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Mimicries

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Mold for a child's death mask, The Tomb of the Valerii.
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CAILLOIS ON MIMICRY

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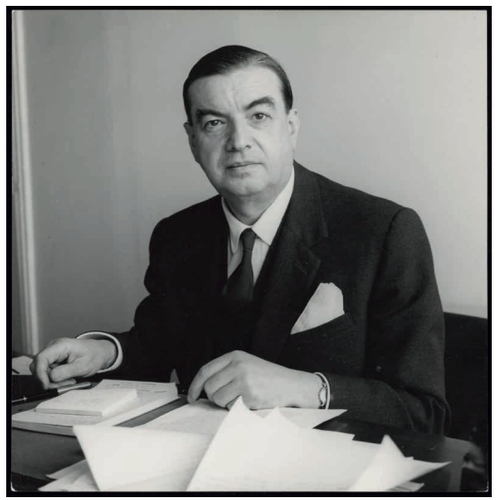


Roger Caillois c. 1962. Courtesy of UNESCO / Dominique Roger*

La fin semble bien être *l'assimilation au milieu*
(The end would appear to be *assimilation to the environment*)
—Roger Caillois, *Le Mythe et l'homme* (1938)

Since the dawn of philosophy, "mimesis" served as the paradigmatic concept that gave birth to aesthetic theory, but it is only recently that the all too human tendency to imitate, or mimic, others has returned to the forefront of the theoretical, scientific, and artistic scene. In areas as diverse as continental philosophy, aesthetic theory, anthropology, political theory, neuroscience, biology, as well as literary theory, and (new) media studies, it is becoming increasingly clear that humans are not only rational, self-contained, and autonomous creatures (or *homo sapiens*) endowed with the unique ability to realistically represent the world from an aesthetic distance—though they continue to do that as well, with increasing efficacy. Humans are also relational, affective, and embodied creatures who, as Aristotle pointed out, are the most mimetic animals in the sense that they imitate other human and nonhuman animals with their entire bodies and souls (or *homo mimeticus*).

Part of a transdisciplinary project titled, *Homo Mimeticus: Theory and Criticism*,[1] I take this special issue of *Effects* on "mimicries" as an occasion to revisit some of the effects of an unclassifiable transdisciplinary figure: the Surrealist French writer, sacred anthropologist, diagonal thinker, and precursor of mimetic theory, Roger Caillois (1913-1978).

Well before the affective turn and the cognitive turn, the new materialist turn and the environmental turn, Caillois supplemented anthropocentric accounts of mimesis restricted to human techniques of representation, or realism. He did so from the margins of Surrealism to foreground the biological fact that human mimicry is in a relation of continuity with animal mimicry. As he put it, "I will never tire of saying this: both belong to the same world."[2]

After a century of benign neglect, the Caillois mimetic effect is currently influencing new generations of writers, thinkers, and artists attentive to the heterogeneous continuities between the material, animal, and human world. Unlike his closest early collaborator and dissident Surrealist thinker, Georges Bataille, whose theory of the "formless" (*informe*) has long been recuperated by avant-garde aesthetic theory, Caillois' career-long fascination with heterogeneous subject matters—from stones to games, the sacred to myth, animal mimicry to human mimicry—had in fact tended to remain at the margins of anthropocentric concerns with "language," "man," and the "human" that dominated the humanities in the past century. And yet, the recent return of interest to the agentic materiality of things and to processes of becoming other that are as human as they are nonhuman, are currently contributing to a return of interest in Caillois' pioneering efforts to move the human sciences and aesthetic theory beyond the fallacy of anthropocentrism.[3] He did so via what he called a transdisciplinary "diagonal science" that paid particular attention to "latent complicities" and "neglected correlations" (DS 347) between, among other things, mimicry in both the animal and human world, constitutive of a *re*-turn of attention to mimesis I group under the rubric of the "mimetic turn."[4]

