Mimetic Posthumanism: An Introduction

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What is the relation between mimesis and posthumanism? And why should these seemingly antagonistic concepts be joined in a volume opening up a new branch of posthuman studies titled *Mimetic Posthumanism*? After the plurality of innovative qualifications that, since the twilight of the twentieth century, have been giving critical and creative specificity to the posthuman turn, rendering posthumanism "critical" and "speculative," "philosophical" and "ecological," among other future-oriented perspectives, adding "mimetic" to the list of qualifications may initially sound disappointing. Skeptics might wonder: What now? Is the posthuman turn so deprived of originality that it returns to the old humanistic notion of "mimesis," traditionally restricted to all-too-human forms of artistic representation?

This first impression is partially justified. At first sight, what we group under the rubric of mimetic posthumanism appears to look in two diametrically opposed directions: the mimetic side looks back to the past origins of aesthetic and philosophical theories attentive to the ways humans are uniquely endowed with a capacity to copy, represent and, in this restricted sense, imitate the world; the posthuman side looks ahead to technological developments that go beyond the human and are characterized by posthumanist difference rather than humanistic sameness, innovation instead of repetition, creativity and originality rather than copying or imitation. Given the long shadow mimesis casts on the very idea of technological innovation that drives posthuman studies, mimetic posthumanism might thus not only seem deprived of originality, it may also appear to generate a performative contradiction that a genealogy of philosophers informing posthuman studies has long trained us to critique, unmask, and deconstruct.

And yet, precisely if we adopt genealogical lenses, the opposition between mimesis and posthumanism reveals itself to be less stable than it appears to be, generating mirroring inversions of perspective that open up new possibilities for alternative reconstructions. Convoking the ancient philosophical and aesthetic concept of "*mimēsis*" should at least remind thinkers of the posthuman that first appearances tend to be deceiving. A second look, in fact, shows that if the two perspectives look in opposed directions, they can be joined to compose a Janus-faced conceptual figure. As we shall see, a plurality of posthuman figurations, configurations, or, better still, transfigurations open up creative,

strikingly metamorphic, and even original directions of inquiry to further a "mimetic turn or *re*-turn to mimesis"[1] in the twenty-first century.

After all, the same genealogists that paved the way for the supplementary "post" that now destabilizes the anthropocentric concept of the "human," rendering it "posthuman," started by troubling the hierarchical metaphysical binaries on which humanism relied.[2] Such binaries were often structured on much-iterated oppositions such as inside/outside, nature/culture, mind/body, self/other, male/female, dominant/subaltern, and human/nonhuman. They also rested on an idealist metaphysics that opposed the "copy" to the "original," the material "phenomenon" to the ideal "Form," the "imitation" to the "model." Despite their multiple iterations that traverse the history of western thought, ultimately, such binary oppositions rested on a dominant conception of mimesis that, at least since Plato, was predicated on the mirroring logic of the Same, a vertical mimetic logic that has long been deconstructed, overturned, and unmasked as a metaphysical fiction.

In the wake of Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics, humans revealed themselves to be far removed from being mere debased imitations of a divine, transcendental, and ideal model posited in an imaginary world behind the world. Rather, the very idea of a divine model, ideal, or phantom turned out to be given form by all-too-human drives constitutive of our evolutionary history in general and modernist critiques of that history in particular. As a period characterized by technological innovations and accelerations, modernist thinkers were thus quick to diagnose a change in human character or subjectivity that turned the ego into a copy, simulacrum, or, to use Nietzsche's phrase, a "phantom of the ego."[3] Over a century later, in the wake of recent developments in robotics and algorithmic reason, and especially artificial intelligence (AI) revolutions that increasingly blur the frontier between human and artificial

1 The mimetic turn or *re*-turn originates in the 'Homo Mimeticus' project (funded by the European Research Council), of which this volume provides a 2.0 supplement. Its theoretical foundations are articulated in a trilogy on homo mimeticus currently in progress. See Nidesh Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus: A New Theory of Imitation* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022); Nidesh Lawtoo and Marina Garcia-Granero (eds.), *Homo Mimeticus II: The Re-Turns of Mimesis,* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2024); Nidesh Lawtoo and Willow Verkek, eds., *Homo Mimeticus III: Plasticity, Mimesis, and Metamorphosis with Catherine Malabou* (in progress). See also www.homomimeticus.eu.

2 For first steps see Nidesh Lawtoo, ed., "Posthuman Mimesis," Special Issue, *Journal of Posthumanism* 2, no. 2 (2022), https://journals.tplondon.com/jp/issue/view/124.

3 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 61.

intelligence, it is thus tempting to repeat modernist claims on radical changes or transformations.

We could say, for instance, that on and about November 30, 2022, posthuman character changed, in an echo of modernist claims. This, at least, is what the launch of ChatGPT (Generative Pre-Trained Transformer), a conversational AI system developed by OpenAI and made available for free use on that date seems to suggest. Designed to fine-tune conversational language on the bases of inputs, exchanges, and questions from users, as the program itself puts it, ChatGPT can generate "human-like responses in natural language based on the input it receives."[4] While likeness is one of the traditional translations of mimesis, the adequation to human responses is not based on a passive imitation or representation of a preexisting human model, or origin. It is not simply a matter of AI imitating or reproducing human speech. It is rather a simulation of human communication that is productive, or generative of new texts without origins, for it is based on statistical patterns learned from a vast amount of internet data during its training process.

This artificial simulation is certainly impressive, generative, and revolutionary. Its consequences for the transformation of posthuman character are far-reaching and in need of careful investigation, if only because an entire tradition of thinkers of mimesis from Plato to Nietzsche, Stiegler to Hayles and beyond have warned that the power of simulations is at least double: Not only can they generate lies far removed from reality that can be illusory and false, leading to what is currently called post-truth, they also have the magnetic power, or will to power, to tap into the mind, soul, or brain of homo mimeticus and cast a spell so profound that it "spell-binds" people living a "*vita mimetica,*" as an ancient myth already warned us at the dawn of philosophy.[5] Posthuman character may not have changed once and for all on and about November 30, 2022, but it is certainly more open than ever to fast transformations in the years to come.

At the same time, if we adopt a long-distance, genealogical perspective, as this book aims to do, there are reasons to be suspicious of a single transformational moment in the history of homo mimeticus. The same philosophical tradition suggests that a *re*-turn of attention to the performative properties of what the ancients enigmatically called *mimēsis* (from *mîmos*, actor but also performance) had been in the making for some time: From hyperreal simulacra without origins to identifications with avatars, impersonations in videogames to deep fakes, fake news online to (new) fascist insurrections offline, it is

4 Text generated by ChatGPT, June 3, 2023, OpenAI, https://chat.openai.com. ChatGPT.

5 Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus*, 69–91.

clear that AI simulations are not simply "hyperreal" in the sense that they do not rest on the logic of "imitation" already critiqued in the past century;[6] they are also and above all, "hypermimetic" in the sense that they generate material effects on the brains and bodies, actions and reactions of homo mimeticus 2.0 living increasingly digitized lives in the twenty-first century. In the process, a radical inversion of perspectives has taken place: It is no longer posthuman intelligence or consciousness that aspires to imitate artificial intelligence. On the contrary, it is the human mind or brain that turns out to be the immanent model computers are currently programmed to imitate or copy. They do so in view of aspiring, perhaps not to human intelligence as such (a notoriously difficult concept to define, let alone copy), but at least to a simulation thereof with the power to retroact on posthuman users generating mimetic, or rather, hypermimetic effects that call for new diagnostics.

Either way, the general assumption of this volume is that mimesis in its multiple iterations (imitating and copying, but also mimicking, doubling, impersonating, simulating, and the like) plays a central role in the posthuman turn. It provides, in fact, a multifaceted mirror to reflect critically on what it means to be human or become posthuman in the first place. In the process, a mimetic drive also informs "posthumanist reading[s]" inclined to "sympathize and empathize with a position that troubles and undoes identity,"[7] if only because both sympathy and empathy generate a shared affect, or *sym-pathos* that increasingly blurs the boundary dividing embodied self and digital others, connecting humans to technology in a plurality of different ways characteristic of the digital age.

Furthering a critical line of posthuman inquiry, this volume suggests that the so-called "originality" constitutive of an all-too-human species with the narcissistic presumption to call itself *Homo sapiens sapiens* (notice the mimetic repetition), rests on a different, perhaps more ancient and destabilizing, but also more embodied, relational, immanent, and social conception of mimesis constitutive of a chameleon-like species that we call homo mimeticus. That is, an eminently adaptable, plastic, and protean species born without proper or essential qualities that would fix, once and for all, all-too-human identities in a stable essence, mold, or form. Instead, homo mimeticus is animated by an immanent drive to mimic others, be they human or nonhuman, real or fictional, offline or online, in reflex, unconscious, and embodied ways that are always relational in nature and open up the humanistic ideal

6 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Galilée, 1981), 10.

7 Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, "What Is a Posthumanist Reading?" *Angelaki* 13, no. 1 (2008): 95–111, 95.

of an autonomous, rational, and fully conscious *Homo sapiens* to a plurality of forms to becoming other. Over the ages, this will to mime rendered homo mimeticus not only relational and social, empathetic and prosthetic, but also eminently vulnerable to external human, animal, and technological influences that formed and continue to transform sapient and not-so-sapient humans and posthumans today—for both good and ill.

