

THEORIA, AISTHESIS, MIMESIS AND DOXA

Theoria, aisthesis, mimesis and *doxa* are terms that sometimes are opposed, and sometimes their particular relationships are denied. However, the system of the paradox that often animates esthetic theories and conceptions of mimesis have only the pathetic enjoyment of reclaimed and affirmed unsolvable questions. Therefore it would be well to grasp the historical configuration that ordered the play of these concepts and their evolution up until our contemporary poetics.

We must keep in mind the movement of decomposition of Greek tribal society that led to a rupture between nature and society between the 8th and 6th centuries B.C. Previously, the legitimacy of the social order came from its harmony with the cosmic order of *phusis*; their separation made it necessary to base society on a different harmony: the principle of an abstract identity between all individuals. The semantic here is very significant:

“E. Laroche has shown (...) that *nomos* has first of all a religious and moral meaning near to *cosmos*, order, arrangement, an equal distri-

Translated by Jeanne Ferguson

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bution. After the Pisistratides, in Athens, it took on that of political law, replacing the *thesmos*, because of its association with the democratic ideal of *isonomia* (...) Another, weaker, meaning of *nomos*, is the one we encounter in Herodotus, as custom, usage, with no normative value. A modification between the meaning of political law and custom may occur from which philosophical thought, especially with the sophists, will profit.”¹

These three moments in the meaning of *nomos* perfectly describe the evolution that I wish to retrace. And later I shall return to this third “sophistic” moment. But for now, a serious problem was faced by the Greek cities, because in a society which is no longer founded on the order of the *cosmos* and thus on the authority of a priest-king, at the same time regulator and image of the social order, “events” must be democratically validated. Now, it must also be avoided that each acts according to his own personal view, thus creating a disorder in the discourse, since no one person has the authority to decide the value of reference of an event.² Wlad Godzich thus describes the solution the Greeks envisioned:

“The Greeks designated certain individuals, chosen on the basis of their probity and their general standing in the polity, to act as legates on certain formal occasions in other city states or in matters of considerable importance. These individuals bore the title of *theoros* and collectively constituted a *theoria*. (It may be useful to bear in mind that the word is always a plural collective.) (...) The *theoria* provided a bedrock of certainty. What it certified to having seen could become the object of public discourse. The individual citizen, even indeed women, slaves and children, were capable of *aisthesis*, that is, perception, but these perceptions had no social standing. They were not sanctioned and thus

¹ Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*, Paris, Maspero, 1982, Vol. 2, p. 115, Note 51.

² See Florence Dupont, “Cicéron, sophiste romain” in *Langages*, No. 65, March 1982: “The people of Athens is a collectivity of anonymous persons [...] No citizen has *a priori* quality to speak truer or more just. *Demos* is the common subject of all the pronounced discourses that, ideally, make up all the possible discourses of *Demos* on the object of the debate [...] The words of the orator are not the expression of a judgement whose vote would be recognition. On the contrary, it is to the degree in which the speaker disappears as an individual, in which he is identified with the *Demos* that his discourse is convincing.” (p. 26).

could not form the basis of deliberation, judgement and action in the polity. Only the theoretically attested event could be treated as a fact.”³

The *theoria* indicated what it would be socially legitimate to speak of and therefore what one had right (and the duty) to think. And Wlad Godzich adds:

Indeed, it may be of more than theoretical interest, in our current sense of term, to wonder how this social dimension of the certification of events (...) came to be occulted.⁴

In fact, it is this occultation that interests me here. It came at the moment when, from legitimized *theoria* as from *aisthesis* one can come to cause a rupture of an ontological nature between *theoria* and *aisthesis*.

Before arriving at that point, we must note some indispensable parallels. For example, the fact that at that time we go from a pre-monetary system, where it is the value of the use that counts (the object is taken in a network of magic and particularizing values) to a monetary system in which the exchange value dominates (the object now has only an abstract meaning, identical to all other objects). In other words, we find, along with the socio-political evolution, the same values of abstract identity and equality, the ones obviously not being the reflection of the others.

These new values will also be those that will impose themselves on Greek thought.⁵ We must distinguish two movements of a

³ Wlad Godzich, “The Tiger on the Paper Mat,” introduction by Paul De Man, *The Resistance as Theory and Other Essays*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. XIV.

⁴ Godzich, *ibid.*, p. XV.

