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Coming to Terms with Aristotle: Technical Terminology in the *Poetics* and Beyond

Abstract: Aristotle uses a number of common Greek words in the *Poetics* as technical terms with specific meanings unique to literary criticism. I argue that the key term *mimēsis*, though typically considered a philosophical term, may be a technical term referring to a particular kind of organization or arrangement of individual imitations within an artistic work. This technical definition is only indirectly related to the word's colloquial meaning of 'imitation', and would exclude it from being understood as a philosophical or aesthetic concept. I conclude that this wider consideration of technical terms and reconsideration of philosophical terms in the *Poetics* could help explain some terminological confusion in Aristotle's other texts.

1 Introduction

Aristotle's thought is practically inseparable from his terminology. Aristotle defined and applied more terms than any other philosopher before him, and many of the terms that he coined are still in use by philosophers today. But paradoxically, Aristotle himself made little effort to adhere to a terminological system. Since the Stoics, readers of Aristotle have complained of his imprecise use of terminology, faulting him for applying words and concepts differently than he himself defines them, or reverting to their colloquial meaning without warning.[1]

These two problems are related, because Aristotle typically uses everyday words as terms without clearly indicating when they are philosophical terms and when they are not. Bonitz, who produced the first lexicon of Aristotle's terms in the nineteenth century, alluded to this practice when he noted that Aristotle 'novavit'[2] many philosophical terms by appropriating common words in Greek. At about the same time, Teichmüller commented in detail on the problem posed by Aristotle's use of terms in a section called "Die Terminologie ist bei Aristoteles nicht von stricter Observanz." Teichmüller concluded "dass man den Aristoteles zwar gar nicht verstehen kann, wenn man seine Terminologie nicht kennt, dass man ihn aber auch notwendig missverstehen muss, wenn man überall *termini* wittert."[3] Most scholarship since Teichmüller has taken a similar approach to Aristotle's terminological practice. While

1 On the Stoics and later periods, see for example Tzamalikos 2016, 72–75 and 129–133.

2 Bonitz 1870, iii.

3 Teichmüller 1867, 7.

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acknowledging that Aristotle is inconsistent in his use of terminology, the assumption is that an intelligent and informed reader can correctly determine from the context the meaning of a term, or whether a common word is being used as a philosophical term. Still, there are numerous critical instances where inconsistencies in Aristotle's usage cannot be adequately resolved from the context.

This pattern of terminological ambiguity is particularly remarkable since Aristotle himself goes to great lengths to precisely define his terminology. For example, he frequently uses the formula "πολλαχῶς λέγεται" (*pollakhōs legetai*) to introduce the disambiguation of several different senses of a term, and Book 5 (Delta) of the *Metaphysics* presents definitions of 30 crucial philosophical terms focused on differentiating the various meanings each term can have. Aristotle also sometimes warns of the grave risks of imprecisely defined terms, for example in *Topics* I 18.108a18–37, or shows he is keenly aware of terminological ambiguity, for example, in *On Sophistical Refutations* 4.166a14–21. And as the founder of formal logic, he emphasized the importance of terminological clarity, for example, in *Posterior Analytics* II 13.97b13–27. So in spite of being the first philosopher to stress the theoretical importance of consistent terminological practice, Aristotle still was quite loose with his terminology. This paradox is one of the most peculiar aspects of Aristotle's works.

But over the last 40 years, several scholars have also considered whether Aristotle's apparently inconsistent terminological practice may in fact adhere to a coherent theoretical principle itself. Edel argued that Aristotle's philosophical terminology can be sorted into conceptual networks, groups "of basic concepts associated in such a way that starting with any one . . . leads to others."[4] For Edel, Aristotle is neither a formalist aiming at (but sometimes falling short of) a strictly consistent terminology, nor an informalist who chooses to avoid the restrictions of philosophical terminology. Instead, Edel believes each term "reaches over to the others and only gradually becomes intelligible as its relations to the others . . . are revealed."[5] This explains why terms may be used inconsistently in Aristotle without revealing a flaw in his thought. The use of terms would naturally change not only depending on the context (i.e., in which 'conceptual network' they appear), but also over the course of a work as the relations between terms develop or the terms shift slightly in meaning. This approach was also applied by Ricœur, who argued that mimesis in Aristotle's *Poetics* relies on a 'conceptual network of action' that includes 'terms such as agent, goal, means, circumstance, help, hostility, cooperation, conflict, success, failure, etc.' in which 'all the members of the set are in a relation of intersignification'.[6] As with Edel's understanding of basic concepts in Aristotle, Ricœur is suggesting that the key term *praxis* in the

4 Edel 1982, 41. See also Horowitz and Thayer 1987, in particular 189–216.

5 Edel 1982, 38.

6 See Ricœur 1984, 54–57.

Poetics and its related terms could be relational, flexible, and unfixed, but still conform to a consistent terminological method.

So studying terms as part of a conceptual network is essentially a more systematic and deliberate way of defining terms in their context. The conventional approach uses the local context of the passage or sentence where the term appears to deduce what it means in that instance. The conceptual network approach takes into account the use of terms in the same network in and around that passage or sentence to determine what the term means in that instance. The network approach is more precise and methodical, but its decisive advantage is that it can explain local shifts in terminology, or even predict them.

Applying this more systematic approach to context in the *Poetics* following Ricœur could be particularly useful, because of all of Aristotle's works, terminological problems are perhaps most prominent in this text. As the first surviving work of literary criticism, it relies heavily on terms that rarely or never reappear in Aristotle's other works or those of previous philosophers. For centuries, the *Poetics* has been criticized chiefly for its "lack of terminological clarity"[7] and resulting obscurity. Aristotle introduces key terms in his theory of poetry without explaining them or defining them, and often uses them in ways that are thought to be inconsistent in various parts of the text. As a result, scholars regularly comment that important terminology "shifts in meaning without warning" or "develops as he writes,"[8] for example, or that Aristotle's "loose terminology" makes the *Poetics* "notoriously difficult to understand."[9] These confusions and inconsistencies apply to a greater or lesser extent to practically all the important terms in the text.

But Aristotle's terminological practice in this particular text can be explained in another way. Halliwell has suggested that "the central ideas of the treatise had been at least partially elaborated elsewhere"[10] by Aristotle in lost works. As a result, Halliwell believes that in the *Poetics* Aristotle uses some "terms and concepts before he has explained or defined them" because they would be already familiar to his audience. Similarly, Bywater[11] speculated that some of the terminology used in the *Poetics* actually belongs to a specific technical vocabulary already established by other critics even before Aristotle. Perhaps substantiating this claim, at *Metaphysics* XIV 3.1090b19 Aristotle argues that nature is not like an "episodic tragedy," suggesting that "episode"

7 Schmitt 2008, 46.

8 Janko 1984, 229.

9 Craik 1970, 95. See also Vahlen 1865, 70 for the more moderate complaint that "neben einer festen Terminologie einiges Abweichende herläuft."

10 Halliwell 1986, 35.

11 Bywater 1902 (see also Bywater 1909, xiv–xv). Without citing Bywater, Gudeman 1934, 19 (with note 17) also argued that many terms in the *Poetics* must come from a "Fachwortschatz literarischer Kritik," and Rees 1972, 1, assumes that *peripeteia* ("reversal"), *anagnōrisis* ("recognition") and *pathos* ("suffering") belonged to the "technical vocabulary of the contemporary theater."

or "episodic" were technical terms from the theater his audience was aware of.[12] Whether developed by Aristotle or by others in addition to Aristotle, the notion here is that key terms in the *Poetics* have special, technical meanings not always entirely derived from their colloquial meanings.

But there is an important methodological consequence of viewing some terms in the *Poetics* as previously defined technical terminology. If it is true that these terms have consistent definitions potentially quite distinct from their dictionary definitions but known to Aristotle's audience, then variously interpreting such terms by relying on the specific context could make less sense than in other cases. This is because the problem here is not necessarily Aristotle's varying uses of a term depending on the context. Instead, the problem may be that since the technical definition is lost, we do not see how the term is consistently applied. This technical definition could then only be recovered by first assuming that the term is used consistently in every instance, and then looking for a definition that matches all the various usages. In other words, *given there may be an entirely consistent definition that works for all the uses of a particular technical term, the only way to determine that definition is to extrapolate it from these uses themselves*.

Without explicitly formulating the methodology in this way, I previously took essentially the same approach to defining the ambiguous terms *megethos* (μέγεθος) and *mēkos* (μῆκος) in the *Poetics*, determining that the word μέγεθος only refers to relative size (meaning proportional size independent of absolute size measured in units), and μῆκος only to absolute size (meaning size quantified and measured in a concrete number of units).[13] Although both definitions still relate in some way to their respective colloquial meanings of 'magnitude' and 'length', obviously the technical meanings are extremely specialized and cryptic. The results also pointed towards a technical redefinition of the key term *muthos* (typically translated as 'plot') in the *Poetics*.[14]

So this approach requires deliberately disregarding the lexical definition, and then carefully analyzing the different applications of the term in question to deduce what its lost technical definition appears to be. It also requires keeping an open mind to surprising technical definitions that cannot be intuited from the lexical definition, and that may even be only tangentially related to it. This approach of course assumes that the lost technical definitions themselves were consistently applied by Aristotle. But that assumption seems more plausible if Aristotle borrowed this terminology from a technical vocabulary already accepted by contemporary critics.