If this more complex, immanent, and intersubjective mimetic hypothesis is correct—and a number of recent developments in the human, social, and evolutionary sciences, including the neurosciences, indicate that it is—then, the transformations of humans across historical periods, societies, and cultures may not only be the product of "intersubjective" agricultural, industrial, and now digital "revolutions" constitutive of popular histories of *Homo sapiens*;[8] these transformations are also dependent on a relational, affective, and embodied conception of homo mimeticus open to the shared experience of sym-pathos that makes intersubjectivity possible in the first place.

Mimetic pathos should thus not be confused with mimetic or Oedipal desire, for it rests on relational processes that transgress triangular structures. This also means that intersubjectivity, relationality, embodiment, the unconscious, metamorphoses, and other concepts central to posthuman studies go beyond the pleasure principle. They rest instead on a little-discussed mimetic principle that amplifies the power of myth, fictions, ideologies, and technologies to form and transform homo mimeticus 2.0 in unpredictable ways that require new diagnostic evaluations. This mimetic principle, affect, or pathos is constitutive of a will to mime that—from the dawn of consciousness to the development of language, from mythic origins to philosophical reflections, from technological inventions to social cooperation—reached into the present, forming and transforming not simply what humans were in the past and are in the present, but also what they can potentially become in the future.

Thus reframed, then, our opening question may begin to sound less improbable than it first sounded. It could be reformulated as follows: Could it be that this different, more immanent, embodied, and relational conception of mimesis serves an important and, so far, still underexplored genealogical link in the narrative of how we became posthuman as well? And if this hypothesis is correct, then shouldn't the recent manifestations of mimesis in the digital age—from avatars to deep fakes, AI simulations to hypermimesis, among others—call for new critical and theoretical bridges between mimetic studies and posthuman studies? This is, indeed, what this inaugural volume on mimetic

8 Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (London: Vintage Books, 2011), 132.

posthumanism aims to perform from the threefold perspective of art, philosophy and technics on different manifestations of posthuman mimesis.

1 Posthuman Mimesis: Precursors

We are not alone in arguing for new connections between mimesis and the posthuman. In a dialogue on posthuman mimesis, Katherine Hayles joined forces to promote a mimetic turn in posthuman studies, which now serves as a "Dialogic Prelude" to the present volume as well.[9] She did so through a retrospective glance that cast new light onto the opening of her landmark study, *How We Become Posthuman* (1999)—a book central to the genealogy of posthuman studies that provides a starting point for mimetic posthumanism as well.

In that book, Hayles' goal was to bring posthuman phantasies of disembodiment promoted by cybernetics back to Earth, by rooting them in the immanence of the body. For this operation, she selected as a genealogical starting point an exemplary case study: the "imitation game," which Alan Turing envisioned in the 1950s to distinguish between humans and machines, so as to answer the question, "Can machines think?"[10] As the name of the game suggests, it was designed in traditional mimetic terms that relied on the original/copy metaphysical opposition I mentioned, a *meta* (after) *physics* (nature) which, at least since Plato and Aristotle, structures other binaries such as intelligible/sensible, forms/phenomena, transcendence/immanence, mind/body, male/female, and idea/copy by privileging the former, more abstract, disembodied, and supposedly universal term over the latter. This traditional conception of imitation is predicated on a dualistic metaphysics that, Hayles convincingly argues, goes from Plato to cybernetics and continues to (mis)inform transhumanism as well. In the process, it had the unfortunate effect of erasing embodiment at the dawn of posthuman studies, while turning out to be radically insufficient to distinguish between humans and machines, as also dramatized in sci-fi films such as Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014). There is thus a genealogical link between posthuman studies and mimetic studies: Both are invested in opposing, deconstructing, or overturning traditional

9 With some minor adaptations, this prologue is a reprint of a dialogue titled "Posthuman Mimesis 11—Connections: A Dialogue Between Nidesh Lawtoo and Katherine Hayles," *Journal of Posthumanism* 2, no. 2 (2022): 181–91, 185. I am grateful to Kate Hayles for agreeing to reproduce it here.

10 See N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), xi–xiv.

conceptions of mimesis modeled on disembodied phantoms far removed from reality.

Now, Hayles adds an interesting twist, in line with the mimetic turn, to give genealogical substance to posthuman mimesis. A few years later, Turing was in fact forced to undergo hormonal treatment as a supposed "cure" for his homosexuality. The cure eventually turned out to be a poison: Turing committed suicide a few years later. Yet, the pathological cure was not deprived of logical or—as I call it, to emphasize the productive interplay of affect and reason, pathos and logos—patho-*logical* insights. In fact, Hayles stresses that Turing, in a later, lesser-known article on "morphogenesis," turned to a more fluid, embodied, and metamorphic conception of mimesis that challenged the metaphysical binaries (human/machine, male/female, original/copy) he had previously set up in the imitation game. This time, in fact, he focused on "the ability of organisms to change form and become something other than what they were."[11] This immanent, morphogenetic, and metamorphic conception of (post)humans endowed with the power to "become something other" is, indeed, the one that the mimetic turn in general and this volume in particular set out to re-evaluate from a plurality of artistic, philosophical, and technological perspectives.

With characteristic foresight, Hayles was quick to establish a genealogical link that connects the two faces of mimetic posthumanism looking in opposed directions. Thus, joining forces to build a bridge between the posthuman turn and the mimetic turn, she asserts that Turing's later revision of the imitation game "is very much in line with the strain of mimetic theory that emphasizes plasticity and transformation."[12] That strain of mimetic theory, or—as we now call it to differentiate it from humanistic theories restricted to desire and rivalry—*mimetic studies,* aims to give material, embodied, and relational substance to the ancient concept of mimesis that now casts new light on the nonhuman processes of posthuman becoming as well.[13] Often simplistically restricted to copying, or aesthetic realism, the Greek concept *mimēsis* is an untranslatable, destabilizing, and troubling concept that includes mimicry

11 Hayles and Lawtoo, "Posthuman Mimesis," 185.

12 Hayles and Lawtoo, "Posthuman Mimesis," 185.

13 Theoretical foundations for mimetic studies are set in Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus* 9–40; Nidesh Lawtoo, *Violence and the Mimetic Unconscious: Vol. 2. The Affective Hypothesis* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2023), 1–33; Nidesh Lawtoo, ed., "The Mimetic Condition," Special Issue, *CounterText* 8, no.1 (2022); and Nidesh Lawtoo, ed., "The Mimetic Turn," Special Issue, *MLN*, 138, no. 5 (2023). We also refer to "new mimetic studies" when the focus is on new media, AI, algorithms, etc., though there are many continuities between old and new manifestations of homo mimeticus.

and imitation, but also impersonation, identification, influence, contagion, simulation, mirror neurons, and plasticity, among other contemporary avatars constitutive of an eminently mimetic species—namely, a hypermimetic species that is not exceptionally self-contained or autonomous, but rather is entangled, often unconsciously, with human and nonhuman others.

Thus redefined, mimesis operates as a relational affective force, power, or pathos that includes desire as previous theorists of imitation have emphasized, but is not restricted to it; if only because it is based on the realization that all affects, from joy to grief, sympathy to panic, love to anxiety, admiration to identification, are manifestations of a mimetic pathos that troubles the boundaries of individuation. Thus it blurs the line between mind and body, self and others, consciousness and the unconscious, humans and nonhumans, often with contradictory, paradoxical effects that operate below the radar of conscious awareness and are in this sense *un*-conscious. Hence the importance of developing new diagnostics of a concept that goes beyond good and evil, for it generates both pathological infections that are life-negating and patho-*logical* opportunities that are life-affirmative. If this unconscious, or as Hayles calls it, "nonconscious," is a "source for intuition, creativity, aesthetic preferences, and social interaction" that operate on the logical side, we shall also see that this "mimetic unconscious,"[14] is equally a source of hypnotic spells, contagious influences, and technological dispossessions that operate on the "pathological" side.[15] Both sides are part of the Janus-faced configuration this volume sets out to explore from a multiplicity of perspectives at the critical and creative crossroads of arts, philosophy, and technics which, together, provide a 2.0 update to homo mimeticus for the digital age.[16]

Given the scope of the concept of mimesis, its protean power of transformation over the ages, and the misunderstandings it continues to generate, a broader contextual framing is in order. This volume is part of a series of books on homo mimeticus that provide new epistemic foundations to rethink

14 Nidesh Lawtoo, "The Mimetic Unconscious: A Genealogy," in *Imitation, Contagion, Suggestion: On Mimesis and Society*, ed. Christian Borch (New York: Routledge, 2019), 37–53.

15 N. Katherine Hayles, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 52. See also Lawtoo, *Violence and the Mimetic Unconscious* and the essays collected in Christian Borch ed., *Imitation, Contagion, Suggestion: On Mimesis and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

16 For a diagnostic of homo ludens 2.0 reloded via digital culture that in many ways resonates with the study at hand see Valerie Frissen, Sybille Lammes, Michiel de Lange, Jos de Mul and Joost Raessens, "Homo ludens 2.0: Play, Media and Identity," in *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Culture*, ed. Valerie Frissen, Sybille Lammes et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 9-50.

mimesis in the twenty-first century across continental philosophy, aesthetics, and politics.[17] The general goal, or *telos*, of this series is to open up the transdisciplinary field of mimetic studies—a pluralist, intersectional, or diagonal field that cuts across humanistic disciplines and ossified two-cultures (humanistic/scientific) divides to generate a paradigm shift in the way we think about mimesis in the twenty-first century.

