CHAPTER 6

A Genealogy for Homo Mimeticus 2.0

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After the shadow and the phantom, the twin and the double, the ancient problematic of what the ancients called, enigmatically, "*mimēsis,*" is returning under different masks and conceptual personae to animate, reanimate, or take possession of posthuman subjects in the digital age. Reloaded by new technologies and media, algorithms and AI simulations, stretching to implants in the body and brain, emerging forms of posthuman mimesis do not passively mirror, copy, or redouble the human, let alone nature. Rather, they contribute to forming and transforming a species that is not only *sapiens* but also *ludens*, not simply *economicus* but also *numericus*, not only *faber* but also *plasticus* and, we now add, *mimeticus* as well. This is not a mere adjectival addition to a long list that already qualifies an eminently adaptable, protean, relational, and eminently metamorphic creature. On the contrary, as I have argued elsewhere, mimesis is the very principle that makes adaptability, protean transformations, and relational bonds of sympathy with humans and nonhumans possible in the first place, thereby bringing a genial, certainly adaptable and plastic, yet not necessarily wise species into being.[1]

Furthering a mimetic turn or *re*-turn of attention to mimesis in need of a digital 2.0 supplement, this volume collectively shows that new manifestations of homo mimeticus are now at play in the figures of the cyborg and the android, the robot and AI, the hologram and the avatar, among other alter egos. Considering especially, but not only, the AI revolution, we have seen how chatbots can effectively copy or mimic human conversations. This simulation of intelligence should not be confused with human intelligence as such, let alone consciousness; and yet, it is not deprived of affective powers on (post)human users. Hence, a 2.0. supplement to homo mimeticus seems the most "natural" addition to mimetic studies. At the same time, genealogical lenses oblige us to specify that this volume is based on papers first presented in 2021 and was not triggered by enthusiastic responses to ChatGPT or GPT-4 (the latest version as I finalize this volume, soon to be replaced by another number in an endless

1 See Nidesh Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus: A New Theory of Imitation* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022).

permutation). Still, the very suggestion of a mimetic turn in posthuman studies sensed that the era of generalized simulations required a rethinking of mimesis in the digital age. Despite the proliferation of different technologies of reproduction, one point at least is clear: Via different media and supports, the new avatars of mimesis generate simulations that may appear fictional or hyperreal online, and yet are now operating hypermimetically on posthuman bodies and minds offline as well, transforming our ongoing process of becoming posthuman.[2]

Given the impressive speed of these innovations, one of the numerous advantages of introducing a mimetic perspective to posthuman studies consists in providing a longer genealogical view, or overview, of what is still a relatively recent field of studies. Posthuman mimesis is, in fact, the latest conceptual avatar in a long genealogy that is ancient in origins, traverses the entire history of western metaphysics, art, religion, and politics; generates virulent quarrels between philosophers and poets, the ancients and the moderns; and, via forceful overturnings of perspectives in the modernist period, reaches into the postmodern period as well,[3] opening up both pathological and patho*logical* possibilities for posthumanism as well. This chapter offers a succinct and necessarily schematic and partial genealogical reconstruction of some of the main steps in a long journey that now leads up to a mimetic turn in posthuman studies.

1 Steps Back to Leap Ahead

If we step back to classical antiquity, to the origins of mimetic studies, Plato and Aristotle disagreed about the value of mimesis understood as a representation of reality, but they fundamentally agreed that humans are mimetic animals, or homo mimeticus—for better and worse. They also agreed that the new discipline they were founding, philosophy, was predicated on a love of wisdom. That said, they did not automatically proclaim humans to be *sapiens*—wise-born, like Athena out of Zeus' head. Far from it. Philosophers were characterized by a love of what they lacked: wisdom in general and self-knowledge in particular. This modest beginning is worth recalling at the outset. In fact,

2 For the first steps to account for posthuman mimesis, see Nidesh Lawtoo ed., " Posthuman Mimesis," Special Issue, *Journal of Posthumanism* 2, no. 2 (2022).

