



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

Vibrant mimesis: new materialism to mimetic studies

Lawtoo, N.; Isar, N.

Citation

Lawtoo, N. (2024). Vibrant mimesis: new materialism to mimetic studies. In N. Isar (Ed.), *Phenomenology, new materialism and advances in the pulsative imaginary* (pp. 219-245). London: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1007/978-3-031-49945-6_11

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3753751>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



Vibrant Mimesis: New Materialism to Mimetic Studies

Nidesh Lawtoo

New materialism and mimetic studies might appear to look in opposed, if not antithetical direction. After all, the “new” orienting a materialist approach that goes beyond the nature/culture divide suggests an original aspiration apparently at odds with an old Greek concept such as “mimesis.” And this difference is subsequently redoubled if we recall that the nonhuman turn advocated by object-oriented ontologies casts a shadow on longstanding anthropocentric tendencies in western thought that single out human subjectivity as a privileged object, or rather, *subject* of inquiry—including inquiries into the all too human tendency to imitate exemplary models. And yet, as often with mirroring inversions of perspective, interesting, often imperceptible, but nonetheless powerful (non) human continuities continue to flow, composing a Janus-faced picture of an embodied, affective, and relational creature we call, *homo mimeticus*.¹ It is, in fact, precisely the problematic of the mimetic subject that was necessarily suspended at the dawn of object-oriented turns that go beyond the

N. Lawtoo (✉)

Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

e-mail: n.lawtoo@hum.leidenuniv.nl

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature
Switzerland AG 2024

N. Isar (ed.), *Phenomenology, New Materialism, and Advances In
the Pulsatile Imaginary*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-49945-6_11

human that now *re*-turns to question, trouble, perhaps even haunt, phantom-like, the nonhuman turn, urging new generations of theorists, artists, and critics to reevaluate the contagious, affective, and highly suggestive powers of mimesis from an immanent, experiential, (post)phenomenological perspective. If modern romantic figures called these mimetic powers “sympathy,” I propose to build a diagonal bridge between ancient, modern, and contemporary perspectives on imitation by grouping the same powers under the protean rubric of mimetic *pathos*.

A number of publications in mimetic studies² have by now shown that mimesis is an untranslatable concept we should refrain from automatically restricting to a stabilizing mirror, a realistic image, or a transparent representation of reality—if only because stability, realism, and representation are only the most reassuring side of a protean concept that changes forms and color to adapt, chameleon-like, to different periods and environments, reaching into nonhuman environments as well. While mimesis appears to vanish during a romantic period haunted by anxieties of originality, influential case studies in the twentieth-century reveal this phantom concept didn’t vanish at all. On the contrary, it animates contagious influences that affects bodies and minds, and are returning to the forefront of the theoretical scene—be it under the rubric of affect, embodiment, intersubjectivity, or mirror neurons. In the process, these mimetic influences cast a spell on the rational ideal of unique, autonomous, and self-sufficient subject, self, or ego casting a long shadow on the West and planet Earth more generally.

Mimetic influences are heterogeneous in nature and mask themselves under different conceptual personae. They include mimicry, identification, affective contagion, hypnosis, empathy, suggestion, trance, mirroring reflexes, and other destabilizing affects whose distinctive characteristics are at least double: on the well-known, dominant side, mimesis blurs the boundary dividing truth and lies, originals and copies, realities and shadows, or phantoms of reality in line with a vertical idealist and transcendental ontology, which is far removed from the materiality of life, yet already in Plato’s thought, cannot be fully dissociated from it; on the minor, lesser-known, yet not less important side, we have also seen time and again that mimesis blurs the very boundaries of individuation, introducing horizontal continuities between self and others, mind and body, conscious actions and unconscious reactions that take possession of an ego that is not one but double or multiple, generating a phantom ego that is deeply in touch with the lived experience of life. It is this second, immanent,

affective, and materialist tradition, which is currently generating a mimetic turn, or *re*-turn, of attention to the vitalist side of homo mimeticus in new materialist strands of political theory previously attentive to vibrant matters and now entangled in vibrant mimesis as well. This, at least, is what our encounter with the North American political theorist, environmental thinker, and advocate of new materialism Jane Bennett suggests.

After “suspending” the problematic of the subject in an influential book titled *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Bennett’s most recent book, *Influx & Efflux* (2020), joins forces with a life-affirmative genealogy of homo mimeticus to further the mimetic turn, or *re*-turn. From different but entangled perspectives, we both promote the vital powers of subliminal influences that cut across dualistic boundaries (self/other, mind/body, human/nonhuman) in order to affirm the possibility of mimetic transformations for the better while also recognizing the potential of things to turn for the worse. In the process, Bennett draws on an heterogeneous tradition at the crossroads of process philosophy, political theory, modern literature, and mimetic studies to affirm, with Walt Whitman as a main investigative lens, the positive, agentic, and non-anthropocentric vibrancy of matter via an emerging conception of a mimetic subject that is not singular but plural, not autonomous but relational, not solid but plastic and phantasmal—thereby opening up the ego to nonhuman influences that give a new and timely vibrancy to the increasingly protean manifestations of what I had called, with Nietzsche as a main source of inspiration, *The Phantom of the Ego* (2013).

My aim in this chapter is thus to continue building a diagonal bridge between new materialism and mimetic studies in the company of Bennett’s recent mimetic turn of attention toward relational, affective, sometimes anxious, but always contagious and vibrant influences. This bridge is located between what we could call, to simplify things somewhat, a new materialist turn attentive to “thing-power” (Bennett 2010, 3) that distributes agency across nonhuman actants central to *Vibrant Matter*, on the one hand, and a *re*-turn of attention to the protean powers of mimesis that cut across the human/nonhuman divide as a manifestation of what Nietzsche called the “will to power” and I now group under the rubric of “mimetic pathos,” on the other hand. As we turn to see and feel, these two entangled perspectives converge on a porous, impersonal, and relational conception of the self, ego, or phantom of the ego, that is now animating shadow-like the affective and material flows streaming through what Bennett, echoing Whitman, calls “influx and efflux.”

To be sure, a bridge is a precarious in-between space that allows for the possibility of encounters that are as material as they are affective, as theoretical as experiential, and are as much based on thing-power as on the power of sympathy. Let us thus recall at the outset that, for the theoretical voices Bennett invokes in *Influx & Efflux*, especially Walt Whitman but also Henry Thoreau, Alfred Whitehead, Roger Caillois, Gilles Deleuze, and Harold Bloom, not unlike for the modernist voices I lean on, primarily Nietzsche but also D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, for these figures, sympathy means first and foremost “feeling with rather than feeling for” (Lawrence 2002, 158)—designating a *sym*-pathos, or shared pathos, constitutive of a multiple and permeable ego that is open to the outside. As Bennett also puts it: “What prompts any deliberate pathos of sympathy, then, is this apersonal mimesis always already in play” (2020, 97). This is, indeed, the same apersonal mimesis that animates mimetic studies.

