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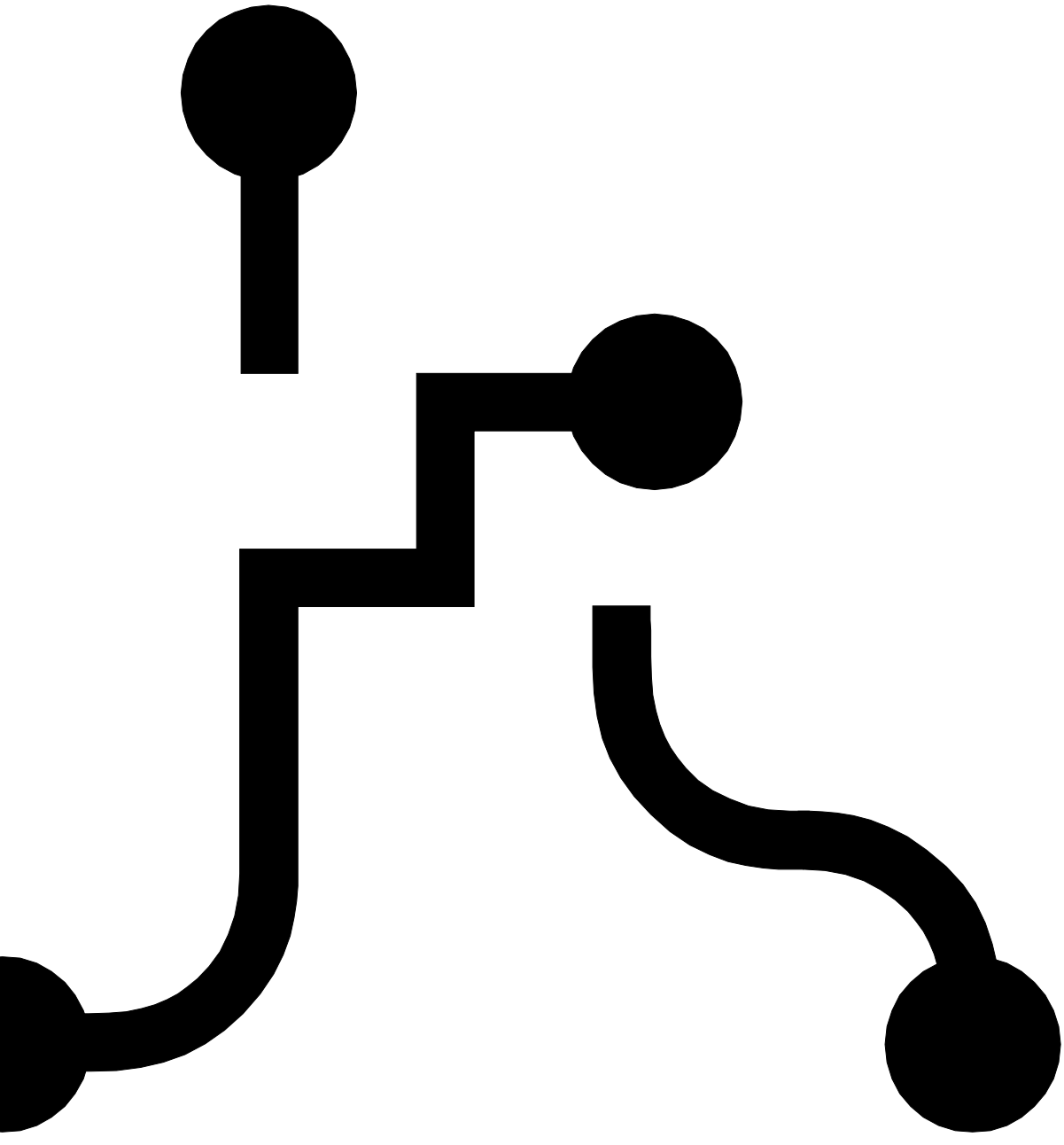

Consuming the scapegoat: Mass shootings as systemically necessary cultural trauma

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Abstract

Mass shootings constitute a recurrent and most violent phenomenon in the U.S. and elsewhere. This paper challenges the ready-made, solipsistically contained metanarratives on offer by mainstream media and formal institutions with regard to the psychological antecedents of the perpetrating social actors, while theorizing mass shootings as acts of violence that are systemically inscribed in the foundations of communities. These foundations abide by the logic of sacrifice which is propagated in instances of collective traumatism. It is argued that the cultural trauma that emanates from events of mass shootings, inasmuch as the commemorative events that are performed on regular occasions, constitute re-enactments of the death drive that sustains communities. The cultural analytic deploys against a CDA reading of longitudinal studies on mass shootings, coupled with psychoanalytic discourse analysis, prior to submitting mass shootings to a deconstructive line of reasoning as systemically necessary transcendental violence. Ultimately, it is shown that the intertextual institutional chain that informs the mediatized representation of this social phenomenon merely attains to obliterate and, hence, to propagate cultural traumatism and the sacrificial logic that underpins it. The terms micrometanarrative, parafunction and expropriating ipseity are introduced and operationalized in this context.

