TITLE

The realm of *mimesis*.

A contemporary interpretation of the orality/writing issue
in relation to the ontology of the image in Plato

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ABSTRACT

This thesis enquires into the vexed issue of the relation between the criticism of orality and the criticism of writing in Plato's works. The main aim is to argue that this relation, often read as an opposition, is grounded on a more ontological level of analysis which is exemplified by the ontology of the image as it is expressed throughout the entire platonic production. Analysing the structure of the ontology of the image it emerges that both the criticism of orality and the criticism of writing are inessential and have more points of convergence than divergences. The theme of *mimesis* is the leading thread of this work and it is addressed as a "mechanism" which progressively reveals the continuity and co-dependency between the opposition orality/writing and the ontology of the image (itself based on the relation and co-dependency between *eidos* and *eidolon*).

The work engages with an open-ended conclusion which suggests the possibility of further enquiring. The conclusive theme dealt with is the platonic conception of beauty. The occurrences of beauty in Plato's works exhibit a singular relation between *eidos* and *eidolon*, a relation that overcome the mimetic mechanism and points to an *erotic* conception of life and philosophy.

The afterword which closes the dissertation aims to show the relevance of this study for a more aware understanding of some of the contemporary phenomena which challenge our way to analyse, communicate and elaborate the visual world in which we have anthropologically shifted.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Declaration: I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and does not contain the work of any other individual. All sources that have been consulted have been identified and acknowledged in the appropriate way.

Signature of Candidate:

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“This tablet shouts aloud
terrible, dreadful words.
Where can I run to, where
can I escape this crushing weight, this pain?
I’m dead. I am destroyed.
This song, the writing’s voice
is venom to my eyes.”

Euripides, *Hippolytus* (vv. 971-977)

PREMISES

This study aims to analyse some elements of a broad and vexed issue in the contemporary interpretation of Plato's philosophical heritage. In general terms, the issue can be referred to as the debate around the relation between orality and writing in Plato's philosophy.

Various approaches and manifold perspectives coexist in this philosophical debate. Unfortunately, it is not possible to include most of them in this discussion, a circumstance which occurs frequently while dealing with an author, such as Plato, who is a starting point and also a milestone in the philosophical consciousness of western culture. The relevance of the aspects excluded could be considered more striking and fortunate compared to the themes analysed. This does not mean that the main interpretations are underestimated; it rather declares an acknowledgement of the vastness of the issue and the need to draw precise limits to this research.

The ambition of this work is not to trace the history and the nature of contemporary approaches to the platonic orality/writing issue, neither to assert the supremacy of one interpretative paradigm over the others. These aspects, in fact, have been widely and accurately investigated by many contemporary studies. Moreover, beneath this thesis lies the firm belief that to read Plato's works adopting only one interpretative paradigm is a methodological choice which, at the same time, narrows the possibilities of comprehending the original platonic texts and does not respect the multi-layered nature of Plato's expression. Hence, it is preferred to connect and integrate different paradigms and, by their confrontation, to consider the limits and the strengths of different hermeneutical approaches to the platonic works.

This investigation into the field of orality/writing occurred firstly as an outcome of enquiring into the value of poetry and the role of beauty in some of Plato's works. Then, in a second moment, the importance of the orality/writing issue revealed itself to be propaedeutic to a correct understanding of poetry in Plato and to be somehow connected to the ontology of the image. The aesthetic lens is then the main filter through which the relation between orality and writing has been read, but it is not the exclusive focus of this research.

Furthermore, it is necessary to criticise the partial inappropriateness of talking about Aesthetics in regards to Plato's philosophy. Aesthetics is a quite young discipline, its

development is collocated in Modern Philosophy: the first time the term occurred as an independent philosophical category was in the mid eighteenth century.[1] Thus, it is evident that an anachronism is displayed in talking about "platonic Aesthetics"; the anachronism uses a Modern category for interpreting an Ancient author. Even if these circumstances do not strictly prevent one from applying an aesthetic reading to Plato's Philosophy, nevertheless, this operation must be done carefully. Seemingly, the field of "platonic Aesthetics" is challenged by a hermeneutical dilemma. Plato, in fact, deals with themes which pertain to Aesthetics such as beauty and the arts, hence, if someone nowadays wants to analyse these themes, inevitably her/his research will be labelled as "Aesthetics" even if this discipline did not exist at that time. In order to circumvent this interpretative conflict, it is necessary to trace at least two hermeneutic boundaries around the application of the Modern/Contemporary "Aesthetics-label" to Plato's Philosophy. Firstly, there is not in Plato a specific and autonomous reflection on arts, nor on beauty. Instead, the reflections on beauty and the arts, in Plato's work, are always interwoven with other themes and they aim towards wider topics such as education, politics, and psychology.[2] Secondly, our contemporary sensibility around beauty and the arts does not fit with Plato's perspective. At the root of this distance there are many elements; in this context it suffices to say that there is mainly a semantic gap. As a matter of fact, for the Ancient Greeks the "arts" (*techna*i) meant something based on skills and techniques which were relegated to specific social contexts,[3] while the term "beauty" (*kalon*) was linked to the ideals of proportion and harmony.[4] More specifically, Plato did not have great

[1] Conventionally, the first time that the word "Aesthetic" has been used to mean a philosophical reflection upon the arts, Beautiful and Taste, was in the work by Alexander Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, 1758. It was Immanuel Kant to denounce this specific use of the term by Baumgarten, in his second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1787. Kant himself in this work uses the term in a different way, related to its etymological meaning (from Ancient Greek, *aisthesis*: sensation, sensorial perception). In the Second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant writes: *The Germans are the only people who currently make use of the word "aesthetic" in order to signify what others call the critique of taste. This usage originated in the abortive attempt made by Baumgarten, that admirable analytic thinker, to bring the critical treatment of the beautiful under rational principles, and so to raise its rules to the rank of a science. But such endeavours are fruitless. The said rules or criteria are, as regards their chief sources, merely empirical, and consequently can never serve as determinate a way by which our judgment of taste must be directed.* (Kant, 1998, p. 173, footnote).
For the contemporary use of the Ancient terms Aesthetics and Beauty (*kalon*), cf. also: the introduction to the *Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, "Aesthetics Today" (Kivy, 2004, pp. 1-11); and Hyland, 2008, pp. 3-5.
[2] The use of the term psycology in Plato cannot be associated to the contemporary discipline that deals with human mind and behaviours. This term, instead, has to be meant in its etymologic sense: "structure" of the soul.
[3] On the meaning of the term *techne* in Ancient Greece, cf. Roochnick, 1996, pp. 20-21; on the use of the term in Plato's works cf. Ivi, pp. 89-177.
[4] Konstan, 2014, pp. 101-131.

consideration of the arts and artists, as he decided to banish them from his ideal city,[5] and he related the concept of beauty more to the idea of the Good than to aesthetic pleasure. Some of these issues are deepened and clarified in the Second Chapter.

Finally, it is worth noting that, being aware of the inexhaustible nature of Plato's philosophy, the main effort of this work consists in respecting this variety as much as possible. The favoured approach consists in reading attentively Plato's own words and trying not to misinterpret them by using hermeneutic keys which would probably fit, but would inevitably constrain, the fluid and indefinite nature of his written works. More than one contemporary philosopher and more than one interpretative paradigm is called upon to deepen the issue at different stages, but there is no intention to privilege any precise key reading and, at the same time, it is not possible to involve all of them.

A pure philological approach has not been considered due to a lack of expertise in this specific field and also, this would possibly limit the original aim of the research. Nevertheless, a personal reading of the Greek text has a priority over the interpretations given by any contemporary philosopher.

Some of the most relevant Greek terms involved in this research are quoted in Ancient Greek, transliterated and italicised. This choice aims to indicate not only the difficulty in translating adequately these terms but also to respect the specific plurality and lack of precision in meaning that many Ancient Greek terms have. As anticipated earlier, there is not simply a huge temporal gap between Ancient Greece and the actual times, but there is also a huge cultural gap which expresses itself in the evolution of language and its determinacy. Citing these terms in the original Greek, it has been tried to respect these differences and restores the richness of the "undefinition" intrinsic in these terms themselves. Among the terms left in Greek there is also the word *mimesis*; this word does exist in English too, however, it is italicised throughout this research to highlight its original meaning in Ancient Greek. In fact, the English term "mimesis" means primarily "imitation"; while the Ancient Greek term *mimesis* means primarily "representation". Originally *mimesis* related to the sphere of poetic composition and performance (from archaic poetry to classic theatre). Technically, it is a representation of a model through its

[5] *Republic*, 607b.

reproduction, although this representation is never identical to the model. The main feature of what is reproduced is that its representation is visible.[6]

Throughout this dissertation, the representation of the reproduced model is addressed mainly as "mimetic mechanism". The use of the term "mechanism" wants to underline the constant relation between reproduction and representation as to say that behind a representation there is a mechanism of reproduction, hence a constant reference back to the original model.

The Greek texts by Plato are quoted following the Oxford version edited by J. Burnet; while the numbering system and the abbreviation of the dialogues' titles refers to the widely used layout by the humanist Henricus Stephanus. The translation from Ancient Greek follows the edition of the complete works by Plato edited by John Cooper, 1997. The translation is occasionally modified, when considered necessary.

[6] Palumbo, 2008, p. 11, n. 7.

INTRODUCTION

The relation between orality and writing appears problematic in Plato's work, not only in terms of the comparison between the two poles but also independently from the comparison. It is a twofold problem in which each face has a contradictory nature in itself. Plato, in fact, criticised the oral tradition as a means of transmitting knowledge, but he also clearly stated that writing is an inadequate means of transmitting knowledge. Since these two elements are in opposition, the very first consequence of the double critique is to be caught in a vicious circle in which each face refers to the other face. The circular dichotomy is even more exacerbated by the fact that Plato himself is a writer, but he is not a "conventional" philosophical writer in the way "philosophical-writing" is considered nowadays. In fact, he did not write philosophical treatises, neither doctrines – as he warned he would never do, in the *Seventh Letter* –[7] but dialogues. The tradition stated that he wrote thirty-four dialogues, one monologue (*Apology*) and few letters.[8] Thus, his philosophical insights are deposited mainly in written dialogues which resemble an oral exchange. Once again, the mutual referring of orality to writing and of writing to orality comes up.

One could think that the critique of writing, mainly exposed in the *Phaedrus*,[9] is to be ascribed to the main character of Plato's dialogues: Socrates. As a matter of fact, Socrates, considered to be the first western philosopher, did not leave any written trace behind him and firmly believed in the practice of philosophy through oral dialogue. Nevertheless, this interpretation would not suppress the contradiction, firstly because it is an ambitious and almost unachievable task to distinguish precisely platonic and socratic elements in Plato's works – a task not undertaken here. Secondly, even if it were possible to assert that the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* is genuinely socratic; then, how does one interpret the platonic statement, in the biographical *Seventh Letter*, that he would never leave any written text about his philosophy? In addition, to whom is to be ascribed the critique of orality contained in *Ion* and *Republic*? If this last critique is ascribed to Plato, then it would clash with his biographical statement, if it is ascribed to Socrates then it would

[7] *VII Ep.* 344c.
[8] Here it is considered the edition, styled on the first century A.D., by Trasyllus. Trasyllus was a Grammarian and Philosopher from Alexandria and he organized the works by Plato in nine tetralogies, not following a chronologic order.
[9] *Phaedrus*, 274b-278d.

clash with the *Phaedrus*. As predicted, the contradiction between orality and writing would start over again.

Some interpreters, passing over this opposition between orality and writing, minimised the relevance of one of the two sides. In fact, the critique of writing is better argued and finds more evidence than the circumscribed critique of orality. This does not mean that the role of the written dialogues has been denied, but that simply it has been reduced in favour of the oral transmission which, supposedly, was the privileged way of expressing philosophical truths to a small, elected audience.[10] On the other side, some other interpreters minimised the critique of writing, or at least underestimated it as an effect of the innovative introduction of a new technology for transmitting knowledge, namely: the writing skill. In a culture based on oral transmission, as it was in Greece between VIII and V centuries BCE, the use of writing to transmit knowledge appeared as something that would weaken memory, but then gradually replaced oral transmission and furthermore made it possible to develop philosophy in a more systematic way.

It is evident here that posing the issue in terms of a polarity makes the contradiction stronger and unresolvable.[11] Also, it is believed that minimising one side of the critique does an injustice to the platonic dialogues. The contradiction is there and it needs to be considered seriously in all its parts. For this reason, the approach chosen for this research aims to overcome the contradiction. In fact, a kind of reading which maintains the opposition would probably end up being partial and sterile. Instead, it has been tried a strategy that seemingly works better, and it consists of finding the essential points of contact between the two poles. Following this strategy, it comes out that the critiques are different parts of one critique and this explains why one side always refers to the other. As a result, it is also shown that the opposition is not simply between orality and writing, it is rather between deceptive speeches (historically performed by sophists and poets) and true discourse (the speciality of the philosopher) both in oral transmission and in writing transmission.

[10] This kind of interpretation was proposed as a "new paradigm" by the Tubingen-Milan School, cf. Reale 2010.

[11] Ruth Finnegan has shown that posing the issue of "orality/writing" in terms of polarity can be useful only as a strategy to define the features of the two poles. But this polarisation would not reflect the real use of these media which are usually mixed together in most of the human cultures as Goody (1968) has documented. Cf. Finnegan, 1988, pp. 139-174.

Undertaking this interpretation involves mainly the well-known platonic condemnation of the arts, especially poetry,[12] as something deceptive that can corrupt the soul. While the opposition to Sophistics is addressed only partially in this dissertation – with the wish of undertaking it at a later date. Following the thread of the "ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy", it is necessary to deal with the consolidated paradigm of the image (*eidos-eidolon*) which frequently occurs in Plato's dialogues. In fact, the critique of the arts, in general terms, is based on the assumption that they produce multiple, false, sensual images (*eidola*) far removed from truth; while truth is a process through which multiplicities are gathered together into intellectual unity (*eidos*).

There is neither the intention, nor the interest in reassessing the classic dichotomy of sense and intellect in Plato's philosophy. To prevent this reading, this research engages with an open-ended conclusion in which it is shown that there is, in Plato's works, a unique "event" that goes over this effective but simplistic distinction between senses and intellect, *eidos* and *eidolon*, orality and writing. This event is beauty. Beauty is in fact the most powerful event in Plato's works because it shines forth suddenly as any other *eidolon* would do, but through its perception, it is possible to be led to its eidetic nature which is almost identifiable with the idea of the Good. Beauty always shows this double nature, and its capacity to elevate the soul makes it the most extraordinary event in Plato's dialogues.

In order to do develop this research, the work is divided in three chapters. The first and second chapters are devoted respectively to the critique of writing and to the critique of orality as they appear in Plato's works, and also as they have been read by some interpreters who privileged one aspect of the dichotomy over the other. The third chapter attempts a resolution of this opposition also through a comparison with the paradigm of the image in Plato and offers an "open-ended" conclusion – as already mentioned. In fact, the final part of the dissertation focuses on the theme of beauty and its relevance, but the impact of the theme of beauty on the latest Plato's production and the connected theory of the immortality of the soul are not analysed here; however, these topics might represent a further field of investigation to which this thesis can provide a basis. The final Afterword to this work aims both to show the relevance of such investigation for the understanding of some of the most effective phenomena which challenge our

[12] *Republic*, 595-608.

contemporary way of communicating; and it grounds the philosophical frame for further enquiries.

The theme of *mimesis* is the thread connecting and interweaving the entire work. This central theme is dealt with using an ascending climax; in fact, at first, it is introduced contextually while, at the end of the work, it is analysed ontologically. In the first chapter, *mimesis* is considered mainly for its epistemological value; in the second chapter, *mimesis* appears as a psychological, hence political, threat; in the last chapter *mimesis* is unrooted and displayed for its ontological nature.

FIRST CHAPTER

The critique of writing in Plato's works

The platonic critique of writing is conventionally located in two areas of Plato's works: towards the end of the *Phaedrus*, when Socrates discusses the myth of Theuth, and in a few lines of the autobiographical *Seventh Letter*.

The first two sections of this chapter aim to analyse these two platonic passages. Respectively, the first section focuses on the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, while the second section deals with the critique of writing in the *Seventh Letter*. Some excerpts from the Plato's works are quoted in order to offer an interpretation as coherent as possible with the original text. Nevertheless, the remarks of some contemporary authors on these passages are integrated in the dissertation in order to support and explain further some issues dealt with and sometimes also to challenge the traditional reception of these same issues.

The main contemporary author referred to in the first section is Jacques Derrida, whose deconstructive reading of the *Phaedrus* emphasises both a more complex sense of the critique of writing and a need for unity in interpreting the themes of the whole dialogue. In the second section, the main contemporary author referred to is Hans-Georg Gadamer whose epistemological reading of the *Seventh Letter* suggests focusing more on the problem of the transmission of knowledge as such, rather than on the medium chosen to transmit knowledge. One of the most relevant aspects emphasised by Gadamer's reading of the *Seventh Letter* is the weakness of the human *logoi* (words/speeches) which is a recurrent and central theme throughout this entire dissertation. The leading theme of the dissertation, *mimesis*, makes its first apparition in these two sections, setting out the bases for further analyses.

The third and fourth sections of this chapter expose the main traits of the most established contemporary position about the criticism of writing in Plato's philosophy. This position is represented by the Tübingen-Milan School which is composed by German and Italian scholars mainly active in academia between 1980s and 1990s. The main claims of these scholars are exposed by exploring the philological and philosophical arguments that build

up the thesis of a firm platonic rejection of writing in favour of an oral and exclusive transmission of higher knowledge. Although these theories elaborated by the Tübingen-Milan School offer good arguments, in this dissertation they are rejected with counterarguments taken from Plato's dialogues but also from some of the most distinguished contemporary interpreters of Plato's works.

Given the reasons to reject the theses of the Tübingen-Milan School, the last section of this chapter reassesses, in general terms, an interpretation of the criticism of writing in Plato more coherent with the dialogues themselves and functional to the development of the main following themes of this dissertation.

The titles chosen for the sections of this chapter are Plato's own words. These are quotations taken sometimes from the *Phaedrus* and sometimes from the *Seventh Letter*. This choice is due to the figurative eloquence of these quotations, but also because with these quotations it is aimed to stress, ironically, one of the typical contradictions in the platonic criticism of writing: it is a criticism of writing elaborated on in writing.

1.1. "I have discovered a potion for memory and for wisdom."[13]

The passage of the *Phaedrus* in which the critique of writing is exposed, has often appeared as an unnecessary appendix that makes the dialogue even more unorganised and fragmentary.[14] If so, it would be highly ironic. In fact, in the dialogue Socrates shows his mastery in the theory and in the practise of composing well-structured discourses. Furthermore, he also harshly criticises the speech by the rhetorician Lysias for being composed of parts which *appear to have been thrown together at random*.[15]

Why would Plato let Socrates criticise a deficiency in Lysias' speech in a dialogue written by himself with the same deficiency? It cannot be assumed that Plato does not know the rules of composing a systematic discourse.

Even if this ironic contradiction is quite striking, it is not alone convincing enough to deny that the *Phaedrus* has a fragmentary structure. For this reason, in this Section, other

[13] *Phaedr.* 274e.
[14] In regard to the main theories about the composition and chronology of the *Phaedrus*, cf. Robin, 1908, pp. 63-120; Brandwood, 1990; Khan, 1998, pp. 42-48.
[15] *Phaedr.* 264b.

reasons are offered for believing that the "trial of writing" is actually a relevant, intentional and nonetheless complementary part of the dialogue.

In this regard, it is worth recalling a few lines of one of the most established contemporary interpretations of the *Phaedrus*, the interpretation by Jacques Derrida:

> That entire hearing of the trial of writing should some day cease to appear as an extraneous mythological fantasy, an appendix the organism could easily, with no loss, have done without. In truth, it is rigorously called for from one end of the *Phaedrus* to the other.[16]

This observation is quite relevant as it establishes a relation of mutual interdependence between the final appendix of the trial of writing and the more systematic rest of the dialogue. This not only means that the trial of writing is a complementary part of the work, but also that it would not be possible to fully understand the section of the trial without integrating it in the entire dialogue. As an evidence for this, immediately after the attribution of randomness to Lysias' speech, Socrates explains that a well-composed speech is like a *human living body*, that is a harmonised whole.[17] Since Socrates seems well aware of how a proper speech has to be structured, it should be doubted whether the trial of writing is just an avoidable appendix. It would be more advantageous, rather, to understand how this part relates to his speeches and to the whole dialogue.

As an interpreter of the *Phaedrus*, Derrida uses a different metaphor to point out the same necessity of unity in the dialogue. In the place of the comparison with the harmony of the body's parts, Derrida talks instead about a *symploke*[18] (a weaving). Consequently, the trial of writing would be like a thread interwoven in the fabric of the entire dialogue.

Keeping with this metaphor, it is arguable that there is not only one central theme in the dialogue, but that there are also other themes around which further themes are developed. On the contrary, in the *Phaedrus* each theme is built and developed thanks to the others,

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[16] Derrida, 1981, p. 67.

[17] *Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own; it must be neither without head nor without legs; and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting both to one another and to the whole work*. (*Phaedr.* 264c)

[18] Derrida, 1981, p. 67. Even if in the *Phaedrus* Plato does not use explicitly the term *symploke*, this is anyway a recurrent term in other Plato's dialogues. Derrida refers specifically to a passage from the *Statesman* (*Pol*. 277-278).

in a structure that works only if the themes dealt with are interpreted in connection one with each other. This hermeneutical approach is valid, and it works mainly from the perspective of the interpreter who wants to read the dialogue attentively; or else, metaphorically, this approach works to understand how the threads of the fabric are bound together in a finished product. From the perspective of the composer of the dialogue – Plato, the organic unity of the creation is guaranteed by an underlying movement of division into parts and reunification into an ideal unity.[19] It means that there has to be a common direction in the structure and in the development of the themes; or, metaphorically, it means that the weaver has to know, not only his technique, but also which are the colours, the shape and the purposes of the fabric that he is creating.

The Socratic metaphor, however, is more focused on the perspective of the composer. A well-structured speech has different parts harmonised in a unity, as the parts of a living human body are harmonised. However, there is an implicit element in this metaphor, and it is probably the most important one. In fact, Socrates is talking about a *living* human body. The element that gives unity to this body cannot be the body itself – this would be a circular reasoning, but it is supposed to be the breath of life in the body that is the *psyche* (the soul). It might be deduced that speeches, as well as human bodies, have souls that guarantee harmonised unity. The liveliness of the speeches and their capability to respond is what makes them authentically philosophical. This assertion is still unclear at this stage, but it assumes a more clarity towards the end of this dissertation, with the progressive examination of other aspects of Plato's criticism.

These preliminary evaluations serve as a basis to argue that the single "thread" of the trial of writing participates in the unity of the dialogue's "fabric" and they have to be read in connection. It is believed that there are many links between *eros*, *maniai*, *rhetorike*, destiny of souls, *paideia*, *psychagoge* and discovery of writing –to mention some of the main themes of the *Phaedrus*. The part of the *Phaedrus* in which the myth of the discovery

[19] Here it is alluded the dialectical movement of *diairesis* (division) and *synagoge* (collection) that is constantly recalled in the dialogue. Just to quote one explicative passage:
Well, Phaedrus, I am myself a lover of these divisions and collections, so that I may be able to think and to speak and if I believe that someone else is capable of discerning a single thing that is also by nature capable of encompassing many, I follow "straight behind, in his tracks, as if he were a god." God knows whether this is the right name for those who can do this correctly or not, but so far I have always called them "dialecticians." (*Phaedr*. 266b-c).

of writing is laid out, namely the myth of Theuth, can now be read in a unifying perspective.

Towards the end of the dialogue, Socrates recounts to Phaedrus the supposedly well-known myth that attributes the discovery of writing to the Egyptian *daimon* Theuth.[20] Socrates heard about the Egyptian myth from someone else who heard it from some ancients that held it as truth. It means that there is not a valid epistemic source behind this myth; nevertheless, its value of truth is not diminished. In fact, Plato, in emphasising that the myth does not have a verifiable source, is not claiming that Socrates has to be trusted blindly, nor, he is giving a preeminent role to oral transmission of myths. Rather, it is possible that Plato is offering an interpretative key that is also a *leitmotif* of the dialogue: it is possible to use and rely on any source if there is constant awareness that what matters is neither the source in itself, nor the plot of the myth, but the capability of giving a "correct" account of it. For this reason, to justify and convince Phaedrus[21] about this way of using myths, Socrates recalls another myth after the exposition of Theuth's story:

> But, my friend, the priests of the temple of Zeus at Dodona say that the first prophecies were the words of an oak. Everyone who lived at that time, not being as wise as you young ones are today, found it rewarding enough in their simplicity to listen to an oak or even a stone, so long as it was telling the truth, while it seems to make a difference to you, Phaedrus, who is speaking and where he comes from. Why, though, don't you just consider whether what he says is right or wrong? (*Phaedr*.275b-c)

Hence, a platonic reader is warned – before and after the brief myth of Theuth – that a literal reading is not worthwhile.[22]

Another interpretative element needs to be called into question at this juncture, regarding the role of opinion (*doxa*) in the process of gaining knowledge. If human beings could

[20] It is not graspable the reason for referring to an Egyptian myth, while there is a Greek version of it, which is the myth of Prometheus as inventor and spreader of writing amongst mortals. Cf. Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. Theuth appears also another time in Plato's dialogues, cf. *Phil.* 18b.

[21] Phaedrus seems to suspect that Socrates is inventing the myth of Theuth: *Socrates, you're very good at making up stories from Egypt or wherever else you want!* (*Phaedr*. 275b)

[22] This warning is actually quite similar to the one at the very beginning of the dialogue. When Socrates was referring to Phaedrus the myth of Borea, he made a distinction between some intellectuals who waste their time trying to rationalise the myths, and himself who believes the myth as they are spread. In fact, Socrates seems to be primarily concerned in knowing himself rather than criticise and dissect the myths. (*Phaedr*. 229c-230a) Cf. Griswold, 1996.

access truth straight-forwardly, they would not be interested anymore in the opinion of other human beings,[23] because they would not need to undertake a quest for truth. This means that, in order to develop knowledge, it is valuable to trust ancient opinions and myths, even if it is not possible to verify their sources, or even if the sources are considered to be oaks and stones. The trust in any sort of account (opinions, myths, stories, metaphors etc.) is a preliminary requirement in order to be engaged in the quest for truth; but blind trust in *logoi* (discourses) is not enough. When the quest is undertaken, then the dialectical method[24] will shed light on the right path towards knowledge.

Seemingly, Plato suggests here relying on opinions and also on the myths referred to by Socrates, who, in turn, is playing the role of a rhetorician. In fact, he is tailoring a speech which should perfectly fit with Phaedrus' soul for this occasion.[25]

One, amongst the many, interesting aspects of this very short myth told by Socrates is that its plot is presented mainly as a dialogue within the dialogue – a frequent occurrence in Plato's works. Plato, probably, believes that, in order to reach the core of the myth, it does not suffice to let Socrates simply talk about the discoveries by Theuth and their spreading through human beings. In fact, the dialectical expedient of representing a myth through "a dialogue within the dialogue" succeeds in displaying – by contrast – some determinant dualisms such as medicine/poison, remembering/reminding, opinion/wisdom and appearance/reality.

The myth is actually a brief exchange between Theuth and Thamus, the Egyptians' King. Theuth goes to visit Thamus at his court to show him seven *technai* (arts/techniques): number, calculation, geometry, astronomy, the game of chess, the game of dice, and, above all, writing that he himself discovered, and that, he believes, all Egyptians should learn. Thamus wants to know the use of each art of each specific art or technique. Then, the *daimon* and the King discuss for an extended period each art, and Thamus makes some appraisals as well as some criticisms of them. Socrates skips this whole discussion,

[23] *Phaedr.* 374b.
[24] Cf. note 19.
[25] *Since the nature of speech is in fact to direct the soul, whoever intends to be a rhetorician must know how many kinds of soul there are. Their number is so-and-so many; each is of such-and-such a sort; hence some people have such-and-such a character and others have such-and such. Those distinctions established, there are, in turn, so-and-so many kinds of speech, each of such-and-such a sort. People of such-and-such a character are easy to persuade by speeches of such-and-such a sort in connection with such-and-such an issue for this particular reason, while people of such-and-such another sort are difficult to persuade for those particular reasons.* (*Phaedr.* 271d).

because it would require too much time to expose it all, and he just focuses on the technique of writing. This is the dialogical exchange between Theuth (who claims that writing will make Egyptians wiser and will improve their memory – in fact, he compares his invention to *a potion* [*pharmakon*] *for memory and for wisdom*); and Thamus who believe that Theuth, being the affectionate "father" of the discovery of writing, cannot be objective in judging his "son" and for this reason attributes to it positive effects. In fact, Thamus considers writing in this way:

> It will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own. You have not discovered a potion for remembering, but for reminding; you provide your students with the appearance of wisdom, not with its reality. Your invention will enable them to hear many things without being properly taught, and they will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they will know nothing. And they will be difficult to get along with, since they will be wise only about opinions instead of really being wise. (*Phaedr*. 275a-b)

The dialectical *agon* between Theuth and Thamus is played out mainly on the ground of memory. On one side, Theuth believes that writing is a healing medicine (*pharmakon*)[26] which improves memory, hence it improves also wisdom; on the other side, Thamus pinpoints that writing is a dangerous poison (*pharmakon*) which weakens memory, although it may help in reminding.

This contrast is usually characterised by its striking contents. One, eventually, agrees more with the objections of the wise King; but behind the contents there is still something relevant that is worth noting. It seems, in fact, that in his statements about writing Thamus over-interprets the sense that Theuth attributes to his invention. Furthermore, the myth is

[26] The Greek word *pharmakon* which is a *vox media* (meaning at the same time medicine and also poison) recurs often in the dialogue: starting from the allegory in the myth of Borea (229c) to the metaphor of being convinced of going out of the city (229d) and ending up in the constant recalling in the myth of Theuth. Cf. also Derrida, 1981, pp. 65-75 and pp. 95-117.

concluded with those objections by Thamus, and it is not possible to know how Theuth would defend his "son".

Thamus argues as if writing were a mnemonic device. This criticism, however, does not apply to writing in its essence; in fact, in the oral tradition there were already many other devices and techniques for reminding. The originality of Theuth's invention is that it can improve the ability to memorise and (hence) it can make the Egyptians wiser. The speciality of the invention is not that it should be used instead of other forms of transmitting knowledge, but that it can help to remember even more in terms of quantity, so consequently, it allows to know more, always in terms of quantity. Thamus instead goes over and beyond, imagining the extreme situation in which writing substitutes any other form of transmitting knowledge and thus wisdom would move from the valuable inside of the soul to the ephemeral exteriority of written traces.

At stake here is not solely an opposition between reminding (*hypomneme*) and remembering (*mneme*), but clearly there is also an opposition between two ways of considering wisdom. The wisdom considered by Theuth is: the more you can remember, the wiser you are; instead, the wisdom for Thamus is: the deeper you can remember, the more your wisdom is valuable. *Pharmakon* (potion), *mneme* (memory) and *sophia* (wisdom) have different connotations if considered from Theuth's perspective or from Thamus' perspective.

As shown, the critique of Thamus over-interprets Theuth's invention and leads to an extreme hypothesis: writing would become a privileged mean of transmitting knowledge. In the dialectic relation that goes on in this myth, Thamus has to be drastic in order to show all the boundaries of the new discovery. Moreover, he has a formal responsibility toward the Egyptians that also explains why he foresees all possible consequences taken to their extremes. Thus, if on the one hand Theuth is simply a witty inventor who wants to persuade Thamus about the advantages of his discovery, on the other hand, Thamus appears conscious that those advantages hide many dangers beyond the mere technique of writing. In fact, through Thamus' words it is possible to read not only a concern for the weakening of memory and knowledge, but also an implicit and bitter acknowledgement that, once discovered, the technique of writing will develop without

stopping – as in fact happened.[27] Thamus seems to know that a technique is never innocent in itself, it is not only a vehicle for content. In fact, any new technology, while promising many improvements, contains also a contrary power like a medicine (*pharmakon*) that both cures and poisons at the same time.

This acknowledgement should sound quite familiar nowadays: the constant invention and upgrade of new technologies, in a sense improves human skills, but at the same time modifies the way we relate to each other, the way we communicate, the way we interpret the world and thus the way we think.[28]

On the basis of this myth, Socrates and Phaedrus carry out their own evaluations of the writing tool and Phaedrus eventually agrees with Socrates' criticisms. In order to define the epistemological and psychological drawbacks of writing, Socrates associates the technique of writing with the realm of *mimesis*, more specifically he mentions the art of painting.[29] A few paragraphs later, Socrates also associates the technique of writing with the function of rhythmic verses, namely the art of rhapsody.[30] Firstly, written words as well as painted images stand silently in front of us and, if questioned, they are not able to answer. Furthermore, if a written speech is criticised, it would not be able to defend itself and it will always need to ask help from "its father" (the composer of the speech) who has to make its defence. Secondly, as rhythmic verses, written discourses cannot be taken seriously. As an evidence, the performances of rhapsodists aim only to persuade, and they cannot teach anything, because they are composed without discernment.

The point that Socrates wants to assert in his criticism of the writing technique appears even clearer after these two comparisons between writing and painting, and writing and rhapsody: these are just tools which may help in remembering, but they are not alive, not responsible and most of all they are not fertile as the connected metaphor of the seeds points out.[31] By contrast, the only valuable kind of speeches is the fertile one, the one that is able to write into the soul about what is right, beautiful and good.[32] This is the idea of

[27] Ruth Finnegan discusses the related idea that a new media, once adopted, drives out older-established ones. She refers mainly to the polarity "orality/literacy". Cf. Finnegan, 1988, pp. 142-143.
[28] For further evaluations on these themes cf. Gunkel, Marcondes Filho and Mersch, 2016.
[29] *Phaedr.* 275d-e.
[30] *Phaedr.* 277e-278b.
[31] *Phaedr.* 276b.
[32] *Phaedr.* 278b.

speech that is used as a righteous and comparative model in Socrates' criticisms of writing.

These last arguments aim to underline again the negative aspects of writing, but beyond this evident scope, it is interesting to note the recurrent and unfavourable association between painting and poetry in Plato's dialogues, especially when it comes to the themes of education and care of the soul.

At this stage of the study, it would suffice only to mention the main traits of the well-known critique of arts in the *Republic*,[33] as well as the critique of rhapsody in the *Ion*.[34] These themes are analysed further in the next chapter.

The critique of painting and the critique of poetry in general terms, find their link in the same pivot: the issue of *mimesis*.[35] *Mimesis* appears to be multifaceted in Plato's works. It can be considered from different philosophical perspectives: from an epistemological point of view; an educative point of view; a psychological point of view; a poietic point of view. All these aspects are considered in Plato's critique, but what really matters is the mechanism behind it. The mimetic mechanism always implies an imitative reproduction of something which stands first as an original model. This model is not a model and is not "original" until the *mimesis* comes into play to reproduce something that looks like it, but it is actually just a copy.

Three determining features in this intuitive mechanism need to be underlined. As these features are relevant throughout this whole dissertation hence, it is useful to state them now.

First, *mimesis* is presented as an imitative re-production strictly connected to the ontology of the image. This is clear even considering only the semantic area chosen by Plato when dealing with this issue.[36] Furthermore, the element on which Plato insists is that the copy has to *look like*, or else, has to resemble the shape of the original. It can be a depicted image or a movement of an actor, or the explication of a concept, but it has to have a

[33] *Resp.* 373b-c; 377b-e; 603b-sgg.
[34] Cf. *Ion*, 535a-b.
[35] To retrace the use of this term in Plato's *Republic* cf. Havelock, 1963, pp. 20-35; to retrace the history of the term from Plato to Gadamer, cf. Sallis, 2015; to retrace a complete history of the term in the field of Aesthetics from Plato to modernity, cf. Halliwell, 2002.
[36] To talk about the relation between the model and its copy Plato uses terms related to vision. The main conceptual couple referred to in this dissertation is *eidos-eidolon* which it is analysed in details in the Third Chapter.

visual shape. In fact, the terms used to talk about the things reproduced by *mimesis* refers mainly to the semantic area of appearance.

Second, *mimesis* reproduces but does not produce. It means that what comes out from this mechanism is something unanimated that is dependent on the original model, in fact, it would not exist if not as a derivation of the original. This is also an aspect of the drawbacks of writing that Socrates points out: written speeches, as depicted images, cannot respond, they need someone to look after them as they are not responsive and responsible for themselves.

Third, it is an evaluative aspect introduced by Plato who states that the copy which emerges from the mimetic reproduction is false, while the original is true. In addition, every stage of reproduction would augment the distance from the original and true model causing wider deceptive effects.

To understand this last feature, it is advisable to compare the example of the bed and the table in *Republic*.[37] At this point, it would suffice to recall only the introductory part of this example, which is the analogy of the mirror.

This brief analogy allows to exemplify the three features just exposed:

> SOCRATES: Tell me, do you think that there's no way any craftsman could make all these things, or that in one way he could and in another he couldn't? Don't you see that there is a way in which you yourself could make all of them?
>
> GLAUCON: What way is that?
>
> SOCRATES: It isn't hard: you could do it quickly and in lots of places, especially if you were willing to carry a mirror with you, for that's the quickest way of all. With it you can quickly make the sun, the things in the heavens, the earth, yourself, the other animals, manufactured items, plants, and everything else mentioned just now.
>
> GLAUCON: Yes, I could make them appear, but I couldn't make the things themselves as they truly are.
>
> SOCRATES: Well put! You've extracted the point that's crucial to the argument. I suppose that the painter too belongs to this class of makers, doesn't he?

[37] *Resp.* 596b.

