On the genealogy of inspiration
Performing creativity in Plato and Nietzsche

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Abstract: My aim is to examine the role played by the acknowledgment of performativity in the historical debate between the philosophers and the artists (especially poets and musicians). I will focus on the question of the legitimation of epistemological authority, which in the course of this debate is often called "inspiration". I will observe the deconstruction process in the concept of poetic inspiration through the work of the two authors who most explored this issue: Plato and Friedrich Nietzsche. Both philosophers claim for themselves the ability to perform the acts which constitute poetic inspiration in a mimetic way, of their own free will and in accordance with rational schemes. Thus, philosophers not only prove the performative nature of the poet's main legitimation tool but also appropriate it in order to acquire the social prestige traditionally conferred on the poets. This analysis, applying methods drawn from classical hermeneutics and from Sacks's Membership Categorization Analysis, will show a strategy of broader relevance for queer studies: the acknowledgment of the performative nature of category-bound activities as a tool to understand and manipulate reality.

Keywords: performativity; Harvey Sacks; inspiration; Plato; Nietzsche.

This essay aims at showing the relevance of methods and perspectives drawn from queer studies to the understanding of an important concept in Western culture and literature: the idea of "poetic inspiration" as it has grown in the course of the historical debate between philosophers and poets.[1] In particular, I will point out that this notion, as it appears in the works of the two philosophers who most examined this issue, Plato and Friedrich Nietzsche, is not only suitable to be studied with the hermeneutical tools developed by queer studies and relative disciplines, but it also provides these modern theories with new elements of discussion on social and epistemological issues.[2] Thanks to the cooperation between historical and philological methods on one side and contemporary theory on the other, we will be able to detect a detailed strategy of deconstruction at work in an apparently remote epistemological debate, which deserves to be

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[1]   For a history of the concept of inspiration see Moffitt 2005, with a rich bibliography. The most recent and detailed survey on the quarrel between philosophy and poetry is Barfield 2011.
[2]   For recent, comparative studies on Plato and Nietzsche see Anderson 2014 and Dixsault 2015.

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considered by queer studies as one of the first attempts at subverting social normative frameworks in recorded history.

In narrative-dramatic works concerning inspiration, like Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* or Plato's *Phaedrus*, we do not only read a theoretical discussion on inspiration, but we witness the *performance* of it by characters representing different *categories of people*. Consequently, a new, more suitable approach to this matter would be to concentrate not only on what these two philosophers *say* about poetic inspiration, but also on what they make *people do* with it. For this reason, I propose to read their works through the lenses of performativity, a concept pertaining to gender and queer studies, according to which the naturality of social notions is an illusion conferred on them by the reiterated performance of the series of actions which constitute them.[3] From this perspective, philosophers attempt to deconstruct the poets' apparently ontologically grounded wisdom by acknowledging the performative nature of their main legitimation tool, i.e. inspiration. In particular, philosophers demonstrate that inspiration is not an inexplicable and unrepeatable state of being caused by the intervention of superhuman forces, but only the reiterated performance of a series of well-defined acts, those typical of madness. These kinds of actions, philosophers manage to show, can be perfectly accomplished even by people apparently not entitled to do so, such as philosophers themselves.

As it appears from this summary, philosophers' speculation on performativity is not confined to the theoretical assessment of its functioning. It is part of a dynamic process in which, by demonstrating their own ability at performing poets' legitimation tool, philosophers try to replace poets in their prestigious social and cultural role. Since this whole mechanism is configured by philosophers in their works as a *dialogical* confrontation between two different *social* categories, one way to better understand it

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[3]   On performativity, see Butler 1999[2]; for a concise definition, see p. 12 "Performativity is thus not a singular 'act', for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition". The performance of a definite series of actions is not only at the core of gender identity, which is Butler's main concern, but it also constitutes the core of "being ordinary" according to Sacks 1984: 414 "Whatever you may think about what it is to be an ordinary person in the world, an initial shift is not think of 'an ordinary person' as some person, but as somebody having as one's job, as one's constant preoccupation, doing 'being ordinary'. It is not that somebody is ordinary; it is perhaps that that is what one's business is, and it takes work, as any other business does". The issue is dealt with in a more detailed fashion at the beginning of Section 2 of the present work.