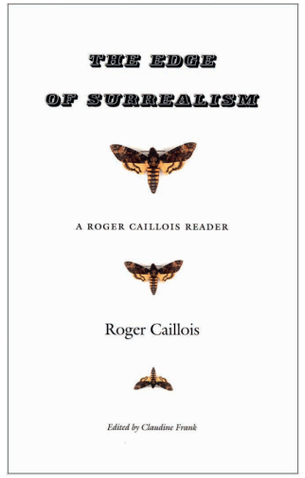
The main goal, or *telos*, of the mimetic turn is thus to reframe the ancient concept of mimesis from the dominant translation of representation of reality that confines it to aesthetic realism toward a more material, affective, and environmentally oriented conception of mimesis constitutive of a *homo mimeticus* that untimely figures like Caillois were in a position to anticipate. If his Surrealist bio-psycho-anthropological lenses revealed a human and nonhuman vulnerability to the enveloping materiality of the environment, a new generation of forward-oriented artists are in a position to overturn perspectives to consider that the environment is also radically vulnerable to anthropocentric activities as well, entangling human and nonhuman animals in a spiraling vortex of mimetic interactions in which we are, *nolens volens*, already caught.

Caillois' Mimetic Re-Turn[5]

The recent edition of *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader* testifies to the growing interest in the heterogeneous work of a writer who Georges Dumézil did not hesitate to call "the genius of our time."[6] Countering academic tendencies toward specialization and fragmentation that risk turning the scholar into what he calls an "effacing myopic mole," Caillois writes: "genius almost always involves borrowing a proven method or fruitful hypothesis and using it in a field where no one had previously imagined that it could be applied" (DS 343). An insight into Caillois' transdisciplinary hypothesis on mimicry (a diagonal hypothesis that straddles biology, anthropology, and psychology at the level of method) not only offers a precious insight into the affective powers of mimesis that threaten to dissolve the form of human and nonhuman animals against natural and technological environments; nor does this mimetic hypothesis solely foreground the untimely role of Caillois in paving the way for influential theories of subject formation reflected on a "mirror stage" which, as we shall see, turn out to be of direct Surrealist inspiration.[7] In the end, Caillois may also open up less subject-oriented and more environmentally-oriented perspectives on both human and animal mimicry in an age increasingly haunted by rampant climate change known as the Anthropocene. He does so by calling attention to the mimetic powers of the environment, traditionally left in the background of anthropocentric approaches, to dissolve the all too human subject, or *anthropos*, narcissistically placed in the foreground. But let us take a closer look at Caillois' diagnostic of mimicry first.

In a chapter titled, "Mimétisme et psychasthénie légéndaire," collected in *Le Mythe et l'homme* (1938),[8] Roger Caillois considers mimetic phenomena of physical camouflage in the animal world in order to cast new light on mimetic phenomena of psychic depersonalization in the human world. Tellingly, Caillois wrote this essay at the time he was collaborating with Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris in an anti-fascist transdisciplinary group called *Le College de Sociologie* (1937-1939) whose goal was to study manifestations of mimetic contagion in modern societies[9]—an indication that for him, as for his collaborators, the line dividing animal from human mimicry was thin and porous at best. Taking as his starting point certain "lower animals" (such as spiders, lizards but also insects and birds), Caillois observes that they are mimetic not in the dominant anthropocentric sense that they represent or copy the world; rather, they are mimetic in the physical, biological sense that they have a tendency to visually disappear—chameleon-like—in order to blend with the background against which they are situated.

Caillois notices that in such a state, the mimetic animal in the foreground is, quite literally, indistinguishable from the background. With a Surrealist eye ready to awaken powers of perception made dormant by everyday sociality, he wonders about the



origin of this disquieting mimetic phenomenon that tends to be taken for granted. The classical biological answer, of course, is that mimetism is a defense mechanism perfected through evolution meant to guarantee the survival of the species. This is certainly a realistic, positivist, and evolutionary hypothesis in line with scientific and philosophical principles Caillois was well familiar with. But Surrealist writer that he is, Caillois has a different, more artistic, and intuitive hypothesis in mind. His main objection to the evolutionary hypothesis is that some of these mimetic insects are actually inedible, or, alternatively and even more problematic, that disappearing against a given background (such as edible plants) may actually diminish rather than increase their chances of survival—in the sense that the insect might inadvertently be swallowed by herbivorous animals. Mimicry, in these numerous cases of defensive mimetism (*mimétisme defensif*), seems indeed a dangerous activity of dissimulation. Perhaps even a luxury on the side of nature that can afford to squander its excessive energy, as Caillois' collaborator, Georges Bataille would say in a famous essay titled "The Notion of Expenditure" (1933). In any case, Caillois considers it a "dangerous luxury" (*luxe dangereux*) (MH 106) that calls for a different, perhaps more aesthetic-oriented, but not necessarily representational mimetic hypothesis. In his view, what is essential about mimicry is that the blending between living organism and environmental background entails a form of biological regress: what he calls a "return to an inorganic state" (MH 116). In fact, he notices that the immobile insect nested against inorganic matter is not simply invisible to the observer's eye—a question of exterior mimetic representation. Rather, it enters in a state of "catalepsy" whereby "life," as he says, "steps back a degree [*recule d'un degré*]" as in a sort of "trance" (113, 94)—a question of inner mimetic experience.

Caillois' hypothesis is the following: rather than being a strategy for survival, this mimetic principle is associated with a drive that pulls the animate, organic, and living being toward inanimate, inorganic, and dead matter. Coming close to the Freudian conception of *Thanatos* but echoing philosophical principles that go back to Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Spinoza, Caillois infers from these phenomena a mimetic death drive that induces a dissolution of the boundaries of individuation. As he puts it: "the being's will to persevere in *its* being [*la volonté de l'être de persévérer dans* son *être*] consumes itself to excess and secretly attracts it toward the uniformity that scandalizes its imperfect autonomy" (122). It is thus nothing less than the "autonomy" of the living organism that is scandalized by the transgressive power of animal mimicry.

There is an inversion of perspectives at play in Caillois' untimely mimetic observation which goes beyond anthropocentrism or even biocentrism and is worth underlining: while the *exterior* "scientific" observer only sees—or if mimicry is successful, fails to see—a visual continuity between a living organism and the environment that is interpreted in terms of an evolutionary strategy for survival, Caillois overturns perspectives to consider the mimetic phenomenon from the *inside* of a nonhuman organism in a cataleptic state akin to "trance" instead. And what he *senses*, rather than *sees*, via his Surrealist antennae that blur the human/nonhuman divide, is that in this state of mimetic trance it is the self-sufficient "autonomy" of the biological organism that is radically threatened by the inner experience of animal mimicry. In sum, for Caillois, this disquieting form of mimesis whereby a figure disappears against the background that surrounds it is not simply a visual exterior phenomenon. It is rather an *affective*, inner experience that pulls a living being on the side of death, while leaving it on the side of life, or better, on the shadow-line that both connects and divides organism and environment, foreground and background, life and death. This inner mimetic experience, he adds, is not only constitutive of animal mimicry; it equally animates *homo mimeticus*—if only because "humans and insects belong to the same nature." (MH 70)

Ctenomorphodes chronus camouflaged as a eucalyptus twig**

From Animal Mimicry to *Homo Mimeticus*

Now, as an anthropologist of Surrealist persuasion, Caillois draws inspiration from the animal world but remains fundamentally interested in reframing dominant conceptions of what the human is—or can potentially become. If he focuses on the natural phenomenon of animal mimicry it is because, in his view, this disconcerting *biological* mechanism reveals a fundamental *psychic* principle at the heart of humans as well. Caillois' diagnostic of mimicry coincides with his rising preoccupations with fascist psychology and the massive forms of mimetism it generated in heterogeneous crowds—a phenomenon that almost a century later we are far from having overcome. Quite the contrary. It is still at the palpitating heart of (new) fascist movements that—via new media—generate massive phenomena of what I call, echoing Caillois and Bataille, "mimetic contagion."[10]

Attack on the U.S. Capitol, January 6th 2021
Courtesy of Tyler Merbler***

A rally in fascist Italy, c.1930
© Tallandier / Bridgeman Images

If we adopt Caillois' Surrealist frame, which does not simply take mimetic phenomena for granted, we should wonder: what is the mysterious force that troubles the boundaries of individuation, introducing affective continuities in place of discontinuities that reach from the 1930s into the present? And what is the psychology that drives human forms of mimicry? Caillois' hypothesis rests on the "psychological analysis"—not of Sigmund Freud whose "error" in reducing all phenomena to his "schema" (MH 84) Caillois had already pointed out—but, rather, of the long-neglected French philosopher and psychologist, Pierre Janet (1859-1947).

Professor at the prestigious *Collège de France* and one of the most influential French philosophers and psychologists of his time, Janet invented the term *analyse psychologique* in the first place to account for phenomena of automatism, hypnotic dissociation, and double personality, among other mimetic pathologies. He was a major source of inspiration for the Surrealist generation in general and for members of the *College* like Bataille and Caillois in particular. Above all, Janet paved the way for a Freudian discovery of the unconscious, which, as historians of psychology have now long demonstrated, was not a discovery after all, but a canny appropriation of many of Janet's ideas, including the very concept of *Psychoanalyse* itself, which is but Freud's translated inversion of Janet's *analyse psychologique*.[11]

On Janet's shoulders, then, Caillois establishes a connection between animal mimicry and human mimicry, a physical blurring of forms and a psychic dissolution of individuation, or, as he also puts it in the phrase that gives the title to his essay, "Mimetism and Legendary Psychasthenia." Janet had devoted a lengthy study to "psychasthenia,"[12] a personality disorder that affects people's relation to their environment and affects the unity of the ego, blurring the boundaries of individuation.

Building on Janet's case studies, Caillois explains that "for these dispossessed spirits, space seems to be endowed with a devouring capacity…The body, then, dissociates itself from thought so that the individual crosses the frontier of its skin and lives on the other side of its senses" (111). Bodies, for Caillois, are porous, open to the outside, prone to suggestive or mimetic influences that cross the thin skin of individuation, generating shadows or phantoms of egos instead.

Well before poststructuralism and posthumanism, Caillois is already calling attention to the fact that mimetic subjects are traversed by heterogeneous continuities that blur the line between interiority and exteriority, the human ego and the nonhuman space, generating processes of becoming lost in space. This is why he concludes: "The subject itself feels that it is becoming space, *black space*" (111). Once again, what applies to animal mimicry equally applies to human mimicry. Caillois is not simply describing individuals who are physically invisible in the darkness from the outside; rather he is accounting for a mimetic drive that is much more disquieting and fundamental for it operates from the inside. Mimicry in other words is not only something seen—or mimetic representation; it is above all something felt—or mimetic pathos. It reaches the affective foundations of *homo mimeticus*. It does so because it entails a feeling of psychic permeability to darkness that blurs the boundaries of individuation. Quoting the phenomenological and psychological work of Eugène Minkowski, Caillois explains that "'the ego is *permeable* to obscurity whereas it is not so to light.'" (MH 112) Does this inner/outer experience sound too surreal? Let us try a little subjective experiment: go back in time and think of that all-too-real fear of the dark you experienced as a child. Why were you afraid? After all, as we now say in our role as parents, there is nothing to be afraid of. But the child in us might still reply: it is precisely this nothing that is so frightening!

This is, in a sense, also Caillois' reply. For him, children fear the dark because their egos are still permeable and not yet fully formed. He specifies that they do not fear darkness as such. Rather, what they fear is a loss of selfhood generated by the dissolution of boundaries between the figure and the background, the human organism and the nonhuman environment: "The magical hold…of night and obscurity, *the fear of the dark*, has unquestionably its roots in the threat it generates with respect to the opposition between the organism and the environment" (MH 112). Now, this is the moment to recognize that Caillois was not alone in suggesting this mimetic hypothesis at the foundation of psychic development. As that other theoretical chameleon of surrealist inspiration *par excellence*, Jacques Lacan, will later claim, children fear darkness for its affective power to dissolve the boundaries of the ego, just as they jubilate to see their own mirror-image for its power to delineate and give form to the ego—via a mimetic experience.

Beyond the Mirror Stage

Lacan, just like Freud, has received much critical attention in the past century, whereas Janet and Caillois have not. It has thus not been sufficiently stressed that Caillois' Janetian psychological analysis of mimetism and psychasthenia in-*forms* (gives form to), quite directly, Lacan's celebrated "mirror stage," in the sense that it provides the latter with a mimetic model for his own account of ego formation. Janet's influence on Lacan's analysis of the ego has been characteristically erased, but the theoretical shadow Caillois casts is still clearly visible in "The Mirror Stage." Lacan in fact writes: "But the facts of mimicry (*mimétisme*) are no less instructive when conceived as cases of heteromorphic identification, in as much as they raise the problem of the significance of space for the living organism."[13] And he specifies:

> We have only to recall how Roger Caillois (still young, his thought still fresh from his break with the sociological school that had formed it) illuminated the subject by using the term "*legendary psychasthenia*" to classify morphological mimicry (*mimétisme morphologique*) as an obsession with space in its derealizing effects.[14]

This is a revealing genealogical connection for mimetic theorists and artists to rediscover in the twenty-first century. The mythical "mirror stage," with its celebrated account of the birth of the ego out of the subject's identification with a bright, stable, and ideal form (or *Gestalt*), entails nothing less and nothing more than a mirroring *inversion* of what Caillois, following Janet, called "legendary psychasthenia." For Caillois, mimicry dissolves the unity of the ego against the material background; conversely, for Lacan, a mimetic identification with the unity of an ideal image gives form to the ego.

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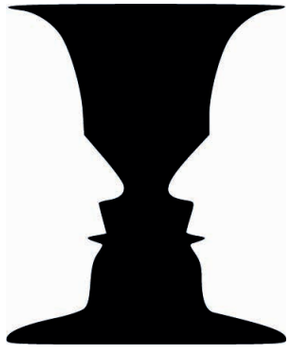

The Lacanian ego is thus the positive imprint of Caillois' negative mimetic configuration; the exterior form of the ego is what appears in the foreground once the inner experience of formless dissolution is left in the background. This is how the mirror stage became a legend, while psychasthenia was actually dissolved. Lacan's is an idealist theory of narcissistic subject formation; Caillois' is a materialist theory of non-anthropocentric dissolution. The former spoke to the structuralist generation; the latter was left in the background to be rediscovered. Still, a genealogical lesson remains visible nonetheless: seemingly "original" theories have "mimetic" origins.

Caillois is, in fact, careful not to dismiss this personality disorder as an anomalous, mimetic pathology that affects only children or neurotic cases. Rather, he considers both the animal (physical) mimicry and the human (psychic) pathology as revealing of a more generalized (metaphysical) anxiety of dissolution of the boundaries of individuation in "black space" that affects human and nonhuman animals in general. Moreover, his mimetic hypothesis has nothing to do with a fully visible, mirror-like realistic representation of the self but, rather, designates an intimately felt, yet truly invisible psychic dissolution of the boundaries of selfhood in spatial darkness, a dissolution that is most intimately and obscurely connected to the horror of death. In sum, unlike Lacan, Caillois stresses the importance of affect over vision, turbulent bodily senses over unitary images, material dissolution over ideal formation, becoming space rather than a being an imago. And in this overturning of perspectives constitutive of his diagonal account of mimicry, lies, perhaps, his future originality.

Diagonal Mimicry: Perspectives for the Anthropocene

In light of this brief genealogy of Caillois' diagnostic of animal and human mimicry, which paved the way for what is arguably one of the most influential theories of the subject in the twentieth century, we might still wonder: what is the theoretical and artistic value of revisiting Caillois in the twenty-first century? By way of conclusion, I schematically outline four entangled perspectives that were untimely when Caillois first developed his diagonal account of mimicry but are timely and urgent to pursue in the age of environmental transformation constitutive of the Anthropocene.

First, "diagonal science," as Caillois theorized and practiced it, was not based on a nature/culture opposition that, under the aegis of structuralism, dominated a good part of the past century. On the contrary, he went beyond a "two cultures" opposition to account for a transdisciplinary (non)human phenomenon like mimicry that has biological, psychological, social, philosophical, and aesthetic manifestations, all of

which escape the "increasing specialization" (DS 343) of academic knowledge. As he puts it: "What we need are relay stations at every level: anastomosis and coordination points, not only for assembling the spoils but above all for comparing different processes" (344). And he adds: "A network of shortcuts seems ever more indispensable today among the many, isolated outposts spread out along the periphery, without internal lines of communication—which is the site of fruitful research" (347). The human and nonhuman tendency to imitate at different levels of—biological, psychic, aesthetic, social, political etc.—behavior is a case in point. Caillois' plea for a diagonal science of mimesis provides important transdisciplinary steps that the mimetic turn or *re*-turn to *homo mimeticus* intends to further explore.

Papilio machaon. Courtesy of Otakárek fenyklový****

Second, Caillois' attention to animal mimicry challenged anthropocentric tendencies that set humans apart from the nonhuman world. Human exceptionalism goes back to the dawn of philosophy and traverses western humanistic thought and aesthetic practices, which consider humans as the most imitative animals. If humans remain indeed thoroughly mimetic, other animals are not foreign to mimicry. Quite the contrary, the human mimetic faculty is an extension of animal mimicry which allows for fruitful communications between the two. As he puts it, addressing the specifically human sphere of aesthetics: "Aesthetics studies the harmony of lines and colors. Could it not conceivably compare paintings with butterfly wings?" (DG 345)

And Caillois continues, anticipating the objection that was routinely addressed to him in the past century, but might no longer work today: "Anthropomorphism!" people will say, but it is exactly the opposite" (345). As his account of mimicry makes strikingly clear, the goal is to "explain man [*sic*] (governed by the laws of this same nature to which he [*sic*] belongs in almost every respect) in terms of the more general behavioral forms found widespread in nature throughout most species" (345-346). While the human animal remains thoroughly mimetic in its ability to represent the world, Caillois rooted the foundations of mimicry in an animal, all too animal tendency to merge against dominant backgrounds, be they natural (mimicry) or cultural (mimetism)—a tendency that is now radically amplified by new media and the enveloping technological environment in which *homo mimeticus* is immersed and that urgently deserves new studies of what I call, "hypermimesis."[15]

Third, Caillois' diagnostic of the power of the natural environment to form, transform, and dissolve the autonomy of human and nonhuman animals entails an overturning of perspectives that we should take to heart in the age of rapid climate change characteristic of the Anthropocene. Caillois was ahead of his time in stressing that (non)human animals are not the "autonomous" creatures they appear to be and are radically open, entangled, and vulnerable to the "enveloping" powers of the environment. What we must add is that humans are now caught in a spiraling vortex in which their influence on the environment generates complex feedback loops that retroact on human and animal behavior alike, threatening to pull humans in what is already recognized as a sixth extinction. Well before the environmental turn, Caillois teaches us that the environment is never simply background; it is the very ground from which human and nonhuman life emerges and to which it is bound to return. As he puts it in a phrase that served as the epigraph for this essay: "Indeed, the end would appear to be *assimilation to the environment*." (MH 108)