Schematically put, this entails going beyond two dominant definitions of mimesis central to both philosophy and the arts, which, despite their differences, traditionally restricted mimesis to the mirroring logic of visual representation. On the philosophical side, since at least Plato, philosophers defined mimesis as a metaphysical mirror (or mimetic re-presentation) opposing intelligible ideas to material phenomena, universals to particulars, forms to phantoms or shadows; on the literary side, up to the nineteenth century, mimesis was understood as a realistic representation of reality (or mimetic realism) that in-*forms* (gives form to) western aesthetics from Homer to Zola. Although this restricted definition rests on an ancient quarrel between philosophy and literature, these agonistic perspectives share, paradoxically, the same genealogical foundations that can be traced back to book 10 of Plato's *Republic*. This dominant idealist tradition that reduces the many to the one, phenomenal multiplicity to intelligible abstraction is well-documented in the history of philosophy. It is also part of what Hayles calls the "Platonic backhand"[18] mimetic posthumanism is up against.

And yet, at the same time, Plato, in the same dialogue, was the first to theorize that mimesis is first and foremost a theatrical practice (*mimēsis*, from *mîmos*, actor or performance) that plays a key role in the education, formation, and transformation of humans, often for the worse but also for the better. This pharmacological, or as I call it, "patho(-)logical" lesson was reloaded by anti-Platonic modernist philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche, who paved the way for poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers—such as Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Bernard Stiegler, and Catherine Malabou, among others—who now inform posthuman studies as well. More recently, Nietzsche also laid the foundations for a transdisciplinary theory of imitation that benefited from collaborations with key figures in different areas of inquiry—including literary studies (J. Hillis Miller), political theory (William E. Connolly), continental philosophy (Jean-Luc Nancy), feminist philosophy (Adriana Cavarero), new materialism

17 See footnote 1 of this chapter. For more outputs, see https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/716181.

18 Hayles, *How We Became*, 12–13; Hayles and Lawtoo, "Posthuman Mimesis."

(Jane Bennett), the neurosciences (Vittorio Gallese)—who joined forces with mimetic studies in a series of dialogic encounters.[19] This recent mimetic turn is now informing and transforming posthumanism as well via a minor, intersectional, collaborative, and increasingly influential theory of embodied imitation that is central to the genealogy of homo mimeticus. It is mediated via new technics of simulations that problematize metaphysical binaries dividing copy and original, fictional and real, phantoms and egos, digital shadows and material realities, among other oppositions that no longer hold today and will become increasingly blurry in the future.

Mimetic Posthumanism assembles essays that were first presented at an interdisciplinary conference titled, "Posthuman Mimesis: Embodiment, Affect, Contagion," hosted at the Institute of Philosophy at KU Leuven, Belgium, in 2021. Bringing together over fifty international scholars from around the world in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the Janus-faced patho(-)logical orientation of mimetic posthumanism was performatively at play during the conference itself. On one side, Zoom simulations mediated by our computers kept speakers at a safe distance from the risk of viral contagion, allowing participants to join intellectual forces over three intense days to turn a pathological health crisis into an untimely occasion to develop life-affirmative patho-*logies* for our increasingly precarious posthuman future. On the other side, the same simulations reminded us not only that homo mimeticus continues to be dependent on bodily encounters in the real world for survival, but also that an excess of technological mediation can lead to isolation, fatigue, and anxiety among other posthuman pathologies.

A complex diagnostic lesson was thus already at play at the level of the medium itself: It revealed how digital simulations could not only be used as straightforward antidotes to prevent the spread of a viral mimetic pathology; the simulations also allowed us to develop critical diagnostics, or patho-*logies*,

19 For a representative sample see, J. Hillis Miller and Nidesh Lawtoo, "The Critic and the Mime: J. Hillis Miller in Dialogue with Nidesh Lawtoo," *Minnesota Review* 95 (2020): 93–119; Jean-Luc Nancy and Nidesh Lawtoo, "Mimesis: A Singular Plural Concept," *CounterText* 8, no. 1 (2022): 23–45; Adriana Cavarero and Nidesh Lawtoo, "Mimetic Inclinations: A Dialogue with Adriana Cavarero," in *Contemporary Italian Women Philosophers: Stretching the Art of Thinking*, eds. Silvia Benso and Elvira Roncalli (New York: State University of New York Press, 2021), 183–199. See also "Poetics and Politics: with Lacoue-Labarthe," Special Issue, *MLN* 132, no. 5 (2017); Jeffrey Stuker and Jan Tumlir, eds., "Mimicries," Special Issue, *Effects* 3 (2022); Lawtoo, "The Mimetic Condition"; Lawtoo and Verkek, eds., "Mimetic Inclinations with Adriana Cavarero," Special Issue, *Critical Horizons* 24, no. 2 (2023); Lawtoo, ed., "The Mimetic Turn"; and HOM Videos ERC Project 'Homo Mimeticus', YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJQy0y0qCxzP4QImG2YWqpw.

that, in a spiraling feedback loop, included the pathologies developed by new media simulations in which a large part of the world population was then entangled. In a reloaded, diagnostic sense, then, the medium was indeed still the message in a globally infected village—to echo Marshall McLuhan famous phrase with a difference.[20] In particular, it revealed that posthuman mimesis continues to operate as a patho(-)logy, understood both as sickness and as a diagnostic discourse (*logos*) on the suffering or affect (*pathos*) it generated. Or, to use a more ancient term inscribed in the long history of mimesis, the medium operated as a *pharmakon*, both poison and cure,[21] albeit one in need of new diagnostic evaluations, which takes us to the level of the message, or rather, messages.

Despite the variety of perspectives presented, many of which dealt directly with the patho(-)logies of viral contagion, the intellectual cohesion of the conference and, at one further remove, of the volume and the series on homo mimeticus of which it is part, was guaranteed by a shared intellectual objective constitutive of mimetic studies: The general goal was to initiate a mimetic turn, or *re*-turn of attention to mimesis already at play in different areas of critical theory—from philosophy to literary studies, media studies to political theory—in posthuman studies as well. We did so by inviting founding figures of posthuman studies like Katherine Hayles and Kevin Warwick as keynote speakers in view of presenting both posthumanist and transhumanist perspectives on mimesis. They were supplemented by a number of influential theorists of posthumanism who contributed to expanding the reach of posthuman mimesis, including Stephen Shaviro, Ivan Callus, Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, Roberto Marchesini, Stefan Herbrechter, Jean-Marie Schaeffer, Patricia Pisters, Kevin La Grandeur, and Francesca Ferrando, along with a host of young emerging voices. The second collective output to emerge from the conference, the contributors of the present volume redouble and supplement a 2022 special issue of the *Journal of Posthumanism* titled *Posthuman Mimesis,* which already set new conceptual and theoretical foundations for the mimetic turn from representation to posthuman simulations.

What I want to stress now is that the distinguished speakers we invited at the conference had already provided some steps for the mimetic turn, albeit not under the rubric of posthuman mimesis as yet. Kevin Warwick, for instance, in

20 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1964).

21 Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61–172; Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 1998.

his keynote address, not only took us through a tour de force of his pioneering "cyborg experiments" with therapeutic, existential, and philosophical implications, for they allowed him to generate electronic communications with both machines and (post)humans (most notably his spouse, Irena); he also reminded us that he found mimetic sources of inspiration for his experiments in literary classics about mimetic doubles, or doppelgangers, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*[22] This genealogical step back confirmed our hypermimetic hypothesis that technological innovation in the real world can be stimulated by mimetic fictions at play in imaginary worlds. It is thus perhaps no accident that the same texts also played a key role in the modernist strain of mimetic studies that I developed elsewhere and now paves the way for the posthuman *re*-turn to mimesis.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, Hayles's keynote, titled "Survival as Mimesis: Microbiomimesis and the Production of Posthuman Bodies" (later published in *Critical Inquiry*) made clear that she had already started to take mimesis beyond traditional anthropocentric accounts restricted to realism by considering "what mimesis might signify in the nonhuman realm."[23] In particular, Hayles relied on her training in biology to give an account of "microbiomimesis" in view of, among other insights, extending human sympathy beyond the human so as to "empathize with, conserve, and consider the value of all species."[24] In yet another timely confirmation that the genealogies of posthuman studies and new mimetic studies are already entangled, Hayles recalled the pioneering work on animal mimicry of the French diagonal thinker Roger Caillois, who put mimesis to use to affirm "nonhuman forms of creativity, which he saw as freeing creative acts from rational thought and agency."[25] This connection is timely for Caillois, along with his collaborator Georges Bataille, occupies a privileged place in the "diagonal" genealogy of homo mimeticus as well.[26] After a long period of subordination to traditional humanist concerns with representation, the pandemic crisis made clear that there is now a significant drive to rethinking mimesis beyond the human anthropocentrism and exceptionalism characteristic of the epoch of the Anthropocene. This is also what the emerging field of "biomimicry" suggests

22 See Kevin Warwick, *I, Cyborg* (London: Century, 2002), 9.

23 N. Katherine Hayles, "Microbiomimesis: Bacteria, Our Cognitive Collaborators," *Critical Inquiry* 47, no. 4 (2021): 777–787, 777.