is to resort to sociology. In particular, Harvey Sacks's sociological studies on conversation analysis, which focus on the conversational interaction between categories of individuals, will help us outline a general scheme at work here and in similar cases of confrontation between competing categories as well.[4]

At the end of this study, I hope to contribute an outline of one of the possible "genealogies" of inspiration, in the Nietzschean and Foucauldian sense of the term[5]: an attempt at underlining the twists and turns of an apparently "natural" concept that, far from being unitary and elevated, has shown over the centuries multiple, contradictory, and even oppressive aspects. But I also would like to show that such a genealogical work, with its potentiality for the understanding of contemporary reality, is only possible when traditional, history-orientated disciplines are willing to cooperate with more recently developed theoretical frames, and vice-versa[6].

1. Poetic inspiration as madness

The concept of "inspiration", i.e. the idea that poets (and artists in general) produce their works thanks to the intervention of inexplicable and even supernatural forces, first appeared in ancient Greece as a direct consequence of the peculiar social and religious structure of that civilization[7]. In the cultural *milieu* of Archaic Greece, in fact, the absence of a revealed religion favoured the rise of eminent sapiental figures who complemented, on a more or less profane level, the action of the priestly elite. Poets first fulfilled this social role, devising original variations on the rich and flexible

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4   An introduction to Harvey Sacks, his theories, and their relationship with sociolinguistics (in particular with ethnomethodology), is given in Schegloff's introduction to Sacks's lectures in Sacks 1992: I, ix-xlii. For an overview on Sacks's theory and their relationship to militant disciplines such as queer studies, see Dell'Aversano 2017, esp. 36-44.

5   For Foucalt's views on the genealogical method, see Foucault 1977, in particular p. 162: "The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us". A detailed study on Foucault's genealogical method and its further applications can be found in Koopman 2013, in particular the Introduction and Chapters 1-3.

6   On the importance, for queer studies, of a widening of their research field beyond LGBT themes, see Dell'Aversano 2017: 36-44, esp. 38-39.

7   The information given in this part are inevitably no more than a rough sketch of a complex historical pattern. Canonical views on this matter are to be found in Fränkel 1962 and Lesky 1958. As a first historical introduction to beginners, chapters in literary histories or companions are recommended, such as Nagy 1989 or Raaflaub 2009.

Greek mythical heritage. Their work, according to a conception already present in Homer and originating from the high social consideration accorded to poetry, took its epistemological legitimation directly from the religious sphere. The poet, in fact, could publicly claim to derive the content of his poetry from a superhuman level, through a direct and privileged contact with all-knowing divinities (the Muses or the god Apollo).[8] Yet, as early as the late Archaic period, philosophy, a new conception of knowledge (more independent both from the narrative forms of poetry and from the contents of popular wisdom), was flourishing.[9] In its definitive epistemological configuration (already visible in the second half of the fifth century BC), philosophy conceived itself as an enquiry into truth after a rigorous logical method, unconstrained (at least in its ideal definition) by the boundaries of religion or tradition, and practiced by groups of male adults under the guidance of one or more prominent figures. The clash between the two different conceptions of knowledge represented by poetry and philosophy was inevitable and, after its first manifestation in Plato's works, has been ongoing throughout Antiquity and beyond.[10] In particular, one of the most contested aspects of this issue was the origin of the poets' epistemological legitimation, i.e. inspiration, whose authority was first systematically questioned by Plato.[11]

On the problem of inspiration Plato devoted a short dialogue, the *Ion*, usually considered a juvenile text.[12] In this work Plato's teacher, the philosopher Socrates, appears as a character and expresses his views on poetic inspiration while having a conversation with the homonymous rhapsode

[8]   For an introduction on early views on inspirations in Greece, see Nagy 1989, Murray 1980.