At one remove, then, this pathos is also theoretically shared, for it gives both affective and material vibrations to what I call *homo mimeticus*, just as much as it injects mimesis into what Bennett calls *influx and efflux*. While we establish a genealogical bridge between two mimetic/materialist traditions in theory, it is thus important for genealogists sensitive to the emergence of new thoughts to register that mimetic fluxes flow in writing because experiential encounters have already taken place in reality—leaving material traces behind.³ For both traditions, thinking is not an abstract mental or conceptual process restricted to a *vita contemplativa* out of touch with the materiality of bodily pathos, if only because those immanent material powers are constitutive of a *vita mimetica* that, since the beginning of mimetic studies, plays a key role in political theory.⁴ As Bennett also puts it, commenting on the “sympathies” at play in Whitman’s verses, the thinking subject

is traversed by ambient sounds, smells, textures, words, ideas, and erotic and other currents, all of which commingle with previously internalized immigrants and become “touched” by them, until some of the incorporated and no-longer-quite-alien materials are “breathed” out as positions, dispositions, claims, and verse. (2020, xiii)

This process of breathing in and breathing out is conducive to a type of non-verbal mimetic communication that transgresses the boundaries of individuation, generating a pulsating movement of attraction and

repulsion, openness to sym-pathos and critical distance that, as we shall see and feel, already animates phantom egos. This double movement that characterizes the distinctive, pulsating dynamic of mimetic studies, rests on what Bennett calls “an older definition of sympathy as a physics of attraction (and antipathies) between porous bodies” (32), or a “feeling-with that respects the distance” (36). In this feeling at a distance, or better, pathos of distance, mimetic subjects are caught in material, embodied, and contagious processes of becoming other. We shall thus remain true to one of the key methodological principles internal to mimetic studies that entails paying attention to both the pathos of encounters and to the distance of genealogy (from Greek *genea*, generation, descent; *logos*, discourse, theory, from *legin*, to speak, tell); that is, a *logos* on a vibrant mimesis that goes beyond human and nonhuman binaries to account for entangled subject matters vital to both the materialist and mimetic turn, or *re*-turn.

My wager, then, is that by explicitly bridging these two genealogically related perspectives, a vibrant mimesis pulsating in-between pathos and distance begins to blur the shadow-line dividing the human and the non-human, subject-oriented and object-oriented ontologies, the pathos of sympathy and the distance of patho-*logies*. In the process, this bridge casts a new, vital, and perhaps even original light on the dynamic flows that continue opening subjectivity to influences that are both affective and material, not only volitional and conscious but also automatic and unconscious, both open to debilitating human pathologies that threaten to dissolve the boundaries of individuation and receptive to vital nonhuman processes constitutive of a new materialist poetics—a mimetic poetics attentive to the influx and efflux of a shared pathos, or *sym-pathos*.

MIMETIC INFUX & EFFLUX: ENCOUNTERS

Influx and Efflux is, in many ways, a personal, subjective, perhaps even intimate, and experiential book that marks a new turn in Jane Bennett’s thought and writing. This is not simply because she now foregrounds the question of the “I” or “self,” which had been “bracketed” in *Vibrant Matter* in order to attune her political theory to imperceptible, subliminal, yet insidious influences that flow through the self and are “experienced as most local, most personal” (Bennett 2020, xii)—though these political influences, as we shall see, require an aesthetic touch and genealogical sensibility to be registered. Nor is this book personal solely because

Bennett now focuses primarily on the American poet Walt Whitman, who made the self and the multitudes it contains his privileged focus of experimentation via a type of poetic writing, which, as he wrote in a letter that Bennett quotes at the outset, “is personal, confessional, a *variegated* product” (xvi)—though this description, as we shall see, applies at one remove to *Influx & Efflux* as well. Both subjective and poetic perspectives are visibly constitutive of the personal, experiential, at times confessional and existential dimension of this untimely book and find variegated expression in different chapters.

But to immediately foreground the less obvious, but not less powerful driving force that, like an invisible undercurrent, flows through all the chapters in order to carry forth a porous, plastic, and permeable self, I, or ego, open to outside (non)human influences, it is necessary to pay diagnostic attention to the following genealogical question: what do concepts like “sympathy,” but also “influence,” “nervous mimicry, spirituo-sexual magnetism, neuromimesis” (29), a mimetic communication between mind and body called “pathognomy” (19), or “an automatic biomimesis working to destroy individuation” (xvii) and related notions that punctuated Bennett’s recent prose have in common? As the key term “sympathy” already suggests, they share a concern with a type of mimetic *pathos* that is at the foundations of our theory of mimesis, is impersonal or apersonal insofar as it blurs the boundaries that divide self and others, the human and the nonhuman, often “below conscious awareness” (xvii), operating on the embodied register we designated under the rubric of the “mimetic unconscious” (Lawtoo 2013). In the process, it *trans*-forms—that is, forms via a trance that “alter[s] states of mind” (xv)—an untimely conception of mimesis that has mirroring influences as a *via regia* to subject formations and plastic transformations. These subject matters are central to the long genealogy of homo mimeticus that goes from antiquity to modernity, reach via a plurality of embodied perspectives into the present, and now stretch to animate new materialism as well.

Bennett’s conception of sympathy that gives shape to a porous, plastic, and dilated “I” differs from dominant nineteenth-century understandings of the term in two significant ways, which are perfectly in line with the mimetic turn. First, she makes clear we should not translate the flows of *sym-pathos* in Whitman’s poetry, as well as in the writings of Thoreau and others, as a feeling *for* the suffering, or pathos, of the other in terms of personal or religious moral sentiments that find in Christianity—what Nietzsche dubbed “the religion of pity”—a moral and transcendental

imperative. Thus, Bennett writes that “Whitman is developing an I who, while still imitating Christ’s love for the poor and weak, appears not so much to be performing a voluntary act of pity as to be physically ‘possess’d’ by the circuit of pain” (2020, 31). She also specifies that Whitman is much closer to modernists like D. H. Lawrence who, echoing Nietzsche, also articulates a nonmoralistic notion of *sym-pathos* predicated on an oxymoronic tension or oscillation toward/away from the pathos of the other Bennett describes as follows: “Lawrence affirms, for example, a Whitmanian sympathy that appears not as a merging without remainder [...] but as a feeling-with that respects the distance, and preserves the differences, between each being” (36). Nietzsche calls this hovering vibration between feeling and distance, “*pathos of distance* [Pathos der Distanz]” (1996, 12), identifying an oscillation—or as Georges Bataille will later call it, “attraction and repulsion”—between mimetic pathos and critical distance central to D. H. Lawrence in particular and to modernist studies more generally.⁵ Second, the Whitmanian sympathy Bennett posits at the heart of democratic (American) pluralism should not be hastily conflated with major voices in romanticism, if only because it does not rest on the transcendental powers of what (British) romantic poets grouped under the category of an organic or primary “imagination.” On the contrary, it rethinks the imagination via a more embodied, “pulsating” and material perspective this volume proposes to call “disimagination.”