Keywords: mass shootings, transcendental violence, cultural trauma, death drive, sacrifice, communitarianism.

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0. Introduction: The representational violence of mass shootings

Mass shootings constitute a recurrent social phenomenon with a long trail of incidents on a global scale, while the majority have been perpetrated on U.S. soil. Mass shootings have been theorized and empirically scrutinized from a variegated disciplinary roster, as well as institutional agencies. This paper focuses on the specific strand of so-called rampage shootings that have been defined as symbolic attacks on communities, with a considerable portion focusing on secondary schools. "These are expressive, non-targeted attacks on a school institution. An institutional attack takes place on a public stage before an audience, is committed by a member of former member of the institution, and involves multiple victims, some chosen for their symbolic significance or at random. This final condition signifies that it is the organization, not the individuals, who are important" (Muschert 2007: 63). The random targets of mass shooters as general Other is a ubiquitous characteristic of mass shootings whence stems the observation that the shooter's enemy is symbolic in nature (Meek 2016). What matters in these instances is not exacting revenge on particular people, but to make a statement through the use of violence (Rocque 2012). Violence, in this respect, constitutes a systemic necessity (Bernasconi 2014) for upholding the traumatic scaffolding of communities (Erikson 1995), as will be argued in this paper.

The antecedents and outcomes of mass shootings have been approached from various psychological and sociocultural perspectives (cf. Leary et al. 2003; Newman 2004; Fox and Levin 2017). In a cross-case analysis of 15 school shootings, it was found that acute or chronic rejection—in the form of ostracism, bullying, and/or romantic rejection—was present in all but two of the incidents, while experimental research has shown that real or imagined rejection increases aggression towards both rejectors and other people (Leary et al. 2003). Although the myth of mental illness is regularly invoked in mainstream media reports of mass shootings (Wilson, Ballman, and Buczek. 2014; Van Brunt and Pescara-Kovach 2018), mental illness is rarely recognized prior to the shootings, while many of the perpetrators are diagnosed after the fact (Rocque 2012). Likewise, inconclusive evidence and profiling information circulate between institutional agencies (e.g. FBI) and the press (Follman 2018; Montero 2018), oscillating between lay descriptors (e.g. loner) and pseudo-institutional stigmatizing adjectives (an array of 'psychiatric illnesses'). Although the press tends to rely quite heavily on official police reports for construing the representational armory about mass shootings, albeit dramaturgically embellished, the latter appear to be conflicting in many respects with the longitudinal analyses that have been carried out by other agencies, such as the FBI. For example, although the police tends to employ attributional tactics, such as the 'loner archetype', such ready-made attributions have been invalidated by cross-case analyses by the FBI (Follman 2018). Furthermore, although mainstream media, but also political figures, regularly lay claim to the negative influence that is exerted by violent films and video-games on potential shooters, there is scant evidence (Ferguson 2008) with regard to such popular cultural forms' causal status with regard to mass shootings.

The principal objective of the offered cultural analytic is to theorize the meaning of violence in light of mass shootings by approaching it as an intertextual construal (Fairclough 1995), spanning multiple agents of cultural production and

consumption, by drawing on longitudinal analyses of mass shooting incidents (Bonilla 2000; Newman 2004; Muschert 2007; Fox and Levin 2017), rather than on a few select cases. As will be shown, the meaning of violence shifts once reframed in different discursive formations, marked by different chainings between causes, effects and cultural conditionals. Violence rests with the act of shooting *per se*, as physical violence, inasmuch as with the violently representational overcoding of the physical event by an intertextual institutional chain (what will be defined as 'micrometanarrative'), but also with the transcendental violence (Derrida 2001; Noys 2013; Evink 2014; Bjørnholt Michaelsen 2015) of the sacrificial logic (Girard 1989) that underpins a communitarian order. All of these facets will be considered in turn, by drawing on mass shootings as mediatized phenomenon that is critically addressed from a CDA point of view, and progressively deconstructed from a cultural analytic angle.

This paper pursues a cultural reading of mass shooting by seeking to interpret it through the lenses of cultural traumatism. By drawing on media CDA (Fairclough 1995), psychoanalytic CDA (Parker 2002, 2014, 2015; Parker 2013), and deconstructive cultural criticism (Caruth 1995; Derrida 2001), it argues that mass shootings constitute a necessary collective trauma that reflects the sacrificial logic (Girard 1989) that buttresses communities.