⁵ As is shown by the linguistic model that Benveniste reconstitutes when he compares the Greek derivation *polis-polites* to the Latin *civitas-civis*. In the latter case, the “co-citizen” is first and the city is defined with regard to him as the ensemble of those who have relations of co-citizenship. In the first case, on the contrary, we start from an abstract term from which is derived the *polites*, that is, one who belongs to the *polis*: it is the abstraction and equality before this abstraction which are at the base of Greek civil thought. See Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Paris, Gallimard, 1982, Vol. 2, pp. 272-280. In addition, it should be noted that in French we have followed the Greek model and not the Latin: our conception of civic society is closer to that of the Greeks. It is necessary to see how the linguistic reversal operated, beginning with the 12th and 13th centuries, along with the notion *Universitas*. See in this regard P. Michaud-Quantin, *Universitas: expressions du mouvement communautaire dans le Moyen Âge latin*, Paris, Vrin, 1970.

geographical order. The first, in Ionia, will attempt to conceive the *phusis* no longer on the cosmological order of the animate (growth of plants or animal life) but on the technological model of mechanism. That is, there will no longer be the mythical story of the birth of the world; on the contrary primary structures and permanent principles will be sought. The problem therefore is to know what makes the mechanism start to work. It will be the figure of the divine that is considered as exterior to the *phusis*. The second, in Magna Grecia, where the Pythagoreans try to found social harmony on mathematical harmony and where they place duality between the soul and the body. Duality in which the soul dominates, directs the body, as relative of the divine and finally renews this situation of exteriority by rapport with the sentient world of the *phusis*.

But the rupture with the sentient world is not entirely accomplished. There is still an attempt to think of the multiple (*ta onta*). Heraclitus, of course, is the best example. With Parmenides, who conceived the total Being, perfect and unique, (*to on*) the first rupture occurred.

But before analyzing the new paradigm proposed by Parmenides, we must understand how the figure itself of the philosopher is formed. The one we will mention is thus the heir of the *demiourgon*, that some historians, like Dodds, connect with the shaman. The *demiourgon* is prophet, poet, musician, dancer, doctor, and many other things. He is a Seer, that is, one who can see the invisible. However, what will constitute the originality of the philosopher with regard to the shaman, is the fact that, in liaison with the political *isonomia*, he will no longer be satisfied with relating his visions to some initiates. Instead, he will teach them to everyone in the city, thus delivering them to the judgement, reflection and especially the reasoning of each. The invisible is then no longer the place of supernatural (even though it may remain that of a “revelation”) but that of abstraction, of “objectivized self-identity” as Vernant says, in short, of the *Logos*. This invisible can only be known through a discursive experience whose criterion of validity will no longer be the content but the form. For the first time, it is the form of a debate that will constitute the proof of value of a statement.

It is Parmenides who inaugurates this conception by imposing

the principle of identity (fragment 8, 16): “*estin e ouk estin*” (it is or it is not⁶) or principle of non-contradiction. We thus go from a type of non-formal reasoning whose validity rests on the “capacity of evocation”, the “force of evidence” of a discourse, to a formal type whose validity rests on the quality of a “general manner of speaking.” From the examination of this tautology will come logic: to think the thought leads to making a theory of the *Logos* as proposition. And that as well as the examination of the initial thesis, from fragment 2, shows this interesting face: it is given in the elliptical form *estin* and not as in 8, 3, *eon estin* (the being is). By this ellipsis of the subject, Parmenides wants to lead us to consider the implicit monism of the tautology “the being is” and so he uses the person of the verb bearing the two elements, both subject and verb: existence in that it exists; two elements that are not one alone. Parmenides marks in language (grammatical analysis, that is, logic) what language reveals: that being is.

But he does not stop there, or more precisely, what the goddess says to him—since the poem is *vocative* here: it is a matter of a vision—is not satisfied with this common way of truth and being. The way of truth is never one way, a divine way that is articulated only by the divine voice. The other way is that of appearance, of non-truth, that the mortals share, that named “opinion.” (*doxa*). And this way, although untrue, also stores a sort of knowledge which the goddess teaches Parmenides so that no mortal can surpass him. In other words, the only way to be is not sufficient in the world of mortals; there must also be knowledge proper to mortals, even if it is knowledge of appearance (which does not mean an apparent knowledge). The error of mortals comes from language: “They have established two points of view to name (*onomarein*) exterior appearances (*morphas*)” (8, 53), that is, they mistake the only reality, the being visible however in language. The error comes from the fact that instead of making a grammatical analysis of language so as to stay in the way of being, mortals use a nominative analysis be-