12 See Webster 1954, 307. On the definition of "episode" see Köhnken 1990.

13 Marsh 2015.

14 See now in further depth Marsh 2021.

One fundamental term in the *Poetics* that has never been considered as a potential technical term is *mimēsis*.[15] Especially because of its extensive previous use by Plato in his discussions of art, it seems obvious that in the *Poetics mimēsis* would be, as in Plato, a philosophical term that is part of the conceptual network of imitation including other terms such as *metaphora*, *logos*, *phusis*, *phonē*, *sēmainein*, and *onoma*.[16] But Aristotle's concept of *mimēsis* has little in common with Plato's. Plato defines *mimēsis* in several contexts explicitly in relation to literal imitation, while Aristotle never offers any explicit definition at all.[17] In addition, Plato's use of the term in general aligns with meanings that place it in the conceptual network of imitation. But the problems with understanding mimesis in relation to imitation in the *Poetics* are notoriously complex.[18]

To name just a few of these problems, at 1447a20 Aristotle mentions "*mimēsis* with the voice" together with the other prominent *mimēsis* forms listed such as tragedy, comedy, dithyramb, music, the visual arts, and dance. If this refers to vocal imitations (mimicry and so on) as most critics conclude, why would such an obscure "parlor-trick"[19] be included in this selection of major arts? Similarly at 1448b7–9, he says that we first learn by *mimēsis*, presumably referring to children imitating those around them. But then he completes the sentence by noting everyone likes mimetic objects, apparently referring to artistic works. Again within this one sentence *mimēsis* has shifted from meaning simple mimicry to sophisticated artistic activity. Then a few lines later at 1448b13–19, Aristotle seems to say that visual imitations (in painting, for example) give us pleasure because we learn something by recognizing things or people such as we have seen before. But later at 1461b28–32 Aristotle specifically criticizes arts that imitate "everything," for example when an aulos player mimics the flight of a discus with his body. Don't we also "learn" from recognizing the player's movements as a flying discus just as we do from recognizing a figure in a painting? Why is this sort of imitation then so undesirable? Lastly, Aristotle may explicitly contradict

15 Woodruff 1992, 74 begins his investigation of the term by stating that "*mimesis* seems to be a technical term in the *Poetics*, and so ought to be used with reference to one focal meaning." But since he assumes the "focal meaning" must be derived from the dictionary definition of "imitation," his conclusions do not stray far from previous attempts to define the term. My point here is that a technical term's definition cannot be assumed to be derived from the dictionary definition. Similarly Söffing 1981, calls mimesis a *terminus technicus* at 46, n. 22. But he still relates *mimēsis* to its dictionary meaning, glossing it as the "Umsetzung von Realität," and therefore assumes its definition is quite broad and abstract.

16 For an innovative and detailed analysis of this conceptual network, see Derrida 1974, 30–46.

17 For a comparison of *mimēsis* in Plato and Aristotle, see Woodruff 1992, 74: "What Aristotle has to say on mimesis is almost entirely free of Platonic influence." He also reviews Plato's various definitions of *mimēsis* and summarizes the different meanings of *mimēsis* in Aristotle. On *mimēsis* in Plato see also Else 1958; Golden 1975; Belfiore 1984; Halliwell 2002, 37–71; and now Pfefferkorn and Spinelli 2021.

18 Besides my list here, see also Belfiore 2014, 63–64.

19 Lucas 1968, 57.

his own initial description of *mimēsis* when discussing epic. At 1448a21–22 Aristotle includes Homer's combination of narrative and direct speech as a category of art that is also a *mimēsis*. But then much later at 1460a7–11 Aristotle criticizes epic poets who unlike Homer "speak in person" throughout the poem, and only infrequently engage in *mimēsis*. The context seems to indicate Aristotle means Homer uses more direct speech than the other epic poets, and as a result that plain narration apparently now no longer qualifies as *mimēsis*, and the epic is no longer viewed in its entirety as a *mimēsis*.

The accepted explanation for these difficulties is that *mimēsis* is a remarkably malleable and multifaceted philosophical term straddling an enormous scope of meanings ranging from literal imitation to representation to expression.[20] Many of these varying uses of the term can be explained by studying the context, or analyzing local shifts in the conceptual network of imitation. But still we must accept that in some cases, Aristotle is either inconsistent or that we cannot know what he means. As a result, the definition of *mimēsis* defies any simple or static formulation. Some even praise Aristotle's "sagacious reticence,"[21] arguing that the term's profound philosophical subtlety justifies his refusal to define it. Yet the fact remains we do not really know what *mimēsis* means in this text and are just guessing at definitions that relate it to concepts of imitation, no matter how vaguely.

Here I would like to explore the opposite notion: that Aristotle's use of *mimēsis* seems confusing or inconsistent because it is actually a technical term with a precise meaning unknown to us, but familiar to him and his audience. Instead of assuming the term refers to a large family of philosophical concepts related to its lexical definition of imitation that must somehow apply in each of these very different contexts, I examine whether it may have a narrower, more precise definition. I show that in the single case where Aristotle appears to define *mimēsis* in relation to imitation or representation at 1448b9–19, this understanding of that crucial passage relies on a misinterpretation of a single Greek word, one almost entirely overlooked or dismissed by commentators until now. I then demonstrate that the passage may instead point to a consistent definition of *mimēsis* not necessarily derived from the one found in the dictionary. Finally, I apply that definition to the problems with the use of the term listed above. I conclude that mimesis may be a narrow technical term that refers to a particular artistic practice or procedure that only indirectly integrates the concept of imitation.

20 See for example Janko 1987, xv: "The Greeks drew no distinction between imitation, copying, impersonation and representation – all these concepts were included in the word mimēsis." Hubbard 1972, 89 comments, "*mimesis*, the central concept of the *Poetics* . . . is never defined and the range of ideas Aristotle uses it to cover is a shifting one."

21 Halliwell 1995, 8.

2 *Mimēsis* and Scope

Aristotle launches his discussion of poetry at 1447a13–16 with a list of arts that he defines as kinds of *mimēsis*. But even with this first mention of the term, he narrows its scope. He first specifies that "most" but not all music for the aulos or lyre is *mimēsis*. He also adds that the arts listed are *mimēsis* "as a whole" (*to sunholon*, τὸ σύνολον). There are three possible interpretations of these limits. The first is that only some specimens of aulos or lyre music, for example, are *mimēsis* and some not. The second is that only some parts of these works of art are *mimēsis*, and some not. The third is that *mimēsis* is present in various degrees in different parts of a work, and perhaps entirely absent in some parts. As I will show, all three of these possibilities are confirmed by Aristotle's other statements indicating the scope of *mimēsis*.

Since the focus in the *Poetics* is on narrative works such as tragedy, comedy, and epic, which Aristotle appears to assume always require *mimēsis*, there is little further discussion of works of art that exclude *mimēsis* entirely besides some music for the aulos and lyre. But following this passage at 1447a27–8 he mentions that dance is also a kind of *mimēsis*. He explains this is because dance also can translate rhythms into movements that are a *mimēsis* of *ēthē kai pathē kai praxeis* (ἤθη καὶ πάθη καὶ πράξεις). Since Aristotle goes out of his way to list the objects of *mimēsis* for this particular art, it seems likely that the inclusion of such 'characters, emotions and actions' qualifies a dance as a *mimēsis*. A reasonable assumption then is that not all dances included such elements at all, and as a result some dances fall outside the scope of *mimēsis* entirely. The statement also suggests that it was not immediately obvious how dance could be a kind of *mimēsis*, or at least that Aristotle felt obligated to specify which category of dances he believed qualify as *mimēsis*.

In addition, in the *Politics* Aristotle indicates that musical *mimēsis* may be a special category of music in general. At VIII 5.1340a8 he states that many melodies and particularly those of a musician named Olympus make our souls "enthusiastic." He then goes on at 1340a12–14 to add: ἔτι δὲ ἀκροώμενοι τῶν μιμήσεων γίγνονται πάντες συμπαθεῖς ("besides everyone is emotionally affected when listening to *mimēseis*.") Since Aristotle writes "besides" (*eti de*, ἔτι δὲ), one logical interpretation of this passage is that a musical *mimēsis* is a particular type of musical composition that makes its listeners emotionally "sympathetic" (the literal translation of *sumpatheis* (συμπαθεῖς)). He first describes an effect of music in general, and then the effect of a particular group of works within it, the musical *mimēsis*. Many melodies such as those of Olympus can make our souls 'enthusiastic', but only musical *mimēsis* can make us 'sympathetic'. So by this reading of the passage a piece of music is not automatically a *mimēsis*, but music can be composed in such a way that it is a *mimēsis*. If this is correct, it would also explain why in the *Poetics* Aristotle immediately signals that not all music for the aulos or lyre can be called *mimēsis*. Regardless of the instrument or instruments used, it appears that some pieces of music can be examples of *mimēsis* and some not.