24 Hayles, "Microbiomimesis," 787. See also Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus*, 277–99.

25 Hayles, "Microbiomimesis," 777, n1.

26 See Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus*, 157–90.

by taking nature as a "model" and "mentor" for developing life-sustaining innovations and technological transformations that are mimetic yet original in nature and whose innovative potential for posthuman studies still needs to be explored.[27]

From a different but genealogically related perspective, before Hayles, Donna Haraway equally counts as a genealogical precursor for the mimetic turn in posthuman studies. It is, in fact, well known that in "A Cyborgs Manifesto" (1985), Haraway argued that the hybrid figure of the cyborg transgresses the nature/culture binary so as to entangle nonhuman and human animals with machines via a "cyborg imagery [that] can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms."[28] Less known is that this foundational anti-dualistic move hinges on a less visible, yet equally fundamental redefinition of mimesis as well. Thus, Haraway calls future generations of theorists to move beyond the "comfortable old hierarchical" logic of "Representation" to account for the more troubling and complex logic of "Simulation."[29] This is a foundational move that already in the 1980s began to tilt the balance of other, previously stable, binaries. Hence the turn from "Reproduction" to "Replication," "Depth" to "Surface," "realism" to "postmodernism," among other shifts of emphases that will lead up to the posthuman turn. Interestingly, Haraway paves the way for posthumanism by *re*-turning to a differential conception of simulation endowed with the power to induce what she calls, drawing on an anthropological category, a "trance state."[30] These altered states of consciousness, or trance, we should now specify, rest on a mimetic conception of the unconscious that finds in hypnosis, suggestion, and mirroring reflexes, more than dreams, a trans-formative power, pathos, or sym-pathos that is in a relation of continuity with animal mimicry, reaching to animate avatar simulations as well. Dismissed as magical in the past Freudian century, the tradition of the mimetic unconscious is currently regaining traction in the present post-Freudian century, in which the power of

27 See Janine M. Benyus, *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997). For a rich study that gives philosophical foundations to biomimicry in ways that contribute directly to mimetic studies and appeared too late to be fully incorporated here, see Henry Dicks, *The Biomimicry Revolution: Learning from Nature How to Inhabit the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023); see also Henry Dicks, "The Biomimicry Revolution: Contribution to Mimetic Studies," in Lawtoo and Garcia-Granero eds., *Homo Mimeticus II*.

28 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, 2299.

29 Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" 2281–82.

30 Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 2282, 2296.

hypnotic spells is amplified by "hypermimetic simulations" at play on digital screens qua "black mirrors."[31]

Warwick, Hayles, Haraway: These are just three examples who provide initial steps to mimetic posthumanism. Still, they are significant ones. They testify that a mimetic turn, or *re*-turn to a different conception of mimesis had been implicitly informing the posthuman turn all along, waiting for future theorists and critics to make it explicit. Consequently, if the posthuman, as Rosi Braidotti noted more recently, is indeed a "work in progress … a working hypothesis about the kind of subjects we are becoming,"[32] an explicit theoretical supplement is still needed to account for this immanent process of becoming other: namely, the realization that the relational, embodied, and affective (im)properties of homo mimeticus play a so far rarely noticed, often imperceptible, yet foundational and transformative role in our current process of becoming posthuman in the twenty-first century.

From digital simulations to AI, trance to contagion, conspiracies online to insurrections offline, robotics to gene editing, unconscious mimicry to biomimicry, microbiomimesis to hypermimesis, there is hardly an aspect of posthuman transformation today that does not entangle our processes of (non)human becoming with an iteration, repetition, or re-enactment of the protean concept of mimesis. If we still had doubts about the power of technological simulations to (mis)inform the population, deepfakes and, more recently, GPT-4 (the latest iteration of OpenAI's generative language model) should make clear at least two points: First, the copy/model binary that traditionally structured discourses of mimesis does not apply to simulations deprived of referential origins. If it is true that the driving goal of AI is to mimic, or "copy fragments of human intelligence,"[33] as Daniel Andler recently puts it in an informed philosophical study on AI, it is equally true that human intelligence is notoriously difficult to define. It cannot be reduced to quantifiable criteria, generating a disconcerting paradox that can be summarized as follows: The more AI progresses, the further away does the approximation of

31 On trance, mimesis, and simulation, see also Nidesh Lawtoo, "*Avatar* Simulation in 3Ts: Techne, Trance, Transformation," *Science Fiction Studies* 125, no. 42. (2015): 132–50; Nidesh Lawtoo, "Black Mirrors: Reflecting (on) Hypermimesis," *Philosophy Today* 65, no. 3 (2021): 523–47.

32 Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (London: Polity Press, 2019), 2. Braidotti had kindly agreed to join us as keynote speaker at the "Posthuman Mimesis" conference but unfortunately had to cancel due to sickness. As the numerous references to her work will show, she plays a key role in our theorization of posthuman mimesis.

33 Daniel Andler, *Intelligence artificielle, intelligence humanine: La double enigme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2023), 15 (my translation).

human intelligence appear to be. Rather than a copy of a model, AI seems to have the properties of "chimera."[34] This, at least, is what not only Andler but also Noam Chomsky and other leading scholars seem to suggest, at least for the moment.

And yet, this does not mean that AI cannot generate phantoms without human origins—be they linguistic, vocal, visual, or a combination thereof—with the power to trigger disconcerting hypermimetic effects on homo mimeticus 2.0 that can be as logical and informative as they can be pathological and manipulative, which leads us to the second point: If the first version of ChatGPT could go as far as simulating inner experiences such as love and jealousy with troubling effects on (post)humans,[35] it is not difficult to imagine that without a strict regulation system, it can be used to cast a pathological spell on the population: AI can radically amplify an all-too-human vulnerability to conspiracies, fake news, and manipulations that have already led to "(new) fascist"[36] insurrections in the recent past and are likely to affect (post)humans in the near future as well.

Our argument to promote a mimetic turn is thus as past-oriented as it is future-oriented; it rests both on a genealogy of homo mimeticus and on its technological process of becoming 2.0. On one side, our "mimetic faculty,"[37] as Walter Benjamin reminded us, is what allows us to become other in the first place. On the other, after a long parenthesis in the cognitive sciences during which the human brain was reduced to the model of the computer, new developments in both AI and the neurosciences overturn perspectives in order to ask if algorithms are "already able to mimic" our brain.[38] This plastic brain, as the French philosopher Catherine Malabou notes, serves as a model for the development of "synaptic chips" that "not only imitate the brain" but also simulate a synapsis so effectively that, she argues, it "*is* a synapsis."[39] Once again, mimesis

34 Andler, *Intelligence*, 15. See also Noam Chomsky, Ian Roberts, and Jeffrey Watumull, "The False Promise of ChatGPT," *New York Times*, March 8, 2023.

35 Kevin Roose, "Why a Conversation with Bing's Chatbot Left Me Deeply Unsettled," *New York Times*, February 17, 2023.

36 Nidesh Lawtoo, (*New*) *Fascism: Contagion, Community, Myth* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2019).

37 Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 333–38.

38 Stanislas Dehane, *How We Learn: The New Science of Education and the Brain* (New York: Penguin Books, 2020), xxii.

39 Catherine Malabou, *Métamorphoses de l'intelligence: Que faire de notre cerveau bleu* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2017), 108 (my translation). For a first genealogical link between Malabou's concept of plasticity and mimesis see also Lawtoo, *Homo*

is not simply a passive imitation that upholds traditional binaries such as the model and the copy, the human and the machine (or vice versa). On the contrary, it is a destabilizing mirroring concept that blurs the boundaries between copy and original, appearance and being. It does so by entangling humans and machines in mimetic processes of embodied and algorithmic transformation that we shall group under the rubric of hypermimesis.

On either side of a human/nonhuman binary which is not one, the lesson is double too. On the one hand, human brains remain thoroughly mimetic and thus adaptable, plastic, and shaped by external impressions. Traditionally, subject formation was linked to human parenting, education, and social face-to-face interactions at work and during leisure activities that took place via embodied encounters, for better and worse. Such encounters are now increasingly mediated via a proliferation of nonhuman technological simulations and social media. Channeled via hand-held devices (the smartphone *in primis*), they operate regularly on the senses of increasingly younger generations triggering a flow of impressions in need of patho(-)logical diagnostics. On the other hand, the posthuman turn reveals that on either side of the human/machine binary, mimesis continues to operate as a transgressive link that allows for metamorphic transformations of both human and artificial intelligence. It is thus no longer clear who is the subject or the object of experience, active or passive. Hence the need for new diagnostics of a hypermimetic condition that goes beyond the human and the nonhuman. Hence the urgency of joining posthuman studies with new mimetic studies to foreground the role mimesis and its multiple contemporary avatars in the digital age—from simulation to identification, trance to mimicry, contagion to plasticity, influence to mirror neurons, techno-mimesis to hypermimesis, among others—play in the ongoing metamorphic transformations constitutive of mimetic posthumanism.

As the Janus-faced orientation with which we started already suggests, one of the genealogical assumptions that orient the chapters in this volume is that looking back to the different transformations mimesis made possible in the past is a necessary step to look ahead to some of the most recent challenges posthumans will have to face in the present and future. Before introducing the threefold perspective on posthuman mimesis centered on aesthetics (Part One), philosophy (Part Two), and technics (Part Three) in more detail, let me now briefly step back to consider why, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, a species called *Homo sapiens* requires a mimetic supplement to face

Mimeticus, 129–55. *Homo Mimeticus III* will be entirely devoted to the plastic metamorphoses of mimesis.

posthuman challenges that are already here and will continue to proliferate in years to come.

