimetic desire as at once an attractive and repellent force, as the ever renewable occasion of scandal. The US has experienced this dynamic on a spectacular scale in the impeachment process of President Clinton. As Joel Black writes,

the most preposterous aspect of the investigation was the fact that the very same conservative politicians who just two years before had decried pornography in the arts and on the Internet and who had pushed for the Communications Decency Act were now insisting that the most lurid details of the affair be made public, regardless of the consequences. . . . It's as if Will [a noted conservative commentator] was trying to conjure up a *visual* image of Starr's verbal account, to use the report as a script for a porn film. And so it was that a columnist who was quick to condemn as obscene depictions on the Internet of ordinary anonymous individuals engaged in sex had no qualms about foisting upon the

public the most graphic accounts of the sexual affairs of the president of the United States. (188-89)14

Black appears here to be denouncing the investigators for hypocrisy, but the logic, the contradiction, is more insidious than that. Doubtless their primary motives were political, but we do not need to psychoanalyze the investigators and commentators to understand that the forces of repulsion incited by such sordid detail were complemented alluringly by the violation of intimacy that their relation required. Porn is porn, congressional or other, and the scandal of presidential wrongdoing–which throughout remained undecidably that of adultery or lying–was mirrored in the "intense, prurient disgust" displayed by investigators. The overall thesis of Black's book,*The Reality Effect: Film Culture and the Graphic Imperative*, is that as film, and all media with it, becomes more graphic, reality becomes more filmic (pp. 8-10); more and more experience falls prey to the explicit and implicit protocols of film culture, to mediated and mediatized scenarios, narrative modeling, imaginary identities, fanciful gratifications–and to spectacular displays of destruction.

An op-ed piece by Neil Gabler in the *New York Times* following the September 11 attack argued persuasively that it was itself modeled on the pyrotechnics of our disaster films, a point suggested as well by Jean Baudrillard in *Le Monde* ("L'Esprit du terrorisme," November 3).(7) This cruel mockery is in fact a grotesque hypothesis unpleasant but perhaps necessary to envision. Film entertainment is the US's most successful export and it is perhaps inevitable, or at least not unlikely, that we reap in real life the images of horror that we sow with such gorgeous abandon among spectators around the globe. How could the refulgent pageantry of destruction we deploy on screens worldwide fail to redound to our harm? We need to recall the root of *imitari* in imagery as we consider the consequences of projecting our culture and its commodified fanfare as a model for global development.

I am not describing a one-to-one ratio that we could perceive on a highway leading from cause to effect, but a triangular complex of inter-agency in which every object is the apex of a triangle whose base is occupied by desiring subjects–a configuration of whose byways of desire and idolatry the realist novel is the boldest explorer. Because our desire comes from unacknowledged and often non-deliberate sources, its representation, which we locate in an object, is liable to all manner of distortions and non-conscious manipulations. One man's icon, however "innocently" projected (they never truly are; our disaster films partake in an apocalyptic mythology of redemptive violence) is another man's idol, to be worshiped or abominated, and most often both, in cyclothymic oscillations whose key is to be found in the alternating bouts of self-exaltation and self-disgust with which Dostoevsky's narrator regales us. When he insists that we are only half-conscious versions of him, he underlines the ubiquitous role of mimetic modeling:

We have lost touch so much that occasionally we cannot help feeling a sort of disgust with "real life," and that is why we are so angry when people remind us of it. Why, we have gone

so far that we look upon “real life” almost as a sort of burden, and we are all agreed that “life” as we find it in books is much better. And why do we make such a fuss sometimes? Why do we make fools of ourselves. What do we want? We don’t know ourselves. . . . Why, we do not even know where we are to find real life, or what it is, or what it is called. Leave us alone without any books, and we shall at once get confused, lose ourselves in a maze, we shall not know what to cling to, what to hold on to, what to love and what to hate, what to respect and what to despise. (239-240)Substitute the film and TV of our media age for books whose modeling role they have expanded astronomically, and we find Black’s argument anticipated by Dostoevsky and implemented by the terrorists.

15

In the matter of presidential misconduct, pornography was not the investigators’ conscious strategy in their insistence on literal depictions of graphic detail. But what prevails is the “strategy” of desire: mimetic, contagious, mediated, and above all scandal-bound, just as scandal operates as a double bind, beckoning and repelling desire at once, alluring and offending our sensibilities. I would say the same of the disaster-film character of the terrorists’ attack. We are not talking here about a conscious decision or a rational choice, the opportunities for which are minute when arrayed against the oceanic swirl of initiatives that precede, environ, and structure one’s attention. Dostoevsky’s insistence on modeling is born out worldwide, where desire circulates amidst the galactic swarm of mediations that orchestrate an open society rooted in consumerism. Here rational choice itself is advertised as an object of desire rather than its agent; its exercise is everywhere marketed as a distinguishing feature of the commodity on display, a discriminating mark of its discerning purchaser.