For our purpose suffices to say that the imagination, as originally theorized by romantic thinkers and dramatized by poets, tends to be animated by a contradictory push-pull toward/against mimesis. In fact, if it was expressed in the anti-mimetic figure of the romantic genius who may spontaneously “overflow with powerful feelings” (Wordsworth 2005, 490), the romantic imagination remains nonetheless based on a “repetition” of an “eternal” creative power that finds expression in the imitation of an “infinite *I am*” (Coleridge 2005, 504). Such an imaginative “I” expresses beautiful and sublime sentiments central to romantic poetics that shine from the inside out like a “lamp,” to borrow M. H. Abrams’s anti-mimetic metaphor in the *Mirror and the Lamp* (1953).⁶ It also give rise to “anxieties of influence” that lead poets in search of originality to “repress some of [the influences] and remember others” (Bloom 1989, 332), as Harold Bloom noted in his perhaps still Oedipal account of poetic creation out of an agonistic struggle with predecessors, a “romantic agonism” that, as I have discussed elsewhere, stretches to inform accounts of mimetic desires still entangled in the “novelistic lie [*mensonge*

romantique]” of autonomous originality (Girard 1965; Lawtoo 2023a).⁷ This also means that this romantic I or ego is less horizontally inclined to acknowledge impressions from others, be they human or nonhuman, with the power to generate mirroring reflexes in a multiple, yet finite, embodied, phantom ego openly in touch with the materiality of life. Its power of creation, Bennett would say, is closer to the sovereign autonomy of Zeus than to democratic nonchalance of a democratically inclined I.

This *différend* with dominant romantic accounts of sympathy, be they moral or poetic, mimetic or anti-mimetic, is directly in line with our genealogy of homo mimeticus. It presupposes the specific, immanent, and unconscious dynamic of a pathos that transgresses the boundaries of individuation, is immediately shared, while also allowing for some distance to emerge from the liminal space between I and not-I. Bennett does not convoke British poets, for her focus is primarily on an American poets and thinkers, but she notes that influential theorists of moral sympathy who precede them rely on the romantic category of the imagination to mediate the *pathos* of the other, which is only a partially shared pathos, or *sympathos*. Adam Smith, who in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) famously defined sympathy as “our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever” (2002, 13), is a case in point. Smith, in fact, posits that face-to-face encounters with the pathos of the other person tend to be mediated by a mental “representation” or “idea” he locates in the faculty of the “imagination.” As he puts it:

By the imagination we place ourselves in his [*sic*] situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensation, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them (12).

There is indeed an underlying Platonism haunting this theory of moral sentiments. For Smith, an idea or representation appears to be required to feel, at some remove, the pathos of the other. Commenting on this passage, Bennett rightly stresses that the “as it were” dimension of this mimetic experience presupposes a detour via an interior (or reflective) subjectivity to partially access the (embodied) pathos of the exterior other. As she critically puts it, for Smith “only by way of a detour through one’s own reflective interior is it possible to ‘enter into’ the feelings of another—and then only ‘as it were’” (Bennett 2020, 28). Indeed, this “as if” experience

is mimetic not so much because it leads to a shared pathos with the other but because it rests on a rational mediation predicated on an idea or mental representation mediated from a distance.

There is thus a pathos of *distance* internal to this romantic theory of *sym*-pathos. Smith confirms this point as he continues, a bit later: “If the very appearances of grief and joy inspire us with some degree of the like emotions, it is because they suggest to us the general idea of some good or bad person that has befallen the person in whom we observe them” (Smith 2002, 14). This is still an influential theory of how we access the minds of others that had an impact on a number of philosophers attentive to sympathy, compassion, or *Mitleid* informing a tradition in mimetic studies that goes from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche.⁸ It is safe to say that, to this day, ideas of representation continue to dominate theories of mind in the analytic tradition but not only. Its fundamental assumption is that a mediated knowledge or rational distance based on an idea of the reasons of suffering decides whether a pathos will actually be allowed to flow or not from self to others in order to become a shared pathos. A rational mediation based on a representation in a volitional, rational subject, in short, keeps the powers of mimetic pathos at a safe rational distance.

Now, contra mediated conceptions of sympathy that presuppose the interiority of an autonomous I still dominant in analytic strands of theory of mind and political theory, Bennett joins forces with the genealogy of homo mimeticus we have been pursuing, which was from the beginning attentive to less-mediated, more embodied, and unconscious influences constitutive of the relational dynamic of mimetic pathos. As she puts it: “What it means to be a sympathizer is to partake, both consciously and unconsciously, in an atmospheric of mimetic inflection” (33). She does so, among other things, by registering in the compressed, “processes-oriented syntax” (xv) of Whitman’s poetic lines a type of “direct affective transfer” (30) rooted in a sympathy with the power to infiltrate a poetic/mimetic I that is porous, relational, and characterized by an “unusually sensitive cuticle” (74), a dilatable cuticle that leads Whitman to express with pathos the following impression: “I am possess’d! / Embody all presences outlaw’d or suffering, / See myself in prison shaped like another man” (31). For Whitman, then, as for Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and other advocates of the mimetic unconscious, the experience of *sym-pathos* is not mediated by an idea or representation modeled on a transcendental I, or ego; yet his inner/outer experience oscillates, pendulum-like, between the immediacy of bodily pathos and the mediation of visual distance. In fact,

while Whitman's speaker emphasizes vision as a privileged sense that leads him to be "shaped *like* another man," it also stresses that the expressive force of a possession is "embodied." Body and mind are thus entangled in a physio-psychological experience that is not under the full control of consciousness and is animated by a more immanent, relational, and embodied unconscious we have already encountered.

To account for the "affective transfer" of sympathetic influences that flow from self to others, Bennett does not explicitly convoke the Freudian conception of the unconscious that finds in Oedipal dreams a *via regia*. Yet this does not mean that an alternative, pre-Freudian conception of the unconscious rooted in a physio-psychological forms of magnetic dispositions is not internal to her diagnostic of a porous self. Bennett, in fact, makes clear that the dynamic of sympathy goes "beyond 'imaginative projection' or psychological 'identification'" (2020, 42), suggesting that the concepts constitutive of Freud's metapsychology do not fully capture the impersonal flows of mesmeric influence that dilate the self or ego to the point of (dis)possession. And rightly so, for a genealogy of the unconscious attentive to the pre-history of psychoanalysis convincingly demonstrated that, despite all appearances, these Freudian concepts continue to implicitly presuppose a traditional philosophical category of the "subject."⁹

Bennett implicitly concurs with this tradition. Hence, while she notes that the influence she is concerned with "is often unconscious" (2020, 29), she does not lean on a repressive hypothesis to the unconscious based on an Oedipal myth. Instead, she aligns her diagnostic with a pre-Freudian but also post-Freudian mimetic hypothesis attentive to altered states of consciousness that are as psychological as they are physiological, for they are physio-psychological. "Mesmerism," suggestive "influences," "automatic" reactions, "altered states," and other relational processes Bennett convokes to account for the dynamic of *sym-pathos* cut across dualistic boundaries that simply oppose mind and body, self and others, consciousness and the unconscious, generating imitative dispositions that operate at the juncture of "physiognomy" and "physiology"—what she calls "phyz" (1)—and inflect psychology as well. What we can add is that such physio-psychological processes were well known in the nineteenth century and pave the way for phenomenological approaches to empathy, *Einfühlung*, or feeling into the pathos of the other; they were also constitutive of the discovery of the unconscious. After a century dominated by the "Freudian legend," genealogists of the psyche uncovered a pre-Freudian, embodied, and relational unconscious, which, as the historian of psychology Henri