⁶ I use the Greek text in Nestor-Luis Cordero, *Les deux chemins de Parménide*, Paris, Vrin, 1984. We know that this only text remaining to us of Parmenides is a poem and that it relates the visitation of a goddess who came to teach Parmenides the two roads to truth (*aletheia*) and opinion (*doxa*).

believing to have designated the real by the magic power of a name. This is why men are called *dikranoi*, men with two heads, because they oppose the pluralism of onomastic judgements to the unique reasoning of being. In that way they can speak of the light of the night, *nuktiphaes*, joining in one word opposed predicates and believing to find a particular truth. While it is they, the mortals, who have established a distinctive name for each thing (fragment 19) forgetting that words are only conventions without immediate rapport with reality, persuaded (*pepaitotes*) even that words are true and real. From this come the two ways drawn by the eyes of men: that of the *truth* that goes through an analysis of grammar of the language to show that there is nothing but being, and that of *appearance* that is never anything but an abusive belief in the power of naming, in short, a rhetoric.

If for Parmenides the opposition of *being* and *appearing* is thus well marked, there is no question of scorning the sentient world to the point of denying it all legitimacy. It is rather to take the measure of the respective places of the gods and men, of being and non-being as well as the possibility (since there is opposition) of a passage—described by the metaphorical beginning of the poem that must not be reduced to a meaningless ornamentation—a passage that is never a common measurement, nor even a common measurer. In other words, it is not possible to find in Parmenides an intelligible/sentient opposition to the degree in which both are taken up into the One. However, everything is ready for this opposition to assert itself so as to resolve the problem of the rigidity of the Parmenidian monism.

Before arriving there—that is, to Plato—we may ask why the principle of non-contradiction imposes itself when it is obviously false in the sentient world and seems completely alien in the supernatural world. In fact, we must understand that what was desired was the conception of an invisible world, consequently denying the sentient world and outside the supernatural model that supposed a nature-society harmony that had already been revoked: “thus it was necessary that this discourse be a determined discourse that did not deny itself, that did not carry a condemnation against itself.”⁷ The legitimacy of the discourse is

⁷ Régnier, *Les Infortunes de la raison*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 140.

then found, not outside but within itself, just as that of society resides in itself and not in the cosmos. It is easy to see at this level the parallel that is traced between politics, economics and culture: each time it is a matter of instituting these new values of the social order (abstract equality and identity).

From this beginning, the rapport *theoria-aisthesis* changes. *Theoria*, which is still a “contemplation”, becomes only that of this invisible being, more real than the sentient real—the vision of the goddess *Aletheia*. *Theoria* is no longer of the order of *aisthesis*; it is of the order of discourse, and “rational” discourse. So it is logical that *aisthesis* is no longer only the arena of appearance, of deception and illusion of the senses, in short, of non-being. There is a separation from the multiplicity of the sentient as from the social, to leave for the quest of the One, through the intermediary of a discourse whose legitimacy is to be “logical” (that is, identical to itself). *Theoria* and *aisthesis* are opposites in terms, according to the two antithetical ways prescribed by the goddess: True/False, Being/Non-being, One/Multiple, Non-apparent/Apparent, Order/Disorder, Value, Veritable/Real/Illusory Real, Rational/Non-rational.

In such a context, it is easy to understand the Platonist condemnation of the poet (he is on the “wrong side” of the barrier) but it is also easy to conceive the impotence of a philosophy founded on the postulate of the Being to *think* the *aisthesis* since at the start this latter was excluded from the arena of thought: literally, it became illegitimate (thus impossible in the considered reference system) to think it. Either, with Parmenides, the respect for the two measures was maintained, while affirming the superiority of “usage” (since the discourse belonged already to the order of the divine) accorded to Truth. Or with Plato, the otherness of appearance was no longer conceived except under the form of an alteration. In any case, the occultation of the social dimension of *theoria* (like its dimension of *aisthesis*) occurs through this ontological movement that sends *theoria* into the Heaven of Ideas and *aisthesis* into the Inferno of Illusion.