[9]   Detienne 1967 is a classic on this topic. For an introduction to the rise of philosophy and philosophers in Archaic Greece (in particular on Presocratics), see among the others Kenny 2004, chap. 1, Schofield 2003, and Curd 2012.

[10]   On the debate between poets and philosophers in Antiquity, see Gould 1990, Rosen 1993: 1-27. For a sociological view on the rise of the debate, see Misheva 1998. On Plato's own views on the debate (and on their historical reliability), see Most 2011.

[11]   On the huge topic of Plato and poetry, an exhaustive bibliography can be found at the end of the collective volume on this subject edited by Destrée and Hermann 2011; for a general survey with further bibliographical suggestions, see the introduction to Murray 1996 and a general overview in Rijksbaron 2007: 9-14. The most influential of Plato's doctrines on art poetry, the *mimesis* theory, has a vast bibliography and will be not dealt with in this essay; however, a general introduction to this issue can be found in Ferrari 1989, Griswold 1981, Marusič 2011, (with updated bibliography).

[12]   For an overview on the *Ion*, see the introduction in the reference edition by Rijksbaron 2007, the introduction and essays to Capuccino 2005's edition, and also Dorter 1973, and Stern-Gillet 2004.

(i.e. public performer of the Homeric poems).[13] In this text we can read the first detailed description not only of what inspiration is, but also of what people do when they are inspired:[14]

ΣΩ. πάντες γὰρ οἵ τε τῶν ἐπῶν ποιηταὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ οὐκ ἐκ τέχνης ἀλλ' ἔνθεοι ὄντες καὶ κατεχόμενοι πάντα ταῦτα τὰ καλὰ λέγουσι ποιήματα, καὶ οἱ μελοποιοὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ ὡσαύτως, ὥσπερ οἱ κορυβαντιῶντες οὐκ ἔμφρονες ὄντες ὀρχοῦνται, οὕτω καὶ οἱ μελοποιοὶ οὐκ ἔμφρονες ὄντες τὰ καλὰ μέλη ταῦτα ποιοῦσιν, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὰν ἐμβῶσιν εἰς τὴν ἁρμονίαν καὶ εἰς τὸν ῥυθμόν, βακχεύουσι καὶ κατεχόμενοι, ὥσπερ αἱ βάκχαι ἀρύονται ἐκ τῶν ποταμῶν μέλι καὶ γάλα κατεχόμεναι, ἔμφρονες δὲ οὖσαι οὔ, καὶ τῶν μελοποιῶν ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦτο ἐργάζεται, ὅπερ αὐτοὶ λέγουσι. λέγουσι γὰρ δήπουθεν πρὸς ἡμᾶς οἱ ποιηταὶ ὅτι ἀπὸ κρηνῶν μελιρρύτων ἐκ Μουσῶν κήπων τινῶν καὶ ναπῶν δρεπόμενοι τὰ μέλη ἡμῖν φέρουσιν ὥσπερ αἱ μέλιτται, καὶ αὐτοὶ οὕτω πετόμενοι· καὶ ἀληθῆ λέγουσι. κοῦφον γὰρ χρῆμα ποιητής ἐστιν καὶ πτηνὸν καὶ ἱερόν, καὶ οὐ πρότερον οἷός τε ποιεῖν πρὶν ἂν ἔνθεός τε γένηται καὶ ἔκφρων καὶ ὁ νοῦς μηκέτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐνῇ· ἕως δ' ἂν τουτὶ ἔχῃ τὸ κτῆμα, ἀδύνατος πᾶς ποιεῖν ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν καὶ χρησμῳδεῖν.

SOCRATES: [...] All good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Corybantian revellers when they dance are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains: but when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed; like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind. And the soul of the lyric poet does the same, as they themselves say; for they tell us that they bring songs from honeyed fountains, culling them out of the gardens and dells of the Muses; they, like the bees, winging their way from flower to flower. And this is true. For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles.