Ellenberger has convincingly shown in *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970), has a long and complicated history that goes from mesmerism to hypnosis, suggestion to influence. And as we have argued elsewhere, this mimetic unconscious is animating the genealogy of homo mimeticus as well.¹⁰

Jane Bennett draws on and furthers the genealogical tradition of an embodied, relational, and mimetic unconscious that accounts for a dilated, porous, and suggestible phantom ego. She does so by paying attention to involuntary reactions that trouble volitional accounts of human agency and that she groups under the rubric of “nervous mimicry, spirituo-sexual magnetism, neuromimesis” (2020, 29), but also “influence,” “eroticism” and other flows of apersonal affect that generates movements or “attractions and repetitions” (97), are mimetic in the immanent sense that they are contagious, blur the boundaries between human self and (non)human others, and rest on an all-too-human openness to contagious powers that render the subject susceptible to plastic impressions from within but also receptive to mirroring expression from without. Thus, in different chapters, Bennett explores the ramified powers of this shared pathos via Henry Thoreau’s take on “natural sympathy” and the awareness of the “effort it takes to maintain the boundaries of individuation” (93); Alfred Whitehead’s diagnostic of the “physiology of affective tone,” which is “*not* sensed” for it operates on the “visceral” level (53); Caillois’s surrealist diagnostic of a “animal mimicry” that, as we have also seen in Chap. 5, induces a human “*dissolution* of self” (78) and Pierre Janet diagnosed as “legendary psychasthenia.” In the process, she establishes bridges with some of the most recent empirical confirmations of homo mimeticus—namely, “mirror neurons” and brain “plasticity”—while also stretching to include a critical self-reflection on the process of creative writing itself via practices of “misprison” of predecessors Harold Bloom grouped under the rubric of “anxiety of influence” (82)—an anxiety of indebtedness, Bennett specifies contra Bloom, that could be “operating in the unconscious (or perhaps even Whitehead’s ‘viscera’)” (85).

Bennett and I could not agree more: it is on the basis of a genealogy of a mimetic unconscious open to *sym-pathos* that a dilated phantom I, is born. In a characteristic personal tone imbued with the pathos of self-recognition, Whitman identifies this phantom as follows: “Myself effusing and fluid, a phantom curiously floating, now here / absorb’d and arrested” (in Bennett 2020, 111). And brining this phantomlike figure into theoretical focus Bennett outlines its shape as follows: “An ‘I’ existentially

open to outsides is both a profoundly *relational* being suffused with apersonal ‘affections’ and a profoundly *fragile* being susceptible to an anxious attempt to close its pores” (64). Since this “I” is embedded in a plurality of human and nonhuman influences the discontinuous efforts at human closure is a legitimate attempt to set up a distance in the continuous flow of impersonal pathos that threatens to overwhelm the subject. It also calls for a negotiation between the contradictory push-pull of a pathos of distance out of which a different, less anthropocentric, and more relational political consciousness, in favorable circumstances, could emerge.

Taken together, the phantom I that emerges from *Influx & Efflux* entails a reconsideration not only of the I but of the multiplicity of others that are intrinsically related to it from a perspective that is at least double. First, what was true for Whitman then remains true for Bennett now: a deeply divided country calls for pluralist efforts to inflect or incline individual physiology—and thus psychology—away from an increasingly self-absorbed ego toward the plurality of immigrant others constitutive of a pluralist and aspirational view of the American self. In the wake of (new) fascist phantoms, this self is still desperately in need of “identifications across the color-line” to go beyond its racist history that is still part of political realities. Such a “*democratic* disposition” (Bennett 2020, 8) is all the more vital to affirm collectively in periods plagued by antidemocratic and racist positions, as the spread of Black Lives Matter movements demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the US and globally. Second, what is true for the mimetic turn in new materialism is also true for the *re-turn* of mimesis in the different patho-*logies* informing homo mimeticus. In fact, both object-oriented and subject-oriented perspectives converge toward the same fragile conception of the phantom I whose multiple (ideological, digital, conspiratorial etc.) dispossession needs to be seriously revisited in the digital age. The flows of influence internal to this account of a porous, dilated, and relational ego suggests that the turn internal to Bennett’s new book supplements, among other things—for this book is variegated and contains multiplicities—a new voice to the heterogeneous chorus opening up the diagonal field of new mimetic studies.

And yet, if the return to the question of the self is predicated on a *re-turn* to the question of mimesis, it does not mean that this mimetic turn in new materialism is deprived of original theoretical insights. Quite the contrary. As a long genealogy of modern and contemporary thinkers of mimesis we have been engaging with over the years—from Plato to

Nietzsche, Derrida to Girard, Arendt to Cavarero, Caillois to Lacoue-Labarthe to Malabou, among others—have repeatedly confirmed, mimesis tends to generate repetitions with a difference. Jane Bennett is no exception. Her contribution to the mimetic turn, or *re*-turn, is at least double, for it concerns as much the content of her thought or logos as it does the form through which she mediates it with pathos, a mimetic pathos whose distinctive characteristic is that it does not limit the experience of mimesis to the human but, as anticipated, includes nonhuman influences as well. Let us take a closer look at both sides.

EROTIC *LOGOS* & NONHUMAN *PATHOS*

Vibrant mimesis emerges from the liminal space between the vibrations of matter and the vibration of the self, whose (non)human resonances I take to be Jane Bennett's distinctive theoretical contribution to the mimetic turn, *re*-turn. As she makes clear from the outset, the *sym-pathos* that flows through the veins of the poetic lines of *The Leaves of Grass* opens up the already dilated phantom I beyond human influences. And it does so to affirm a “cosmic dimension of the self” (2020, xii) that is “*a more-than human atmospheric force* that greatly interested Whitman” (27) as well as the other materialist thinkers she convokes.

In touch with “magical traditions” that favored embodied forms of affective participation as constitutive of mimesis, Bennett contributes to putting contemporary theorists back in touch with “more-than-human consistency of the I” (48). She does so by foregrounding nonhuman forces that have the mimetic power to take possession of the human ego precisely because they are more than human. On the shoulders of Whitman, in fact, the boundaries of *sym-pathos* keep dilating from “sympathy as moral sentiment to a more naturalistic, not-exclusively-human kind of affectivity” (40) that animates Whitman's verses. This inner experience, as Bataille would call it, allows the I to contain nonhuman multitudes as well as it “begins to ‘spread’ into what it ‘touches,’ becoming the breast of another, a trickle of sap, a fibre of wheat, a generous sun, a sweaty brook, a lusty wind” (36). Whitman puts it performatively as follows: “Breast that presses against other breasts it shall be you!/ Trickling sap of maple, fibre of manly wheat, it shall be you! Sun so generous it shall be you!” (in 35). There is thus, between the lines, a touch of eroticism at play in Whitmanian *sym-pathos* that resonates with transgressive experiences characteristic of modernists like Oscar Wilde and D. H. Lawrence, Roger Caillois and

Georges Bataille, generating a push-pull between the fusion of erotic pathos and the distance of individuation. As Bennett notes: “The figure of erotic sympathy highlights the powerful allure of oneness and the thrill of letting go of the efforts required to maintain the perimeter of a self” (36). In erotic possession there is indeed an alluring power of dispossession that puts not only lovers in touch but also opens them up to apersonal forces, animating a creative, generative, and cosmic nature, or *natura naturans*.