2 *Homo sapiens* to Homo Mimeticus 2.0

It is now clear enough that humanism rests on an antiquated conception of *Homo sapiens* that uncritically values autonomy, free will, and solipsistic self-sufficiency in theory, yet remains radically dependent on human and nonhuman others for its survival in practice. Prone to the hypnotizing spell of mythic narratives of technological progress centered on a universal, exploitative, and exceptionalist conception of western "Man," for a long time, humanism relied on clear-cut patriarchal, ethnocentric, and anthropocentric distinctions between colonizer and colonized, humans and nonhumans, subjects and objects, culture and nature, ideas and phenomena, as well as male and female, white and black, heterosexual and homosexual, western and non-western, that is, barbaric (from *barbaros*, foreign, not Greek and thus not the same), among other binaries. This humanistic ideal is constitutive of violent hierarchies the "post" in posthumanism aims to move beyond.[40] It does so from multiple critical, creative, philosophical, and we shall now add, mimetic perspectives.

At the same time, as the humanistic origins of the concept of mimesis already implicitly suggest, posthuman mimesis must not necessarily be completely severed from the humanism it aims to move beyond. Humanistic aspirations continue to inform posthuman, all-too-human efforts for greater inclusiveness, social justice, agentic power, and technological innovations, all of which can be put to use to critique a growing network of techno-powers used for control and subjection in order to affirm more equality and freedom. Albeit no longer based on universalizing terms restricted to Eurocentric or even anthropocentric perspectives, such critiques offer discursive, deconstructive, immanent, and situated diagnostics that "relativize the radical novelty of the 'posthumanist' phenomenon" while at the same time showing the "innovative potential of *critical* posthumanism."[41] Posthuman mimesis furthers this Janus-faced approach by foregrounding a heterogeneous concept at the palpitating heart of the life-affirming and life-negating sides of posthuman studies. Its objective is to multiply genealogical perspectives that can help future-oriented scholars and readers map innovative metamorphoses for the future.

40 See Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014); Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

41 Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), viii.

On the genealogical front, for instance, it would be anachronistic to deny that the shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric worldview started with humanism in the fifteenth century and accentuated with the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century, led to a series of industrial, economic, medical, and now digital revolutions that generated immense progress in many areas of cultural, political, and economic life over the past two centuries. Since the 1960s and 1970s, it also led to more egalitarian opportunities for traditionally marginalized and oppressed subjects like women, racial minorities, and, in recent years, sexual minorities as well—all figures that, from different perspectives, turned the destabilizing impropriety of mimesis qua "mimicry" to progressive political and emancipatory use,[42] thereby supplementing a liberating step to a genealogy of homo mimeticus that paves the way for posthuman mimesis as well. As the liberating potential of what was once called the World Wide Web democratized access to knowledge, information, and education with patho-*logical* potential, the *pharmakon* of technological innovation also opened up new hypermimetic pathologies that—from isolation to addiction, conspiracy theories to (new) fascism, violent insurrections to environmental catastrophes—now affect and infect homo mimeticus 2.0.

Furthermore, a mimetic perspective on the posthuman also reveals that despite the multiple proclamations of the death of man understood as a relatively modern discursive creation in theory,[43] humanism is far from dead in practice. Quite the contrary. This "enlightened" ideal of a rational western man qua *Homo sapiens* continues, often under different conceptual masks, to cast a shadow on future-oriented approaches to human and nonhuman processes of becoming in the twenty-first century. Often this humanist ideal informs, or rather misinforms, phantasies of endless technocratic progress and immortality animating what Bernard Stiegler calls "a transhumanist ideology that is first of all a story-telling of a colossal and totalizing marketing operation."[44] This operation, Stiegler and I agree, is entangled in what a key genealogical precursor of the mimetic turn, Friedrich Nietzsche, diagnosed under the rubric of

42 See Luce Irigarary, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Homi K. 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), 13–31.

43 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archelogy of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 387.

44 Bernard Stiegler, "Le nouveau conflit des facultés et des fonctions dans l'Anthropocène," in *La technique et le temps*(Paris: Fayard, 2018), 847–76.

"herd-society."[45] That is, a mimetically driven process of modernization that, via increasingly invasive social media and technologies of mass manipulation, has the power to turn the ego into a "phantom of the ego."[46] Namely, a porous, suggestible, and docile ego prone to hypnotic spells, unconscious mimicry, and trance-like states of somnambulism familiar since modernism and now regularly registered in sci-fi films—from *The Matrix* to *Avatar* to *Her* to *Black Mirror*—at the crossroads of postmodernism and posthumanism. Spellbound by mesmerizing screens, vicariously immersed in second lives via digital avatars, increasingly disconnected from immanent, embodied, and social encounters that reveal the possibilities but also the limits of what bodies actually can do, the posthuman subject, as Hayles warned, risks indeed being particularly vulnerable to idealist phantasies of disembodiment, digital afterlife, genetic enhancement, space migrations, and illimited longevity. That transhumanist ideology often invokes the name of Nietzsche as a precursor of ideals of autonomy, free will, and endless technological progress; ideals that he was among the first to denounce in his writings. This reminds us of the insidious power of phantoms of disembodied conceptions of consciousness whose idealist origins we shall trace back to the beginning of mimetic studies.[47]

If we step back and adopt immanent genealogical lenses, it is clear that after a period of intense social strife for democratization in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, where mimicry was put to deconstructive use in theory, an equally intense period of neoliberal exuberance for growth, expansion, and mimetically contagious forms of consumption was massively enacted in practice. At least since the Great Acceleration of 1945, if not earlier, mimetic pathologies of mass consumption turned out to be detrimental for both humans and nonhumans alike, with catastrophic consequences for future generations and the ecosystem more generally. Hitting first what Franz Fanon called "the

45 Bernard Stiegler, *Acting Out*, trans. David Barison, David Ross, and Patrick Crogan (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 48.

46 Nidesh Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 68–83.

47 For a genealogy of transhumanism that reads Nietzsche in the opposite direction to the one I do, but aptly recognizes that "the signature themes of transhumanism—especially the preoccupation with intellectual immortality and physical resurrection—bear the marks of Abrahamic theology" and is born out of "middle-aged white male with a reasonable amount of disposable income," see Steve Fuller, *Nietzschean Meditations: Untimely Thoughts at the Dawn of the Transhumanist Era* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2020) 199, 200. On the Nietzschean posthuman side, see Francesca Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Lawtoo and Hayles, "Posthuman Mimesis 11;" and Marina Garcia-Granero's chapter in this volume.

wretched of the earth"[48] who are currently being displaced in unprecedented numbers by climate catastrophes not of their own making, postcolonial and environmentalist historian Dipesh Chakrabarti points out that a good part of the humanities at the twilight of the past century was "environmentally blind," calling on "academics to rise above their disciplinary prejudices, for it is a crisis of many dimensions."[49]

This is a severe evaluation. But it is also a necessary wake-up call that urges both humanists and posthumanists to take a closer look in the mirror before going further. In particular, Chakrabarty urges "posthumanism," which, "by itself cannot address the political" (though that may be debatable) to continue joining forces across disciplines in view of shifting the focus of attention from "global" (anthropocentric) concerns toward "planetary" (postanthropocentric) processes that reveal how "the planet puts us in the same position as any other creature."[50] We are indeed entangled in what another major contributor to mimetic studies, William E. Connolly, calls "planetary processes" that call for a "politics of swarming" that puts mimetic communication to life-affirmative use.[51] Or, closer to the genealogy of posthumanism, Donna Haraway, in recent work that shifts her early preoccupations from making kin with cyborgs to making kin with compost, argues that this entangled and fragile creature endowed with different degrees of agency is nonetheless replete with what she calls "response-ability:"[52] namely, the ability to respond affectively and cognitively to others.

Furthering these lines of inquiry we could add that this (post)human ability to respond is rooted in a relational openness to mimetic pathos that, in specific circumstances, can generate *sym-pathos* (feeling with) the suffering of human and nonhuman animals. While in theory this ability to respond with pathos stretches to include nonhuman life more generally, that shift from human to nonhuman sym-pathos is easier to promote via domestic animals (dogs, cats, hamsters) and anthropocentric simulations (avatars, robots, AI) than with

48 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

49 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 38.

50 Chakrabarty, *Climate of History*, 91, 90.

51 William E. Connolly, *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

52 Donna J. Haraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 11. For a study on the ethical implications of cyborgs understood as "persons" see Aleksandra Łukaszewicz, Are Cyborgs Persons: An Account of Futurist Ethics (New York: Palgrave, 2021).

wild nonhuman animals (worms, birds, plants), calling for a transformation of the concept of "sympathy" itself.[53] Either way, aggravated by the return of war, energy crises that cause a scramble for, rather than reduction of, fossil-fuel consumption and oil dependencies, not to speak of the threat of nuclear escalation, the Great Acceleration is currently generating a sixth mass extinction that casts a shadow on the present and future. It also sets up a rather unflattering mirror to the ideal of *Homo sapiens* in the twenty-first century thus far.

The mirroring reflection is constitutive of the shift from an autonomous and technocratic *Homo sapiens* toward a relational and affective homo mimeticus that has an important role to play in mimetic posthumanism. This is true not only because the mirror is a mimetic trope that has traditionally been used for reflections geared toward self-knowledge, but also because it provides a genealogical frame to re-evaluate a process of becoming posthuman made possible due to the plastic, relational, and affective foundations of subjectivity. Despite the vertiginous speed of current technological innovations that increasingly entangle posthuman subjects in human and nonhuman others, or perhaps because of this speed, we remain eminently mimetic, or rather, hypermimetic creatures influenced by virtual models, digital technologies, and neoliberal ideologies, which used to be the product of human intelligence but will increasingly be produced via artificial intelligence. This paradoxical loop in which the *logos* of science generates forms of technological mediation that retroact on posthuman bodies and minds, with both logical and pathological effects, is a central concern for many of the essays that follow: From viral pathologies to Zoom patho(-)logies, AI simulations to viral zombies, mimetic metamorphoses to figurations of desire, techno-mimetism to reverse mimesis, noomimesis to hypermimesis, the chapters that compose the volume are careful to trace the spiraling loops of patho(-)logies that escape linear logic, entangle posthumans in a widening net of technological processes, and are in need of careful diagnostics of the spiraling interplay of reason and affect, logos and pathos, which is one of the distinctive features of mimetic posthumanism.