But it also seems that within a work that can be called a *mimēsis*, *mimēsis* may be more pronounced in some parts than in others. In the case of tragedy, there are several instances when Aristotle suggests that the poet engages in *mimēsis* to a greater degree when composing the *muthos* than in other parts of the play. At 1449b24 tragedy is described as a *mimēsis* of an action, a formula that is repeated many times throughout the rest of the text. The *muthos* is then defined at 1450a4 as the *mimēsis* of the action in the play. Among the parts of tragedy, Aristotle specifies that the *muthos* is primary, and the other parts such as character are secondary. For example, at 1450b2 he writes: ἔστιν τε μίμησις πράξεως καὶ διὰ ταύτην μάλιστα τῶν πραττόντων ("tragedy is a *mimēsis* of an action, and primarily because of the action *a mimēsis* of agents.") Aristotle also notes at 1450a23–5 that a tragedy can be written without character, but not without *muthos*. If tragedy is *a mimēsis* of character primarily because it is a *mimesis* of an action, it seems that character here depends on action.

One interpretation of this ranking is that *mimēsis* of character is secondary only because it is less necessary to a tragedy. It would still then be *mimēsis* in every sense, just not essential for the purposes of tragedy. But it could also indicate that since *mimēsis* of character is secondary, it requires less *mimēsis*. There is a primary *mimēsis*, *muthos*, which lays the foundation that supports a secondary *mimēsis*, character. This secondary *mimēsis* is weaker, and therefore unable to stand on its own. It may be missing a degree of mimesis that it must borrow from the *muthos*. As a result, it could be that the parts of the tragedy that establish character contain less *mimesis* than the parts that compose the action.

If true, this would parallel the *muthos*' relationship with the other events in a narrative work. Some scholars argue that not all events are included in the *muthos*, and the rest are what Aristotle describes as "episodes."[22] The *muthos* events must be linked by probability or necessity, but the "episode" events are only plausible or appropriate.[23] In this case the difference cannot be a matter of what is essential or not, because Aristotle never suggests the "episodes" are inessential or could be left out like character. But Aristotle does indicate that the "episode" events are supported by the *muthos* events, and rely on their stronger structure of causality. That is why at 1455b1–2 Aristotle instructs the poet to first lay out the *muthos*, and then "fill it out" with "episodes" that relate to it. In addition, he says at 1451b33–52a1 if the *muthos* events are not linked by probability or necessity, the result is a flawed "episodic" *muthos*. This shows the "episodes" can only serve their proper function when they appear in relation to a *muthos*, and, regardless of their content, cannot replace the *muthos*. So as with *muthos* and character, it appears that the *muthos* events lay the foundation for the 'episode' events. Here again there is a primary *mimēsis*, the *muthos*, with a secondary *mimēsis*, the "episodes," which cannot stand on its own.

22 For summary of the evidence here, see Marsh 2015, 581–582.

23 See Belfiore 1992, 364–366.

That conclusion may be confirmed by another comment Aristotle makes about the events in a tragedy. Discussing the proper effect of tragedy, at 1453b11–4 he writes:

> ἐπεὶ δὲ τὴν ἀπὸ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου διὰ μιμήσεως δεῖ ἡδονὴν παρασκευάζειν τὸν ποιητήν, φανερὸν ὡς τοῦτο ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐμποιητέον.
>
> And since the poet should produce the pleasure of pity and fear through *mimēsis*, it is clear that it should be produced in the events.

Since just before at 1453b2 he states that fear and pity should be a result of the "structure of events" and this formula often appears in the *Poetics* as a gloss for the *muthos*, it can be assumed that in this sentence *tois pragmasin* (τοῖς πράγμασιν) refers to the events in the *muthos*, not the "episodes." So Aristotle here asserts that this effect of tragedy should be produced by *mimēsis*, and as a result 'it is clear' (*phaneron*, φανερὸν) by the *muthos*. It appears that *mimēsis* covers a number of parts of tragedy, but it is most obvious and 'clearest' in the *muthos*. *Mimēsis* is more pronounced in the *muthos* than in these other parts, and the other parts participate in *mimēsis* to a lesser degree.

Lastly, there are two passages showing that *mimēsis* may be entirely absent in some parts of a work. As mentioned in the introduction, at 1460a7–11 Aristotle gives this advice to epic poets:

> αὐτὸν γὰρ δεῖ τὸν ποιητὴν ἐλάχιστα λέγειν: οὐ γάρ ἐστι κατὰ ταῦτα μιμητής. οἱ μὲν οὖν ἄλλοι αὐτοὶ μὲν δι᾽ ὅλου ἀγωνίζονται, μιμοῦνται δὲ ὀλίγα καὶ ὀλιγάκις: ὁ δὲ ὀλίγα προοιμιασάμενος εὐθὺς εἰσάγει ἄνδρα ἢ γυναῖκα ἢ ἄλλο τι ἦθος . . ..
>
> The poet should speak as little as possible in person, since that is not what makes the poet a *mimētic* artist. Other poets perform in person throughout, making a *mimēsis* rarely and just in a few parts. But Homer after a short introduction immediately brings on a man or a woman or some other character . . ..

I will return below to what Aristotle might mean by the poet speaking "as themselves" or "in person" as the phrase could also be translated. But whatever it means he explicitly states that the poet is not acting as a "mimetic artist" in these parts of the poem where the poet performs "in person", and that other poets (besides Homer who Aristotle praises for avoiding this mistake) only are "mimetic artists" in small parts of the poem. So the passage not only establishes that it may be possible for some parts of the poem to lack *mimēsis* entirely, it even suggests that in some cases *mimēsis* may appear in only small sections of a long epic poem.

Then when discussing problems in poetry such as the pursuit of Hector in the *Iliad*, which Aristotle finds implausible, at 1460b31–2 he minimizes these kinds of errors by comparing them to a similar kind of mistake in painting: ἔλαττον γὰρ εἰ μὴ ᾔδει ὅτι ἔλαφος θήλεια κέρατα οὐκ ἔχει ἢ εἰ ἀμιμήτως ἔγραψεν. ("It is a smaller error if the artist did not know that a female deer has no antlers than if he painted it unmimetically.") The word *amimētōs* (ἀμιμήτως) here is typically understood to mean imi-

tate 'poorly' or unconvincingly, so that the sentence highlights the difference between slavishly copying reality and creating a successful work of art. According to this reading, Aristotle means that painting a female deer inaccurately – in other words failing to imitate in every detail the physical characteristics it has in life – is better than painting a poor artistic *mimēsis* of the deer that is less effective for other reasons. But then it would make more sense for Aristotle to use a phrase that means "apply *mimēsis* incorrectly" or inadequately, so that the contrast between narrow imitation as copying and much broader imitation as an artistic activity is clear. Instead, he uses a word whose literal translation is simply 'non-mimetically' or entirely without *mimēsis*. It seems at least possible then that *amimētōs* does not mean imitating poorly, it means the deer is not part of the *mimēsis*. In that case, the larger painting (which would then presumably include other subjects) could qualify as a *mimēsis*, but this one figure of the deer within it would not. Aristotle means that an inaccurately depicted female deer that is part of the *mimēsis* is still better than an accurate depiction that makes no contribution to the *mimēsis*. If true, the passage indicates that a deer appearing in a painting can be 'non-mimetic' in every sense, and as a result that certain parts of a painting may not contain any *mimēsis* at all.

3 *Mimēsis* for the Structure, *Mimēma* for the Part

If Aristotle limits the scope of *mimēsis* within the artistic work, it could also be that the definition of *mimēsis* itself has a narrower scope. The only instance where Aristotle comes close to defining what *mimēsis* is, or explicitly describing how *mimēsis* functions in a work of art is at 1448b7–19. This makes the use of the term *mimēsis* in this passage unique in the *Poetics*. I do not have space here to go through each and every use of *mimēsis* and its cognates in the text, but they all fall into three general categories.

In the first category, the term is used without any object. For example, as mentioned at the beginning of the last section, Aristotle launches his discussion of poetry at 1447a13–16 with a list of arts ranging from literature to music to dance that he defines as kinds of *mimēsis*. He also uses *mimēsis* as a synonym for the artistic work, for example when referring to epic as the *dihēgēmatikēn mimēsin* (διηγηματικὴν μίμησιν) or 'narrative *mimēsis*' (1459b33).

In the second category, *mimēsis* or the verb *mimeisthai* (μιμεῖσθαι, 'to imitate') is used in the sense of 'to make an artistic *mimēsis*' about certain objects, such as in the passage at 1447a28 also discussed above where Aristotle specifies that dance can make a *mimēsis* about 'characters, emotions and actions', or in the definition of comedy at 1449a32–3 where he says it is a *mimēsis* of inferior people. It is also used with an object, though much more rarely, to indicate literal imitation, such as at 1454b9 where it refers to copying a good painter's approach to character.

In the third category, Aristotle occasionally calls the artist a *mimētēs* (μιμητὴς) or 'mimetic artist', such as in the passage about Homer at 1460a7–11 cited at the end of the last section.

Since the term is used absolutely in both the first and third categories, these uses function basically like a label, and give no explicit indication of Aristotle's criteria for classifying an art or artwork as a *mimēsis*, or an artist as mimetic. The uses in the second category show that an artistic *mimēsis* has objects such as people or actions and that these objects can be real or made up. For example, Aristotle specifies that the *muthos* can take either real historical events or events that never happened as its object.[24] But Aristotle leaves unsaid what a *mimēsis must do* with these objects to produce a work of mimetic art, or what precisely makes the *muthos* events – whether real or invented – a *mimēsis* of an action.

