I divine, he said, that you are considering whether we shall admit tragedy and comedy into our city or not. Perhaps, said I, and perhaps even more than that.

—Plato, *The Republic*

We saw how *Homo sapiens* came into being as a social, affective, and intersubjective creature, part of a network that ties self to others. Since time immemorial, generation after generation, mimetic forms of nonlinguistic communication enmesh newborns into a network of communal relations that are constitutive of our genealogy of homo mimeticus. Given the central role mimetism plays in the process of all-too-human aspirations to become *sapiens*, we might still wonder: how come, at the dawn of philosophy in classical antiquity, at a key moment in the cultural, social, and political evolution of this eminently relational and gregarious species, when communities of people were beginning to assemble in organized city-states that allowed for imperfect forms of democratic participation among a minority of privileged male citizens—how come, at this crucial turning point in the history of western civilization, a new and emerging discipline known as *philosophia* that aspired to the love of wisdom characteristic of *Homo sapiens* broke with a long-standing oral, mythic tradition that thought it wise to nurture the imitative forms of communication that gave birth to human consciousness?

The story of this quarrel or agon is seemingly well known: the father of philosophy (Plato), under the mask of a fictional dramatization of his teacher (Socrates), set out to violently exclude from his ideal *polis* previously revered arts and the practitioners who dramatized them: primarily poets, rhapsodes,
actors, and mimes. That is, the very figures that gave voice to the collective mythic womb that was sensitive to the affective, embodied, and thus social life of a relational species that, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, become *sapiens* by exploiting the relational power of mimetic *pathos* to produce networks of communication.¹ We are thus in a position to recognize that in *Sapiens*, Yuval Harari re-popularizes an ancient idea, as he stresses “that belief in shared myths” is central to building “an astounding networks of mass cooperation” (2014, 117, 115). This is a central historical insight, but it is still in need of a philosophical supplement. Unlike Plato, and later Nietzsche, Bataille and others, Harari does not focus on myth’s primary medium of mass communication: namely, mimesis. Hence the need to further complementing the history of *Homo sapiens* with a genealogy of homo mimeticus.

Mimetic studies allows us to revisit an old quarrel from a present-oriented perspective by asking specific questions such as: what reasons or, perhaps, affects motivated this notorious ban at the dawn of western thought? And if Plato’s critique of mimesis, as is routinely noted, was paradoxical and self-contradictory, for he fought mimesis with eminently mimetic genres (such as the Socratic dialogue), is there a way to put this ancient paradox to productive contemporary use? At some further removes, could Plato’s diagnostic evaluation of mimesis as a patho(-)logy—that is as both sickness and a *logos* on mimetic *pathos*—continue to account for an increasingly digitized society that reloads illusory and spellbinding shadows allegorically projected at the back of a mythic cave in the hypermimetic space of the virtual constitutive of our increasingly digitized caves? These are some of the questions Plato’s exclusion of homo mimeticus opens up at the dawn of philosophy and which continue to haunt, perhaps more than ever, our hypermimetic world as well. Hence the urgency to follow up on ancient phantoms reloaded via new media from the pluralist perspective of new mimetic studies.

There is, of course, no single, unitary, and universal answer to these ancient yet still contemporary questions. What our genealogy makes clear is that what the Greeks called, enigmatically, *mimēsis* can no longer be framed uniquely in a stabilizing metaphysical mirror or *imago* that reproduces the logic of the same—though the distinction between truth and lies remains urgent to make in the digital age in order to dispel illusory fables in second lives that may not be disconnected from Plato’s idealist metaphysics. But let us start at the beginning.

First introduced in book 10 of the *Republic*, the doubling trope of the “mirror” *in-forms* (gives form to) a dominant idealist tradition oriented toward a vertical hierarchical axis that culminates in abstract, intelligible, and universal ideas posited “behind the world”—what Nietzsche, contra Plato, calls “*Hinterwelt*”
Vita Mimetica in the Cave

(1996a, 5). Pushing against this dominant metaphysical tradition, a genealogy of minor materialist thinkers is currently promoting a re-turn of attention to mimesis that helps account for the singular-plural power of affects to both incline subjects and take possession of the ego, from antiquity to modernity, reaching with increasing efficacy into the digital age as well—generating what Nietzsche, this time with Plato, calls a “phantom of their ego [Phantom von Ego]” (1982, 106). That is, an ego that is immanent, embodied, relational, eminently suggestible, prone to unconscious spells, and easily bound, chained, or spellbound to visual simulations that may be epistemically illusory or false, yet due to a magnetic will to mime, have the power, or pathos, to generate material effects in this world as well.

Could it be, then, that it is because in both its phylogenetic and ontogenetic evolution, homo mimeticus is, from birth onward, radically open to mirroring forms of nonverbal communication in childhood that its relational, embodied, and porous ego, both individually and collectively, remains radically open to external influences in adulthood as well, be they real or fictional? This is the genealogical question that I will explore both with and contra Plato in this chapter. In the process, we shall see that the spell of shadows, be they ancient, modern, or contemporary, have the (will to) power, or pathos, to tilt the vertical metaphysics of mimesis framed as a visual phantom predicated on the logic of the same toward relational forms of affective and spellbinding communication that reveal the centrality of otherness in the formation of an ego that is not one—that is, a phantom ego.

Inclining Mimesis

For this delicate genealogical operation, it is wise to join forces with philosophers who share our attention to mimetic pathos. Furthering a genealogical operation that ties the ancient concept of “mimesis” to the more contemporary concept of “inclinations,” I step back to Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” in book 7 of the Republic in the company of the feminist philosopher, classicist, and political as well as literary theorist, Adriana Cavarero. My goal is to continue a dialogue on “mimetic inclinations” (Cavarero and Lawtoo 2021) that animate—for better and worse—spectacles that were once staged in oral, theatrical cultures and are now reloaded in digital, audiovisual cultures as well. Perhaps what was true of the shadows in Plato’s cave is even truer of the shadows in our
digitally connected caves: illusory simulations projected on black mirrors have the magnetizing power to retroact on bodies and souls assembled in the body politic offline, casting a spellbinding effect on the ego that dispossesses it of its proper identity, generating both good and bad inclinations.

Cavarero and I fundamentally agree that since at least classical antiquity, a dominant patriarchal philosophical tradition has tended to restrict, disavow, and project affective inclinations that deprive Homo sapiens of rational control over the ideal of the autonomous, rational, and self-sufficient ego onto subordinate, marginalized, and vulnerable “others.” This projection of mimesis and all it entails (mimicry, mimetism, affective contagion, hypnosis, dispossession, etc.) onto racial and ethnic minorities is constitutive of what I call elsewhere mimetic racism; it equally applies to the mimetic sexism internal to stereotypically inclined figures who, in the West but not only, are expected to take on the full burden to care for those vulnerable others we all once were, who are the newborns of Homo sapiens: namely, mothers.