Plato, *Ion* 533e-534d [Eng. tr. by W.R.M. Lamb 1925, Cambridge MA]

[13] On the oral performance culture in ancient Greece, see among the others SEALEY 1957, WEST 1981, GENTILI 1995.

[14] On the theory of inspiration in Plato, a general, updated overviews for beginners is MURRAY 1996: 6-12. The seminal work on this topic is by TIGERSTEDT 1969. See also FERRARI 1989, VELARDI 1989, MURRAY 1992, BÜTTNER 2011, GONZALEZ 2011, SCOTT 2011b; further bibliography in CAPUCCINO 2005: 327-330.

Inspired poets are explicitly compared to two different groups of people, both related to the religious sphere. Theirs is an emotional status which is similar to that of the Corybants (priests devoted to Zeus, famous for their wild ceremonial dancing) and of the Bacchae (female worshippers of Dionysus, whose behaviour was characterised by frantic and almost feral actions, such as dancing, eating raw meat, etc). Both categories enjoyed an episodical contact with the divine sphere which manifested itself in an abnormal behaviour, similar to madness. The same phenomenon was typical of prophecy as well, as can be seen from the religious figure of the Pythia (Apollo's female priest at Delphi): when possessed by the god, she was manifestly out of her mind and, the same time, able to utter oracles.[15] In the ancient Greek worldview, all these individuals were blessed with holy madness, a powerful legitimating tool which resembles the device of madness as theorised for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe by Michel Foucault: the manifestation of a secret and superior knowledge through apparently incomprehensible behaviour.[16] But, unlike madness in the Classical Age of French culture, holy madness in Greece was not a persisting disease, or an unfortunate, continuous alteration of one's psyche, but only the outer manifestation of an episodic contact between the divine sphere and an otherwise sane individual, often a representative of the priestly elite.

It is not clear whether the equation of inspiration with madness was a commonplace in Greek culture or instead a Platonic innovation.[17] What is sure is that Socrates, in the text quoted above, affirms not only that inspiration through insanity is a well-known fact, but even that poets themselves have spread this conception. At any rate, Plato has fixed here two important

[15]   For madness in Ancient Greece (and in particular for its links to prophecy), the most influential account is DODDS 1951, chap. 2; more recent accounts are SIMON 1979 and PADEL 1992. A more general overview in PORTER 2002, chap. 2.

[16]   See the description of madness as a recondite knowledge in FOUCAULT 1961: 21-22 "[M]adness fascinates because it is knowledge. It is knowledge, first, because all these absurd figures are in reality elements of a difficult, hermetic, esoteric learning. […] This knowledge, so inaccessible, so formidable, the Fool, in his innocent idiocy, already possesses. While the man of reason and wisdom perceives only fragmentary and all the more unnerving images of it, the Fool bears it intact as an unbroken sphere: that crystal ball which for all others is empty is in his eyes filled with the density of an invisible knowledge".

[17]   Since only fragments survive of the work of philosophers previous to Plato, the most reasonable hypothesis is that Plato was the first to systematise a popular conception, which nonetheless was never explicitly stated either by poets or by previous philosophers (and not even, or at least not in a systematic form, by Democritus): see TIGERSTEDT 1970, SCHLESIER 2006.

features of poetic inspiration, which will meet great favour in the Classical world and beyond. First, its episodic nature. The poet cannot dispose of divine knowledge at will, as it would be the case with a science which he has been taught, but rather he knows things only as long as the moments of inspiration (ἐνθουσιασμός, *enthousiasmòs*) occur. On these occasions only is he able to compose his poetical pieces. Second, the impossibility for the poet to be aware of what is happening while he is being a poet. Not only does the poet know things only in his moments of inspiration, but on those very occasions he is actually out of his senses and acts like a mad man.