> GLAUCON: Of course. But I suppose you'll say that he doesn't truly make the things he makes.
>
> SOCRATES: Yet, in a certain way, the painter does make a bed, doesn't he?
>
> GLAUCON: Yes, he makes the appearance of one.
>
> SOCRATES: What about the carpenter? Didn't you just say that he doesn't make the Form – which is our term for the being of a bed – but only *a* bed?
>
> GLAUCON: Yes, I did say that.
>
> SOCRATES: Now, if he doesn't make the being of a bed, he isn't making that which is, but something which is like that which is, but is not it. So, if someone were to say that the work of a carpenter or any other craftsman is completely that which is, wouldn't he risk saying what isn't true?
>
> GLAUCON: That, at least, would be the opinion of those who busy themselves with arguments of this sort.
>
> SOCRATES: Then let's not be surprised if the carpenter's bed, too, turns out to be a somewhat dark affair in comparison to the true one. (*Resp.* 596d-597a)

The centrality of the visual image is explicit in this comparison: the mirror can make everything, but only the images of everything. In fact, as Glaucon points out: the mirror can make things appear, but they are not real, they are not alive. Lastly, the appearance of things is so deceptive and negative that even a carpenter can be considered as someone who is involved in a "dark affair."

The theme of *mimesis* and its link with the arts, is going to be set aside temporarily, and it will be developed further in the Second and Third Chapter. This discussion in fact, for now, would distance the dissertation from the issue of the critique of writing. However, it has been relevant to recall it in this context, in virtue of its strong impact on the arguments against writing developed by Socrates.

Still, before moving on, it is worthwhile to show two different kinds of approaches that have arisen around the issue of art and *mimesis* in the *Phaedrus*. On the one side, there is an approach similar to the one just adopted, which tends to connect the critique of mimetic images in the *Phaedrus* to the critique of *mimesis* in the *Republic*. On the other side, there

is an approach that denies any link between the critique of mimetic images in the *Phaedrus* and the critique of *mimesis*.

The first side can be considered the reading Derrida offers in his *Plato's Pharmacy.* Derrida throughout his work establishes a link between the deception caused by the mimetic image and the deception of writing in Plato's works. His focus is mainly on the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, but when the theme of *mimesis* comes up, he mainly refers to the *Republic*. Derrida uses as arguments against writing the same three features of *mimesis* just outlined, which are easy to detect in Plato's critique of the Arts. He notices that the original kernel of Socrates' arguments against writing is that this is not a good *techne* since it is not able to produce something alive, but it just re-produces. Furthermore, it reproduces something far from the *eidos* of the *aletheia* (the shape of truth).[38] Based on these reasons, Derrida states that writing and painting are related; in fact, the images that they represent are mere *simulacra*, stubbornly mute.[39] In line with his original reading of the *Phaedrus*, Derrida offers another element of connection between writing and painting that is the use of the term *pharmaka* in the *Republic* and the polyvocal use of the term *pharmakon* in the *Phaedrus*. In the *Republic*, the term *pharmaka* means the colours of the painter,[40] while in the *Phaedrus*, writing itself is considered to be a *pharmakon* – it has been already shown the ambiguous meaning of this *vox media* in the Egyptian myth of the discovery of writing recalled by Socrates.

This last evidence offered by Derrida strengthens his general point on the value of *mimesis* in Plato: any mimetic art is negative because it is far removed from the truth. Derrida discusses the theme of artistic *mimesis* as he believes that the mechanism behind it is applicable as well to writing, with the aggravating circumstance that "the written word gives itself as the image of the speech."[41] Eventually, this mimetic mechanism is so well accomplished that it disappears:

> A perfect imitation is no longer an imitation. If one eliminates the tiny difference that, in separating the imitator from the imitated, by that very fact refers to it, one would render the

[38] Derrida, 1981, 134-135.
[39] Ivi, 136.
[40] *Resp.* 420c.
[41] Derrida, 1981, p. 137.

> imitator absolutely different: the imitator would become another being no longer referring to the imitated.[42]

In Derrida's account of the *Phaedrus*, this is the main charge against the written word: firstly, it imitates the original, but then it substitutes itself the original. The reason for involving Derrida's reflection on mimetic arts in the *Phaedrus* is to show that there is an actual link between arts and writing in Plato's work. This link is the mimetic mechanism.

On the other hand, it has been argued that there is no reason to establish a link between the critique of writing and the critique of mimetic images (painting and poetry) in Plato's work.

Franco Trabattoni holds that the theme of *mimesis* is not discussed at all in the *Phaedrus*.[43] As a matter of fact, the main charge that Socrates formulates against written speeches concerns their immobility and their incapability of responding. The pre-eminence of this charge finds evidence not only in the *Phaedrus* about written words,[44] but also in other platonic passages in which this same charge is reiterated and not linked with the theme of *mimesis*.[45]

The reasons for sustaining such a position are strong. In fact, Trabattoni rejects the mimetic mechanism because it would exacerbate the polarisation between oral speech and written speech; while he wants to argue that this polarity is inessential. Stating that writing resembles the mimetic mechanism of the Arts, it could imply the simplistic equivalence that oral speech is the original, while written speech is a copy.

Trabattoni's wariness in avoiding that simplistic equivalence is well-founded,[46] but it does not necessarily mean that the theme of *mimesis* has no place in the *Phaedrus*. Indeed, Trabattoni's position on the dichotomy orality/writing is one of the favoured interpretations in this dissertation, since he demonstrates that the opposition between oral speech and written speech is a misleading one, which obscures a more determining issue

[42] Ivi, p. 139. In the footnote, Derrida recalls the passage 432b-c from the *Cratylus*.
[43] Trabattoni, 1993, p. 31 cf. in particular note 74.
[44] *Phaedr.* 275d.
[45] Cf. *Prot.* 329a-b; *VII Ep.* 341d.
[46] As an evidence, Thomas Szlezák interprets the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* as if Plato argues that written speech is simply a copy, or an image, of the oral speech; hence, it is less valuable when measured to the oral exchange. Cf. Szlezák, 1999, p. 30.

for Plato: the role of persuasion, in any kind of speech. Nevertheless, it does not seem possible to deny the relevance of the theme of *mimesis* in the *Phaedrus*.

Just to give one, incisive example, *mimesis* is intentionally performed by Phaedrus reading Lysias' speech at the very beginning of the dialogue. Phaedrus originally wanted to perform the speech trusting in memory, but when Socrates notices Phaedrus hiding the written version of the speech by Lysias under his cloak, he wants him to read it. This is a kaleidoscopic *mimesis* that can be understood following the mimetic model traced by Derrida: the written speech (re-enacted orally) is a copy and hence a substitution of the original oral speech by Lysias, who probably first wrote the speech and then performed it orally. It is difficult to determine here whether the written speech or the oral speech comes first, and this would partially support Trabattoni's position, but it is not enough to deny the relevance of *mimesis* in the dialogue.

Mimesis is a determining theme of the *Phaedrus*, its relevance takes part mainly in the relation between oral speech and written speech; but this same relevance has to be limited to the role of its mechanism (re-producing) and not to its content (oral is not the original as written is not the copy). If there is a polarisation it is not between oral speech and written speech, but between production of speeches (dialectic) and reproduction of speeches (*mimesis*).

1.2. "If the author really cares about, this book does not contain his best thoughts."[47]

The other platonic passage, in which writing is criticised, is in the *Seventh Letter* (324a-344d). This platonic testimony against writing has often appeared controversial to many interpreters. In fact, the main statement against writing is a linking passage between the first part of the letter, in which Plato narrates some personal events, and the second part of the letter, in which Plato outlines a general theory about human knowledge. The fact that personal events and rigorous philosophical reflections are bound together in the same letter has raised some suspicions about the authenticity of the letter itself. The two parts have, in fact, different styles and at first glance, their continuity can be questioned. A

[47] *VII Ep.* 344c.

deeper assessment may show, instead, that the biographical elements are themselves philosophically relevant, as well as the philosophical section being based on autobiographical beliefs. However, this does not suffice to drive away the doubts about the authenticity of the letter.

A discussion about the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* is not at stake in this study and it can be avoided, not only because it has been analysed much more and much better than it can be repeated here; but also because it is almost fruitless to question its authenticity or not, while it has been studied and integrated for centuries into platonic hermeneutics, such that it has become an essential part of the reflection upon Plato's philosophy and its reception. The *Seventh Letter*, authentic or not, is part of our hermeneutic horizon.[48]

Nevertheless, it is not possible to disregard the debate around the authenticity of the letter with such ease, at least, not in a study that deals with the issue of orality/writing in Plato. In fact, nodding silently in favour of the authenticity of the letter, it could be read as an indirect assistance to the determined position of those interpreters who consider the *Seventh Letter* not only authentic, but the most authentic text by Plato. These interpreters, supporters of the existence of Unwritten Doctrines through which Plato transmitted his real philosophical thoughts, consider the *Seven Letter* the most important evidence of their theory. They sustain that Plato in the letter clearly exposes his rejection of writing and, supposedly, also affirms the existence and the superiority of his Unwritten Doctrines.[49] Hence, it is necessary to specify here that there are good reasons to believe that the *Seventh Letter* is authentic,[50] but these reasons do not necessarily imply that there were esoteric, oral teachings that Plato held only for a few, elitist students. This thesis will be considered and examined in the next section.

As a matter of fact, the passage about the critique of writing, whose style and terminology are more technical and scholastic, if compared to the rest of the letter, can be considered

[48] On the value and impact of philosophical, epistolary writing in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, cf. some remarks by Mathilde Cambron-Goulet in Scodel, R. ed. by, 2014, pp. 148-175.
[49] This is the general position of the Tübingen School.
[50] The letter has to be dated after the death of Dion, 353 BCE and, in fact, following stylometric parameters and analysing its contents, the *Seventh Letter* is well integrated with the later works by Plato such as *Laws*. Cf. Adorno, 2008, pp. 235-240 and Ross, 1951, pp. 139-141. Nowadays the majority of the interpreters considers it authentic with few exceptions, cf. Trabattoni, 1993, note 1, p. 200.

an independent epistemological *excursus* about the nature of knowledge.[51] Nevertheless, it is not possible to dissect the letter and simply extrapolate this passage as an independent platonic (or pseudo-platonic) theory of knowledge. In fact, it is evident from the letter that Plato is not concerned with tracing a theory of knowledge for its own sake; he is rather focused on how to transmit true knowledge. The concern about the transmission of knowledge is related to the critique of writing as a method of transmitting knowledge and, in its turn, the critique of writing is related also to some events contingent to Plato's political-pedagogical mission in Syracuse narrated in the letter.

The detailed autobiographical elements on Plato's journeys in Syracuse may sound like a chronicle about personal frustrations and also like an *excusatio non petita* for the failure of his pedagogical-political project. However, nobody should rush to conclusions about the poor philosophical value of these autobiographical accounts.

It is undeniable that the critique of writing and the connected theory of knowledge are so poignant here that they seem to be the central issues of the letter. Consequently, the autobiographical elements of the letter may appear almost as a narrative frame, or else as a personal defence. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that the references that Plato makes to writing, in the letter, are completely contingent on the personal events that he is narrating, and if there is but one central philosophical issue in the letter, it is to proclaim how difficult and demanding is the philosophical path. This is something that Plato experienced himself as a pupil, later as a teacher, and also as a citizen with a political view.

In the *Seventh Letter*, Plato wrote that he would never write anything about his philosophy because:

> For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the object, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself. (*VII Ep*. 342c)

[51] Hans-Georg Gadamer conjectures that this epistemological *excursus* can be a kind of institutionalised introduction that Plato was used of making beforehand to the students in his Academia. This would explain the technical and scholastic style of it. Cf. Gadamer, 1993, p. 115.
It is important to specify that Gadamer's interpretation of the letter excludes that Plato refers to any esoteric theory. Gadamer simply suggests that the *excursus* can be a sort of formula or usual exemplifying teaching made by Plato in the Academia, a teaching that is coherent with some epistemological evaluations that can be also found in other dialogues of the same period. Cf. Gadamer, 1980, p. 97, note 10 and p. 98.

In fact, he never wrote treatises nor made any clear statement on his own philosophical insights, as did his pupil and new Syracuse's Tyrant, the Young Dionysius. The reason why in the *Seventh Letter* Plato refers to the practise of writing philosophical content is that Dionysius and some unknown scholars besides wrote a few philosophical books based on what they heard about Plato's teachings. This is, claims Plato, the utmost evidence that Dionysus has not the right attitude for philosophy, because he is sure to have already had enough knowledge about many philosophical issues so as to avoid Plato's further teachings and so as to write an approximate book on these.[52]

Plato takes distance from the content of these books for two kinds of reason. First, the implicit but evident kind of reason: he does not want to be associated with the philosophical ideas and political behaviour of Dionysius; hence, he declines any responsibility for the way in which Dionysus interprets Plato's teaching. Second, the explicit and more essential kind of reason: Plato has a deep motivation for not considering it possible to write on the questions about which he cares and this is intrinsically related to its conception of the nature of human knowledge.[53]

The first genre of reasons can be left aside, as what has been said for the moment suffices to understand why Plato wants to take distance from those books. The discussion about this point will return later under another perspective, concerning the relation between responsibility and *mimesis*.

About the second genre of reasons, it is worth starting from the evidence that there are things about which Plato is concerned, or better, there are questions about which he really cares.[54] These questions cannot be written down by anybody. If it had been possible to write them, says Plato, he would have spent his entire life writing about them. Hence, no one who has written down these problems has understood them.

It cannot be concluded that by this, Plato means that these problems are secrets to be revealed only orally. In fact, their inexpressibility depends on the way human knowledge is articulated and transmitted; it does not depend on their content. There is no essential

[52] *VII Ep.* 341a-b.
[53] *VII Ep.* 342a.
[54] *VII Ep.* 341c.

philosophical truth that can be written systematically, nor systematically expressed orally, because human *logoi* are weak as Plato declares in the epistemological *excursus*.

The epistemological *excursus*, systematically written by Plato, is a teaching he admits to have already expounded orally many times. According to this platonic teaching, any object of knowledge has three features that make knowing it possible: name (*onoma*), *logos* and image (*eidolon*). Through these three features, someone can actualise the knowledge of the object (*episteme*). *Episteme* is the fourth element of the knowing process; it does not pertain to the object, but to the soul of the subject who is knowing. Fifth and last, comes the object of knowledge in itself, "the truly real being" (*nous*). The fifth element of knowledge does not follow spontaneously after the fourth, or better, it could, but its spontaneity is not guaranteed, it is sudden and it requires an intense philosophical activity. The captivating metaphor of the light flashing before a fire, recalled above, gives an image of how the *nous* can be reached. Furthermore, once reached, it is difficult to communicate this *nous* because of the weakness of the *logoi*.

The weakness of the *logoi* is a determinant stigmatization in this *excursus*, but its relevance is clearly stated although it is left unexplained. Hence, a first question may be raised: why are the *logoi* weak and how does this affect knowledge? While a second question may be: why is only the *logos*, within the other elements of knowledge, considered weak?

In finding an answer to the first question, it has to be noticed that here the term *logos* has not been translated intentionally. This term can have polyvocal meanings (such as word, language, discourse, reason, etc.). In this context, it may work to translate it as "definition". In fact, Plato, in this letter, refers to it as a "composition of name and verb".[55]The weakness of *logos* seems to depend on the approximate delimitation that occurs in the composition of names and verbs. Every definition is, in fact, a delimitation, which at the same time explains better and excludes more. This finds confirmation in the frustrating Socratic practise of asking "What is it?" identifiable in the early platonic dialogues. As known, this latter definitional question is destined not to be answered precisely.[56] It can stimulate further philosophical investigations but it cannot be answered because of the same weakness of the *logoi*. The *logos* has its weakness in its strength

[55] *VII Ep.* 342b.
[56] Cf. Fronterotta, 2001, pp. 33-39, 47-56.

since, in effect, any attempt to define will try to catch the essence, but will miss it because it cannot be delimited by words.

There is a very clear comparison that Plato uses in the *Seventh Letter* to exemplify the process of knowledge. This is the comparison of the circle. This example is not repeated here, but it is possible to say that trying to catch the essence of an object of knowledge with the *logos* is like trying to square a circle.[57]

What has already been said is enough to understand both why *logoi* are weak and why Plato would have never written the content of his philosophy:

> These things, moreover, because of the weakness of *logoi*, are just as much concerned with making clear the particular property of each object as the being of it. On this account no sensible man will venture to express his deepest thoughts in words, especially in a form which is unchangeable, as is true of written outlines. (*VII Ep.* 342e-343a)

This conscious and motivated criticism about written words recalls also some aspects of the criticism in the *Phaedrus*, as pointed out earlier, mainly the fact that written words are immobile. But this kind of criticism still involves the problematic presence (or absence) of the mimetic mechanism. This issue about *mimesis* will be considered after trying to answer the second question raised above about the reason of the exclusive weakness of the *logos*.

Concerning the weakness of the *logos*, it is worth considering the detailed reading of the *Seventh Letter* by Hans-Georg Gadamer.[58] Gadamer points to the exclusive weakness of the *logos* in the letter, but he believes that this peculiarity of *logos* affects also the other elements involved in the process of knowledge (name, image, *episteme*) which aim to

[57] This same image is recalled also by Gadamer, cf. Gadamer, 1980, p. 106. Plato himself seems to suggest this equivalence: *Every circle that we make or draw in common life is full of characteristics that contradict the "fifth," for it everywhere touches a straight line, while the circle itself, we say, has in it not the slightest element belonging to a contrary nature. And we say that their names are by no means fixed; there is no reason why what we call "circles" might not be called "straight lines," and the straight lines "circles," and their natures will be none the less fixed despite this exchange of names. Indeed the same thing is true of the definition: since it is a combination of nouns and verbs, there is nothing surely fixed about it.* (*VII Ep.* 343b)

[58] Cf. Gadamer, 1980, pp. 93-123.

reach the fifth (*nous*). The weakness of the *logoi* is, in general terms, the weakness of human knowledge itself:

> Plato leaves no doubt that even knowledge of the ideas, although it cannot merely be derived from language and words, is still not to be attained without them [the *logoi*] (*Cratylus* 433 a, 438 b). The weakness of the *logoi*, which is the weakness of all four, is precisely the weakness of our intellect itself which depends upon them.[59]

The sense of this statement becomes clearer when realising that Gadamer believes that the theory of knowledge in the *Seventh Letter* is indeed a theory of communication (of knowledge). Plato is not interested in defining a theory of knowledge for the sake of itself, but he is certainly concerned with how his teaching has been received and divulged. Under this perspective should be read also the connection that, in the quotation above, Gadamer establishes with the passages of the *Cratylus*[60] where the necessity of the *logoi* is one with the necessity of learning and communicating them correctly. The Gadamerian interpretation confirms the hypothesis that the autobiographical section and the epistemological *excursus* of the letter are closely connected. The failure of the political mission in Syracuse is also the failure of the communication of philosophical teachings to Dionysius. This failure is two-sided as the relation between teacher and pupil is. In fact, the teacher fails also because of the philosophical indisposition of the pupil.[61] This reinforces the belief that the *Seventh Letter* is an exceptional testimony about the difficulties of the philosophical path, a path that needs a guide but also a pupil honestly willing to be guided. Furthermore, the major challenge on the philosophical path is about the frustration and the incompleteness of each step and this depends, as said, on the nature of human knowledge, hence on the special status of the human soul.

The soul plays a defining role in the theory of knowledge, but its relevance is not immediately graspable. A more detailed exploration of the elements of the epistemological *excursus* is necessary to understand both how the weakness of one

[59] Ivi, p. 105.
[60] *Crat.* 433a, 438b.
[61] The feeling of being defeated that comes out of this biographic story should sound quite familiar if compared to the relation between Socrates and Alcibiades. Cf. the entire *Alciabiades I*, *Symp*. 213e-222c; for an historical account of this relation cf. Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades*, and De Romilly, 1997.

element – the *logos* – affects the other elements and the role that the soul has in this process.[62]

The five elements in the theory of knowledge are listed one after one as if they are in a hierarchical structure. In a certain sense, they are hierarchical, as much as the weakness of the *logoi* can allow Plato to build a hierarchy. It is possible to see two nuances in this hierarchy: one is the temporal order of the elements; another one is the qualitative order of the elements.

Starting from the consideration of the temporal order, it is necessary to presume that this succession of elements works only if this theory is considered as a theory of communication of knowledge and not as a theory of knowledge itself – as argued earlier. When one wants to communicate knowledge, this supposes that there is, on the other side of the knowing process, someone learning who is following the same passages. All knowledge about the object of knowledge is communicated starting from the name of the object, and then it will be given a definition of the object and also an image of it. After the communication of the elements related to the object, will come the fourth element, the *episteme*, which is a self-elaboration of the previous three by a subject (the one who is learning). Last comes the *nous*, the perception of the thing itself, the fifth element "which after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the object, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself."[63]

In regard to the qualitative order of the elements, it may be said that there are three levels in the hierarchy. At the first level, can be placed the name, the *logos* and the image which pertain to the object of knowledge. At the second level, there is the act of knowing these three features by a human soul. At the third and last level comes, eventually, the perception of the thing in itself. Paradoxically one needs the first step to reach the last

[62] Gadamer considers that the weakness of the *logoi* is the weakness of all the four elements (name, *logos*, image, knowledge), but in his view the weakness of the knowledge realised by the soul has a peculiar status because it depends on the features and on the philosophical disposition of every single soul (Gadamer, 1980, p.112). While Trabattoni disagrees on this interpretation by Gadamer, Trabattoni rather considers that the weakness of the soul depends on its interrelation with the name, *logos* and image which are weak themselves. Trabattoni holds that the fourth is the subjective reflection of the three elements of the object and this is why the fourth is weak too (Trabattoni, 1993, pp. 207-208). In this place I agree with Trabattoni's interpretation, even if the singularity and the philosophical disposition of the souls has a decisive role in the *Seventh Letter*. Unfortunately, a discussion about the role of the soul in the process of knowledge, does not find space in this dissertation.

[63] *VII Ep.* 342c.

one, but the fulfilment of the last level is impeded by the persistence of the elements in the first level.

The differences amongst these three levels are glaring and the distance between one and another level appears to be a huge gap in as much as the task of fully knowing something seems an impossible one.[64] The first level has to do with the contingency of an object of knowledge and its definition (name, *logos*, image). On the second level, there is the immaterial elaboration of these elements by a soul whose structure should be receptive of *logoi* and transform them into knowledge (*episteme*). Last, there is the thing itself (*nous*), the ungraspable essence of the object of knowledge for what it is. It is something that transcends a particular soul, but at the same time can be grasped only by a soul; as well as something that has nothing to do with any contingency, but at the same time, the access to it originates with a contingent object of knowledge.

The special status of the soul, in the process of knowledge, is to be an intermediate between the perceivable object and the object in itself. The transition can be possible only through the catalysing effect of the soul that has to reflect subjectively the structure of the first level and convert it into knowledge. This explains more about the weakness of the *logoi*, as in fact the first and the second levels represent a tragic blend of failure and necessity in the act of defining. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the last level is unachievable because of the failure of the previous levels. Indeed, Plato has never argued that knowledge is impossible; rather, it is difficult to grasp and it is not definitional, but it shines forth eventually, in such circumstances:

> By the repeated use of all these instruments [the four elements of knowledge], ascending and descending to each in turn, it is barely possible for knowledge to be engendered of an object naturally good, in a man naturally good; but if his nature is defective, as is that of most men, for the acquisition of knowledge and the so-called virtues, and if the qualities he has have been corrupted, then not even Lynceus could make such a man see. (*VII Ep.* 343e-344a)

[64] Franco Trabattoni compares fruitfully some peculiarities of this theory of knowledge both with the famous statement by Gorgias about the incommunicability of knowledge and with Protagoras' acknowledgement about the difficulties of turning the contingent traits of an object into properties of a subject. Cf. Trabattoni, 1999, p. 110.

For the process of knowledge, the natural disposition of a soul seems as determinant as the will for engaging in the philosophical enterprise. Moreover, the special intermediate status of the soul manifests another aspect that finds its strength in the *long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil*. This is the vitality of the soul, which clashes with the immobility and the silence of *logos*. Anything possessing a soul is alive; hence, it is able to respond and to be responsible for itself. The responsiveness of the soul shows its strength in the dialectical relation between teacher and pupil. In fact, a good philosophical relation is alive and productive: it produces true knowledge that keeps on disseminating its life. To use the famous metaphor of the *Seventh Letter*, true knowledge is like the light flashing from a fire when kindled; it is lively and sheds itself. This is the complete opposite of cold, mute and immobile words either written or orally performed.

At this stage, it should be clear that this critique of writing does not mean that anybody can write about Plato's thoughts (as indeed is happening here in this dissertation), nor that there are secret teachings that can be expounded only orally. An oral explanation, as well as a written account, have the same boundaries[65] mainly caused by the weakness of *logos* that consists in defining without grasping the object of knowledge itself. The soul would be able to grasp the thing itself, but before reaching it, the soul needs *logoi*. *Logos* is necessary to know an object, but somehow it immobilises the liveliness of the object itself and this inhibits the lively soul reaching that *nous*.

The exploration of this epistemological *excursus* is not taken further, as the main scope is to understand better the sense of the critique of writing in the *Seventh Letter*. The specific problem about writing is that it exacerbates the weakness of the *logoi*. The failure of the definition becomes over-exposed when it presents itself in the immobile shape of written outlines.

The problem here is even more complex because, beyond its incontestable philosophical value, the critique of writing in the *Seventh Letter* is related to the particular event of Dionysius, and some scholars at his court, writing some books about Plato's philosophy.

In this problem, can be seen certain aspects of the articulated issue of *mimesis*. Clearly, the knot that binds the critique of writing and the communicability of knowledge is not that Dionysius wrote a book; but that he wrote a book on what he presumed to have

[65] Cf. Isnardi Parente, 1970, pp. 152-154.

learned from Plato's philosophy and that he presents those contents as his own philosophy. There are at least three negative aspects in this episode. First, Dionysius assumed to have understood Plato's philosophy, while he did not because of his lack of persistence in the effort that the philosophical path requires. Second, Dionysius wrote a book based on Plato's teachings or better on what he supposedly heard and understood about Plato's teachings. Third, Dionysius (as other unknown scholars did) presented the concepts of the book as his own philosophical ideas.

In regard to this episode, Plato exposes his definite and ultimate opposition to the act of writing philosophical concepts:

> So much at least I can affirm with confidence about any who have written or propose to write on these problems, pretending to a knowledge of the questions about which I care, whether they claim to have learned from me or from others or to have made their discoveries for themselves: it is impossible, in my opinion, that they can have learned anything at all about the subject. There is no writing of mine about these questions, nor will there ever be one. (*VII Ep.* 341b-c)

If one is writing about these questions, one is automatically demonstrating that one did not understand them.

The theory of (communication of) knowledge that follows next in the letter, serves to explain why it is impossible to divulge to a multitude the questions about which Plato cares. True knowledge is hard to communicate and to be received; furthermore, it requires philosophically disposed souls, seriously engaged in the philosophical enterprise.

It seems that a soul such as that of Dionysius cannot express any philosophical concept. He would be able to reproduce contents heard superficially by someone else and repeated without any awareness of the effort of getting to know something. Dionysius can reproduce a philosophical thought, but he cannot produce an authentic philosophical (*dia*)*logos*. Once again, behind this critique it is possible to glimpse the same mimetic mechanism explored earlier regarding the *Phaedrus*.

It has been already pointed out that the critiques of writing in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Seventh Letter* have a same pivot, namely the mutism of written words, hence their

immobility and incapability to reply. Now it is possible to step forward and to make explicit something more that is disguised through metaphors and allusions. First, the anthropomorphism or even the animism of the *logoi*.[66] Then, the "dialectic of the image" in which *logoi* are trapped.[67]

The animism, in general terms, means that true *logoi* are alive and can transmit life, they are productive and they are displayed in a dialectical relation; while false *logoi* are half-dead, they are reproduced and they are not able to reply. In this latter case can be recognised the case of written *logoi*. The range of this metaphor becomes wider when it refers to responsibility and responsiveness of the *logoi*. In fact, to say that *logoi* are alive means that they have a soul, this soul and this life that inhabit true *logoi* allude to the fact that there must be a generator, a father who gave life to them. The (exclusively male) anthropomorphism involved in these metaphors implies that if the *logos* (the son) cannot answer independently, then its father has to respond and be responsible for it. Only in regard to this aspect there is, if someone wants to find one, the superiority of oral exchange, that is the fact that the voice is alive and its bearer is alive, hence he must always be together with its *logoi*, so that they are never orphans as written *logoi* are.

Going back to the *Seventh Letter* it is legitimate to ask now: who is the father of the *logoi* in the books written by Dionysius and by those unknown scholars? The harsh distance that Plato takes from them is also saying that he is not responsible (he is not the father) of them. The philosophical superficiality with which Dionysius has reproduced those *logoi* makes him unable to respond for them. Besides, Dionysius' *logoi*, meshed in the reproduction of reproduction, are closer to death than life. Those scholars who believed it possible to write, to immobilise, to devitalise the questions about which Plato cares, cannot respond for these *logoi* since they almost killed them. It seems that these *logoi* about Plato's philosophy are illegitimate, orphan and sterile. Nobody can really claim their paternity and even if there is still some trace of life in them, they cannot kindle any fire.

As with the *Phaedrus*, in the *Seventh Letter* the paradigm of the image has a determinant role, but here it is mainly connected with the epistemological *excursus*. In the *Phaedrus*,

[66] These terms and the general approach to the metaphor come from the essay *Plato's Pharmacy* by Jacques Derrida, in particular cf. Derrida, 1981, p. 143. The discourse about the responsiveness and liveness of the *logoi* is further analysed in the Third Chapter.
[67] Cf. Gadamer, 1980, p. 112.

the connection depends on the immobility of written words which is the same kind of immobility as that of painted images. In the *Seventh Letter*, this connection is not as explicit as it is in the *Phaedrus*. Earlier it has been argued, coherently with the interpretation by Gadamer, that the weakness of the *logoi* is, in truth, the weakness of all four elements of knowledge. It may seem circular reasoning if from this premise it follows that all four means are trapped in the dialectic of the image.[68] Still, Gadamer does so when he implies that the dialectic of the image is the key of the entire *excursus*:

> All four means are trapped in the dialectic of the image or copy, for insofar as all four are intended to present the thing in and through themselves they must of necessity have a reality of their own. That which is meant to present something cannot be that thing. It lies in the nature of the means of knowing that in order to be means they must have something inessential about them. This, according to Plato, is the source of our error, for we are always misled into taking that which is inessential for something essential.[69]

This statement by Gadamer is definitely adequate and coherent with the previous evaluations. However, it must be specified what "image" (*eidolon*) means here. Image is the second element listed by Plato in the process of knowledge described in the *Seventh Letter*. It could be said that is a deictic moment of the process of knowledge. It means that the image of an object of knowledge is this concrete thing that can be pointed to and it allows one to say: "*X* is this thing that I am pointing to and that you can see yourself – without any more definitional effort". This image is true, real, but partial because while it shows the thing, at the meantime it hides the thing in itself (*eidos*). It is correct to say that this image that can be pointed to, is inessential, but at the same time, we cannot avoid it because it is all we can see. Human beings cannot see the essence, the *eidos* of the object, they can only see the copy, the *eidolon*.

The sense to which Gadamer refers in the dialectic of the image is more generic and transcends the particular deictic moment of the *excursus*. Gadamer refers to the general mechanism of human epistemology about which essences (*eide*) are knowable only through appearances (*eidola*). This is true of every means we have to know, hence it is

[68] Ibidem.
[69] Gadamer, 1980, pp. 112-113.

applicable and it is valid for the entire epistemological *excursus*. Once again, it is the mechanism that has to be considered and not its mere content.

Therefore, there is no circularity in saying that the weakness of the *logoi* is the weakness of all four elements and that, at the same time, the dialectic of the image (dialectic between *eidos* and *eidolon*) traps all four elements. To reinforce the sense of this thinking it is worth quoting a celebrated passage from the *Phaedo*:

> When I had wearied of investigating things, I thought that I must be careful to avoid the experience of those who watch an eclipse of the sun, for some of them ruin their eyes unless they watch its reflection in water or some such material. A similar thought crossed my mind, and I feared that my soul would be altogether blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and tried to grasp them with each of my senses. So I thought I must take refuge in *logoi* and investigate the truth of things by means of words. However, perhaps this analogy is inadequate, for I certainly do not admit that one who investigates things by means of words is dealing with images any more than one who looks at facts (*Phaed.* 99e-100a).

Logoi are a place in which human beings can take refuge and can evade the trapping dialectic of the image. Thanks to the *logoi* it is possible to give a limited account of what we try to know, it is possible to walk on the philosophical path, and it is possible to fail on it and start over again. At least, *logoi* give the chance to move, to evolve from the immobility of every *eidolon* toward the ungraspable *eidos*. However, dealing with *logoi* does not mean that the dialectic of the image is overcome and left apart. In fact, any definition (*logos*) is itself an *eidolon* met on the way toward the *nous*.

The dialectic of the image is a central paradigm in Plato's works and it will be shown later that its relevance plays a determinant role in the critiques of writing and orality as well.

1.3. "If a man has nothing more valuable than what he has composed or written"[70]

[70] *Phaedr.*278d.

The first two sections of this chapter dealt, respectively, with the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* and the critique of writing in the *Seventh Letter*. The reason for giving the greatest relevance to these two passages is that these are the only ones known in which Plato exposes directly his critique of writing. For this same reason, some interpreters consider these passages the most valuable evidence in favour of the supremacy of orality over writing in Plato's philosophy.

Stating that these two passages are the most valuable, because they come directly from Plato's works, suggests that there is also other indirect evidence for the supremacy of orality over writing in Plato's philosophy. There are, in fact, different testimonies to support this position. These indirect testimonies derive from some of Plato's disciples and interpreters. Within the indirect testimonies, it would be functional to distinguish between: *A.* ancient evidence; *B.* contemporary interpretations.

As ancient evidence, critics mean: *A.1)* passages from ancient works written by authors who were contemporary or relatively posterior to Plato; *A.2)* some obscurities that Plato seems to have intentionally left in his works. A few of those passages are going to be mentioned here in order of relevance.

A.1) The most famous indirect testimony which supports the theory of the existence of Unwritten Doctrines by Plato comes from Aristotle. In the Book IV of the *Physics* (2, 209b15) Aristotle writes clearly that "in the so-called Unwritten Doctrines" (*en tois legomenois agraphois dogmasin*) Plato gives a definition of matter and spatiality which is slightly different if compared to the definition exposed in the written dialogue *Timaeus*.

This passage by Aristotle is extremely relevant for three main reasons. First of all, because of the relevance of the witness: Aristotle was, in fact, a direct pupil of Plato in his Academia for at least twenty years; hence, he was likely one of the most informed, direct witnesses of those oral teachings. Secondly, Aristotle seems to take for granted that there is something widely known as "Unwritten Doctrines"; thus, it is reliable that the existence of these teachings was somehow widespread, even if circumscribed to a few pupils. Thirdly, Aristotle states that there is a difference – at least in this case – between the Unwritten Doctrines and the written dialogue.

The third point is definitive because based on this difference between written and Unwritten Doctrines, some have assumed that Plato held oral teachings that were

deliberately different from the theories that can be excerpted from his written works. Consequently, some have tried to outline the contents of these oral teachings believing that the most fundamental elements of Plato's philosophy were communicated through those theories expounded orally. Furthermore, this belief is corroborated by the critique of writing that Plato himself stated both in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Seventh Letter*.

Anyone, who is not yet influenced by the *Wirkungsgeschichte* developed around this topic, is able to detect some unnecessary cause-effect relations in this chain of reasoning. Starting again from the passage of the *Physics*, it seems possible to rely on Aristotle and infer that there existed official oral teachings held by Plato and that these might sometimes differ from some theoretical elements written in the dialogues. Nevertheless, from these accepted premises, it does not necessarily follow that there is a difference, intentionally imposed by Plato, between the contents of the dialogues and the contents of the oral teachings. Consequently, there is no necessity that should follow that the theories exposed orally were more authentic than the written ones. The difference that Aristotle denounces in regard to the *Timaeus* is a very detailed one. Some have argued that these kinds of discrepancies are likely due to the evolution of Plato's thought in a lapse of time which probably occurred between the moment Plato wrote the dialogue, and the moment he exposed similar theories in some oral teachings.[71] This last interpretation may be fairly convincing, but there is not enough evidence to support it. In addition, the fact that Plato held oral teachings should neither provoke any surprise, nor elicit the certainty that what Plato said orally was almost secret, highly inspired and exclusive. It is widely known that Plato established his *Academia* with the purpose of teaching philosophy and educating the souls of a few pupils. Surely, the selection of the students was quite strict and it was probably based on the philosophical disposition of their souls. Hence, the audience of Plato's oral teachings was necessarily small and elitist. I cannot see any necessary reason for overestimating the Aristotelian passage of the *Physics*; least of all, there is no reason from this to infer that platonic oral teachings were the most authentic words by Plato and that these were intentionally secret.

There are interesting philosophical positions that question the effective relevance of this passage by Aristotle. A very balanced position in this regard comes from Trabattoni.

[71] Among most of the contemporary interpreters, it is commonly accepted that the oral teachings by Plato occurred later in his lifetime. Cf. Nikulin, 2012, p. 7.

Trabattoni's position starts from a general interpretation of Aristotle's method of reading his predecessors. Aristotle tends somehow to translate the theories of his predecessors into his own philosophical language. This subtle and apparently innocent operation is fully evidenced in the very well-known I and XIII Books of the *Metaphysics*. In particular, in Book I of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle delineates a draft of History of Philosophy in (thus-far-known) History of Philosophy; hence, he analyses and criticises chronologically the theories of his predecessors. Trabattoni, in this regard, makes a very good point claiming that Aristotle is not mainly interested in the History of Philosophy itself, but in truth.[72] It means that Aristotle is not interested in reporting accurately the investigations on nature of his predecessors – Plato included; rather, he uses his predecessors as terms of comparison for testing or supporting his own philosophical theories. This is also the reason why Aristotle applies his filter retrospectively and often forces the theories of the predecessors into functional, but limited, categories.[73] Trabattoni recognises a plausible existence of oral doctrines and admits the existence of discrepancies in Plato's works, nevertheless he warns about the risk of misinterpreting Plato if these discrepancies are read under Aristotle's perspective.[74] As distinct from Aristotle, Plato was not interested in definite statements about first principles and truth and, yet again, it is important to underline that this was also a reason for not considering writing a sufficient tool to express truth and for not writing treatises – as Aristotle did.