What was true of mimetic pathos remains true of erotic sympathy: a negotiation of proximity and distance is in order to preserve the boundaries of individuation while remaining in touch with the other. For instance, in what appears to be a philosophical echo to the American poet who lies “in the grass,” in a section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* titled “On the Poets,” Nietzsche, under the mask of Zarathustra, speaks the following lines from Alpine vistas:

But this all powers believe: that whoever lies in the grass or on lonely slopes and pricks up his [*sic*] ears will discover somewhat of the things that are between Heaven and earth. / And if tender emotions should come to them, the poets always think that Nature herself is in love with them. (2005, 111)

Across romantic and modernist traditions, there is thus a shared sense that not only a mimetic but also an erotic pathos troubles the boundaries of individuation opening up channels of communication “only the poets have let themselves dream” (111). If Zarathustra is somewhat suspicious of the poets’ attraction to heavenly dreams, Nietzsche himself is not immune to their charms while attempting to negotiate his distant proximity to the inner experience of pathos. Or, as Graham Parkes puts it: “The hydrodynamics of Zarathustrian generosity depend on keeping the boundaries of the self-permeable and the channels clear for a continuous influx and outflow” (1994, 153).

Riding the influx and efflux of Whitman’s prose, Bennett puts us back in touch with erotic/mimetic forms of (non)human communication with the power to dispossess the ego. I say “back in touch” because a Nietzschean strand in political theory never lost touch with the realization that mimesis goes “beyond nature and culture,”¹¹ and this lesson applies to our genealogical tradition as well. At least two distinguished precursors—one ancient, the other modern(ist)—need to be mentioned to continue deepening our genealogy of the nonhuman powers of vibrant mimesis beyond all-too-human affects. This will allow us not only to

continue circumnavigating influential accounts of mimesis as a false copy of an ideal reality but also to better evaluate Bennett's distinctive (new) materialist contribution to the mimetic turn.

We have already noted that the language of possession and dispossession is constitutive of Whitman's poetics of a phantom I, who has no trouble expressing, with pathos, "I am possess'd." What we must add now is that this type of poetic (dis)possession comes close to what the ancient Greek sources of *pathos* (πάθος) this time understood not in the romantic sense of feeling with or for but in the Greek sense. That is, as an impersonal and uncontrollable force that takes possession of the I, leading to frightening forms of dispossessions that are as physical as they are psychic, as human as they are nonhuman. As E. R. Dodds makes clear in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951):

The Greek had always felt the experience of passion as something mysterious and frightening, the experience of a force that was in him [*sic*], possessing him, rather than possessed by him. The very word *páthos* testifies to that: like its Latin equivalent, *passio*, it means something that "happens to" a man [*sic*], something of which he is the passive victim (1973, 185).¹²

This something, as the Greeks well knew, can be tied to a human force that found in *eros* a privileged human medium of (dis)possession. In a recent dialogue, for instance, Jean-Luc Nancy also notes that "Eros – the erotic impulse [*élan*], the impulse of desire – is thus the energy of participation [*methexis*]" (Nancy and Lawtoo 2022, 26). Nancy and I agree that an emotional participation provides the power or pathos animating a "sharing [*partage*]" of voices and affects in which mimesis is not opposed to desire. On the contrary, it blurs the artificial boundaries between desire and mimesis that psychoanalysis split in two distinct ties to form a familial triangle but that the experience of *sym-pathos* joins in an influx and efflux that opens the ego to others—including nonhuman others.

In many ways, then, the realization that mimesis goes beyond nature and culture is already constitutive of the birth of mimetic studies. Plato, as we noted at the outset, is notoriously biased contra representations or "phantoms" at "three removes from nature" (1963, 597e) for metaphysical and epistemic reasons that inaugurate an idealist, transcendental, and still dominant tendency in western thought that, to this day, casts a shadow on mimetic theories. Yet, at the same time, and without contraction, he is equally attentive the dramatic, hypnotic, and mesmeric powers of the actor

or mime to induce a mirroring contagion with the phantom power to take possession of an enthusiastic theatrical audience in immanent, embodied, and psychosomatic terms characteristic of the *vita mimetica* (Lawtoo 2022a, b, 69–91). What we must add now is that Plato, under the mask of Socrates, also broadens the scope of the powers of mimesis beyond the human, as he asks his interlocutor in book 3 of the *Republic* the following rhetorical but rather revealing question:

Socrates: Well, then, neighing horses and lowing bulls, and the noise of rivers and the roar of the sea and the thunder and everything of that kind—they [the guardians] imitate these?

Adimantus: Nay, they have been forbidden, he said, to be mad or liken themselves to madmen. (1963, 396b)

The question is, of course, rhetorical. Plato will make clear that forms of dramatic impersonation that lead actors, and at one remove, spectators, to be magnetically possessed by a fictional figure and are thus deprived of their proper identity should be banned from the city as a pathological form of intoxicating madness. And yet, the question is also revealing. It indicates, among other things, that already for Plato the powers of mimesis were not restricted to impersonations of human figures with the power to impress the malleable souls of children and adults he often compares to the plasticity of clay or, to update the metaphor, to the plasticity of Play-Doh (whose homonymy with Plato is not deprived of theoretical ironies). On the contrary, they stretched to nonhuman expressions that go from horses to bulls, rivers to thunders, with the electrifying power to shake, destabilize, and take possession of homo mimeticus disrupting the very boundary that divides humans and nature. If at the dawn of philosophy, Plato feared these nonhuman forces for the destabilizing powers they had on a precarious city, or polis, at the twilight of the Anthropocene, we should perhaps attune ourselves to nonhuman mimesis to better sense the agentic power of nature with which we are, nolens volens, already mimetically entangled, part of what William Connolly calls “entangled humanism” (2017)—which leads us to the second, modernist precursor.

It is true that representational theories of mimesis dominant in the twentieth century accustomed generations of critics to restrict mimesis to realistic plots or transparent images cast a shadow on this nonhuman inclination at the origins of mimetic studies; but it is equally true that, for more nuanced theorists, the human faculty to imitate remains rooted in

(human) nature. Walter Benjamin, for instance, opens his essay “On the Mimetic Faculty” (1933) with the assertion that not only humans but rather “nature creates similarities” (2007, 333). And paving the way for Roger Caillois’s diagnostic of continuities between human and animal mimicry, Benjamin establishes a bridge between natural mimesis, animal “mimicry,” and a “magical” animistic tradition attentive to the all-too-human compulsion visible in childhood but still present in adulthood “to become and behave like something else” (333): from windmills to trains (Benjamin’s examples), bears to tigers (my children’s examples). These are all forms of embodied, material, and sensuous similarities that can still be heard in onomatopoeic words and continue to animate, albeit less tangibly, non-sensuous similarities that operate below the register of conscious awareness and are in this sense unconscious—which brings us back to Bennett’s diagnostic of influence.