The equation between inspiration and madness sketched by Plato survived his works and, after meeting great success throughout all Antiquity, was revitalised in the late eighteenth century by Romantic views on genius and spontaneity.[18] The philosopher who most elaborated on the connection between madness and creative inspiration, giving this issue a considerable role in his theories about art and aesthetics, was Friedrich Nietzsche.[19] It appears that, from a famous passage in his autobiography *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche endorses the traditional Platonic and Romantic theories on inspiration as an overwhelming, uncontrolled, and privileged contact with the divine, which explicates itself in foolish acts:

> — Hat Jemand, Ende des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, einen deutlichen Begriff davon, was Dichter starker Zeitalter *Inspiration* nannten? Im andren Falle will ich's beschreiben. — Mit dem geringsten Rest von Aberglauben in sich würde man in der That die Vorstellung, bloss Incarnation, bloss Mundstück, bloss medium übermächtiger Gewalten zu sein, kaum abzuweisen wissen. [...] Man hört, man sucht nicht; man nimmt, man fragt nicht, wer da giebt; wie ein Blitz leuchtet ein Gedanke auf, mit Nothwendigkeit, in der Form ohne Zögern, — ich habe nie eine Wahl gehabt. Eine Entzückung, deren ungeheure Spannung sich mitunter in einen Thränenstrom auslöst, bei der der Schritt unwillkürlich bald

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[18]   On the fortunes of Plato's idea of inspiration in Antiquity, see the introduction to MURRAY 1996 for a guide into further bibliography. The development of Platonic theories in the Renaissance and afterwards, and their influence on the Romantic representation of genius and madness, are a vast topic, on which a general sketch and more bibliography can be found in MOFFITT 2005: 183-204 and, for the historical frame, in PORTER 2002: 80-83.

[19]   On Nietzsche's aesthetics, general recent accounts are YOUNG 1992, SOLL 1998, and RIDLEY 2007; a reassessment in GARNER 2013 and JANAWAY 2014. For further works, see the lists at the end of the collection of essays in CAME 2014. For the relationship between philosophy and inspiration in Nietzsche see FRAZIER 1974, ALLISON 2000, and ROBERTS 2000. On Nietzsche's personal contribution to the interpretation of the quarrel between poets and philosophers in Antiquity see MEYER 2014; for his ambivalent views on Plato see BARACCHI 1995, GHEDINI 1999.

stürmt, bald langsam wird; ein vollkommnes Ausser-sich-sein mit dem distink-testen Bewusstsein einer Unzahl feiner Schauder und Überrieselungen bis in die Fusszehen […]. Dies ist *meine* Erfahrung von Inspiration; ich zweifle nicht, dass man Jahrtausende zurückgehn muss, um Jemanden zu finden, der mir sagen darf „es ist auch die meine". —

Does anyone, at the end of the nineteenth century, have a clear idea of what poets in strong ages called *inspiration*? If not, then I'll describe it. — With the slightest scrap of superstition in you, you would indeed scarcely be able to dismiss the sense of being just an incarnation, just a mouthpiece, just a medium for overpowering forces. […] You hear, you don't search; you take, you don't ask who is giving; like a flash of lightning a thought flares up, with necessity, with no hesitation as to its form—I never had any choice. A rapture whose immense tension is released from time to time in a flood of tears, when you cannot help your step running on one moment and slowing down the next; a perfect being-out-side-yourself with the most distinct consciousness of myriad subtle shudders and shivers right down to your toes […]. This is *my* experience of inspiration; I have no doubt that you need to go back millennia in order to find someone who can say to me 'it is mine, too'.