3 For informed general studies see Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture, Art, Society*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Matthew Potolsky, *Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

self-knowledge seems more lacking than ever in an age in which technological, political, and environmental transformations occur faster than we can possibly adapt to, let alone critically reflect on. The Janus-faced orientation at play in *Mimetic Posthumanism*, then, urges us to look back to both mythic and philosophical models to better see, or try to foresee, where we are currently going.

The history of homo mimeticus takes many twists and turns before it reaches the posthuman turn and cannot be fully recapitulated here. For our purpose, its genealogy can be summarized via the following, admittedly schematic steps:

1. Mimesis *animates* human, animal, and divine worlds in constant becoming.
2. Mimesis both *mirrors* and *de-forms* a true, ideal world.
3. Mimesis *re-presents* a true, rational world.
4. Mimesis *imitates* artistic models worthy of emulation.
5. Mimesis entails the *imitation* of exemplary religious figures believed to be in a true world.
6. Mimesis *unmasks* the true, ideal world as an illusory world.
7. Mimesis *deconstructs* the distinction between copy and original via a mimicry of nothing.
8. Mimesis is *banned* as there is no relation between hyperreal simulations and the real world.
9. Mimesis *re-turns* to diagnose hypermimetic simulations in an age of posthuman becoming.

This is obviously a bird's eye overview meant for a general orientation in the labyrinth of the protean transformations of mimesis. The different steps I number for convenience should not give the false impression that the genealogy of homo mimeticus 2.0 rests on a grand linear narrative of progress, if only because the last step brings us back to the question of becoming with which the genealogy starts, albeit with a technological supplement. We are thus not confronted with a circular logic based on sameness but with a spiraling movement based on a series of repetitions and differences. This genealogy, traversing over 2,000 years of history, is part of an ongoing process of transformation that continues to inform the philosophical, aesthetic, and technological imagination of the twenty-first century. Let us treat it as a provisional map that certainly doesn't transparently reflect the territory as a mirror does. Still, it might help us to orient or reorient ourselves in the labyrinthine mimetic twists and turns now internal to posthuman becomings as well. Let me thus articulate each step in some more detail.

1.1 *Mimesis* Animates *Worlds in Becoming*

Historical accounts of mimesis often start with critiques of this concept, but this is a false and biased start. It betrays an idealist inclination characteristic of a Platonic metaphysics that, under different masks, still reaches into the present and is thus important to unmask at the beginning. This false start, in fact, masks the centrality of mimetic practices of nonverbal communication, participation in natural forces, collective effervescence, education, and memorization, but also dance, painting, singing, and dramatic impersonations that, since at least the dawn of humanity, were at play in ritual, prehistoric cultures of which few historical traces remain. These ritual practices arguably paved the way for the birth of *Homo sapiens* out of mimetic forms of communication.[4] Ritual cultures, in fact, relied on mythic identifications to account for a world of becoming that entangled humans with nonhuman animals, nature, and spiritual entities or gods, vibrant energies and matters that continue to inform the very concept of mimesis today.

Let us recall that the Greek term, "*mimēsis*"—from *mimeisthai*, to imitate—comes from *mîmos*, meaning "mime actor" but also "performance."[5] This is already a reminder that mimesis was originally an embodied practice rooted in music and dance; it originates in rituals of collective participation still at play in indigenous cultures today.[6] Despite its Greek origins, as a concept, then, the ritual, magical, and animistic practices linked to mimesis already provide an initial corrective to Eurocentric definitions that restrict it to visual representation, epistemic concerns with visual illusions, and metaphysical obsessions with copies and originals. Over time, in a still predominantly oral culture, such performative rituals played a key role in bringing mythic models to life in front of an audience assembled in theaters. The *mîmos* would impersonate in body, gesture, and voice mythic heroes like Odysseus or Herakles as well as divinities like Gaia and Athena, or, for that matter, demigods like Prometheus, whose titanic gesture paves the way for posthuman studies. These heroes' dramatic actions took place in a world of becoming that was not based on clear-cut distinctions between the material world and the divine world, physics and

4 See Edgar Morin, *Le Paradigme perdu: La nature humaine* (Paris: Seuil, 1973) and Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus,* ch.1.