Last but not least, Caillois' diagnostic of mimicry/mimetism as a "dangerous luxury" locates a squandering excess, or expenditure, at the heart of human and nonhuman life which figures like Nietzsche and Georges Bataille already placed at the heart of aesthetic experience. If since its emergence during the eighteenth century, aesthetics was traditionally considered without instrumental purpose or use, Surrealist writers like Caillois insisted that it remains the palpitating heart of inner experiences that do not simply aim to realistically represent the world. Rather than being without purpose, as a tradition that goes from Kant to Bataille suggests, Caillois reminds us that aesthetics stems from purposive yet not necessarily utilitarian drives that are rooted within a human, and thus animal body (aesthetics, from *aisthetikos*, "sensitive, pertaining to sense perception," derived from *aisthanomai*, "I perceive, feel, sensation"). This aesthetic feeling entails, among other things, the ability to step out of

one's shoes via a form of empathy, or better, *Einfühlung*, leading to the "feeling into" the inner affects of others. Caillois took this aesthetic principle seriously by stepping beyond anthropocentrism so as to consider the mimetic drive from the perspective of nonhuman mimetic animals who, like *homo mimeticus*, are part of nature. As he puts it: "nature (which is no miser) pursues pleasure, luxury, exuberance, and vertigo just as much as survival." (DS 346)

The pleasure, luxury, and exuberance of mimicry is constitutive of this vertigo. If humans had their share—a share Bataille would call "accursed" (*part maudite*)—driven by excessive consumption and pollution in the last century it is perhaps time to put the mimetic faculty to aesthetic, cognitive, and ethical use to affirm survival as well—for humans and nonhumans. In the midst of an environmental catastrophe that is currently causing a sixth extinction, this mimetic tendency might have a purpose after all, albeit this purpose will not be singular for its manifestations will have to be plural. One of them could entail a power to animate and perhaps reanimate life on Earth via non-anthropocentric mimetic principles that trace the dynamic interplay between (non)human life and the environment that envelops us and—for how much longer?—still sustains us.

Michaela Lawtoo, *Holocene* (2020)
Courtesy of the artist

Michaela Lawtoo, *Anthropocene* (2020)
Courtesy of the artist

How new generations of artists will be able to go beyond a mimesis restricted to anthropocentric forms of realistic representation, and give aesthetic expression to the chameleon metamorphoses vital to the survival of (non)human animals in the Anthropocene, is perhaps what this issue will help us find out.

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NOTES:

1 See www.homomimeticus.eu.

2 Roger Caillois, "A New Plea for Diagonal Science," in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. Claudine Frank, tr. Claudine Frank and Camille Naish (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 343-347, 343. Hereafter DS.

3 See Jane Bennett, *Influx and Efflux: Writing Up with Walt Whitman* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 74-80.

4 On the mimetic turn, see for instance the special issue on "The Mimetic Condition," *CounterText* 8.1 (2022).

5 The two sections that follow rework/expand a section on Caillois originally part of Nidesh Lawtoo, *Conrad's Shadow: Catastrophe, Mimesis, Theory* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016).

6 Anecdote reported by André Castel, and quoted in *The Edge of Surrealism*, 9.

7 Both Lacan and Caillois published essays in the surrealist magazine, *Minotaure*.

8 Roger Caillois, *Le Mythe et l'homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938). Hereforth quoted as MH in the body of the text (my transl.) For an English translation, see "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," trans. John Shepley, *October*, vol. 31 (1984): 16-32.

9 Regular participants included figures like Jean Wahl, Pierre Klossowski, Denis de Rougemont, Jean Paulhan, among others. *The College of Sociology*, ed. Denis Hollier (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

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

11 For a historical reevaluation of the role of Janet in the discovery of the unconscious, see Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), chap. 6; on Janet's influence on The College, most especially Bataille, see Nidesh Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 260-82.

12 See Pierre Janet, *Les Obsessions et la psychasthénie* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1903), 260–442.

13 Jacques Lacan, "Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je," in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 92.

14 Ibid. 92.

15 For an account of hypermimesis in cinema in line with Caillois, see Nidesh Lawtoo, "The Human Chameleon: *Zelig*, Nietzsche, and the Banality of Evil," *Film-Philosophy* 25.3 (2021), 272-295.