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F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 1888, sec. F, chap. 6, *KSA* VI, 3, 337-339
(emphasis in the original) [Eng. tr. by D. Large 2007, Oxford]

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While patently alluding to Plato as a philosophical model for this quote, Nietzsche's views on the topic differ from the traditional scheme in one fundamental point.[20] What we read here, in fact, is clearly Nietzsche's own experience of inspiration, but he is not a poet. The paradigm set by Plato is curiously overturned. This is not even the strangest feature of the passage. Even if he famously claimed to be an almost unique example of philosopher-artist, in Nietzsche's view inspiration is not something which pertains to him alone.[21] As it appears clearly from his other works, inspiration is a philosopher's birthright: other kinds of inspiration (including the poets') are counterfeit, mere *performances* of it.

What I will show in the next section is that, in Nietzsche as well as in Plato (unlike any other philosopher), the correspondence between inspiration and madness has allowed philosophers to represent inspiration as a performance. Furthermore, this kind of representation is at the core of their attempt to appropriate this powerful legitimation tool, which was not associated with philosophers before. For both philosophers, the history of

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[20]   Sommer 2013: 551 *ad loc.*
[21]   Discussion in Ridley 2007, chap. 4.

inspiration is not a concern of single individuals, but is actually a clash between competing social categories, which takes places in a narrative-dramatic form; as a consequence, in the next section I will try to frame the debate as it appears in Plato and Nietzsche by using theoretical tools provided by the Harvey Sacks Membership Categorization Analysis.

2. Madness as performance

After describing, in the *Ion*, the nature and the manifestations of inspiration, Socrates makes a number of other important points. In particular, as it is clear from what the text says immediately after the description of the inspired poet, it is only thanks to the insane and exalted conduct of the poet that it is possible to understand that the god is communicating with him and, as a consequence, that the poet is speaking the truth. It follows that reiterated moments of insane behaviour are a fundamental requirement for the poet to claim to indeed be such:

ΣΩ. οὐ γὰρ τέχνῃ ταῦτα λέγουσιν ἀλλὰ θείᾳ δυνάμει, ἐπεί, εἰ περὶ ἑνὸς τέχνῃ καλῶς ἠπίσταντο λέγειν, κἂν περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἁπάντων· διὰ ταῦτα δὲ ὁ θεὸς ἐξαιρούμενος τούτων τὸν νοῦν τούτοις χρῆται ὑπηρέταις καὶ τοῖς χρησμῳδοῖς καὶ τοῖς μάντεσι τοῖς θείοις, ἵνα ἡμεῖς οἱ ἀκούοντες εἰδῶμεν ὅτι οὐχ οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ ταῦτα λέγοντες οὕτω πολλοῦ ἄξια, οἷς νοῦς μὴ πάρεστιν, ἀλλ᾽ ὁ θεὸς αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ λέγων, διὰ τούτων δὲ φθέγγεται πρὸς ἡμᾶς. [...] ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ δὴ μάλιστά μοι δοκεῖ ὁ θεὸς ἐνδείξασθαι ἡμῖν, ἵνα μὴ διστάζωμεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἀνθρώπινά ἐστιν τὰ καλὰ ταῦτα ποιήματα οὐδὲ ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ θεῖα καὶ θεῶν, οἱ δὲ ποιηταὶ οὐδὲν ἀλλ᾽ ἢ ἑρμηνῆς εἰσιν τῶν θεῶν, κατεχόμενοι ἐξ ὅτου ἂν ἕκαστος κατέχηται.

Socrates: [N]ot by art does the poet sing, but by power divine. Had he learned by rules of art, he would have known how to speak not of one theme only, but of all; and therefore God takes away the minds of poets, and uses them as his ministers, as he also uses diviners and holy prophets, in order that we who hear them may know them to be speaking not of themselves who utter these priceless words in a state of unconsciousness, but that God himself is the speaker, and that through them he is conversing with us. [...] In this way, the God would seem to indicate to us and not allow us to doubt that these beautiful poems are not human, or the work of man, but divine and the work of God; and that the poets are only the interpreters of the Gods by whom they are severally possessed.