Let us see now precisely how Plato proceeds, in his famous passage in *The Republic*⁸ to measure the disqualification not

⁸ Plato, *La République*, Book X, trans. by E. Chambry, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1982. I sometimes modify the translation to make it more literal.

only of *aisthesis* but also of its variant, *mimesis*. The premise of *The Republic* is twofold: one must elucidate how knowledge of being is possible (theory of ideas) and how communal living of men is viable (it is according to the idea of communal living). Thus it is matter both of epistemology and a politics instituted in a theory of being as an idea—and not as the apparition of being. It is in this double optics (which like all binocular vision fixes the same point)⁹ that we must grasp the rejection of *mimesis*.

Plato starts from the fact that habitually “a certain idea (*eidos*), one only, that embraces each group of multiple objects to which we give the same name, is admitted”. (596a) Thus while there are many beds and many tables, there is never more than one idea of bed and one idea of table. Now this reciprocal relation between uniqueness of the idea and the multiplicity of objects is grasped, in fact, in the tissue of language or, more precisely, in the relation of reference to the name. It is clear that the idea is not reducible to the name, but the way it works, marked here, appears mediated by that of the name.

The worker (*demiourgos*) who makes beds, makes them (*poiei*) after the idea. As for the idea itself, no human worker can fashion it (*demiourgei*). Apparently then the *demiourgein* is to the *poiein* what the singular is to the unique, what acting for the community is to doing everything.

In 596 Socrates the actor reasons in this way:

- See now what name you will give to this worker (*demiourgon*).
- What creator (*Poion*)?
- The one who makes all objects (*Os Panta poiei*) that the various workers each make in their own way.
- There you are speaking of an admirable and able man!
- Wait, and you will soon say so with more reason. This worker I am speaking of is not only capable of making all kinds of furniture but he fashions all living beings including himself, and in addition he makes the earth, the sky, the gods and all that is in heaven, and all that is under the earth in Hades.
- You are speaking of a quite admirable sophist (*sophisten*).

⁹ “If we insist on saying that Plato does not inquire about art from a ‘political’ point of view, it means only that Plato evaluated art from its position in the State, according to the essence of the State... that is, knowledge concerning the ‘truth’. Such an inquiry on art is a ‘theory’ of it to the highest degree.” M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. by P. Klossowski, Paris, Gallimard, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 153.

Separating the demiurge from the creator appears less clear here, mostly due to the suspense of the dialogue rather than to lack of clarity in the terminology, or rather the lack of clarity is necessary to the degree in which the point obviously is to fix a terminology, that is, a correct word for the differences of these apparently simple practices. The act of naming is an act of partition, at the same time association and separation.

What is admirable in such a worker is that he is capable of everything (*panta*), nothing of what is created is impossible for him to make. He seems to be a supreme creator. But Glaucon is not deceived, and the name with which he designates the worker does not lack a subtle evocation: sophist!¹⁰ The great creator becomes a simple manipulating figure and player with words: he only fashions words quickly borne away by the wind. Socrates, however, does not take up the way thus offered by the sophist; he prefers to use the image of the mirror which, *in an instata*—agility also was found in the art of the sophist—allows no matter who to present no matter what, not as truth (*aletheia*) but as the appearance of the object (*phainomena*). Painting is the facile metonym of the mirror: the painter would thus be described as one of those workers who can produce everything, including a bed (*klinen poiei*). Now, the maker of the bed (*klinopoios*) only makes a bed that seems like the real bed. What is it then that divides the idea of a bed, the particular bed and the apparent bed?—*tropo ge tini*: a certain shape. “Plato’s intention is to make visible here the different ways and consequently, three ways of presence and derivations of Being,” claims Heidegger.¹¹ Let us admit that for the moment. In any case, these shapes also have

¹⁰ We must not see in this a chance: in the dialogue of the *Sophist* we will find exactly the same accusation with even something more (the idea of payment). “The one who would affirm that he knows how, not to say nor to contradict, but produce and make, through one sole art, all things [...] The one who would produce and you and me and all the rest that grows (...) and the sea and the earth and heaven and the gods are the rest. What is more in a turn of the hand producing one or the other of these creations, he gives for a minimum amount. It is a jest you are making. What? When one affirms that one knows everything and that one will teach everything to someone else for practically nothing in a short time, must we not think that it is just in jest? [...] Now do you know a more savant or more gracious nest than mimetics?” Plato, *Sophiste*, trans. by A. Diès, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1950, 233c-234a. Quickness and money are two nerves of the value that Plato here devalues.