As Cavarero convincingly argues in Inclinations (2016), maternally inclined roles in patriarchal societies are traditionally restricted to women in general and mothers in particular who provide a different ethical posture to care for others. At the same time, we have also noted that different forms of alloparenting central to non-western cultures contribute to complicating this essentialist stereotype. In fact, as Sarah Blaffer Hrdy argues, they open up care to a plurality of inclinations that concerns “mothers and others” (2009), including fathers, uncles, and other caretakers as well. Still, despite the emancipatory progress of feminist movements since the 1960s, the stereotypical figure of maternal inclination is a posture, position, or disposition that continues to weigh heavily on women’s shoulders—perhaps because this patriarchal burden is passed down mimetically to girls to reproduce and to boys qua future men to automatically expect, and thus demand or enforce. Moreover, this chain of reproductions is now mediated and amplified via a variety of simulacra (dolls, cartoons, films, YouTube videos, selfies, social media, video games, porn sites, etc.) with intergenerational performative effects that spread contagiously, from generation to generation, via increasingly ramified social networks online that increasingly penetrate the private sphere, generating both repetitions and differences that can congeal in stereotypical behavior offline.

It is well known that stereotypes tend to be reproduced. As the etymology already suggests, stereos (solid), typos (impression), they also generate solid impressions not only in the mind but also, as we shall see, on the plasticity of the subject that can be imprinted in psychic and bodily dispositions that assume a
type as a model. The massive presence of stereotypical differences across cultures is living proof that all subjects, to different degrees and irrespectively of their nationality, language, ethnicity, gender, and other differences, are vulnerable to the pression of types. Consequently, it is crucial to pay attention to relational, affective, and embodied dispositions that, since time immemorial, incline not only mothers and women but Homo sapiens more generally toward others. This, at least, is true if we want to continue accounting for a relational model of subjectivity that is part of what Nietzsche already called a “net of communication” (1974, 298) that cast a spell on the ego, both individually and collectively. In fact, our genealogy attests to a generalized all-too-mimetic tendency that artists, poets, storytellers, and a tradition of philosopher-poets (Plato included) have long attributed to all humans—for both good and ill.

To schematize things somewhat, on the positive side, mimetic inclinations are at play whenever humans are part of plurality of unique, individual, perhaps even original voices that assemble in the streets to express democratic sentiments on social equality and justice constitutive of what Cavarero calls “surging democracy” (2021); on the negative side, depending on contexts, these assembled voices can also merge into phantom egos who join in a formless group of people traditionally called a mass or mob who can give collective (rather than individual) expression to antidemocratic, violent, and pathological insurrections offline we will discuss more at length in part 3 and are constitutive of what I call “(new) fascism” (2019).

Building on these Janus-faced perspectives, this chapter explores the heterogeneous affects internal to the immanent, relational, and magnetizing power that, for both good and ill, inclines the subject toward others. Such mimetic inclinations are at play in our private homes but also in public streets and increasingly in virtual spaces animated by digital simulacra that connect users online—part of a maddingly indeterminate patho(-)logical power that continues to find in mimetic pathos its primary inclining force. That is, a (will to) power endowed with both liberating, affective, and logically grounded aspirations to be in common, on the one hand, and a violent, imprisoning, and pathological potential to be dispossessed, on the other. Both sides, as we turn to see and feel, are internal to forms of contagious communication that continue to shift the focus of attention from the solipsistic and purely rational and self-contained individuality of Homo erectus toward the relational, embodied, and affective disposition of Homo mimeticus.

The powers of mimesis, then, cannot be reduced to the metaphysical logic of the same, if only because they generate differential effects depending on the
pathos involved, the bodies at play, and the degrees of distance it allows. While in her more recent work, *Surging Democracy* (2021), Cavarero has tapped into the democratic potential of affective inclinations that culminate in a plurality of distinct voices constitutive of what Hannah Arendt calls the *vita activa* (Arendt 1998), like Arendt before her, Cavarero remains equally worried about the dangerous inclinations that lead a plurality of people to fuse in what a long tradition in crowd psychology calls a “mass” (* massa, Masse, foule*) (Cavarero 2021, 59–70). My wager is that from the liminal space between the *vita contemplativa* that, since Plato, orients philosophical thought (*logos*) toward abstract and universal ideas, on the one hand, and the *vita activa* characteristic of political action (*praxis*) based on the exposure of one’s uniqueness to otherness, on the other, the patho(-)logical shadow of a *vita mimetica* driven by a destabilizing interplay of both *pathos* and *logos*, uniqueness and dispossession, and above all, attentive to the power of aesthetic shadows to form and transform both thoughts and actions, informs two radically antagonistic ways of being in common today: this agon confronts the pathology of fusion characteristic of masses under the spell of (new) fascist leaders, on one side, to its patho-logical counterpart that gives birth to the singularity of unique plural voices that animate surging democracy, on the other. Whether these two antagonistic concepts define opposite manifestations of the *vita mimetica*, or whether a destabilizing mirroring interplay could exist between mass and plurality (or both), is what this chapter sets out to explore.

Following our genealogical orientation, let us start by stepping back to that *locus classicus* of both philosophy and aesthetics that is Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”—in order to leap further ahead.

**Homo Mimeticus in Chains: From *Ion* to the Cave**

As any minimally attentive reader of Plato soon realizes, despite the apparent brutality of the exclusion of the poets from the ideal city, his critique of mimesis in the *Republic* rests on a complex patho-logical operation in which his philosophical *logos* remains nonetheless deeply entangled in the mimetic *pathos* he critiques. In fact, “he” (Plato), never speaks in his proper name. Instead, he speaks under the mask of his dead teacher (Socrates) via a dramatic impersonation that informs his dialogues. This also means that “he” (Plato) relies on a first-person mimetic speech “they” (Plato-Socrates) condemn in theory but
actually enact in practice. This paradox is indeed constitutive of what Nietzsche calls, oxymoronically, “the pathos of philosophy.” To be sure, on the side of philosophy, Plato’s dialogues generate original thoughts on science (episteme), the nature of the mind or awareness (nous), and a reason (logos) oriented toward intelligible forms or ideas (eidos) located in another world; at the same time, on the side of pathos, he also dramatizes mythic tales, characters, and exemplary heroes clearly intended to serve as affective models for imitation in this world. Philosophy may thus aspire to the contemplation of abstract ideas driven by a rational logos in theory, but as it is enacted in practice, it cannot shed the shadow of the pathos animating homo mimeticus—which includes, nolens volens, the philosopher’s pathos.