5 As the classicist Gerald Else puts it: "What we can infer with some confidence is that the original sphere of *mimêsis*—or rather of *mîmos* and *mimeisthai*—was the imitation of animate beings, animal and human, by the body and the voice (not necessarily the singing voice), rather than by artefacts such as statues or pictures." Gerald F. Else, "'Imitation' in the Fifth Century," *Classical Philology*, 53, no. 2 (1958): 73–90, 78.

6 See Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

metaphysics, the copy and the original—if only because in the sphere of myth there was constant communication between the two. Hence the importance of exemplary models worthy of imitation in the formation and transformation of humans and, now, posthumans, as we shall see in more detail in Chapter 11. The point, for the moment, is that exemplary figures in posthuman studies stem from a mythic ground that was sensitive to the transformative powers of mimesis. Hence the need to look back to better see what lies ahead.

1.2 *Mimesis* Mirrors *the "True" World*

It is often said that philosophy is born out of a conflict, or agon, with the mythic tradition that precedes it, but a mimetic perspective immediately complicates this clear-cut opposition. The agon between philosophy and myth or literature is what I call a "mimetic agon." I do so to designate the genealogical fact that literary precursors (such as Homer) are imitated by philosophers (such as Plato) as much as they are opposed by them.[7] As is well known, after a lengthy mimetic dialogue on the nature of justice, in book 10 of *Republic* (c. 375 BC), Plato, under the mimetic mask of Socrates, bans mimesis and mimetic practitioners (poets, rhapsodes, actors, sophists). He does so because these protean figures do not represent an ideal, metaphysical, and disembodied reality that culminates in intelligible, universal, and immutable Forms that, for Plato, constitute true Being. On the contrary, they only represent "phantoms" at "the third remove from truth."[8]

Less known is that Plato's understanding of mimesis is still in touch with a Homeric, mythic, and immanent perspective that does not neatly divide humans from nonhumans, is extremely sensitive to material processes of becoming, and finds in a mimetic pathos that stretches to include the imitation of nonhuman forces its defining characteristic. For instance, in book 3 of the *Republic,* as the concept of "*mimēsis*"—what the eminent classicist Erick Havelock calls nothing less than the "most baffling of all words in his [Plato's] philosophical vocabulary"[9]—first enters the philosophical scene under the mask of actors endowed with the pathos to imitate mythic examples, Socrates specifies that the contagious powers of mimesis include nonhuman forces

7 See Nidesh Lawtoo, *Violence and the Mimetic Unconscious: Vol. 2. The Affective Hypothesis* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2023).

8 Plato, *Republic*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, trans. Paul Shorey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1963), 575–853, 827, 602c. Hereafter cited in text by line number.

9 Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 20, see also 20–31.

as well. Thus, Socrates says that dramatic impersonation (or mimesis) could include "claps of thunder, and the noise of the wind and hail … and the cries of dogs, sheep, and birds" (397a–b)—that is, a nonhuman mimesis or mimesis of nonhuman forces Plato fears, condemns, and excludes from the *polis* in theory, yet remain operative in dramatic practice in a culture still dominated by an "oral frame of mind."[10] Genealogical lenses already reveal that since the dawn of mimetic studies, mimesis has not been restricted to an anthropocentric focus on Man alone. Rather, it goes beyond binaries that simply oppose nature to culture, the human to the nonhuman, the original to the copy, along fluid, perspectival, and metamorphic perspectives that now inform the concept of posthuman mimesis as well.

1.3 *Mimesis* Re-presents *a Rational World*

But in the classical period, mimesis is not only a subject of critique; it also finds early on a worthy defense appreciative of the creativity at play in myth, or to use a modern term, literature. Plato's most famous student, Aristotle, provides a powerful reply to Plato's exclusion of mimesis as a dangerous, irrational, and pathological force. He does so in the *Poetics* (c. 335 B.C.), where he articulates a defense of poetry predicated on the *logical* assumption at play in the mimetic pathos of a carefully crafted tragic plot, or *muthos*. Thus, Aristotle redefines mimesis as an "imitation of an action" predicated on laws of necessity and causality that not only have rational philosophical potential on the side of *logos*, but also generate "cathartic" effects of "pity and fear"[11] that operate on the side of *pathos*.