When Bennett calls attention to the powers of sympathy to transgress the boundaries dividing humans and nonhumans, she encourages scholars to go beyond tired nature/culture binaries that no longer hold in the age of the Anthropocene. She does so via a conception of an I that is, as she puts it, “possessed by possessions, irradiated by sunlight, caught by the sympathies of pine needles, intoxicated by drops, and is a mass of thawing clay” (2020, 117). When she dramatizes these mimetic things, Bennett can be seen as revitalizing an ancient, mesmerizing, perhaps magical, yet nonetheless immanent and material genealogy that never lost touch with the nonhuman powers of mimesis. Or as she also puts it, she “mingles with predecessors already on the page” (ix). And yet, as this tradition also taught us, sitting on precursors and mingling with them, whether consciously or unconsciously, does not preclude the possibility of innovation. On the contrary, it is the necessary but not sufficient genealogical condition to push mimetic studies further. Thus, Bennett’s qualifications to the mimetic powers of nature applies to her ancient/modernist predecessors as well, as she specifies—“*and yet I make a difference*” (117). This difference, as we turn to see, concerns not only the content (*logos*) of her materialist theory of a phantom I but animates the formal diction (*lexis*) that mediates it in the first place. What she says of doodling, in fact, equally applies to her new materialist take on mimesis—she seems to add something to the process, which takes me to the formal qualities of the mimetic poetics that is taking shape.

DOODLING POETICS: “LO A SHAPE!”

As any theorist of mimesis worth their salt has by now learned to appreciate, an account of the powers of imitation cannot operate only at the level of philosophical content or *logos*; it must pay equal attention to form, diction, or *lexis*. The process of mimetic influx and efflux is, in fact, already at play in the doodles that provide an elegant cover, or dress, to the book and punctuate it throughout. They are no simple decorations or representations to be seen from a visual distance. On the contrary, they trace unconscious emerging processes that are not the expression of a volitional ego but, rather, have the power to induce subliminal impressions, or influences. And these mimetic influences are equally at play in the style of “writing up” that in-forms this book and trans-forms this self.

Suspended in the space between a passive disposition for receptivity to impressions and an active position of agentic expression, possessed and dispossessed at once, open to the influx of mimetic pathos and distant from affective influences, forming and giving form, there is a sense in which Bennett’s style of writing up mimes, so to speak, the stylistic movement of her doodling. She does so not to simply copy, reproduce, or mimic their external form in writing; rather, the goal is to embody, through writing, an inner disposition that is as receptive to the influx as it is to the efflux she strives to capture. How? By performatively reproducing the effects of this movement outside the page for the readers to feel. What Bennett says of doodling in the epigraph that opens the book equally applies to the style of writing up she practices throughout: “Lines flow down arm, fingers, length of pencil, to exit at graphite tip and mingle with predecessors already on the page. ‘Lo, a shape!’ I say to myself (quoting Whitman) as it emerges” (2020, ix)—and in the process an epigraph stylistically crafted at the in-between juncture of activity and passivity, impression and expression, influx and efflux, has taken shape as well.

Notice that this stylistic effect is subliminal, imperceptible, and easy to miss, especially for readers primarily attentive to the content, thought, or logos of writing. And yet, the epigraph suggests that any reader who wants to capture the mimetic powers of influx and efflux Bennett performatively describes in her political theory should begin by paying attention to the poetic, and thus aesthetic, influences at play in her stylistic register, mimetic influences the epigraph attunes us to, and the rest of the book pursues via an alternation of concepts to be mediated from a distance and drawings to be immediately experienced with pathos. I consider this pathos of distance

that generates movements of “attractions and repetitions” (2020, 97) with both logical and affective powers that blur the human/nonhuman divide as Bennett’s distinctive contribution to the mimetic turn.

As the epigraph suggests, and the whole book confirms, this contribution calls for a poetic voice that is not the property of a volitional subject, or I. Rather, it relies on verbs in the middle voice (to partake, to inflect, to sympathize) in order to hover in the space between impression and expression, activity and passivity, conscious actions and unconscious reactions, opening up an in-between space of articulation that goes beyond static dualities in view of fostering mimetic processes of becoming instead. It is in fact no accident that such a hovering space Bennett locates in the “and” connecting/disconnecting influx & efflux has its physio-psychological counterpart in altered states of consciousness in which the ego experiences itself as both located in the mind and in the body, active and passive, inside and outside, present and absent, conscious and unconscious, in touch with pathos and distant, being mostly herself while being someone else—in short a middle state of pathos of distance I take to be the defining disposition of *homo mimeticus*.

The style, then, redoubles the content, to bring us back to the palpitating heart of what I take to be the distinctive characteristic of vibrant mimesis. As Bennett puts it, it is a style that is “simultaneously descriptive and performative” (32), echoing Whitman’s poetics in prompting “the reader to take on, to mimetically reenact, the nonchalance of earth” (10). We are thus not dealing with a type of writing that is mimetic in the narrow sense that it realistically describes or represents external shapes or forms already crystallized in the materiality of the world and, at one remove, in the immaterial sphere of ideas. On the contrary, the style is mimetic in the ancient, rhetorical, yet also increasingly contemporary performative sense: a performativity that not only does things with words, as poststructuralism taught us, but also does things through bodies, as genealogists of mimesis remind us. That is, via imitative bodies that register unconscious influences that are not simply visible from a stabilizing rational distance but are felt vibrating with the immediacy of bodily pathos—stretching to potentially affect and inflect readers’ dispositions as well.

Once again, what Bennett says of the mimetic powers of Whitman’s poetry applies to her poetic theory as well: readers are in fact encouraged to “mimetically reproduce in their own bodies protoversions of the stance described” (2020, 11). Writing-up does not entail writing and reading only. It has performative properties built in it that encourage affective and

bodily dispositions constitutive of what we called, *vita mimetica*. If we saw that the mimetic inclinations we traced back to the Platonic cave had pathological political effects on the subjects in the polis, this does not mean that magnetic influences cannot be turned to patho-*logical* political use, for the same phantom I is vulnerable to both good and bad influences. It is, in fact, on the basis of a vibrant receptivity to mimetic pathos that has the disconcerting power to take possession of the ego, turning into a phantom ego who can cast a spell on others, that Bennett's "distinctive model of the I" is born. As she puts it, this I is constituted as "a porous and susceptible shape that rides and imbibes waves of influx-and-efflux but also contributes an 'influence' of its own" (xi). There is thus a paradox of influence at the heart of the realization that "I alters and is altered" (xii) that mirrors a mimetic paradox we have already encountered via the problematic of a plastic subject: both are simultaneously susceptible to impressions and to expression, active and passive, receptive to being shaped and to giving shape via a process-oriented, unconscious, and plastic conception of a phantom I located at the paradoxical juncture of the *both-and* rather than of the *either/or*.¹³