Genealogical lenses urge us to take this aporia seriously. My goal, however, is not to deconstruct once again Plato’s paradox, which has received enough attention so far. Rather, it is to reconstruct the affective logic of Plato’s patho-logical thought, which, as we shall see, both confirms and furthers the genealogy of homo mimeticus we have been uncovering so far. In fact, since the dawn of philosophy, Plato’s critique of mimesis cannot be confined to epistemic concerns with visual representations or simulations far removed from an ideal, universal, and intelligible truth that finds in the vertical specularity of the mirror in book 10 of the Republic the paradigmatic trope. That is, a mirroring trope that sets up binary oppositions between origin/copy, model/shadow, universal/particular among other vertical hierarchies that led idealist philosophers to turn away from the world of sensible impressions in order to become “enraptured” by universal theoretical abstractions characteristic of the vita contemplativa (Arendt 1998, 303–304). Nor can mimesis be solely locked up, or rather, locked down, at the bottom of a metaphysical cave where shadows are continuously projected on a dark wall, preventing prisoners qua spectators under the spell of simulations to actively participate in civic plural actions of public appearance and exposure to others constitutive of the vita activa (14–17)—though it is clearly both, as Hannah Arendt, whose anti-mimetic categories I have been borrowing, convincingly shows in The Human Condition (1958).

Mimesis is also, and perhaps above all, an affective, embodied, relational, and magnetizing force, power, or pathos that may not always be fully visible, for it operates on an imperceptible, unconscious register that can be oral and is difficult to theorize (from theōrein, to see, or look at). Yet mimesis literally animates the Platonic dialogues, generating both echoes and reflections that, like a magnetizing atmosphere, or hypnotizing bond, align mimesis, contagion, and the madness (mania) it generates with both pathological and logical properties constitutive
of the origins of philosophy. On both these patho(-)logical fronts, Plato relies on dialogues to develop a dia-logos within a mind vertically oriented toward the ideal abstractions of the philosopher’s ontological fixation on the vita contemplativa. At the same time, he also consistently aligns mimesis with more relationally inclined figures like poets, rhapsodes, actors, or mimes, from which mimesis, as we recalled in the introduction, derives its conceptual identity (mimēsis from mimos, actor, and performance) and other practitioners of the vita mimetica attentive to the power of aesthetics to operate on the impressionable senses of homo mimeticus. Plato’s Janus-faced perspective with and contra mimesis, then, stages a kind of double life out of which philosophy is born. At some removes, this double life might continue to inform contemporary mimetic studies as well.

Here is a Nietzschean question for idealist philosophers: who can seriously claim to have risen above the shadows of the contemporary avatars of mimesis—from film to TV, social media to the Internet—in order to contemplate the splendor of a “true world—attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man” (Nietzsche 1954, 485) while leaving shadows behind locked down in mythic caves? If humans never relinquished mimetic spectacles in the past, it is highly improbable they did so during pandemic lockdowns in the present as I write. It is also increasingly unrealistic they will do so, as we sail deeper into a turbulent environmental world outside toward a future redoubled by idealized second lives inside our digital caves projecting a world behind this world. Hence the urgency to account for the ongoing relevance of Plato’s untimely dialogues on the spell-binding powers of mimesis that, perhaps more than ever, chain homo mimeticus to all kinds of visual simulations.

To re-evaluate these powers from the joint perspective of both affect and reason, pathos and logos, constitutive of Plato’s patho-logy, it is important to recall that the “Allegory of the Cave” is not the only myth in which Plato ties the affective powers of mimesis to the allegorical trope of an enigmatic “chain.” In a minor but, for our genealogy, crucial dialogue titled Ion, Plato had already made clear that there is a subtle magnetic and highly contagious power at play in professionals of theatrical impersonation, or rhapsodes, who specialize in oral recitation. His target is a rhapsode named “Ion,” who has just won a prize for his oral recitation of Homer. He did so not because of any artistic knowledge, or tekhnē, in general, Plato argues (under his Socratic mask), for Ion can recite well only Homer and cannot transfer his skills to other poets. Rather, Ion’s gift in impersonating different Homeric characters makes him what Plato calls (drawing on a Homeric analogy) a bit like “Proteus” who “twists and turns” (Plato 1961a, 541e), eluding the philosopher’s grasp.
This protean power, Socrates presses on, tightening the grip on this chameleonlike character, stems from a divine inspiration or possession that renders Ion “enthusiastic,” for he becomes en-theos when he recites, or in the god. As Plato puts it: “this gift you have of speaking well on Homer is not an art [tekhnê]; it is a power divine” that generates “enthusiasm” (533d) through which “it is the god himself who speaks” (534d). A character who does not speak in his proper name; someone who is skilled in agonistic contests; a reliance on Homeric myths; the use of mimetic speech...notice how, so far, these moves define Ion as much as Plato.

Still, Socrates does not register the aporia. Instead, to explain this confusion of identities, he convokes the trope of a magnet he borrows from Euripides: namely, a magnetic stone (or “Stone of Heraclea”) that “does not simply attract the iron rings, just by themselves; it also imparts to the rings a force enabling them to do the same thing as the stone itself” (533d). Within this vertical concatenation of magnetically connected but still divided rings, then, Ion is framed as a “middle ring” in a “mighty chain” (536a) that goes from Apollo to the Muses, from Homer to the rhapsode, who in turn casts a magnetic spell that charms the audience in the theater, rendering them “enthusiastic” and “possessed” (534a) as well.

What, then, is this mysterious, magnetic, spellbinding, and highly contagious power? Informed voices have addressed this question before. In an admirable account of Ion that resonates in many ways with our genealogy of mimesis and informs Adriana Cavarero as well, Jean-Luc Nancy rightly notices that “magnetism is here the enigma” (Nancy 1982, 61). Hence, he starts by taking the metaphor of magnetism literally as he notes: “the characteristic of magnetism [...] is that it communicates its force” (61). This is a communicative force that reaches, through what Nancy calls a “sharing of voices [partage des voix]” (68) into the present. But then again, what force allows for such a partage (sharing/dividing) that is as much a sharing in the same flow of magnetic contagion as a division in uniquely separate rings—a con-division that might as well be animating the vita mimetica of relational, embodied, and affective subjects?

Cavarero, not unlike Nancy, but from a different perspective, has an attuned ear to register the sharing of voices at play in this long chain. In our dialogue, a shared concern with Ion’s power of dispossession already implicitly informed our account of what we started to call “mimetic inclinations.” That is, affective, embodied, and relational inclinations that find in a nonvisual, oral, and affective mimesis the force that opens up the ego to the other. For instance, joining forces to tilt mimesis from a purely visual model of representation or realism toward an embodied and relational pathos internal to homo mimeticus, Cavarero starts by recalling that poetry “charms [incanta]” (from canto, song) (Cavarero and
Lawtoo 2021, 185). She does so to give a specific oral dimension to the spell of poetry that is not simply read but, rather, as Ion also suggests, recited and sung, as rhapsodes and lyric poets launch into “harmony and rhythm” (534a). Speaking of the “Allegory of the Cave” but convoking the trope of magnetism at play in Ion, Cavarero also specifies that “there is a magnetic field of attraction/fascination” (185) that is perhaps invisible, imperceptible, and thus not suitable for contemplation or theōria: from theōrein, to look at.