As the spread of contagious affects triggered by the return of (new) fascist leaders made visible, and the viral disseminations of conspiracy theories during the first pandemic crisis to be shadowed by digital media confirmed, *Homo sapiens* does not appear to be driven uniquely by enlightened ideals of a pure autonomous reason characterized by a Kantian *saper aude* that once inspired the subject of *Aufklärung*. On the contrary, while this will to know

53 See Jane Bennett, *Influx & Efflux: Writing Up with Whitman* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus*, 255–75.

is now facilitated in the digital age for those endowed with a solid education that allows them to distinguish facts from alternative facts, the "mimetic inclinations"[54] of *Homo sapiens* qua *mimeticus* render us easy prey to the spell of a will to ignore unflattering realities that do not conform to the narcissistic ideal some might still aspire to in theory, but fail to achieve in practice.

Driven by spellbinding algorithms, Big political Lies, climate change denialism, beliefs in endless progress, fantasies of immortality, easy techno-fixes, or migrations to other worlds, a significant part of the Global North continues to mimetically reproduce patterns of destructive behavior in which posthumans increasingly dependent on fossil-fuels technologies are, *volens nolens*, deeply and problematically entangled with the fate of the planet. Hence the need for mimetic posthumanism to look into the critical mirror first. Should the picture not conform to the ideal (spoiler alert: it never does), it is then vital to contribute creatively to aesthetic, philosophical, technological, and, we should add, environmentalist perspectives that are currently informing the mimetic turn across disciplines, and now transform posthuman studies as well. Our shared goal in the pages that follow is to collectively affirm new beginnings by propelling the mimetic turn in posthuman studies toward new destinations.

3 Program

The genealogical move that oriented these chapters' original formulation at "The Posthuman Mimesis" conference remains at play in the present volume as well, providing a shared orientation across the plurality of disciplinary perspectives they convoke. Inspired by the double face of the Roman god Janus, traditionally placed on gates to preside over departures and new arrivals, contributors were invited to step back to the ancient realization that humans are, for better and worse, mimetic animals, to leap ahead to the uncharted new territories homo mimeticus 2.0 is currently exploring. The mimetic or hypermimetic forces at play in a digital age driven by breathtaking technological innovations in AI and robotics, gene editing and algorithmic influences, entangled with global pandemics and (new) fascist phantoms, massive displacement of populations due to war and famine as well as catastrophic climate change in the Anthropocene are many and still in need of diagnostic evaluations. In the "Dialogic Prelude" on "posthuman mimesis" Hayles and I join forces to establish genealogical links between posthuman studies and mimetic studies.

54 Cavarero and Lawtoo, "Mimetic Inclinations," 183–99.

Reframing her seminal work, *How We Became Posthuman*, from the angle of an embodied mimesis that was already implicit in her work allows Hayles to show how this foundational book paves the way for future explorations in mimetic posthumanism. Given the aesthetic, philosophical, and technological perspectives informing the emerging field of mimetic posthumanism, the volume is divided into three corresponding parts, with multiple resonances, echoes, and genealogical links that establish heterogeneous continuities between mimetic turns and *re*-turns.

Part 1: The Mimetic Turn in Posthuman Art revisits the aesthetic concept of mimesis by shifting the focus from traditional anthropocentric forms of human representation (or realism) to embodied forms of imitation that are constitutive of the posthuman age. Faithful to the genealogical perspective that orients the book, this part starts by returning to the marginalized subject of alchemy as a nonanthropocentric aesthetic source to rethink AI in general and humanoid robots in particular. Thus, in Chapter 1, Patricia Pisters looks back to the ancient concept of the "eidolon," traditionally linked since Greek mythology to "doubles" and "phantoms," animating homo mimeticus. She does so to cast new light on the ways AI operates on the mimetic unconscious. The genealogy of the mimetic unconscious is, indeed, closer to Jungian concerns with the human Shadow than to Freudian diagnostics of Oedipal complexes. This unexplored connection leads Pisters to exploit the alchemic deconstruction of human and nonhuman doublings of identity to account for emerging forms of AI at play in contemporary avatars and cyborgs. Starting with a classical literary reference to Walt Whitman's poem "Eidolons"(1876), Pisters reframes the Romantic poet's alchemical interpretation of these eidolons in terms of mimetic figures resonant with contemporary sci-fi films, from *Blade Runner* to *Ghost in the Shell*: that is, films where human fate is entangled with nonhuman forces that go beyond the nature/culture divide. Our high-tech culture and posthuman self-image, she argues, have still something to learn from ancient sources concerning eidolons and simulacra, especially as encountered in alchemical texts that contain mythical and symbolic images of human connections to the nonhuman. Pisters's genealogical wager, then, is that alchemy works as a low-tech (fore)shadowing of our high-tech future still in need of an update for the protean future of a hypermimetic homo mimeticus 2.0.

Shifting the artistic lens from poetry to sculpture while retaining the focus on AI, Nikoleta Zampaki and Peggy Karpouzou compare Auguste Rodin's *Le Penseur* (1904) with a contemporary machine artwork called *Thinking Robot.* Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, or rather, "the flesh," they reinterpret both natural and artificial forms of embodiment by focusing on a lived experience that overcomes the artificial/natural, human/

nonhuman binary oppositions. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology allows Zampaki and Karpouzou to examine the embodied experience of thinking in both *Le Penseur* and *Thinking Robot* as an intentional choice that mobilizes postanthropocentric, mimetic, and plastic layers of thought about the materiality of the world. With AI inscribed in the immanence of the human body as well as in a lifeworld that does not simply oppose nature to culture, the authors propose the concept of "posthuman *flesh*" to account for an aesthetics characterized by embodied processes of subjectivation central to mimetic posthumanism.

After literature and sculpture, in Chapter 3, María del Carmen Molina Barea turns to the medium of film to address mimicry from the point of view of zombification: that is, the standardized replication of hordes of non-living individuals understood in the context of viral contagion. Molina Barea argues that a new type of zombie found in films like *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002) and *World War Z* (Marc Forster, 2013) exceeds the traditional picture of zombies forged in George Romero's cinema and takes root in pandemic scenarios that speak to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Specifically, she argues that viral zombies show enhanced capabilities of strength, endurance, and physical brutality while also triggering rapid processes of zombification. They spread infection very quickly, even instantaneously. If French philosopher Michel Serres showed that the "parasite" lives, eats, and multiplies inside the body of its host, this chapter shows that we parasite each other within the environment of the body politic. The parasitic phenomenon is thus conceived as both intersubjective and mimetic for it is based on a type of reproduction that is not only viral but leads humans and posthumans to copy each other in ways that illustrate the pathological potential of zombification. In the language of mimetic studies, the figure of the zombie is Janus-faced: One side shows the homogenized subject of consumerism colonized by institutional powers, while the other side reveals a subversive patho-*logical* subject. Thus reframed, the patho(-)logies of zombies reflect two opposed faces of mimetic posthumanism.

Furthering this diagnostic of viral pathologies from the angle of the very medium we used to promote patho-*logies*, in Chapter 4, Majero Bouman turns to consider the patho(-)logical effects of Zoom simulations in the period of pandemic lockdowns. Adding yet another artistic perspective, Bouman turns to music in order to sound out the embodied and sonic dimension of aesthetic sensation as she echoes Aretha Franklin's 1985 song: "Who's zoomin' who? Take another look and tell me, babe." This repetition with a difference entails taking a critical stance toward the possibilities for intimacy and embodied connection at play in the hypermimetic feedback loop of real-time digital video telecommunication. The staging of a mirroring hand dance with online groups

during COVID-19 lockdowns led by Bouman herself in 2020–21 experimentally grounds her diagnostic of aesthetic performance, part of an emergent expression of hypermimetic intra-activity. In the process, Bouman establishes bridges between the neuroscientific account of mirror neurons, embodied cognition, and the materialist, posthuman theories of Braidotti and Hayles whose attention to embodiment and relationality, as noted, intersects productively with mimetic studies. In a performative move, the mirroring hand dance ritual Bouman discusses in her chapter also provided a hypermimetic experience all participants—picture over 100 hands floating—collectively enacted as a hypermimetic ritual to close off the online conference. It testified, among other things, to the affective power of mirroring gestures to establish relational bonds of *sym-pathos* that cut across posthuman simulations and continue to affect the bodies and minds of homo mimeticus 2.0.

Continuing the critical and creative focus on embodied aesthetic practices whose vital function was intimately felt when pandemic lockdowns made ritual gathering impossible, in Chapter 5, Andreea Stoicescu connects animation and posthuman mimesis by considering the patho-*logical* role played by music and dance during the pandemic crisis. She argues that through embodied manifestations of the dancing body, we can determine how movement is connected to mirroring reflexes constitutive of mimetic posthumanism. If the pandemic confined liberties of expression to the flat sphere of virtual simulations, the phenomenon of organic movement, be it in dance, theater, or music reveals an all-too-human propensity to be influenced by the presence of other bodies. Furthering immanent approaches to the posthuman proposed by Hayles, Braidotti, and others, Stoicescu shows that the immersive, evolutionary, and technologically determined cosmology of posthumanism resonates with mirroring forms of embodied animation rooted in organic life itself. It also offers the theoretical possibility of integrating the evolutionary history of mimetic humans within the digitalized world constitutive of hypermimetic posthumans.