Harold Cherniss adopted, instead, a more radical position in regard to that passage by Aristotle. His position can be situated at the extreme opposite of the position of those who valued Aristotle's testament as the most relevant indirect testament about the existence of Unwritten Doctrines by Plato. Cherniss, in fact, believes that Aristotle misinterpreted Plato's thought; hence, he denies the existence of Unwritten Doctrines. Cherniss' position can be considered neither a direct contraposition nor a reaction to the interpreters that support the theory of Unwritten Doctrines. As a matter of fact, Cherniss' work about the Aristotelian misinterpretation of Plato was published before the theories of Unwritten

[72] Trabattoni, 1999, p. 43-sgg.
[73] This operation by Aristotle is actual and it is coherent not only with his idea of a chronological development of truth which lies beyond the historical part of the *Metaphysics*, but also with his inclusive way of structuring philosophical arguments as if a qualitative development of truth can be guaranteed thanks to analytic structures, categorisations and use of syllogisms.
[74] Trabattoni, 1999, p. 49.

Doctrines were elaborated by later interpreters.[75] Cherniss analyses in detail and technically contradicts the criticism that Aristotle developed around the passage in the *Timaeus*.[76] The reason why Aristotle misinterpreted Plato is due to very similar reasons to those given by Trabattoni. Cherniss too notices that Aristotle tends to translate Plato's thought in his own terms and this cannot work positively. The difference in Cherniss' position is that he is not interested in denying the existence of Unwritten Doctrines in the first instance; rather he is interested in showing the shortcomings of the Aristotelian interpretation of Plato. Even though he also minimises the relevance of the ancient indirect tradition[77] and of the contemporary trend[78] that, along with Aristotle, preserved the hypothesis of the existence of unwritten esoteric doctrines in Plato.

Another relevant point, in continuity with Cherniss' reading of the Unwritten Doctrines, is made by Wolfgang-Rainer Mann. Mann stresses that when Aristotle refers to the *agraphata dogmata,* is not positing a difference of content between the oral teachings and the written dialogues. Indeed, Aristotle seems to take for granted that there is doctrinal overlapping between these two. Hence, restating Cherniss' position, Mann holds that Plato is saying the same thing both in the *Timaeus* and in the *agraphata dogmata*, even though he is probably expressing himself differently in the two contexts.[79]

It has to be assumed that, the contemporary interpreters who asserted the superiority of the oral teachings were not so cursory as not to notice the narrowness of the "*agraphata dogmata* passage" from the *Physics*. They have, in fact, also based their evaluations on other indirect testimonies and other elements.

Another of the most important testimonies in the discussion about platonic Unwritten Doctrines is the passage X 248-283 from the work *Adversus Mathematicos* by Sextus Empiricus (II Century) In this passage, Sextus Empiricus relates certain notions of Mathematics and Geometry to the platonic theory of the Ideas, but only as a brief mention. He writes also about the mathematical/geometrical relation between the One and the Indefinite Dyad, but he clearly assigns this theory to Pythagoras. Nevertheless, the

[75] The first publication of *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* by Harold Cherniss was in 1944; while the very first publications in regard to the theory of unwritten platonic doctrines appeared in the late fifties/early sixties (Krämer, 1959 and Gaiser, 1963).
[76] Cherniss, 1944, pp. 113-116.
[77] Ivi, pp. 564-566.
[78] He mainly refers to Léon Robin, Julius Stenzel and Eduard Zeller, cf. Ivi, *Foreword*.
[79] Mann, 2006, p. 378.

articulated theories expressed in the testimony by Sextus Empiricus have contributed to outline the contents of the supposed platonic Unwritten Doctrines elaborated on by the Tübingen School. For this reason, inevitably, a relevant issue about the reliability of this passage has been raised. In fact, the testimony by Sextus Empiricus appears very weak not only as reliable evidence to support the theory of Unwritten Doctrines, but even principally as a possible source of platonic teaching.

A quite detailed analysis of the of the insufficiency of this passage as a valid testimony for the theory of Unwritten Doctrines, has been carried out by Gregory Vlastos in his review of Krämer's work.[80] Vlastos points firstly to a major shortcoming concerning the misuse of Sextus' passage for supporting the Unwritten Doctrines theory:

> What is particularly surprising, in view of the vast evidential weight Sx [Sextus Empiricus] is expected to carry, is the complete absence of a *Quellenkritik* of this whole text. […] There is no serious confrontation of the problem raised by the fact that everything in Sx which is taken by K. [Krämer] as a disclosure of Platonic Philosophy is presented by Sextus as the teachings of Pythagoreans, except for a single parenthetical reference to Plato[81]

Vlastos identifies also other more technical shortcomings that do not allow to use the passage by Sextus Empiricus as a reliable testimony. However, most of the supporter of the Unwritten Doctrines theory consider this passage a strong source for their position.

Just to quote one last example about ancient indirect testimonies, it is worth recalling that the two ancient philosophers, Aristoxenus and Simplicius, reported in their works the existence of platonic Unwritten Doctrines. These testimonies refer to the same oral speech that Plato supposedly gave on the Idea of Good.

In *The Harmonics* (II, 39-40 Da Rios), Aristoxenus of Tarentum (IV Century BCE), a direct pupil of Aristotle, narrates an episode about a *Lecture on the Good* during which Plato instead of talking about wealth, health, strength and happiness as many listeners were expecting, rather spoke about mathematics, geometry and astronomy leaving most of the audience surprised or even disappointed. Some centuries later, Simplicius, a

[80] Vlastos, 1973, pp. 379-398.
[81] Ivi, p. 385.

Neoplatonist who lived in the IV Century, in his commentary *On Aristotle Physics* (151, 6-29 Diels), reports a similar episode adding that it is highly probable that Plato spoke about unity and duality as well on that occasion, being influenced by Pythagorean doctrines.

Some other relevant testimonies about the existence of platonic Unwritten Doctrines have been collected by Hans Joachim Krämer[82] as well as by Margherita Isnardi Parente.[83] In the context of this dissertation, it has been preferred to give attention only to a few of these passages as most pertinent samples of testimonies.

A.2) The last, ancient and indirect testimonies that are going to be considered here, are some omissions (also known as "platonic gaps")[84] that Plato seems to have intentionally left in his dialogues. Many passages could be considered as "omissions", but it is reliable to consider only eleven of them as intentional omissions.[85] By platonic omission, most of the interpreters mean a passage of a dialogue which is obscure and unclear. The obscurity might sometimes seem deliberate, because, in most of the occurrences it seems that Plato did not want to exhaust a reasoning. Usually the opacity of these passages relates to the philosophical content, but it may also be a recollection of something else – through a reference, an allusion or a promise to explore the issue on another occasion.

Friedrich Schleiermacher has argued that these kinds of allusions and gaps are distinguishing traits of Plato's style, aimed at making his writing more similar to oral expression.[86] This position, which evocative, in any case, – as it calls into question the

[82] Ibidem.
[83] Isnardi Parente, 1997.
[84] The term *Aussparungsstellen* (generically translated as omissions) was coined and introduced for the first time by Thomas Alexander Szlezák in his work *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie* (1985) translated in Italian, with the complacency of the Author, as *Platone e la scrittura della filosofia. Analisi di struttura dei dialoghi della giovinezza e della maturità alla luce di un nuovo paradigma ermeneutico*, in 1988.
[85] The eleven passages listed by Hans Krämer are: *Prot.* 356e-357c; *Men.* 76e-77b; *Phaed.* 107b; *Resp.* 506d-507a and 509c; *Parm.* 136d-e; *Soph.* 254b-d; *Pol.* 284a-e; *Tim.* 48c-e and 53c-d; *Leg.* 894a. Cf. Krämer, 1989, *Appendix II*.
[86] The work by Schleiermacher, *Introductions to the Dialogue of Plato*, does not play a relevant role in this dissertation. Nevertheless, it is important to declare the strong impact of this work in the later "Unwritten Doctrines" issue. Schleiermacher's work, in fact, is considered to be at the roots of the debate developed around this topic. His position denies the existence of any oral teaching by Plato. He believed that, even if oral teachings were existing, these did not add something more, nor something deeper to what has been said in the written dialogues. Schleiermacher rather argues in favour of a hermeneutics of the written text considering that the dialogues are autarchic and they themselves bear all of Plato's philosophy. In this place, it should be denounced that Schleiermacher did not consider the *Seventh Letter* as an authentic work by Plato, that is why its contents have not been analysed by him.

relevance of choosing a certain writing style – has been reasonably opposed by Thomas Alexander Szlezák. His main motivation to oppose Schleiermacher's position is grounded in the explicit platonic critique of writing. Indeed, as Szlezák notices, it is undeniable that the critique of writing by Plato necessarily pertains to everything that Plato himself has written. Hence, it can be assumed that if the platonic critique of writing is valid and has to be taken seriously, then the dialogues cannot be read hermeneutically – as Schleiermacher meant to do – and they cannot be considered the only valid source of Plato's philosophy. Basing his view on a philological analysis, Szlezák states that the dialogues are "reliant on oral supplementation", especially when Plato recalls "things of greater value" which can be expressed only orally.[87] For this reason, Szlezák reads in detail the platonic omissions and detects different types amongst these.[88] One type can be definitely identified with the frequent use of quotations and myths by Plato. Another type is connected with some allusion to higher truths or "higher *archai*" which would be completely obscure if not integrated with the theories developed by other contemporary interpreters, such as Konrad Gaiser. A third type of omission is not related to allusion, but has to do with a "dramaturgical device" which consists in interrupting the narration of the dialogue to signal that there is something relevant to be intended beyond this interruption; something that most of the time can be found in other dialogues. The last type of omission, listed by Szlezák, would refer to those occurrences when Plato, in a dialogue, alludes to something which was said, but not concluded earlier in the same dialogue (this can easily be the case with long dialogues such as *Republic*).

The role of these omissions works very well in the frame of any interpretation that considers orality superior to writing in Plato's philosophy, in fact, it offers the opportunity to believe that the issues which are often omitted in the written dialogues, were probably covered and integrated through the oral teachings.

Even if the arguments by Szlezák are built on solid philological assumptions and on a careful reading of the dialogues, however, these are not probing enough to support the superiority of oral doctrines over the written dialogues by Plato. In this dissertation, the

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The reason for not involving Schleiermacher arguments in this dissertation is due to the attempt of circumscribing the history of the critics to a more contemporary trend which, however, includes elements of critique coming from Schleiermacher.

[87] Szlezák, 1999, p. 61.

[88] For a more detailed account of these types of omissions cf. Ivi, pp. 61-64.

omissions present in the dialogues are not considered eminent testimonies for the superiority of orality over writing, as they only denounce a general, platonic denial of exhaustive definitions and definite statements. As it has been argued earlier, Plato applies a fluid and dialectical form of reasoning to his philosophical insights and this is one of his reasons for criticising writing as a means of communication. Writing, indeed, is too rigid, it is sterile and it is not alive, as any authentic thought needs to be. Hence, the fact that Plato in his dialogues is often unclear and inconsistent about definitive contents, should not be read as a hint for other sources of communication (oral esoteric teachings); rather it should be interpreted as a denial of any stiff reasoning. Coherently, the means for transmitting knowledge, either orally or written, are relevant elements, but still secondary elements; while the nature of knowledge and of its expression and communication are at stake firstly for Plato.

Nevertheless, many contemporary interpreters admirably managed to fill the gaps left in the dialogues, after having reshaped a plausible platonic theory of ideas interlaced with mathematics and geometry.

B.) These interpreters are the indirect contemporary testimonies that have been mentioned at the beginning of this section. They tried to outline the contents of the Unwritten Doctrines integrating elements of ontology, geometry and mathematics to the incomplete theories exposed in the dialogues. In this regard, once again, a testimony by Aristotle has been determinant for these interpreters. In the XIII Book of *Metaphysics*,[89] Aristotle declares that a theory of numbers was developed by Plato after the theory of ideas and that this was somehow a development of the same precedent theory of the ideas. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that Aristotle never expressed these theories as something learned directly from Plato. He explicitly makes deductions trying to clarify some obscurities that he found in Plato's philosophy.[90] Hence, the absolute validity that is attributed to Aristotle's testimonies should be limited when it comes to his own deductions. However, the most widely accepted interpretation about this issue is that there are two stages of Plato's life corresponding to two different stages of his philosophical development. At an early stage, Plato elaborated a theory of ideas which is detectable also in the dialogues; later he developed a theory of ideas and numbers which was divulged

[89] *Metaphysics*, 1078b9-12.
[90] *Metaphysics*, 987b31-33. For a more complete and detailed account cf. Trabattoni, 1999, note 70.

mainly orally to a few pupils.[91] This set of testimonies (direct and indirect) definitely created a wide and strong enough ground to build the contemporary theory of the "Unwritten Doctrines".

The most determinant part of the story of this theory took place between the Universities of Tübingen and Milan around 1980. However, as pointed earlier, the roots of the criticism in support, or in opposition to the theory of the Unwritten Doctrines by Plato precede the 20th century and they date back to the 19th century with Schleiermacher, Eduard Gottlob Zeller, Léon Robin and Julius Stenzel – just to mention some of the most relevant names in the debate. This dissertation intentionally excludes an analysis of the early stage of this theory and, instead, privileges a focus on the stage that goes from the fifties to the nineties of the last century. The general reason for this specific focus depends on the majority of works published on this topic in those decades. The specific reason is that from these publications emerged an innovative paradigm to re-interpret Plato anew, based on the contents of the "Unwritten Doctrines". The content of these doctrines and the new paradigm for the interpretation of Plato will be exposed in the following section.

1.4. "Things of greater value"

On the basis of some direct and indirect testimonies, of some omissions and some interpretations of Plato's dialogues, certain contemporary interpreters were able to develop a presumed platonic theory of ideas, numbers and geometry. Paradoxically, this theory, which is only presumed and deducted, is considered to be more authentic and trustworthy than dialogues themselves which, indeed, are the only direct testimonies. Once again, it is important to underline that this presumed oral theory has been considered more valuable for two main reasons. First, because it is not written, hence it is exempted from the platonic critique of writing which instead involves all the dialogues (but also the critique itself, disputably). Second, because, presumably, this oral theory dealt with things of greater value (*timiotera*). In fact, in the *Phaedrus*, Plato writes that what makes a philosopher different from a mere writer is that the philosopher possesses something more

[91] Cf. Nikulin, 2012, Chapter 1, and Trabattoni, 1999, p.5.

valuable than written words, hence – deduced some interpreters – he possesses also an oral theory which deals with things of greater value.

> SOCRATES: Well, then: our playful amusement regarding discourse is complete. Now you go and tell Lysias that we came to the spring which is sacred to the Nymphs and heard words charging us to deliver a message to Lysias and anyone else who composes speeches, as well as to Homer and anyone else who has composed poetry either spoken or sung, and third, to Solon and anyone else who writes political documents that he calls laws: "If any one of you has composed these things with a knowledge of the truth, if you can defend your writing when you are challenged, and if you can yourself make the argument that your writing is of little worth, then you must be called by a name derived not from these writings but rather from those things that you are seriously pursuing."
>
> PHAEDRUS: What name, then, would you give such a man?
>
> SOCRATES: To call him wise, Phaedrus, seems to me too much, and proper only for a god. To call him wisdom's lover – a philosopher – or something similar would fit him better and be more seemly.
>
> PHAEDRUS: That would be quite appropriate.
>
> SOCRATES: On the other hand, if a man has nothing more valuable (*timiotera*) than what he has composed or written, spending long hours twisting it around, pasting parts together and taking them apart – wouldn't you be right to call him a poet or a speech writer or an author of laws?
>
> PHAEDRUS: Of course. (*Phaedr.* 278b-e)

Some interpreters worked around this suggestion about things of greater value until they reconstructed the presumed contents of Plato's oral theory.

In particular, Hans Joachim Krämer and Konrad Gaiser identified the contents of the oral theories with the contents of the oral teachings to which Aristotle refers. Both Krämer and Gaiser, Professors at Tübingen University, started to work on the interpretation of the "esoteric teachings"[92] towards the end of the fifties of the last century. In continuity with

[92] That use of term "esoteric" excludes any reference to mysticism. It means that Plato destined those oral teachings only to the pupils in the Academia. In talking about esoteric teachings reverberates the classic and consolidated distinction in between Aristotle's written works which are partly exoteric (destined to a large public of readers and that are not arrived to us) and partly esoteric (destined to the pupils in the Lyceum which are almost all the works by Aristotle arrived to us). Nevertheless, this parallelism is not only

this interpretation, starting from eighties of the last century, Thomas Alexander Szlezák from the University of Tübingen and Giovanni Reale from the Università Cattolica di Milano, reinforced the interpretation by Krämer and Gaiser.

Krämer's position on the interpretation of Unwritten Doctrines is largely based on Heinrich Gomperz' interpretation.[93] Krämer, like Gomperz did thirty years earlier, detects in Plato's philosophy a dualistic and derivative system according to which things derive from Ideas, Ideas derive from Numbers and Numbers depend on First Principles (the One and the Indefinite Dyad). Supposedly, the platonic discussion on these First Principles, which Krämer considers to be the things of greater value mentioned by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, was exclusively destined to the oral teachings reserved for a small elected audience.

Specifically, Krämer claims that the theories exposed in the early and middle dialogues (*Republic* included) are restricted to ethical-political themes, while some ontology is covered as an introduction in later dialogues (such as *Parmenides*, *Sophist*). While, the real ontological and essential contents of Plato's Philosophy were exposed on an advanced level only orally in the Academia.[94] In the frame of this interpretation, the written dialogues are simply propaedeutic to true philosophy, as Gaiser himself argued in the same years.

Gaiser believes that the distinction between esoteric and exoteric teaching was present in Plato as it was already in the Pythagoreans. In particular, Gaiser states that the dialogues (exoteric) were just an introduction to philosophy as it comes out from the *Second Letter* by Plato. In this letter, Plato admits that the dialogues were simply a recalling of Socrates' teachings which were preliminary to real Philosophy:

inappropriate but it is also misleading, not only because Plato and Aristotle's philosophies are different in their intents, but mainly because the use of writing and the teaching systems of the two philosophers cannot be compared. Aristotle never criticised writing, on the contrary he used to write systematically the contents of his lectures. While Plato criticised writing especially as a means to transmit knowledge. Schleiermacher already used this language to point out this distinction in Plato and to remark that esoteric teachings have no authority. Cf. Mann, 2006, p. 354-357. A clear disambiguation of the term esoteric in relation to Plato's teachings, can be found in Szlezák, 1988, p. 484 and 1999, pp. 85-86.

[93] Cf. De Vogel, 1986, pp. 13-16.

[94] Krämer, 1989, pp. 211-213.

> Keep this in mind and take care that you have no occasion in the future to feel remorse for now exposing these doctrines unworthily. The best precaution is not to write them down, but to commit them to memory; for it is impossible that things written should not become known to others. This is why I have never written on these subjects. There is no writing of Plato's, nor will there ever be; those that are now called so come from an idealized and youthful Socrates. Farewell and heed my warning; read this letter again and again, then burn it.[95]

Even though Gaiser's reading of Plato may result partial and biased by the will to sustain a theory of Unwritten Doctrines, nevertheless, he acknowledges that the critique that Plato makes in regard to writing involves orality as well. In fact, both orality and writing are simply "reproductive" – as any other way of communicating knowledge.[96] Hence, the superiority of the oral doctrine over the dialogues, does not consists in a better "communicability" of the teachings and not even in the contents of the teachings, but in the fact that oral teachings were more systematic and scientific in comparison to the theory exposed in the dialogues. Furthermore, Gaiser denies the sharp parallelism between orality and academic teachings on the one side, and literary, written teachings open to a wider public, on the other side. He sees instead an interaction between oral teachings and dialogues in the Academia, as well as he acknowledges that most of the oral teachings were open to a wide public as presumably was the *Lecture on the Good* mentioned by Aristotle. Considering all this, Gaiser's position on the transmission of knowledge by Plato appears quite balanced between orality and writing; but his position actually turns to be in favour of orality for what concerns the philosophical quality of the contents of Plato's teaching. Since Gaiser claims that the oral teachings were more systematic and scientific, he somehow asserts the superiority of orality over writing in terms of the quality of concepts expressed through oral teachings. For this reason, even if with a cautious respect toward writing, Gaiser ends up in holding the same position as many other interpreters who believe that through esoteric, oral teaching Plato expressed "things of greater value".

Interpreters worked deeply around "things of greater value" that might have been expressed in Plato's oral teachings. Eventually they agreed that these things are all related to the underlying existence of two fundamental principles which work as opposite powers

[95] *Ep. II*, 314 b-c.
[96] Gaiser, 1994, pp. 10-11.

permeating each other. For this permeation of opposites being possible on an ontological level, it is necessary to detect an analogous structure in all the existing entities.[97] This structure is identified with mathematical principles, as these interpreters can detect a binding connection between Ontology and Mathematics in Plato's philosophy.[98]

The works by Krämer and Gaiser have been decisive, not only because, for the first time, they tried to outline systematically the contents of the presumed Unwritten Doctrines by Plato, but also mainly because in doing so they provided a collection of documents (direct and indirect testimonies) to support their arguments. Anybody else who, after them, tried to support or to oppose the theory of Unwritten Doctrines, had somehow to refer to a pre-set frame drawn by the two philologists from Tübingen.

A few decades later, Thomas Alexander Szlezák, Professor at Tübingen University and director of the "Platon-Archiv" in the same University,[99] himself held the theory of Unwritten Doctrines, but he based his interpretation on different assumptions and argued it with a different method from Krämer and Gaiser. Szlezák, in fact, does not focus primarily on the Unwritten Doctrines and their presumed content; he rather works on the written dialogues by Plato to support the existence and the superiority of the oral teachings over the written dialogues. The element that supports this, more than others, is that often the dialogues appear incomplete on relevant points and sometimes they seem to ask, through gaps and omissions, for a supplementation that can be likely found in the oral teachings. The things of greater value have to exceed the written text – believes Szlezák, hence dialogues contain less valuable truths. This is due especially to the different quality of communication that can be performed orally and through writing. Plato, in fact, condemned writing as a means of communicating and very probably, he preferred oral, dialectical exchange as it is lively and as it permits to choose the interlocutor. This is undeniably clear in the final part of *Phaedrus* where Plato not only criticises writing, but also says that things of greater value necessarily exceed writing and that they need support (*boetheia*). This support for the written words has to be found outside the dialogues, thus, can be probably detected in the oral teachings. Szlezák's

[97] Gaiser realises a detailed schema of couples of principles for each kind of relevant opposition in Plato's ontology. Ivi, p. 25.
[98] Gaiser analyses in details the relation between Ontology, Mathematics and Geometry in Plato in his work first published in German in 1962 (It. trans. 1994). Cf. also Gaiser in Nikulin, 2012, pp. 83-120.
[99] The previous director was Gaiser, Szlezák followed him after his death in 1988.

method seems to be the most convincing criticism of writing and support for the theory of Unwritten Doctrines: it convinces in virtue of his earnest and detailed approach to what it is criticised. Before saying that the dialogues do not contain things of greater value, Szlezák reads them carefully and looks for the essence of Plato's philosophy in them. It could be said that he uses the same method as Schleiermacher, but ends up with opposite conclusions, and he does so intentionally, as it emerges in an appendix on the modern theory of the written dialogue toward the end of his main work on Plato.[100]

Giovanni Reale, Professor at Università Cattolica di Milano, during the late eighties, intentionally collocated himself in this tradition started with Krämer and Gaiser. His works on the Unwritten Doctrines are the most detailed and systematic on the topic and his monumental book *Per una nuova interpetazione di Platone* (originally published in 1984), has been translated in several languages (German, English, Spanish, Czech et alia). All this makes of him the most motivated exponent of this theory. Furthermore, he realised a meta-philosophical operation: while he intentionally joined this tradition, at the same time he defined the name and the common traits of this tradition. Hence, he has been not only an exponent of the tradition, but also the one who, more than other exponents, was aware of the common traits between different interpreters and of the potential impact of this innovative hermeneutic paradigm. In fact, he did not name this interpretative approach the "Unwritten Doctrines Theory", he rather called it "The New Hermeneutic Paradigm". Reale originally studied at Marburg under the influence of the Neokantian interpretation of Plato. His first explicit approach toward the theory of the platonic Unwritten Doctrines was early in the eighties when he had the chance to meet Krämer. After this meeting, Reale translated and edited a vast work by Krämer on the Unwritten Doctrines.[101] After this publication, many other publications on this theme followed. In the Università Cattolica di Milano, Reale also established the "Centro di Ricerche di Metafisica" where he was surrounded by a small group of students and scholars who came out with other relevant publications on the theme, as to create the effective circumstance to talk about a new hermeneutic paradigm on Plato's interpretation, held by the Tübingen-Milan school. This alliance was made official during a meeting in Tübingen on the 3rd of September 1996 when Krämer and Szlezák met with

[100] Cf. note 84.
[101] The work by Krämer is *Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics*, this work was originally published in Italian for the first time in 1982, the book was translated edited and introduced by Giovanni Reale.

Reale, some of his scholars and other relevant philosophers.[102] The main guest of this meeting was Hans-Georg Gadamer with whom Reale had already long-term links, since 1986. In previous and successive occasions to the meeting Tübingen,[103] Reale tried to outline the common aspects of Gadamer's reading of Plato and "The New Hermeneutic Paradigm" on Plato's interpretation. Doing so, Reale was looking for a stronger support to the theory of Unwritten Doctriness, but honestly, this support was never fully found in Gadamer who never adhered to the theories of the Tübingen-Milan school. The only valid link which has been confirmed by Gadamer, is the idea that Plato was in a sense anticipating the concept of "hermeneutical circle" in his critique of writing exposed in the final section of the *Phaedrus*. According to Reale, when Plato affirms that the written text is not autarchic and it needs support (*boetheia*), Plato means that oral dialectic should supplement the written text; and also that, without a set of pre-concepts and pre-knowledge, it would not be possible to understand any philosophical text.[104] These two elements related to the critique of writing in Plato are the link with Gadamer's own hermeneutics – as Reale pointed out and Gadamer seemingly agreed.[105] It does not seem possible to equate Gadamer's interpretation of Plato with the interpretation by the Tübingen-Milan school. In fact, the few connections that have been found by Reale are about Gadamer as philosopher and writer of *Truth and Method* and not to Gadamer as a philologist and interpreter of Plato. This comes out in the transcription of the conversation during the meeting in Tübingen on the 3rd of September 1996.[106] The transcription gives the impression that Gadamer did not really fit in that theoretical context as he disagreed openly with the theory of the Unwritten Doctrines. Specifically, in the introduction to the volume that contains this transcription, Gadamer says that Gaiser and Krämer had the merit of reinvigorating the contemporary debate around the interpretations of Plato, but he disagrees with the deductions (about the connections between Ontology, Geometry and Mathematics)[107] that the two philologists developed from the presumed platonic

[102] It is worth recalling also the participation of Maurizio Migliori, Giuseppe Girgenti, Günter Figal, Klaus Oehler, Ramón Arana, Rémi Brague, Jens Halfwassen and Dominique Richard.
[103] There are interviews that Gadamer released to Reale in occasion of their meeting in Tübingen in 1996 and in Heidelberg in 2000.
[104] Cf. *Introduzione all'edizione Bompiani* in Reale, 2010, pp. XIX-XXI.
[105] Girgenti, a cura di, 1998, pp. 10-11 and pp. 133-134.
[106] The transcription of the meeting has been edited by Giuseppe Girgenti and published in 1998 with the title *La nuova interpretazione di Platone*. The introduction of the volume has been written by Gadamer and at the end of the volume there is also an interview that Gadamer released to Reale in occasion of the meeting on 1996 in Tübingen.
[107] Girgenti, 1998, p. 20.

Lecture On the Good mentioned by Aristotle and his disciples. Gadamer also asserts that by no means, as an exponent of Hermeneutics, could he be convinced that the omissions in Plato's dialogues are a sending back to an esoteric oral doctrine.[108] Hence, Gadamer does not support this theory, but he is willing and open to the participation to the debate, as he believes that Plato's philosophy is always open and cannot be reduced to determined resolution.

Gadamer denies the tension between an oral theory and a written theory in Plato: he believes that there were oral teachings by Plato, but at the same time, he defends and sustains Schleiermacher's tradition to which he belongs. Moreover, Gadamer holds that Plato was aware of the failure of definition, as no philosophical concept can be fully determined nor orally neither by writing.[109] Under this perspective, Gadamer reads the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* not as an affirmation of the superiority of orality over writing, but rather as a platonic solicitation to look for the truth through the lively soul and not through external supports as writing.[110]

It is relevant that in this dissertation, place and consideration have been given to the Theory of Unwritten Doctrines and its main exponents. First, because their works are really detailed and incisive, particularly concerning the ontological analyses carried out in order to draw a more systematic reading of Plato's philosophy. Secondly, because they represent a determinant and revolutionary phase in the contemporary history of Plato's interpretation.[111] Thirdly, and especially, because this position is considered not sustainable in this dissertation, hence it has been necessary and fair to expose at least its main traits to highlight better the reasons for disagreeing with this position itself.

1.5. "He will sow gardens of letters for the sake of amusing himself"[112]

[108] Ivi, p. 21 and p. 118.
[109] Ivi, p. 36.
[110] Ivi, p. 32.
[111] A determinant feature of Reale's work, which has not been declared yet, is the relevance of the epistemological ground on which he intentionally builds his theory (and consequently drags on it the entire Tübingen-Milan School). This ground is explicitly Thomas Kuhn's Theory of Scientific Revolution. Reale believes that Kuhn's theory explains the revolutionary compass and the obvious rejections of the New Hermeneutic Paradigm in the interpretation of Plato held by the Tübingen-Milan School. There have been many criticisms about the New Hermeneutic Paradigm and also about its epistemological ground. Reale tries to defend his position and his use of Kuhn's Theory in the final appendix of his 2010 edition; in the appendix there are also a collection of Articles by Krämer and other scholars who defends the same position.
[112] *Phaedr*. 276d.

Bearing in mind the evaluations above, it seems appropriate to come back to Plato's writing itself and try to consider his criticism of writing in its general sense, before to move on to the next chapter.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter – Plato in the *Phaedrus* gives directions on how to compose good speeches (both oral and written). First of all, there is an advice to follow:

> I am not forcing anyone to learn how to make speeches without knowing the truth; on the contrary, my advice, for what it is worth, is to take me up only after mastering the truth. (*Phaedr*. 260d)

This is for what concerns the content of the speech, while for what concerns the structure of the speech it has to be an organic and ordinated structure, like a living body, as said earlier:

> Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own; it must be neither without head nor without legs; and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting both to one another and to the whole work. (*Phaedr*. 264c)

The fact that the good discourse has to be like a living body is a determinant aspect, not only for the platonic theory of speech-composition, but also for the structure of the dialectic method. The organic and living unity of a speech cannot be simply dismissed as a trick of the successful rhetorician; in fact, the last main feature of the good speech, detected by Plato, consists in the composition of speeches able to direct the soul.[113] This means that the *logoi* are designed around the soul of the listener/reader, hence around something that is alive and gives life to a body; but it means also that the direction of the soul (*psychagoge*) is the accomplishment of a good dialectical method (based on *diaharesis* and *synagoge*). These features of the good speech are gathered together, coherently, in a later passage:

[113] *Since the nature of speech is in fact to direct the soul, whoever intends to be a rhetorician must know how many kinds of soul there are*. (*Phaedr*. 271d)

> First, you must know the truth concerning everything you are speaking or writing about; you must learn how to define each thing in itself; and, having defined it, you must know how to divide it into kinds until you reach something indivisible. Second, you must understand the nature of the soul, along the same lines; you must determine which kind of speech is appropriate to each kind of soul, prepare and arrange your speech accordingly, and offer a complex and elaborate speech to a complex soul and a simple speech to a simple one. Then, and only then, will you be able to use speech artfully, to the extent that its nature allows it to be used that way, either in order to teach or in order to persuade. This is the whole point of the argument we have been making. (*Phaedr.* 277 b-c)

This is the best speech to compose, but Plato is nevertheless aware that even the best speech cannot ever be a sufficient tool to express the truth, as every speech (both oral and written) is always dependable on the mimetic mechanism for the reasons clearly exposed through the myth of Theut and in general for the weakness of the *logoi* themselves. This, far from preventing Plato from writing, rather leads him to redefine the context of use of writing. The *eide* (of justice, good and beauty)[114] can be grasped through a dialogical method (dialectic) and can be expressed with speeches (rhetoric); both dialectic and rhetoric are based on *logoi* which are the only tools available for the human beings, but they are *eidola*. Forced to dwell in the realm of *mimesis*, the philosopher can only admit that any attempt to express the highest truths it is like a joke (*paidia*)[115] and this is the correct way to value writing, as a simulation of sense.

To grasp a general sense of the platonic criticism of writing, it suffices to consider the themes exposed so far. However, these last observations need to be read in connection with the analyses that follow in the next two chapters, only in this way the criticism of writing can reach a better framing within Plato's works.

[114] For now, the *eidos* of beauty is classified equally among the other *eide*, while in the Third Chapter it is clarified the special status of this *eidos*.
[115] *Phaedr*. 276d.

SECOND CHAPTER

The critique of orality in Plato's works

The platonic critique of orality is conventionally located in two areas of Plato's works: in an early dialogue, the *Ion* and in some passages of the more famous dialogue the *Republic*.

In order to draft a more complete theory of orality in Plato, it would be relevant to consider also other dialogues, especially those that deal with the relation between philosophy and sophistry.[116] However, it has been decided to circumscribe the textual analysis mainly to these two dialogues as they contain a critique of oral tradition preserved and transmitted by ancient Greek Poetry; while the critique of oral speeches, such as those performed by sophists and rhetoricians, will just be referred to in a few circumstances, but it is not involved directly in the dissertation. By this, it is not meant to deny the relevance of this aspect of the oral production in Greek Culture, on the contrary: this aspect is itself as wide and articulated to deserve a more detailed and deeper analysis which could not find space in this dissertation.

Unlike the critique of writing, the critique of orality is not explicitly stated in Plato's dialogues and it appears often in connection with the more established and famous "platonic critique of the arts". In fact, the platonic critique of orality is not intended here as a critique of the oral exchange in the general sense, not even as a critique of the oral transmission of knowledge. It is rather intended as a critique of precise forms of orality: those performed by rhapsodes and by poets.

For all these reasons, this chapter exercises the same caution that has been used in regard to the critique of writing in the previous chapter. Generalisations and polarisations are avoided in favour of a more contextualised understanding which implies primarily the adherence to the original text – often quoted, then the recalling of multiple aspects of Plato's philosophy and also the contemporary consideration of cultural/anthropological aspects of Ancient Greek Culture.

[116] Specifically, the *Hippias Major*, *Gorgias*, *Protagoras* and *Sophist*. The *Sophist* is still consistently involved in this dissertation, towards the end of this chapter and the beginning of the third chapter, when the theme of *mimesis* comes to a more ontological level of analysis.

The first Section of this Chapter deals with the genealogy of the contemporary focus on orality and it also introduces the critique of orality in the *Ion*. The second and third sections deal with different aspects of the critique of orality in the *Republic*. The last two sections gather the manifold elements of the platonic critique of oral poetry and aims to link together some of these elements with the wider theme of the ontology of the image.

2.1. Orality and Vocality

It is likely that Ion never existed. This character who gives the name to the early platonic dialogue[117] seems to be tailored to fit perfectly to the stereotype of the rhapsode. In virtue of this, any detail provided about this character can be taken as a valuable indication to understand the sense of the platonic critique of orality. Being an early dialogue, the presence of Socrates in it is predominant and the dialogue veers often towards aporetic passages.

As soon as the dialogue starts, Ion appears in the most beautiful dress: he is a successful rhapsode who returns gloriously to Athens after a poetic competition. Immediately, the reader of the dialogue is pushed to feel admiration for this character and for the benefits of his art. The reasons why this feeling is evoked here are precisely listed by a praise-giving Socrates. First, a rhapsode has to always look beautiful and his body has to always be dressed up; then, a rhapsode spends most of the time "having his mind occupied with many good poets, especially with the divine Homer";[118] last, a rhapsode learns not only the words of the poets, but also their thoughts (*dianoia*). With this list of praiseworthy attributes, Socrates wants to identify the three main traits of the rhapsodic art: the beauty

[117] This brief but meaningful platonic dialogue has been considered inauthentic for too many decades due to the long-lasting and influential opinion of two relevant philosophers such as Goethe and Schleiermacher who asserted that the dialogue could not be authentic, but it was probably a joke or a bad imitation of a platonic dialogue (Cf. Reale, 2001, pp. 7-20). Only with a more complete understanding of the Greek oral culture it was possible to have a correct integration of this dialogue in the platonic production which, considering the style and the themes dealt with is conventionally collocated among the dialogues of the early period -most likely after the *Euthyphro*, but before the *Hippias Major* (Cf. Adorno, 2008, p. 24). Eric Havelock represents the most influential interpreter of the theory of orality in Greek Culture, especially in relation to Plato's dialogues. Surprisingly enough, his main work *Preface to Plato*, although is a determinant source of information to understand the main arguments of the *Ion*, never addresses this early dialogue, but focuses only on the *Republic* and on a few other dialogues mainly used as references.
[118] *Ion* 530c.

of appearances; being occupied with poets as qualifying activity; the ability to understand the *dianoia* of the poets as a specific skill of the good rhapsode.

That seemingly innocuous praise, with its layers of meaning, leads Ion straight into multiple aporias and these start from the moment that Ion proudly accepts the praises and recognises himself in these three traits. With Ion's consent, Socrates chases him through the dialogue in an articulated web which has at its philosophical core the themes of *techne* and *episteme*. In fact, the very early admission of understanding not only the words, but also the thoughts of the poets, is what makes Ion fall into the web.

However, the most relevant descriptive element in the prologue of the *Ion* is the ambiguous word that Socrates chooses to define the role of Ion – in relation to the understanding of the poets, that is *hermeneus*. This term is ambiguous in itself, but specifically because of the uses that are made of it in the dialogue. Sometimes, as in this early occurrence, *hermeneus* refers to the technical meaning of "literary exegete",[119] other times, as shown later in this chapter, it refers to the generic meaning of "interpreter".