1. Cultural trauma: From individual suffering to fundamental cultural conditional for communities' sustainability

The concept of traumatic neurosis that was originally popularized by Freud in his seminal treatise *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) marked a critical turning point in psychoanalytic theorizing. It laid the foundations for one of the most heavily researched topics in contemporary psychologically oriented research, namely PTSD, while it has been instrumental in the consolidation of cultural trauma theories which constitute common conceptual currency in cultural studies and cultural sociology, among other disciplines.

At the heart of Freud's original theory of traumatic neurosis lies repetition compulsion. As a result, the subject places himself in distressing situations that repeat a prior experience, without the latter being necessarily recalled. The repressed object or event that is repeated in situations involving traumatism resurfaces obliquely in the form of jokes, parapraxes, displaced and distorted. Freud went even further as to question the necessity of a primal scene (whether actually lived or imagined) as the object of a traumatically lived repetition. As remarked by Laplanche (1992), trauma may as well be an instance of afterwardness or, in Zizek's (1992) terms, a case of retroactive causality.

Freud highlighted the role performed by the death drive that works unconsciously in traumatic neurosis, and in dissonance to the pleasure principle, towards reinstating subjects to a state of inertia. The construct was operationalized in order to offer a putative account of the destructive impulses that mitigate the pleasure principle and that may not be attributed to the reality principle. Lacan (1998; also see Dor and Gurewich 2010; Laplanche and Pontalis 1988) later opened up new interpretive horizons by contending that traumatism is a necessary condition for entering the symbolic order whereby the subject is split.

On an individual level, traumatic re-enactments surface as moments of disintegration, discontinuity, as an uncontrollable space that unfolds and breaks the subject (Ratti and Estevao 2016). While recognizing the paramount influence of affect in the return of the repressed, Neal (1998) contends that traumatic events resurface in feelings of anxiety and despair. Subsequently, selected facets of psychoanalytic approaches to traumatism have informed sociological and culturological readings of sociocultural phenomena.

On a collective level, according to Alexander (2012), cultural trauma occurs when members feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. It effects a "blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (Erikson 1995: 187). Collectively lived trauma presents a paradoxical co-existence of two antagonistic forces, according to Smelser (2004), between repression and obliteration, and compulsive reliving.

The qualifying difference between individual and cultural or collective trauma (Erikson 1995; Matei 2013), as remarked by Eyerman (2019), in line with Neal (1998) and Alexander (2012), is tantamount to the gap between event and representation. "It is within this gap that the process of cultural trauma can be found, typically expressed as an agonistic struggle over the meaning of an event, in which key social actors performatively seek to convey their intended meanings" (Eyerman 2019: 196). However, a fundamental paradox emerges once attempting to extrapolate a cultural trauma from an individual one. Pickering & Keightley (2009) dwelt extensively on this paradoxical relationship, so prior to considering how cultural trauma may aid in apprehending the mass shooting phenomenon, it is prudent to consider issues pertaining to leaping from individual to collective traumatism.

A fundamental objection was launched against Neal's (1998) contention that the source or event of collective traumatism has to be representable, communicable, and in some way knowable. As above shown with regard to the original Freudian conceptualization, trauma usually eschews recollection and concrete memory representations, due to the intensity whereby it was originally lived. Therefore, Pickering and Keightley (2009) contend that Neal's usage contravenes the very criteria by which trauma is defined. They seek to lend further credence to this claim by recourse to Caruth's deconstructive approach to traumatism, according to whom "any efforts to verbalize and integrate traumatic experiences will inevitably destroy the valuable precision of trauma" (Jansteiner and Weilnböck 2008: 233). Caruth not only adopts a diametrically opposed thesis on cultural trauma to Neal, but actually extols the non-representability of traumatism as a fundamental absent conditional for the sustenance of communities.

In the following, I seek to reconcile Neal's contention that collective trauma may be contained representationally with Caruth's arguing for the fundamental impossibility of doing so, by recourse to the neologism expropriating ipseity, that is a self-sameness that does not belong to the order of the Same (ipsus), but to the Other as non-originary locus. The non-originary character of the Other is evinced in its manifestation as afterwardness (cf. Laplanche *supra*), therefore attesting to its future anteriority. Since trauma is always already a name for what is yet to come as evinced

in repetition, its resemantization (either as individual or collective trauma) is a condition for its affirmation. Therefore, at its most orginary, it is always other than it is or different from what it has been in anticipation of what is to come as repetition that differs in itself from itself. Renegotiating representationally the meaning of what is yet to come is an essential condition for affirming the expropriating ipseity of the afterwardness of trauma as non past origin. This affords to bridge the seemingly paradoxical relationship between the obliteration of trauma as originary event in its individual theorization and the affirmation of an event as such in the context of collective trauma. The affirmation of an event as ipsus in the case of collective trauma constitutes a sublimated repetition of what is always yet to come. If this is so, that is if trauma is not defined by a past event, but by an event that is always yet to come in repetition, then it is not dependent on memory, but on performativity as acting out or as evocation for presencing. The impossibility of this presencing is attested by the centrality of repetition. The event to come is not an anticipated presence, but a constant retracing as re-petition. In a collective setting, such repetitions consist of the recurrence of an intertextually moulded canonical narrative schema that portrays the participants, the events and the respective processes in uniform social representations. These repetitions point to the signified of a chain of traumatic events as always already sliding beneath the events it signifies. This absent signified is responsible for setting in motion repetition as retracing. “This repetition operates retroactively, fixing what was once an arbitrary signification after-the-fact as an expression of underlying historical necessity” (Hallsby 2019: 12).

The participants as members of a traumatized social collective do not commemorate past events as such, but misrecognize each other in the mirror of social representations that is edified in the mediatized accounts of cultural traumatism. “But if that vantage point proves to be illusory, misrecognition contaminates closure. In that case, distortion is constitutive of social objectivity” (Laclau 2014: 12). Although conditioning the creation of a symbolic community, trauma is always in excess of symbolism which is why some scholars (e.g. Goarzin 2011) have described the event of traumatism as an encounter with the Lacanian Real. The public, communal space of the medium, then, constrains representationally the interaction, the semiotic elements and the traumatic events’ grammar. This cultural frontier is synonymous with the object of primal repression which becomes appropriated as an audience’s structural unconscious (Hewitson 2019). Trauma as a community’s structural unconscious is at the same tine disrupting and solidifying (Alexander 2012). The discursive construction of cultural trauma as socially mediated attribution (Alexander 2012) is, subsequently, not only a narrative encapsulation of an event’s effects, but also of the event as source. As pointed out by Eyerman (2012, 2019: 93), cultural trauma is “a discursive (interpretive) process whereby an initial shock gives rise to an affect that is narratively manipulated.” Accounting for how this discourse is construed is crucial in understanding how trauma is consumed in its collective dimension, as will be endeavored in the ensuing sections by drawing on CDA.

2. Approaching mass shootings from a CDA angle

In this paper, I am adopting a CDA perspective, mainly informed by Fairclough's (1995) media discourse analytic framework and methods of analysis, complemented by Parker's psychoanalytic DA insights, given that the notion of trauma stems from psychoanalysis, prior to its opening up to a broader cultural territory by cultural analysts and cultural sociologists. According to Fairclough (1995), the critical discourse analysis of a communicative event amounts to the analysis of relationships between three dimensions or facets of that event […] *text, discourse practice,* and *sociocultural practice.* The critical mission of CDA consists in unearthing cultural conditions that pass under the radar of social life as ordinarily lived, by attending to connections between language use and the exercise of power. In this way, the seeming transparency of cultural practices (or, *pace* Heidegger, the self-givenness of what is in its mode of giveness) is transformed into a camera obscura of mediatized ideology where ideology radiates through the discursive chain of institutional glosses and cover-ups.

This conceptual framework of inter-locking dimensions takes into account any textual form, regardless of modality. Discourse practices designate the processes of textual production and consumption, while sociocultural practices refer to the macro-cultural contextualization of specific communicative events. Communicative events are analyzed with regard to participants and processes, as well as the institutional discourses whereby they become discursively articulated, resemanticized, and recontextualized. Textual analysis stretches over multiple interdisciplinary readings of texts, involving not only sentential grammar and semiotic resources, but also discursive strategies (e.g. nominalization, passivization), pragmatics, conversation analysis and cultural analysis. Fairclough (1995) endorses the three sociosemiotic metafunctions in his analyses, namely the ideational, interpersonal and textual ones, each corresponding in turn to the social representations that are construed through media discourse, the relations among participants, as well as the linguistic resources that are mobilized. A CDA account consists in intertextual chainings featuring discrete types of participants, processes and social events, among both lay and institutional agents.

In this metafunctional framework I am adding the newly coined term parafunction, as a fourth analytical category. Parafunction sets out to unearth the cultural conditionals that operate at the fringes of a text in order to seamlessly inscribe the contextual aspect of discursive formation within the same discourse analytic fabric. In contradistinction, and in complementarity to the metafunctional logic of the three established categories, parafunction does not seek to account for how a text performs a function across instances, but, from a deconstructive point of view, of an even more foundational facet of textuality that conditions the functional logic of manifest discourse as regards the cultural logic of discursive formations. Whereas the ideational metafunction singles out types of representation that emerge in light of specific semiotic resources as part and parcel of the textual metafunction, the parafunction accounts for the hidden cultural premises that sustain manifest webs of meanings as co-articulations between these two metafunctional levels.

The paratext, according to Genette (2001), designates the fringe elements of texts that in reality control the text's entire reading. The paratext points obliquely to the context outside the text that conditions its deployment as an absent source (Rolls

and Vuaille-Barcan 2011). The cultural context that conditions the emergence of the mass shooting phenomenon, thus, and which is unearthed through the parafunctional reading, constitutes a paradoxical entity, or an inherent self-alterity (Rolls and Vuaille-Barcan 2011) that opens up the text precisely at the point of its closure.

Discourse, according to Fairclough (1995), performs constructively social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge. It does not represent, but construes representations by re-ordering phenomena (e.g. through the selection and differential chaining of events). The co-articulation of these representations in recurrently recognizable patterns constitutes what I call here micrometanarratives. The notion of parafunction is particularly geared towards identifying aspects of canonical micrometanarratives that recur uniformly beneath the identified representations and the semiotic resources that are selected for activating them in instances of mass shooting.

The concept of metanarrative was coined by Lyotard (1984) to designate self-enclosed conceptual systems, such as Kant's and Hegel's philosophical systems, as totalizing narratives that seek to explain and ground fundamental principles of Western metaphysics, as well as religious narratives that purport to be offering accounts or myths of origin and foundational premises for edifying morals (cf. Rossolatos 2018: 219-262). In contradistinction to the traditional metanarratives, as defined by Lyotard, micrometanarratives outline ready-made discursive formations that suppress and level out the minute details of sociocultural phenomena (mass shootings in our case) with a view to imposing a uniform truth about selected facts. Micrometanarratives aim at foreclosing scrutiny into the chain of events that culminate into the observable act of shooting by imposing a pre-conceived causal chain and to overshadow sub-alternative accounts by sublimating an intertextual institutional framework as purveyor of truth. The deconstruction of the canonical status of such micrometanarratives, from a media CDA point of view, and in line with Fairclough's overarching framework, rests with attending to unaccounted processes (with regard to events and their transformation into narrative accounts, in other words to the discursivization of a discursive order), social actors (with regards to lay, institutional participants, and mediators of cultural production) and sociocultural context (with regard to embedded belief systems and discursive practices that allow for the articulation of specific accounts as seemingly more ordered and convincingly so than others). Ultimately, as will be shown, the parafunctional dimension of this micrometanarrative allows for identifying the cultural conditionals that lead to the recurrence of the mass shooting phenomenon with cultural traumatism and its sacrificial logic.

In turn, and upon returning full-circle from the cultural conditional to the conditioned events, we are capable of enriching, recontextualizing and reordering the meaning of mass shooting in terms of the ideational metafunction. In essence, what this discourse analytic shift as a strategic move in the way whereby the scrutinized phenomenon is shaped affords, is to compare and contrast a dominant institutional discourse with a more primordial discursive order of which it is the symptom, rather than the exegesis. At the same time, highlighting the parafunctional dimension of the scrutinized phenomenon allows for a deeper synthesis of both dominant and sub-alternative discourses as interchangeable valorizations of types of participants in the inherent dialectic of the recurrent micrometanarrative, i.e. between heroes and

villains, while viewing them as complicit figures in the metanarrative's depth grammar. This grammar shapes up the acrhi-text (Derrida 2001) that sustains recurrently its instantiations, and that feeds parasitically on events with a view to transforming them into repetitions of the machinery of the Same. This reorientation is effected here by reviewing the phenomenon from a cultural traumatic lens.

The critical approach towards the micrometanarrative of mass shootings that is adopted here is further accentuated by recourse to Parker's (2002, 2014, 2015) psychoanalytic discourse analysis, primarily on three grounds: First, whereas psychiatry and traditional psychology treat the mind and behavior as being tantamount to facts, psychoanalytic CDA views them as a form of institutional discourse that reproduces certain relations of power (even more so, as will be shown in the ensuing section, where this discourse is part of an intertextual chain that is co-articulated with the political, police and media discourses). Second, psychoanalytic CDA recognizes the linguistic constructivist processes that spawn 'mental illnesses', rather than endorsing an innatist and biologically deterministic psychologism that seeks to localize and essentialize (reify) them in the 'brain'. Third, it attends to the interplay between lay and epistemic discourses in the pathologization of social phenomena. In this context, the former operates as the mythic reproduction of the latter and ultimate 'court of appeal'.

3. Interpreting mass shootings: Opening up metafunctions to parafunctionality

3.1 Mass shootings from an ideational metafunction point of view

The dominant representations that are shaped for discrete types of participants in light of the factual antecedents of mass shootings before and after performing the parafunctional reading are laid out in Table 1.

Table 1. Dominant representations for different types of participants in the discursive formation of mass shootings before and after performing the parafunctional reading.

	Before	**After**
The mainstream media as institutional agent	Disseminators of a ready-made discourse as intertextual chaining (Fairclough 1995) with the 'official' narrative issued by the police	Purveyors of public sentiment who gloss over the necessity of cultural traumatism (Alexander 2012)
The police as institutional agent	The heroes who arrive on the scene in order to take down the mass shooter Its role as 'policing representations', i.e. the authoritative source that issues the dominant	Gatekeepers of a canonical micrometanarrative: Violently interrupting access to cultural traumatism by subsuming the shootings' irreducible factual differences and

	discourse about the shooting event, while ensuring that it is adequately reproduced by the intertextually complicit mainstream media	their role as cultural conditional under a recurring canonical micrometanarrative. "These are part of a more complex series of transformations over time which background police responsibility, and which are ideological as well as linguistic processes: they assimilate problematic events to preconstructed ideological frames for representing political relations" (Fairclough 1995: 27).
Psychiatrists as institutional agents	Responsible for reversing the causal chain: Containing the causal chain of events leading up to a mass shooting in the solipsistic enclave of the physical perpetrator by ascribing ready-made 'mental illnesses', while acting in intertextual complicity with the police narrative and its circulation through mainstream media	Apologetics for communitarian violence: Violently undercutting the interpretive process that seeks to identify extra-individual causal links and barring access to cultural traumatism as necessary cultural conditional. Post-hoc attribution of mental illness to shooters (Newman 2004)
Politicians as institutional agents	Guarantors and sentinels of the integrity of local communities	Apologetics for communitarian violence
The perpetrator of the shooting	Villain	Hero
The recipients of the shooting	Victims	Villains
Community at large	Consumers of the produced spectacle	Consumed by cultural trauma

3.2 Mass shootings from an interpersonal metafunction point of view

The mediatized representation of the relations between participants concerns first and foremost a distribution of social roles between knowing (those 'in the know') and those who await to be informed. These types correspond to the formal intertextual institutional discourse and to lay accounts respectively. Each group is vested with an a priori differential sociocultural and epistemic capital in terms of who has the right to make claims about the mass shooting phenomenon. The parafunctional opening up allows for accessing the social ontological necessity of cultural traumatism beneath the contingent facts of each case, as repetition compulsion and death drive.

The distribution of relations between perpetrator and victim in the recurrent mediatized encapsulations of mass shootings is localized in the distinction between the social actor who performs the shooting versus the recipients of the physical act. The parafunctional redistribution of roles allows for readdressing the recipient of the event of shooting from the physical victims towards the community at large, and, hence, to apprehend the mode of construal of the symbolic relationship between shooter and community. The community bonds are strengthened in the work of mourning that ensues upon the physical act of shooting.

3.3 Mass shootings from a texual metafunction point of view

The very subsumption of the phenomenon under the mass noun 'mass shooting' enables its recurrence under a canonical narrative schema as a nominalization (Fairclough 1995) that imposes a hegemonic representation in terms of end-states, rather than processes. This lexical instantiation of irreducibly different cases forces them to succumb to the very violent representational armory that constitutes the nominalistic heritage and lineage of a discursively complicit institutional chain, while allowing for the predictive legitimacy of this discursive order.

The parafunctional opening up of mass shootings allows for a discursive reframing form the culmination in a chain of social events to a factual conditional for the enactment of the communally foundational event of cultural traumatism.

Mainstream media, in discursive complicity with political speeches, employ regularly ontological (deep) metaphors, such as "tearing the social fabric of our communities" (NBC Chicago 2016). The parafunctional recontextualization of this deep metaphor allows for glimpsing the semantic core of trauma as chasm, as fissure and absent conditional for the sustenance of communities.

The mediatized discourses about mass shootings employ pejorative adjectives that describe end-states, while effacing the process whereby these end-states came to pass, such as 'loner'. In this instance, the social dynamics that are conducive to alienation and estrangement, including the most often cited in mass shooting incidents acts of bullying, i.e. assault and battery that violently disrupt the homeostasis of the ego, are silenced and suppressed. The parafunctional resemantization of 'loner' allows for reversing the shooter's evaluation (Fairclough 1995) from villain who disrupts the integrity of a community, according to the canonical micrometannarrative, to a heroic figure who rises above one's homeostatic sustenance in order to perform ec-statically (i.e. outside of oneself) the communitarian demand for sacrifice.