Overall, despite the diversity of perspectives or, rather, thanks to this perspectivism, all the chapters in Part 1 confirm that aesthetics (from *aisthetikos*, perception by the senses) in the digital age remains genealogically connected to the different facets of mimesis (from *mîmos*, actor or performance), which, from dance to theater, sculpture to music, film to Zoom, contribute a relational, affective, and embodied *pathos* that is essential to the development of any discourse or *logos* attentive to tracing the plastic figurations of posthuman mimesis. Hence the need to supplement the pathos of art with the logos of philosophy without falling into the trap of setting up a quarrel or opposition between these entangled and complementary patho-*logical* perspectives.

Traditionally an ancient quarrel between philosophy and art was centered precisely on the Janus-faced problematic of mimesis. *Part 2: Mimetic* Re-*Turns in Posthuman Philosophy* goes beyond this antiquated opposition by furthering the mimetic turn in posthuman art from the related and complementary angle of the *re*-turn of mimesis in posthuman philosophy. In Chapter 6, I step back to tell, in concise form, the story of the birth of homo mimeticus 2.0. This entails, sketching, in broad brush strokes, a genealogy that goes from antiquity to modernity, modernism to postmodernism, reaching into poststructuralist decenterings of man that foreground posthumanism as well. Rather than starting with Plato's condemnation of mimesis as an illusory phantom, I trace *mimēsis* further back to mythic concerns with the dramatic powers of mimes or actors to trigger affective contagion among spectators. This step back allows for the development of alternative ontological foundations in the recuperation of mimesis now at play in posthuman studies . Articulated in nine fast-paced genealogical steps, the chapter goes from pre-philosophical accounts of dramatic mimesis in myth (Homer) to critiques and defenses of poetry in classical antiquity (Plato and Aristotle), theories of the sublime (Longinus) to Christian concerns with the imitation of exemplary models (Augustine), the imitation of the ancients central to humanism to the overturning of idealist models central to modernism (Nietzsche), before reaching into more contemporary philosophies of sameness and differences that—from Girard to Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe to Irigaray, Baudrillard to Stiegler—prepare the mimetic turn in posthuman studies as well.

Given the notoriously protean meaning of the untranslatable Greek term "*mimēsis,*" which is usually reduced to representation, copy, or reproduction, but also entails mimicry, imitation, impersonation, dramatization, identification, and simulation, among other meanings under the lens of mimetic studies, it is useful to distinguish between different masks of mimesis. This is what Jean-Marie Schaeffer does in Chapter 7. The general aim of this chapter is to caution against the temptation to reduce the heterogeneous faces of mimesis to a homogeneous concept—a move in line with the pluralism of mimetic studies. To that end, Schaeffer disentangles four different "families" of copying behavior: mimicry, imitation, mimesis, and simulation. This critical move takes us, once again, back to the philosophical foundations of mimetic studies in Plato and Aristotle; it also stresses that copying processes and practices are ubiquitous across biological life forms. From an evolutionary point of view, Schaeffer agrees that these processes largely predate the birth of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, but he also emphasizes how, in humans, copying takes on a diversity of forms and functions unknown in the animal world. This evolutionary point is not intended to argue in favor of human exceptionalism, for mimicry can be

found across the human/nonhuman animal spectrum. Still, Schaeffer argues that some forms and functions of copying are the product of evolutionary heritages, while others are generally believed to be specifically human, and others still seem to emancipate themselves from their grounding in human agency by opening up forms of posthuman agency that the volume will continue to trace.

If Plato and Aristotle continue to provide the foundations for the *re*-turn of attention to homo mimeticus, among modern philosophers it is arguably Friedrich Nietzsche who articulates the most far-reaching theoretical foundations to further the mimetic turn in posthuman studies. Hence, in Chapter 8 Marina Garcia-Granero establishes new genealogical connections between mimetic studies and posthuman studies via Nietzsche's diagnostic of mimetic patho(-)logies once dominant in the modernist period and now reloaded in the posthuman period as well. As already noted, Nietzsche is widely recognized as a significant source for both philosophical posthumanism and transhumanism; his thought occupies a privileged position in mimetic studies as well. Garcia-Granero both strengthens and deepens the connection between the posthuman turn and the mimetic *re*-turn by showing how for Nietzsche, subject formation and transformation rest on mimetic phenomena that are not simply passive and pathological (mimicry, herd behavior, habitual reflexes), but also creative and patho-*logical* (exemplarity, education, arts of self-cultivation). At play in daily actions, both healthy and sick perspectives cut across the nature/culture, mind/body, and human/nonhuman divides, and are increasingly relevant to our technologically embedded lives, yet they do not give way to transhumanist fantasies of agentic freedom and disembodiment. On the contrary, as a Nietzsche scholar, Garcia-Granero is well positioned to confirm that Nietzsche's theory of the *Übermensch* urges posthuman theorists to remain rooted in the Earth. Reframed within his proper immanent perspective, she traces new connections between Nietzsche's theory of the mimetic subject and posthuman theorists of embodiment and transformation, of which Hayles, Braidotti, and Ferrando are the main representatives. In sum, Marina Garcia-Granero's immanent philosophical bridge between *mimetic* and critical posthumanism furthers the Nietzschean imperative to promote vital and creative metamorphoses for the future.

In the wake of Nietzsche's overturning of Platonism, we have seen that a number of poststructuralist thinkers who paved the way for posthumanism turned back to the concept of mimesis and its troubling avatars (mimicry, simulation, repetition, impersonation, performativity, etc.). They did so to deconstruct metaphysical binaries via mimetic concepts like writing, the trace, or the *pharmakon* that remain relevant to posthuman mimesis as well. It is, thus, useful to return to seminal deconstructive readings of mimesis to further the

mimetic turn in posthuman studies. This is what Ivan Callus sets out to do in Chapter 9. He reminds us that Jacques Derrida's interest in Plato concerns not only the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* but also the *Timaeus,* where mimesis is tied to the formation of the universe via an imitation of an eternal model characteristic of Plato's metaphysics. Taking a marginalized but, for our topic, important Derridean text titled *Advances*, Callus performs a close reading that prefigures the connection between mimesis and posthumanism. In characteristic deconstructive fashion, Derrida—and at one remove Callus as well—keeps in view various sequences and iterations of mimesis in the *Timaeus* itself without letting the "original" text overshadow the deconstructive "copy" or commentary. If only because it is the copy, shadow, or phantom that serves as a guiding thread, or trace, that unsettles Plato's mimetic metaphysics. Needless to say, via this genealogical detour back to the origins of mimetic studies, Callus' interpretation of Derrida sharpens our understanding of the destabilizing (im)properties of posthuman mimesis.

Let us now briefly pause to note that a deconstructive focus on mimesis helps clarify the critical distinction between the posthuman as a figure and posthumanism as a discourse. The genealogy of the trope of the "figure," or *figura,* which shares the same stem as *fingere* and fiction, goes deep in western aesthetics. As Erich Auerbach has influentially shown, its links with mimesis are manifold, given its rendering as "copy" or "image." And yet, *figura* was not restricted to realism alone for it entailed the "outline," "outward shape," or "mold" endowed with a certain "plasticity." For Latin authors, in fact, *figura* was linked to the Greek *typos* and was rendered as "imprint of a seal," as in Dante's phrase from *Purgatorio*, "'*come figura in cera si suggella* [as a seal is stamped in wax]."[55] Scholars of mimetic studies will recognize that this is the plastic meaning recuperated by a deconstruction of mimesis emerging in the 1980s, most notably in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's work. There is thus a genealogical connection that goes from Auerbach to Lacoue-Labarthe to mimetic studies that ties *figura* to subject formation in plastic ways that anticipate recent accounts of brain plasticity or neuroplasticity that we have explored elsewhere and shall return to.[56]

It is against this genealogical background that Stefan Herbrechter furthers a deconstructive disarticulation of the traditionally humanistic concept of

55 Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 11–175, 15.

56 See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 43–138; Nidesh Lawtoo, "The Plasticity of Mimessi," *MLN* vol. 132, no. 5 (2017): 1201–24. See also *Homo Mimeticus III.*

figura in Chapter 10 by linking it to posthuman discourses. As he points out, the use of the posthuman as a figure, or figuration, translates into different temporalities and strategies. To a certain extent, every posthumanism has to presuppose some minimal form of figural existence for the posthuman. However, exploiting the plastic potential of *figura*, Herbrechter specifies that the figuration of the posthuman takes a great variety of forms: It can be speculative or futural (we will be posthuman), retrospective (how we became posthuman), processual (we are becoming posthuman), reverse-teleological (we have always already been posthuman), among other plastic possibilities. Drawing from a variety of key figures in posthuman studies—from Hayles to Braidotti, Haraway to Malabou—he shows that these positions regarding the posthuman rely on corresponding figurations of the human onto which they are grafted (we will always be human; we are no longer human; we have to become human "otherwise," we were never human …). Behind these political, figurative, or strategic ontologies lie more or less openly articulated "desires." Critical posthumanism, Herbrechter argues, is a way of looking at these desires that drive, like a plastic force, or pathos, the mimetic figurations of the posthuman and the discourse of posthumanism.