Before delving deeper into these central aspects of the dialogue, it is important to analyse and make explicit the extent to which the definition of the rhapsode that Socrates attributes to Ion corresponds to the cultural/social figure of the rhapsode. Hence, an excursus about the cultural role of the rhapsode is necessary not only to fill the gap of meaning that sets after twenty-six centuries, but also and especially, to understand the gap of meaning that comes between a preliterate, oral-based culture which was shifting towards literacy, as the one in which the fictious rhapsode Ion lived, and a post-literate[120] culture, as the one in which we live.

Among the different etymological hypotheses, the most convincing is that claiming the term rhapsode originated from the verb *rhaptein* (to sew) in conjunction with *aoide* (songs).[121] According to this, the rhapsode was a sewer of songs, but this does not give any specific element of distinction about the rhapsodic art. In addition, according to this definition, the rhapsode is not very different from a poet and this seems to be true not only in terms of etymology, but also in factual terms. In fact, in the *Republic* Plato defines

[119] Cf. Rijksbaron, 2007, pp. 124-128.
[120] The term post-literate here refers to our contemporary culture, strongly affected by communication formats emerged with the media revolution in the 60's. The term is taken by Orville Jenkins, 2006.
[121] This etymology can be attributed to Dionysus Thrax, *Techne Grammatike*, I, I, 8, 5. For this etymology, cf. the accurate analysis by Capuccino, 2005, pp. 263-273.

Homer and Hesiod, who were the most emblematic poets of his culture, as rhapsodes. [122] Consequently, the challenge now consists in understanding why these terms and these roles were interchangeable. The solution to this can be found only by questioning the contemporary way of considering Ancient Greek poetry.

The most established contemporary interpretation of Ancient Greek Poetry focuses on the original oral-mnemonic aspect of poetry. Eric Havelock became the representative of this revolutionary tradition, known as the Harvard School. The Harvard School tradition is the main theoretical model referred to in this chapter.

Eric Havelock, a disciple of Milman Parry and Alfred Lord, continued and further elaborated on the investigation into oral poetry which his colleagues started in the second and third decades of the Twentieth Century. What Parry found out, on the basis of the theories held earlier by the linguist Antoine Meillet (who was Parry's Supervisor at *Sorbonne*), is that the use of formulas, epithets and certain sets of adjectives in Homeric Epics was functional to oral memorisation, hence to oral transmission. Therefore, the choice of words by Epic Poets was not made primarily considering the meaning of the terms, but mainly the rhythm and the fitting of the words themselves in the structure of the hexameter. This theory, based on an accurate philological work, was reinforced by a couple of trips that Parry took to Ex-Yugoslavia, first on his own, then with Lord. During these trips, they investigated and recorded the still living phenomenon of oral, traditional poetry memorised and performed by Yugoslavian bards.[123] Parry's method of investigation – continued by Lord after Parry's premature death – combining Greek Philology, Slavic Studies and Anthropology, resulted highly original and, although it was made possible by a series of favourable circumstances,[124] it is a distinctive sign of his time.

Havelock later noticed that his own work, *Preface to Plato*, was part of a wider cultural momentum and also an outcome of a general, intellectual inclination towards the role of

[122] *Resp.* 600d.
[123] Parry, 1971, *Introduction*.
[124] Milman Parry acknowledges the relevance of the theories elaborated by Mathias Murko, Professor of Jugoslavic Poetry in Prague, for his own research, Parry 1971, p. 439. Meillet introduced M. Parry to Murko and, according to Adam Parry (son of Milman Parry), it is likely that Murko's work suggested to M.Parry the possibility of finding a living poetry tradition analogue to the Homeric one, Parry, 1971, p. xxiv.

orality and its relation to literacy in the history of human culture. This inclination is a very contemporary one and Havelock points to the 1963 as the watershed year:

> The year 1963 provides a convenient watershed: or perhaps better a date when a dam in the modern consciousness appears to burst, releasing a flood of startled recognitions of a host of related facts. To be sure, some notice of the role of the spoken as opposed to the written tongue goes back to the eighteenth century, and more recently field anthropologists have compiled extensive reports of "primitive" societies (meaning nonliterate ones) which have indirectly pointed to the need for a category of human communication designated as primary orality. But the suggestion took the form of a firm concept only after 1963 […]. Within the span of twelve months or less, from some time in 1962 to the spring of 1963, in three different countries – France, Britain, and the United States – there issued from the printing presses five publications by five authors who at the time when they wrote could not have been aware of any mutual relationship. The works in question were *La Pensée Sauvage* (Levi-Strauss), "The Consequences of Literacy" (Goody and Watt, an extended article), *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (McLuhan), *Animal Species and Evolution* (Mayr), and *Preface to Plato* (Havelock).[125]

After 1963, argues Havelock, the focus on the *Oral Problem* has been predominant in academic and specialised publications. This focus on orality, mainly on an anthropological level, lasted for at least twenty years and culminated with Walter Ong's work, *Orality and Literacy* (1982), which also has the merit of tracing back the modern-contemporary history of this theme.

How and why the study of orality produced so much evidence to support an oral theory of Ancient Greek Poetry before the watershed year. In answer to this question, Havelock refers to the widespread use of radio and its impact, especially during the Second World War;[126] he also refers to the relevance of anthropological investigations which produced "cross-cultural collisions" by showing the existence of non-literate cultures based on

[125] Havelock, 1986, pp. 24-25.

[126] In line with this are also some evaluation by McLuhan. I.e.: *Our Western values, built on the written word, have already been considerably affected by the electric media of telephone, radio, and TV. Perhaps that is the reason why many highly literate people in our time find it difficult to examine this question without getting into a moral panic. There is the further circumstance that, during his more than two thousand years of literacy, Western man has done little to study or to understand the effects of the phonetic alphabet in creating many of his basic patterns of culture. To begin now to examine the question may, therefore, seem too late*. McLuhan, 1994, p. 82.

orality still at his time.[127] Havelock's answers offer determinant elements to understand the relevance of orality on that cultural scene. Nevertheless, as a Greek Philologist, hence as a historian of Greek written language, Havelock probably underestimates the impact of another approach to language that flourished before the watershed year and that has a common origin with his own tradition which started with Parry.

As said, Parry had been Meillet's student in Paris; Meillet was a Greek Philologist, a Slavic and Oriental Languages Philologist and a Linguist. In his cultural development, at the very end of the Nineteenth Century, an important role was played in the teaching of Comparative Grammar at the *École Pratique des Autes Études* in Paris by Ferdinand de Saussure, considered the founder of the Structuralism and Modern Linguistics. A proficient elaboration of de Saussure's theses was carried out some years later in Moscow by a very talented scholar, Roman Jakobson who then became the most relevant exponent of Structuralism. Although he went through many political misadventures, Jakobson obtained his Ph.D. at the German University of Prague in 1930 with the dissertation *Über den Versbau der serbokroatischen Volksepen*[128] (On the Verse-Making of the Serbocroatian Popular Epic). During the same year, Parry published, in the *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, an essay entitled "Studies in the Epic Technique of Verse-Making. I. Homer and the Homeric Style"[129] and just a few years later, he left for his first trip in Ex-Jugoslavia to record the still existing oral tradition of Serbocroatian popular epic performed by bards. Until this point, the Greek Philological tradition from Harvard and the Structuralist movement evolved parallel (consciously or not – it is impossible to ascertain) around common-rooted themes, but when Parry died in 1935 the two paths evolved differently. As said, Parry's tradition was brought forward by Lord and subsequently by Havelock. While Jakobson, well before the watershed year, spread the Structuralism not only to another continent but also to other subjects. In fact, when the Nazi invasion forced him to escape first in Scandinavia and then to New York, he had already theorised the necessity to apply the Structuralist method not only to Linguistics, but also to other disciplines. Beginning as a theory, this became a real approach in the work of the Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss who met Jakobson for the first time in 1941, in New York as a colleague at the *École Libre des Hautes Études*.

[127] Havelock, 1986.
[128] https://libraries.mit.edu/archives/research/collections/collections-mc/mc72.html#ref8425
[129] Parry, 1971, pp. 266-324.

Hence, the answer to the question on how it was possible, during the decades that preceded the watershed year, that a research on orality encouraged further elaboration on a sophisticated theory of the oral origin of Ancient Greek Poetry, is: through the specific attention to language and theory of communication that flourished in the first half of the Twentieth Century.

Here has been traced just a brief account of this cultural focus on language, and this partiality is in virtue of its connection with the established tradition to which Havelock belongs and that is the favoured theoretical position of this chapter – with some limits and objections.

While, the answer to why many reflections on orality emerged from a structuralist analysis of language, is essentially intertwined with anthropology. The need to analyse language and its structure is exacerbated already at the end of the Nineteenth Century as to lead, during the Twentieth Century, to a de-construction of language in order to find the original sense of language and communication. The strongest interest behind the over-analyses of language does not seem to be primarily functional or manipulative. In fact, at first, Linguistics and Philology do not aim forward; instead, they look back, but not necessarily along a temporal line. The analytic approach aims to trace back the roots as to reach the genesis and the origin of language. Hence, the archaeological attempt to unearth the origin of what is intrinsically human (language and communication) is the point of connection between Linguistics and Anthropology.

In virtue of a common origin and of a same striving, the two disciplines compenetrate and support each other:

> The linguist provides the anthropologist with etymologies which permit him to establish between certain kinship terms relationships that were not immediately apparent. The anthropologist, on the other hand, can bring to the attention of the linguist customs, prescriptions and prohibitions that help him to understand the persistence of certain features of language or the instability of terms or groups of terms.[130]

[130] Lévi-Strauss, 1963, p. 32.

This connection between Linguistics and Anthropology is obvious in European culture at least since Rousseau's *Noble Sauvage*.[131] In fact, there is a line of continuity from Rousseau to Lévi-Strauss,[132] a line that Derrida names *phonocentrism* and that is one expression of the characterising western philosophical default, otherwise known as logocentrism which namely means "metaphysics of phonetic writing" .[133]

In simpler terms, the basis on which Anthropology builds its structure is, actually, a transition: the transition from nature to culture. The principal symptom of this transition is detected in language which has its own phases and inner transitions – such as the transition from orality to literacy. The contemporary attention towards orality as opposed to literacy – on a linguistic level as much as on an anthropological level – and the amount of research developed around this theme, offered a determinant input to the interpretation of Ancient Greek Poetry.

The issue of the oral origin of Ancient Greek Poetry was already debated in antiquity,[134] especially in regard to the Homeric Poems. The issue was much broader as to become institutionalised under the name of the *Homeric Question* during the Nineteenth Century.

Some aspects of the *Homeric Question* were already investigated in the Sixteenth Century,[135] but it is only during the Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Century that the *Question* reaches its full awareness and legitimacy thanks to a stricter philological approach, especially by German philologists. Core issues of the *Question* are: if there was a unique author or different authors behind the *Iliad* and behind the *Odyssey*; if this author was the author of both works; if there was an original kernel around which the poems developed later; if the original kernel was written down first or was originally oral. It is natural to notice that the issue of authorship is interdependent with the issue of writing. In fact, if the poems, or at least their central kernel, were originally written down, then

[131] Some anthropological reflections on the origin of language in the primitive and ancient cultures can be found the work of Giambattista Vico (i.e. *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia, ex linguae latinae originibus eruenda*, 1710; *Scienza Nuova*, 1744). It is likely that Vico's *Scienza Nuova* influenced Rousseau's theory on the origin of language and for sure Condillac's theories influenced Rousseau. However, first, in his *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundation of Inequality among Men* (1755) and then in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (1781), Rousseau has the merit to theorise an evolution of human language from unarticulated primary sounds (to ask help, to grieve), to a deictic and imitative stage (metaphoric) and finally to a complex grammar structure (from which follows literacy), and all this without recurring to a theological foundation.
[132] Derrida dedicates the entire Second Part of *Of Grammatology* to this continuity.
[133] Derrida, 1997, p. 3.
[134] Ong, 1982, p. 18.
[135] Cf. D'Aubignac, 1715; Vico, 1744; Wood, 1769; Rousseau, 1781; Wolf, 1795.

there is no doubt that there was only one author per poem and from that it could be analysed, through stylometry, whether both poems were written by the same author or not. Instead, if the origin of the works was oral, then there must have been more than one author to transmit (in different places and at different times) the poems with slight personal variations from the original kernel, and all these variations contributed to refine the work until the point it was written down as we know it in the age of Pisistratus.[136]

The main views on the *Question* are at least two and they are opposed: one view denies a unique authorship and a written origin of the Homeric Poems; the other, unitarian view considers the poems as works of one and same author. The variations and oppositions internal to the first view on the *Homeric Question* are many and well supported based on textual, linguistical, historical and anthropological analyses. In the unitarian view there are also differences and variations, but in general this view is supported by whomever embraces a literary approach to the *Question*. This approach prefers to look backward, before the fracture of the *Homeric Question* was posed, in order to keep considering the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as literary masterpieces composed by one and same author. The problems of this view are many, for example, there has not been any convincing explanation on how these poems were composed, and furthermore, the fact that there was a very limited use of writing at the time the poems were supposedly written is ignored. However, the main problem of this view – a problem that can be ascribed also to the opposing view – is that there is a lack of hermeneutic perspective. In fact, both views often considered Ancient Greek Poetry as an art-product similar to Modern and Contemporary Poetry. It means that an ancient phenomenon has been mis-interpreted with modern categories:

> The assumption that in retrospect seems to have been common to all the analyst scholars, underlying all the erudition and ingenuity of their constructions, that Homeric poetry was essentially poetry like ours, only subject to peculiar distortion and development in its transmission, was more harmful finally to their work than the qualities for which they have been frequently taken to task: their dogmatic presentation of guesswork, their revealing disagreements with each other.[137]

[136] Lachmann, 1847, pp. 31-33.
[137] Parry, 1971, p. xviii.

The entire *Homeric Question* would actually deserve at least a chapter, but it is not entirely relevant here.[138] In fact, to follow up the historical development of the *Question* would not be beneficial for this dissertation, as it "had taken on a life of its own that overwhelmed the poetry. For the sake of scoring points against opponents, it had become scholarly practice to disparage the ancient epics themselves." [139] This is one reason to focus instead on some of the positive developments in relation to the *Homeric Question* carried out by the tradition started with Parry.

Milman Parry's approach, as shown, was very much a child of his time, but it was also revolutionary, especially for its capacity to find another way out of the *Homeric Question*. In fact, Parry's studies on the Homeric Verse highlighted how the choice of words for the verse was made primarily to pander to the hexameter's structure without sacrificing the meaning. This also explains the recurrent use of epithets and formulas in Homeric Epics.

This finding says something very important about the origin of Greek Poetry: the rhythm of the words was more important than their semantic. Hence, these words were initially put together to be heard and not to be read, or better, they were put together to be easily uttered, then to be captivatingly heard. It must be acknowledged that for this type of oral literature, poetic composition is completely different from the modern conception of poetic composition and this aspect emerges mainly from the investigations developed by Albert Lord in Ex-Yugoslavia. While there is a temporal gap between composition and reading/performance in a literary poem; instead, in the case of an oral poem "[…]composition and performance are two aspects of the same moment. […] An oral poem is not composed *for* but *in* performance." [140] By studying the Slavic Tradition, Lord realises that illiteracy is a common feature in oral poetic traditions. In fact, in a literary culture writing substitutes and then replaces the function of oral narrative songs.[141] This

[138] For further information of the *Homeric Question* it is recommended the reading of: Parry, 1971; Ong, 1982; Nagy, 1996; Morris and Powell, 1997.
[139] Turner, F.M. in Morris and Powell ed., 1997, p. 138.
[140] Lord, 1971, p. 13.
[141] Ivi, p. 20. The connection between illiteracy and oral culture has been widely studied not only in relation to Ancient Greek poetry and to Slavic tradition, but also in relation to native communities of Africa (cf. Finnegan, 1976 and 1988) and Americas (Levi-Strauss, 1961). The decision of excluding other exempla in this context does not depend on the relevance of these studies, it rather depends on the need to circumscribe the study on the phenomenon Ancient Greek Poetry.

is one of the reasons why it is not possible to read and interpret Ancient Greek Poetry in the same way as Modern Poetry.

At this stage, enough elements have been covered to allow the exploration into the difference between a poet and a rhapsode in Ancient Greek Poetry. It can be supposed that the moment when the creative action of the poet and the performing action ceased to be simultaneous corresponds most likely to the moment when literacy became a social and cultural reality. When epic was institutionalised and put down in writing, the terms *aedos*,[142] rhapsode and poet overlapped determining also a reduction of improvisation in the mimetic oral repetition.

At the time of Socrates, rhapsodes were professional reciters who had a determinant role during religious and social celebrations; although their role declined over the centuries because of the dominant role that theatre conquered, they were still a traditional institution in Classical Greece. Their role was institutionalised and it was perceived as a social need precisely because of the oral origin of Greek Poetry. In fact, before Homeric Poems were written down, the rhapsodes were the depositaries and transmitters – made out of flesh and blood – of those epic hexameters. It must be clarified that these poetic performances were not meant to be entertaining primarily, they meant to preserve a heritage of notions and hence to be educative tools for shaping social identity. As a matter of fact, according to Havelock's studies, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were like social encyclopaedia[143] of an entire culture.

Rhapsodes would perform passages from epic poems in front of a vast audience and possibly partake in competitions. The parameters of the competitions were certainly relied on memory as a skill, but not mainly. It seems very clear from the origin of their profession that rhapsodes had no authorship or compositional skills. Before the spread use of writing, rhapsodes were supposed to perform by sewing together different passages that they had learnt by heart through the previous listening to other rhapsodes. They would sew availing of formulas and epithets and obeying primarily to the rhythm and to the structure of the verse. Even after the writing down of traditional epic verses, rhapsodes still performed the same sewing process by oral performances. The writing down of the

[142] This is the technical Greek term to refer to the singer of poems who would compose and perform at the same time. In the Homeric Poems there are frequent reference to this social character who was able to compose and sing in improvisation. Cf. Parry, 1971, p. XVI.
[143] Havelock, 1963, pp. 61-86.

verses, allowed them to save energy on memorisation and to focus even better on the emotional bond with the audience. It is not a coincidence that the century in which Socrates lived (and the fictitious Ion is located) was the century in which rhetoric and sophistry flourished. Hence, the parameters of the rhapsodic competitions were mainly depending on the ability of the rhapsode of captivating, moving and shaking the souls of the audience. In certain ways, writing empowered some forms of orality and this is another reason for not thinking about orality/writing as an opposition, but rather as an anthropological shift.

Recapitulating from Socrates' praise to the evaluations carried so far, it can be said a good rhapsode was beautifully looking in order to be liked by the audience; also, he had his mind occupied with good poets. However, was he really supposed to understand the *dianoia* of the poets?

In the light of the above, Ion does not have to understand the thoughts of the poets, he only had to repeat the words (which, at his time were already immobilised in writing) previously memorised and he has to transmit irrational feelings through the repetition of these words. It is true that, once the poems were written down, the rhapsode became a sort of literary exegete, a *hermeneus*, but never a composer himself. The *aedos* was a composer and singer of verses at the same time; the poet was a composer of verses; the rhapsode was just a reciter of what had already been composed.

Behind Socrates' praise, especially on the third point about the understanding of the thought, there is a provocation. The provocation aims to show and to make Ion aware, in a perfect Socratic style, that the rhapsode cannot have knowledge of the thought of the poets, because he cannot even give account of his own *techne*. In fact, Ion has no *techne* as having a *techne* means having mastery of the chosen art as a whole: it means to know and to be able to explain what you do, how you do it, why you do it and what is its purpose. Instead, the only thing Ion knows is that he is the most talented in talking about Homer, and only about Homer, in the most beautiful way.[144] The very point of weakness is this uniqueness. Socrates claims that if someone masters a *techne*, then he masters this *techne* as a whole and not just a specific trait:

[144] *Ion* 533c.

> SOCRATES: […] Anybody could understand what I meant: don't you use the same discipline throughout whenever you master the whole of a subject? Take this for discussion—painting is a subject to be mastered as a whole, isn't it? […] Have you ever known anyone who is clever at showing what's well painted and what's not in the work of Polygnotus, but who's powerless to do that for other painters? […]
>
> ION: Good lord no, of course not! […]
>
> SOCRATES: And further, it is my opinion, you've never known anyone ever—not in flute-playing, not in cithara-playing, not in singing to the cithara, and not in rhapsodizing—you've never known a man who is clever at explaining Olympus or Thamyrus or Orpheus or Phemius, the rhapsode from Ithaca, but who has nothing to contribute about Ion, the rhapsode from Ephesus, and cannot tell when he does his work well and when he doesn't—you've never known a man like that.
>
> ION: I have nothing to say against you on that point, Socrates. But *this* I know about myself: I speak about Homer more beautifully than anybody else and I have lots to say; and everybody says I do it well. But about the other poets I do not. Now see what that means.
>
> SOCRATES: I do see, Ion, and I'm going to announce to you what I think that is. As I said earlier, that's not a subject you've mastered—speaking well about Homer; it's a divine power that moves you […] (*Ion* 532e-533c)

The words that Ion performs orally seem to be very similar to the written words of Lysia's speech in the *Phaedrus*. These words are orphans, no one owns them and defends them, they are just repeated and heard. They cannot express any knowledge (*episteme*) because whoever reproduces them has no knowledge of what he is talking about, but has only an appearance of knowledge.

> But *you*, Ion, you're doing me wrong, if what you say is true that what enables you to praise Homer is knowledge or mastery of a profession. […] You aren't even willing to tell me what it is that you're so wonderfully clever *about*, though I've been begging you for ages. Really, you're just like Proteus, you twist up and down and take many different shapes, till finally you've escaped me. (*Ion* 542a)

Rhapsodising is similar to painting or acting. A painter does not have to be a craftsman to paint a bed, just as an actor does not have to be a king to represent a king on the stage, just as a rhapsode does not have to be a general to speak about war strategy in Homeric

poems. These arts imitate, and not without purpose, Socrates refers to the art of painting[145] and to the art of sculpting as comparisons for the art of rhapsody. The comparison is actually wider and continues referring also to the art of flute-playing, cithara-playing and singing. It seems pretty clear that what connects painting and sculpting to rhapsodising is *mimesis* (imitation/representation). However, what is it that binds together flute, cithara and singing to rhapsody? The answer is rhythm. Rhythm itself is a support of memory and of *mimesis*. The relevance of this supporting role can be better understood only considering the other half of the rhapsodic performance.

So far, the role of the audience participating to rhapsodic recitals has not been considered much. The audience is the other half of the performance itself, as the performance is a real exchange between the rhapsode and his public. The exchange happens through the voice uttered by the rhapsode and heard by the audience, but there is a much wider involvement, the involvement of the entire soul (*psyche*) and of the entire body. Very often, the audience would not just listen, but it would participate actively imitating the rhapsode: repeating the verses and dancing according to the rhythm of the hexameter punctuated by music that always accompanied these performances. The rhapsodic recitals were a totalising experience that would release the *psyche* from anxieties and relax the body from tensions, as if the audience was almost hypnotised and dragged by rhythmic words and music. This type of performances did not aim only to preserve the culture of a commonalty through the repetition of its epos, but also to urge pleasure and recreation, in other words "the Muse, the voice of instruction, was also the voice of pleasure." [146]

There are two features about Ion's art on which Socrates insists more than once. First, Ion does not even have a *techne*, neither he has *dianoia* of the thoughts of the poets; hence he performs his art without awareness. His knowledge is not rational; it is not mastered, as he cannot explain what it is. His knowledge is irrational, and this is the second point that Socrates stresses. Ion seems to be only an instrument, a vehicle, better a *hermeneus* (now used in the sense of intermediator) between the Muses and the audience. Maybe he has not a *techne*, but he has a *mania* (madness) and the ability to transmit it as much as to

[145] Cf. also *Resp.* 198b.
[146] Havelock, 1963, p. 152.

make *entheoi*[147] also the members of the audience. Ion's *mania* is categorised in between other irrational activities which were part of the spiritual and religious heritage of Ancient Greek Culture. These *maniai*[148] were both non-rational and non-conscious, although they were not related to a pathological state, rather, they were mostly considered a source of authority.[149] In the *Ion*, in the *Symposium*, in the *Phaedrus* and also in the *Timaeus* Plato refers to the *mania* as something necessary to be in contact with the gods and gain knowledge from them.[150] To engage in divination a human being has to lose control of his/her mind as to let the good to take possession of his/her soul.[151] The most established account of this madness comes from the *Phaedrus* where Socrates, in order to strengthen the positive source of love-madness, states that "the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god." [152]. The divine madness, or else *mania*, has different forms of expression among humans, such as: prophecies and predictions; mystic rites and purifications; "[…] possession by the Muses, which takes a tender virgin soul and awakens it to a Bacchic frenzy of songs and poetry that glorifies the achievements of the past and teaches them to future generations." [153] – this is precisely the mania that Ion expresses; and last, erotic madness that arises in the soul of the person who has fallen in love.

Being *entheos*, as every maniac is and as Ion is, means to be dispossessed of the soul and this is the very reason why Ion has no responsibility for what he does.

By calling the poetic *mania* as a *deus ex machina* on the scene of the *Ion*, Socrates denies any form of rationality to the art of rhapsody. Ion is simply a voice possessed by the Muses and he sings Homer not for choice, but almost for an innate talent, or more precisely for *theia moira*,[154] divine fate. *Moira* is the portion of fate that happens to each

[147] Technically the Ancient Greek term *entheos* means "full of god", or else "filled by god". It refers to the phenomenon of divine inspiration, when a prophet or a poet would lose control over his own soul and would be possessed by a god. Cf. Velardi, 1989.
[148] For an accurate reflection on these forms of sacred madness, cf. Chap. III in Dodds, 1951.
[149] Hatab, 1990, p. 57.
[150] It is typical of ancient cultures to consider divine madness as a form of knowledge, but Ancient Greek Culture was definitely giving to sacred madness a privileged role also in public and politic life, as much as madness was considered the origin of knowledge. Cf. Colli, 1975, pp. 15-21.
[151] *Tim.* 71e.
[152] *Phaedr*. 244a.
[153] Ivi, 245a.
[154] *Ion*, 534c. *Theia moira* (literally "divine partition") is the very same terminology that Plato attributes to Socrates when this last one tries to explain what is that "voice" that pushes him to speak and act rightly, cf. *Apol*. 33c. Jean-Luc Nancy insists on the vocal aspect of the rhapsodic activity, considering it as a partition

and every human being, it is personal and unique. For Ion his *moira* corresponds to his voice. Considering the role and the type of performance in Ancient Greek Poetry, it is deducible that the voice of the rhapsode has a sensorial surplus if compared to the contemporary idea of orality: it is more material and physical because it has a rhythm and a melody which are specific traits of identity and are bearers of meaning, a meaning that it is not necessarily rational.[155] Hearing, in Ancient Greek Culture, was the predominant sense, especially before the spread of literacy which instead, through the introduction of the alphabet,[156] involves vision. Archaic Greek Culture is oral-based, or better, vocal-based in a way that it is very difficult to imagine for a contemporary reader. In fact, to accept the complete lack of responsibility and the complete passivity of the rhapsode Ion, it has to be understood that the psychology (literary, the structure of the soul) of a Greek Poet had not consciousness and not precise idea of the self, hence lacked completely of self-consciousness. Some vocal messages, accompanied and emphasised by the rhythm of music, were stored passively and would be recalled with the same passivity, almost in a state of trance. Some studies convincingly showed that in Greek Archaic Culture auditory hallucinations[157] would work as nowadays intuition and visualisation work and self-identity would be better identified with the personal voice rather than by self-consciousness.

The opposition to orality that Plato expressed through Socrates' hunt of the rhapsode, it is actually, but partially, also criticism to a vocal based psychology. The "new-born" philosophy is a reaction to the archaic culture based on vocality, irrationality and passivity. Socrates' quest for truth cannot accept any ready-made, impersonal, uncontrollable and especially easy-to-repeat *logos*. The soul, which is the tool of the philosopher, has to be readable, tided up and purified of any form of irrationality.

> But to see the soul as it is in truth, we must not study it as it is while it is maimed by its association with the body and other evils—which is what we were doing earlier—but as it is in its pure state, that's how we should study the soul, thoroughly and by means of logical

of the divine voice itself as if the personal voice represents the personal identity, the individual soul of each human being. Cf. Nancy, 1993, pp. 65-sgg.

[155] Cf. the analyses developed by Cavarero, 2003.

[156] Most likely spread by the mid-eight century BCE. Cf. Havelock, 1986, p. 63.

[157] With this term Julian Jaynes refers to the "auditory hallucinations" that were typical of prophets and god-possessed human beings, cf. Jaynes, 1976, pp. 340-341.

> reasoning. We'll then find that it is a much finer thing than we thought and that we can see justice and injustice as well as all the other things we've discussed far more clearly. What we've said about the soul is true of it as it appears at present. But the condition in which we've studied it is like that of the sea god Glaucus, whose primary nature can't easily be made out by those who catch glimpses of him. Some of the original parts have been broken off, others have been crushed, and his whole body has been maimed by the waves and by the shells, seaweeds, and stones that have attached themselves to him, so that he looks more like a wild animal than his natural self. The soul, too, is in a similar condition when we study it, beset by many evils. (*Resp.* 611b-d)

2.2. Myth and Philosophy

If on the one hand, *logos* – intended as rational reasoning – and *dialogos* (especially the one that occurs within the soul) are the tools and the gifts of the philosopher; then, on the other hand, performance and *mania* (specifically the one that comes from the Muses) are the tools and the gifts of the poet. The philosopher detects and sets this opposition on the battlefield of the soul. However, the opposition seems to be unjust as the poet is not aware of it, he is not even aware of the readability of his soul. The poet speaks and hears material words; he does not have inner dialogues made out of immaterial words – as the philosopher does. In addition, the poet is not in control of his soul, his soul is at the service of the Muses, it is the channel of poetic madness. The philosopher instead knows his own soul and makes it disciplined to serve the *logos*.

Plato can be considered the first author to set out the opposition between myth and philosophy, but very often Plato identifies myth with the entire contents of the oral tradition, to the point that he considers the poet not simply a myth-teller, but also a myth-maker.[158] The differences between philosopher and poet are multiple and widely expressed by Plato throughout his dialogues. Nevertheless, there is one difference which expresses an opposition between poet and philosopher, a difference which remains blurred compared to the others, although it says a lot about the cultural shift from an oral culture to a literate culture. The theme of this opposition is memory: the memory of the poet is a goddess; the memory of the philosopher is coincident with true knowledge.

[158] Naddaf, G. in Wians, ed. by, pp. 101-102.

The exercise of memorisation, as it can be understood nowadays, is a phaenomenon that appeared in Greece only at the beginning of the IV Century BCE among literate intellectuals,[159] almost as a necessary technique to acquire for the exercise of rhetoric. Back in Archaic Greece, the poets' memory was personified with the goddess Mnemosyne (literary, remembrance). Mnemosyne as a goddess did not have any direct communication with the poet, she availed of a more sophisticated system of communication which is the poetic *mania* given to the poets in different ways, via the intercession of different Muses. Hence, Mnemosyne communicates with the poets through the Muses, and the Muse sings to the audience through the voice of the poet. The real gift of the poet is not simply to sing; rather it is to be able to hear the voice of the Muses during a maniac trance.

The nine sisters known as Muses retain the heritage of Mnemosyne as they are her daughters. The Muses can be considered the guardians of social memory, a form of memory preserved and transmitted in spoken speech.[160] They are very representative of the oral culture to the point that the preservation of social memory, as well as the role of the Muses changed slowly with the progressive introduction of literacy in Greek Culture, up to the point that their influence on poets was no longer functional, but simply inspirational.

In Greek Epics, at the beginning of any poem, the poet addresses the Muses asking them to sing something to him so that then he would be able to sing it himself to his audience. Almost as if by searching for the voices of the Muses, the poet indeed searches for that voice which would help him to sing: the inner voice of memory. With the support of writing, poets did not need to hear the sound of that voice as much as they did in the past. In fact, the words were put down and became visible. Nevertheless, poets and rhapsodes kept invoking the Muses at least as an inspirational ritual. The Muses are not only daughters of Mnemosyne, but also of Zeus. This makes their genealogy not only culturally relevant but also religiously relevant. They are as functional as solemn; also, being almost a choir, they needed a lead which was taken by Apollo, the Greek god of Poetry. The Muses were specialised in different artistic disciplines representative of an archaic, oral-based culture. Their own names reveal their primary belonging to an oral culture. In

[159] Havelock, 1986, p. 80.
[160] Ivi, p. 79.

conventional order: Cleio (Celebrator) represented History; Euterpe (Delighter) represented Lyric Poetry; Thaleia (Luxuriator) represented Comedy; Melpomene (Song Player) represented Tragedy; Terpsichore (Dance-Delighter) represented Choral Lyric and Dance; Erato (Enrapturer) represented Erotic Poetry; Polyhymnia (Hymnal Player) represented Ritual Dance and Sacred Singing; Urania (Heaven Dweller) represented Astrology; Calliope (Fair-Speaker) represented Eulogy.

The contents of Greek Poetry were conveyed to the poets by the voice of the Muses. The Epic Poet who more than anyone else was able to categorise clearly what the voice of the Muses told him, was Hesiod. In the Proem of the *Theogony*, while invoking the Muses for inspiration, Hesiod gives relevant information about the cultural role of the nine sisters. Specifically, he says that "They sing the laws (*nomoi*) of all and the ways (*ethe*) of all/ even of the immortals they do celebrate." [161] Both terms *laws* and *ways* shifted their meaning from the original use of Greek Archaic Culture to the use made later by Philosophy. The shift moves from a more concrete meaning of the terms to a more abstract one. By laws here is intended the force of usage and customs before they were written down,[162] while *ethe* (ways) – etymologically connected to the haunt of an animal – in this context means personal behaviour patterns or even personal character.[163]

The striking aspect of Hesiod's declaration does not consist in revealing the contents of the Muses' songs, but rather in the juxtaposition of human laws and ways with those of the immortals. This is a characterising trait of Epos and one of the points of criticism in the platonic opposition to Poetry and imitative arts in general. In fact, in the *Republic*, Plato says that "the most serious charge against imitation, namely, that with a few rare exceptions it is able to corrupt even decent people" [164] This corruption happens because of a double imitation: the poet in his compositions imitates the behaviour of heroes and gods making them too vulnerable to suffering and grief; hence, human beings, taking heroes and gods as exempla of virtue, end up in imitating their psychological weaknesses. Heroes and Gods in epos are represented with human psychological features and this is wrong according to Plato, as the only way for a man to become just is to make himself godlike, but the image of the gods in the epos is completely anthropomorphised. Gods

[161] Hesiod, *Theogony*, vv. 64-68.
[162] Havelock, 1963, p. 63.
[163] Ibidem.
[164] *Resp.* 605c.

and heroes in the epos are easily inclined towards their weakest part of the soul, the irrational/emotional part. It is precisely this part of the soul that is urged by traditional Greek Poetry.

The problematic aspects that led Plato to an opposition against this whole poetic world are many but they all converge to the theme of the soul, to its safeguard and ownership. This is explicitly expressed in the *Republic*, the dialogue that *par excellence* looks at the structure of the soul in relation to the structure of the ideal city in which justice reigns. The role of arts, and specifically the role of the poet in the city, along with the dangerous effects of his art on the soul, are questioned in this dialogue, as much that Plato states:

> Then let this be our defence – now that we've returned to the topic of poetry – that, in view of its nature, we had reason to banish it from the city earlier, for our argument compelled us to do so. But in case we are charged with a certain harshness and lack of sophistication, let's also tell poetry that there is an ancient quarrel between it and philosophy […]
> (*Resp.* 605c)

Before trying to understand the social and political reasons of this opposition, it is worthwhile to linger on some features about the Greek Archaic, oral-based poetry and its slow transition towards literacy.

The ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry, as analysed before, is mainly caused by the prevalence of irrational elements in the poetic performance.[165] Rhythm, manic inspiration, dance and choral dispossession are the features of an oral-based type of transmission of knowledge. Moreover, it was not only the way this type of poetry was performed to feed that irrational part of the soul, but it was also the contents of this poetry. Plato considered dangerous these contents for their effect on the human soul, but also, intrinsically, for their deceptive ontological nature. The ontological focus is probably the most relevant aspect to keep in mind in order to rebalance, once again, the dichotomy between orality and writing in Plato. This major point of the platonic critique of poetry (and the arts) has been addressed by Havelock, but somehow also missed, as in fact he

[165] This is the platonic position which, even if it sounds quite assertive, it should not be taken as a commonly accepted truth. Glenn Most analyses the genealogy of this quarrel and questions its platonic assertiveness in "What Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry?" in Destrée and Herrmann, ed. by, 2011, pp. 1-20.

focused mainly on the poetic performance and the social role of Greek poetry connecting these themes under the category of Oral Culture. This is perfectly in line with the tradition to which Havelock belongs and which he represents; although, in comparison to this same tradition, Havelock has the merit of having broadened the theme of orality in Plato to more philosophical aspects.

From a philosophical point of view, the transition from orality to literacy does not reflect simply a change in the technology of communication, but reflects a deeper change of values from mythology to philosophy. This shift is probably one of the contingent elements that determined the birth of Western Philosophy as it is still thought of.

As already anticipated while talking about the self-perception of the soul by the poet, the concept of identity was lacking back in the oral culture and so it was the concept of authorship.[166] In Epics the poet is present but as a role, not as a specific identity. He is a performer and *hermeneus*.

In mythical thought the concept of subject, as a pivot around which experience is organised and filtered, is missing. Every human being was part of a social, cultural, spiritual and natural system, and therefore would not perceive himself/herself as an isolated self. The concept of self that is central in philosophy was not developed in mythology. In fact, one of the revolutions instigated by Socrates, conventionally the initiator of Western Philosophy, consisted in bringing to completion a progressive change of meaning of the term *psyche*.