¹¹ Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, p. 166.

to be named (*prosagoreuesthai*): on the one hand, the one that creates (*poietes*) the essential bed can only be a god; he will be called *Phutourgos*—the one who “activates the *Phusis*,” who allows it to develop; on the other hand, the one who makes the singular bed, letting the idea of the bed appear, is the worker, the *demiourgos*—the one who acts for the *Demos*.¹² Finally, the artist who is neither the *demiourgos* nor the *poietes* will be called the “imitator” of these things of which those are the workers. That is to say, that it will be a matter of a *mimesis* of objects not as they are (in the idea) but as they appear to be (in their fashioning). And since Glaucon does not understand, Socrates adds:

“If you look at a bed sidewise or straight on or in any other way, is it different from itself or without being different, does it seem different?

— [...]

— It seems different but is not.

— Now consider this. What objective does painting propose relative to each object? Is it to represent what is (*to on*) or as it seems (*to phainomenon*)? Is it the imitation of the appearance (*phantasmatos*) or the truth (*altheias*)?

— The appearance (*phantasmatos*).

— The art of imitating is then far from the truth and if it can do everything, it seems that it only touches a small part of each thing, and this thing is only a phantom (*eidolon*). (598a)

Located from the beginning in the play of optics (mirror of painting) we are in the experience of the visible: it is a physical impossibility to see a bed in all its aspects; it thus seems different each time, but its being is always the same, otherwise we would not even recognize it as a bed. The experience that leads to the recognition (and naming) of the object goes through a dissociation of the being and the appearing, in which the appearing, always incomplete and inadequate in itself only finds its plenitude in a tour around the bed. If, for Heidegger, Plato presents us here with the three possible derivations of being, he only does so on the

¹² It is interesting that Plato should choose this name that earlier designated the wise man, the shaman, for its literal value *demos-ergon*. In *Timaeus* however this same term named the creator god of the universe. These lexical variations allow us to grasp how one of the aims of *The Republic* is to show the difference between *Phusis*, *Demos* and *Mimetes*.

horizon of this *previous* split that makes appearance the idiot of the family and being the wonderful older son. It is not because we do not see the object in all its facets that we cannot recognize it—and there is no need for a reminder of the being of this object in order to do that.¹³ Such is the experience that painting proposes to us: “it is not just the fact that the artist cannot produce a table which can be used but that he cannot make it appear as a whole under all its angles at the same time, that contributes to the determination of its nature as *mimetes*”.¹⁴ But Heidegger does not go beyond this remark even though he brings up an important point by sustaining that the implications would lead him to go back on what he intends to show as the degrees of being. In fact, by separating *aisthesis* from *theoria* we are forced to not conceive the former except within the orbit of the latter, at times as a distant degree but often as an insult. The great mistake of the imitator is that he only produces an appearance, a phantom—not only does he represent just the appearance but under its sole appearance—and that, nevertheless, we recognize a bed, a table, a carpenter and so on. The scandal in *mimesis*? The fact that only one person borrows the voice or gestures of different persons, or rather, since it is not a question of individuals, one competence (for the poet, that of the discourse) uses the discourse of several different competences. And in fact, a writer can compose the discourse of psychologist, sociologist, historian, geographer, doctor, botanist, philosopher (as well as bourgeois, teacher, peasant, policeman, the student of 1968 or the bald queen of England) without being immediately accused of prevarication and imposture.¹⁵ But Plato is as sensitive as Bourdieu to these

¹³ We may note that phenomenology errs exactly inversely when it claims that the cube with six faces never has its six faces at the same time to the degree in which, if the real cube is the cube for myself, I only see its faces one at a time. See Merleau-Ponty, *La structure du comportement*, Paris, P.U.F., 1942, p. 201, and for a Wittgensteinian critique of the epistemological presuppositions of phenomenology, see Vincent Descombes, *Grammaire d'objets en tous genres*, Paris, Minuit, 1983, pp. 55-123.

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, p. 170.

¹⁵ To take only one example, the medical discourse of Balzac, not only is accepted without a problem, but authority itself legitimizes it since there are medical theses on the illnesses of certain characters in *La Comédie Humaine*, and we congratulate Balzac on the acuity of his descriptions! On the other hand, it is less well accepted when an author explicitly claims such authority, thus with Zola, in which the same doctors show instead the derisory and caricature of somatic descriptions.

problems of the legitimacy of the discourse: that one takes on oneself to usurp the functions for which one has no competence, that no one has asked us to carry out, that no one would be valid to receive: this is what is scandalous.