<div align="right">Plato, *Ion* 534c-d [Eng. tr. by W.R.M. Lamb 1925, Cambridge MA]</div>

This operation is described by scholars of Plato as an attempt to discredit poets as an epistemological category by showing how theirs is only an empty role as mere mouthpieces of the gods.[22] But it is clear, as the scholarship on Plato admits, that this strategy does not undermine the prestige traditionally accorded to the contents of poetry. In order to better understand Plato's views on this issue, it can be useful to stress the fact that the main target of this text are poets as people forming a social category, and that therefore sociological tools can be introduced now to make sense of Plato's statements. In particular, the category of poets as sketched by Plato bears all the characteristic of what, in the terms of Harvey Sacks's Membership Categorization Analysis, is called an "identity category".

According to Sacks, an identity category is one of the many groupings of people by which society divides its members on the basis of arbitrary distinctions (sex, race, age, occupation, etc.).[23] Each category enjoys more or fewer privileges, and bears more or less stigma than others. In order to be part of a given category, and to be considered a full "member" of it by co-members and outsiders, a person has to prove their ability to continuously and correctly perform those actions which are considered typical of the category in the eyes both of co-members and of all others. These sets of actions are called "category-bound activities" (CBA).[24] For instance, in order to be considered a full member of the category "mother", a person

[22]   See for instances Murray 1996: 9 "The value of the end product is not overtly questioned in the Ion, and in so far as Socrates touches on the subject, he is apparently complimentary [...]. But Plato transforms the traditional notion of poetic inspiration by emphasising the passivity of the poet and the irrational nature of the poetic process"; Collobert 2011: 41 "Even though the poet inspired by the gods does not look for the truth, he may tell truths, whereas the poet, seen as merely an imitator, cannot".

[23]   Sacks 1992: I, 40 "I'll begin now talking about some very central machinery of social organization. [...] It seems that there is a class of category sets. By 'category sets' I means just that: A set which is made up of a group of categories. There are more than one set, each of which can be named, and they have common properties. And that is what I mean by referring to them as a 'class.' A first thing we can say about this class of category sets is that its sets are 'which'-type sets. By that I mean that whatever number of categories a set contains, and without regard to the addition or subtraction of categories for that set, each set's categories classify a population. [...] The names of the sets would be things like sex, age, race, religion, perhaps occupation. And in each set are categories which can classify any member of the population. I call them 'which' -type sets because questions about any one of these can be formulated as, "Which, for some set, are you?", and "None" is not a presumptive member of any of the categories".

[24]   Sacks 1992: I, 245 "Let's introduce a term, which I'm going to call 'category-bound activities.' What I mean by that is, there are a great many activities which Members take it are done by some particular category of persons, or several categories of persons, where the categories are categories from these membership categorization devices".

must – at least in Western contemporary society – be able to perform a number of actions, such as having delivered a baby, or taking care of them in various ways (rearing them, educating them, and so on). A reiterated failure at accomplishing these sets of actions can undermine the membership of a person in the given category, with all the drawbacks (or the benefits) which this involves. Even from this short summary it is possible to notice how Sacks's idea of reiterated acts defining the identity of a group is close to the concept of gender performativity as developed by Judith Butler. Just like the continuous performance of the actions considered to be typical of a given gender persuades both performers and onlookers of its naturality and spontaneity, in the same way a continuously reiterated CBA acquires the appearance of a natural necessity.[25] In our case, poets are a category which can be identified by the fact that all its full members, and they alone, are able to perform the insane acts which characterise the process of inspiration (i.e. madness and the composition of poems). According to the keyterms introduced by Sacks, in Plato's narrative, divine insanity (a powerful tool of epistemological legitimation) is one of the CBAs of the identity category of poets.