So Aristotle's uses of the term and its cognates in all three categories appear to rely on an assumption that his audience is already familiar with its meaning when applied to works of art. Yet at the same time, although context may indicate how Aristotle intended the term to be variously understood in each of these passages, no single consistent definition emerges from them. As Woodruff concludes, in Aristotle "the texts do not determine a single account of *mimēsis*. We shall have to speculate."[25]

That is why the passage at 1448b7–19 is such an important exception. The passage stands apart in two ways: it is the only passage where literal imitation and artistic *mimēsis* are directly linked; and it is the only passage where the process of understanding an artistic *mimēsis* is explained. That means it is the only evidence we have of how Aristotle himself may have defined *mimēsis*.

Aristotle begins the passage by stating that people "learn their first lessons" through *mimēsis*, and that everyone enjoys "*mimetic* objects" (μιμήμασι). He further explains how this pleasure is produced, which it turns out is also linked to learning:

> σημεῖον δὲ τούτου τὸ συμβαῖνον ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων: ἃ γὰρ αὐτὰ λυπηρῶς ὁρῶμεν, τούτων τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς μάλιστα ἠκριβωμένας χαίρομεν θεωροῦντες, οἷον θηρίων τε μορφὰς τῶν ἀτιμοτάτων καὶ νεκρῶν. αἴτιον δὲ καὶ τούτου, ὅτι μανθάνειν οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ἥδιστον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁμοίως, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ βραχὺ κοινωνοῦσιν αὐτοῦ. διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο χαίρουσι τὰς εἰκόνας ὁρῶντες, ὅτι συμβαίνει θεωροῦντας μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι τί ἕκαστον, οἷον ὅτι οὗτος ἐκεῖνος: ἐπεὶ ἐὰν μὴ τύχῃ προεωρακώς, οὐχ ᾗ μίμημα ποιήσει τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἀπεργασίαν ἢ τὴν χροιὰν ἢ διὰ τοιαύτην τινὰ ἄλλην αἰτίαν.
>
> The proof is what happens in practice: we enjoy viewing the most precise images of objects, which themselves are unpleasant to look at, for example, the shapes of the most unattractive animals or corpses. The reason is that learning is intensely pleasurable, not only for philosophers but likewise for others as well, although they derive less pleasure from it. That is why people

24 On Aristotle's comments on the relationship between the events of history and the events in the poetic muthos, see in particular Butcher 1902, 163–165; Lucas 1968, 123–124; Gallavotti 1974, 144; Dupont-Roc and Lallot 1980, 222; Croix 1992; Nussbaum 2001, 386–387.

25 Woodruff 1992, 89.

> enjoy seeing images. What happens is that they learn by looking at the images, working out what each thing is (for example 'this is a particular person'). If the viewer happens not to have seen it in advance, it will not give pleasure as a mimetic object, but because of the technique or color, or for some other reason.

Aristotle observes that *mimēmata* (μιμήματα) give us pleasure so reliably that we even enjoy seeing *eikonas* (εἰκόνας) or images of unpleasant objects. But not all images are in this category. At the end of the passage he concludes that depending on the context, we may not be able to enjoy an image *hēi mimēma* (ᾗ μίμημα) but only for other reasons unrelated to its function as a μίμημα. So the topic in this passage is images functioning in a particular way as μιμήματα that produce the specific pleasure appropriate to them.[26]

Aristotle then goes on to argue that such μιμήματα produce this pleasure through learning of a certain type. These images require the viewer to *sullogizesthai* (συλλογίζεσθαι, besides 'work out' translations include 'conclude' or 'infer') what each thing is, for example that a person depicted is 'so-and-so', a particular individual or perhaps kind of individual. But this at first seems to be a form of recognition, not learning or even inference. Initially at least then, it is unclear how recognition of this sort could produce any notable pleasure.[27]

Apparently aware of this, Aristotle lays out the conditions of such learning. He states that the viewer must *proheōrakōs* (προεωρακώς) the object, or else the image cannot give pleasure as a μίμημα. If this word προεωρακώς means 'to have seen the object previously' as it is usually translated and generally understood, then he must be describing an interpretive process that resembles the recognition of an imitation. He would then be saying that such recognition is only possible when the viewer is in some sense familiar with what is imitated, and this is where the learning and pleasure lies. For some interpreters, this leads to an understanding of *mimēsis* as a nuanced form of imitation relating 'the world within the work and the world of the artist or audience'.[28] This would then be in fact the only passage in all of Aristotle where the term *mimēsis* applied to artistic works is explicitly linked with imitation in the literal sense.

But the verb *prooraō* (προοράω) does not in any other instance during this period mean 'see before' in the sense of having seen something previously. Everywhere else and in the rest of Aristotle's works it means 'see what is before one' in the sense of see what is ahead, see in advance, or to foresee. This problem with the passage has

26 For the debate on how or if this pleasure through learning may apply to the pleasures of poetry as well, see Lear 1988, 307–314, Ferrari 1999, 84–86, Heath 2012, 68–72; Destrée 2012, 98–103.

27 See Tsitsiridis 2005, 437–440 for a convenient overview of how scholars have interpreted this reference to learning, understanding and inference in the passage.

28 Halliwell 2002, 155.

been almost universally ignored.[29] That approach was inaugurated by Bonitz himself, who tries to explain the phrase *ean mē tukhē proeōrakōs* (ἐὰν μὴ τύχῃ προεωρακώς, "if the viewer happens not to have seen it in advance") by adding in parentheses "i.q. πρότερον ἑωρακώς" ("the same as having seen previously"). But I cannot see why this single usage should have such a different meaning, except because scholars believe the context requires it if *mimēsis* is about imitation.

Given this crucial ambiguity, it may be worthwhile to consider what the passage would mean otherwise. If this word προεωρακώς does not refer to any form of recognition or directly to the world outside the work of art, then what the passage might say about *mimēsis* and how it functions can have only an indirect relation to imitation. In that case, a parallel passage at *Rhetoric* II 23.1400b28–33 may help explain what Aristotle means when he writes the viewer can συλλογίζεσθαι what each thing is, and in the process 'foresee' an image:

> πάντων δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐλεγκτικῶν καὶ τῶν δεικτικῶν συλλογισμῶν θορυβεῖται μάλιστα τὰ τοιαῦτα ὅσα ἀρχόμενα προορῶσι μὴ τῷ ἐπιπολῆς εἶναι (ἅμα γὰρ καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐφ᾽ αὑτοῖς χαίρουσι προαισθανόμενοι), καὶ ὅσων τοσοῦτον ὑστερίζουσιν ὥσθ᾽ ἅμα εἰρημένων γνωρίζειν.
>
> Of all refutative and demonstrative syllogisms, the most celebrated are those where the listeners foresee the conclusion from the start, though not because they are superficial (since at the same time they congratulate themselves on figuring them out in advance); and also those where the hearers lag behind to some extant so that they understand them at the same time as they are said.

Here the listeners see in advance the conclusion of a rhetorical syllogism, or an argument with premises and a conclusion. As the listeners hear the first premise, the rest of the argument or simply the conclusion itself comes into view before they are spoken. It appears that the listeners infer what the next steps in the syllogism are, or in a sense compose the syllogism themselves before the orator lays it out. They 'congratulate themselves' because they not only can understand a syllogism just after it is delivered by the orator, they can even think 'syllogistically' like the orator in anticipating the argument. In other words, like the orator they can also συλλογίζεσθαι, and when they use that facility to accurately infer what will come next, it gives them pleasure. This could also be described as a form of learning, since the audience learns how to apply their 'syllogistical' thinking to the argument at hand.

If a similar mechanism applies in the *Poetics* passage, then the image only qualifies as a 'mimetic object' if the viewer has in some way foreseen it or expected it from other parts of the artistic work. As with the conclusion of a syllogism and its premises,

29 The sole exceptions I am aware of are Martineau 1976, 452–453; Halliwell 2001, 90; Veloso 2018, 193–194. Martineau makes a tortured and unsuccessful attempt to gloss the word as a kind of intellectual intention, Halliwell without evidence simply denies the dictionary definition applies, and Veloso argues the word can mean "recognize" or "guess" by misreading Thucydides 7.44.2 where it more likely refers to seeing a figure just ahead.

foreseeing what image will come next here would mean inferring it from the other images in the painting. This would suggest that a visual *mimēsis* would be a structure of μιμήματα linked in such a way that they permit the viewer to syllogistically anticipate them from the others. Such 'mimetic objects' would always be single images in a larger *mimēsis* structure including other images that can be understand as part of a sequence, or that relate to each other according to a specific logic. So when viewers of a painting infer who someone is as Aristotle describes, it would mean that they see who they already expected to see or could have guessed they would see, not that they recognize who they see because they have in some sense seen that figure before.[30] The identification process described is only secondarily about who the particular person is. Primarily, it is about identifying the person's place in the syllogistic structure.[31]

To the objection that Aristotle may seem to speak in this passage of only one person that is 'syllogistically' recognized as a μίμημα, I would answer that the wording of the text in fact indicates precisely the opposite. Before citing the individual image of a person as a specific example (*hoion hoti houtos ekeinos*, οἷον ὅτι οὗτος ἐκεῖνος), Aristotle speaks in general of the viewer inferring *ti hekaston* (τί ἕκαστον), or 'what each thing' is. He would only speak of 'each thing' if the viewer sees a number of images considered as a group. This clearly demonstrates that for Aristotle the μίμημα here is part of a whole or a sequence. So although the object of 'syllogize' is singular and Aristotle's example that follows is of a single figure, the formulation 'each thing' strongly suggests that thinking syllogistically about a single thing means considering it as one among several others.[32]

By this reading each *mimēsis* part would produce the pleasure particular to *mimēsis* by how it relates to the other images in the *mimēsis* structure, and only indirectly by how it may function as an imitation that relates to the world outside the artwork. This explains why this pleasure would still be produced even if the thing itself is unpleasant to see, because the pleasure does not come from the thing itself alone. On the other hand if the viewer cannot understand those relationships adequately and so

30 For a complete discussion of how the Greek text ὅτι οὗτος ἐκεῖνος could have this different force indicating something that is expected or previously known including extensive examples, see Sifakis 2001, 47–49.