> In brief, instead of signifying a man's ghost or wraith, or a man's breath or his life blood, a thing devoid of sense and self-consciousness, it came to mean 'the ghost that thinks', that is capable both of moral decision and of scientific cognition, and is the seat of moral responsibility, something infinitely precious, an essence unique in the whole realm of nature.[167]

Self and world are not separated in myth, as much as subject and object are separated in philosophy instead. This distance and reversal which is the essential one between

[166] Cf. Havelock, 1986, pp. 20-21.
[167] Havelock, 1963, p. 197.

mythology and philosophy, is made evident also in other aspects typical of myth that changed completely with the advent of philosophy. Whereas myth would focus on specific exempla and situations, full of concrete details; philosophy, on the contrary, would abstract from concreteness to reach a general concept. In the same way, while in myth there is no different degree of ontological value between reality and imagination, as they are both part of the same lived experience; instead, philosophy constantly draws a line of demarcation between what is real and what is illusion. Moreover, is the entire way of thinking that changes, precisely with the affirmation of the *psyche* as self-consciousness. In fact, the affirmation of the subject in opposition to an object, caused an active and rational control over the given world, that is typical of philosophy; while myth is taken a-critically and its meaning emerges without control, in the same way as dreams or hallucinations happen:

> Mythical thought requires receptivity; logic cannot exist without activity. Logic does not materialize until man has become cognizant of the energy within him, and the individuality of his mind. Logical thought is unimpaired wakefulness; mythical thinking borders upon the dream, in which images and ideas float by without being controlled by the will.[168]

The process from mythical thought to philosophy was not straight and clear. Those who are conventionally considered the first philosophers (Preplatonics)[169] moved their attention from mythological stories and characters, to nature, *physis*, but they still referred to mythical elements and categories such as the relation of opposites, the materiality and unifying role of the *arche*. Even later, when philosophy became more conceptual and abstract with Plato, the presence of myths was still strong but more as a reference to stories and characters which would exemplify the immaterial essence of the philosophical *logos*. Especially, with Plato the myth is a like a crucible of allegories in which deeper values, religious rituals and social meaning could be found. In this way myth ceases to be the message of the communication, it is silenced and visual, as a blurred past internalised and passively memorised. For all these reasons, it is possible to agree with the fact that

[168] Snell, 1953, p. 224.
[169] Havelock deliberately decides to use the term "Preplatonics" instead of "Presocratics". Although -as Havelock himself recognises- at least since Zeller (1846) the term Presocratic has become institutionalised, in this dissertation it is preferred to follow Havelock's amendment for chronological and theorical reasons. Cf. Havelock, 1996, pp. 15-22.

there is no shift from myth to philosophy, but there is an actual shift *through myth to philosophy*.[170]

In the same way, there is no shift from orality to writing, but through orality to writing and Plato can be considered the main representative of this shift, surely because it gains more awareness and intentionality in his cultural project. Plato, in fact, invented a new literary genre: the written (oral) dialogue and he called it "philosophy".[171] After Plato, this genre veered quickly towards a more systematic style where all oral residual (dialogues) are sublimated in the dialectical movement. This is the "philosophical treatise" of which Aristotle was already the best representative and it is still the main philosophical genre. Philosophy flourished on the basis of literacy and it seems impossible to refer to philosophy without its literary substratum. That is also why all the Greek mythical heritage has been confined in the tradition of oral poetry in opposition to philosophy, an opposition first stated by Plato in an explicit and aware way.

This deeply rooted opposition reached its dramatic peak in Socrates' death sentence. Socrates was indeed the living example of a new way of thinking that was perceived as threatening. This new way of thinking was still expressed orally –Socrates did not leave any written work. Plato was in some ways protected by dialogue-writing, although he lived the risks of philosophy himself by opening the Academy and also with his misadventures in Syracuse.

The main charge against Socrates was that with his teachings he was corrupting young people. His way of teaching was rather a way of raising questions, hence of instigating the doubt in that new territory of self-reflection called *psyche*. The main things to put in question by a logical attack were consolidated convictions, established traditions and appearances. The world of traditional myth was based precisely on these features. Dialectic and rationality aimed to dismantle the passivity of the mythological world and instigate the search for a truth that was not ready-made by the tradition. The awakening of the individual psyche was considered threatening on a political level, because anything could be put into question and the inner truth of the individual could become more

[170] Expression taken from Hatab, 1990, p. 199.
[171] Cf. Colli, 1975, p. 109.

relevant than the established institutions of the community. Critical thinking is perceived as a challenge for social stability.

In the same way, but in the opposite direction, one of the main platonic charges against Poetry (the melting pot of the mythological heritage) is that it corrupts young people by giving bad examples. In fact, it feeds the worst part of the human soul by showing human beings and gods easily inclined towards emotions and irrational behaviours. Young people are the next *polites* (citizens) in charge for the wellbeing of the city. To be good citizens young people need to be awake and aware through a healthy control over their souls. The education of young people is at stake in both cases, in attacking philosophy and in defending philosophy.

From the moment the soul was silhouetted with clarity through attentive philosophical work, the concept of identity became the pivot of the human experience and the mythical world faded away, but never disappeared.

2.3. The Arts and the City

In the *Republic*, the criticism of the oral culture, specifically in its poetic guise, starts in Book II, continues in Book III and comes back, changed and revised, in Book X. From the first occurrence of the issue to its later revision, Plato's position on poetry changes in its disfavour. To explain this type of interruptions and changes which are typical of the *Republic*, often it has been argued that the *Republic* is a fragmentary work. According to this argument, the reasons of this fragmentation are due to the length of the work and to the fact that most likely it has been composed in a fragmented way, through a wide lapse of time.[172] Most studies support this theory of the fragmentation which is valid and functional for a general reading of the dialogue, however, in this context, it is preferred to consider that the reasons for such interruptions and changes are actually internal and rely on the dialectical structure of the work itself.[173] It is, in fact, what is discussed in the long gap between the first and the last occurrence of poetry that better explains Plato's change of position.

[172] Cf. Vegetti, 2008, pp. 7-21.
[173] For a complete and coherent account of the theme of *mimesis* throughout the entire *Republic* cf. Belfiore, 1984, pp. 121-146.

The discourse about the arts comes up in the *Republic* in connection with a discourse on the soul, which in turn is related to a theoretical projection of an ideal city in which justice reigns –justice is, in fact, the original theme of the dialogue. More specifically, in the bigger frame of the whole dialogue, a just city is the one in which live just citizens who can become so only if they get a just education.

When Plato first introduces the theme of poetry in Book II of the *Republic*, the context of discussion is the definition of justice. The exchange is mainly between Socrates and Glaucon, but Adeimantus intervenes too citing the common opinion on justice, with discourses supported by ancient poets. The discourses from poets like Homer and Hesiod show that it requires a lot of effort, and ultimately it is useless, to act according to justice, because very often the gods reward the unjust and punish the just. In addition, an unjust action can be exculpated following the ancient rituals and sacrifices that purify and absolve the soul. Seemingly, there is no convenience in being just. This brings up a radical question: why should human beings pursue a strenuous but unrewarding aim such as justice?[174]

In few lines, through Adeimantus intervention, Plato points to the ancient heritage of the poetic tradition to show how it does not allow even the possibility of justice. Even worse, it may persuade that injustice is better and easier to live with, and this is highly dangerous for the ears of young citizens who are in the process of shaping their souls. Confronted with this risk, Socrates is called to give good reasons why justice should be preferable to injustice, and also – in connection to this – why ancient poetry should not be part of the education of young citizens.

> "The investigation we're undertaking is not an easy one but requires keen eyesight. Therefore, since we aren't clever people, we should adopt the method of investigation that we'd use if, lacking keen eyesight, we were told to read small letters from a distance and then noticed that the same letters existed elsewhere in a larger size and on a larger surface. We'd consider it a godsend, I think, to be allowed to read the larger ones first and then to examine the smaller ones, to see whether they really are the same."

[174] *Resp.* 366 b-sgg.

"That's certainly true", said Adeimantus, "but how is this case similar to our investigation of justice?"

"I'll tell you. We say, don't we, that there is the justice of a single man and also the justice of a whole city? […] Perhaps, then, there is more justice in the larger thing, and it will be easier to learn what it is. So, if you're willing, let's first find out what sort of thing justice is in a city and afterwards look for it in the individual, observing the ways in which the smaller is similar to the larger. That seems fine to me. If we could watch a city coming to be in theory, wouldn't we also see its justice coming to be, and its injustice as well? Probably so. And when that process is completed, we can hope to find what we are looking for more easily?"

"Of course." […]

"I think a city comes to be because none of us is self-sufficient, but we all need many things. […] And because people need many things, and because one person calls on a second out of one need and on a third out of a different need, many people gather in a single place to live together as partners and helpers. And such a settlement is called a city. Isn't that so? […] And if they share things with one another, giving and taking, they do so because each believes that this is better for himself?"

"That's right."

"Come, then, let's create a city in theory from its beginnings. And it's our needs, it seems, that will create it." (*Resp.* 368b-369c)

This method of comparison consists in recognising, through the magnifier of a macrocosm, a similar structure in a microcosm. Socrates establishes that there is an isomorphism between human soul and city government and through this parallel his philosophical focus shifts from justice to political theory. Specifically, he puts the theoretical bases on which he projects the foundation of a beautiful city (Kallipolis) in the following books of the *Republic*. This is extremely relevant in this context because one thing that Socrates asserts repeatedly, at this early stage already, is that there is no space for poetry in such a political project. In the essential structure of a city, which covers only the essential needs, poetry is not involved. There is a risk, though, that as the city grows beyond its limits, then a series of new accessories and new characters is required:

Then we must enlarge our city, for the healthy one is no longer adequate. We must increase it in size and fill it with a multitude of things that go beyond what is necessary for a city—

> hunters, for example, and artists or imitators, many of whom work with shapes and colours, many with music. And there'll be poets and their assistants, actors, choral dancers, contractors, and makers of all kinds of devices, including, among other things, those needed for the adornment of women. And so we'll need more servants, too. Or don't you think that we'll need tutors, wet nurses, nannies, beauticians, barbers, chefs, cooks, and swineherds? We didn't need any of these in our earlier city, but we'll need them in this one. (*Resp.* 373 a-c)

The poets are listed in a series of unnecessary adornments which may be required in a larger city. Bearing in mind the parallelism between city and soul, it can be implicitly assumed that there is a similar risk for the soul too. If the soul gets more than it needs, then unnecessary needs will come up. This is not explicitly stated, but the way Socrates shifts back from the city to the soul is quite pointed. He starts considering how the city has grown, so that it requires an army for the defence of all its needs. The army has to be composed of professional guardians who have to be in possession of certain physical dispositions by nature, such as fast reactions and strength – spiritedness, in one word. This is all they need, according to their physical disposition; but, if their souls are that spirited too, they may end up acting savagely among themselves and also with their own citizens – observes Socrates.[175] How do we get an army of spirited guardians who are also gentle – when required, and philosophical – since they need to discern between friends and enemies?[176]

The answer is through education. This answer brings Socrates back to the exploration of the soul and this investigation helps also to reach the goal of the original inquiry which was the definition of justice. For a moment, the foundation of the beautiful city is put aside, to focus on the education of the soul of the guardians. As predictable, if the poets were an unnecessary adornment for the city, it can be deduced that they are no good for the soul either.

At first, indeed, Socrates claims that the best education is based on music and poetry for the soul, and on physical exercise for the body. On second thoughts, he rejects poetry because all poetry derives from the stories told by the ancient oral tradition (Homer and

[175] *Resp.* 375b.
[176] To distinguish between friends and enemies means to be able to distinguish between right and wrong which is a specific task of the philosopher.

Hesiod mainly). The problem with these stories is that by being false and not well told, they are compromising the education of the youngest:

> Telling the greatest falsehood about the most important things doesn't make a fine story […]. But even if it were true, it should be passed over in silence, not told to foolish young people. The young can't distinguish what is allegorical from what isn't, and the opinions they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable. For these reasons, then, we should probably take the utmost care to insure that the first stories they hear about virtue are the best ones for them to hear. (*Resp.* 377e-378e)

Circularly, the detailed motivations and exempla offered towards the end of Book II, reconnect and reinforce the first occurrence of poetry, with its the criticism of ancient culture, expressed early in the same Book. The poets tell false stories about gods and heroes, hence they instigate and promote injustice, this becomes even a bigger danger if it impacts on the souls of young citizens.

This quite intuitive criticism, expressed in an articulated narrative frame, contains a more implicit aspect that links with the criticism of poetry which follows in Book III of the *Republic*. It is the connection between false stories and false images which recurs often in the *Republic*.

The first time that this connection occurs, it is meant literally and not metaphorically; this is one of the reasons why this connection needs to be considered as intentionally established by Plato and not just rhetorical. More precisely, Socrates, while articulating his criticism of storytelling, compares a false story to a bad painting which does not represent things as they are.[177] Then, a few passages later, talking about falsehood in a more ontological way, Socrates states that a falsehood in words is not a complete falsehood, as it is an imitation, an image:

> Surely, as I said just now, this would be most correctly called true falsehood-ignorance in the soul of someone who has been told a falsehood. Falsehood in words is a kind of *imitation*[178]

[177] *Resp.* 377e.
[178] Italics is mine.

> of this affection in the soul, an image of it that comes into being after it and is not a pure falsehood. (*Resp.* 383b)

In the last occurrence, in Book II, it is again related to deception; specifically the false story told by ancient poets cannot be trusted in their representation of the gods, because a god does not deceive by means of images, words or signs.

It needs to be noted that the connection between *logos* and *eidos* that Plato starts establishing through Book II of the *Republic* has a specific name revealed *en passant*, this name is *mimesis* (imitation, representation). This should not surprise, as in fact *mimesis* played this same connecting role in regard to the critique of writing. The theme of *mimesis* is a clear point of connection between the criticism of writing and the criticism of orality which converge in the wider theme of the ontology of the image, as it shown at the end of this chapter.

In Book III of the *Republic* the theme of *mimesis* comes back openly, still in relation to the criticism of poetic stories. Socrates assesses again the rejection of all the poetic stories which contain falsehood, then proposes to leave the discussion about the content (*logos*) of the stories to focus rather on the style (*lexis*) in which these are told.[179]

There are three stylistic ways that the poets use for storytelling: one is narration itself (*diegesis*), when the poet uses his own voice to refer a story; the second is imitation (*mimesis*), when the poet narrates through the voice of the characters – this is the typical style of tragedy and comedy; the last is a combination of the two previous styles – which is the typical style of epos.

After this distinction, Socrates goes directly to the point of this stylistic analysis which consists in rejecting *mimesis* once again. *Mimesis*, as a stylistic device in which *logos* and *eidos* are connected, is dangerous in the city because it allows the possibility of multiplicity, which means that a person can act as if he/she is at the same time himself/herself, and someone else, just by means of imitation and not by means of real knowledge. Furthermore, multiplicity of roles is not suitable to the constitution (*politeia*) of the beautiful city where everyone has a precise role and does only one specific job.[180]

[179] *Resp.* 392c.
[180] *Resp.* 397e.

This last, seems a too abstract reason itself to exclude poetry from the beautiful city, but it gains a more complete sense of reality when applied to the educative system, especially that of the guardians which is at stake in Books II and III of the *Republic*.

This criticism may leave contemporary readers quite astonished, not only because of the exclusion of poetry from an educative system, but also because the work in which Plato is articulating this criticism is written precisely with the style that it is banished from the city, the mimetic style. Through Socrates' voice, Plato seems to banish any form of poetry (and his own dialogues too) from the beautiful city. However, there are actually some exceptions, within the mimetic style, that can make it acceptable:

> It seems, then, that if a man, who through clever training can become anything and imitate anything, should arrive in our city, wanting to give a performance of his poems, we should bow down before him as someone holy, wonderful, and pleasing, but we should tell him that there is no one like him in our city and that it isn't lawful for there to be. We should pour myrrh on his head, crown him with wreaths, and send him away to another city. But, for our own good, we ourselves should employ a more austere and less pleasure-giving poet and storyteller, one who would imitate the speech of a decent person and who would tell his stories in accordance with the patterns we laid down when we first undertook the education of our soldiers. (*Resp.* 398 a-b)

According to this passage, some part of the poetic art is actually valid and worth saving it as far as, when it comes to imitation, it imitates good characters who can work as exempla for the younger citizens. Probably, this is the role imagined for Plato's own philosophical dialogues.

Nevertheless, later on, in Book X, the last Book of the *Republic*, Plato's position becomes harsher. That careful stylistic distinction (between *diegesis* and *mimesis*) fades away and the entire poetic art is condemned as mimetic:

> […] all such poetry is likely to distort the thought of anyone who hears it, unless he has the knowledge of what it is really like, as a drug to counteract it. (*Resp.* 595b)

Poets can only present things by their appearances, not in their truth. The drug to counteract this poetic spell would be the knowledge of things as they really are – and not as they seem. For this reason, Socrates decides to reject also the verses of the beloved Homer, in fact, there cannot be any exception, as no man is more honourable than the truth.[181]

From this moment on Socrates and Glaucon engage in a philosophical analysis of *mimesis*.

Through the famous example of the table and the bed, Socrates and Glaucon are able to distinguish three ontological degrees, corresponding to three different activities. This distinction makes possible the acknowledgment of the three steps that lead from truth to appearance through *mimesis*. First, there is the generation of an idea which comes directly from the god; then, there is the production of an object that the craftsman creates looking to the idea of it; last, there is the visual representation of that object painted by an artist. In this transition there is an anti-climax in terms of ontological value which is also aggravated by the multiplicity that it implies. In fact, the idea is only one and whole, while the objects created by the craftsman can be many and the images represented by the painter can be even more. Hence, the transition in three steps not only diminishes the value of the original idea by decreasing its ontological value, but also by the dispersion that the easy multiplication of the image allows.

This fairly intuitive tripartite scheme is simplified through very concrete examples – bed and table are quite trivial, but common. If, on one side, this makes the concept easy to grasp, on the other side it makes it also vulnerable to philosophical criticisms. The chief of these criticisms addresses the reason why the painter cannot himself look at the idea of the bed and paint it out from that, rather than looking at the material bed created from the carpenter.[182]

The answer to this question is overshadowed by the surprising simplicity of the "furniture comparison". The question itself is caused by the extreme simplification that Plato makes

[181] *Resp.* 595c.
[182] Cf. Sallis, 2015.

from Book VI, where a theory of the ideas is sketched,[183] to Book X, where he seems to betray his previous theorisation.

As often in Plato's work, metaphors, myths, poetic quotations and digressions mean to simplify a complex abstract argument to the interlocutor of the moment. This throws the argument into a world of materiality that has to be taken analogically and never literally. What seems to matter the most, in Plato, is the geometry of the argument, its intrinsic inner structure. Hence, in the metaphors and narrations that Plato uses, the reader has to look for that essential geometric structure[184] in order to find a resemblance with the original philosophical thought. This does not diminish at all the value and the suggestions that may come from concrete details, but the game of analogy does not work as a mirroring resemblance –as a *mimesis*, indeed – it rather works as a parallel restructuring. Certainly, if taken literally, it is not easy to understand why the painter cannot look to the original idea of the bed, but in truth, something like "the idea of the bed" does not even exist. What the craftsman looks at is the structure of the *techne* which allows him to create a bed; in other words, it is to the structure and the organization of practical knowledge required to build a bed or a table that he looks at. However, in Plato's view, the artist does not have a *techne* at all –as discussed earlier – so that he can only reproduce phantoms of material things, without having the knowledge of how these really are in their inner structure and organisation. Plato does not spend time in explaining this, because the point to stress here is another: the painter, as well as the poet, is not able to look at the *eidos* of the things; he can look only at the *eidola* and imitate them. This, which is clearly expressed in the dialogue, it is already enough to answer to the question above.

> Then imitation is far removed from the truth, for it touches only a small part of each thing and a part that is itself only an image. And that, it seems, is why it can produce everything. For example, we say that a painter can paint a cobbler, a carpenter, or any other craftsman, even though he knows nothing about these crafts. Nevertheless, if he is a good painter and

[183] In Book VI of the *Republic* common objects do not seem to have ideas from which these supposedly derive; at this stage of the dialogue, ideas exist only for values and abstract entities, not for common objects.
[184] Cf. *Timaeus*, where the transition between ideal world and material world is made more accessible thanks to presence of geometrical shapes which work as intermediaries. This is expressed particularly in the act of creation of the world by the demiurge: *And he gave it a shape appropriate to the kind of thing it was. The appropriate shape for that living thing that is to contain within itself all the living things would be the one which embraces within itself all the shapes there are. Hence he gave it a round shape, the form of a sphere, with its center equidistant from its extremes in all directions*. (*Tim.* 33b)

> displays his painting of a carpenter at a distance, he can deceive children and foolish people into thinking that it is truly a carpenter. (*Resp.* 598 b-c)

This entire discourse on *mimesis* in Books II, III and X of the *Republic*, in its essential lines, can be reduced to three features of the mimetic mechanism listed in the previous chapter: first, *mimesis* is an imitative re-production strictly connected to the paradigm of visual image; second, *mimesis* reproduces but does not produce; third, the copy which emerges from the mimetic reproduction is false. As said, the criticism of *mimesis* can be definitely considered the point of connection between the criticism of orality and the criticism of writing in Plato.

To honour the entire structure of Plato's dialogue and to contain those criticisms about the fragmentary nature of the *Republic*, it is still worth spending a few lines trying to understand what happens between the position held by Plato in Books II and III, and the revised position in Book X in regard to poetry and the arts in general.

The return to the theme of poetry in Book X happens unexpectedly, also because Socrates had already taken a position about it in Book III. If in Book III some part of imitative poetry was accepted in the beautiful city, in Book X instead it is completely rejected. What has changed from Book III to Book X is not simply Plato's conception of poetry, rather it is the city itself and consequently – in virtue of that isomorphism established before – the soul.

From Book II to IV there is an attempt to found Kallipolis, the beautiful city. Specifically, in Book IV there is an outline of the structure of the soul as tripartite (*epithymetikon* = desiderative; *thymoeides* = passional; *logistikon* = rational) corresponding to the tripartite structure of the classes in the city (bronze class = moneymaker; silver class = auxiliary; gold class = guardians). The tripartite system is structured in a very analytic way and it works both for the city and the human. It needs to be noted that when the critique of poetry was first articulated in Book III, there was not a definite psychology to which apply the critique itself. This would be already a good reason to come back to the theme of poetry availing of a more articulated theory of the soul. But, if Socrates does not come back to poetry with this tripartite psychology, it is because the more the dialogue progresses, the more this tripartite scheme is challenged by limits and contradictions to

the point of resulting inadequate to describe the soul and the city. In fact, from Book V to VII, Socrates is forced to a long pause mainly because Polemarchus had forced him to elaborate on about the sexual regulation in Kallipolis. Only after this break, through which Socrates revises and integrates his previous account, in Book VIII it is possible to find a more complete articulation of tripartite psychology and by Book IX Socrates acknowledges that human beings act with the soul as a whole, not by means of separate parts.[185]

Already in Book IV[186] Socrates admits that there are two ways of articulating the soul, the first one is the analytical, expressed in Book IV itself which is adequate and logical, and then a longer road. The longer road must be this new account of the soul in Books VIII and IX, which still respects the tripartition of Book IV but also includes eros.

Only by articulating a human psychology, Socrates is able to take the critique of poetry to its full extent in Book X.

By giving this brief and concise account of the dialogue, it is meant to show the dialectical movement of the entire work and its profound unity. Although in this chapter there has been a selection of themes and passages to better serve the argumentation, none of the passages could have been used if not understood in the light of the entire dialogue. To express this effectively:

> No single bit of the dialogue, then, should be isolated and treated as a whole. Similarly the whole should not be read as a single argument guided by the norm of logical consistency. Instead, it is a dialectical drama, a dialogue, a conversation that twists and turns, develops and at times revises what was earlier said. In its totality it gives voice to the truth about the human soul.[187]

The protection of and the control over the human soul are at stake in this articulated criticism of poetry and ancient culture, not only in the *Republic*, but also in the *Ion* as argued earlier.

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[185] For further information about this interpretation of the *Republic* and the relevance of eros in this dialogue, cf. Roochnik, 2003.
[186] *Resp*. 435d.
[187] Roochnik, 2003, p. 131.

2.4. *Hermeneia* and Responsibility

There is still one aspect left aside earlier that needs to be deepened. It is the role of the poet as *hermeneus*.[188] As mentioned, the term can be translated in different ways and it occurs with different meanings in the dialogue *Ion*. Its first and most generic translation is "interpreter". In fact, as seen, the rhapsode Ion is a fine interpreter of one poet, Homer. He is an interpreter both in the sense of a literary exegete, but also in the sense of a performer of Homer's verses – at least, this is of what Ion is convinced of. Socrates, instead, through a dialectical confrontation proves the rhapsode to be wrong about his convictions, as in fact Ion has no understanding of the thoughts of the poets, he can only interpret – as to repeat and perform – Homer's verses not in virtue of his mastery of poetry, but in virtue of a divine gift.

The role and the position of the interpreter in the process of transmitting knowledge is "in-between", in fact, he is a deliverer of a message. This is confirmed by the etymology of the word *hermeneus* that can be connected to the Greek god Hermes whose primarily role was to be a messenger between gods and humans.

Olympic gods usually would not communicate directly with human beings, also because, in virtue of the ontological distance between gods and humans, the message would not be expressed in the way human beings could understand it – with a rational language on which communication is normally based. To communicate with human beings, the Olympic gods availed of different irrational channels: dreams; oracles; exceptional natural events; symbols. On the other side, to communicate with the gods, or better, to ask their support and to get their mercy, human beings had to put in practice some rituals which mainly consisted in sacrificing the life of animals, sometimes also of human beings.[189]

[188] As anticipated earlier, the general term used to translate *hermeneus* is "interpreter", but this translation is influenced by biblical exegesis. In Ancient Greece the term originally referred to the semantic area of "expression" meaning the vocal expression of something held inside (such as the voice of a god). Only later (already with Pythagoras and more explicitly with Plato) it assumes a meaning of "mediator" between gods and humans of which Hermes has been taken as divine representative. From the meaning of mediator, the shift to interpreter or translator is quite natural. Cf. Carchia 2003, p. 161.

[189] The most common ritual practice to gain the favor of the gods was the hecatomb: the sacrifice of a hundred oxen. In some circumstances, a god would have asked to sacrifice the life of a virgin, as narrated

A demonstration of this practice can be found in the dialogue *Statesman*:

> Then let's get still closer to those we haven't yet cross-examined. There are those who have a part of a subordinate sort of expert knowledge in relation to divination; for they are, I believe, considered to be interpreters from gods to men […]. And then too the class of priests, in its turn, has—as custom tells us—expert knowledge about the giving through sacrifices of gifts from us to the gods which are pleasing to them, and about asking from them through prayers for the acquisition of good things for us. I imagine that both of these things are parts of a subordinate art. (*Pol*. 290c-d)

This exchange between gods and humans, and vice-versa, needed to be regulated and somehow translated by specific persons who can be represented by the role of the *hermeneus*. In the above quoted passage, the word used to identify them is *hermeneutai* (interprets); while the word to mean the general art, that subordinates this and other forms of knowledge, is *mantiken* (divination). Since the *hermeneus* is still a human being, his way to access to this superior knowledge, is by escalating his human side and push himself out of his soul. It is, in fact, only when he loses control over his soul that the voice of the god can inhabit him, making him *entheos*. This is typical of all the genres of *mantike* (divination). Before to understand what type of divination characterises the rhapsode Ion, it is worth to analyse what type of account Plato has given about divination in his works.

As argued earlier, the dialogue that, more than others, deals with the topic of divination is the *Phaedrus*, here Plato identifies four types of divination. The discussion about divination originates from a previous attempt to revaluate positively the effects of eros on the human soul. Eros makes human beings irrational to the point of losing control over their own souls. As a first instance, this is considered negatively by Socrates, on a second instance he reconsiders his opinion and eventually praises this erotic madness as something divine, which derives to the humans from the gods. In this praise Socrates connects, also etymologically,[190] the divine madness to the *mantike techne* (divination

in the tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Euripides. Not all the rituals to propitiate the gods involved sacrifices, sometimes they consisted in the offer of bread, seeds and devotional objects.

[190] *The people who designed our language in the old days never thought of madness as something to be ashamed of or worthy of blame; otherwise they would not have used the word 'manic' for the finest experts of all—the ones who tell the future thereby weaving insanity into prophecy. They thought it was wonderful when it came as a gift of the god, and that's why they gave its name to prophecy; but nowadays people don't know the fine points, so they stick in a 't' and call it 'mantic.'* (*Phaedr*. 244b-c)

art). Four are the main expressions of divine madness: prediction of the future through the observation of natural events – such as the flight of the birds; mystic and purification rites to clear the souls from ancient guilts:

> Third comes the kind of madness that is possession by the Muses, which takes a tender virgin soul and awakens it to a Bacchic frenzy of songs and poetry that glorifies the achievements of the past and teaches them to future generations. If anyone comes to the gates of poetry and expects to become an adequate poet by acquiring expert knowledge of the subject without the Muses' madness, he will fail, and his self-controlled verses will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds. (*Phaedr*. 245a)

Fourth comes the erotic madness.

The conception of poetry as possession by the Muses as described in the *Phaedrus* is expressed similarly also in the *Ion*. Socrates, with highly inspirational words, seems to praise the poetic activity, while he is actually criticising it for what seems to be its virtue: the capability of making someone out of control.

> For a poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer in him. As long as a human being has his intellect in his possession he will always lack the power to make poetry or sing prophecy. Therefore because it's not by mastery that they make poems or say many lovely things about their subjects (as you do about Homer)—but because it's by a divine gift—each poet is able to compose beautifully only that for which the Muse has aroused him: one can do dithyrambs, another encomia, one can do dance songs, another, epics, and yet another, iambics; and each of them is worthless for the other types of poetry. You see, it's not mastery that enables them to speak those verses, but a divine power. (*Ion* 534b-c)

This passage, not only gives further elements to the platonic theory of poetic madness,[191] but it also points to a relevant aspect of the platonic criticism of poetry. According to

[191] A platonic theory of divine madness can be traced out considering these passages from the dialogues: *Ion*, 534b, *Apol*. 22b-c, *Prot*. 347e, *Meno* 99c, *Rep*. 598c-e, *Symp.* 218b, *Phaedr.* 244d, 256b, *Tim.* 72a, *Leg.* 682a and *Leg.* 719c: *There is an old tale, legislator, which we poets never tire of telling and which all laymen confirm, to the effect that when a poet takes his seat on the tripod of the Muse, he cannot control his thoughts. He's like a fountain where the water is allowed to gush forth unchecked. His art is the art of representation, and when he represents men with contrasting characters he is often obliged to contradict*

Plato, anything a poet composes does not originate from the poet's mastery, but rather from a divine power. In fact, it is possible to compose verses only when the possession of the intellect is lost and the soul is somehow emptied to leave space to the god. Without being *entheos* (possessed by a god) a poet would not be able to compose any verse. Proof of this is the fact that if verse-making was an art to master, then a good poet would have been able to compose any type of verse, but this does not happen. Each poet, in fact, is gifted to compose only the type of verses *for which the Muse has aroused him*.

The very problematic aspect of this loss of control over the intellect is that it is contagious. In the *Ion* Plato refers to it as a magnetic power that bonds together many rings in a chain. This analogy shows not only how the poetic madness is pervasive and contagious, but also how complex and multi-layered is the poetic composition and performance.

The spectator is the last ring of the chain and is held by the middle ring which is the rhapsode, the rhapsode/actor[192] in his turn is held by the poet, first ring of the chain, directly depended on the Muses who magnetically radiate the power of the god who pulls the souls of the humans as he wants, through this chain. Once again, the "hermeneutic" role of the rhapsode is made evident by his in-between position in the chain. Indeed, for the nature of the analogy itself, each ring of the chain has, partially, a hermeneutic role, a role of transmission which is not simply vertical, but also lateral, as there are numerous rings hanging on the side, held directly by the Muses and these represent the art of dancing.

On the level of the poet's ring, there are some specificity; in fact, some rhapsodes can be held by the poetic ring of Homer, some other by Orpheus and some other by Musaeus. This specificity nullifies any form of independence and choice by the rhapsode and this explains, via analogy, why Ion can sing only Homer's verses. If the poet is already limited in composing only one type of verse, depending on the Muses' inspiration, the rhapsode – who has the role of the hermeneus *par excellence* – seems to be even more deprived of freedom, hence of any human responsibility. This is what the conclusion of the dialogue points to.

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himself, and he doesn't know which of the opposing speeches contains the truth. But for the legislator, this is impossible: he must not let his law say two different things on the same subject; his rule has to be "one topic, one doctrine."

[192] *Ion*, 536a. Here Plato places the role of the rhapsode and role of the actor on a very same level, emphasising in this way the performative side of the rhapsodic activity.

> If you're really a master of your subject, and if, as I said earlier, you're cheating me of the demonstration you promised about Homer, then you're doing me wrong. But if you're not a master of your subject, if you're possessed by a divine gift from Homer, so that you make many lovely speeches about the poet without knowing anything—as *I* said about you—then you're not doing me wrong. So choose, how do you want us to think of you—as a *man* who does wrong, or as someone *divine*? ION: There's a great difference, Socrates. It's much lovelier to be thought divine. SOCRATES: Then *that* is how we think of you, Ion, the lovelier way: it's as someone divine, and not as master of a profession, that you are a singer of Homer's praises. (*Ion*, 542a-b)

If Ion does not want to take responsibility for his ignorance, then he cannot take merit for, and not even ownership of, his performances. Ion's ignorance is mainly expressed by the phenomenon that Socrates often met in the *polis*, especially bumping into the sophists. This phenomenon is the *polymathia*[193] (the self-alleged knowledge of everything). Socrates shows to the rhapsode that being able of speaking about everything – as Ion claims, it is equivalent of knowing nothing. Nevertheless, this fault affects Ion only as a second instance, this is in fact a feature of epic poetry first, and it affects Ion only in the vest of a repeater of those verses. If there is, but one thing that Ion should prove to know, in order to avoid the charge of ignorance, is his own *techne*. However, Ion fails also on this; the evidence of his failure is that he can sing only Homer's verses. Instead, who masters a *techne*, masters it as a whole and should be able to sing the verses of all of the poets. As a result, Ion is irresponsible on three levels: first he believes to know everything, but in truth he is not able to respond and take responsibility for anything he believes to know; then, he has no responsibility for the verses he sings, he cannot respond for their composition, because he has not a *techne* to master as a whole and to apply to the poetic art, rather he depends on one poet; last, he has no ownership of his own activity, as a god possesses him during the performance.

For Socrates it is vital that Ion acknowledges the limits of his responsibility, as this traces also the limits of the rhapsode's freedom. To lose control over the soul means also to give up to freedom and to a portion of humanity. Being divine, after all, is not that lovely. From Socrates' point of view, Ion is a simple voice in the manipulative hands of divine

[193] This is exemplified by the myth of Proteus recalled earlier cf. *Ion*, 542a.

inspiration; he is a vehicle, a *hermeneus* whose identity and freedom are nullified by divine inspiration. Even worst, this loss of control over the soul is magnetic and contagious, to the point of affecting the audience and push it in a state of trance.

This consideration of poetry as a powerful mean to encourage a dangerous psychological identification, ties together the criticism of the rhapsode's contagious loss of control over the soul and the criticism of the effect of poetry in the *Republic* which main focus is on the soul of the young citizens. Both in the *Ion* and in the *Republic* the platonic criticism of poetry is not related to "artistic" reasons. Instead it is related both to an entire world of values and meaning which impeded the development of the new-born philosophy, and to a weakening of the soul through a progressive dispersion of and distancing from the truth.

To refer to a more contemporary vocabulary, it can be said that traditional, oral, Greek poetry was a powerful medium which reinforced the psychological damage already intrinsic in the contents of the tradition. In fact, the performances of rhapsodes accompanied by music and dance empowered the negative effects of such archaic set of values on the soul. The vocabulary to which is referred to here is taken from McLuhan's theorisation of the medium as the content:

> […] This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the "content" of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph. If it is asked, "What is the content of speech?," it is necessary to say, "It is an actual process of thought, which is in itself nonverbal."[194]

Bearing this terminology in mind, it can be said that the voice of the rhapsode is itself a medium which content is another medium, which content is another medium and so on – as the platonic analogy of the magnet expressed it clearly, well before McLuhan's theory.

Nevertheless, the platonic critique of the oral tradition is not completely exhausted in the critique of poetic madness, hence of poetic lack of responsibility. The *Republic* shows, in fact, that beyond the psychological aspect, there is also a more ontological aspect which has to do with the issue of *mimesis*. The *Ion* highlights how the reproduction of a message without *techne*, without *dianoia* and, ultimately, without responsibility is highly

[194] McLuhan, 1994, p. 8.

damaging for the soul of the audience. The *Republic* highlights how the repetition carried out by the poet is damaging for the soul, but it also demonstrates that the nature of the message is ontologically deceptive because of its mimetic (re)reproduction. The theme of truth of poetry comes into play in the *Republic*, while it seems to be overshadowed by the divinity of the message in the *Ion*. In other words, if in the *Ion* the message is (the voice of the) medium (which is itself a medium of a medium with a divine source), in the *Republic* the medium is the message (which, being already a mediate message, is false).

The ambiguity of the term *hermeneus* is clearer now, it is an ambiguity personified by Ion himself. In fact, Ion claims to be an interpreter (*hermeneus*) of the thoughts of the poets, but through the dialogue, Socrates proves him to be only a medium (*hermeneus*) of only one poet.

A similar ambiguity is in the *Republic*, in relation to the different meanings of the term *mimesis*. If in the Book III *mimesis* is one of the *lexeis* (techniques of poetic composition), in Book X, instead, *mimesis* is revealed to be an ontological deception. The inner evolution of the two dialogues can be compared through the parallel evolution of the terms *hermeneus* and *mimesis*. In some way, it can be held that the internal transition in each dialogue reflects also an evolution of the platonic theory of oral poetry between the two dialogues and, in general, in the platonic production, as Catherine Collobert claims:

> In *Republic* Book X the falsehood of poetry is clearly stated and the definition of poetry as a deceitful art appears to be justified. Plato, dare I say it, lays his cards on the table. The cautious critique of poetry, which Plato shows in the *Ion*, Book III of the *Republic*, and the *Phaedrus*, is no longer in place. The critique is final: poetry is nothing but an illusion and a dangerous deceit. *Mimesis* is no longer viewed as a technique of narrative combined with a poetic experience, but is regarded as the nature of poetry.[195]

The turning point for this shift to happen, in both dialogues, and more generically in Plato's *work*, is the increasing involvement of the image as a term of comparison to explain the *poietic*[196] activities in general sense.

[195] Destrée and Herrmann, ed. by, 2011, p. 49.
[196] Here the term is intended in the original and more generic sense of *poiesis* as "making", "producing".