If we assume that acts of insanity are evidence of contact with the divine, as Socrates claimed up to this point in the dialogue, it follows that anyone who is able to perform insanity is potentially close to God, and therefore possesses authority from an epistemological perspective. Socrates argues therefore that not only poets (that is, *authors* of poems), but rhapsodes as well (people publicly *performing* – as classical scholars say – poems by others) can claim a special relationship with the divine, since they are clearly out of their mind in the very moment of their performance. According to Socrates, then, inspiration is in some ways contagious: divine knowledge passes, through the inspiration, to the poet. The poet in turn possesses the rhapsode, who in turn inspires the audience. Essentially, poets and rhapsodes are twin categories: rhapsodes perform the poets' words, poets those of the God:[26]

ΣΩ. ἔστι γὰρ τοῦτο τέχνη μὲν οὐκ ὂν παρὰ σοὶ περὶ Ὁμήρου εὖ λέγειν, ὃ νυνδὴ ἔλεγον, θεία δὲ δύναμις ἥ σε κινεῖ, ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ λίθῳ ἣν Εὐριπίδης μὲν

[25] BUTLER 1999²: 191 "As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation".

[26] See on this issue the discussion in CAPUCCINO 2005: 128-134.

Μαγνῆτιν ὠνόμασεν, οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ Ἡρακλείαν. καὶ γὰρ αὕτη ἡ λίθος οὐ μόνον αὐτοὺς τοὺς δακτυλίους ἄγει τοὺς σιδηροῦς, ἀλλὰ καὶ δύναμιν ἐντίθησι τοῖς δακτυλίοις ὥστ᾽ αὖ δύνασθαι ταὐτὸν τοῦτο ποιεῖν ὅπερ ἡ λίθος, ἄλλους ἄγειν δακτυλίους, ὥστ᾽ ἐνίοτε ὁρμαθὸς μακρὸς πάνυ σιδηρίων καὶ δακτυλίων ἐξ ἀλλήλων ἤρτηται· πᾶσι δὲ τούτοις ἐξ ἐκείνης τῆς λίθου ἡ δύναμις ἀνήρτηται.

Socrates: The gift which you possess of speaking excellently about Homer is not an art, but, as I was just saying, an inspiration; there is a divinity moving you, like that contained in the stone which Euripides calls a magnet, but which is commonly known as the stone of Heraclea. This stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a similar power of attracting other rings; and sometimes you may see a number of pieces of iron and rings suspended from one another so as to form quite a long chain: and all of them derive their power of suspension from the original stone. In like manner the Muse first of all inspires men herself; and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration.

<div align="right">Plato, Ion 533d-e [Eng. tr. by W.R.M. Lamb 1925, Cambridge MA]</div>

The relevance of performativity here is suggested by the Greek terms themselves. Actually, the word used here by Plato for "performer" is ἑρμενεύς, *hermenèus*, which should be more properly translated as "interpreter", but, as it has been clarified by G.W. Most, the significance of the word here is the canonical one in Archaic Greek poetical language: it designates "the agent that performs any act of translation of signification from one kind of language in which it [i.e. the signification] is invisible or entirely unintelligible into another kind in which it is visible and intelligible".[27] According to this definition, poets and rhapsodes are both "performers": the former translates the contents of divine wisdom into human language, and the latter turns the linguistic texture composed by the poet into verbal utterances.

What is new here in Socrates' frame is that poets and rhapsodes are at the same time performers (i.e. people who accomplish a series of well-recognisable acts) and possessed (out of their mind, and therefore unaware of the process they put into action when inspired). But is this a correct account of the matter? Ion at least is not entirely persuaded. In fact, the symptoms which are evidence of possession in the rhapsodes, as Ion suggests, are not always uncontrolled and inevitable; sometimes the rhapsode

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[27] Most 1986: 308. Other discussions in Murray 1996: 102, 121; Capuccino 2005: 62n34.

(who is actually a performer, an actor *tout court*) can control his reactions to contact with the god, in accordance to the demands of his audience:

ΣΩ. Οἶσθα οὖν ὅτι καὶ τῶν θεατῶν τοὺς πολλοὺς ταὐτὰ ταῦτα ὑμεῖς ἐργάζεσθε;
ΙΩΝ. Καