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Abstract

The main purpose of this article is to consider the role attributed to terrorism by the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, who conducted an extensive study on the nature of terrorism in the West over the course of three decades. His enquiry started with an analysis of the relationship between terrorism and the media, and led to the development of a number of concepts that will be considered in detail in this article. These concepts share the idea that in the West we are currently witnessing a return to what Baudrillard defined as the 'symbolic exchange', a concept which draws on the French tradition of sociological and anthropological research.

Keywords: Jean Baudrillard, terrorism, media.

1. Introduction

During his research career, Jean Baudrillard developed several topics which became something of an obsession with him, and which he addressed extensively at different times (Codeluppi, 2014). This is especially true of terrorism, a theme that features widely throughout the French sociologist's reflections and which he developed over a period spanning three decades or so. He thus had the opportunity to witness all the changes that the various evolutionary phases of terrorism underwent in the West, and from these he derived several key concepts which this article will examine.

This will enable us to analyze the manifold forms through which terrorism manifests itself in our time. As we shall see, Baudrillard was concerned with the relationship between terrorist incidents and the media, in

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the knowledge that terrorism cannot do without the media insofar as they provide the essential space for terrorism to achieve social visibility. Baudrillard, however, also broadened the scope of his investigations to include other key aspects of terrorism.

2. The return of the symbolic exchange

A concept running through the reflections on terrorism developed by Baudrillard over the decades is that of 'symbolic exchange'. The concept was explained by the French sociologist in his book *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993a), published in France in 1976, and it does not concern that important expressive dimension so prevalent in contemporary societies, strongly characterized as they are by the production of symbolic goods. In Baudrillard's words, 'Symbolic exchange is no longer the organising principle of modern society ... the symbolic no longer rules these social forms' (1993a: 13). It is worth noting that Baudrillard's concept of symbolic exchange was strongly influenced by the innovative ideas of Émile Durkheim (1999, 2005), one of the leading masters of French sociology, and by the anthropological research tradition inspired by Durkheim's work, starting from the ideas developed by Marcel Mauss (2002) and Georges Bataille (1988).

After studying the behaviour of aboriginal tribes in Australia and other primitive societies, Durkheim reached the conclusion that society is not something given but produces itself continuously. In other words, it produces symbolic forms that individuals use as a means to unify the social world in which they live, and to attribute a particular order to it. Thus, we do not have an objective reality or a system of objective knowledge. There are only particular ideas constantly springing from a given social fabric. Hence, human beings tend to confuse socially produced images of reality with reality itself.

In 1925, Durkheim's nephew, Marcel Mauss wrote the renowned essay *The Gift* (2002), highlighting how in primitive societies the exchange of goods constituted a symbolic exchange insofar as it symbolized the feelings and relationships that bind together human beings. To Mauss, this was particularly evident in the way gifts were used in a number of highly ritualized social situations. One such example is the *potlatch*, a banquet-feast organized by the Tlingit and Haida tribes from the American Northwest, in which each tribal chief would challenge the other guests by giving them gifts of food and precious objects in order to show that he was the richest and most powerful among them. Often these tribal chiefs would even go as far as to destroy or burn all the riches they possessed. Thus, through the *potlatch*, the donated or destroyed objects became symbols of social worth, prestige or power, and

they established or confirmed hierarchies within the social system. Through the exchange of gifts, tribes could conduct commercial exchanges or forge alliances, but they could even go as far as to mutually challenge each other.

Mauss defined exchanges of gifts as 'total social phenomena', in the sense that, while they can take the form of apparently object-free exchanges, they are in fact characterized by a strong sense of inter-individual obligation. The concept of *hau*, or the 'spirit of things', enabled Mauss to explain this phenomenon. Thus, looking at the Maori tribes, he found that there was a particular category of goods, the so-called tonga (sacred idols, mats, talismans, treasures and so on), which were passed down from generation to generation, and were so deeply connected to the tribe, the family and their owner as to be animated by their very *hau*, namely their spiritual power. The Maoris believed that objects given as gifts possessed part of the soul of the giver (the *hau*), and that it was consequently necessary to reciprocate the gifts so that this soul could be returned to its legitimate owner, just as it was necessary to accept them when they were received. Thus, according to Mauss, the exchange of gifts entails three fundamental obligations: giving, receiving and reciprocating. To stymie such obligations is considered a refusal to establish a social exchange – a dangerous gesture tantamount to a declaration of war.

To sum up, the key aspect of the analysis conducted by Mauss lies in the idea that the exchange of gifts leads to the development of the relationships which tie individuals together, and thereby to the creation of society. Hence, the social system, too, has a vital need to continue to rely on the power of the symbolic, namely on the secret soul that individuals and objects share.

In 1949, in the book *The Accursed Share* (1988), Georges Bataille rejected the social obligation component of the gift, a component which instead plays such a key role in Mauss' own analysis. Bataille believed that the gift does not necessarily have to be reciprocated and is instead a waste, a *dépense*. In his view, the focus should be on the excessive and gratuitous nature of the gift, which he regards as being closely linked to the intrinsic need to destroy and squander that generally characterizes production in the capitalist system.

As mentioned earlier, Baudrillard was influenced by Durkheim as well as by Mauss and Bataille. Yet it was especially the latter that sparked his idea of the devastating power of the symbolic. Thus in Baudrillard's view, rather than uniting and integrating society (as Durkheim and Mauss believed), the symbolic poses a challenge to society and seeks to seriously undermine it.

This explains why to Baudrillard the terrorists' gift of sacrificing their own lives is impossible to reciprocate with a counter-gift, and is significantly different from an economic form of exchange. Indeed, during the last phase of his investigations, Baudrillard took up the concept of symbolic exchange once again, and sought to stress its importance. This was a necessary step after

the attack on the Twin Towers in New York, which seemed to be reintroducing the symbolic exchange. As Fulvio Carmagnola (2009) has aptly put it, for Baudrillard, just as for Bataille, the culmination of exchange is the irreversibility of sacrificial death.

3. The masses and terrorism

The central thesis advanced by Baudrillard in his book *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities... Or the End of the Social* (1983) gained widespread renown. At the time of its publication, the French sociologist aroused considerable reaction with his idea that the social is disappearing, and that responsibility for this lies with the masses, which refuse to do what society tries to impose on them. He argued that the population is no longer a system of organized social groups but a single, anonymous and undifferentiated group whose power derives from its very destructuration. In other words, it is composed of individuals who refuse to do their duty as citizens and consumers, and thus do not enable society to function effectively. The masses therefore represent a sort of 'black hole' which has a tendency to refuse every representative institution, to neutralize everything it receives, to cancel every possible meaning and thus to go down the path of silence and inertia.

In this respect, according to Baudrillard, the masses have an affinity with terrorism, for just like the masses, terrorism lacks any form of social and class representativeness, and thus to our eyes it, too, looks meaningless. Baudrillard wrote that 'Present-day terrorism, initiated by the taking of hostages and the game of postponed death, no longer has any objectives (if it claims to have any, they are ridiculous or unachievable , and in any case, this is quite the most ineffective method of attaining them), nor any determinate enemy' (1983: 55). If it were any different, it would in fact be a phenomenon of banditry or a military commando action. Instead, the act of terrorism represents a defiance of sense, and this makes it akin to our perception of the natural catastrophe which is beyond the control of human beings and, as such, is meaningless. Or, it makes it similar to the blackout, which can strike a technological system, and is also entirely independent of human control.

Baudrillard was fully aware of the fact that there is a particularly close relationship between the masses, terrorism and the media. He argued, however, that the masses no longer develop resistance strategies to deal with media messages based on reinterpretation and reappropriation, as posited by previous sociological theories with respect to the reception of media messages. Indeed, in his view, the masses do not attempt to attribute their own meaning to the massages they receive but oppose them through their

indifference. They passively accept everything that is delivered to them, and let it slide into a space characterized by indeterminateness. Consequently, as Baudrillard pointed out, 'the masses are a stronger medium than all the media' (1983: 44).

The French sociologist subsequently came to see the media as playing an increasingly significant role in the way society functions. He placed growing emphasis on the idea that the world is becoming filled with representations and simulacra, and that this phenomenon is primarily attributable to the key role played by the media in this respect. Contemporary societies could thus be regarded as huge repositories of messages consisting of signs which all carry the same value, insofar as they have lost all connection with physical reality and therefore make it impossible for human beings to attribute intelligible meanings to them. The resulting effect is the volatilization of the real, an effect which Baudrillard ascribes above all to the modes of communication that characterize the way in which modern-day media work, and which lead to a progressive disappearance of reality. As reality becomes shrouded in a vast web of signs and symbols, these make it impossible for individuals to distinguish between the real and the reproduction of it, between reality and artifice, between true and false.