31 By this interpretation, a passage at *Rhetoric* I 11.1371b4–10 that contains similar phrasing to 1448b9–19 basically restates what the passage in the *Poetics* suggests about *mimēsis* requiring an understanding of its parts for learning. But the *Rhetoric* passage does not focus on individual images or *mimēsis* parts. Instead, that passage indicates that even if all parts of the *mimēsis* are unpleasant, it can still produce this pleasure.

32 This reading of the passage might also rehabilitate the now rare but still plausible translation of ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων at 1448b10 as "in the case of artistic works" (for example the translation by Schmitt 2008, 6 "unser Umgang mit Kunstwerken") instead of the more common 'in practice' as I have translated it above. Since my interpretation presupposes Aristotle is talking here about a μίμημα functioning together with a number of others in an artistic work, it would make more sense for him to introduce the explanation with a reference to entire artworks.

predict what will come next in the structure, then as Aristotle observes the image is not a *mimēsis* part, and only its execution or color could please the viewer. In addition, this pleasure comes from a form of learning just like Aristotle describes in the passage from the *Rhetoric*, because the viewer learns how to think syllogistically about this particular *mimēsis* structure.[33] So besides altering how Aristotle's concept of *mimēsis* should be understood, a corollary of this interpretation of the passage is that μίμημα would also be redefined in this context as a technical term meaning '*mimēsis* part'.

4 *Mimēsis* and Imitation

Even if *mimēsis* is a technical term for Aristotle, it would still also have its colloquial meaning of 'imitation' in other contexts. In the *Poetics*, as already mentioned at the beginning of the last section there are a number of occasions where Aristotle uses the word in this way, sometimes even immediately after using it to refer to an artistic work. For example, in the passage at 1454b8–10 cited above he writes:

> ἐπεὶ δὲ μίμησίς ἐστιν ἡ τραγῳδία βελτιόνων ἢ ἡμεῖς, δεῖ μιμεῖσθαι τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς εἰκονογράφους.
>
> Since tragedy is a *mimēsis* of people better than us, the poet should imitate good painters.

The first *mimēsis* refers to a complex artistic work, but the second clearly means simply to copy or emulate. He also at 1459a12 notes that the iambic poetic meter 'imitates' everyday speech, showing that this usage of the term can even apply to things that resemble other things. And as already mentioned in the introduction, at 1461b28–32 Aristotle refers to musicians who imitate what they are singing about with gestures or body movements.

These passages again demonstrate that there is no simple link between imitation and artistic *mimēsis*. One is a kind of reproduction and the other a complex cultural product. Since Aristotle himself offers no explanations, the conventional definition of *mimēsis* as a philosophical term covering both kinds of imitation must always remain speculative. But if it is true that *mimēsis* is in fact a technical term, there is one instance that may explicitly establish a precise relationship between imitation in this literal sense and *mimēsis* as an artistic work. Just before the passage describing the pleasure produced by μιμήματα discussed in the previous section, at 1448b4–9 Aristotle identifies the natural causes of poetry:

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33 If this interpretation is correct, then the "καὶ" in μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι at 1448b16 in the *Poetics* passage should probably be understood as explanatory or epexegetical. The translation then would be, "they learn, namely work out what each thing is . . .."

> ἐοίκασι δὲ γεννῆσαι μὲν ὅλως τὴν ποιητικὴν αἰτίαι δύο τινὲς καὶ αὗται φυσικαί. τό τε γὰρ μιμεῖσθαι σύμφυτον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ παίδων ἐστὶ καὶ τούτῳ διαφέρουσι τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων ὅτι μιμητικώτατόν ἐστι καὶ τὰς μαθήσεις ποιεῖται διὰ μιμήσεως τὰς πρώτας, καὶ τὸ χαίρειν τοῖς μιμήμασι πάντας.
>
> There seem to be two causes of poetry in general, both natural. Imitation comes naturally to people starting from childhood (people differ from the other animals in that they are the most mimetic, and they also learn their first lessons through imitation); and everyone naturally enjoys mimetic objects.

The first μιμεῖσθαι in the sentence must refer to imitation in the sense of copying or mimicking behavior, because activities such as writing poetry or composing music do not come naturally to people as children; these skills must be learned. Similarly, if people are the 'the most mimetic' (*mimētikōtaton*, μιμητικώτατόν) of animals, this means that animals are also capable of this kind of *mimēsis* to a lesser degree, and so the reference again must be to imitation and not artistic production. The last observation that children learn their first lessons through *mimēsis* could in principle also refer to artistic works. But since the first two uses of the term in the same clause apply only to literal imitation, it seems highly likely that Aristotle here again means that children learn from imitating their parents or others around them.[34]

Then Aristotle suddenly shifts his focus at the end of the sentence from imitation to μιμήματα, going on to use painting as an example as discussed in the last section. This is one of the problems listed in the introduction, that the transition between the discussion of *mimēsis* as imitation and the following explanation of the pleasures of artistic *mimēsis* is confusingly abrupt. The basic problem is that the passage moves from the first general category focused on imitation in the literal sense, to the other general category, imitation as artistic activity, without any explanation or comment concerning what they have in common. Aristotle apparently feels no need to clarify that the topic has shifted so radically in the space of a few words and within the same sentence. As a result, the passage can be read as proof that *mimēsis* is an abstract philosophical concept characterized by this extraordinarily wide scope.

But the transition could also be a shift from the general to the specific. As I have argued above, the rest of this passage may establish that μίμημα is a technical term meaning '*mimēsis* part'. If true, then the passage would first establish that imitation in general is natural, and then that *mimēsis* parts are always pleasing. Still, this would not explain how imitation in general is linked to these specific parts of an artistic work.

If there is any direct link at all, then somehow imitation itself must be divided into parts. This would be the only way that μιμήματα – since the word clearly refers to a collection of discrete things – could also be considered imitations. Viewed in this light, there is one speculative explanation that could adequately clarify the transition

34 Here Halliwell 2002, 178–179 (see further references in note 5) would also include children's "make-believe or playacting."

from imitation to *mimēsis* parts. It may be that such parts are simply the specific results of the general activity of imitation discussed in the first several lines of the passage. This would mean that Aristotle is still talking about imitation in the literal sense, but now discussing individual imitative acts or products. The explanation of the transition would be that he moves from talking about imitation in general to particular *mimēsis* parts because these *mimēsis* parts are discrete imitations.

For example, when he says that children learn 'from imitation', an individual imitation in this general category could be a child imitating a parent pouring a libation. This specific action of pouring a libation could also be performed by an actor on stage. If this same individual imitative action is arranged syllogistically in a drama together with other imitative action parts, then it would become a μίμημα in a *mimēsis*. So the full definition of μιμήματα would be individual imitations in an artistic work functioning as parts of an artistic *mimēsis*. This would establish a clear connection between imitation in the literal sense and artistic *mimēsis*.

If this is true, then Aristotle would be saying that there are two causes of poetry:[35] one is that producing imitations is natural, and the other is that when individual imitations are arranged syllogistically in artistic works, they are naturally enjoyable. The first is a general capacity for imitation, and the second the specific pleasure of syllogistically understanding imitations, or learning from them when they are syllogistically arranged. This means that for the mimetic artist, the imitations all of us are capable of producing are the basic material of *mimēsis*. They are the parts used by the artist to build a syllogistic *mimēsis* structure. In the example from the visual arts that follows in the passage, Aristotle then explains exactly how an individual imitation (in this case an image of an unpleasant animal or corpse) can be used as a μίμημα in a painting. A corollary of this interpretation is that the skill required to arrange these imitations in a work of art so they can be syllogistically enjoyed is not a natural cause of poetry. Like syllogistic thinking itself, it must be learned.

5 What Does 'Syllogize' Mean?

Mimēsis understood in this way places as much emphasis on the structure of the imitative parts as on the imitations themselves. Given the structure's new importance, understanding its specific requirements is central to determining how *mimēsis* functions in individual works of art. But Aristotle's use of συλλογίζεσθαι to describe the structure of

35 It is unclear from the text whether the two natural causes are the capacity for imitation and pleasure in mimetic objects, or if the first natural cause is imitation together with enjoyment of mimetic objects, and the second cause the natural instinct for rhythm and melody mentioned at 1448b20–1. I have chosen here the first interpretation because it seems to me otherwise the second reason is introduced too late, but see Vahlen 1865, 10–11; Montmollin 1951, 32–34; Else 1957, 127–130; Lucas 1968, 74.

mimēsis leaves open a number of possibilities. The word applies to range of procedures from strict logical deduction to casual inference. This key term must now be further investigated as well so that its meaning can be more narrowly defined in this context.

In reference to the arts, the meaning of συλλογίζεσθαι probably cannot be directly derived from its meaning in reference to speeches in the *Rhetoric*.[36] If an artistic *mimēsis* is an intelligible structure of individual imitation parts, inferring the connections between the parts cannot be limited to or even primarily about deductive thinking. Instead, syllogizing here must have a broader scope to accommodate the many ways that parts of an artwork can be followed or anticipated.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle goes into great detail about how the events in the *muthos* should be arranged. Since the tragic *mimēsis* clearly includes the play's plot, the *muthos* is also part of the *mimēsis*, and its constituent events can be seen as *mimēsis* parts or μιμήματα. Their arrangement could then be taken as an example of a syllogistic mimetic structure. That means Aristotle's instructions for arranging the events could also serve as a guide to understanding how syllogizing functions in an artistic work.

Aristotle's most important and explicit rule for the relation among events is that they lead to each other by probability or necessity.[37] As Ricœur has described it, these links permit the events to be effectively 'grasped together'.[38] Following the events in the *muthos* requires moving "forward in the midst of contingencies and peripeteia under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfilment in the 'conclusion' of the story. This conclusion is not logically implied by some previous premises," Ricœur adds, but must be understandable and 'acceptable' given what came before.

By this model, syllogizing the parts of the *muthos mimēsis* requires applying the rules of probability and necessity familiar from real life to understanding how the events lead from one to another. The result is that we read "the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending," as Ricœur writes. Importantly for understanding what syllogize might mean in this context, Ricœur emphasizes that following the *muthos* has nothing to do with drawing a logical conclusion from a series of premises. Instead, it is a complex procedure that combines 'grasping events together' with expecting what events will come next. The mind ranges back and forth across the events as they unfold, drawing conclusions and making inferences about what has occurred as well as what will occur.

But not all the events in a narrative work are linked by probability or necessity as in the *muthos*. Aristotle appears to apply a very different set of rules to the events of the 'episodes'. These events are held to a lower standard of causality than those in

36 For attempts to explain the process of recognition itself as a syllogism, see for example Sifakis 2001, 43–45; Redfield 1975, 74. Montmollin 1951, 35 believes the term does (here at least) refer to reasoning in the sense of drawing a true or false conclusion. Lear 1988, 309 confines the sense of the word to "realizing that one thing (an artistic representation) is an instance of another."

37 See for example 1451a12–13, 1451b35 or 1452a20.

38 Ricœur 1984, 66–67.

the *muthos*, but must still be plausible or appropriate.[39] It may at first seem that since these events are also linked by a looser kind of probability, they still can be syllogized by applying the procedure described above for the *muthos*. But Aristotle's example of a good 'episode' in epic shows that it is certainly not always the case.

At 1459a36, he specifically cites the Catalogue of Ships in Book 2 of the *Iliad* as an appropriate 'episode'. This list of fighters and the places they came from can be viewed as a sequence of events. Each entry in the list recounts the arrival of a group or establishes who leads it, in addition to where it is from. But remarkably, the Catalogue is one of the few passages in the epic where it would be hard to identify any kind of causal link between the events. Instead, the list is ordered according to a geographical pattern. The poet starts with a group from a specific location in Greece, then moves to another group whose origin is nearby, and so on. The links between these events are in fact determined almost exclusively by geographical proximity.[40] In this way, the structure of the Catalogue outlines a tour around ancient Greece moving from one region to another. This shows that unlike in the *muthos*, the structure of the 'episode' events may be completely independent of any kind of causality.

But the structure of the Catalogue still permits the reader or listener to follow the sequence of events and predict what would come next. Since the audience was likely familiar with the geography of the regions named in the Catalogue, they would immediately recognize that the poet's list is moving across the terrain of Greece in a systematic way. They would be able to learn what the pattern of movement was, and then apply their increasingly precise understanding of that pattern to predict what places or regions would come next. This process of understanding and prediction would have probably been supplemented by a knowledge of who the groups are, what role they play in the epic, and how their place in the list might additionally reflect the poet's intention to either bring them together or contrast them for the audience.

This example of a good 'episode' widens the meaning of syllogizing considerably. A syllogistic structure must always be intelligible and adequately predictable, but the Catalogue of Ships shows that the connection between *mimēsis* parts can be determined by a rule, pattern or design. This puts these structures in an entirely different category than those built with causal links like in the *muthos*. In the *muthos*, not only are the events individual imitations of reality, the links between those imitations should ideally imitate what is considered probable or necessary in life. In the case of the 'episodes' by contrast, it appears that the links could potentially have no relation to real life at all. Although the order of the Catalogue of Ships relies on the real geography of ancient Greece, I would argue that in principle the list could have been organized by a different rule or pattern without reference to reality, and still remain a *mimēsis*.

39 For the distinction between the muthos and the 'episodes', see Belfiore 1992, 364–366; Marsh 2015.
40 Stanley 1993, 13–26 sees in addition to the geographical organization a complex thematic organization.

For example, the Catalogue could have been organized on the principle of importance, starting with the group that plays the most significant role in the epic and progressing to the most minor group. The audience could still learn from the Catalogue how and by what criteria the poet ranks each group in importance by following the pattern, but since they were probably already familiar with the story they would also be able to guess which groups would come later in the list as it went on. This would be syllogizing in the sense that I understand it, since it requires 'grasping together' the parts of the list in order to understand or expect the others. But the connection between the *mimēsis* parts here would not rely in any way on a link to the real world, only referring internally to how the groups feature in the rest of the text. Syllogizing *mimēsis* parts here means understanding, following, and predicting any pattern, design, or rule no matter how abstract or independent of the real world. As a result, *mimēsis* itself as a structure need have no imitative relation to the real world.

Since Aristotle does not discuss visual arts in detail, I can only speculate on how this definition of *mimēsis* and syllogizing would apply to the example of a μίμημα image at 1448b7–19. But if a visual *mimēsis* requires a structure of several images, then paintings of a single object or person, such as a portrait or still life, would be excluded. This may at first seem unlikely, but when naming specific artists Aristotle often refers to the famous painter Polygnotus (at 1448a5 and 1450a27), whose best-known works are large frescoes of mythical or historical subjects. It could be that Aristotle is only thinking of such works depicting larger scenes including many figures in action or interacting when he refers to *mimēsis* in painting. As Lucas comments, "the figure recognized must in most cases have been a mythological one,"[41] in other words, a mythological (or historical) character in a scene or scenes including other figures.

In these kinds of paintings, the viewer could potentially follow how the figures relate to each other and then 'foresee' what will come next. To take a very simple example, in Pausanias' description of Polygnotus' painting of the sack of Troy,[42] the first group in the painting is Menelaus on his boat and the next group Helen surrounded by others. If Menelaus is preparing his boat to leave, and Helen, who the war was fought for, is not on it, the viewer could very likely infer that the next group near the boat will include Helen. These links between images on a much larger and complex scale across the painting would define the *mimēsis*. Recognizing individual things and people in the painting would still be part of understanding it as a *mimēsis*, but that recognition would only be part of what makes the painting a *mimēsis* and does not alone make it a *mimēsis*.

41 Lucas 1968, 73.

42 Pausanias 10.25.2–5.

6 A Technical Definition of *Mimēsis*

It is now possible to integrate these observations and analyses into a provisional definition of *mimēsis* based on this new interpretation of 1448b9–19. This definition is a radical departure from previous interpretations of *mimēsis* in the *Poetics* because it relegates the concept of imitation itself exclusively to the μιμήματα or *mimēsis* parts. In addition, this very specific and narrow definition I set out would be unique to the *Poetics*, and in principle unrelated to other uses of the term *mimēsis* such as in Plato. Finally, this definition does not consider *mimēsis* as a philosophical term in the conceptual network of imitation as most previous approaches have. Instead, here *mimēsis* is considered a technical term with a narrow, precise definition tailored to its application in the *Poetics*.

As a result, in the demonstration of this definition that follows I will not attempt at every step of the argument to analyze how my approach to *mimēsis* here engages with previous ones that are much broader, or link it with other concepts of *mimēsis* outside the *Poetics*.[43] Since the concept of *mimēsis* in Aristotle has attracted so much comment in the past, and the definition proposed here is so fundamentally different in almost every respect from previously developed notions of *mimēsis* in Aristotle, such a comparison would require far more space than is available to do it any kind of justice. In addition, the definition I set out and these other definitions are so far apart that there is some question if comparing the two approaches would be intellectually productive or illuminating for either one.

The definition of *mimēsis* proposed here has three elements:

1. A *mimēsis* is a syllogistic arrangement of individual imitations termed μιμήματα.
2. If this syllogistic arrangement of imitations can be adequately followed and predicted, it produces the pleasure of understanding and learning.
3. An individual imitation alone cannot be a *mimēsis*, and is not termed a μίμημα.