2.5. Image-making

The previous section illustrated that there is an inner transition in the platonic criticism of oral poetry. This transition moves from a particular aspect of the criticism to a more abstract and ontological level explicated with the comparison of the image. In its essential terms, this criticism finds many points of contact with the platonic criticism of writing. The two forms of criticism, often considered as opposed poles in Plato's philosophy, ultimately address the same ontological issue which is the mimetic relation between *eidos* and *eidolon* and for this reason they can be reduced to what, in the previous chapter, has been referred to as "the dialectic of the image" – expression adequately outlined by Gadamer.[197]

Both in the *Ion* and in the *Republic*, there are references to the image which aim to reinforce and to move to a higher level of abstraction the criticism of oral poetry. According to the same abstractive process, the references to the image are first expressed through an analogy with the art of painting and then, more generically with "image-making".

In the *Ion*, Socrates simply establishes an analogy between rhapsody and painting[198] as similar arts to be compared in order to establish that each art is a whole to master. What specifically connects these two (as the other mentioned) "arts" is that they produce something through a mimetic mechanism, hence they need a *techne* – as any other form of production.

In the *Republic*, the analogy is carried throughout the whole dialogue and it is expressed in all its complexity. The first occurrence of painting is by mentioning it in between those extra accessories that feel needed in the city when it overgrows.[199] While, the second occurrence establishes immediately a connection with the oral tradition of story-telling:

> Those that Homer, Hesiod, and other poets tell us, for surely they composed false stories, told them to people, and are still telling them. […] what fault do you find in them? The fault one ought to find first and foremost, especially if the falsehood isn't well told. […] When a

[197] Gadamer, 1980, pp. 112-113.
[198] As discussed earlier in this chapter, this analogy is actually wider and takes into account also the art of sculpting, the art of flute and chitara playing, and the art of singing. Cf. *Ion* 533a.
[199] *Resp.* 373a.

> story gives a bad image of what the gods and heroes are like, the way a painter does whose picture is not at all like the things he's trying to paint. (*Resp*. 377d-e)

After this connection, it follows a progressive escalation in the use of the painting analogy[200] which leads to Book X where the analogy is more explicitly connected to the critique of the poetic oral tradition.

> Then shall we conclude that all poetic imitators, beginning with Homer, imitate images of virtue and all the other things they write about and have no grasp of the truth? As we were saying just now, a painter, though he knows nothing about cobblery, can make what seems to be a cobbler to those who know as little about it as he does and who judge things by their colors and shapes. […] And in the same way, I suppose we'll say that a poetic imitator uses words and phrases to paint colored pictures of each of the crafts. He himself knows nothing about them, but he imitates them in such a way that others, as ignorant as he, who judge by words, will think he speaks extremely well about cobblery or generalship or anything else whatever, provided—so great is the natural charm of these things—that he speaks with meter, rhythm, and harmony, for if you strip a poet's works of their musical colorings and take them by themselves, I think you know what they look like. […] We say that a maker of an image—an imitator—knows nothing about that which is but only about its appearance. (*Resp.* 600e-601c)

The critique of oral poetry is empowered by the painting analogy, which helps to show, even better, that this type of *mimesis* has its weakness not only in its psychological and educational aspects, but also and mainly in the epistemic and in the ontological aspects – as already discussed.

This critique also highlights a heavy lack of responsibility of the poetic message as, in fact, its oral words do not vehicle any content, but only appearances along with meter, rhythm and harmony. The multicoloured (*poikilia*)[201] *mimesis* behind both painting and poetry provokes dispersions. Being repeated mouth by mouth the poetic words lose their

[200] The painting analogy recurs very often in the *Republic*, not all the recurrences are relevant for this argument and not all of them are worth being analysed here. However, it follows a brief list of the passages with the most relevant recurrences: 400e 401a, 500e-501c, 523b, 583b, 586b, 596e, 597b, d-e, 597e-598c, 600e-601a, 601c, 602a, 602d, 603b, 605a-b.
[201] *Resp*. 604d.

origin and no one owns them anymore; in the same way, being represented multiple times, the original image gets lost and cannot find its way back to its origin anymore.

Something similar has been analysed in the previous chapter, in regards to the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*:

> You know, Phaedrus, writing shares a strange feature with painting. The offsprings of painting stand there as if they are alive, but if anyone asks them anything, they remain most solemnly silent. The same is true of written words. You'd think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever. When it has once been written down, every discourse roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father's support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support. (*Phaedr*. 275 d-e)

Once mimetically repeated, both the oral words and the written words end up in being fragmented and lost not only in their meaning and in their truth, but also in their ownership. This is the very same mechanism established by the mimetic process of image-making. In fact, if the painting analogy works so well, both for the written word and for the oral word, it is because is itself an analogy of an ontological mimetic mechanism, the one already mentioned, between *eidos* and *eidolon* which is intrinsic in any form of *mimesis*.[202]

The painting analogy is the most functional one as it is image-based, hence it avails, for its inner structure, of the mimetic mechanism between *eidos* and *eidolon*. It could be said that the painting analogy is itself an *eidolon* of the *eidos* of the mimetic mechanism.[203]

[202] Stephen Halliwell, in his study on *mimesis*, underlines two aspects that are worth recalling about Plato's conception of painting: first that, very often, Plato refers to painting as a synecdoche for all the figurative arts; second, that if painting would not have existed, maybe it would have not mattered for Aristotle, but it would have deprived Plato of "source of reflection on human attempts to model and interpret reality" . Halliwell, 2002, p. 125.

[203] The model of pictorial *mimesis* is a *topos* in Plato's dialogues since the early dialogues such as the *Cratylus*, cf. Halliwell, 2002, pp. 126-128.

Surely, the painting analogy, used as an exemplification both for the critique of writing and for the critique of orality, demonstrates that at the essential core of Plato criticism it is not implied an opposition between writing and orality, and even if this would be implied, it would be completely inessential. Indeed, also the painting analogy, which connects the two criticisms, is itself inessential.

The critique of writing and the critique of orality are actually two expressions of one common rooted criticism. Reason why to read the two criticisms either in terms of contrast, or in terms of supremacy of one over the other one, does not help to understand the original, ontological value of the platonic criticisms. It is a criticism of image-making which probably finds its best ontological expression in the *Sophist*.[204] This dialogue represents an invaluable model of comparison to grasp the ontology that structures the "dialectic of the image". In fact, in the *Sophist* there is a real hunting of the sophist through the definitional tool of the *logos* which explicates itself in the dialectical exchange between the Visitor from Elea (representative of the Eleatic philosophical tradition) and Theaetetus. Hence, the dialogue stands as a model firstly and generically, because it intentionally shows multiple *eidola* of the *eidos* of the dialectic structure; secondly and specifically to this dissertation, because in order to define the sophist the two interlocutors have to refer to the *mimetic mechanism* as the only way through which the falsehood of the sophist's *logoi* can come to existence both in language and in essence. In fact, when the Visitor from Elea and Theaetetus are getting closer to catch the sophist with their seventh definition, the *mimetic mechanism* plays a determinant role in this chase.

The chase has been very difficult for the two philosophers, as the sophist managed to escape any definition and slipped down the dialectic net at least six times. The main reason why the sophist is hard to define/to catch in a unifying definition (*synagoge*) is his polymorphic nature: he knows not only "how to say things or to contradict people, but how to make and do everything." [205] In the same way as Ion claims to able to speak about any *techne* (although he is not able to perform any of them) and, even more, in the same

[204] The interpretation of the *Sophist* in this dissertation takes a very different direction to one of the most established interpretations, the one by Stanley Rosen. Rosen (1983, pp. 165-173) in fact, argues that the analogy of the image in the *Sophist* obscures the real disputative nature of the sophist and allow the Visitor to avoid this aspect of the analysis. Instead, in this dissertation it is argued that the exemplifying role of the image in this seventh definition is determinant in order to highlight the commonality of all those activities in which the mimetic mechanism is activated by means of the relation between *eidos* and *eidolon*.
[205] *Soph.* 233d.

way as the mirror in the *Republic* can represent everything (but not real things), the sophist can say and reproduce anything.[206]

In the *Sophist*, the best way to exemplify this ability is, once again, by the painting (in this case drawing) analogy:

> So think about the man who promises he can make everything by means of a single kind of expertise. Suppose that by being expert at drawing he produces things that have the same names as real things. Then we know that when he shows his drawings from far away he'll be able to fool the more mindless young children into thinking that he can actually produce anything he wants to. […] Well then, won't we expect that there's another kind of expertise—this time having to do with words—and that someone can use it to trick young people when they stand even farther away from the truth about things? (*Soph.* 234b-c)

There is, of course, a kind of expertise like this and that is sophistry. By means of spoken images/copies (*eidola legomena*)[207] the sophist can trick young people and foolish ones, as he seems able to reproduce everything with his *logoi*. This ability is nothing but *mimesis*, it is in fact a reproduction of *eidola*, but the analysis and the terminology in the *Sophist* are much more detailed and articulated than elsewhere, because the Visitor and Theaetetus are involved in a definitional hunting. Hence, the specific definition for the sophistic art is: *eidolopoiikes techne* (image-making art/copy-making art). This is the seventh and last definition of the sophist, but it still involves a further reflection on the image that is worth to consider in this place. In fact, the image-making art/copy-making art is subject to a distinction (*diairesis*): it can be a way of likeness-making (*eikastike techne*) or a way of appearance-making (*phantastike techne*).[208] Likeness-making is a way of reproducing an image which respects the proportions and real colours of the model (*eidos*); appearance-making is a way of reproducing an image in which proportions are

[206] *The sophist, the orator, and the poet fall under the same category of ignorant and 'insincere manufacturer of eidola by mimicry' as Dodds 1959, puts it.* Collobert, in Destrée and Herrmann, ed. by, 2011, p. 58.
[207] *Soph.* 234c.
[208] Elizabeth Belfiore warns about the common mistake of considering the *phantastike mimesis* the same as the imitation of *eidola* in book X of the *Republic*. The *eidola* of the *phantastike techne* in the *Sophist* are deceptive in virtue of a partiality of vision; the *eidola* of the book X of the *Republic* are deceptive ontologically. This warning is poignant and correct, also because it depends on the different articulation of the arguments in the two dialogues. However, I believe, ultimately both types of eidola have their main weakness in their ontological status. Cf. Belfiore, 1984, pp. 129-132.

not correct as there is no interest in representing the truth, but the aim is just to seem beautiful. This last "part of imitation covers a great deal of painting and of the rest of imitation."[209] After all that has been said, it seems spontaneous to place the sophistic art in this last category; nevertheless, the Visitor and Theaetetus, have now more doubts than before. In fact, they left the exemplifying painting analogy and moved back again to the real issue of sophistry, the one related to *logoi*. With the intent of going to the essence of the issue, they have made things more complicated by challenging the parmenidean interdiction:

> […] which type we should put the sophist in. He's really an amazing man—very hard to make out. […] This appearing, and this seeming but not being, and this saying things but not true things—all these issues are full of confusion, just as they always have been. It's extremely hard, […] Because this form of speech of ours involves the rash assumption that that which is not is, since otherwise falsity wouldn't come into being. But when we were boys, my boy, the great Parmenides testified to us from start to finish, speaking in both prose and poetic rhythms, that *Never shall this force itself on us, that that which is not may be; While you search, keep your thought far away from this path.* (*Soph.* 236c-327a)

The Visitor, through the dialectic confrontation with Theaetetus, has gone too far, at the borders of Elea and of the Eleatic Philosophy of which Parmenides can be considered the most relevant exponent. Once they accepted *pseudos* (falsity) into language, they necessarily asserted the existence of something that is not. In the same way, once *eidola* (images/copies) and *phantasmata* (appearances) are taken for real, in a parallel way the existence of "something that is not" is asserted. This is the biggest challenge imposed by the sophist and it is the main danger of the mimetic mechanism: it allows the *pseudos* to find its way through *logos* to being.

The philosopher can still make a good use of the *mimesis* as the entire dialogue proves. In fact, the dialectic, exhibited as a *methodos*[210] since the very beginning of the dialogue, is nothing else but a form of *mimesis*, precisely an *eikastike techne* which resembles the

[209] *Soph.* 236c.
[210] *Soph.* 218d. The Ancient Greek term *methodos*, from which the word method derives, is composed by the word *hodos* (a path, a route) preceded by the preposition *meta* (that gives the meaning of moving forward). Hence it is the way to move forward on a path, it represents a quest that proceeds towards a destination.

structure of the *eide* and their articulations. The analogy of fishing represents a first training for the method that needs to be used to define the sophist himself. This analogy is a form of *mimesis*, an *eidolon* which represents the very structure of dialectic in its *eide*. To define a thing, first it needs to be related to something else to which it partakes (*synagogein*); secondly, this needs to be divided in two different horns (*diairein*); then, one of the two horns will be excluded (*temnein*); hence, the movement will start over again from the horn which has not been excluded with a new *synagoge*. This will eventually lead to a definition which contains in itself the different stages of *diairesis* and *synagoge*; this definition would not need any more divisions, nor exclusions.[211]

The dialectical structure of the *logoi* resembles the *eide* and their articulation.[212] This supports what was held earlier in this dissertation about the exemplifying role of metaphors and analogies in Plato's works: these need to be considered for their analogical structure, for their geometrical articulation that respects the proportions, and not strictly literally. Nevertheless, the effectiveness and vividness of most of these analogies recall often some semantic areas that can inform about the meaning of the analogy itself (i.e.: the fishing analogy suggests that the sophist is someone to chase; the bed and tables analogy in *Republic* suggests that *mimesis* may occur when *poiesis* is involved etc.)

These complex analogy between *eide* and *logoi* is based itself on a mimetic mechanism whose features are explored in the next chapter.

[211] For an accurate logical explanation of the dialectical method in the *Sophist* cf. Fronterotta, 2007, pp. 36-60.
[212] Cf. the grammar example in *Soph.* 253a, and the weaving (*symploke*) analogy in 259d-e. Cf. also *Phaedr*. 265d and *Polit*. 286d.

THIRD CHAPTER

The Ontology of the Image in Plato's works

Both the critique of writing and the critique of orality in their most philosophical essence reveal a connection with the ontology of the image. The reasons for this are intimately related to the mimetic mechanism implied in both ways of transmitting knowledge. Following the thread of the image and its mimetic vocation, it becomes clearer that both the criticisms of writing and of orality are inessential. In fact, Plato does not address simply and only the way the knowledge can be transmitted (either in written speech or in oral speech) but the nature of being itself and the possibility of grasping and communicating it at all, as a form of knowledge.

After attentive evaluations carried throughout this dissertation, it seems that there are more points of contact than elements of opposition at the core of both criticisms; hence, it is fruitless to consider the orality/writing issue as a substantial matter implying that one way of expression excludes the other one.[213] This does not mean that the medium is an innocent tool. It is, instead, itself misleading and dangerous, but only on a second level, on the level of the reproduction of the *logoi*.[214] Being a form of de-potentiated *poiesis* (production of a production), the media may enhance the potential deception of some *logoi* by means of the *mimesis* to which they are subjugated, although they are not objects of criticism for themselves. Under this perspective, all those theories which focus mainly (or only) on the mediatic side of the platonic criticism are partial, almost like a synecdoche: they take a part to mean the whole. This approach could still be valid if used for a paradigmatic reading that eventually traces back the philosophical genealogy of the criticism; while, if it is taken literally and in an unrelated way it can be deceptive. It is like considering one of the *eidola* as the *eidos* or, in other words, as if the criticism of the

[213] As Franco Trabattoni argues in different works, the opposite of the written speech is not the oral speech, but the speech "written in the soul" (*Phaedr*. 278a). The philosophical discourse (either written or oral) does not aim to mirror the truth, but it aims to stimulate the philosophical exchange through dialectic. Cf. Trabattoni, 2015, p. 107. In addition, Trabattoni clarifies that if the two ways of transmitting knowledge are really meant to be read in opposition, orality would be superior to writing but exclusively because it can avail of that responsiveness denied to writing. However, the fact that orality can avail of responsiveness does not mean that it always does so, indeed Plato does not criticise orality itself, but those forms of orality which lack in responsibility and responsiveness. For a general theory of persuasion and philosophical knowledge in Plato cf. Trabattoni, 1993.

[214] Cf. McLuhan, 1994.

deception of a medium would overshadow the criticism of the deception itself. It is indeed this same deception whose philosophical implications are analysed throughout this chapter.

3.1. *Eidos* and *eidolon*

To trace a profile of the image in Plato's work is a determinant enterprise which unhinge the ontological structure laying at the heart of Plato's philosophical thought. Plato intentionally establishes a duality between being and appearing;[215] the second step of this distinction is to give a negative connotation to the world of appearances (*eidola*) as an ontological and epistemological, hence psychological too, decrease of the authentic world of beings (*eide*).[216]

The dissociation between appearance and truth happens through the mimetic mechanism – as discussed at different stages of this dissertation. *Mimesis* is, in fact, production of images: "We say imitation is a sort of production (*poiesis*), but of copies (*eidōlon*) and not of the things themselves."[217]

Hence, on one side, there is the *eidos* and on the opposed side there is the *eidolon*.[218] This conceptual couple is based on a conflict that does not tear apart the relation between the two terms, but in fact it reinforces it. *Eidos* and *eidolon* are co-dependent and have the same source which can be detected in their etymological origin from the verb *horao* (I

[215] Cf. Vernant, 1982, pp. 119-152.
[216] About this, Lidia Palumbo punctuates that there are still some images (*eidola*), the philosophical ones, which have a high content of knowledge. Palumbo, 2008, p. 45, n. 48. This has been argued at the end of the previous chapter too, while distinguishing between *eikastike mimesis* and *phantastike mimesis*.
[217] *Soph.* 265b.
[218] The conceptual couple *eidos-eidolon* in this dissertation is considered the best terminology to express the mimetic relation between the original and its copy. I am aware that throughout Plato's works there is not always homogeneity in the use of these two terms (very often Plato uses terms like *eikon*, *phantasma* in place of *eidolon*, and *paradeigma*, *genos* or *idea* in place of *eidos*, etc.) In the same way, I am aware that there is not a univocal meaning attributed to these two terms. However, this is perfectly in line with Plato's philosophical writing in which usually the meaning and the selection of the terms is determined by the context of use and the structuring of the dialectical reasoning. For a clear distinction of these visual terms and their contexts of use I would recommend the essay by Catherine Collobert in Collobert, Destrée, Gonzales ed by, 2012, pp. 87-108. In regard to the term eidos and its use in the context of the theory of the ideas cf. cf. Fronterotta, 2001, pp. XII-XV.
Furthermore, it needs to be clarified that the theory of knowledge exposed by Plato in *Republic* 509c-sgg., although extremely relevant and connected to the paradigm of the vision, it has been intentionally excluded as it focuses specifically on the epistemological side of the issue; while here, the attempt is to unearth the ontology behind the mimetic mechanism.

see) which the aorist form is *idein*, which in turn is etymologically connected to the verb *oida* (I know).[219] According to Ernst Cassirer who dedicated an essay to this conceptual couple,[220] *eidos* and *eidolon* represent two fundamentally different qualities of vision:[221] *eidos* represents the contemplative side of vision, freed from perception, which grasps shapes through an act of ideal conformation; *eidolon* represents the passive side of the vision as a sensible perception. In a certain way, the *eide*[222] are elements of stability both in ontology and in epistemology, they manage to maintain integrity and unity against the multiplicity and the deterioration provoked by all the sensible and reproduced *eidola*. The co-dependency of *eidos* and *eidolon* is explicated by that movement of separation (*diairesis*) and unification (*synagoge*) essential in the dialectic, hence essential in the philosophical quest. If there would not be *eidola* to catch, the philosopher could not find a way back to the *eide* and if there would not be stabilising *eide*, the *eidola* would not have any sort of genealogy from where to derive.

This seems to be a very intuitive and broadly accepted version of Plato's philosophy in general sense. The couple *eidos-eidolon*, in fact, emphasises the platonic theory of ideas (or forms) according to which ideas are the real and fundamental forms of every being condemned to appear through the multiplicity of the sensible experience.

In this dissertation, though, there is not a real interest in reassessing this ontological and epistemological model, neither in stressing a form of dualism in Plato's philosophy. Rather, it seems relevant to consider how the paradigm of the image, configured here as the ontology of the image, is an evident and immediate paradigm to read Plato's dialogues and to overcome some apparent contradictions in his thought. A main reason for such a relevance of the image may be relying on the fact that for Plato every form of production (*poiesis*) is dependent on and guided by a form of vision. As already shown, through many passages quoted earlier, the connection between production and vision occurs about

[219] Cf. Ross, 1951, p. 13; Hyland, 2011, p. 156, n. 37, Kirkland, 2012, pp. 153-172.
[220] The original essay has been published in 1924 with the title *Eidos und eidolon. Das problem des Schönen und der Kunst in Platons Dialogen* in a collect volume by the Warburg Library.
[221] Cassirer, 2009, p. 7.
[222] Ritter (1910) has identified six meanings of the term *eidos*: the outward appearance; the constitution or condition; the characteristic that determines the concept; the concept itself; the genus or species; the objective reality underlying our concept. The translation from German to English of these six definitions by Ritter is by Ross, 1951, p. 15. This variety of meaning, is due to the inner evolution of Plato's dialogues, it can be noticed in fact that in later dialogues the meaning of the term has a more technical shade (such as class or form); while in earlier dialogues has the generic sense that derives from the Presocratic tradition as well, the meaning of visible form. Ross, 1951, p. 15.

the art of the painter, about the carpenter, about the sophist, about the philosopher and even about the demiurge.[223] What connects *poiesis* and vision is indeed *mimesis*: the couple *eidos-eidolon* works for both the mimetic mechanism involved in *poiesis* and in vision.

The main reason to condemn *mimesis* is not the reproduction in itself, but its power to create a world of appearances and pretend that it is the real one. If the fiction of the *mimesis* is accepted, the possibility of moving on a philosophical path towards the *eide* is denied as the *mimetes* (imitator) cancels the distance between *eidos* and *eidolon*. There is no distinction for the *mimetes*; conversely, the philosopher shows his best talent in the art of division[224] and distinction. Hence, the risk presented by the *mimesis* is not only to immobilise everything in a world of *phantasmata*, but also to live in a lie as it happens to the prisoners chained in the cave – according to the myth narrated in Book VII of the *Republic*. So, if the sophist, the poet and the painter deny the way back to the *eide* by ignoring the division between *eidos* and *eidolon*; the philosopher makes the effort to accept the *eidola* but only to reveal their deception and to reassess the realness of the *eide*.

It can be argued that the philosopher would not need to refer to the image as he has access to the *logos*, meant both as a system of thought and, mainly, as a way to articulate words in a web of relations. Nevertheless, very often, the philosopher, in making use of the *logoi* experiences that weakness of the *logoi*[225] themselves. That same weakness that seemed to be a point of failure of both written transmission and oral transmission; but also, the failure of the thought itself.

In front of the failure of the *logoi*, the philosopher may avail of something more immediate and essential such as the paradigm of the image. The immediate support of the image in favour of the *logoi* is explicated with a double movement of proximity and distance in the *Sophist*. In fact, after the seventh definition of the sophist as *eidolopoion* (creator of images), with the careful distinction of the *eidola* in *eikones* and *phantasmata*[226] – implying the superiority of the *eikon* over the *phantasma*, the quest is problematised again. The paradigm of the image, in fact, has led the Visitor and

[223] *Tim.* 47b-c.
[224] *Soph.* 253c-d.
[225] Gadamer, 1980, pp. 93-123.
[226] Here the reference is to the distinction of the art of image-making (*eidolopoiikes techne*) in *mimesis eikastike* (which produces *eikones*, proportionated images) and *mimesis phantastike* (which produces *phantasmata*, images based on appearances). *Soph*. 236b-c.

Theaetetus to admit in their speech that appearances exist. This verbal admission pushes them away from the image to shift back to the language and its logical rules such as the parmenidean interdiction according to which the path toward the hypothesis of the existence of *not being* should never be undertaken.[227] Nevertheless, this is a new *aporia* (a no-way-out) where the Visitor and Theaetetus are brought to a halt again: it is impossible to verbalise with the *logoi* the existence of something that does not exist; the simple fact of naming its non-existence makes it exist. This *aporia* is caused by the weakness of the *logoi*, reason why the *logos* is abandoned once again to come back to the *eidolon* as image/copy and its ontological relation with the *eidos*.

> So if we say he has some expertise in appearance-making, it will be easy for him to grab hold of our use of words in return and twist our words in the contrary direction. Whenever we call him a copy-maker he'll ask us what in the world we mean by a "copy."[228] We need to think, Theaetetus, about how to answer the young man's question. (*Soph*. 239c-d)

The question now is about the definition of *eidolon*. This time the *logos* can get a real support by the paradigm of the image through the definition of the *eidolon* itself, a definition that needs to be made with the *logoi*. The level of abstraction offered by the image empowers the *logoi* to the point of finding a way to verbally articulate the existence of what does not exist. This twisting passage is put in place in Theaetetus' answer to the question of what is *eidolon*. In his final answer, Theaetetus shows such an ease that may surprise the reader – in fairness, it seems to surprise himself too:

> THEAETETUS: What in the world would we say a copy[229] is, sir, except something that's made similar to a true thing and is another thing that's like it? […] Not that it's *true* at all, but that it resembles the true thing.[…]
>
> VISITOR: So you're saying that that which is like is not really that which is, if you speak of it as not true.
>
> THEAETETUS: But it *is*, in a way.

[227] *Soph.* 237a.
[228] "Copy" here is the translation for the term *eidolon* which meaning is in between copy/image.
[229] Cf. previous note.

VISITOR: But not truly, you say.

THEAETETUS: No, except that it really is a likeness.

VISITOR: So it's not really what is, but it really is what we call a likeness?

THEAETETUS: Maybe *that which is not* is woven together with *that which is* in some way like that—it's quite bizarre. (*Soph*. 240a-c)

It takes some time and a clear awareness of the previous analyses about the ontology of the image to un-weave this answer by Theaetetus.

Firstly, once again, Theaetetus is contradicting the parmenidean interdiction; in fact, he says that the *eidolon is* something made similar to a true thing. Hence, at the same time he is saying that the *eidolon is*, and that the *eidolon is not* – because it is not the true thing. There is a distinctive line of demarcation between *eidolon* and the true thing. On a parmenidean level of correspondence between ontology and language, what is true *is*; what is not true it *is not*. Clearly, the ambiguity is represented by the verb "to be" intended in terms of positive ontology and simultaneously in terms of propositional truth.

Secondly, Theaetetus insists on similarity (*eoikos*), resemblance (*eoikos*), likeness (*eikon*). These terms work for him as mediators between what *is* and what *is not*. These terms though, do not sound new, they come from the vocabulary of the *mimesis* which should not provoke any surprise. As seen, the paradigm of the image and the paradigm of the production are intrinsically dependent on the mimetic mechanism which, in fact, reproduces copies of things and not real things. The answer to the question is then: *mimesis*. This is what Theaetetus is trying to say, it is an answer that has already been given indeed, but now it needs to be elevated to another level of analysis, to a metaphysical level.

Mimesis is production of images (*eidolopoiikes techne*). Within the production of images, it can be distinguished between *mimesis eikastike* and *mimesis phantastike*. In the attempt to apply this paradigm of the image to the *logoi*, it emerges that the *logoi* are themselves mimetic, they are *eidola* of beings, at least according to the parmenidean correspondence between ontology and language. The type of *mimesis* that governs the production of *logoi* is the *eikastike* one, the one that reproduces images as likenesses; as if there would be the same proportion between beings and *logoi*, a proportion whose measures are guaranteed

by the dialectical method. In the same way, the dialectical method can be considered an *eikastike mimesis* of the geometry intrinsic into being. This is somehow inevitable. If it is true that everything that exists comes into being in virtue of a production,[230] then it seems impossible to escape the mimetic mechanism. However, thanks to the ontology of the image (governed itself by the *mimesis*) it can be adequately distinguished between a "philosophical" *mimesis* and a "sophistic" *mimesis*. In this way, the *logoi* can be saved, even when they venture in the territory of the *eidola*.

Lastly, it is "quite bizarre (*atopon*)", but there must a way that *what is not* is woven together with *what is.* Theaetetus cannot deny that there is a line of demarcation between *eidos* and *eidolon*, nor he wants to, but he is saying that, even if the two things are distinct, they do not live separate and distinct lives. This is quite realistically Plato's position: he never poses that *eide* exist while *eidola* do not exist; he clearly distinguishes a different axiological level of ontology for each of them, though. The fact that the *eidolon* is deceptive while the *eidos* is real, does not imply that the *eidolon* does not exist. This position cannot work coherently with Parmenides' one. The further Theaetetus elaborates on his own definition of the image, the farther, or maybe the closer he gets to Parmenides: so close to annihilate the Eleatic position. The warning comes from the Visitor who is a disciple of Parmenides himself:

> VISITOR: Not to think that I'm turning into some kind of patricide. […] In order to defend ourselves we're going to have to subject father Parmenides' saying to further examination, and insist by brute force both that *that which is not* somehow is, and then again that *that which is* somehow is not.
>
> THEAETETUS: It does seem that in what we're going to say, we'll to have to fight through that issue.
>
> VISITOR: That's obvious even to a blind man, as they say. We'll never be able to avoid having to make ourselves ridiculous by saying conflicting things whenever we talk about false statements and beliefs, either as copies or likenesses or imitations or appearances, or

[230] This has been already argued about the *Sophist*, but it is a common trait of *poiesis* in different dialogues. The most eloquent one: *After all, everything that is responsible for creating something out of nothing is a kind of poetry* (poiesis)*; and so all the creations of every craft and profession are themselves a kind of poetry* (poiesis) *and everyone who practices a craft is a poet.* (*Symp.* 205b-c)

about whatever sorts of expertise there are concerning those things—unless, that is, we either refute Parmenides' claims or else agree to accept them. (*Soph*. 241d-e)

The role of the image is exhausted at this point of the *Sophist* and the chase can move back to the *logoi* which, through to the paradigm of the image, have been elevated on a metaphysical level.

3.2. The ontology of the *pseudos*

The paradigm of the image helps to highlight the sophistic deception on the ontological level. The corresponding level of deception, implied in the parmenidean parallelism, is that of the *logos*. The shift from the deceptive image to the deceptive logos is a shift from the *eidolon* (copy/image) to the *pseudos* (falsity).

The *logoi*, in virtue of their weakness, are a source of strength for the sophist, in fact, he can use the *logoi* to name the existence of things that do not exist. Not only this, but his own existential status is determined by the violation of the parmenidean interdiction. Not accidentally, it is while looking for a definition of the sophist that the Stranger and Theaetetus end up in this clamorous contradiction (to say that what is not *is*) which conduce them to confront with many *aporiai*. This means not only that what the sophist says is deceptive, but also that he is deceptive himself.

In the first place, it needs to be considered the deception of the sophistic *logoi*. It can be said that the sophist is a producer (*poietes*) of things that are not real in virtue of that usual mimetic mechanism. This cannot be considered innocent in any way, because the deception of the *logoi* implies a deception in the opinion (*pseudes doxa*) of whomever hears or reads these *logoi*.[231] The deception is contagious and leads always into *aporia*, almost like a bad illness that gets worst with every attempt to treat it; or almost like in a neurotic circle. There is a possible treatment, as well as, there is way out of the circle. It is a "homeopathic" treatment, but its countereffect is to break some sort of inner protective resistance and open the organism to new patterns. The way is to perform a *mimesis* of the deceiver on the reverse side. This is what happens in the *Sophist*, when the

[231] *Soph.* 240 c-d.

Visitor, with the support of Theaetetus, makes himself sophist-like by doing what the sophist does: he affirms the falsity but not by speaking it with *pseudes logos*, rather by accepting *pseudes doxa* (false opinion). Hence, also the philosopher is placing himself in the territory of the sophist, availing of the ontology of the *pseudos*, but on the passive side of it, believing in the deception (*apate*) instead of fighting it back.

> VISITOR: So you're saying that a false belief is believing those which are not. […] Believing that those which are not are not, or that those which in no way are in a way are?
>
> THEAETETUS: That those which are not are in a way, it has to be, if anyone is ever going to be even a little bit wrong.
>
> VISITOR: Well, doesn't a false belief also believe that those which completely are in no way are?
>
> THEAETETUS: Yes.
>
> VISITOR: And this is false too?
>
> THEAETETUS: Yes.
>
> VISITOR: And I think we'll also regard false speaking the same way, as saying that those which are are not, and that those which are not are. (*Soph.* 240d-241a)

The movement from the *logos* to the *doxa* serves first to explain the dangerous effects of the *pseudos* on the soul, but it also prepares a way back, and eventually a way out, for the philosopher. The philosopher does not want to say any false discourse (*pseudes logos*) but he can mimetically ("as if") believe in a false opinion (*pseudes doxa*). Believing in a false opinion and accepting it, extends the acceptance also to the *logoi*. While lingering a little bit in the territory of the *pseudos*, the philosopher can find a way out from the *aporia*. The problem is that this determines the final rupture with the father Parmenides. Nothing seems to crumble down though and, by accepting the *pseudos*, the philosopher has not become a sophist himself. The philosopher has proved that even performing the worst of the *mimeseis* (making himself a sort of sophist) he is still different from what he is imitating because the acceptance of the *pseudos* by the philosopher is not guided by *apate*, but by *aletheia* (truth). He is accepting the deception for the sake of truth not for the sake of deception itself. This is even clearer in another dialogue in which the same Theaetetus

(who gives the name to the dialogue) and Socrates are confronting themselves with the issue of the false opinion:

> SOCRATES: We may sum up thus: it seems that in the case of things we do not know and have never perceived, there is no possibility of error or of false judgment, if what we are saying is at all sound; it is in cases where we both know things and are perceiving them that judgment is erratic and varies between truth and falsity. When it brings together the proper stamps and records directly and in straight lines, it is true; when it does so obliquely and crosswise, it is false.
>
> THEAETETUS: Well, isn't that beautiful, Socrates? (*Theaet.* 194b)

The *doxa* saves the *logos*. If the *doxa* is part of the *logos* and it is entitled to be false, then the *logos* can contain falsity. What happens next is that, if there is a correspondence between *logos* and being – as assumed earlier, then being can contain some form of not-being in the same way as *logos* contains some form of falsity. It is a matter of *symploke* (weaving) where not-being is somehow interwoven into being. This is not dangerous on a philosophical level, as far as it is seen for what it is: something that goes straight-lines or something that goes crosswise.

In the second place, it needs to be considered the existential deception of the sophist. It is in the attempt of defining who the sophist is that the Stranger and Theaetetus get trapped in many *aporiai*. It is the same existence of the sophist to prove that the deception exists. The sophist, in fact, is essentially deceptive and with his *apate* he pretends to be – or he even believes to be – a *sophos* (a wise man) while he is indeed an *eidolon* of a *sophos*. Conversely, with much more modesty, the philosopher is simply a lover (*philos*) of wisdom (*sophia*). Significantly, the sophist is defined in opposition and completion to the philosopher.

The *Sophist* begins by introducing to Socrates the Visitor from Elea, who is told to be "very much a philosopher".[232] Socrates tries to verify this and in doing so says something very relevant about appearances:

[232] *Soph.* 216a.

> Certainly the genuine philosophers who "haunt our cities"—by contrast to the fake ones—take on all sorts of different appearances just because of other people's ignorance. […] Sometimes they take on the appearance of statesmen, and sometimes of sophists. Sometimes, too, they might give the impression that they're completely insane. (*Soph*. 216c-d)

Mimesis strikes again. The grounding issue is not simply that the sophist is an *eidolon* of the philosopher, but that this *eidolon* can substitute the *eidos* in its appearance,[233] so that even the original can be confused with the copy. Undoubtedly, this can happen only in virtue of ignorance; nevertheless, it is relevant to explain how to avoid this ignorance: by means of the philosophical method *par excellence*, the dialectic. Hence, the reason to start talking about the sophist and to define him, derives from the proximity of the philosopher to the sophist (the same proximity between *eidos* and *eidolon*). Even Socrates himself is named "sophist" in different occasions. This means that the philosopher and the sophist can be confused, as they appear similar:

> THEAETETUS: But there's a similarity between a sophist and what we've been talking about.
>
> VISITOR: And between a wolf and a dog, the wildest thing there is and the gentlest. If you're going to be safe, you have to be especially careful about similarities, since the type we're talking about is very slippery. Anyway, let that description of them stand. I certainly don't think that when the sophists are enough on their guard the dispute will be about an unimportant distinction. […] let's say that within education, according to the way the discussion has turned now, the refutation of the empty belief in one's own wisdom is nothing other than our noble sophistry.
>
> THEAETETUS: Let's say that. But the sophist has appeared in lots of different ways. So I'm confused about what expression or assertion could convey the truth about what he really is. (*Soph*. 231a-b)

This analogy stresses that to confuse an *eidolon* with its *eidos* is not an innocent, intellectual mistake, it can be dangerous especially when dealing with someone who

[233] About this close and twisting relation between the sophist and the philosopher cf. Cassin, 2014, I.1.

appears under so many ways. The wilderness of Sophistics[234] recurs also in the *Republic*, it is meant in a similar way and, again, it addresses the danger represented by the sophist.[235] More specifically, in the *Republic* Socrates recalls the episode when Thrasymachus, a teacher of the Rhetoric Art, reacted in a very aggressive way against Socrates. Literally, Thrasymachus "coiled himself up as a beast ready to spring" and seemed to want to tear apart Socrates by roaring something to him. Socrates was afraid and trembled, paralysed and muted for a few minutes; nevertheless, he managed to confront Thrasymachus and contained the sophistic arguments of the rhetorician.[236]

The different ways the sophist appears denounce that he is intrinsically an *eidolon* and lives in a world of appearance where different *eidola*, in virtue of their essential inconsistency can be interchangeable. This explains why he is said to be many-headed,[237] very similarly to the way Ion is addressed by Socrates: "Really, you're just like Proteus,[238] you twist up and down and take many different shapes, till finally you've escaped me altogether".[239]

First, it is difficult to identify the sophist; secondly and consequently, it is easy to be deceived by him. Nevertheless, it is necessary to unmask him because it can be dangerous to go wrong about him.

The danger presented by the sophist is the loss of the *logos*. The sophist can paralyse and mute anyone who is confronting him, in the same way as, according to mythology, the above-mentioned wolf does[240] and in the same way as a Gorgon does.

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[234] I use the term sophistics with the full meaning of the neologism introduced by Barbara Cassin: *The set of doctrines or teachings associated with the individuals known as the sophists is sophistike, in French sophistique. The expression is lacking in English, which puts one in the position of either using the adjectives "sophistic" or "sophistical", or to use the dismissive expression "sophistry". As I argue for a systematic role of these doctrines, I will ask your indulgence and introduce the neologism "sophistics" for now.* Cassin, 2014, 1.I.

[235] Cf. Mati, 2010, p. 44. Always in the *Republic* poetry is associate with a dog barking: *there is an ancient quarrel between it and philosophy, which is evidenced by such expressions as "the dog yelping and shrieking at its master" […]* (*Resp.* 608b).

[236] *Resp*. 336b-sgg.

[237] *Soph.* 240c.

[238] *Ion*, 541e. Proteus is an old sea-god famous for being a revealer of truth. In fact, according to the myths he was omniscient and unable to lie, for this reason many tried to catch him in the sea and force him to speak out the truth about anything. In order to escape from his hunters, Proteus would assume any shape depending on the needs, even the shape of water. Cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, IV, 354 and Hesiod, *Theogony* 233; cf. also Kerényi, 2009, pp.47-50.

[239] *Ion*, 542a.

[240] Cf. Mati, 2010, pp. 43-44.

The Gorgons are mythological characters; they are three sisters with snakes instead of hair on their heads, a beard on their chins, boar-like teeth[241] and a petrifying gaze (whomever would cross their eyes would be petrified).

In a seemingly irrelevant passage of the *Symposium* Socrates recalls a verse from the *Odyssey*[242] but he modifies it either unintentionally – as a lapsus, or intentionally – as a pun. Whichever of the two interpretations is preferred, Plato is anyway putting in place an example of Socratic irony:

> How am I not going to be tongue-tied, I or anyone else, after a speech delivered with such beauty and variety? The other parts may not have been so wonderful, but that at the end! Who would not be struck dumb on hearing the beauty of the words and phrases? Anyway, I was worried that I'd not be able to say anything that came close to them in beauty, and so I would almost have run away and escaped, if there had been a place to go. And, you see, the speech reminded me of Gorgias, so that I actually experienced what Homer describes: I was afraid that Agathon would end by sending the Gorgian head, awesome at speaking in a speech, against my speech, and this would turn me to stone by striking me dumb. (*Soph*. 198b-c)

The original verses by Homer, of course says "Gorgon head" and not "Gorgian head". Intentionally or not, Socrates is establishing an equivalence between Sophistics and petrification. The context when Socrates quotes this verse is immediately after hearing a speech about Eros by Agathon, a poet (who is hosting the symposium at his venue) disciple of the sophist Gorgias and a sophist himself. Socrates is about to perform his own speech, but he is in *aporia*, immobilised and muted by the exhibition of the sophistic art.

Naming nothingness and using it as something real, it may even paralyse. The proximity to nothingness may lead to a form nihilism, not only in speech, but ultimately in being. In a certain way, it can be said that the major risk is that the sophist takes Parmenides even more literally than a philosopher would, as to demonstrate that nothingness has actually the same extent of being. This is what Gorgias does himself: twisting, turning and manipulating words with violence for the pure sake of contradiction; this is, in general, a typical trait of Sophistics.

[241] Vernant, a c. di, 1982, p. 55.
[242] Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 633-635.

In a passage from Sextus Empiricus, it is possible to read an elaboration of the work by Gorgias entitled *On What Is Not*. This work has gone lost, but Sextus Empiricus (II Century), recognising its relevance, made an accurate summary of the principal issues dealt with in it. It is a quite long section, so here it is quoted only a part of it. However, this is enough to understand and empathise with the fear of the philosopher:

> If there is anything, either there is what is or what is not, or there is both what is and what is not. But neither is there what is, as he will establish, nor what is not, as he will explain, nor what is *and* what is not, as he will also teach. Therefore there is not anything. Now, there is not what is not. For if there is what is not, it will both be and not be at the same time; in so far as it is considered as not being, it will not be, but in so far as what is not is, it will on the other hand be. But it is completely absurd that something should both be and not be at the same time; therefore there is not what is not. And besides, if there is what is not, there will not be what is; for these are the opposites of one another, and if being is an attribute of what is not, not being will be an attribute of what is. But it is *not* the case that there is not what is; neither will there be what is not. (Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathemathicos*, 66-67)

This is where the parmenidean logics leads, it leads to the coincidence of *being* and *not being*, with the outcome that *not being* completely overshadows *being*. Everything is immobilised: first *being* is annihilated by *logos* and then *logos* is annihilated by *not being*, causing an absolute silence, like a stone. It seems evident now that to commit the parricide of Parmenides is actually in the interest of the philosopher more than in the interest of the sophist.

This is the act of violence, very similar to a sophistic act, that Theaetetus and Socrates decide to undertake:

> VISITOR: Not to think that I'm turning into some kind of patricide. […] In order to defend ourselves we're going to have to subject father Parmenides' saying to further examination, and insist by brute force both that *that which is not* somehow is, and then again that *that which is* somehow is not.
>
> THEAETETUS: It does seem that in what we're going to say, we'll to have to fight through that issue.

> VISITOR: That's obvious even to a blind man, as they say. We'll never be able to avoid having to make ourselves ridiculous by saying conflicting things whenever we talk about false statements and beliefs, either as copies or likenesses or imitations or appearances, or about whatever sorts of expertise there are concerning those things—unless, that is, we either refute Parmenides' claims or else agree to accept them. (*Soph*. 241 d-e)

Every detail in this manifesto of enterprise is extremely valuable and coherent, the entire *Sophist* is, in fact, the story of the attempt to prove, on a dialectical basis, that *what is not* may be and *what it is* may not be.[243] The solution of this logical riddle requires a dismantlement of the parmenidean ontology, to eventually find out that *being* and *not being* are interwoven. This operation implies a redemption of the ontological status of *eidolon* on different levels. Firstly, and most evidently, the *eidolon* is redeemed on the level of the *logos*. On one side, this makes the speech free to name "not-being" and to say falsities; on the other side, this makes the speech subject to judgment and discernment between truth and things that do not really exist. Consequently, it is also possible to believe hypotheses approximated to truth, and this is possible in virtue of a legitimate distinction between *doxa* and *episteme*. Thirdly, the redemption of the *eidolon* has some relevance on an existential level, in fact, the sophist is now allowed to exist in his full vest but he is invested of responsibility for what he says, especially when he speaks about nothingness. On this existential level though, this operation makes the sophist and the philosopher more related, as in some ways the sophist and the philosopher are interwoven together and they need to be carefully distinguished. Fourthly and lastly, the *eidolon* is finally redeemed in its own realm, the realm of the image. The image/copy is no longer an *apate* opposed to the truth of the *eidos*, it is still a copy but it is partially true and partially false, not anymore either completely true or completely false. It could be said that the complex logical articulation of the *Sophist* sheds a new light on the mimetic mechanism making it smoother as a continuous stream of *poiesis*, not anymore as a deceptive, reproductive tool. Hence, the poet, the painter and all the *mimete* can be free to create; but the range of their freedom should be as wide as the range of their responsibility.

[243] Not casually this operation is symbolically undertaken by the Visitor from Elea, a stranger (*xenos*) which in traditional Greek culture represents the alterity to be respected as holy and to be welcomed unconditionally. Cf. Curi, 2010, pp. 98-101.

3.3. Mirrors and *paidia*

To elevate the *logos* to a higher ontological level, the ontology of the image comes to support the logic of the philosophical argument against the deception of the sophist; in exchange, the *logos* redeems the image. Even though its existence is ontologically accepted, nevertheless, the image/copy keeps dwelling in deception and the philosopher keeps denouncing it. The most relevant thing to remember about the image is that it is not representing things as they are, but as they seem, as a mirror does. The references to the mirror that occur in different parts of Plato's dialogues have to be intended in this way, as exempla of deceptive image-making.

It seems that, once the problem of *mimesis* (hence the problem of *poiesis*) is overcome and integrated on an ontological level, it is still necessary to clarify some problematic aspects related to the multiplicity and the partiality provoked by *mimesis* on an epistemological level. This is where the analogy of the mirror (intended as any reflecting surface) comes to help. A mirror is usually considered one of the most reliable ways to reproduce accurate images of objects and people. Apparently as objective as possible, also because any form of intentionality by the mirror can be excluded. The mirror does not want to deceive intentionally, nevertheless whoever looks into the mirror can be deceived because it does not make things for what they are, but for what they seem. This clarifies why this farther analysis of the *eidola* is set on an epistemological level, because it depends mainly on the beliefs (*doxai*) of the observers.

The reasons that Plato offers to explain why the mirror causes deception are two. The first comes up immediately in some of the circumstances when the mirror is mentioned in the dialogues; the second is more implicit as it is based on a specific and different conception of the mirror by Plato. Although it is extremely obvious, it is worth to denounce that the analogy of the mirror is often connected with the issue of *mimesis* and its criticism.

The first reason has to do with the problem of the multiplicity of the *eidola*. The mirror just like a painter, a poet, a rhapsode and a sophist[244] is able to produce any sort of thing without discernment:

[244] Cf. *Soph.* 239d-240a.

> It isn't hard: You could do it quickly and in lots of places, especially if you were willing to carry a mirror with you, for that's the quickest way of all. With it you can quickly make the sun, the things in the heavens, the earth, yourself, the other animals, manufactured items, plants, and everything else mentioned just now. (*Resp*. 596 d-e)

As seen at different stages of this dissertation, the ability of producing the *eidola* of many things is equivalent to not being able to produce anything specifically (in virtue of a lack of *techne*). Also, by not deciding what to reproduce and how to reproduce it, the mirror is extremely powerful as it replicates the mimetic mechanism without intermediation: suddenly, unintentionally and without taking any responsibility for it. The mirror is the material exemplification of the mimetic mechanism, it is like the gears of a clock which gives back the time, but it is not necessarily the right time (and surely, it is not *the time*). The mirror exhibits and reveals the tricks of *mimesis*.

The second reason has to do with the partiality of the *eidola* made by the mirror. In the Greek literary tradition and conventionally, the mirror is considered a tool which gives back a correct and faithful image. Plato seems to deny this convention. Keeping in mind that, according to Plato, the only positive form of *mimesis* is the one which respects the proportions (*eikastike mimesis*), it follows that the mirror cannot be trustworthy because it can only give back a partial image which depends on the perspective and the positioning both of the mirror and of the person or object reflected into the mirror. The mirror, as the platonic *mimesis* in general, "can give back only a small part of each thing and a part that is itself only an image. And that, it seems, is why it can produce everything."[245]

Every image reproduced by a mirror is always partial; furthermore, it has not an independent life, it is always dependent on the original (while, instead, a painting, once created keeps existing without the model) – pretty much like the shadows are stitched to everything and everyone. The existential relations between *eidos* and *eidolon* are stronger in this type of mechanical *mimesis*. This makes the *eidola* that come out from this form of *mimesis* more innocent in some ways, primarily because are not intentional, but also because they can never replace the *eidos* as they need to exist at the same time, along with it.

[245] *Resp*. 598b.

This last point is quite relevant in relation to the *mimesis* implied both in the criticisms of writing and in the criticism of orality. In fact, one of the problematic aspects of *mimesis*, detected also by Derrida,[246] is that, once created, the *eidola* could aim to substitute the original and live independently from it. This is where, again, the *mimesis* can get dangerous: in withdrawing the ontological web of its mechanism. Written words can exist independently, abandoned on paper, as orphans without genealogy hence, without responsibility; as well as a speech, once learned by heart, can exist independently from its source. Consequently, the analogy of the mirror cannot be taken extensively to explain the complexity of the mimetic mechanism, but surely can be taken as a paradigm to exhibit the mechanism itself and its undeniable partiality.

Considering all these elements, it can be held that Plato, most likely, aimed to protect the unity and the integrity of the *eide* more than denigrating the *eidola*. The *eidola* in themselves are not meant to be seriously problematic; indeed, they are not serious at all. The risk though, is that they might substitute the *eide* and so interweave, in a confuse way, the ontological web. This is also a reason for compromising in favour of the *eikasia* (similarity), but never in favour of the *homoiotetes* (identity) of the *eidolon* in relation to the *eidos* – the *eidos* is identical only to the *eidos*[247] as explicated by this example in the *Cratylus*:

> SOCRATES: […]Would there be two things—Cratylus and an image of Cratylus—in the following circumstances? Suppose some god didn't just represent your color and shape the way painters do, but made all the inner parts like yours, with the same warmth and softness, and put motion, soul, and wisdom like yours into them—in a word, suppose he made a duplicate of everything you have and put it beside you. Would there then be two Cratyluses or Cratylus and an image of Cratylus?
>
> CRATYLUS: It seems to me, Socrates, that there would be two Cratyluses.
>
> SOCRATES: So don't you see that we must look for some other kind of correctness in images and in the names we've been discussing, and not insist that if a detail is added to an image or

[246] Particularly in the essay "Plato's Pharmacy" in Derrida, 1981.
[247] This argument is in line with the interpretation given by Lidia Palumbo. She points out that one of the main claims in the *Sophist* is that the images exist in virtue of their *eikaisia* (similarity) and this is not negative in itself; the falsity and the deception of the image take place only when the image wants to substitute and become identical to the original. Palumbo, 2008, pp. 50-63.

> omitted from it, it's no longer an image at all. Or haven't you noticed how far images are from having the same features as the things of which they are images?
>
> CRATYLUS: Yes, I have.
>
> SOCRATES: At any rate, Cratylus, names would have an absurd effect on the things they name, if they resembled them in every respect, since all of them would then be duplicated, and no one would be able to say which was the thing and which was the name. (*Crat*. 432b-d)

An image is an image (*eidolon*), it could never be identical (*homoios*), and it cannot be a clone. This is a matter of ontology; it is the entire sense of *mimesis* both for the images and for the words.

Hence, the mirror, at a first glance, may scare off and challenge the logic of ontology presenting something like a *homoios*, but the image that it offers, does not contain any structural geometry in what represents, it does not have any intentionality, it does not have an inner structure of sense, it is an unanimated, merely superficial (on the level of the surface) appearance. Although, in other relevant circumstances of the dialogues, the mirror is considered as an analogy of the identity accessible only through a relational alterity.[248]

In the light of the above, it can be connected the charge of scarce earnestness of the *eidola* which recurs often in different places of the platonic dialogues. The lack of earnestness is actually imputed to the *mimesis* itself as if it is a joke (*paidia*)[249] which works in virtue of its similarity with reality, but then the *pseusdos* contained in it reveals that it cannot be taken seriously. This is generically valid for any form of *mimesis*:

> VISITOR: Do you know of any game[250] that involves more expertise than imitation does, and is more engaging?
>
> THEAETETUS: No, not at all, since you've collected everything together and designated a very broad, extremely diverse type. (*Soph*. 234b)

[248] *Alc. I* 132e-133a; *Phaedr*. 255d.
[249] I would rather suggest to translate *paidia* as "joke", instead of "game" or "play". In fact, a game and the act of playing are something to be taken seriously in their performance, even if they have a fictitious and imitative character. Plato refers often to *paidia* as something that cannot be taken seriously, this is why the term "joke" would work better.
[250] *Paidia*.

About this passage, Stanley Rosen[251] argues that this "type" just designated is the *paidia* and that it falls under the category of the *mimesis*. Nevertheless, claims Rosen, this is problematic because this type of *paidia* seems to include both a negative *mimesis* (that of the sophist) and a potentially good form of *mimesis* (that of the philosopher). Seemingly, the Visitor and Theaetetus are saying that any form of *mimesis* is a joke. Even admitting that this is true, it is nevertheless partial. In fact, after a few lines in the dialogue, it follows the distinction between the two types of image-making (*eikastike mimesis*; *phantastike mimesis*). In this way, the distinction between the *mimesis* of the philosopher and the *mimesis* of the sophist gets clarified.

Rosen's point seems quite weak, especially if compared with other occurrences of the association between *mimesis* and *paidia*. Most of the passages in which Plato considers *mimesis* as a *paidia* are related with the arts, specifically poetry and painting. This is stated in the *Republic*, as clearly as possible:

> It seems, then, that we're fairly well agreed that an imitator has no worthwhile knowledge of the things he imitates, that imitation is a kind of game and not something to be taken seriously, and that all the tragic poets, whether they write in iambics or hexameters, are as imitative as they could possibly be. (*Resp.* 602b)[252]

Quite in line with this, there is also a passage from the *Statesman*:

> VISITOR: Would we want to put down as a fifth class things to do with decoration, painting, and those representations[253] that are completed by the use of painting, and of music, which have been executed solely to give us pleasures, and which would appropriately be embraced by a single name?
>
> YOUNG SOCRATES: What name?
>
> VISITOR: I think we talk about something we call a 'plaything' […] this one name will be fittingly given to all of them; for not one of them is for the sake of a serious purpose, but all are done for amusement. (*Pol.* 288c)

[251] Rosen, 1983, pp. 166-sgg.
[252] About mimetic art as a joke cf. also *Resp*. 606c
[253] *Mimeseis*.

Hence, if there is a commonality in the conception of *mimesis* as a joke, this is not between the philosopher and the sophist – as Rosen claims; rather, the commonality is between the artist and the sophist. Furthermore, these passages have been quoted in sequence to show that, at least in regard to this critical aspect of *mimesis*, there is quite a homogeneity in Plato's works.[254] Consequently, there is not much room to doubt about this analogy which implies that some types of *mimesis*, those that create *phantasmata* – as many arts do, are like the type of *mimesis* that rules a joke. A joke is not something intrinsically bad, but its outcomes are not serious, nor worth discussing. This is probably the most adequate interpretation of this vast analogy which finds evidence in a determinant passage from Plato's latest work, the *Laws*:[255]

> ATHENIAN: Yes, and it is precisely this that I call 'play' (*paidia*), when it has no particular good or bad effect that deserves serious discussion. […] And we could conclude from all this that no imitation at all should be judged by reference to incorrect opinions about it or by the criterion of the pleasure it gives. This is particularly so in the case of every sort of equality. What is equal is equal and what is proportional is proportional, and this does not depend on anyone's opinion that it is so, nor does it cease to be true if someone is displeased at the fact. Accuracy, and nothing else whatever, is the only permissible criterion.
>
> CLINIAS: Yes, that is emphatically true.
>
> ATHENIAN: So do we hold that all music is a matter of representation and imitation?
>
> CLINIAS: Of course.
>
> ATHENIAN: So when someone says that music is judged by the criterion of pleasure, we should reject his argument out of hand, and absolutely refuse to go in for such music (if any

[254] Another relevant passage in line with the previous passages can be found in the *Epinomis*. However, it has been decided not to quote it as a main source in the dissertation as the authenticity of the *Epinomis* is quite questionable. According to Diogenes Laertius (*Vitae philosophorum*, III, 37) the *Epinomis* was added by a Plato's student, Philip of Opus as a last book to conclude the *Laws*.
The passage is the following: *Next in order is a kind of play, which is mostly imitative and in no way serious. Its practitioners make use of many instruments and many bodily gestures—and not wholly becoming ones at that. This includes skills that employ words, all the arts of the Muses, and the genres of visual representation, which are responsible for producing many varied figures in many media, both wet and dry. But the imitative art makes no one wise in any of these things, even those who practice their craft with the utmost seriousness.* (*Epin*. 975d)

[255] According to the tradition Plato found his death while trying to complete his last work the *Laws*. Quite symbolically in his last work the character of Socrates is completely absent. In this work Plato shows a more concrete and complete (including also a cosmological level) vision of politics if compared to the *Republic* or even to the *Statesman*.

> were ever produced) as a serious *genre*. The music we ought to cultivate is the kind that bears a resemblance to its model, beauty. (*Leg.* 667e-668b)

This passage is relevant on many levels. It is worth pointing to a preliminary level that is central also in the passage from the *Statesman* quoted above. It is about the pleasure and amusements provoked by jokes and by the mimetic arts. Pleasure, as an effect of *mimesis*, is not denied nor denigrated; nevertheless, it should be rejected as a criterion of judgment. This is the very same point that, with other arguments and in another context, Plato makes against the mimetic arts in the *Republic*: the mimetic arts are delightful, their pleasure is undeniable, but they are not bearers of truth. They do not have an epistemological value; hence, they cannot have an educational role. Even worst, they are dangerous for the souls of the young ones as well as for the souls of the well-rounded citizens.

It can be said that the antidote necessary to cure the souls poisoned by the mimetic poetry, is outlined in a clearer way in the *Laws.* In the *Republic* Plato affirms that "such poetry is likely to distort the thought of anyone who hears it, unless he has the knowledge of what it is really like, as a drug to counteract it."[256] In the *Laws* there seems to be a valid counteracting drug which is accuracy (*aletheia* – usually translated as truth), as the only criterion valid to judge the products of *mimesis*. A criterion of objectivity for the mimetic arts has been found, but this would have not been possible if not by the distinction between *eikastike mimesis* and *phantastike mimesis* in the *Sophist*. In fact, accuracy means that the mimetic mechanism between the *eidos* and the *eidolon* is ruled by equality (*isotes*) and proportion (*symmetria*); these are indeed the criteria of the *eikastike mimesis*.

A *mimesis* that respects the geometry intrinsic in the *eidos* and makes the *eidolon* proportionated seems to be the only acceptable form of *mimesis*. This strict conception of *mimesis* is not based on a rejection of pleasure, but on the acknowledgment that *mimesis* does not simply relates to the senses, but it informs too. Hence, even artistic *mimesis* involves knowledge and human judgment which ultimately consists in the capability of discerning between truth and falsity, and between wrong and right:

> You have hit the nail on the head. So anyone who is going to be a sensible judge of any representation—in painting and music and every other field—should be able to assess three points: he must know, first, *what* has been represented; second, how *correctly* it has been

[256] *Resp*. 595b.

> copied; and then, third, the *moral value* of this or that representation produced by language, tunes and rhythms. (*Leg*. 669a-b)

This brief and not exhaustive parenthesis on the pleasure of the arts, serves only to prepare the ground for the consideration of another relevant aspect in that passage from the *Laws*.

Earlier it has been argued that in the *Sophist* there is a redemption of *eidolon* also in its ontological status. The patricide of Parmenides, although hurtful, allows to the genres of being and of not-being to interweave themselves in order to admit the existence of the similarity which is the specific trait of the image. Similarity does not exist as an independent genre in the *Sophist*,[257] but it comes to existence every time that the genre of diversity partakes to the genre of identity. Similarity could have never existed as an independent genre; it is dependent in the same way as *eidolon* is dependent from the *eidos* – no *eidola* could exist without an *eidos*.

If this is taken to its consequences, it comes out that everything, in the human condition of life, is a matter of *mimesis.* Everything that comes into being springs out from a *poiesis* and necessarily partakes to the genres of being and of identity. Subsequently, since it is the only genre which partakes to all the other genres, the genre of difference partakes also to being and to identity producing *eidola* of everything. The philosopher, living himself in the realm of *mimesis*, is affected by this too and he knows it. The full awareness of living in the realm of *mimesis* makes the philosopher in charge for distinguishing between good and bad *mimesis*, between jokes and good music, between *eikasia* and *phantasia*, and so he does. Nevertheless, by judging correctly every form of *mimesis* the philosopher cannot escape his own participation to the realm of *mimesis*. The philosopher is a *mimetes* too, but a good *mimetes*, who invites to cultivate the best type of music, that one which is a proportionated *eidolon* of the *eidos* of beauty.

The passage from the *Laws* clarifies retrospectively also a seemingly autobiographical episode narrated by Socrates in the *Phaedo*:

[257] The five genres in the *Sophist* are: being; identity; difference; stillness; movement. Every genre is independent, but the genre of difference participates to all the other genres. Cf. *Soph.* 255e-sgg.

> The same dream often came to me in the past, now in one shape now in another, but saying the same thing: "Socrates," it said, "practice and cultivate the arts."[258] In the past I imagined that it was instructing and advising me to do what I was doing, such as those who encourage runners in a race, that the dream was thus bidding me do the very thing I was doing, namely, to practice the art of philosophy, this being the highest kind of art, and I was doing that. (*Phaed*. 60e-61a)

The art of the philosopher is to encourage other people in cultivate his same art. However, in what consists this art? Once again, this art consists primarily in being able to distinguish (*diairein*).

3.4. Shadows and dialectic

It is possible to understand the art of the philosopher and its ontological collocation quoting a sample of this art itself. The passage below is the initial part of the conclusive movement of *diairesis* and *synagoge* in the *Sophist.* The beginning of the last and exhaustive attempt to define the sophist:

> VISITOR: I'll assume divine expertise produces the things that come about by so-called nature, and that human expertise produces the things that humans compound those things into. According to this account there are two kinds of production, human and divine. […] Since there are two of them, cut each of them in two again. […] That way there are four parts of it all together, two human ones related to us and two divine ones related to the gods. […] Then if we take the division we made the first way, one part of each of those parts is the production of originals. Just about the best thing to call the two parts that are left might be "copy-making." That way, production is divided in two again. […] We know that we human beings and the other living things, and also fire, water, and things like that, which natural things come from, are each generated and produced by a god. Is that right? […] And there are copies of each of these things, as opposed to the things themselves, that also come about by divine workmanship.
>
> THEAETETUS: What kinds of things?

[258] "The arts" is a translation for the term *mousike* which, literally, means "the arts of the Muses". Sometimes this passage is translated as "practice and cultivate music" so that it ends up saying that philosophy is the highest kind of music.

> VISITOR: Things in dreams, and appearances that arise by themselves during the day. They're shadows when darkness appears in firelight, and they're reflections when a thing's own light and the light of something else come together around bright, smooth surfaces and produce an appearance that looks the reverse of the way the thing looks from straight ahead. […] And what about human expertise? We say housebuilding makes a house itself and drawing makes a different one, like a human dream made for people who are awake.
>
> THEAETETUS: Of course. (*Soph.* 665e-666e)

The distinction continues for a while in an articulated way, from one passage to another, the Visitor takes a breath to express a personal evaluation: "Some imitators know what they're imitating and some don't. And what division is more important than the one between ignorance and knowledge?" The philosopher and the sophist, once again, fall under a same general category (human production as opposed to divine production) and live in the same realm of the *mimesis*. However, with his activity, the philosopher proves his own capability and his own art: he knows what he is imitating, he is on the side of knowledge; the sophist, instead, is on the other side, deliberately. This means that the sophist knows that his art is deceiving. Both the philosopher and the sophist know that they do not know. They know they live among the *eidola*, but if this, on one side, pushes the philosopher to undertake a quest towards the truth of the *eide*; on the other side, this same ignorance is where the sophist decides to dwell and to perform his art.

The conclusive definition of the sophist does not have the flavour of the victory in a hunt; it rather has a bitter and dramatic tone. The *eidola* spring out with any creative act, not only in the *poiesis* of human beings, but also in the *demiourgia* of the gods. The real difference consists in deciding to know this or to ignore this.

This extremely complicated way to articulate the ontology of the image has to be considered in the most serious way. Plato is the aware and intentional bearer of a cultural revolution which shook the roots of the Greek Archaic thought and posited the basis of our western conception of the ontology of the image and co-extensively of the ontology itself. That, among the divine production there are *eidola* and that these *eidola* do *exist*, could have not be said straight forwardly, it needed a slow and complicated path.

The *eidola* produced by divine creation, says the Visitor, are things in dreams (*ta en tois hypnois*), shadows (*skia*), reflections (*diploi*).[259] According to Jean-Pierre Vernant, these three types of *eidola* correspond to the three ways Archaic Greek culture identified the *eidolon*. In the Archaic thought the *eidolon* could present itself as a dream (*onar*), or as an apparition caused by a god (*phasma*), or else as the ghost of a defunct (*psyche*).[260] The correspondence seems to work, but with Plato, the concept of *eidolon* changes its ontological status.

In Archaic thought, the *eidolon* was intended as a double which at the same time existed (for the eyes) and did not exist (materially). Some example of this can be taken by some episodes in the *Odyssey* when the souls of the dead appeared to the alive ones, but when these last tried to hug or touch the appearing souls, these simply vanished revealing their real non-existence in the humans' world.[261] It can be said that the Archaic *eidola* belonged to another world, nevertheless they could appear in the humans' world almost like hallucinations. The realms from where these *eidola* derive are "elsewhere" and parallel, such as the realm of dreams, the realm of the gods, and the realm of the dead.

For Plato instead, the *eidola* do not derive from parallel realms, they are inevitable outcomes of any form of production, because everything that exists is somehow subjugated by the mimetic mechanism. The humans' world is itself the realm of *mimesis* and, inevitably, it contains *eidola*. To include the *eidola* in the human world is the only way to pose them under the surveillance and the judgment of philosophy, although this opens space to a risk which is the manipulation of the sophist.

The recurrent platonic analogy of the shadows is what exemplifies this the most. To believe that the shadows truly exist, cannot be a wrong thing; but, to believe that only shadows exist is a mistake derived from a deception. The allegory of the cave is probably the most famous and clear way to detect the relevance of this mistake. In fact, the prisoners in the cave truly believe that the shadows of the things they see at the bottom of the cave are the reality – indeed, that is the only reality they know. This false belief is the result of a biased and forced view. The prisoners in the cave are chained since childhood

[259] Literally "the doubled things" meaning all the reflections in mirrors and in other types of reflecting surfaces.
[260] Vernant, Milano, 1982, pp. 124-125. About the souls of the dead people as *eidola* in the Archaic culture, cf. also Vernant, 2006, p. 325-326 and Carchia, 2003, pp. 131-132.
[261] Cf. also *Men.* 100a.

and their faces are immobilised in a way that they can only look in front of them. If they can turn their backs towards the wall behind them, they could see the statues which forecast the shadows at the bottom of the cave and reveal the deception of the *mimesis*. Simply, they would not think straight away that shadows are not real (they would not deny their own reality), rather they would understand that there are "truer things"[262] than shadows, as in fact shadows are derivations and not independent entities; in this way, and this is what counts the most, they would also understand the tricks of the mimetic mechanism. Instead, the prisoners are forced in a portion of the realm of *mimesis*, in the portion of the *eidola*. They do not seem to have access even to the most basic of the human intuitions which is the mimetic mechanism, because their full reality is exposed in front of them, plane and readable, without derivation.

With the allegory of the cave, Plato means to exemplify the effect of a good education, which would consist in unchaining the prisoners and leading them out of the cave. For this reason, it is not the case to take the entire analogy extensively here; although, it would still be highly beneficial to do so, as the many details of the allegory would reinforce the claim held throughout this dissertation. Nevertheless, at this stage, it should be clear enough that Plato's analogies need to be taken more seriously for their structure than for the precise correspondence of their terms of analogy.

When finally freed, the first prisoner learns the first exemplum of *mimesis*, that the shadows (his own reality) derive from some statues placed on a wall, thanks to the light of a fire behind the wall. This exemplum is all the prisoners would need to learn in order to make their way out of the cave. This does not mean that the way out is an easy one, it actually gets more and more difficult upward and it needs to be walked slowly, but everything the prisoner encounters on this path is based on the same mechanism as that one from which the shadows at the bottom of the cave derived: the mimetic mechanism.

Significantly, when Glaucon expresses his very first reaction to this story told by Socrates, Socrates points to the mimetic mechanism again: this story may present a weird image (*atopon eikona*) and weird (*atopous*) prisoners as Glaucon claims, however these prisoners are alike Socrates and Glaucon (*homoious hemin*).[263] With the weird images of this allegory, Socrates is making a *mimesis* of his own status. In fact, he is forced to look

[262] *Resp*. 515d.
[263] *Resp.* 515a.

at *eidola* and to be deceived by them, however he has been freed (supposedly by his *daimon*),[264] hence he has obviously acknowledged the mimetic mechanism – in fact he is using it by means of the allegory, and is willing to walk the entire path until out of the cave and farther. The state of deception in which Socrates admits to be along with Glaucon is that one caused by the attempt to define justice (the *Republic* originated with this intent). The dialogue represents a difficult progression towards the *eidos* of justice where *mimesis* presents its deception on different ontological and subtle levels that requires revisions, steps back and mainly the bitter awareness to dwell among *eidola* most of the time. In the allegory, the path of the prisoner is resumed in a few passages: from the shadows in the cave the prisoner goes upward to the statues and the fire; from the statues the prisoner goes upward to living entities, their shadows and the sun; then, he goes from the reflection of the sun to the sun itself; lastly from the sun itself to the understanding of how the sun sheds light on everything and gives structure and variation to the natural world. The path that Socrates and Glaucon kept walking is more articulated, but similar in its outcomes:

> This whole image, Glaucon, must be fitted together with what we said before. The visible realm should be likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside it to the power of the sun. And if you interpret the upward journey and the study of things above as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm, you'll grasp what I hope to convey, since that is what you wanted to hear about. Whether it's true or not, only the god knows. But this is how I see it: In the knowable realm, the form of the good is the last thing to be seen, and it is reached only with difficulty. Once one has seen it, however, one must conclude that it is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, that it produces both light and its source in the visible realm, and that in the intelligible realm it controls and provides truth and understanding, so that anyone who is to act sensibly in private or public must see it. (*Resp.* 517 b-c)

The form of the good to which the form of justice is strictly linked, is like the sun. However, the human condition is to dwell in the realm of *mimesis*, and even if the forms

[264] Cf. *Apol.* 29d-31a. Keeping the analogy proposed by the allegory, Socrates can be compared to that first prisoner who makes himself free (it is not clarified how) and then tries to convince the other prisoners to come out of the cave (out of their state of ignorance). The reaction of the prisoners is not very positive, they would not believe him to the point that they desire to kill him (*Resp.* 517a). Somehow, this resembles Socrates' destiny.

can be grasped, that could be only for a moment of clarity and not the normal condition of the human sight as this would be unbearable for it. Nevertheless, in the realm of *mimesis* human beings are not abandoned to the *eidola* only, the *eide* are accessible and create the condition for the visibility of the *eidola*, even though the eyes cannot stare constantly at them. What matters the most for the philosopher is that he is always able to distinguish the *eidolon* from the *eidos* and that he is always on the path towards something truer using the dialectical method.

This same analogy is used in a similar way in the *Phaedo*, one of the most biographical dialogue by Plato, narrating the last days of Socrates and declaring the sense (and the defence) of his philosophical enterprise:

> After this, he said, when I had wearied of investigating things, I thought that I must be careful to avoid the experience of those who watch an eclipse of the sun, for some of them ruin their eyes unless they watch its reflection in water or some such material. A similar thought crossed my mind, and I feared that my soul would be altogether blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and tried to grasp them with each of my senses. So I thought I must take refuge in discussions and investigate the truth of things by means of words. However, perhaps this analogy is inadequate, for I certainly do not admit that one who investigates things by means of words is dealing with images any more than one who looks at facts. (*Phaed*. 99d-100a)

By means of *logoi* the philosopher progresses on the path towards the truth; but, as already discussed, the *logoi* are weak and it is anyway impossible to fully overcome the impeachment of the *eidola*. The mimetic mechanism is intrinsic in the *logoi* which are the tools of the philosopher, reason why any attempt to grasp an *eidos* by means of *logoi*, although extremely refined and approximated to truth with the flexibility of the dialectic method, is always posing a distance with the *eidos* itself. It could be said that *logoi* are the instruments through which the philosopher tries to perform his own *mimesis* which is an *eikastike mimesis* aiming to dissect and reveal the inner geometry that constitutes the *eide*.

If on one side the *logoi* are a refuge for the philosopher, on the other side this refuge does not protect the philosopher from the exposition to the mimetic mechanism, hence does not protect him from the risks of the *eidola*.

Ironically enough, the way through which the *logoi* can get approximated to the *eide* is with more *logoi*, by adding up more and more *diairesis* and *synagoge* at each stage, hence by making the dialectic path as long and as articulated as possible. The advantage that the *logoi* have in opposition to the visual *eidola* is that they are not as immediate, consequently not immediately deceptive, they require a great work and they can be worked as tools towards the truth. In addition, even though with a high degree of difficulty, the *logoi* work best in a common enterprise. Before to deepen this aspect of commonality of the *logoi*, it is worth to underline, once again, one of the main issues of this dissertation. In fact, at this stage enough elements have been gathered to reassess the position about the orality/writing opposition in Plato in a more complete way.

As discussed at different stages, both the critique of writing and the critique of orality in Plato's works prove to be inessential if taken literally, also for this reason they are not to be considered in opposition to each other. This alleged opposition, in virtue of which one should affirm its own superiority over the other, is not sustainable because the weakness of the *logoi* affects both the written speech and the oral speech. The reason for Plato to criticise the *logoi* is not primarily related to their being written nor being orally exposed; it has to do mainly with the mimetic mechanism intrinsic in the use of them. In other terms, it has to do with the weakness of the *logoi* themselves and their close connection to the ontology of the image. The place where the critique of writing and the critique of orality resolve their supposed conflict is the critique of the deceptive image which, in turn, has been integrated in the platonic philosophical system as well. The *Sophist* stands also for a philosophical redemption of the deception: even the deception, when carefully identified and regulated, can be an integrative part of a philosophical system. This operation of inclusion and regulation of the deception is only partially deliberate, mostly is inevitable, as it depends on the limited nature of the human soul.[265] Since the human beings are limited also in the way they can gain, express and transmit knowledge, philosophy – although aware of this limitedness[266] – remains itself a limited tool and has to avail of images. The images are not always used to vehicle contents, however the

[265] As Jill Gordon expresses it with a clear sentence: *That human beings are inherently limited, that philosophy is the appropriate medium for human inquiry due to our limitations, and that philosophy needs therefore to be carried out to some extent through images, are pervasive ideas in the Platonic corpus*. In Scott, ed. by, 2007, p. 220.

[266] Drew Hyland, in his book *Finitude and Transcendence*, analyses the *Republic* as a model to interpret the entire platonic production. He convincingly argues that Plato's philosophy represents a general attempt to transcend the human limitedness/finitude through philosophy. Cf. Hyland, 1994.

mechanism which vehicles contents itself is based on the ontology of the image discussed in this chapter. The entire human world is an expression of this mimetic relation exemplified by the ontology of the image. This aspect, which has been analysed on different levels so far, should still be considered on the cosmological level as interpreted by Plato.