The turn to technology, or as we call it, technics, cannot be dissociated from the aesthetic and philosophical perspectives on mimetic posthumanism explored so far, if only because *technē*, for the Greeks, meant both art and craft, or technique. Hence, both the artistic and conceptual insights that emerged from Parts 1 and 2 equally inform *Part 3: Technics Reloading Mimesis*. This final part builds on both the aesthetic and philosophical foundations of mimetic posthumanism by joining the *pharmakon* of mimesis with the *pharmakon* of technics via contemporary techno-patho(-)logies that haunt the epoch of the Anthropocene. In the wake of seminal deconstructions of western metaphysics, which as the mimetic *re*-turn shows, have mimesis as a fulcrum of attention, it is arguably Bernard Stiegler who went furthest in a critical rethinking of technics for future generations to explore. Stiegler's untimely passing in 2020 prevented him from joining forces with mimetic studies as he had planned and scheduled.[57] As a consequence, the genealogical bridge between technics and mimesis is still largely unknown and in need of construction.

57 Stiegler had agreed to participate in a series of video interviews titled HOM Videos whose goal was to widen the reach of the mimetic turn across disciplines via dialogues with influential thinkers (see https://www.youtube.com/@homvideosercprojecthomomim971). The interview was planned for March 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented this encounter, and it was rescheduled for August 2020. Sadly, Stiegler passed away a few days before the interview could take place.

To begin filling this gap and add another step to the genealogy of mimetic posthumanism, in Chapter 11, I return to the founding myth of posthuman studies: the myth of Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus, two mimetic figures that have not lost any of their untimeliness in the epoch of the Anthropocene. Rather than reiterating the myth of Prometheus's *anti*-mimetic originality characteristic of both Romantic and transhumanist myths, I adopt genealogical lenses to show how the philosophical forgetting of techne central to Stiegler's account of *Technics and Time*, overlaps significantly with the philosophical exclusion of mimesis. Starting with Hephaestus's warning in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* that "you shall be grilled by the sun's bright fire" brings this ancient myth closer to home. It also allows to reframe the Promethean myth in the context of the catastrophic reality of the Anthropocene as theorized by Bruno Latour's final preoccupations about "where to land." Landing back on Earth is the only immanent option available for humans, posthumans, and transhumans alike. In particular, the chapter revisits the shared genealogical foundations of the excluded concepts of technics and mimesis via a pharmacology that is not only of Derridean, and thus of (anti-)Platonic origins. It also steps further back to a mythic tradition dramatized by Hesiod's *Theogony* and, above all, Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, a mythic tradition that preceded philosophy but also informs it. Well before philosophy, myth is in fact attentive to the patho(-)logical lessons on the right measure central to the development of "self-knowledge" or "know thyself," which as Socrates will later argue, drives philosophy as well. As Promethean foresight is doubled by Epimethean hindsight, we shall thus remain faithful to the Janus-faced genealogy that orients mimetic posthumanism by looking back to better see what lies ahead. The hope is that the self-reflective mirror of myth can help, if not to fully avoid, at least to postpone the mythic prophecy of being "grilled by the sun."

In Chapter 12, Zeigam Azizov furthers the link between technics and mimesis by focusing on Stiegler's critique of technics and the processes of individuation and memorization it entails. He does so from the angle of what he calls *noomimesis* (from the Greek *noo*, knowledge, and *mimesis*, imaging or imitating). As the genealogy of homo mimeticus 2.0 already made clear, bipedalism, the liberation of the hand, and the invention of writing it entailed allowed for technologies of memorization that operate as a *pharmakon*, both poison and cure.[58] With Stiegler's pharmacology as a starting point, Azizov reminds us that the all-too-human fault of forgetfulness is supplemented by technics of memorization that cut both ways. The distinction between

58 See Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus*, 59–67.

automatic imitation based on biomimesis and more cognitive mimesis qua noomimesis divides conscious from unconscious forms of imitation. The latter, he argues, are central to processes of memorization that orient as much as they can disorient and are constitutive of the posthuman condition. Thus framed, Stiegler's pharmacological re-evaluation of technics, long repressed within the philosophical tradition, *re*-turns to play a key role in the mimetic turn, as it is located at the crossroads of knowledge and imitation. As Azizov explains, it also opens up intellectual space for new memorizations and translations of mimesis that connect Stiegler's pharmacology of technics with a critique of Quentin Meilassoux's theory of "the meaningless sign."

What emerges from post-deconstructive and post-phenomenological critiques of technology as a *pharmakon* qua patho(-)logy is thus not a unilateral evaluation of technical objects; rather, it is an urgent call to rethink the foundations of a subject that is increasingly alienated, dispossessed, and programmed by technocratic processes that disrupt individuation and call for the creation of alternative modes of existence. If mimetic posthumanism decenters humanistic and anthropocentric conceptions of free will, what role, then, does agency play in the posthuman/mimetic turn?

In Chapter 13, Diego Scalco reminds us that in its broad sense, agency consists of both the ability or the intention to act and of the mediated or immediate awareness of past, current, and potential interactions. Agency therefore constitutes a mode of subjectivation that we propose to approach in correlation with techno-mimetism. Techno-mimetism, he argues, is inseparable from the contemporary subject, even if the latter is not necessarily aware of the techno-mimetic aspects of his own development. Formulated initially in an anthropocentric framework, the question of subjectivation now receives answers that no longer conform to this very framework and problematize traditional conceptions of intentionality predicated on an autonomous subject that no longer holds in the posthuman age. Necessity and contingency, Scalco continues, frame the divergent ecological, political, and individual choices that are looming on the technological horizon as an inevitable condition. Those divergences are also framed by mastery and loss of control, given that the logic of technics can still be identified with an infrastructure from which subjects should emancipate themselves. This chapter, in sum, approaches subjectivation under the double perspective of posthuman agency and of techno-mimetism that informs mimetic posthumanism.

Further complicating autonomous ideals of subjectivity, in Chapter 14, Philipp Höfele argues that, since the eighteenth century, the genius has been regarded as the genuine paradigm of aesthetics and technology, while mimesis is seen as something to be overcome, as Hans Blumenberg also points out. The

aim of the chapter is to understand why, for structural reasons, the ancient problematic of the imitation of nature cannot simply be shelved. As Höfele shows, imitation is not simply an act of unfreedom, and freedom cannot be realized in the isolationist form of solipsistic and transcendental autonomy. On the contrary, technical imitation of living nature can be conceived as an excellent way of responding to the environmental challenges posed by the Anthropocene. In order to make this plausible, the chapter returns to Aristotle to examine the origin of the thesis that art (*technē*) imitates nature (*physis*). It then discusses Georges Canguilhem's reflections on the historically suppressed relationship or interdependence between organism and machine and shows how Canguilhem's pupil, Gilbert Simondon, comprehends the technical object as a living thing in relation to its environment, or "milieu." This provides the background to understand ethical claims expounded by the emerging interdisciplinary field of biomimetics, which is currently already contributing to mimetic studies.

In a last patho(-)logical overturning of perspectives, Kevin LaGrandeur, in Chapter 15, returns to ethico-political concerns for how "intelligent" technology generates a dangerous mimetic cycle in today's posthuman world. As a species, LaGrandeur argues, we have moved from creating intelligent tools in our own functional image to having those tools execute human functions so well that they force us to remake ourselves in their machinic image. In other words, to survive competition from our own intelligent inventions, we must incorporate into ourselves elements of those very inventions, or risk losing jobs—and perhaps even existential viability. For example, we automated many of our production processes in factories and the humans left working in those places have mostly become managers of machines. But as those machines have become smarter, they have begun to manage humans in the workplace, cycling to the next phase of this master-servant dialectic. Taking examples from businesses in China and elsewhere that monitor data on employees' brains by forcing them to wear caps outfitted with sensors while they work, LaGrandeur shows how these sensor arrays can scan employees' brainwaves for emotional disturbances and send that data to their bosses. The chapter sets out to discuss what the ethical and existential implications are of such scenarios, which are far from being isolated.

Art, philosophy, and technics, it should be clear by now, are not treated here as three autonomous perspectives on mimetic posthumanism. On the contrary, they are inextricably entangled in the metamorphic processes of becoming homo mimeticus 2.0—for good and ill. Since mimesis, as both a conceptual and creative tool, originates in dialogic practices already central to mimetic studies, the volume conforms to this ancient genre to further

transform mimesis so as to adapt it to our contemporary problems. Thus, in the final Coda, Francesca Ferrando and I join philosophical posthumanism and mimetic posthumanism in view of providing—via a tradition that goes from Plato to Nietzsche, Deleuze to Braidotti, and many other figures encountered along the way—immanent, embodied, and relational steps for a new theory of posthuman mimesis already at play in the twenty-first century. Going beyond the dualisms that dominated the anthropocentric tradition (mind/body, nature/culture, conscious/unconscious, human/nonhuman) Ferrando and I address contemporary topics that go from the pandemic crisis to online education, from (new) fascist drives to radical imagination, from unconscious adaptation to responsibility in the age of the Anthropocene, both in theory and practice.

From different but related perspectives, the dialogue suggests that mimetic posthumanism is based on a creative interplay between the pathos of art and the logos of thought that goes beyond good and evil. As the chorus of voices in this volume confirms, the patho(-)logies of hypermimesis are currently generating metamorphoses that already forming and transforming posthuman subjects to come.

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