If *mimēsis* is a syllogistic arrangement of imitations as described here, this explains why *mimēsis* is limited in scope as I showed in Section 2. By the definition outlined above, *mimēsis* is a specific operation performed by the artist in arranging the individual imitations in an artwork. Although a particular artwork might be primarily a *mimēsis*, this operation could still be missing in some parts of the work. Those parts may not include individual imitations, for example, or individual imitations that are not syllogistically related to the others may appear in the work. For these reasons, *mimēsis* is not necessarily everywhere in the work.

43 For previous definitions aside from the probably still standard part 2 of Halliwell 2002, see Woodruff 1992 who proposes a precise definition of *mimēsis* related to its dictionary definition that solves some (but not all) of the problems dealt with here. For a brilliantly original definition of *mimēsis* as a threefold structure of narrative reconfiguration see again Ricœur 1984.

Similarly, according to this definition some artworks or art forms would be excluded from the category of *mimēsis* entirely. In certain cases the *mimēsis* operation is impossible, for example, if the artwork contains only one imitation such as a portrait, since there can be no syllogistic arrangement. In others it is optional, for example, as Aristotle indicates is the case of dance, where apparently the dance moves do not necessarily have to be individual imitations.

The limited scope of the definition might also explain an intriguing comment in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems* XIX 15, 918b18–20 that dithyrambs 'became' mimetic at a certain time in their development. It could even be that *mimēsis* was not always a feature of certain art forms, and was only introduced when they reached a level of sophistication that could accommodate a syllogistic structure of imitations. This would suggest that *mimēsis* as a creative method was chosen and deliberately applied by the artist.

In addition, this definition would explain why *mimēsis* can be present in greater or lesser degrees within the artwork. It seems reasonable to assume that within the *mimēsis* structure, the quality of the syllogistic connections between the individual imitations may vary. I have already discussed how in tragedy, *muthos* events that are probable or necessary appear to lay the foundation for the 'episodes' that are only plausible or appropriate, and that as a result these *muthos* events may require more *mimēsis*. If it is accepted that events can be viewed as individual imitations (for example the action of pouring a libation discussed above), then it could be that the *muthos* events are 'more mimetic' since their tight causal connections make them easier to infer or logically predict, while the 'episodes' are less so because it is harder to determine how these events are connected with each other or the *muthos* events.

This definition also distinguishes works of *mimēsis* from other works that may produce pleasure through syllogistic understanding and learning. As discussed above, Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* says that some syllogisms in forensic speeches can produce a pleasure similar to *mimēsis* by prompting the listeners to use their syllogistic ability. But the difference in a speech is that the components of the syllogism are not individual imitations, they are premises formulated as propositions or statements. As a result, a forensic syllogism cannot qualify as a *mimēsis*. Only syllogistic arrangements of imitations are in the category of *mimēsis*.

Conversely, the definition discriminates *mimēsis* from non-artistic works that may include a number of related imitations. An anatomy textbook such as Aristotle's lost *Dissections,* for example, might contain diagrams that could be considered imitations, since they represent forms or shapes. The diagrams may even be in a sequence where one leads logically to the next, so that the reader of the textbook could syllogistically follow or predict these individual imitations just as in a *mimēsis*. But the textbook would still not qualify as a *mimēsis*. That is because the reader cannot understand the relationship between the imitations, or only very little, without the explanations in the text that refers to them. In the passage where Aristotle discusses how a μίμημα functions, he appears to assume that predicting what will come next or understanding what

each thing is in the syllogistic structure are operations that the viewer must perform independent of any explanation. This may be confirmed by his comment at 1456b2–8 that the events in a play should produce their proper effect without additional explanation (*didaskalia*, διδασκαλία). Similarly, in the Catalogue of Ships cited by Aristotle as an example of an 'episode' in a narrative *mimēsis*, Homer never alludes to the fact that the sequence of groups named follows a geographical pattern, or even mentions in passing that one location is near the next. So it seems that if the recipient learns or understands by relying on the explanations in a text and not by seeing the relationships between the imitations alone, this would not produce the particular pleasure of *mimēsis*, and cannot be considered a *mimēsis*. As a result, discursive or theoretical works such as an anatomy textbook are excluded from *mimēsis*.

In developing this definition, I have already discussed most of the problems with the term *mimēsis* in the *Poetics* listed in the introduction. But three problems remain to be explained. The first is why *mimēsis* 'with the voice' is listed among the major arts. The second is why towards the end of the text when discussing Homer, *mimēsis* seems to suddenly only apply to direct speech and not narration. The third is why Aristotle criticizes arts that 'imitate everything'.

By the technical definition of *mimēsis*, voice *mimēsis* must mean a syllogistic structure of individual vocal imitations. There were several major categories of performers in this period who worked primarily with the voice. These were actors and rhapsodes, together with orators by extension, since they sometimes 'acted' in reciting their speeches. As Else has argued, it could be then that Aristotle means that these performers would use their voice in performance to imitate a manner of speaking, for example "the organ notes of patriotism" or "the whining tones of an opponent."[44] That would at least plausibly explain why vocal imitation is included in this list, since actors and rhapsodes were intimately connected with major arts such as epic, tragedy, and comedy.

But by this description vocal imitation would still not meet the requirements of the definition of *mimēsis* proposed here. That is because there is still no indication of a larger structure of relationships among the individual vocal imitations. This raises the possibility that by *mimēsis* with the voice Aristotle means a performance seen as a whole. Especially in this period when the actors wore masks, the voice was the central element of a dramatic performance. Appearing as a character on stage, an actor must choose how to say each line and even each word. Ideally, these choices come together in such a way that how the character speaks can be understood as a whole and predicted. That means they function just like μιμήματα in a *mimēsis*.

In addition, these choices of how to use the voice (which would probably be called 'line readings' in modern terms) can be viewed as individual imitations. Speaking a particular line in an angry tone or a pleading tone, for example, are both ways

44 Else 1957, 20.

an actor could produce individual imitations of how people speak. Such imitations are similar to imitating manners of speech as described by Else, but different because their application is much broader. Instead of using a particular tone for a single patriotic passage or a line quoted from the opponent's speech, here the individual imitations are present in every sentence and even every word that is spoken.

The actor's art then would be building a coherent, syllogistic structure using these vocal imitations for all the character's lines in the play. The same procedure would apply to the rhapsode's art, only at a much larger scale across the many characters and events in an epic. Such an organization of imitations would fully qualify as a *mimēsis* by this technical definition. It would also explain why *mimēsis* with the voice appears alongside the other arts, since acting as a craft is a major art in itself.

Turning to the passage in the *Poetics* at 1460a7–11 where *mimēsis* seems to suddenly exclude narration, this is how Aristotle describes the parts of an epic poem that lack *mimēsis*:

> αὐτὸν γὰρ δεῖ τὸν ποιητὴν ἐλάχιστα λέγειν: οὐ γάρ ἐστι κατὰ ταῦτα μιμητής. οἱ μὲν οὖν ἄλλοι αὐτοὶ μὲν δι᾽ ὅλου ἀγωνίζονται, μιμοῦνται δὲ ὀλίγα καὶ ὀλιγάκις: ὁ δὲ ὀλίγα φροιμιασάμενος εὐθὺς εἰσάγει ἄνδρα ἢ γυναῖκα ἢ ἄλλο τι ἦθος . . ..
>
> The poet should speak as little as possible in person, since that is not what makes the poet a mimetic artist. Other poets perform in person throughout, making a *mimēsis* rarely and just in a few parts. But Homer after a short introduction immediately brings on a man or a woman or some other character . . ..

The passage clearly indicates that the parts of the poem that lack *mimēsis* are those where the poet appears to intervene 'in person'. But it is less clear what Aristotle may mean by the poet speaking or performing 'in person' in this context. If Aristotle means simple narration as opposed to direct speech, the problem is that the surviving epics of Homer are filled with passages lacking direct speech. If he means exclusively passages where the poet uses the first person such as a proem or invocation of the muses, it seems highly unlikely that other poets besides Homer would have devoted large portions of their poems to these elements.

But another solution has already been proposed that fits perfectly with the technical definition of *mimēsis*. By speaking 'in person', Aristotle is drawing a distinction between "'telling' (a narrator is visible and sums up or interprets for the readers what is happening) versus 'showing' (the story seems to tell itself without intervention of a narrator, the reader having to draw his own conclusions)"[45] as de Jong writes. By this interpretation *mimēsis* is incompatible primarily with the 'visibility' of the author's person in the poem, and only secondarily with the author interpreting the story for the reader.

45 de Jong 2005, 620–621. See also Halliwell 2002, 167–171, who views the problem as an explainable "discrepancy" and Woodruff 1992, 79–80, suggesting the later passage may be Aristotle's "playful" nod to Plato.