And yet the powers of mimesis already incline, chain, and magnetize those poor prisoners “squatting” in the infamous cave. If the cave is indeed an allegory of the Greek city or polis still under the spell of what Eric Havelock in Preface to Plato (1963) influentially calls an “oral culture” in which poetry in general and dramatizations of Homer in particular served as an “encyclopedia” that educated the Greeks inducing an “oral state of mind,” we may ask: how does this strange power or force of incantation operate, as it magnetizes the prisoners, both physically and psychically inclining them toward moving shadows that may be illusory, for sure, yet are endowed with an all-too-real binding pull?

If we follow the rings back to their magnetic source, this state of being enthusiastic originates in Apollo, the god of Music who presides over the Muses. Once mediated by that “winged thing” who is the poet and echoed by the rhapsodes who are “interpreters of the gods, each one possessed by the divinity to whom he is in bondage” (Plato 1961a, 534e), this state of Apollonian dispossession also flows down to the audience to generate a bondage that is mimetic in the sense that it is highly contagious, spreads from self to others, and generates an intoxication Euripides famously linked to Dionysus in The Bacchae. Thus, Plato specifies, always under the mask of Socrates, once in this state of “enthusiasm” (533d), the theatrical audience is not unlike the “worshiping Corybantes [who] are not in their senses when they dance,” and “are seized with the Bacchic transport, and are possessed—as the bacchants” (534a). Although this divine genealogy is not frequently noted, there is a revealing magnetic, contagious, and dispossessing power, or force, that is shared between two gods—namely, Apollo and Dionysus—with a number of mediating rings in the middle. Important for us to note is that this contagious, and in this sense mimetic, power is not simply linked to visual representations; it also triggers a Dionysian form of intoxication that is commonly attributed to Nietzsche's youthful artistic metaphysics in The Birth of Tragedy but is already embryonic in Plato's metaphysical poetics at play in Ion.8
Now, Cavarero offers important steps to further this genealogical connection beyond Ion by taking us to the very allegory that provides a mythic origin, or womb, out of which a theory of homo mimeticus is already developing in embryo, waiting for a push to be born. In an inspiring essay titled “The Envied Muse,” for instance, the feminist philosopher convincingly argues that the magnetic chain that ties the Muses to the rhapsode to the audience in Ion is not without a strange family resemblance to the famous chain in the Platonic cave. This leads Cavarero to perceptively suggest that the chained prisoners “allude to the Muses’ enchanting power” (2002, 52), if only because those shadows explicitly allude to that crowd of simulators Plato groups under the rubric of mimētēs: primarily poets, actors, and rhapsodes.

On the shoulders of Nietzsche, I fundamentally agree. To put it in his (anti-)Platonic language, the mimetic power of visual Apollonian representations projected on a wall cannot be detached from the embodied pathos of Dionysian intoxication. This also means that, in the shift of perspective from the magnetic pathos at play in Ion to the visual dispositif that in-forms the “Allegory of the Cave” in Republic, there is an important difference in the binding powers of mimesis to be registered: if the epic poet par excellence Ion excels in reciting, namely Homer, enchants through the invisible medium of voice, meter, and rhythm, generating a state of enthusiastic dispossession Plato compares to the Dionysian Maenads when they dance, the “shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the cave that fronted them [the prisoners]” (514c) enchain visually, not orally, via what Cavarero calls “projection of visual tricks” (2002, 55), whereby “the bearers of simulacra [eidola]” turn the wall of the cave into “a projection screen” (48).9

This is a crucial point in our genealogical reframing of the affective powers of mimesis. The agon confronting Plato and Homer not only stages philosophy contra poetry, the power of intellectual abstraction contra the affective power of enchantment—though it does that; it is also redoubled by a second, less perceptible, but not less fundamental agon that opposes an oral mimetic culture against a visual mimetic culture. The pathos of oral mimesis contra the logos of visual mimesis; or, to put it in a Nietzschean language arguably inspired by this founding agon, the oral pathos of Dionysian intoxication contra the visual power of Apollonian representations. This is, in a nutshell, the genuine mimetic agon that both opposes and connects Plato to the Homeric culture he is up against.
Mimetic Agonism and the Sharing of Voices

I call this agon *mimetic* because Plato not only violently opposes Homer but also admires him and thus copies him—the opposition being all the more radical to counter the magnetic power of attraction of his antagonistic model. If Plato’s opposition to Homer is most visible and often noted, the mimetic continuities are loud and clear, at least to genealogists. Still, the agonistic mimetic logic, or patho-*logy*, that both opposes and connects them, is still little understood: Plato, in fact, like Homer before him, invents mythic characters, narrates allegories, speaks in mimetic rather than diegetic speech, stages heroes and models to imitate, generating in the process mirroring inversions that destabilize the clear-cut opposition between poetry and philosophy he appears to work hard to set up—with and against Homer and the poetic culture he represents. The agon is thus mimetic because Socrates, and at one remove, Plato “himself,” as Jean-Luc Nancy also specified, “envies not so much the prize but the art of the rhapsode himself” (1982, 55)—a point that Cavarero shares with Nancy, as she speaks of Plato’s “envy” for the power of the Muse that inspires this art or techne.

Envy is based on imitation, as Girard saw, but mimetic agonism should not be confused with mimetic rivalry. In the former, in fact, the opposed poetic figure (Homer) is not simply a model turned rival for a contested object of desire that leads to violence—though a scapegoating exclusion does ensue, at least in that utopian philosophical fiction that is the *Republic*. Rather, the antagonist is an admired model who generates a paradoxical form of imitation I call patho-*logical*, for the pathos of envy is not simply rivalrous or destructive but is put to creative, productive, and logical use. To borrow once again from Nietzsche’s categories, this time from a youthful text titled “Homer’s Contest” (1967), we could say that the mimetic agon, or Homeric *contest* Plato stages is not based on what Nietzsche calls, thinking of Hesiod, a “bad Eris [strife],” driven by sad, rivalrous passions like “resentment” (1996b, 3). Rather, it is reproductive, heroic, and creative, for it is mediated by a “good Eris” that incites the opponents to a “contest [Wettkampf]” that is heroic in its Olympic nature. Thus, Nietzsche specifies, that by a sort of positive contagion internal to the logic of the contest: “Every great Hellene passes on the torch of the contest; every great virtue sets afire new greatness” (4). This applies to a Greek culture under the spell of Olympic contests. It also applies to cultural contests at play in oral recitations, tragic/comic dramatizations, and philosophical contestations as well, as Nietzsche’s colleague in Basel the historian Jacob Burckhardt also noted.10
In my interpretation of this mimetic agon, then, the torch is passed on, from generation to generation, via a paradoxical movement in which the opposed model provides both the conceptual and technical tools to promote a new discourse or logos that sets new greatness on fire—by pushing with and against the shoulders of influential predecessors already invested with the force of mimetic pathos. That logos born out of a mimetic agon with the pathos of poetry or myth is now known under the rubric of philosophy. As Jean-Pierre Vernant recognizes, myth means that “formulated speech” “belongs to the domain of legein […] and does not originally stand in contrast to logos” (1980, 187). On the contrary, we are arguing that myth makes the development of logos possible. And if philosophy is born out of a mythic womb, this also means that the paradoxical logic of mimetic agonism destabilizes the opposition between poetry and philosophy via the very concept (mimesis) that apparently sets up the all-too-visible opposition in the first place, yet in reality was channeling imperceptible continuities instead. Contrary to romantic models of originality based on an Oedipal anxiety of influence, then, the ancient but also modernist logic of mimetic agonism provides a productive starting point that continues to inform the sharing of voices animating mimetic studies as well.