If Plato had a broader conception of mimesis that was crucial to education and subject formation, Aristotle tended to restrict mimesis to tragic representations that are not deprived of exemplary figures;[12] if the former emphasized the passive, reproductive side of mimesis, the latter was sensitive to its active, productive power; if the teacher stressed the pathologies of mimesis, the student stressed its balancing therapeutic value as a patho-*logy*. Their agonism notwithstanding, they agreed that mimesis, not unlike techne and thus technics as well, has the double patho(-)logical structure of a *pharmakon*, that is

10 Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, 41.

11 Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. Stephen Halliwell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 37. I discuss Aristotle on catharsis and mimesis in Nidesh Lawtoo, *Violence and the Oedipal Unconscious: Vol. 1, The Catharsis Hypothesis* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2023), 127–48.

12 See Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

both poison and remedy—a Janus-faced evaluation that will be central to poststructuralism and posthumanism. Either way, mimesis provides a relational, embodied, and affective principle that opens up subjectivity to human and nonhuman processes of becoming other that, in different forms, are still with us today.

1.4 *Mimesis* Imitates *Artistic Models*

Given its aesthetic origins, then, mimesis turns out to be essential not only for philosophical critique, but also for artistic creation. If both "critique" and "creativity,"[13] as Rosi Braidotti reminds us, are constitutive of the posthuman turn, it is then crucial to *re*-turn to a concept located precisely at the juncture of creativity and critique. Let us therefore recall that for Roman rhetorical authors like Horace and Longinus, mimesis becomes a principle of artistic creation predicated on the assumption that great art is not the product of a divine inspiration that renders the poet enthusiastically possessed by the Muses, as Plato thought.[14] On the contrary, it is based on an imitation of classical models that rests on the visual analogy between poetry and painting (*ut pictura poiesis*). This classical analogy still relies on the logic of aesthetic representation that dominates western aesthetics, but it also convokes what Pseudo Longinus calls, in a more materialist mood, "a sort of natural impulse."[15] The latter, in fact, accounts for the sublime power of nature to inspire "awe" and "genuine passion,"[16] or pathos, that regained traction during the romantic period and is especially strong in Promethean transgressions that paved the way for the posthuman.[17] Suffice it to say that there is a long genealogy connecting creativity-mimesis-nonhuman forces that rendered humans *ek*-static in the past. Via the iteration of "the modern Prometheus"[18] and the doubling/mimetic relation between creator and creature it entails, this genealogy entangles all-too-human aspirations to scientific progress in the spiraling process of becoming posthuman still in need of evaluation.

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13 Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 11.

14 See Plato, *Ion*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, trans. Paul Shorey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1963), 215–28.

15 Pseudo Longinus, *On the Sublime*, in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, 3rd ed., eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Belmont, Calif.: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), 94–118, 113.

16 Pseudo, Longinus, *Sublime*, 98.

17 See, for instance, Ihab Hassan, "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?" *The Georgia Review* 31, no.4 (1977): 830–50.

18 See Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or the Modern Prometheus*, ed. Johanna M. Smith (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2016).

What is certain is that as we enter deeper into the epoch of the Anthropocene, anthropogenic climate change will continue to accelerate. So will the awe and fear triggered by the nonhuman agentic powers of nature. Given the speed of widening tornados and typhoons, melting glaciers, growing deserts, spreading fires, rising oceans, and devastating hurricanes, among other catastrophic effects, sublime emotions can no longer be witnessed from a safe aesthetic distance.[19] On the contrary, they affect posthuman and nonhuman life, triggering a mimetic pathos that spreads contagiously from nonhumans to posthumans with unpredictable amplifying effects. Hence the renewed importance of the promotion of mimetic creativity to provide antidotes to the pathologies of climate change unleashed in the epoch of the Anthropocene.