What is it then that can legitimize this discourse, apparently so illegitimate? We could say that it is the place in which it is found that offers it validation: we are in fiction, nothing is true, consequently all the discourses may exist without questioning the symbolic functioning of society. To the degree in which these discourses are “authentically false” they may be held for one alone with no other competence to support them than that of fabricating false discourses. The scandal then seems to disappear. We have grounds for legitimization.

But that is going too fast. and Plato, once more, seizes it: the wrong in these false discourses is that they have an effect, they pass for true. For Plato, only the one who is competent can tell the truth, only the one who remembers the idea, who is guided by it, has the ability to produce the being, now here the incompetent seems to tell the truth, he produces the illusion of the true, an appearance of being and not the being. This is what is inadmissible because if one can be so deceived, confuse competence and incompetence, true and false, real and unreal, being and non-being, communal living cannot function in all security. Far from being simply removed from the idea, *mimesis* is unaware of it: it fabricates an otherness that is not remembering or recognition of the idea but a work of presentation beginning with the multiple singularities of what is in daily usage. *Mimesis* works directly on appearance, directly on *doxa*.

This labor does not come from an analysis either in terms of unveiling the being, or in terms of production beginning with the non-being, since both remain in a doctrine of being which always thinks of itself in spatial terms:

“the distance with respect to the being and its visibility gives the true measure to determine the essence of *mimesis*.”¹⁶

The distance to the being is what regulates the distinctive quality

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, p. 169.

of a production. And yet a mimetic action never has its own quality, never its own place since it continually borrows the quality and place of others. It comes neither from being nor non-being, but from others in their singularity. It says neither the true nor the false, because it never speaks in its own name but in the use it makes of the saying of others (doctor, carpenter or philosopher) connected with the true and the false. The Platonist analysis is amazingly correct, without a doubt never equaled—among other reasons, because it grasps that the act of *mimesis* does not repose on space but on speed. But perhaps it is so because the mimetic activity was, for a theory of the idea, a merciless challenge. How, in fact, if we admit such a production of legible appearances from other appearances, can we still find in an idea of communal living, in a transcendental, the assurance of a correct relationship to things, to the cosmos, to the gods and to other men? The exclusion from the city is not from scorn (Plato begins by emphasizing at the start of Book X his love for Homer) but the recognition of an incompatible at the heart of a city governed by the idea.

For Heidegger the bed (*klines*) is declined like the grammatical cases of a noun or like the decline on the slope of being.¹⁷ While for Plato the *klines* is rather declined as one would decline an identity. Because the main question posed by mimetic art is that of identity: not only how the identical can be produced without competence but also with what proper noun call the discourse of the imitator. And this is why the entire passage continually tries to name everything—the theory of being leaning to a practice of language as *nomination*. While *mimesis* foils from the beginning the design of the name to the profit of another seizure of the language (in a way, more grammatical).

Furthermore, this discourse of the proper name also engages in a genealogical statement: not only in the lineage that goes from idea to appearance and from appearance to appearance, but in the attempt to divide the inheritance, to separate the good son

¹⁷ For the conception of appearance as flexion of being, see Heidegger, *Introduction à la métaphysique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985, pp. 107-124. See also *Être et temps*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, para. 44.

from the bad one, philosophy from the imitator.¹⁸ This is how we must understand the reference to the sophists, since the sophist also usurps the competences he does not have, speaks in the name of others, works only in the realm of appearance. He is the one who quickly produces (*takhu poiesas*) creations that he delivers for a minimum sum (*smikrou nomismatos*) (*Sophist*, 234a). The sophists are in fact wrong in Plato's eyes: they confuse the different values of the *ousia*. If, philosophically speaking, the "Goods" are found on the side of the Non-Apparent, as we have seen, and beyond the sentient world, economically speaking Plato (like Aristotle) considers that the Value and the Real of the "Goods" are on the side of the Apparent, of the physical reality of the earth and property and not on the illusory side of money. Now, the sophists not only deny the value of this invisible world; they are all ready to exchange their knowledge for money, in other words, for Plato, exchange the true Being (assuming, of course, they had a real knowledge) for the Non-Being, the *nomos* for the *nomismatos*, like the artist exchanges the *eidon* for the *eidolon*. The *nomisma* is as much the money or the current measure as, more generally, all that is recognized and established by usage. The negation therefore of someone exterior to the community, of a transcendent otherness before the conduct of the community. The sophist, like the artist, only works on the scale of common usage. But this work, having no journey to make toward the idea (always at a distance) has only a short temporal duration: it acts quickly (*takhu*). Contrary to what Heidegger says about it, the rejection of poetry does not come so much from its distance from the place of the being as from its absence from its own time. Now, this absence from time comes only from the fact that the poet does not come out of usage, from the immediacy of the community from the space limited by the agora. *Mimesis* is not there-