Some of the platonic works of the maturity deal with cosmology, mainly the *Philebus* and the *Timaeus*. In these works, the platonic arguments on the creation of the *kosmos* are nurtured by a complex ontology along with some geometrical and mathematical theories.[267] The mimetic mechanism persists as a neat element of continuity also in this period of the platonic production and it is still based on the ontology of the image. To show this legacy, it suffices to quote an explicative passage from the *Timaeus* in which the intrinsic human limitedness and its dependence on the ontology of the image emerge in the attempt to give an account of creation the human world itself.

> Since these things are so, it follows by unquestionable necessity that this world is an image of something. Now in every subject it is of utmost importance to begin at the natural beginning, and so, on the subject of an image and its model,[268] we must make the following specification: the accounts we give of things have the same character as the subjects they set forth. […] Don't be surprised then, Socrates, if it turns out repeatedly that we won't be able to produce accounts on a great many subjects—on gods or the coming to be of the universe—that are completely and perfectly consistent and accurate. Instead, if we can come up with accounts no less likely than any, we ought to be content, keeping in mind that both I, the speaker, and you, the judges, are only human. So we should accept the likely tale on these matters. It behoves us not to look for anything beyond this. (*Tim.* 29b-d)

The only way humans have for understanding what they have around is by means of the *eidola*. This does not necessarily imply that the mimetic mechanism affects everything; it simply means that the way human beings can know is based on this mechanism. Moving upwards, out of the cave, the philosopher tries to transcend his condition and to grasp those things which are subjugated by the *mimesis*, the *eide*. The philosopher can reach that level of understanding, but he cannot dwell there. Keeping on the analogy of the cave,

[267] Cf. Trabattoni, 2015, 159-178.
[268] *Eidolon-eidos.*

the philosopher can walk all the way out of the cave to look into the sun, but he would not be able to stare at it eternally, that vision would let him understand the nature of vision itself, but then, his destiny is to back down and divulge his partial knowledge in the realm of *mimesis*. This movement upward and then downward is mimetically reproduced in the movement of the dialectic method by the philosopher.[269]

The *eide*, as said, can be grasped, but only temporarily and with a lot of effort: "For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightaway nourishes itself."[270]

This quotation, already analysed in a different context in Chapter I, here offers a brilliant image of Plato's theory of human knowledge and brings the analysis back to where it was put aside, at the commonality of the *logoi*. The *logoi*, although limited, can work better if the enterprise towards the truth is brought forward commonly. It is quite evident that Plato considers the process of knowing strictly related to an educative relation, subsequently, on a higher level of access to the *eide*, the process of knowledge is grounded on an *erotic* relation.[271]

This need of relationality emerges in the dialogues mainly through the dialectic method of research and through the dialogic narrative structure of the dialogues themselves. The dialectical method implies the presence of at least another interlocutor; bearer of a point of divergence and/or convergence; as well as the dialogue is a literary device which represents an exchange at least between two people. The path towards the truth needs to be walked and to be integrated reciprocally. The dialectical exchange is what respects mostly the vitality, the fluidity and the desire of transcendence typical of the human soul.

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[269] About the path that leads the prisoner out of the cave Socrates comments: *And what about this journey? Don't you call it dialectic?* (*Resp.* 532b) and shortly after continues: *Therefore, dialectic is the only inquiry that travels this road, doing away with hypotheses and proceeding to the first principle itself, so as to be secure. And when the eye of the soul is really buried in a sort of barbaric bog, dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it upwards, using the crafts we described to help it and cooperate with it in turning the soul around.* (*Resp.* 533 c-d)

[270] *Ep. VII*, 341c.

[271] Both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, the two main dialogues about the theme of eros, describe the erotic relation as a form of relational dialectic through which the soul can reach the *eide* and become able to generate in the most authentic way.

The dialectic method is a path towards the truth as a constant movement[272] that even when it reaches the *eidos* then backs down and renews the quest. In this context, it might be recalled the antithetic model of knowledge presented by the sophist. The sophist accomplishes his research by dwelling among the *eidola*, he is aware of the mimetic mechanism, but he chooses the apparent stability and solidity of what is immediately reachable and knowable in the human condition, in other terms he prefers the finitude to the transcendence. The analogy of the petrification here shows all its power: this type of sophistic knowledge petrifies the *logoi* with the *logoi* (either written or oral) and makes them empty, as they are not able to transcend and nurture the soul. The sophist, like the philosopher, performs a sort of *mimesis* of the reality with the tool of the *logoi*, but the sophistic *mimesis* is deceptive and does not respect the vitality of the human soul as it is resigned to one aspect of the reality while takes it for the whole – a synecdoche, as argued earlier. The philosopher, instead, uses the *logoi* as tools, but he transcends them; his *mimesis*, although *eikastike* – hence rightly proportioned, is never exhaustive; it is always subject to failure and passible of integration, revisions. In this way, the dialectic method and the dialogic style do not, and cannot, aim to mirror the truth, but they rather aim to keep alive the authentic desire of the soul for the truth.[273] As if the truth is not the reaching point of the path, but it is the path itself.[274] Just to mention a concrete example of this, it can be considered the conclusive definition of the sophist in the homonymous dialogue. The definition of the sophist was a resume of the entire path walked by the Visitor and Theaetetus; this path was articulated (it was stuck in *aporiai* many times), difficult (they even had to commit a patricide) and provoked changes and growth in the souls of the two philosophers. This example, among many others, shows how dialectics can be the most realistic way to interpret the realm of *mimesis* as it does not deny the multiplicity and partiality of the human world. Dialectics contemplates and includes organically the differences intrinsic into being. This, once again, is a conceptual revolution brought forward by Plato's philosophy.

[272] In the *Cratylus* (439e-440c) Plato expressed the impossibility of knowing anything that is in a constant movement, unless by posing the existence of stable *eide*. On the stability of the *eide* it is possible to ground the human knowledge which, due to the limited human nature, is constantly changeable and fluid.
[273] Cf. Candiotto, 2013.
[274] About the reciprocal and dialectic nature of the platonic dialogues, Pierre Hadot writes relevant pages (Hadot, 1995, pp. 89-93). Just to quote an example: *A dialogue is an itinerary of the thought, whose route is traced by the constantly maintained accord between questioner and respondent*. Hadot, 1995, p. 91.

Plato does not simply identify oppositions in the genres of being, he also finds a way to integrate them in a system of thought and in a way to express them. The dialectic method raises from an *aporia* in the logic of being (the problem of contradiction): to solve the *aporia* of the human condition, the philosopher, instead of denying his own finitude and limitedness, creates a model which resembles it. If on one side, the human soul strives for transcendence and for the knowledge of the *eide*, on the other side this same soul is embedded in a realm of *mimesis*. The acceptance of this status does not prevent the philosopher from keeping on transcending it, although this transcendence is possible only relationally (the identity nurtured by the difference). As the allegory of the cave exemplifies, without the external intervention of "someone else", no one would be able to discover different levels of reality.[275] The relation with another human being does not only permit to access the divine core of own's soul,[276] but it also permits to generate and hence to partake to immortality. On this merit, the following passage from the *Symposium*, while describing the drama of human limitedness, subject to constant change, reveals also the way humans can partake to immortality:

> Even while each living thing is said to be alive and to be the same—as a person is said to be the same from childhood till he turns into an old man—even then he never consists of the same things, though he is called the same, but he is always being renewed and in other respects passing away, in his hair and flesh and bones and blood and his entire body. And it's not just in his body, but in his soul, too, for none of his manners, customs, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, or fears ever remains the same, but some are coming to be in him while others are passing away. And what is still far stranger than that is that not only does one branch of knowledge come to be in us while another passes away and that we are never the same even in respect of our knowledge, but that each single piece of knowledge has the same fate. […] And in that way everything mortal is preserved, not, like the divine, by always being the same in every way, but because what is departing and aging leaves behind something new, something such as it had been. By this device, Socrates," she said, "what is mortal shares in immortality, whether it is a body or anything else, while the immortal has another way. So don't be surprised if everything naturally values its own offspring, because it is for the sake of immortality that everything shows this zeal, which is Love." […] "Now, some people are pregnant in body, and for this reason turn more to women and pursue love in that way, providing themselves through childbirth with immortality and remembrance and

[275] Cf. Fronterotta, 2001, p. 85.
[276] *Alc. I* 132e-133a, *Phaedr*. 255d.

> happiness, as they think, for all time to come; while others are pregnant in soul—because there surely *are* those who are even more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies, and these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth. And what is fitting? Wisdom and the rest of virtue, which all poets beget, as well as all the craftsmen who are said to be creative." (*Symp*. 207d-209a)

Dialectics and relationality (educative and erotic) have the same structure: systematic and progressive; these both lead, after a long and articulated course, to a generative truth which, as said, rather than being a reaching point is an evolving path.[277]

3.5. Beauty and wonderment

The *aporiai* with which the philosopher is forced to be confronted are due to the weakness and limitedness of the human condition itself, but he is characterised by having the desire to look for a resource. This dialectic between misery (*penia*) and resource (*poros*) is the dialectic which generates Eros. In the *Symposium*, the priestess Diotima recalls the myth of the birth of the *daimon* Eros[278] who, being generated by the god *Poros* (father) and the mortal *Penia* (mother) is the embodiment of the *metaxy* (in-between). Eros is a *daimon* in between a god and a human: he is in between mortality and divinity; he is in between knowledge and ignorance; he is always in movement between opposites which are co-dependent. In fact, no one would look for a resource (*poros*) if not in a state of need (*penia*), this is a perfect dialectic movement brought forward by the generation of Eros who, in his turn, spreads the desire to generate among the humans.

The authentic philosopher is guided by an authentic erotic desire and this is testified by Socrates himself who notoriously professes many times to know nothing…but one thing: *ta erotika*, the love issues.[279]

In the realm of *mimesis*, the power generated by the erotic desire is necessarily kindled by an *eidolon*. This is the only *eidolon* which eludes the mimetic mechanism:

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[277] About dialectics and erotic relationality intended as methods of truth cf. Robin, 1908, p. 213, pp. 223-226, p. 251. However, Robin believes that in the platonic system eros is an inferior method of truth if compared to the dialectic method. The reason to hold this position are well grounded, nevertheless I would not hold it myself. I would rather say that the two methods work analogically in their structure and co-dependently in their striving.
[278] *Symp*. 203b-204c.
[279] Cf. *Symp*. 177d, 193e, 198d, 201d, 212b; *Lys.* 204b-c; *Phaedr.* 227c, 257a.

> Now beauty, as I said, was radiant among the other objects; and now that we have come down here we grasp it sparkling through the clearest of our senses. Vision, of course, is the sharpest of our bodily senses, although it does not see wisdom. It would awaken a terribly powerful love if an image[280] of wisdom came through our sight as clearly as beauty does, and the same goes for the other objects of inspired love. But now beauty alone has this privilege, to be the most clearly visible and the most loved. Of course a man who was initiated long ago or who has become defiled is not to be moved abruptly from here to a vision of Beauty itself when he sees what we call beauty here; so instead of gazing at the latter reverently, he surrenders to pleasure and sets out in the manner of a four-footed beast, eager to make babies; and, wallowing in vice, he goes after unnatural pleasure too, without a trace of fear or shame. A recent initiate, however, one who has seen much in heaven—when he sees a godlike face or bodily form that has captured Beauty well, first he shudders and a fear comes over him like those he felt at the earlier time; then he gazes at him with the reverence due a god, and if he weren't afraid people would think him completely mad, he'd even sacrifice to his boy as if he were the image of a god. Once he has looked at him, his chill gives way to sweating and a high fever, because the stream of beauty that pours into him through his eyes warms him up and waters the growth of his wings. Meanwhile, the heat warms him and melts the places where the wings once grew, places that were long ago closed off with hard scabs to keep the sprouts from coming back; but as nourishment flows in, the feather shafts swell and rush to grow from their roots beneath every part of the soul (long ago, you see, the entire soul had wings). (*Phaedr.* 250d-251b)

This passage from the *Phaedrus* is slightly out of context here as it refers to some aspects of the platonic psychology and the platonic theory of love which are not dealt with in this dissertation, such as the immortality of the soul and the platonic theory of metempsychosis,[281] but also the homoerotism and the traditional code of behaviour between lovers.[282] However, the relevance of this passage and the impact it had on the ongoing western conception of love and beauty is that strong that it is possible to understand it and feel all its power even if it is quoted out of context. It seemed relevant, at this stage, to expose it without too much of an introduction to leave intact its emotional effect.

[280] *Eidolon*.
[281] Cf. Long, 1948.
[282] In regard to these last aspects cf. Foucault, 1990, Vol. II, pp. 185-245.

On a second and more rigorous approach to this passage, what is relevant to highlight in regard to this dissertation is the special status of the *eidolon* of beauty among the other *eidola*. Unless used in a manipulative way – as the sophist does, the *eidola* would not be able to stand and respond for themselves without the *eide*, this means that in each and every *eidolon* it is possible to glimpse its correspondent *eidos*. That is particularly effective for the *eidola* of beauty. Due to its specific visibility, the *eidos* of beauty shines forth frequently through the *eidola* in the realm of *mimesis* and kindle the erotic desire in the human beings:

> All of us are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and in soul, and, as soon as we come to a certain age, we naturally desire to give birth. Now no one can possibly give birth in anything ugly; only in something beautiful. That's because when a man and a woman come together in order to give birth, this is a godly affair. Pregnancy, reproduction—this is an immortal thing for a mortal animal […]
>
> "What Love wants is not beauty, as you think it is."
> "Well, what is it, then?"
> "Reproduction and birth in beauty." (*Symp.* 206 c-d)

This reproduction has somehow to do with *poiesis* hence with *mimesis* – as learned, but there is an enormous difference here. What is reproduced in love (*eros*), through beauty, is alive and responsible as it always bears with it the creative energy of its *eidos*. It can be a human being, a work of art, a set of rules but it bears with it the creative energy that made it exists and that, in this way, makes it partake to the eternity over the finitude of its producer. However, the main specificity of the *eidola* of beauty lies in their unique relation with the *eidos* of beauty itself. As anticipated, the *eidola* of beauty seem to elude the mimetic mechanism because in this case the relation between *eidos* and *eidolon*, although truly based on a distinction (*diairesis*), it is more based on collection (*synagoge*). The *eidola* of beauty do not simply derive from the *eidos* of beauty; they partake in it as it comes out also in the following passage from the *Phaedo*:

> If there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything. […] I no longer understand or recognize those other sophisticated causes, and if someone tells me that a thing is beautiful

> because it has a bright color or shape or any such thing, I ignore these other reasons—for all these confuse me—but I simply, naively and perhaps foolishly cling to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in,[283] or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned, for I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful. That, I think, is the safest answer I can give myself or anyone else. And if I stick to this I think I shall never fall into error. This is the safe answer for me or anyone else to give, namely, that it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful. (*Phaed*. 100 c-e)

This type of relation entertained by *eidola* of beauty with the *eidos* of beauty does not have the characteristics of a *mimesis*, it can rather be named *methexis* (participation).

The *eidola* of beauty in their visibility show also their *eidos.* To explain the structure of this relation leads to one of the most delicate areas to explore within platonic philosophy. In this regard, this dissertation avoids to venture in an explanation based on a principle of causality,[284] primarily because just to set correctly this type of analysis it would be necessary both to analyse and articulate the entire platonic theory of the ideas, and to define the status of the empiric objects within Plato's philosophy.

To unroot the criticism of writing and the criticism of orality in Plato, it suffices to refer to the mimetic mechanism and the visual model to which it depends. However, the ontology intrinsic in the mimetic mechanism arises issues related to the visibility and understandability of the whole reality (both in its finitude and in its transcendence). As far as the analysis dwells in the realm of *mimesis*, among the *eidola* and their asymmetric resemblance, the ontology of this derivation/separation is easier to grasp. When it comes to reconnect the *eidolon* to its source and to understand the nature of this participation, the analysis gets more complicated. On the stable level of the *eide*, the main difficulty consists in understanding how these eternal and self-identical entities partake in the *eidola*.

What is undeniable is the unique and exceptional nature of the beauty which is the only *eidos* visible itself in its *eidola*. This does not mean that the distance between the *eidos*

[283] The term used to mean this sharing is *koinonia* which is semantically interchangeable with *methexis* (used in a verbal expression a few lines above) and *metalepsis*. Plato himself seems to use these terms in an equivalent way, meaning a general sense of participation of the *eidola* to the *eidos*. Cf. Fronterotta, 2001, p. 149.
[284] For this type of analysis cf. Vlastos, 1969.

and the *eidolon* is cancelled in beauty, there is still a distinction between the multiple beautiful things and the "Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed".[285] The *eidos* and the *eidolon* are clearly distinct also in beauty and the philosopher is always about to remark this distinction.[286]

Differently from a mimetic relation between *eidos* and *eidolon*, in beauty the reconnection between *eidolon* and *eidos* is made accessible intuitively with the sense of vision, almost aesthetically – in etymological sense.

The vision of something or someone beautiful happens suddenly and rouses wonderment.[287] On the first instance, it is something completely reliant on the sensorial experience: beauty relies on the *eidola*, as to say that without the ephemeral impact of the *eidola* of beauty on the human senses, there would not be any access to the *eidos* of beauty. Although this does not sound like the conventional reading of the platonic theory of love, it is indeed what the *Symposium* shows throughout the dialogue and it is exemplified by the levels of the love-ladder that Diotima describes in the *Symposium*.[288] The first, inevitable step to access the path that leads to *the great sea of Beauty* is the love for one body – argues Diotima. In other words, it is the love for the embodiment of beauty: after and only after this wonderous impact with beauty, a human wants to step forward as it is much more worth to love the beauty in its *eidos*[289] than multiple, equivalent, *eidola* of beauty.[290]

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[285] Cf. *Symp*. 211d-e.
[286] Cf. *Resp*. 476b-d.
[287] Along the entire exchange between Diotima and Socrates, the priestess warns him often to not express an easy wonderment (*thaumasia*) for things which are quite logical nor for simple truths. *Thaumasia* is a condition which originates from a sudden vision (*And the man who made Iris the child of Thaumas was perhaps no bad genealogist. Theaet*. 155d) and it raises both the desire to love and the desire to know (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b)
The moment when wonderment can be correctly aroused is all of a sudden, after a long course, in front of the vision of something beautiful: *the man who has been thus far guided in matters of Love, who has beheld beautiful things in the right order and correctly, is coming now to the goal of Loving: all of a sudden he will catch sight of something wonderfully beautiful in its nature; that, Socrates, is the reason for all his earlier labors* (*Symp*. 210e).
[288] In the *Symposium*, another example of the relevance of the sensorial experience of beauty comes with a narrative event in the dialogue, and not through the exposition of a theory, that is the arrival of Alcibiades at the *Symposium.* Alcibiades, famous for his beauty, arrives at Agathon's house drunk but still handsome. The description of his apparition is full of sensorial details: noises, colors, good smells, ornaments, plastic poses etc. Cf. *Symp*. 212c-213a.
[289] *Symp*. 210b.
[290] The central place given to Diotima's speech on love does not imply that Plato denies or diminishes the relevance of individuality in an erotic relation. On this regard, Martha Nussbaum has elaborated a confutation of Gregory Vlastos' who claimed that platonic love is a form of neglection of the individuality and of the affection. Cf. Nussbaum, 2001, p. 166-173 and Vlastos, 1973, p. 31.

The special status of beauty represents a turning point and an occasion both to make clear, once again, a determinant aspect about the ontology of the image in Plato, and to redefine the mimetic mechanism by a comparison with the *methexis*.

Concerning the ontology of the image, it should be even clearer now that the fact that the *eide* have a visible side – as *eidola* – and hence they are graspable by the human perception, does not make the *eidola* less real or wrong in their essence, it rather makes them intelligible. What can be seen can be also known and, mostly, can be put under the surveillance of the philosophical judgment. This is a determinant and innovative aspect of Plato's philosophy and is the philosophical substratum on which, still nowadays, is grounded the epistemological and ontological value we give to the image.

Concerning the mimetic mechanism, in comparison with the *methexis*, the main difference is determined by eros. If on one side, *mimesis* is a pure mechanism which reveals its functioning in a mirror; on the other side *methexis* is a generation.

To contextualise this comparison, it can be said that best expression of the mimetic mechanism consists in the *eikastike mimesis*, that type of reproduction which respects the proportions (rigorously based on mathematics and geometry) of the articulation of the *eidos*. The platonic *logos* with its articulations is a clear example of *eikastike mimesis*. With its complex integration of the *pseudos*, actualised in the *Sophist*, the *logos* represents a mediation between the triggering opposition of identity and difference in being.

While, the best expression of the *methexis* is indeed in the platonic theory of love. Through an erotic relation and an erotic generation, it is possible to partake to that eternity that shines forth in some *eidola* as a promise of happiness[291] – that is mostly visible in the *eidola* of beauty. The manifestations of beauty have the power to kindle the erotic desire into human beings, the erotic madness drives the souls of the human beings to the *eide* without the mediation of the *logos*, and hence without that weakness of the *logoi* that constantly reminds the human limitedness.

These further evaluations on the *methexis* of beauty are not simply meant to show other aspects of the relation between *eidos* and *eidolon*. The model of the *methexis* clarifies in a more complete way the firm axiological rejection that Plato has towards most of the *eidola*. The *eidolon* is rejected not because it contains deception, but because it stands for

[291] *Symp*. 205d, 208e.

the *eidos* and may aim to substitute it as in the manipulative use of the sophists. The *eidolon* stands for the *eidos* not in a generative way, but in a lifeless way, rigid and mute like a double or a statue without a soul.

On these last notes, it seems relevant to reconnect a theme left aside earlier which is the petrifying power of the manipulated *logoi*. As discussed, the Sophistics does with the *logos* what the Gorgon does with the gaze, turns a live body into a stone. The *eidolon* of beauty transcends the risk of the *mimesis* as beauty is the spark of the erotic desire. The erotic desire is the generative power that brings forth life in the human production, giving birth to a new-born human life or even to *logoi*[292] and in this way allows human beings to partake to immortality. The manipulation of the *logoi* instead, is the most dangerous outcome of the mimetic mechanism and leads to the annihilation of being, to relativism and to mortality – as seen with Gorgias.

The sophist plays with the *eidola* as if they are the (only) reality, as if the multiplicity and the finitude of the *eidola* are all that exists. For a sophist, behind the transient apparitions there is no sending back to a unifying and immobile *eidos*. According to this view, everything is a matter of perspective and interpretation: the *logoi* do no serve to reach the *eide*, but to build a variable account of a variable reality; also, the *logoi* are not weak at all for the sophist, *logos* is actually an incredibly powerful seducer (a peculiar eros).[293] On this ridge of the realm of *mimesis*, human life is nothing, it is an *eidolon* itself, a bearer of mortality and finitude.

The philosopher, instead, suggests that every human being strives for immortality and the evidence for this relies in that strong passion that arises in him/her at the "methexic" view of beauty. On this basis, Plato grounds his theory of recollection and metempsychosis which finds its best expression both in the myth of the winged horses and the charioteer in the *Phaedrus* and in the myth of Er in the *Republic*. Unfortunately, as anticipated, a discussion on these themes does not find adequate space in this dissertation.

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[292] […] *the lover is turned to the great sea of beauty, and, gazing upon this, he gives birth to many gloriously beautiful ideas and theories* (logous), *in unstinting love of wisdom.* (*Symp*. 210e)

[293] *Inspired incantation through speeches* (logōn) *are inducers of pleasure and reducers of sorrow; by intercourse with the mind's belief the power of the incantation enchants and persuades and moves it by sorcery. Two arts of sorcery and magic have been invented. They are deceptions of mind and deviations of belief. How many have persuaded and do persuade, how many on how many subjects by fabricating false speech* (pseudes logos). Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, 10-11.

Coming back to the analogy of the stone in the *Symposium,* the lapsus (Gorgias/Gorgon) in the quotation from the *Odyssey*[294] should be considered as an intentional platonic allusion.

The association between the stone and the realm of death was codified in the archaic culture and was made explicit by the ritual use of some types of statues. Death itself was considered as a petrification of human beings.[295] To remain within the frame traced by the Homeric (modified) quote, the context of the original verse narrates about Ulysses descending into the Hades (the realm of dead people). The verses recalled by Socrates tell about the moment when Ulysses runs away scared by Persephone, the virgin abducted in the underworld by Hades (the homonymous king of his own realm) who married her and made her the queen of the Hades. Persephone guards the entrance of the Hades holding in her hand the head of Medusa, the most terrific of the three gorgons, but also the only mortal of the three sisters – decapitated by Perseus after a cunning use of his shield as a mirror.[296] Persephone stands there to petrify, with the help of Medusa's gaze, any alive person who might descend in the Hades.

In the *Symposium,* the analogy of the stone recurs in different circumstances,[297] mainly referring to the incapability of entering in a relational dialectic. By definition, the stone is aporetic[298] and interestingly, some specific types of statues were standing as substitutes for the souls of dead persons such as the *kolossoi.*[299] The main characteristic of these statues is that for the archaic culture they were not considered as representative images, but as real "doubles". Their existence was derived from an original (the soul of the dead person) but once created it was considered independent, having its own parallel existence.

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[294] *Symp*. 198c.
[295] Cf. Vernant, 2006, p. 328.
[296] The character of Perseus, his use of the mirror, the deadly petrification in the gaze of Medusa are part of one of the most emblematic and relevant episodes of Greek mythology. Unfortunately, this dissertation does not offer the occasion to deepen the important philosophical implication of this myth within Plato's *Symposium*. This can easily be material for an independent research.
[297] Most emblematically when Alcibiades compares Socrates to a statue of a Silenus: *Look at him! Isn't he just like a statue of Silenus? You know the kind of statue I mean; you'll find them in any shop in town. It's a Silenus sitting, his flute or his pipes in his hands, and it's hollow. It's split right down the middle, and inside it's full of tiny statues of the gods. Now look at him again! Isn't he also just like the satyr Marsyas? Nobody, not even you, Socrates, can deny that you look like them. But the resemblance goes beyond appearance, as you're about to hear*. (*Symp*. 215a-b) This passage is quite poignant and contains many symbolic philosophical elements which would deserve an independent research.
[298] Without *poroi* (exits) from which derives the English term "pore(s)".
[299] Cf. the two studies by Jean-Pierre Vernant one on the *kolossos* and on the other one on the theme of visual presentification, Vernant, 2006, pp. 321-349.

As argued, to consider the *eidola* fully existent and independent in their own existence was a specific trait of Archaic culture which resembles also the structure of the parmenidean ontology: what exists, is, and it cannot be said that it does not exist. Hence, the *kolossoi* too exist as doubles of human beings, although they have not movement and no life, simply no soul – hence no way back to the *eide*.

Plato, to avert the possibility of the unanimated "double" and the risks of petrification (primarily the loss of *logos*, but also the impossibility to see), articulates an ontology of the image capable of integrating not-being as a relational aspect of being and does it with the only available tool, the *logoi*. This allows the *eidola* to exist but never independently, in fact, the human world is the realm of *mimesis* in which *eidos* and *eidolon* both exist but dialectically and never independently. The mission of the philosopher is to give account of this dialectic, being merged in the finitude and transcending it.

In conclusion, it is worth to bring to completion the analogy of the stone repeating that the statue cannot be a self-standing ontological being has the stone lacks sound, view, warmth, resource, beauty. The lack of beauty is not an aesthetic problem of the stone as such, in fact, beauty is defined by *eros* and not vice-versa[300] and this is one of the reasons why it is still impossible to talk about "platonic Aesthetics" as something related to arts and image-making. If there is something like a "platonic Aesthetics" this is related to *eros* and beauty and not to art-making. It is related to *methexis* and not to *mimesis*. Although limited in a realm of *mimesis*, human beings thanks to the liveliness of their souls can see beauty and consequently they can experience *eros* as a desire and a generative power to bring forth life over the human finitude.

These last reflections on the theme of eros in connection with Aesthetics, beauty and immortality of the soul are not exhaustive and, as preannounced, they represent an open-ended conclusion which, in virtue of its openness can serve as a starting ground for further enquiries in the liminal territory of "platonic Aesthetics". A correct and complete understanding of beauty in Plato should take into account also the theory of metempsychosis and the role of the *anamnesis* in the process of knowledge.[301] In this dissertation, these themes have not found adequate space. The main reason for the

[300] Carchia, 2003, p. 136.
[301] Daniele Guastini holds that eros and anamnesis have a substantial connection and a determinant role in the platonic theory of knowledge. Cf. Guastini, 2003, pp. 52-61.

exclusion of these themes is due to the necessity of restraining the field of research to the precise platonic opposition (orality/writing) which, rather than being a side aspect has revealed to be a preliminary and grounding aspect to set a possible theory of "platonic Aesthetics". To analyse this specific platonic opposition, it has been relevant to include many aspects of contemporary interpretation and this implied the exclusion of many exquisitely platonic aspects which relevance was not meant to be denied.

For these last reasons, it is still worth recalling, as a final note to this work, the power of the wonderment aroused by the *eidola* of beauty in the soul. The wonderment provoked by the view of something or someone beautiful reconnects the soul with the *eidos* of beauty itself. For a brief, but powerful moment, the soul is brought back to its undefinable past in the *hyperuranion* and through a process of *anamnesis* it remembers the *eide*, specifically, the *eidos* of beauty:

> This is the best and noblest of all the forms that possession by god can take for anyone who has it or is connected to it, and when someone who loves beautiful boys is touched by this madness he is called a lover. As I said, nature requires that the soul of every human being has seen reality; otherwise, no soul could have entered this sort of living thing. But not every soul is easily reminded of the reality there by what it finds here—not souls that got only a brief glance at the reality there, not souls who had such bad luck when they fell down here that they were twisted by bad company into lives of injustice so that they forgot the sacred objects they had seen before. Only a few remain whose memory is good enough; and they are startled when they see an image of what they saw up there. Then they are beside themselves, and their experience is beyond their comprehension because they cannot fully grasp what it is that they are seeing. (*Phaedr.* 249e-250a)

The shining forth of beauty is able to reconciliate the best human souls.

AFTERWORD

On the contemporary relatability of this study

This work, although focuses on specific themes of Ancient Philosophy, does not intend to be a purely autoreferential academic exercise. The desire to investigate these aspects of the platonic thought originated – as said – from some Aesthetics interests; nevertheless, the research has been nurtured by an authentic desire to challenge, philosophically, the understanding of some of the most influential traits of contemporary communication and of the perception of the image nowadays.

This work offers a philosophical, although immediate, application to the understanding of some of the most popular contemporary phenomena which puzzle our inherited sense of the self as single beings and also as human species. To explain this in generical terms, I believe that focusing on the implication of the ancient issue of orality/writing, could help to live our present with more awareness. We live in an age of transition as much as Plato in his own time. The transition that we experience is from literate communication to telematic communication. The implications of this contemporary shift are wider and more articulated compared to those that occurred through the shift from orality to literacy[302] which Plato witnessed with his own work.

In this dissertation, the analysis of relevant contemporary themes has not found adequate space; nevertheless, this study can serve as a theoretical tool to frame the philosophical ground on which these themes should be correctly discussed and analysed – with the wish of having further occasions to develop these investigations.

Just to offer a few examples of the relevance of this study for interpreting some puzzling issues of our times, I shall mention two of the most contemporary relatable phaenomena.

The first, is the phenomenon of the "fake news". The web represents a sort of unmaterial, although visual, mirrored world of the real word. On the internet, there are channels for the exhibition and the exchange of information of any sort, such as websites and social

[302] As Walter Ong noted more than thirty years ago: *Most persons are surprised, and many distressed, to learn that essentially the same objections commonly urged today against computers were urged by Plato in the* Phaedrus *(274–7) and in the* Seventh Letter *against writing. Writing, as Socrates says in the* Phaedrus*, is inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can be only in the mind. It is a thing, a manufactured product. The same of course is said of computers*. Ong, 1982, p. 80.

media. The validation of what is written on websites and of what is exchanged on social media is based on the simple "presentification" of such information. The fact that the information is present (visible) seems enough to consider it real. The visibility of the information and of pictures (they can both be manipulated and deceptive) on the web alters the perception of truth and cancels the distinction of different degrees of truth: everything is equally true hence everything is equally (un)questionable. Moving an entire world on the visual level makes the distinction between *eidos* and *eidolon* almost impossible to see.[303] As argued at different stages in this dissertation, the major risk of confusing an *eidolon* with its *eidos* is the annihilation of truth as the manipulative use of *logoi* by the sophists does. Considering this, it can be better understood the parallel and co-dependent contemporary phaenomena of the "fake-news" and of the "conspiracy theories". In more exemplative terms, the information about Donald Trump ending school shootings by banning schools[304] and the "flat earth theory" which questions scientific data, are equally valid in the "post-truth world".[305] If this is possible is also in virtue of a problem – dealt with in this thesis – which is implicit in the relation between *eidos* and *eidolon* and has been pointed by Plato as a risk-factor. This problem concerns the issue of responsibility. What appears on a screen is unresponsive, it means that it cannot speak, but also that is not responsible for what it stands for.[306] This phenomenon is so dangerous on an epistemological and ethical level, that a group of well know intellectuals and scientists gathered together to found a group of research in Italy to contrast the phenomenon of pseudoscientific divulgation.[307] Their criticism and active work recalls in

[303] I am not establishing a relation of effect-cause between the "fake news", the "conspiracy theories" and the visual nature of the web. However, the structure of ontology of the image is one the factors – frequently underestimated – which increases this type of intellectual dystopia.

[304] This news was spread on the basis of an article published on online journal *The Yew Norker* on 07/10/2018 by Paul Zies. The article attempts to be trustworthy, reporting some declarations made by the President Trump; however, the title of the article "President Trump to Ban Schools in Order to Stop School Shootings" is approximated and incomplete, although catching. Also, the name of the journal (mocking and imitating a famous and established journal) and the design of its logo are very deceptive and might convince an inattentive reader about the authenticity of the information. On the basis of this catching title it has been built and spread a series of incorrect information or fake news.

[305] *Scepticism about common-sense things has been on the agenda of philosophers for centuries, but only as a plaything confined to the study. It does not spill into everyday life. So, what on earth do people mean when they say we are living in a "post-truth" world?* Blackburn, 18/02/2019.

[306] *Now in an age of global internet connectivity, social media offers impressionable teenagers and innumerable troll factories an unprecedented opportunity for mischief and immunity to its consequences. As a result, we begin to live in a world in which more and more people are untrustworthy more of the time.* Ibidem.

[307] This group was founded first in 1989 under the acronym CICAP (*Italian Committee for the Investigation of Claims on the Pseudoscience*) with intent of contrasting the divulgation of distorted information on paranormal episodes. Since 2013 the group focuses mainly on the wrong claims of pseudoscience, its main

some ways the criticism that Plato developed both against writing and orality. Even some of the contradictions are quite similar, in fact these intellectuals criticise also some uses of the tool that they use to express their criticism (web and media).

The other example is related to a recent scientific event which had a world-wide echo: "A global team of astronomers, led by Harvard scientists, has for the first time captured an image of a black hole".[308]

*Sagittarius A** is the scientific name of the black hole at the centre of the Milky Way galaxy and, to be precise, the picture taken shows its horizon of event. In fact, notoriously, a black hole is invisible; but, before to consider other scientific explanations, a philosophical question arises: how is it possible to take a visible picture of something invisible? This is an original philosophical question comparable only to the platonic question of how would it be possible to see one's own source of the view (hence, the pupil of the eye). Plato's answer was:

> I'm sure you've noticed that when a man looks into an eye his face appears in it, like in a mirror. We call this the 'pupil', for it's a sort of miniature of the man who's looking. […] Then an eye will see itself if it observes an eye and looks at the best part of it, the part with which it can see. […] But it won't see itself if it looks at anything else in a man, or anything else at all, unless it's similar to the eye. […] So if an eye is to see itself, it must look at an eye, and at that region of it in which the good activity of an eye actually occurs, and this, I presume, is seeing. (*Alc.* 133a-b)

The scientific answer about taking a picture of a black hole is pretty much the same:

> But the only way to detect black holes, Doeleman said, was through VLBI, or very long baseline interferometry. The process involves collecting data from multiple radio telescopes around the globe, then using algorithms and supercomputers to analyze that data, effectively creating a "virtual telescope" the size of the Earth itself, turning the planet into a giant radio telescope.[309]

intent is to verify the sources and the scientific validity of some pseudoscientific claims. Cf. https://www.cicap.org/n/index.php

[308] Reuell, 10/04/2019.

[309] Ibidem.

A telescope, in fact works like the pupil of a human eye, reflecting and mirroring. By turning the planet in a big enough eye, then it was possible to obtain this paradoxical image. However, the black hole itself remains invisible, and what the many radio telescopes could picture is just photons:

> Doeleman and his colleagues were hoping the giant flashlight would reveal a ring of light known as the last photon orbit. The closest light can get to a black hole without being "eaten," that orbit is the result of photons being flung off from the super-heated material around the black hole. Some of those photons are redirected by the extreme gravity and come to Earth, where they could be detected by EHT researchers.[310]

The fact that technology and science have somehow allowed us to "see the unseeable" should not lead to believe that that picture is actually *Sagittarius A**. Indeed, that picture represents – without denying at all its success and the utmost enthusiasm which derived from it – the perfect example of what Plato meant with the term *eidolon*: a collection of perspectives of a thing and not the thing itself.

Although their technical perfectibility, human *logoi* remain weak. This does not mean that our human research should give up, on the contrary, to keep examine is the entire point of a human life;[311] it rather means that human research should not stop because no *eidolon* can ever be exhaustive enough to satisfy the authentic desire of human knowledge. We do live in the realm of *mimesis* and our visibility can keep the eye stable only on the *eidola*, while *eide* can be grasped only temporarily. It is a matter of finitude. The most dangerous mistake would be to confuse an *eidolon* with its *eidos*, because this would disclose the realm of death and annihilate the incessant life of the *eide*. To protect not only our knowledge, but also the creative power of our soul, we should train in the art of distinction and carefully apply it to the visual which, willingly or not, is the territory

[310] Ibidem.

[311] *On the other hand, if I say that it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for men, you will believe me even less.* (*Apol*. 38a)

on which human knowledge and human relations have progressively grounded themselves.

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