This we may call Emma’s dilemma, Flaubert’s character being at once for Gans the prototype of the modern suburban consumer (see his monograph on *Madame Bovary*) and for Glucksmann the prototype of the nihilistic terrorist: “Beneath the beach, the pavement. Beneath the reign of sentiment, blood, solitude, and death. Behind Emma, a field of ruins” (104). As Rowan Williams has observed, our consumer culture “overplays the role of the will in the construction of persons” (102), resulting in “‘flattened landscapes’ in our thinking about choices these days, a picture conditioned by seeing selves as if they were timeless desiring and deciding mechanisms.” Williams would dissuade us from believing in such “an abstract self” (137). Dostoevsky’s narrator describes St. Petersburg as the “most abstract city in the world,” and I don’t think he was alluding only to its hasty and brutal construction by Peter the Great; I think he had in mind the anonymity of desires circulating in its streets and byways, unmoored from history and traditions. Williams continues, “An abstract self is one that has no life in the lives, speech and perceptions of concrete others.” This is what the socially interactive Part II of *Notes* brings to our understanding of the philosophically preoccupied narrator of Part I, who imagines himself addressing–and deriding–a vast audience. “A controlled self,” writes Williams, “making its dispositions in a vacuum of

supposed consumer freedom and determining the clothing in which it will appear, is a fiction, no less potent for being self-generated" (137-38). But it is far from being self-generated, its decentered broadcast being brought to us by others. This fiction is what Part II brings to our understanding of Part I, whose paean to desire in chapters 8 and 9 is later revealed as the pathetic remnant of the narrator's subjection to desires of others. Williams refers us to social science literature in his reflections here, but I find him writing a prescription for the novel when he states his aim to get us "to think through what it might be to be alive and concrete only 'in' an other, [since] just this thought is what our language and experience of being in time constantly invite us towards" (165). Philosophical critiques of a "punctual self" superabound these days, for example, Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*, but Williams is more clearly insistent on "finding the self in the other" (111), on perceiving "the self's existence in others, the other's investment in my reality" (103). This is the reality that our best novels specialize in revealing, and recent events suggest that we ignore their anthropological value at our peril, as they concern the intersubjective–or in Girard's term, interdividual–dialectics of all valuation.

This critique of rational choice decisionism may recall the old style Marxist critique of old style liberalism, representing bourgeois freedom as an ideological construct, in sum, a mystification. Regardless of the totalitarian abuses of this critique, it points correctly to delusions of individual autonomy, of a sovereign subjectivity that the realist novel of Flaubert and Dostoevsky among others also questions, and that Baudelaire excoriated as *auto-idolatrie*. The post-romantic poet was no friend to socialisms of any kind; his unmasking the delusions of self-possession as those of his *hypocrite lecteur* is nourished by a Scriptural tradition that describes the sinner, which for the poet meant everyone, as someone who "so flatters himself in his mind that he knows not his guilt. / In his mouth are mischief and deceit. / All wisdom is gone" (Ps 36).

16

Israel's reference to a radically Other divinity, with its concomitant ban on representation, on any earthly likeness, is meant to preserve its people from idolatry; it is a ban to which Islam is notoriously heir. Islamism stands out, by contrast, as a scandalized reaction to Western culture in its manifold idolatries. Raban helps us to see this, but we need Girard's notion of scandal to grasp the mimetic dimension of this reaction, its literally morbid fascination with its antagonist. Islamist terrorism is not medieval, as Raban rightly insists at the end of his essay; it's not even Islamic. It does not obey Koranic imperatives but the laws of desire, as explored by Dostoevsky, which, as we learn from Generative Anthropology, resentment inhabits more intimately than the worm does the apple.

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Notes

1. For the scriptural exegesis and theologics of this view, see James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes*. In *Science and Faith*, Gans acknowledges the anthropological content of Judeo-Christian revelation, while resisting its theological authentication. (back)

2. See Jonathan O'Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam* for correlations between Homer's portrayal and the modern experience of warfare. (back)

3. I am relying throughout on Joseph Frank's four-volume biography of the author, especially vols. 1 and 2.(back)

4. We already get a sense of this delusion in Proust's image of Mme de Verdurin's clicking her teeth reproachfully at alleged German atrocities in World War I, while emphatically enjoying her daily croissant and café au lait over the morning newspaper. (back)

5. See McCracken and Bellinger for the notion of scandal-offense in Scripture as explored by Kierkegaard.(back)

6. Anti-market humanism gets due attention in *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* 25, 47, 230, among others. (back)

7. Baudrillard specifically alludes to J.G. Ballard's *Crash*, the novel whose film version provides a still for the cover of Black's book. (back)