¹⁸ "The aim of division is not at all to divide a type into elements but to select the issues: distinguish the pretenders, distinguish the pure from the impure, the authentic from the non-authentic [...] Platonism is the philosophical Odyssey, the Platonic dialectic is not a dialectic of contradiction or the contrary but a dialectic of rivalry (*amphisbetesis*) a dialectic of rivals and pretenders. The essence of the division does not appear in breadth, in the determination of the elements of a genre, but in depth, in the selection of the lineage." Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, Paris, Minuit, 1969, p. 293.

fore rejected as a decline or fall but rather as stagnation in the empirical. Derrida is correct in his critique of Heidegger but a little mistaken in his reference to Plato:

“The metaphysical or onto-theological limit consists undoubtedly less in thinking of a fall *in time* (...) but in thinking of a *fall* in general, whether it be, as *Sein und Zeit* propose, its fundamental theme and in its place of greatest insistence, from an *original* time into a *derived* time (...) Now, the opposition of the *original* and the *derived*: is this not metaphysical? The request of the *archie* in general, those that are the precautions with which we surround this concept, is it not the “essential” of metaphysics? To suppose that we could extract it, in spite of strong presumptions, from all other provenance, is there not still at least some Platonism in the *Verfallen?*”¹⁹

If there is in Plato this theme of appearance as flexion of being, it is the political aspect that leads him there and not just a theory. In other words, not being able to conceive the otherness of the *mimesis* in the framework of *theoria*, since *mimesis* refuses to leave *aisthesis*, Plato in a local and strategic way falls back on the conception of its alteration. The difficulty with this position is seen in the omnipresent use of spatial and optical metaphors that reduce the concept of time of imitative work to the stagnation of the moment.²⁰

When we go to the root of this position, we tend to think ontologically of the otherness of *mimesis* as alteration of a norm, because we think of this “other” object from the interior of the norm. When even so—what Plato saw very well—it is, at the beginning, the institution of the norm that establishes this different object as “other.” Here we see that the devaluation of the

¹⁹ J. Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris, Minuit, 1985, pp. 74-75.

²⁰ We must also understand the specific relationship of the Greeks with the optic and with the problem of the image “what an Ancient sees in a mirror is the thing itself but where it is not and as it is not [...] if the image may be designated as a fantasm (and Plato expressed in *The Republic* the ontological difficulty it brings up) we cannot study it geometrically as such, *since what it has is not to have physical existence*”. G. Simon, *Le negant, l'être et l'apparence dans l'Optique de l'Antiquité*, Paris, Seuil, 1988. That must be put in relationship with the Democritan idea (which Aristotle takes up) which considers that the movement of bodies comes from the fact that they are not in their proper place and continually try to go back to it.

esthetic is necessary to the system and that the pejorative connotations that attempt to qualify it are not there by chance.

However, to understand the double movement of devaluation and over-evaluation of the esthetic or the various contemporary poetics (transgression, scandal and madness become values *par excellence*) we must analyze the other historical moment where a new paradigm is put into place: the 18th century, the revenues of the sentient increase in their scientific version as well as in their poetics. At the beginning of the century the two are still linked.²¹ But at the moment in which the natural sciences detach themselves definitively from metaphysics, an autonomous region is created that will be called “esthetic”.²² *Theoria* as method draws away from its contemplative connotation of the heaven of ideas to enter the domain of *aisthesis*, but not just any *aisthesis*: it must be purified from the contingent, sort out the useless detail, reach “the perfection of sentient knowledge as it is”.²³ But this autonomy requires the legitimization of the esthetic as a value and, through a strange (but logical) reversal of history, we apply to it the very schema of *theoria*. The artist under the figure of “genius” will be the Seer, the one who will tell the veritable Being, the secret Real of things.²⁴ But on the condition that he vows himself to pure sentience, to not-knowing, to the impossible: in fact, how can we think of *aisthesis* in the mode of *theoria*, when an ontological abyss has separated them, if not as lack, non-knowing, etc.? This system of negativity and paradox which finds all its energy with Adorno is the only way to raise *aisthesis* to the level of elocution of *theoria*.