Indeed, the line dividing impressions and expressions, activity and passivity, giving shape and being shaped is progressively blurred as an ancient paradox of mimesis circulates through the channels of (non)human sympathetic influences. I traced the genealogy of the mimetic/plastic subject goes from contemporary thinkers of mimesis (Malabou, Lacoue-Labarthe) back to modernist theorists (Nietzsche, Hegel) to find a privileged locus of emergence in ancient theorists (Plato) elsewhere (Lawtoo 2017, b). What is important to recognize is that Bennett inscribes her theory in the same paradox that turns passivity into activity, receptivity to impressions to propensity for creative expressions, receiving shape and giving shape. Thus, she recognizes that the so-called materiality of the soul, or "clay" has some impressive agency of its own" (2020, 18). It is indeed the conversion of restricted to general mimesis precursors like Lacoue-Labarthe (via Diderot) had located at the center of the paradox of the actor, Malabou (via Hegel) subsequently translated into the paradox plasticity, and as I argued (via Nietzsche) is constitutive a genealogy of a homo mimeticus that turns passivity into activity, pathologies into patho-*logies*.

From different perspectives, then, creative accounts on the powers of mimetic pathos have the performative effect to generate a shared, theoretical sym-pathos that is now gaining traction in the heterogeneous field of new mimetic studies. Having heard powerful vibrations of mimesis in

the flows of influx and efflux, it is thus with affirmative nonchalance that I join paradox to encounter via vibrant mimesis to extend the rings of what is already a long chain. We can thus add a vibrant new voice to our genealogy of mimetic thinkers, who (via Whitman) sing of the powers of (non) human sympathy to generate a phantom I suspended between impressions and expressions, giving shape and being shaped, “alters and is altered” (xiii). How? By partaking from body to soul, soul to body in mimetic waves of expression, “some mine, some yours, some apersonal” (xxiv).

Animating the human and nonhuman pathos of sympathy, but also mimicry, eroticism, magnetism, contagion, plasticity, dispossessions and other manifestations of vibrant mimesis from within, this paradox is the product of “encounters” that are already double-faced, for they are as theoretical as they are experiential, as based on reason or logos as they are based on affect or pathos, as generative of mimetic pathologies that threaten to dissolve an anxious and perhaps still romantic conception of the influenced self that echoes Bloom, as they are of genealogies that open up this self to the vital network of human and nonhuman influences, as Bennett writes up with Whitman. Both sides are as constitutive of nonhuman turns as they are to mimetic *re*-turns; they invite back-and-forth oscillations that are as theoretical as they are affective and require a change of stylistic perspective in order to be foregrounded.

MIRRORING INFLUENCES IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Riding the waves of mimetic influx and efflux imbibes us with unpredictable influences, for the seas have been polluted and the multitudes we contain are as patho-logical as they are pathological, flowing both from human and nonhuman life. Especially in her chapter on Roger Caillois but also in subtle allusions to the dangers of (new) fascism, the pathologies of racial discriminations, and the reality of viral pandemics that plagues an already vulnerable, precarious, and increasingly fragile planet, Bennett’s diagnostic of influences remains indeed attentive to what William Connolly calls “the fragility of things” (2013). And rightly so, for we live in a world increasingly dominated by influences that have the contagious power to dissolve the human ego against an environment that, for the moment still sustains us.

For the moment, at least. Due to rapid anthropogenic climate change, the agentic powers of the earth responding to all-too-human actions are now displacing a plurality of subjects, threatening in the long run to

dissolve us against an increasingly warming environment, as Caillois prefigured. If we then recall that we live in an age that can easily fall under the spell of (new) fascist and tyrannical leaders who rely on the old strategies of the actor now supplemented by new digital media powered by algorithms that amplify the powers of influence and propaganda to unprecedented degrees, while also reactivating the phantom of nuclear escalations, it is indeed politically urgent to come to grips with the realization that the all-too-human “ego” is far from the ideal of a rational, autonomous, and logical *Homo sapiens* that still informs dominant strands of political theory. A minor transdisciplinary tradition that goes from Nietzsche to Bataille, Caillois to Girard, Deleuze to Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe to Nancy, Cavarero to Miller, Connolly to Bennett to Morin, among other contributors to homo mimeticus, have been taking the powers of mimesis seriously along with the unconscious processes that cast a spell on egos and crowds, democracies and autocracies, especially in an age characterized by global pandemics, nuclear threats, and rapid climate change that threaten to literally erase *Homo sapiens* from the surface of the earth. Hence the urgency to reload the ancient realization that humans are—and I say this without narcissistic anthropocentric bias—perhaps still the most mimetic creatures in order to counter human and nonhuman influences that generate contagious pathologies generating dispositions for the worse.

And yet, without contradiction, the same tradition attentive to humans’ imitative nature has equally been calling attention to the metamorphic power of transformation that influence us for the better. *Influx & Efflux* is a strong recent ally of in this immanent tradition. It draws on a minor, perhaps eccentric and heterogeneous, yet deterritorializing and quickly proliferating mimetic tradition that “tends to float between genres—part political theory, part mythmaking, part poetry, part speculative philosophy, part political and existential diagnosis” (Bennett 2020, xxi). And it does so to affirm a conception of the subject that tends to fall through the cracks of disciplinary boundaries, yet is central to the transdisciplinary theory of imitation that affirms the metamorphic potential of a porous, relational, plastic, and sympathetic I open to human and nonhuman influences. It also mimetically performs this metamorphic power in order to influence new dispositions at the level of style, a style that performs the duplicity of influence, with the uncertainties, anxieties, and possibilities it entails in view of affirming new metamorphoses of homo mimeticus for the future.

In the end, then, following the pathognomonic movements of Bennett's pen, revolves us back to the problematic of a phantom of the ego with which our new theory of imitation started. Such a phantom is, in fact, the genealogical point where Whitman's multiple self and Nietzsche's multiple soul momentarily touch in an immanent instant of mimetic vibration—or vibrant mimesis. This instant is but a fleeting vibratory interval located in genealogical spaces between the lines and can easily be missed or misread. Yet, in the process of patiently reconstructing it in the spirit of the "egalitarian generosity" (2020, 35) that Bennett encourages us to pursue, a vital bridge between the nonhuman turn and the mimetic turn, an object-oriented "pathognomy" and a subject-oriented patho-*logy* has progressively taken shape.

Provisionally joined in the vibratory space between the human and the nonhuman, Bennett and I fundamentally agree that the self is not self-contained, autonomous, and disconnected from others, including nonhuman others. On the contrary, it is precisely because the I is, from the very beginning, mimetically entangled with the other, through the other, in a relation of material and affective reciprocity with the other that our disposition is to remain inclined toward others, porous, relational, embodied subjects open to human and nonhuman influences that operate below the register of consciousness of a phantom subject caught in the process of becoming other. Who knows? Perhaps in the future such subjects can also paradoxically serve as "models" not to be simply reproduced but to inspire a plurality of different creative influences in others to further new explorations of homo mimeticus in the twenty-first century.