Nancy comes to similar conclusions via his concept of sharing/dividing, or partage. In an evaluation of the enthusiastic poet who is “dispossessed” of “proper” qualities, Nancy speaks of a “partage of poetic and philosophical genres” (1982, 66) that are both divided and shared, shared-divided (partagées) precisely on the improper question of mimesis. This is indeed the partage des voix that obviously divides Ion and Socrates, the specialist of pathos and the technician of the logos. But, as Nancy also shows, this agonistic strife also implicitly connects the shared voices of the philosopher and the poet, Plato and Ion, Socrates and Homer. How? Via the mimetic agon that connects seemingly opposed figures—not unlike Ion’s chain con-divides different yet connected rings. If we now enter into the patho-logical flow of conjunctive-disjunction at play in Ion, we can say that this partage is generated by an improper figure like Ion who, Nancy specifies, “has nothing proper to its own [rien en propre]” (1982, 66). And paradoxically, precisely because of this “absence of proper capacity” or “dépropriation” (66), this (dis)possessed figure enters into an enthusiastic state of creative receptivity that is both passive and active, restricted to copying a model (Homer) and re-productive of a magnetic spell that generates (Dionysian) bonds. There is thus an implicit mimetic paradox at the heart of the sharing of voices that has so far gone unheard, and that our genealogy allows us to make audible.

This is the moment to register that the partage des voix Nancy theorizes at the level of his logos is redoubled by a shared mimetic experience that generates
revealing echoes that resonate throughout the different chapters, or rings, of this book as well. In his hermeneutical practice, Nancy is in fact clearly echoing a voice with whom he has much more in common than is often realized. Who is this secret sharer Nancy is giving voice to? A colleague in Strasbourg where they both cotaught for their entire careers, a coauthor of numerous books, a philosopher-poet, and above all, an intimate friend, sharer of communities, as well as one of the most profound late twentieth-century thinkers of mimesis, this secret sharer is no one else than the French philosopher, literary theorist, and professor of aesthetics, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe.\footnote{11}

As we shall see in more detail in chapter 4, Lacoue-Labarthe made an original interpretation of mimesis without proper models the throughline, or \textit{fil conducteur}, of his entire career. His account of the “impropriety” of the mimetic subject, its plastic malleability, and radical openness to both restricted (or passive) mimesis that is internal to the “imitation of the moderns,” and finds in Plato a key genealogical starting point, is clearly echoed in Nancy’s interpretation of \textit{Ion}. It is thus no accident that Nancy not only quotes Lacoue-Labarthe a few pages later (1982, 74, n. 52); he also leans on him to give mimetic specificity to his genealogy of shared mimetic voices. Nancy speaks, for instance, of “the singularly complex problematic of mimesis” (70) at play in the rhapsode, a complex mimetic disposition that puts Ion in a passive and receptive position in which he is not properly “himself,” for he is dispossessed by a divine and magnetic power; and yet, paradoxically, this dispossession also puts this improper mime in a position to re-	extit{produce} a “creative mimesis” characterized by what “he,” Nancy, calls an affective “participation” or “\textit{methexis}” (71).\footnote{12} Nancy even opens up the hypothesis that “mimesis could be the condition of this participation” (71) in the first place, thereby entangling mimesis and \textit{methexis} in the sharing of voices he performs philosophically.\footnote{13}

This is a significant supplement to traditional conceptions of mimesis restricted to representation constitutive of \textit{Homo sapiens} but no longer adequate to account for the side of humans that is also \textit{demens}, \textit{ridens}, and \textit{ludens}. If, in his influential account of \textit{Homo Ludens}, Johan Huizinga relied on classical scholars like Jane Harrison to claim that play is “\textit{methectic} rather than \textit{mimetic}” (2016, 15), a philological supplement from \textit{Homo Mimeticus} could help clarify an opposition that is not one. Harrison herself, as a classicist, had in fact duly noted: “We translate mimesis by ‘imitation,’ [or representation] and we do very wrongly” (1913, 46). Recalling the genealogy from which we started, Harrison adds: “The word mimesis means the action or doing of a person called a \textit{mime}” (47)—and what does a mime do if not rely on mimicry to elicit an affective
identification, participation, or methexis? Homo mimeticus in its multiple dramatic manifestations, be they ordinary or extraordinary, serious or ludic, sympathetic or agonistic, logical or pathological is thus animated by the dynamic interplay of mimesis and methexis characteristic of a mime who may lack a proper identity yet can impersonate a plurality of roles.

It would be useless to deny it. There is, indeed, a mimetic phantom animating the paradoxical voice (passive/active, dispossessed/possessed, copying/creative, reproducing/producing, etc.) of that mime de rien who is Ion, which accounts for the paradox that directly concerns us as well: Ion’s recitation of Homer is, in fact, both unique (he just won a prize in a Homeric contest), and he can control the emotions he triggers in spectators from a distance. Contradicting Socrates’s thesis, Ion knows very well what he is doing, as he masters the techne of recitation via a pathology that makes him observe the audience’s pathos from a critical distance. Ion observes:

As I look down at them from the stage above, I see them, every time, weeping, casting terrible glances, stricken with amazement at the deeds recounted. In fact, I have to give them very close attention, for if I set them weeping, I myself shall laugh when I get my money, but if they laugh, it is I who have to weep at losing it. (Plato 1961a, 535d–e)

Socrates appears to dominate Ion, but at a closer hermeneutical look, the mimetic agon is more balanced than it appears to be. It is in fact clear that Ion balances the magnetism of pathos with the mastery of his techne of interpretation, or hermeneia, a techne Socrates tries to wrest from poetry to hand on, like a torch, to philosophy. This poetic hermeneia rests on a pathos of distance, entailing the reading of human faces from a distance that fail to trigger any mimetic responses in the rhapsode. Quite the contrary: the opposite pathos emerges. Thus, in a mirroring inversion, weeping triggers laughter, laughter triggers weeping. And yet, at the same time, Ion also admits to being possessed by a magnetic power that is not proper to him and dispossesses him of his proper being, generating a magnetizing pathos that conveys an enthusiastic intoxication in the audience.

Already for Plato, then, or perhaps especially for Plato, mimetic pathos and philosophical distance, but also orality and writing, the danger of fusion and the unique gift of inspiration, passive reproductive mimesis and active productive mimesis, may not be as stable a binary, as his idealist aspirations make it seem to be. As Nancy puts it in a chiastic mirroring phrase that sums up the paradox of shared voices at play in Ion and perhaps in “his” shared voice as well: “a
philosophical rhapsody allows for a philosophy of rhapsody” (1982, 79). Who is the rhapsode, and who is the philosopher here? In the alternation of voices, it is indeed no longer clear who speaks. Still, this shared singular-plural voice has mimetic properties nonetheless.