However, the autonomy of the esthetic finds in Kant a some-

²¹ Houdart de la Motte in his *Réflexions sur la critique* (1715) considers that between poetic art and science “there is always the same reasoning, always the same method,” and Crousaz in his *Traité du beau* (1715) speaks as much of science as of eloquence or music.

²² The name is Baumgarten’s, who published in 1750 an *Aesthetica*, an epoch in which, for example, Buffon produced his first *Discours d’histoire naturelle* (1748) and Maupertus his *Dissertation inaugurale* (1751).

²³ Baumgarten, *Aesthetics*, quoted by J. Chouillet, *L’esthétique des Lumières*, Paris, P.U.F., 1974, p. 17.

²⁴ We find the best example in Schiller, in his *Lettres sur l’éducation esthétique de l’homme* (an example of a great influence on German esthetic philosophy): “The esthetic sense must please even for living things only as appearance, even for real things only as idea,” 26th letter (my translation).

what different measure. Once understanding and reason are dissociated so as to respond both to empiricist critiques and the need to maintain the ultimate ends of reason, the problem becomes that of their liaison, their *communication*, since there must be a harmony and an agreement between them. And this accord is founded on a common meaning which lends itself as the subjective condition for all "communicability". What is it then that founds this common meaning?

From the opposition *theoria-aisthesis* Kant has placed in another opposition, *theoria-praxis*: theoretical philosophy that takes into account the reduction of the old value allotted to *theoria*, a practical philosophy that takes on this supreme value, and through which *aisthesis* is freed. The remarkable astuteness of Kant consists in starting it up again by having it indicate both the passage between the faculties and the event of common sense. Esthetic judgement supports communication in its double dimension of *passage* and *community*. There is nothing there but a feeling, and yet I ask everyone to agree with that feeling. This demand not having the validity of a concept, and yet existing, Kant infers that it must make a signal in the direction of a common sense that we share even before a logical judgement and that legitimizes our esthetic judgement. In other words, we find there the idea of a *theoria* legitimized as *aisthesis* with the difference that esthetic judgement only anticipates teleological judgement, that which tells the end of nature and the order of being. Appearance is again considered, but it is not yet considerable.

Esthetics deals with what can be considered: what in Greek is called *doxa*. This term has various meanings: 1) consideration as glory; 2) consideration as a simple regard thrown on the state of things; 3) the fact of being "considered as", "to have the air of", from which comes the idea of appearance as mere seeming; 4) the opinion that one or more persons form, from which comes the idea of current opinion. Esthetics supports the weight of all these meanings: none of them should be taken away from it. Plato had launched *mimesis* on the road of *Demos* by emphasizing the fact that the work of the artists is on the same plane as that of the workers in the city, the singular multiplies manufactured objects. We must insist on that, because it is the reason for the failure of those who try to inscribe the artistic effort whether it is being

or non-being: art is without transcendence, it has neither interiority nor exteriority. It only goes at a slant, traverses all the social discourses without ever taking root in any of them: if it does, it perishes. The image of the parasite would be pertinent on the condition that it is not taken except in the sense of someone finding his nourishment at the expense of others. If art is nourished by everything it always gives it back but in a different way. Its link with the real world is there: art is systematically realistic, it lives on the material of actions and discourse, it never says anything else. This is why it can make sense. Art is appearance just as the gesture of love I make or the ironic discourse I make. Seeming is not simulation: the latter is only recognized in the shadow of the former. If seeming were always simulation we could not even give meaning to the particular concept of simulation, because it would then designate the framework of all our actions, all our words and all our thoughts. We must give back to appearance the quality of being and to being the value of appearance. Art works even in appearance in the same way as all our works, from the consideration given to a tree or a drawing, to a potter's work, or the discourse of a politician on his rostrum, the actor on the stage or the journalist in front of the camera. But it works in a different way, to appear as itself and not in the specialization of this or that (there again Plato is right). How can it? Another question: what is there of the considerable—in the sense of glory or value—in works of art? A double question that we could separate: the problem of value comes back to esthetics as it is traditionally conceived, the problem of appearance (that is, we have noticed several times the emergence of that of reference, of the link of the work with the world) to epistemology. The misunderstandings perhaps come from a similar dissociation: to find their link in the *doxa* it would be possible to find a means of discourse on the works of art that could escape the system of paradox, and aporia.*

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