Bridging mimetic studies and new materialism via the in-between medium of influx and efflux is, in the end, a natural-cultural process. While the bridge is a work in process and calls for subsequent back-and-forth movements across a (non)human divide that is not one for it is plural, it also rests on encounters that have already taken place in this world, generating oscillations between pathos and distance that are now internal to the affective reverberations of vibrant mimesis as well, giving it a moving shape. Since genealogy, in the Nietzschean tradition, is not deprived of personal confessions, let me conclude with an experiential observation about what influenced me to write this chapter in the first place. At the end of reading *Influx & Efflux*, I had the vibrant impression, or perhaps expression, that this timely book breathed an ego in and breathed a phantom out—with nonchalance. I can thus only mime the original voice that gives this untimely book an identity that is not one but double, or multiple, and echo:

I am integral with you; I too am one phase and of all phases.
 Partaker of influx and efflux I (Whitman 1990, 46).

NOTES

1. A version of this chapter first appeared in a book titled, *Homo Mimeticus: A New Theory of Imitation* (Leuven: Leuven UP, 2022). I am grateful to Leuven UP for allowing me to reproduce a slightly modified version of chapter 8.
2. For pioneering studies see for instance Wulf 1995 and Potolsky. On mimetic studies, see Lawtoo 2022a, b, 2023a, b and the special issues of *CounterText* 8.1 (2022), *Journal of Posthumanism* 2.2 (2022), *Critical Horizons* 24.2 (2023), *MLN* (2023).
3. This encounter took place in the material world as I held a visiting appointment at Johns Hopkins University from 2013 to 2016. It started informally in conversations that took place in a vibrant reading group and materialized in publications that now entangle new materialism and mimetic studies in friendly collaborations. For a sample of written traces see Lawtoo (2017), Bennett (2017), Connolly (2017), and Bennett (2020).
4. See Lawtoo (2022, ch. 2).
5. On sympathy qua shared *pathos* from a distance generating attraction and repulsion to mimesis in both Lawrence and Nietzsche, see Lawtoo (2013, 3–6, 30–45, 150–162).
6. If Abrams uses the mirror/lamp distinction to indicate a shift from realism (mirror) to romanticism (lamp) (Abrams 1953), I overturn the image to indicate a *re*-turn to mimesis via mirroring reflexes that are not confined to a realistic mirror but affect the poetic I instead.
7. As both the notion of “repression” Bloom convokes and the triangulation with paternal figures and desires internal to both Bloom and Girard confirms, both models remain indebted to a Freudian tradition of the unconscious they attempt overturn via a romantic agonism that erases traces of influences—a romantic move at odds with a modernist genealogy based on mimetic agonism (see Lawtoo 2023a, 45–57).
8. For instance, Schopenhauer’s mediated theory of sympathy is indebted to Smith but also paves the way for a more immediate theory of *Mitleid* Nietzsche will echo (see Lawtoo 2013, 40–45), which is in line with Whitman too. Interestingly, even Smith leaves open a more direct mimetic possibility as he writes: “Upon some occasions sympathy may seem to arise merely from a view of a certain emotion in another person. The passions,

- upon some occasions, may seem to be transfused from one man to another, instantaneously, and antecedent to any knowledge of what excited them in the person principally concerned. Grief and joy, for example, strongly expressed in the look and gestures of any one, at once affect the spectator with some degree of a like painful or agreeable emotion. A smiling face is, to every body that sees it, a cheerful object; as a sorrowful countenance, on the other hand, is a melancholy one" (2002, 13).
9. See Borch-Jacobsen (1988, 1992), Lawtoo (2013, 2019).
 10. See Lawtoo (2023a, b).
 11. See Bennett and Connolly (2020).
 12. E. R. Dodds specifies: "Aristotle compares the man [*sic*] in a state of passion to men asleep, insane or drunk: his reason, like theirs, is in suspense" (1973, 185). Before Aristotle, Plato had already specified that this suspension of reason, whereby the subject is possessed, is not deprived of enthusiastic, magnetic, and electrifying properties characteristic of a type of poetic inspiration akin to intoxication, eroticism, and madness or *mania*, which Nietzsche will later group under the rubric of Dionysian mimesis. See Chap. 2.
 13. The encounter that sealed this additional genealogical connection can be traced back to Bennett (2017) and Lawtoo (2017).

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H. (1953). *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bennett, Jane (2010). *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- (2017). "Mimesis: Paradox or Encounter." *Modern Language Notes* 132.5, 1186–1200.
- (2020). *Influx & Efflux: Writing Up with Walt Whitman*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bloom, Harold. (1989). "Poetry, Revisionism, Repression," in *Critical Theory since 1965*, eds. Hazard Adams and Leory Searle. Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 331–343.
- Borch-Jacobsen, Mikkel (1988). *The Freudian Subject*, trans. Catherine Porter. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- (1992). *The Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis, Mimesis, and Affect*, trans. Douglas Brick et al. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," trans. John Shepley. *October* 31, 16–32.

- Coleridge, Samuel (2005). *Biographia Literaria*, in *Critical Theory Since Plato 3rd ed.*, eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 501–508.
- Connolly, William E. (2013). *The Fragility of Things: Self-Organizing Processes, Neoliberal Fantasies and Democratic Activism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- (2017). *Aspirational Fascism: The Struggle for Multifaceted Democracy under Trumpism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dodds, E. R. (1973). *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ellenberger, Henri (1970). *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*. New York: Basic Books.
- Girard, René (1965 [1961]). *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lawrence, D. H. (2002). *Studies in Classical American Literature*, ed. Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey, and John Worthen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lawtoo, Nidesh (2013). *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- (2017). “The Plasticity of Mimesis.” *Modern Language Notes* 132.5, 1201–1224.
- (2019). “The Mimetic Unconscious: A Mirror for Genealogical Reflections,” in *Imitation, Contagion, Suggestion: Rethinking the Social*, 37–53.
- (2023a). *Violence and the Oedipal Unconscious: vol. 1 The Catharsis Hypothesis*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- (2023b). *Violence and the Mimetic Unconscious: vol. 2 The Affective Hypothesis*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- Lawtoo, Nidesh (ed.) (2017). *Poetics and Politics: with Lacoue-Labarthe*. *Modern Language Notes* 132.5.
- (2022a). *The Mimetic Condition*. *CounterText* 8:1.
- (2022b). *Posthuman Mimesis*. *Journal of Posthumanism* 2:2.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc, and Nidesh Lawtoo (2022). “Mimesis: A Singular-Plural Concept.” *CounterText* 8.1, 23–45.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1996). *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglass Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2005). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parkes, Graham (1994). *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche’s Psychology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Plato (1963). *Republic*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Lane Cooper, eds. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 575–853.
- Smith, Adam (2002). *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitman, Walt (1990). *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Jerome Loving. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wordsworth, William (2005). “Preface to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads*,” in *Critical Theory Since Plato 3rd ed.*, eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 482–492.