1.5 *Mimesis and the* Imitatio *of Exemplary Figures*

As faith in unlimited progress in this world wanes, belief in ideal and eternal but illusory afterworlds waxes. This nihilist lesson applies to apocalyptic end-of-the-world anxieties already haunting the medieval imagination; it might also cast light on the all too real fear haunting the contemporary imagination. Given the dominance of idealist metaphysics in the West, there is, in fact, a strong tendency to aspire to imaginary afterworlds that we should be careful not to deride as vestiges of the past, if only because they can continue to implicitly form mimetic theories in the present, stretching to (mis)inform transhumanist dreams of immortality and disembodiment in the future as well. If these dreams are apparently oriented toward the future, they remain firmly rooted in a Western metaphysics that needs to be understood genealogically to be effectively critiqued.

Following up on Plato's denigration of the phenomenal world, Christianity made Platonism available to the people, as Nietzsche saw. It found in figures such as Augustine spiritual examples that turned to the imitation of Christ, or *imitatio Christi,* as a paradigmatic model for moral formation and spiritual transformation. To be sure, Augustine, who was himself not deprived of bodily passions prior to his conversion, acknowledges the pathos of distance at play in the impossible imitation of an ideal model. Thus, he writes in the *Confessions*: "In their perverted way all humanity imitates you. Yet they put themselves at a distance from you."[20] This all-too-human distance from

19 On mimesis, climate change, and the ethics of navigation, see William E. Connolly and Nidesh Lawtoo, "Planetary Conrad: William Connolly and Nidesh Lawtoo in Dialogue," *The Conradian* 46, no. 2. (2021):144–71.

20 Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 32.

an unattainable religious ideal located in an imaginary, vertical world is, of course, inevitable. Still, it did not prevent the contagious spread of beliefs in the immortality of the soul based on a truly felt emotion, or pathos, experienced horizontally in this world.

The most extreme forms of transhumanist ideology today, with their technocratic beliefs in the possibility of immortality, or of migration to other planets, can be aligned with this humanistic, Christian, and idealistic tradition.[21] For (post)humans who have no choice but to remain faithful to the Earth, the risk is not to fall prey to nihilistic despair triggered by beliefs in the coming apocalypse constitutive of previous mimetic theories.[22] Nihilism is, indeed, a major mimetic temptation for present and future generations writing under the shadow of the end times—a temptation mimetic posthumanism sets out to resist.

1.6 *Mimesis* Unmasks *the "True" World*

In the wake of creative forms of imitation centered on immanent bodies constitutive of the Renaissance spirit, a metaphysical overturning of perspectives on which the mimetic turn in posthuman studies hinges takes place in the modernist period. If dominant philosophical conceptions of mimesis set up a hierarchy between the true world and the false world, the ideal origin and the material copy, it does not mean that this metaphysical story, or rather fable, cannot be unmasked as part of the history of an error. This is, indeed, what Nietzsche does in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889) in a famous section titled, "How the True World Became a Fable,"[23] which will serve as a source of inspiration for mimetic turns and returns that go from poststructuralism to posthumanism.

Briefly put, in a radical overturning of the idealist (Platonic) metaphysics that posits ideal models to imitate in imaginary afterworlds that reach—via Christian ideals (Augustine), as well as transcendental categories (Kant)—into the present, Nietzsche, as is well known, unmasks this ideal "'true' world" and the dominant mimetic tradition that distinguishes between ideal models and

21 For a genealogy of transhumanism attentive to its theological implications, see Steve Fuller, *Nietzschean Meditations: Untimely Thoughts at the Dawn of the Transhumanist Era* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2020). The main difference between Fuller's and my interpretation of Nietzsche reflects the underlying difference between what he calls posthumanism's "*precautionary*" and transhumanism's "*proactionary*" (37) approaches toward risk (emphases in original).