It should be noted that in the book *The System of Objects* (1996) written in the late Sixties, Baudrillard had already begun to argue that technological progress had a tendency to substitute the real and the natural world with simulacra as entirely man-made forms of representation. In his view, simulacra are copies of copies, endlessly referencing one another, and of which the originals have been lost. A few years earlier, in the early Sixties, the American scholar Daniel Boorstin (1962) had developed a similar vision, arguing that the media produce 'pseudo-events', i.e. events which despite being artificially produced by the media seem more natural and spontaneous than the real events, and that individuals consequently tend to perceive real events as second-rate experiences. Not surprisingly, Baudrillard tapped into several of Boorstin's ideas. He eventually developed the argument that while previously media images came out of the film or television screen and became embodied in reality, the very opposite is now taking place. Reality is now entering massively into the media screens and in so doing becomes disembodied, as the barriers between reality and screens progressively fall away.

Contemporary media thus no longer influence individuals by resorting to primitive tools, such as manipulation or censure, but through an excess of communication and transparency that make representation impossible – a phenomenon which Baudrillard called 'obscenity'. The meanings contained in the message become pointless and what counts is the way the medium works, leading to what Baudrillard termed the 'Ecstasy of communication', that is, a

particularly intense form of communication in which not only is reality substituted by representations created by the media system but where 'the message already no longer exists; it is the medium that imposes itself in its pure circulation' (1985: 131).

4. The hostage

In contemporary wars, the hostage has become a key figure. In his article titled 'The Gulf War will not take place', first published on 4 January 1991 in the French newspaper *Libération*, Baudrillard wrote that 'The hostage has taken the place of the warrior,' because 'The warriors bury themselves in the desert leaving only hostages to occupy the stage, including all of us, as information hostages on the world media stage. The hostage is the phantom actor, the extra who occupies the powerless stage of war' (Baudrillard, 1995: 24). And so we, as spectators, in turn act like hostages of the screen. But it is above all in terrorist actions that the capture of one or more hostages frequently acquires a crucial role. Hostages are innocent victims whose condition becomes radically different from that of their everyday existence – a suspended, frozen condition, half way between life and death. In the book *Fatal Strategies* (1990), Baudrillard conducted an extensive analysis of the figure of the hostage. He sees the hostage as an emblematic figure since he is, among other things, a metaphor of that ongoing emergency situation which characterizes the existence of individuals in hypermodern societies. Hence, in Baudrillard's view we can argue that 'We are all hostages now' (1990: 35). And that it is especially the masses which can be considered such, since, 'As with the hostage, there is nothing one can do with him, and one doesn't know how to get rid of him. This is the unforgettable revenge of the hostage, and the unforgettable revenge of the masses' (1990: 44).

According to Baudrillard, just as in the case of the media, in terrorism, too, there is a process of intensification, of redoubling, of taking to a higher level at work which produces a kind of ecstasy. Terrorism thus appears to our eyes as an ecstatic form of violence, and, in this respect, the hostage should likewise be considered obscene, in the sense that he lies outside the scene or stage, and it is impossible for him to represent something. This implies that the hostage cannot be exchanged, and it is impossible to get rid of him because he is annulled and rendered anonymous as a human being, but most of all because he has become dangerous. In a terrorist action, the terrorist soon realizes that he has torn the hostage from his social setting too violently to be able to return him to it. He cannot therefore reconvert him. The value of the hostage gradually melts away in the terrorist's hands. Similarly, the

social system becomes aware that it can actually do without the individual who has been taken from it, even if that individual had previously been extremely important. Thus, ultimately, the terrorist can only exchange his own life with that of the hostage. And this explains the complicity which sometimes brings the two individuals together – a complicity that springs from, among other things, the fact that the terrorist, too, finds himself living in an indefinite emergency situation.

In this context, Baudrillard cites the kidnapping of the leading Italian politician Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades in 1978. In his view, the terrorists won their challenge on that occasion because they were able to change the image of Moro. By taking him out of the game (with the complicity of the Christian Democratic Party, which did all it could to let him die), he argued, they successfully demonstrated that he represented nothing, and at the same time they made him into the empty equivalent of the state. Power, thus reduced to the status of his anonymous corpse, he concluded, no longer held any importance even as a dead body, and could end up in the boot of a car in a way that was shameful for all and, in this case, too, was obscene since it no longer held any meaning. As we have seen, in Baudrillard's view, the media should likewise be considered obscene since they represent the obscene stage of information. A particularly close relationship is therefore established between the hostage and the media founded not only on a shared obscenity but also on reciprocal blackmail. Terrorism is in fact a hostage of the media, just as the media should in turn be considered hostages of terrorism.

5. The mirror of terrorism

Terrorism can thus be considered by individuals as a 'lesser evil' compared to the authoritarianism of the state, but in one of the chapters of his book *The Transparency of Evil* (1993b), Baudrillard also considered a particular case of terrorism, namely state terrorism. His analysis focused on the tragedy that occurred at the Heysel stadium in Brussels on 29 May 1985, in which 39 people, including 32 Italians, died and over 600 were injured. Shortly before the football final of the European Champion's Cup between Liverpool and Juventus was due to kick off, English football hooligans charged at the Juventus fans. The Belgian police forces, not fully aware of the gravity of the situation, stopped the Italian fans from fleeing towards the pitch by beating them back with batons and forcing them to herd against a wall opposite the terraces occupied by the Liverpool fans, until the wall eventually collapsed due to the excessive pressure.

The exceptional nature of this event springs from the fact that it was viewed live by several million people around the world thanks to the cameras of the various television networks. According to Baudrillard, it would seem that it was television itself that generated the outbreak of the violence due to its very presence. It is thus a case of violence that appears to have come about directly through the screen.

Baudrillard also remarked that in this particular case some of the spectators (the English fans) turned themselves into actors, playing a starring role and replacing the official stars (the players) in front of the media's television cameras. Yet all they did was to carry out what they are constantly being asked to do in contemporary societies, namely to participate in events and experience things as intensely as possible.

The spectators in the stadium thus offered a spectacle – a grisly spectacle, to be sure, and, as such, socially condemned from a moral standpoint. It was also offered purely by mistake, as the accidental outcome of an error – a far cry from the kind of thing that happened in ancient Rome, when the masses were expressly treated to spectacles featuring gladiators and fierce animals. Yet the spectacle offered by the Heysel incident was actually broadcast live and to a worldwide audience. And it cleverly exploited people's great fascination with violence.

To return to the subject of state terrorism, the phenomenon applies not only to the decisive role played by the Belgian police in that particular case, but also to the policies adopted by quite a number of modern states which lead entire sections of the population to despair. Or, as in the case of English hooligans, they lead social groups to act of their own accord when abroad. According Baudrillard, the brutal social policy adopted by the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is actually reflected in the violent methods of the hooligans, who are socially rejected even in their own home country. The French sociologist wrote that hooligans 'carry participation to its tragic limit, while at the same time daring the State to respond with violence, to liquidate them. In this respect they are no different from terrorists' (1993b: 79). The process of civilization has forbidden states from going to war with and from destroying one other; consequently they are driven to channel violence towards their own people. We are thus witnessing the outcomes of a new social reality that Baudrillard has called 'transpolitical', namely a political form that characterizes societies such as those of the present day, which are in a state of progressive disintegration.

6. The spirit of terrorism

Over the centuries, Western societies have built their success by constantly offering people promises of wellbeing and happiness. This has led them to attempt to get rid of every form of negativity, particularly the most powerful negativity of all, namely death. Baudrillard described this phenomenon in detail in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993a), probably his most important work, in which he also argued, however, that death, and with it, negativity and evil, cannot be totally erased from society. It resurfaces periodically, flowing into the interstices and the free spaces that are left to it, because it is a dimension of human existence that cannot be eliminated – just like Evil, which is necessarily driven to counterbalance the presence of Good.

Western societies, however, as previously mentioned, constantly attempt to remove the presence of death and when death does occur, it is perceived as wholly unacceptable and incomprehensible. For this very reason, terrorists can use it as a means to launch a powerful symbolic challenge against the social system. Indeed, 'They have succeeded in turning their own death into an absolute weapon against a system that operates on the basis of the exclusion of death, a system whose ideal is the ideal of zero deaths ... The zero-death system' (2002: 16). This, according to Baudrillard, is the 'spirit terrorism'.

The death of terrorists constitutes an effective weapon since, to the extent that it is symbolic and sacrificial, it is more powerful than a physical weapon. Shifting death to the symbolic level entails moving it into a sphere ruled by challenge and counter-challenge. In other words, the only response to a death can be a death of the same, or of a higher, order. This is what Baudrillard meant when he wrote: 'It is the tactic of the terrorist model to bring about an excess of reality, and have the system collapse beneath that excess of reality' (2002: 18). The symbolic death is a death that is taken to extreme – a death even of just a few individuals but to which it is only possible to respond with an equally intense death. But for the Western system this inevitably entails a death that cannot be pursued: a death which involves its own disappearance and final collapse. In short, terrorism tries to get the system to commit suicide in response to the challenge it poses by its own suicide. This is why Baudrillard wrote that when the Twin Towers of New York collapsed as a result of the attack carried out by Al Qaeda, they seemed to be committing suicide in response to the suicide of the terrorists themselves and of their planes.

The 'Twin Towers' became a target of terrorism due to their deeply symbolic nature. They were a symbol of economic and financial capitalism (Wall Street), but also a symbol of the most advanced Western culture: the culture of the binary code for computers and of gene cloning. Baudrillard had

remarked on this particular aspect of the Twin Towers some 25 years before the attack that destroyed them in his book *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993a). He saw their twin and duplicate nature as illustrating the impossibility for the social system to represent and communicate. By mirroring one another, the towers merely represented each other, like pure simulacra without any reference to an original.

But, in this respect, the attack on the Twin Towers represented a qualitative shift since it clearly showed that it is less and less possible to make a precise distinction between the media and reality. The television images of the two Boeings penetrating into the towers, as many commentators have noted, had such intensity that they seemed to have come directly out of a Hollywood movie, and to employ the same sophisticated language of fiction. Featuring in media images over and over again, the two towers seemed to keep belonging to those images. Thus, the spectator couldn't work out whether he was looking at a real event or a representation of it.

Many thought this meant that the real was still alive, and that it undermined Baudrillard's thesis which viewed reality as simulation and simulacra. The French sociologist, however, responded to these challenges in his essay *The Spirit of Terrorism* (2002) with the following words:

> But does reality actually outstrip fiction? If it seems to do so, this is because it has absorbed fiction's energy, and has itself become fiction. We might almost say that reality is jealous of fiction ... It is a kind of duel between them, a contest to see which can be the most unimaginable ... The collapse of the World Trade Center towers is unimaginable, but that is not enough to make it a real event (2002: 28).

On closer scrutiny, the new phase in the intermingling of the media and reality had started before the attack on the Twin Towers, since by then there had long been a growing tendency in advanced Western societies for reality to be confused with its representations. Indeed Baudrillard had argued on a number of occasions that even war, despite its rough and physical nature, was not real. In the early Nineties, for instance, he wrote that the Gulf War, which had already been announced, would not take place because war had gradually been reduced to mere media representation. Later on he also stated the Iraq War launched in 2003 could be regarded as a kind of film since it had 'been so predicted, programmed, anticipated, prescribed and modelled that it ha[d] exhausted all its possibilities before even taking place' (2005: 130). The mediatization of all events, including war, no longer makes it necessary for these events to take place since they are already virtually realized inside our electronic screens.

Baudrillard claimed, moreover, that today the objectives of a terrorist strategy, whatever its nature, can easily be achieved partly due to the fact that: 'Terrorism, like viruses, is everywhere. There is a global perfusion of terrorism, which accompanies any system of domination as though it were its shadow, ready to activate itself anywhere, like a double agent' (2002: 10). This is what, in his work *The Transparency of Evil* (1993b), the French sociologist called 'the fractal (or viral, or radiant) stage of value' (1993b: 5). It is a value that spreads in all directions and knows no boundaries, reaching every possible space within society. Any possibility of exchange therefore disappears, and consequently it becomes difficult even to talk about the presence of some kind of value since it is no longer possible to assess or measure it. Previously, in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993a: 50), Baudrillard had talked about three stages of development of value, or of three 'orders of simulacra', succeeding one another in Western history since the Renaissance. First there was the natural law of value; then, during the industrial era, there was the market law of value; and finally, there was the establishment of the structural law of value – that of the value-sign, of the digital model and of the code. Now, we have entered the fourth stage, namely the fractal stage of value.

7. The pornography of war

In the attack on the Twin Towers in New York, the symbolic challenge came from outside the United States. According to Baudrillard, a qualitative shift occurred in 1994 with the dissemination of the photos taken by American soldiers of the tortures they inflicted on the prisoners held in the Abu Ghraib jail in Iraq. The symbolic challenge now became even more problematic for the system since it came from within the United States. And that way, it transformed the United States, too, into a terrorist state. Baudrillard wrote on this subject in an article titled *Pornographie de la guerre*, published in *Libération* on 19 May 2004, the Italian translation of which was published a few days later in the newspaper *La Repubblica* under the title *Il reality show dell'orrore* (which translates literally as 'the reality show of horror'). In the article, he argued that there is no longer any need for 'embedded' journalists attached to military units as there were during the Gulf War. Thanks to digital technologies, it is the soldiers themselves who now produce images, which in turn become part and parcel of the war.