In this mirror game interesting inversions begin to appear. The mimetic agon between philosophy and poetry is entangling the philosopher in the very pathos that he aims to exclude. Conversely, on the side of poetry, an affective, participatory, and paradoxical mimesis is revealed at play in the magnetic chains characterized by a “communicability and transitivity” that turns “passivity” into “activity” (Nancy 1982, 62) and vice versa. In this process of mimetic communication, a long chain of rings is formed that goes not only from the Muses to spectators but also connects, like a magnetic flow, distinct dialogues like Ion and Republic. Already for Plato, then, the chain is already shared.

So far, so good. But why does Plato insist in the “Allegory of the Cave” on foregrounding visual mimesis, given poetry’s predominantly oral powers? If the magnetizing powers of Ion’s chain are oral, why are the shadow’s powers visual, since the same mimetic agon with and contra Homer animates both dialogues? Picking up this specific question from the point of view of the Muses’ enchanting power, Cavarero has an interesting answer: she argues that Plato’s speculative focus on a visual culture out of which philosophical speculation is born leads him to invent, as a countercharm, so to speak, visual “tricks and devices” intended to displace the oral power of Homeric poetry, now “replaced by an artificial harnessing of the gaze” (2002, 63). Philosophy contra poetry, vision contra orality, mimesis contra mimesis: this is, in a nutshell, the mimetic agon animated by a Platonic good Eris with and contra Homer, which literally informs the Platonic dialogues. As Cavarero succinctly puts it, confirming Nancy: “Plato imitates the fascinating effects of the Muse because he envies her” (64). The father of philosophy is thus skilled in the poetic craft he denounces in his opponent, because, in the practice of mimetic agonism, the opponent to displace is also a model to imitate. Hence, in a mirroring overturning, Plato counters oral mimesis with visual mimesis, the magnetizing pathos of sound with the stabilizing image of the shadows, later stabilized by the speculative trope of the mirror. The mimetic agon is thus not simply reproductive but re-productive—if only because philosophy is born by mirroring, if not echoing, the song of the Muse.
This mirroring overturning of perspectives at the origins of philosophy fits in well with the spirit of our theory, whose goal is to go beyond simple oppositions between philosophy and literature in order to recuperate an oral, ritualistic, and embodied conception of mimesis. At the same time, the opposition between oral mimesis and visual mimesis might not be clear cut. Recall that, at the same time, and without contradiction, Plato is not only addressing a culture that is still dominated by Homeric recitations and practices of memorization that enchant orally; this culture is also under the spell of theatrical spectacles such as comedies and tragedies that rely on both orality and vision in order to spellbind what Plato calls “the nondescript mob assembled in the theater” (1963c, 604e). And what is a theater if not a théatron, a place for viewing (from théomai, to see, to watch, to observe)? The agon between philosophy and poetry, then, technicians of logos and specialists of pathos, also stages théoria against théatron, and this mimetic agon is inscribed in the shared genre of the dialogue (from dia through and legein to speak) that both Platonic dia-logues and theatrical dia-logues have in common.

This is a point Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, in a dialogue with Nancy that informs the latter’s conception of shared voices, clearly hears, as he observes to his philosophical alter ego: Plato’s “choice of the dialogue attests to a severe rivalry and agôn vis-à-vis tragedy” (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 2013, 80; my trans.). The mimetic agon between philosophy and literature, in other words, is given voice by the mimetic lexis (lexis mimētikē), or the “mode of enunciation” (75) they have in common, or share (partagent).15 This is not entirely unlike what Plato’s whispers between the lines that animate his allegorical cave. After all, in his mimetic agon with Homer, he stages, via the mode of the dialogue, a sharing of voices that make fascinating shadows speak, generating a magnetic spell on the bound prisoners who both see and hear them from a visual distance.16 Perhaps then, it is arguably this interplay of orality and vision, phonic pathos and visual distance, that is constitutive of the magnetizing power of those talking shadows—Homeric rhapsodes, but also actors and mimes—giving voice to a blind poet by impersonating roles at play in epic, but also tragic and comic spectacles.

Having listened carefully to the Muses and felt and seen their spellbinding powers at play, let us now return down to the cave with this double audiovisual mimetic hypothesis in our minds and ears attentive to the echo of the shadows “themselves.”
The Echo of the Shadows

On the double shoulders of Nancy’s interpretation of the sharing of voices in *Ion* and furthering Cavarero’s oral account of the “Allegory of the Cave” in the *Republic*, I propose a Janus-faced genealogy of both Apollonian (visual) and Dionysian (oral) mimesis, which should put us in a position to both see and hear the binding power of those enigmatic chains at the dawn of philosophy. The paradoxical logic of mimetic agonism attuned us to the fact that a mirroring interplay between oral and visual mimesis, the pathos of voice and the distance of the eye, activity and passivity, is jointly responsible for the powers that magnetize spectators in the Platonic cave in classical antiquity. At two removes, it equally in-forms a paradox of mimesis constitutive of the imitation of the moderns. At a third remove, so to speak, it might continue to cast a spell on homo mimeticus in the digital age as well.

It is in fact crucial to recognize that Plato—via his alter ego, Socrates—specifies that the projection screen in the cave is not based on the spell of visual simulacra alone. True, the specular shadows are the most visible phenomena in the cave and in-form the speculative metaphysics the allegory clearly alludes to: the shadows stand for the artistic reproductions of the sensible, phenomenal world, presumably represented by the material shapes simulators hold up in front of the fire—though this redoubling, as we shall see, lends itself to more than one interpretation of the *vita mimetica*. Shadows are thus far removed indeed from the intelligible, abstract, universal, but also blinding truth symbolized by the sun outside the cave, standing for the world of ideas in general and the idea of the Good in particular—what the philosopher aspires to via the dialectical ascent to a *vita contemplativa*. As Plato specifies in book 10 via the specular/speculative trope of the mirror, artistic shadows and the “imitators” that give form to them are “at three removes from nature” (1963c, 597e), by which he clearly means the intelligible nature of ideal Forms. Less perceptible to what Plato calls the “most sunlike of all the instruments of sense” (508b), namely vision, but audible nonetheless in the affective and communal sphere of myth, we should also register that a visual mimesis is both redoubled and amplified by an acoustic mimesis that resonates throughout the cave, generating not only a visual but also a sonic doubling effect. There is, in fact, an echo that supplements an auditive dimension to the projection mechanism that is not visible, and thus has tended to elude speculative theorists fixated on, or perhaps spellbound by, the *vita contemplativa*; and yet it is audible enough if one takes the trouble to interpret the
myth. As we shall hear, this echo has wide-ranging theoretical implications for our genealogy of a vita mimetica open to the pathos of mythic fictions.