22 See, for instance, René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010).

23 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 463–563, 485. For an informed Nietzschean account of nihilism see Marina Garcia-Granero's chapter in this volume.

material copies as "the history of an error"[24] (his negative thesis). Less known is that he also affirms an immanent conception of affective mimesis with the unconscious and mirroring power to turn the ego into what he calls a "phantom of the ego" (his positive thesis).[25]

At the twilight of metaphysics, then, Nietzsche, far from fueling ideals into an autonomous conception of subjectivity driven by transhumanist beliefs of endless technological progress, overturns perspectives to provide, immanent, materialist, and psychological foundations for a posthuman subject that is porous, relational, and embodied in its metamorphic transformations.[26] This minor conception of mimesis qua homo mimeticus provides the relational principle that opens up the ego to external influences, be they human or nonhuman, thereby playing a key role in the ongoing processes of becoming posthuman.

1.7 *Mimesis* Deconstructs *"Original" Models*

We are beginning to see and feel how genealogical lenses that look back to the origins of mimetic studies turn out to provide foundational steps in the theoretical moves that will lead to the posthuman turn. As we move into the twentieth century, Nietzsche's decentering of the ego opens up intellectual space to deconstruct old metaphysical binaries (original/copy, inside/outside, writing/speech, passive/active, poison/cure, etc.) that, in the wake of structuralism and poststructuralism in the 1960s and 1970s, relaunched a performative conception of mimesis on the theoretical scene that promotes difference rather than sameness, active rather than passive imitation.

In "The Double Session," for instance, Jacques Derrida's focus on Stéphane Mallarmé's prose-poem "Mimique" returns us to the theatrical origins of mimesis in mime with which we started and adds: "It is impossible to pin mimesis down to a binary classification."[27] Why? Because mimesis, or mime, as he reads it, does not simply reproduce a prior original. On the contrary, Derrida specifies that it "imitates nothing, does not have to conform to any prior referent with the aim of achieving adequation or verisimilitude."[28] This deconstructive

24 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 485.

25 See Nidesh Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013).

26 For Nietzschean concepts internal to the mimetic turn in posthuman studies, see Nidesh Lawtoo, "Posthuman Mimesis 1: Concepts for the Mimetic Turn," *Journal of Posthumanism* 2, no. 2 (2022): 101–14, and Garcia-Granero's contribution to this volume.

27 Jacques Derrida, "The Double Session" in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 173–286, 186.

28 Derrida, "Double Session," 205. On the paradoxical logic of theatrical mimesis that turns an imitation of nothing into an imitation of everything, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe,

move had groundbreaking effects. It was instrumental in putting mimesis to re-*productive* philosophical, feminist, postcolonial, and queer political use. In particular, the troubling mirror of mimesis revealed how the dominant (male, white, heterosexual) "original" remains radically dependent on the (female, black, homosexual) "copy."[29]

Thus reframed, mimicry turns from a passive form of adaptation into an active strategy of empowerment that reveals how the copy precedes the original. It will also be central to Bernard Stiegler's deconstruction of technics that, as we shall see in Part 3, bears the traces of a deconstruction of mimesis that serves as his model. Either way, thus reframed, mimetic differences trouble, deconstruct, and unmask the original concept of Man understood as an ideal phantom or fable.[30]

1.8 *Mimesis Is* Banned *by Hyperreal Simulations*

This poststructuralist decentring of man via the lever of mimesis and the fulcrum of the subject paves the way for the mimetic turn, or *re*-turn of attention to a homo mimeticus that is now attentive to the interplay of "sameness and difference."[31] Prior to this, in the 1980s and '90s, it also led, perhaps too quickly, to postmodern dissolutions of reality in the hyperreal sphere of media simulation.

In an additional twist of the mimetic screw, postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard, for instance, posited a "hyperreal" world of "simulation" that has nothing to do with the logic of the "mirror," or "imitation," for it "substitutes signs of the real for the real itself."[32] Prefiguring the Internet revolution, this lesson was quickly incorporated into cinematic blockbusters such as *The Matrix* (The Wachowskis, 1999), which reloaded the Allegory of the Cave for the digital age by explicitly incorporating *Simulacra and Simulation* in the film itself as a hollowed-out, simulated book qua box used to hide Neo's software

"Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis," in *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 248–66.

29 See Luce Irigarary, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 121–31; Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 13–21.

30 For a genealogical precursor who acknowledged that "Nietzsche was paving the for when, in the interior space of his language, he killed man and God both at the same time" and fostered the process of disappearance of man, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 306.

31 See Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus*, 93–125.

32 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Galilée, 1981), 11 (my translation).

programs.[33] At the ontological level, this proclamation of the death of a traditional mimesis dividing the "true" world from the "apparent" world, reality from fiction, was of loose Nietzschean inspiration. As Nietzsche put it: "*With the true world we have abolished the apparent one.*"[34] Hence, at the moment of the "briefest shadow,"[35] postmodern theorists felt liberated by the weight of metaphysics in the ethereal sphere of high theory. A pandemonium of "free" anti-mimetic spirits unconstrained by the hard materiality of facts ensued as the phrase "there are no facts, only interpretations of facts" was mimetically chanted in unison.

But were these spirits really free? Are there really no facts? Or was this postmodern freedom from facts part of the history of an interpretative error, a mimetic error Nietzsche was urging philosophers of the future to overcome? Genealogical lenses make clear that dreams of ideal afterworlds (be they in the form of Platonic ideas, Christian immortality, or Transhumanist immortality) are certainly unattainable, indemonstrable, and unpromisable, even in uploaded 3D "*Avatar* simulations" currently animating homo mimeticus 2.0.[36] And yet, this does not mean that the immanent powers of mimetic simulations stopped operating in digital, material, and embodied practice. On the contrary, it is becoming increasingly clear that we should return to the Nietzschean diagnostic imperative that the body is "a great reason" and that this reason should "*stay true to the earth.*"[37]

This alarm call only increases in urgency as it dawns on humans that we have entered the epoch of the Anthropocene. Hence, a supplementary step in our genealogy can no longer be postponed—which leads us to the ninth and, for the moment, last step in our genealogy of homo mimeticus 2.0.

1.9 *Mimesis* Re-turns *via Hypermimetic Simulations*

This is where the mimetic turn *re*-turns to the contemporary scene. As its long genealogy of twists and turns already suggests, it had actually never fully left the theoretical scene from which it was born. On the contrary, since the dawn of philosophy, or rather, prior to it, mimesis continued to imperceptibly inform

33 See Nidesh Lawtoo, "The Matrix *E*-Motion: Simulation, Mimesis, Hypermimesis" in *Mimesis, Movies and Media: Violence, Desire, and the Sacred*, eds. Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 89–104.

34 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 486.

35 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 486.

36 Nidesh Lawtoo, "*Avatar* Simulation in 3Ts: Techne, Trance, Transformation," *Science Fiction Studies* 125, no. 42 (2015): 132–50.

37 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 30, 12. Hereafter *Z* with in-text citation.

the vicissitudes of critical theory, stretching from the ancients to the moderns to the contemporaries to eventually transform poststructuralist critiques of the death of man in creative accounts of posthuman becomings. The mimetic *re*-turn, then, addresses an all too mimetic, or better, hypermimetic problem that casts a long material shadow on the present and future. It is, in fact, clear that digital simulations are not disconnected from the logic of imitation, after all—if only because posthuman subjects increasingly exposed to a plurality of simulations online continue to remain vulnerable, perhaps more than ever, to the spellbinding and entrancing powers of unconscious forms of imitation offline.

What Donna Haraway says of cyborgs is even truer of avatars. Both operate a mirroring inversion of perspectives in which "our machines [or digital simulations] are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert."[38] This mimetic, or rather, hypermimetic pathology has only increased since the COVID-19 pandemic crisis confined hyper-connected posthumans within the digital walls of a *vita mimetica*, as Chapters 4 and 5 make clear.

Hypermimesis, then, considers the affective power of hyperreal simulacra that have nothing to do with reality: digital simulations, video games, and avatars, but also conspiracy theories, Big Lies, cyberwars, cybercurrencies, etc.. And yet, they retroact, via spiraling feedback loops, on the material, psychic, and embodied lives of posthuman egos that are spellbound, turning them into physically inert and psychically "dispossessed" avatars or phantoms.[39] Due to deeply rooted mimetic dispositions constitutive of the genealogy of homo mimeticus now amplified by an increasingly thicker network of digital simulations entangling its 2.0 upgrade, we may be living digitally enhanced, immersive, and apparently realistic second lives online, yet we continue to remain radically dependent on precarious bodies tied to the Earth. I call this spiraling loop, in which a hyperreal simulation retroacts on the reality of mimetic bodies and minds, *hypermimesis*. And I do so to call attention to the dynamic interplay of hyperreality online and imitative behavior offline constitutive of the mimetic posthuman as well.

Obviously, in an age in which artificial intelligence is increasingly modeled on human intelligence, this hypermimetic interplay cuts both ways. As Catherine

38 Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 2269–99, 2272; Lawtoo, *Avatar*, 138–44.

39 See Nidesh Lawtoo, "'This Is No Simulation!': Hypermimesis from *Being John Malkovich* to *Her*," *Quarterly Review of Film and Television* 37, no. 2 (2020): 116–44; Nidesh Lawtoo, "Black Mirrors: Reflecting (on) Hypermimesis," *Philosophy Today* 65, no. 3 (2021): 523–47.

Malabou puts it in her evaluation of the *Blue Brain* project, whose goal is to build a digital simulation of the mouse brain (for the moment): "Impossible to deny it: brain and computer are in a relation of speculation (*mirroring*)."[40] And what is a mirror, if not the most classical mimetic trope? Of course, this does not mean that this double mirroring effect is deprived of destabilizing reflections. What is, in fact, ironic in this mirroring overturning of perspectives is that after the complexity of the brain was often reduced to a computer in the past century, it is now the all-too-human brain that serves as the model for computers to imitate in the present century.

If reductionist approaches to the brain mistook the computer for a model to imitate, posthumanists should perhaps be careful not to simply invert the mirror and turn the brain into a model for technological reproductions. Why? Because the relationship between the model and the copy, the original and the simulation, as a long genealogy of homo mimeticus taught us, has never been stable in the first place, generating reciprocal reflections and spiraling patho(-)logical feedback loops that are now constitutive of the processes of becoming at play in mimetic posthumanism. Whether widening hypermimetic loops entail pathological or patho-*logical* metamorphoses—or, more probably, both—is what this volume sets out to find out.

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Nine genealogical turns, then, to promote a *re*-turn to mimesis and its multiple avatars animating homo mimeticus 2.0: Eight turns step back to a genealogy of mimesis that goes from antiquity to poststructuralism to then leap ahead to processes of becoming other now at play in the posthuman present and future. For my cartographic purpose, these should suffice to provide a general orientation for navigating the overlapping fields of mimetic studies and posthuman studies. They should at least indicate that the recent genealogy of the posthuman is deeply entangled with the ancient problematic of mimesis. A philosophical aesthetic, and technological approach to posthuman mimesis reveals that humans are mimetic, and thus relational, embodied, affective, and open creatures that adapt, chameleon-like, to their surroundings, be they natural or cultural, sociological or technological, offline or online. Moreover, the very technological means that are currently forming and transforming posthuman subjects—from digital simulations to robotics, artificial intelligence to gene

40 Catherine Malabou, *Metamorphoses de l'intelligence: Que faire de leur cerveau bleu?* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2017), 144 (my translation).

editing to algorithmic loops—generate increasingly effective duplications, reproductions, and spellbinding simulations that reload the transformative powers of mimesis for the digital age.

As this volume already proves, the genealogical run-up of the mimetic turn should be long enough to give critical and creative power to a Janus-faced *re*-turn of attention to mimesis now at play in posthuman studies as well. It does so under the heterogeneous rubric of posthuman mimesis and its mirroring counterpart, mimetic posthumanism.

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