4. The double movement of cultural traumatism as the sacrificial logic buttressing mass shootings

Pursuant to the opening up of the discursively construed meaning of mass shootings from a parafunctional point of view, let us now attempt a synthesis with the preceding discussion about the facets of cultural traumatism. The main objectives driving the discussion that deploys in this section consist in: demonstrating that mass shootings constitute a case of cultural traumatism par excellence; explaining why the mediatized discursive construal of mass shootings constitutes a micrometanarrative that merely glosses over their necessary recurrence, in social ontological terms, that is incumbent on the logic of sacrifice.

Contrary to political proclamations about 'blows in the fabric of society', the cultural trauma approach suggests that mass shootings constitute the ultimate glue of society as absent conditional. In this context, the physical event of shooting constitutes the culmination of a chain reaction of othering as 'the event' on which collective memory latches in order to appropriate an otherwise inassimilable (Crownshaw 2013) alterity that operates silently as its absent conditional. The transcendental, i.e. non-individual nature of this conditional, transforms the inassimilable alterity of the violent event into transcendental violence (Derrida 2001), that is into an act that is not causally dependent on the individual perpetrator, but uses the perpetrator as vessel for presencing an impossible absence. In essence, not only mass shootings do not constitute a blow to the fabric of a presumably harmoniously operating, functionalist and organically inter-operative societal whole, but demonstrate the very archaic sacrificial logic that buttresses this fabric.

Girard's (1989) christological paradigm is of paramount importance in demonstrating the modus operandi of this logic. According to the christological paradigm, the sacrifice of the innocent not only does not contravene foundational cultural aspects of societal organization, but constitutes a foundational act for upholding a societal fabric. In this respect, sacrifice restores communitarian order by repeating the scapegoating mechanism (i.e. the shooter's othering), that is by constantly re-inventing effigies of the community's Other. This logic mandates social exclusion and bullying as violent acts for effecting a phantasmatic balance, informed by a lay and tribal mentality, rather than by modern ways of civil societal organization. According to Girard (1989), this logic is ubiquitous in societies that endorse both pagan and christian belief systems, while constituting the apex of cultural organization.

Although bullying and outright social exclusion were reported in all incidents of school mass shootings, as regards the physical perpetrators' conditioning social milieu, it merits questioning whether these remote, yet adversely impactful causes could have been minimized, alleviated or even quenched if only the concerned institutions had taken the requisite counter-measures. Yet, no specific information to this end is usually offered in mainstream media reporting of mass shooting incidents, or how they were tackled by institutional authorities in the long-term. The mediatized account of mass shootings does not seek to chronicle the social dynamics whereby individuals are transformed into mass shooters, save for assigning an etiquette that consists of personality traits, rather than of situated interactions in social force fields with multiple stakeholders, empirical conditionals, and micro-events. The same holds for the actions of the police which consist in wiping out the vessel as soon as its pre-

determined task has been completed, thus contributing to the intertextual micrometanarrative that is premised on the pathologization of the act, rather than attempting to resolve the social dynamics that became crystallized as ulterior motive. The police, thus, becomes an accomplice in the stage-setting or scaffolding of the spectacle of collective traumatization as the after-effect of the event of appropriation of the mass shooting event. The 'event' that triggers collective traumatism, therefore, is not the violent event of shooting per se, but the event of appropriation of the act of shooting by a collective representational mechanism that is evinced as intertextual, interinstitutional chain. The sacrificial logic that mandates this appropriation recedes in the act of appropriation (becomes backgrounded, *pace* Fairclough 1995) which is converted into an instance of individual culpability, irrevocably dislodged from the cultural rationale that is responsible for its propagation.

The ontological condition of sacrifice as the silent underpinning of the community fabric is exchanged in this act of appropriation for an ontically situated motive that is located in the psychic apparatus of the perpetrator, rather than the institutional apparatus of the community. This is the double logic of what may be called sacrificial cultural trauma: Producing an instantiation of the scapegoat archetype through conditioning mechanisms in order to expel the scapegoat and subsequently become collectively traumatized by dint of his acts. In other words, othering is coupled with a process of dedoubling: On the one hand, an individual is accorded the status of inassimilable alterity, most often randomly so through acts of bullying and social exclusion, although it is well known to those who enact this sacrificial logic that it is highly likely that such tactics will backfire (high risk factors, according to FBI's typology). On the other hand, the community laments the event of this backfiring, which it conditioned in the first place, by endorsing it as cultural trauma. It becomes apparent, then, as the outcome of this double logic, that the traumatized community is always already operating under a will-to-be-traumatized. Collective trauma is not caused, therefore, by the event of the shooting, but by the event of appropriation of the shooting by its ownmost sacrificial cultural logic. The shooter as inassimilable alterity merely affords to affirm the identity of the traumatized community *ab inverso,* whose unity is restored in the trauma as representational fissure in a phantasmatic fabric. In the act of appropriation of the event of shooting, the community is formed as an imaginary collective, and it is in such a metaphorical mode that it maintains its identity.

In light of the above, the mass shooter does not effect a blow to the fabric of a community, but performs a foundational act that is conducive to the propagation of its sustenance. This explains, at least from the angle of the proposed cultural traumatism perspective, why the act of mass shooting is a symbolic one (cf. *supra*). Its aim is not necessarily the specific social actors who may have caused such an intolerable disgruntlement to the perpetrating subjects, but the notion of community that is perceived as vile as to be meriting annihilation. And this is pretty much self-evident, given that the sacrificial logic that buttresses it is by default inhuman (Lyotard 1992). Becoming the recipient of the effects of such a dehumanizing cultural conditional. the vessel awaiting to inscribe it in the societal fabric (thus becoming semanticized as its necessary Other), imbued as it is with the community's will-for-traumatization (an antonomasia for the death drive), can only perform a symbolic act. The subject of enunciation, in this instance, that issues the demand for cultural

trauma is the collective subject of the community that conditions the perpetrating subject into performing its inner logic, its self-traumatizing *sine qua non*.

This resonates the sacrificial logic, as outlined by Girard (1989) who described most lucidly what happens to the sacrificial (perpetrating) subject once having been put down (by the police that effects temporary closure to the recurrent narrative micro-inscriptions). For as long as the sacrificial subject lives, it becomes the recipient of collective repulsion. Its death is coupled with the work of mourning and with feelings of guilt. Guilt is an alibi for the sacrificial structural unconscious that sustains the community. It does not belong to anyone in particular. It is collective guilt that emerges in the face of the violent appropriation of the sacrificial subject and its dehumanization. This 'we' is precisely the faceless community that demands a sacrificial subject for sustaining its imaginary unity. "Wherever a cultural order is based on the sacrifice of single victims by the collective, we are facing a sacrificial culture stemming from the scapegoat mechanism" (Palaver 2014: 20). At the same time, the sacrifical logic that buttresses the social points to a deathbound cultural demand placed on pleasure-seeking subjects. Most remarkably, the mass shooting that took place during the Eagles of Death Metal live show (Consequence of Sound 2015) is a perfect instantiation of the overdetermination of the pleasure principle by the death drive, insofar as the entertainment value that stemmed from participating in the live show was violently interrupted by a most improbable asymmetric threat. The sacrifice of the participants was subsequently transformed into a mediatized public mourning that repeated the event as cultural trauma. And, quite ironically, the very theological discourse that is responsible for the perpetuation of the sacrificial cultural logic, is regularly evoked in presidential political speeches that are delivered pursuant to mass shooting events' initial publication ("our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families…", "I would just hope that everybody across the country is keeping the families and the community of Fort Hood in our thoughts and in our prayers…" (Korte 2018). In this manner, the call for closure is effected in the work of mourning which retains the absence of the traumatic event in a supplicating invocation. And quite oxymoronically, this invocation is couched in a theological discourse that is responsible for the legitimation of the sacrificial logic that buttresses mass shootings. This oxymoron is evinced as a linguistic foregrounding of an absent textual presupposition (Fairclough 1995), i.e. an emphasis on prayer, as a positive act, that is part of a discursive order that legitimates sacrifice (as an abhorrent act).

5. Conclusions

This paper sought to disentangle the cultural logic behind one of the most violent spectacles in contemporary societies, a spectacle that perpetuates archaic forms of cultural organization and ways of appropriating it in communitarian settings. By revisiting the causal nexus leading up to the physical events of mass shooting, as represented in mediatized discourse through an intertextual institutional chain, the cultural logic of sacrifice was posited as necessary (rather than just efficient) cause. In this respect, an attempt was made at digging beneath the mediatized glossing over of this social phenomenon to reach to the very kernel of an eminent manifestation of cultural traumatism.

The CDA approach that was adopted along the way, enriched by a deconstructive spin in terms of the newly coined parafunctionality, allowed for

critically addressing which aspects of this uniformly recurring micrometanarrative become foregrounded, which ones become backgrounded as silent presuppositions, and which ones become silenced altogether. By applying a parafunctional reading to the intertextual chain that makes up the mainstream media discourse of mass shootings, it was shown that transcendental violence not only underpins the physical acts per se, but allows for their perpetuation as necessary outcomes of the sacrificial logic that constitutes the cornerstone of communitarian cultural organization.

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