Thus, in Baudrillard's view, war is pornographic because it cannot be merely itself and simply kill people, but it is forced to become intensely obscene and immoral. Just like society. In fact, as with all the images

circulating in the contemporary social sphere more generally, these photos of torture are no longer capable of representing reality. The fact that they are forced to show everything and have to make everything explicit and transparent means they have lost the capacity to communicate. Representation requires a gaze that looks upon a *mise en scène* from a distance; but now there is no longer a scene or stage. Hence the parallel with pornography, in which the body is fully exposed and totally revealed in its reality – unlike sexuality, which is based on allusive and figurative language instead (Baronciani, 2016). According to Baudrillard, obscenity might be defined as 'the becoming-real, the becoming-absolutely-real, of something which until then was treated metaphorically... things are brutally no longer *mise en scène*, but immediately proffered for view... When things become too real... we are in obscenity... we are no longer in a society that distances us from things... And this too-real world is obscene' (Baudrillard, 2003a: 27-28).

The ultimate consequence of this process is that, since there is no longer a representation of things, when faced with present-day images individuals find themselves in a situation of ongoing uncertainty. It is impossible for them to distinguish between the true and the false, and the only thing that matters is the impact achieved by the images. Despite this, human beings are unable to escape their predominance because it is primarily through images that individuals are able to experience the world around them. Even the most seemingly unbelievable reality, the kind of reality that pushes its way through by means of the shocking photos so extensively disseminated by the media, takes the form of images populated by reflections and phantoms – but precisely on this account they are totally real.

Indeed, as Arturo Mazzarella (2011) has argued, to us, even the most false and deceptive image still maintains a powerful link with reality, while conversely, the most realistic image are incapable of communicating without the use of artifice. This position is consistent with the reflections on the photographic language developed by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980). Like Barthes, Mazzarella believes that although the photographic image does not physically contain the objects it represents, it nevertheless has the power to attribute a substance and a weight to the reality it depicts which can save it from the transience that inevitably characterizes everything in society. Thus, photography is paradoxical since on the one hand it depicts something which has passed and therefore no longer exists in the present, yet, on the other hand, it is capable of resuscitating something which is no longer there. Hence, it generates what can be described as truly hallucinatory expressive forms, 'a reality one can no longer touch' (Barthes, 1980: 87). The advent of digital photography, with its ability to create things that do not exist, and have never existed, in physical reality, and the massive

spread of the photographic medium as a result of this very technology, have made people familiar with such phantoms, and yet they endure. Indeed, it is precisely thanks to the phantoms and mirages populating images that individuals are so strongly engaged by them.

The process of globalization has made the Western system extremely vulnerable since, paradoxically, the more it becomes concentrated into a single worldwide network, the more vulnerable it becomes in any one point. But its greatest vulnerability derives, *inter alia*, from the 'mimetic' strategy adopted by terrorists. The latter, in fact, employ the same tools as the dominant power, namely weapons, information technologies and media networks. But they also lead the same kinds of lives as ordinary people. They sleep in the same little suburban houses, have the same kinds of families and share the same daily routines. If they have suddenly transformed themselves into terrorists, then the same can happen to anyone. Everyone is an incognito criminal. Everyone is a terrorist. And it is no longer possible to detect a potential terrorist from among so many non-terrorists. Terrorism therefore holds within it not only terrorism itself but also non-terrorism.

8. Conclusions

According to Baudrillard, in the West today, the symbolic takes the extreme form of terrorism. Since the real has acquired the features of a simulacrum, only a symbolic event like the terrorist incident can be experienced as a real event. As we have seen, however, even a shocking and 'unimaginable' event such as the collapse of the Twin Towers cannot transform itself into something real because it remains in that ambiguous condition whereby reality and fiction are intermingled, and in which everything seems to be placed today. This contributes to making the symbolic even harder to grasp for us, as individuals who have grown up within a Western culture. Hence, as René Girard has argued, 'For us, it makes no sense to be ready to pay with one's life for the pleasure of seeing the other die' (2010: 213). Our conception of resentment does not stretch to the point of contemplating the possibility of suicide, differently from archaic religions which systematically employed ritual sacrifice in order to protect human societies from their own violence. However, through the advance of the civilization process, we have freed ourselves from the idea of sacrifice, and thus also of the possibility of fighting against the inherent violence of human beings that this idea was able to offer, namely of employing a tool that is capable of preventing humankind from continuing along the path towards self-destruction.

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