But by the technical definition of *mimēsis*, the only problem with the 'telling' passages would be that, as in the case of the anatomy textbook discussed above, the author is explaining the link between the imitations instead of allowing readers to understand and predict these connections on their own. So it could be that other epic poets besides Homer 'show' events or characters in such a way that there was often no way for the readers to follow them without relying on the author's explanations. This means that even in some passages where the author is not more visible than in others, an epic poet could still write lines that are excluded from the *mimēsis* just because they provide explanations necessary to understand the story. Conversely, there could be passages where the author is clearly visible that are still part of the *mimēsis* because they do not provide such explanations. An example of the latter would be a passage from the *Iliad* at 23.176 cited by Lucas: *kaka de phresi mēdeto erga* (κακὰ δὲ φρεσὶ μήδετο ἔργα, "and he was planning evil deeds in his mind").[46] Homer may be visible in this personal judgement of Achilles' thoughts and in that sense 'telling' the reader what to think, but it is hard to believe that any reader of this passage about Achilles sacrificing human prisoners like dogs would not already have concluded those thoughts are in some sense evil. So for passages like these, author visibility would not exclude them from the *mimēsis*.

This analysis may also be substantiated by the final passage at 1461b28–32 where Aristotle criticizes the arts that 'imitate everything':

> ὡς γὰρ οὐκ αἰσθανομένων ἂν μὴ αὐτὸς προσθῇ, πολλὴν κίνησιν κινοῦνται, οἷον οἱ φαῦλοι αὐληταὶ κυλιόμενοι ἂν δίσκον δέῃ μιμεῖσθαι, καὶ ἕλκοντες τὸν κορυφαῖον ἂν Σκύλλαν αὐλῶσιν.
>
> Assuming the audience will not understand unless they add something in person, they make a lot of movements. For example, bad flute-players go into a spin if they need to imitate a discus, or pull at the leader of the chorus when playing the Scylla.

Just as parts of a poem in which the epic poet 'performs in person' may be excluded from the *mimēsis*, in this passage the performer intervenes 'in person'. But here it is not what the performer says; it is what the performer does that compromises the quality of the *mimēsis*. In addition, Aristotle specifies that these actions are themselves imitative movements. Why are these imitations undesirable in a *mimēsis*, but others not?[47]

It seems that Aristotle believes these imitations are unnecessary additions. The examples given show that they are typically movements made by performers to accentuate a poetic *mimēsis*, which can already be adequately understood and predicted on its own. The audience would be capable of 'grasping' the *mimēsis* without the performer's

46 Lucas 1968, 67.

47 Commentators have found this statement so confusing Bywater and Gudeman have proposed amending the text so that it means the art "imitating for everyone," or in other words for a vulgar audience; for references and discussion see Lucas 1968, 251–252; Else 1957, 635–636.

'in person' actions, so the actions added are similar to explanations in a poetic *mimēsis*. But unlike those explanations, these movements are imitations themselves, and are understood together with the imitations in the *mimēsis*. As a result, they cannot be excluded from the *mimēsis* that is the total performance. Instead, they only reduce the quality of the *mimēsis* in performance, in this case a poem, because they make it too explicit. This shows that for Aristotle, subtlety in the syllogistic links between the *mimēsis* parts is a hallmark of a qualitatively superior *mimēsis*.

That would also explain what exactly Aristotle means by an art that 'imitates everything'. The imitations he is talking about are not those of the *mimēsis* considered separately from its performance. The undesirable imitations are instead parasitic to the imitations in that *mimēsis*. For example, here the poetic *mimēsis* includes a passage describing the flight of a discus, and the performer imitates the description of the discus with his movements. In the case of tragedy, the same could apply to some of the actor's movements or use of his voice on the stage to perform the text. So the problem with these additional imitations is that they are themselves imitations of imitations, and by 'everything' Aristotle apparently means everything in the *mimēsis* before it is performed. However, he does not appear to disapprove of such imitations entirely, since he accepts that tragedy for example should be performed by actors. But he also clearly believes these additions must be carefully moderated to preserve the quality of the syllogistic structure of imitations in the *mimēsis* they are based on.

7 Conclusion

That emphasis on the quality of the *mimēsis* structure is typical. Throughout this exploration of a narrower definition of the term, Aristotle appears almost entirely focused on the arrangement of the *mimēsis* parts and how they relate to each other. This stands in stark contrast to previous philosophical concepts of *mimēsis*. Extrapolations from the dictionary definition of *mimēsis* inevitably bring the focus back to the relationship between an imitation and an object of imitation, or in broader terms between art and life. This is still an important part of Aristotle's thought, just as it was in Plato's. But by the technical definition of *mimēsis* I have outlined here, these philosophical concerns about imitation or representation for Aristotle would be located primarily at the level of the μίμημα, or the *mimēsis* part. That means that by this technical definition the term *mimēsis* does not necessarily refer to any form of imitation or representation, at least in the *Poetics*. It would refer only to a specific artistic practice founded on a flexible logic of imitations – imitations, which themselves have a particular relationship to the real world.

At the same time, this technical definition of *mimēsis* now emphasizes other philosophical concerns. Since the structure is so important, how the structure is arranged or understood in a mimetic work becomes central to Aristotle's analysis of the arts.

Instead of *mimēsis*, the key philosophical terms become συλλογίζεσθαι ('infer' or 'work out') and προεωρακώς ('having seen in advance'). These conceptual terms describe how we grasp, follow, or predict a story, for example, in a tragic *mimēsis*. There is nothing narrow or specialized about these definitions, so they cannot be considered technical terms. Their conceptual use also extends significantly beyond their colloquial definitions, just as would be expected with philosophical terms.

Although these are certainly surprising results, they may be slightly easier to accept in the case of *mimēsis* because Aristotle never defines the term in any of his writings and practically never uses *mimēsis* in reference to artistic works outside of the *Poetics*. In principle, we simply do not know what *mimēsis* means in these contexts, and so are forced to speculate. But the case of *mimēsis* could suggest that other key terms in the *Poetics* that Aristotle clearly defines as philosophical terms in other works may also have unexpected technical meanings in this text. If a presumably philosophical term such as *mimēsis* could in fact have a technical meaning, it is at least worth considering whether other terms in the *Poetics* that are explicitly philosophical elsewhere may also have consistently narrower, more specialized meanings here.

For example, *ēthos* is of course a key term in the *Ethics*. But it also appears in the *Poetics* in a range of contexts. The use of the term in the text falls into two categories. In the first category, the term is used to refer to one of the six qualitative parts of tragedy as laid out at 1450a8–10, indicating character portrayal in a drama. This meaning has an ethical force that would link it with its use in the *Ethics*. In the second category, the term is used to refer to character in the sense of a general type of person, for example at 1460a10–11 discussed above, where Aristotle praises Homer for quickly bringing on "a man or a woman, or some other *ēthos*." In this phrase, *ēthos* appears to refer to character type (a man or a woman), not character portrayal.

But then there are some passages where it cannot be determined which meaning is intended, for example at 1450a21–2 where Aristotle says that characters are included in the tragedy for the sake of the action. It is unclear whether he means that every tragedy requires agents to perform the action, and these agents may also be portrayed as having some character, or if he means that since there are agents, they must be of a certain type, i.e., male, female, young, old, rich, poor and so on, as required by the action. This shows that even when Aristotle appears to clearly define the meaning of a key term, there are still often uncertainties in the *Poetics* on which meaning is intended or how.

As with *mimēsis*, the conventional approach to these ambiguities would be to rely on context to determine which meaning of *ēthos* Aristotle is thinking of in each instance. Since *ēthos* is part of the conceptual network of character, its meaning can also be expected to shift predictably somewhat depending on how the other terms in the network are used. Many scholars also take into account his uses of the term out-

side the *Poetics* for additional context to clarify its meaning.[48] But just as with *mimēsis*, there may be instead a single, consistent technical meaning that would fit all of the uses of the term *ēthos* in this text. It could be that neither of the conventional definitions (character type or characterization) is correct. Like *mimēsis*, *ēthos* could have another hidden meaning entirely specific to this text that remains the same across all its uses. That would also mean that all other uses of ethos and its related terms outside of the *Poetics* are no longer relevant to its definition here. That is because as a technical term in this text, it would no longer be part of the conceptual network of character.

It would also make good sense to explore this approach to *ēthos* if *mimēsis* has a technical definition. Since ethos in the *Poetics* is certainly part of the *mimēsis*, the definition of *ēthos* would also be affected if the technical definition of *mimēsis* is accepted. For example, as a *mimēsis* itself, ethos would have to be a structure of individual imitative parts.

But my intention here is not to develop or argue for a technical definition of *ēthos*. My point is that the example of *ēthos* shows how the very existence of a technical term may imply that other terms within the same Aristotelian text, no matter how familiar they may be elsewhere as philosophical terms, could also have surprising technical definitions specific to that text. Since Aristotle was so fond of terminology and coining terms, there is practically no Aristotelian text that does not include some words that are already accepted to be technical terms. But if there is even one technical term in a text, as with *ēthos* that could indicate that other related terms may also be technical terms. In fact, it seems we can know for certain which terms are philosophical in an Aristotelian text only after the technical terms have been identified. That means that across all of Aristotle's works, unrecognized technical terms could be far more prevalent than is typically thought. As in the *Poetics*, other philosophical terms that seem inconsistent, contradictory, or ambiguous could in fact have narrower, consistent technical definitions quite distinct from their colloquial meanings. If true, then only by first studying Aristotle's particular terminological practice can we ever fully come to terms with Aristotle's philosophy as a whole.

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48 For such attempts to define the term see Belfiore 2014, 92–99; Blundell 1992; Schütrumpf 1970.

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