This echo’s origin is illusory and, in this epistemic sense, false, for it appears to emerge as an original voice from the shadows themselves. Still, it is operative on the senses of homo mimeticus via Dionysian powers of the false that generate an affective bondage nonetheless. Originating from the voices of the carriers of simulacra at the back of the prisoners, the echo generates a confusing yet eminently effective redoubling that alters the visual shadows in front. The echo, not unlike in the myth of Narcissus, follows its illusory visual counterpart, or shadows, yet it has mimetic powers of its own: in fact, it radically amplifies the visual spellbinding powers of the shadows in the foreground by generating a simulation of talking shadows with confusing but also spellbinding effects. Thus, Socrates asks his interlocutor who, in yet another doubling, happens to be Glaucon, Plato’s brother: “if their prison had and echo from the wall opposite them, when one of the passers-by uttered a sound, do you think that they would suppose anything else than the passing shadow to be the speaker?” (1963c, 7.515b) This is a rhetorical question if there ever was one. “By Zeus, I do not, said he” (515b), echoes Glaucon. The doubling trick is not specular and thus does not lend itself to univocal theoretical speculations. If it risks going unheard, and thus unthought, by unilateral speculative thinkers focused only on what they see, it deserves an attentive ear to capture its patho-logical implications for Janus-faced thinkers who both see and hear.

The echo of the shadows is both deviously deceptive and magnetically effective, for it operates on both the logos and the pathos at play in the vita mimetica. On the side of logos, the shadows’ echo generates an epistemic confusion that leads the prisoners to mistake the identity of the speaker and attribute the voices behind their back to the illusory “shadows of artificial objects” (1963c, 515c) in front—an epistemic confusion that is de rigueur in metaphysical discussions of mimesis, is concerned with the unconcealment of truth, or truth as unconcealment qua aletheia, and has already received much attention among influential advocates of the vita contemplativa. On the other, less-attended side of pathos, the echo also generates a troubling confusion of identity that has destabilizing and rather spellbinding powers on the embodied psyches of the prisoners living a vita mimetica through their senses—an affective confusion that was once central in ethico-political concerns with education or paideia in oral cultures and that, albeit via different media, continue resonate with digital cultures as well, with amplifying effects.

Thanks to the echo, in fact, the illusory shadows appear to speak. This is an epistemic illusion the philosopher unveils, of course. But my point is that this
audiovisual illusion is powerful, affective, and spellbinding and generates a suspension of disbelief. Why? Because the shadows become animated, both in the ancient sense of being given a voice and thus a soul (anima), and in the modern sense of a visual animation. The echo of the shadows, in other words, urges us to overturn perspectives and change the orientation of the philosophical gaze by attending to the magnetizing field of the cave itself: if a dominant tendency in western philosophy privileged a visual mimesis to be theorized from a distance along a vertical and increasingly disembodied axis that leads outside the cave toward imaginary speculative Hinterwelts characteristic of the vita contemplativa, our driving telos is the opposite. Thus, we reenter the immanent audiovisual sphere of a vita mimetica under the magnetic spell of participation with animated shadows that need to be experienced with pathos with our audiovisual sensorium first, in order to subsequently re-evaluate the communal bondage they generate.

Despite the abstraction of the dialectical machinery, or rather because of it, the specular patho-logical illusion is easy enough to see, and thus to theorize. It generated the speculations that set up a vertical hierarchy subordinating art and sensible phenomena to an idealist and fabulous metaphysics based on binaries (truth/falsity, original/copy, reality/illusion, etc.) Plato inaugurated and, for over two millennia now, informed religious beliefs in a “true world” behind the world. This Hinterwelt, as Nietzsche provocatively noted at the twilight of metaphysics, turned out to be “unattainable, indemonstrable, unpromisable […] At any rate, unattained. And being unattained, also unknown. Consequently, not consoling, redeeming, or obligating” (Nietzsche 1982, 485). There are ample reasons to abolish this fable, for the metaphysical shadows it casts are still with us in the digital age, as we shall see and feel. But if we listen carefully to the voice of muthos, the allegory also tells a different story that is not deprived of truth. This audiovisual dispositif is staged to make readers feel, via an interplay of Apollonian simulation and Dionysian contagion, the talking shadow’s disconcerting magnetic power of attraction, a mimetic will to power that, I suggest, echoing and amplifying a long chain of minor voices in the philosophical tradition—from Nietzsche to Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy to Cavarero—inclines the vertical ideal of Homo erectus toward the embodied, relational, and immanent reality of a homo mimeticus both possessed and dispossessed by fictional others.

If we now return one last time to the “Allegory of the Cave” via the double lens of our mimetic patho-logy attentive to both vision and orality, a fundamental re-evaluation is needed. This requires readers to engage with the art of interpretation, rumination, or hermeneia, for what we are reading is, after all, a
myth. We can summarize its main insights in the *vita mimetica* as follows. The magnetizing powers of artistic representations are not purely visual nor solely oral but rest on a dynamic interplay of a mutually reinforcing audiovisual mimesis. Fictional characters staged in the theater animated via the middle rings of rhapsodes or actors impersonating epic or tragic/comic heroes, played on both a visual and an oral mimesis to magnetize and chain the audience to spell-binding spectacles.

How does the spectacle bind or chain the prisoners? Via a Janus-faced spell. Its phenomenology operates as follows: the mimetic pathos of such talking shadows, in Plato’s diagnostic view, orients the audience’s gaze in the dark to such talking and moving shapes; such a fixation narrows the field of vision, fixates it so to speak, preventing the spectators qua prisoners to look around. In the process, it generates a light hypnosis that dispossess the audience of its ability to think rationally while under such mesmerizing spell. And this spell is shared in a way that is double: all the prisoners are simultaneously tied to the same mesmerizing spectacle above, but also to each other horizontally; they feel the pathos of the animation directly, but they also sense that other spectators feel the same pathos. This double bond has self-reinforcing properties built in it that are hard to break loose from. In such a vertical/horizontal double bond amplified by a double visual/oral mimesis, the animation does not appear to be real. It *is* real. It operates on our sensorium and affects how we feel, how we act, and what we think. The magnetic spell of the double bonds is complete, and the chain is locked—welcome to the *vita mimetica*!

Having patiently reconstructed the audiovisual projection machine that animates the shadows in the cave, endowing them with a magnetic-hypnotic-contagious will to power, a last narratological supplement is still needed to come to grips with this contagious power of talking simulations. A mimetic narratology is in fact internal to the echo of the shadows, waiting for an interpretation to make it apparent. As Plato/Socrates had already specified in book 3 of the *Republic*, when the concept of *mimesis* was first introduced on the philosophical scene, what matters in questions of dramatic recitation or impersonation is not only *what* is said at the level of content (*logos*) but also *how* it is said at the level of enunciation (*lexis*). When Marshall McLuhan famously stated that “the medium is the message” (1964, 23), he was echoing an ancient lesson that needs to be reloaded for new mimetic studies as well.

The dialogue between Socrates and Adeimantus is worth relistening. It goes as follows: we are “done with the ‘what’ of speech and still ha[ve] to consider the ‘how’” (1963c, 394c). Hence having considered “the topic of tales,” Socrates
picks up “that of diction [lexis] [...] so we shall have completely examined both the matter [logos] and the manner [lexis] of speech” (392c). Thus, Socrates sets out to distinguish between tales that proceed “either by pure narration [haple diegesis] or by narrative that is effected through imitation [mimēsis] or both” (392d). Adeimantus can follow the philosophical argument contra mimesis focused on the content or logos but has trouble following this fundamental formal distinction. Philosophers spellbound by metaphysical Forms might have the same problem. Still, Adeimantus deserves credit, for he starts by candidly admitting: “I don’t understand what you mean by this” (392c). Hence, the philosopher-poet who, in his youth is said to have burned his poems but channeled his poetic drive, or will to mime, in the writing of philosophical dialogues, takes up, once again, the paradigmatic example of his nemesis, Homer—for not only the content of Plato’s myths but also the form of his dialogues remain chained to his mimetic antagonist.

Plato’s example is classical. The beginning of *The Iliad*, as every educated Greek would remember, relies on an interplay between mimetic and diegetic speech, or mixed style. Echoing the opening lines, Socrates makes the following narratological point: when it comes to mimetic speeches, for instance when the priest Chryses of Troy asks the Achaeans for the release of his daughter, the speaker (imagine a rhapsode like Ion) “tries as far as may be to make us feel that not Homer is the speaker but the priest” (393b). You might say that the rhapsode speaks with the voice of the priest, or better, impersonates or animates the old priest for the spectators to hear and see on the stage. In the context of Plato’s poetics in book 3, which precedes and thus in-forms the “Allegory of the Cave” in book 7, then, we find once again a confirmation that spectators are tricked by a technically crafted mimetic *pathos* (affect) perhaps more than by the *logos* (content) of poetry. Socrates, in fact, specifies that contrary to diegetic speech (*diegesis*), in mimetic speech (*mimesis*) the rhapsodes or actor do not speak in their own proper voice but, rather, in the voice of another.

**Reanimating the *Vita Mimetica***

Do you hear the echo? Can you see the animation? This is also the narrative situation in the cave, where the shadows speak with the voice of others who animate them. A sharing of voices, we are now in a position to both hear and see, is
not only problematic for epistemic reasons concerned with knowing who speaks as philosophers routinely assume. Everyone knows by the fourth century BC, even the cavemen, that Homer is dead. This sharing is problematic above all for the affective power to give voice and body to the pathos of the priest Chryses. How? Not only by what the actor or mimos says but by how he says it. That is, by “likening oneself [via a mimetic lexis] to another in speech or bodily bearing” (1963c, 393c). Plato is insistent on the audiovisual power of this dramatic posture. There are indeed dramatic contagious effects on the audience that ultimately rest on the rhapsode’s/actor’s “imitation in voice and gesture” (397b)—or, if you prefer, orality and vision, echoes and shadows.

The electrifying power of mimetic speeches dramatized by actors that cast a magnetic spell on spectators is now revealed in its patho-logical implications, which, at the dawn of philosophy, are perhaps more psychological and pedagogical than epistemic and metaphysical. In fact, in book 3 Socrates had already specified that this impersonation onstage has the disconcerting magnetic power to generate spellbinding “imitations, [which] if continued from youth far into life, settle down into habits and second nature in the body, the speech, and the thought” (1963c, 395d). Among other things, it generates stereotypical impressions that cut deep in the delineation of homo mimeticus, in bodily positions, but also linguistic and above all mental dispositions, generating a pathos that cuts across the mimetic agon between philosophy and poetry. It is in fact Socrates who, in the end, confirms our genealogical suspicion that the simulators on theatrical stages the shadows in the cave obviously allude to are not only problematic because of the illusory nature of the educative content (logos) of their tales—though they remain that too; they are also, and perhaps above all, dangerous for the magnetizing feeling (pathos) of participation (methexis) generated by mimetic speeches and gestures at the level of poetic diction or form (lexis). In sum, what we hear from the shared voices internal to Plato’s patho-logy of mimesis is a diagnostic indication that it is this audiovisual confusion of identity that is endowed with a magnetic-hypnotic-contagious pathos that spell-binds the audience qua prisoners in ways that deprives them of a proper identity and is constitutive of the vita mimetica in the immanent sphere of the cave qua polis.

While form and content cannot be dissociated, when it comes to mimesis, the how in the end might have more power than the what; the medium might be even more important than the message. And if this is obviously true for poetry, it might be equally true for philosophy as well. No wonder that Plato dramatizes dialogues to counter the power of the mimetic poetry he is up against. While a sacrificial exclusion from the ideal city might be a fictional solution at the end
of the *Republic*, the scapegoating mechanism not only failed to work in theory; the narrative strategy of the opponent was also deftly assimilated by Plato in his dramatic practice and is constitutive of the birth of philosophy: out of the pathos of mimetic agonism.

At one remove, when it comes to the art of interpretation, our genealogy of the *vita mimetica* suggests that philosophical attention to *logos* alone is radically insufficient to get hold of that protean figure who is homo mimeticus. Even for the father of philosophy, or rather, especially for him, a techne of the logos must be doubled and redoubled by genealogical diagnostics attentive to the power of mimetic *pathos* in view of generating patho-*logies* that speak to the contemporary human condition and are constitutive of mimetic studies, old and new.

Since the dawn of philosophy, it was clear that *Homo sapiens*’ fascination for mythic fictions not only created solid bonds of communal solidarity on which the life, identity, and unity of the polis rested for the better; they also generated spell-binding effects that took possession of *Homo sapiens*, dispossessing *homo mimeticus* of its individual identity and rendering it easy prey to the magnetizing powers of myth for the worse. In the end, Yuval Harari was right to stress that “myths, it transpired, are stronger than anyone could have imagined” (2011, 115), at least among mainstream social scientists in present times. Still, a genealogical perspective shows that ancient philosophers not only could imagine their strength; they also provided, between the lines, insights that account for this power or *pathos* in the first place, pointing to therapeutic patho-*logies* as well. Hence the importance of supplementing the history of *Home Sapiens* with a genealogy of *Homo Mimeticus*.

This Janus-faced insight at the dawn of aesthetic theory remains an untimely insight to take hold of by new generations. That humans continue to remain under the spellbinding effects of audiovisual simulations projected on a variety of black mirrors is clear enough. A magnetic chain continues to generate phantoms in the egos too, that reach, via different and increasingly spellbinding media, from antiquity into modernity, animating the *vita mimetica* in the contemporary period. Perhaps never before has *Homo sapiens* been so constantly under the spell of magnetizing fictions that fixate our gaze, affect our thoughts, and orient our actions from the dark, mesmerizing and increasingly ubiquitous encaved space between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. Whether a chain of thinkers that follow these shadows can help us put the pathos of philosophy to productive use to generate patho-*logies* that prove adequate to capturing the protean transformations of homo mimeticus in the present century is what our genealogy still needs to find out.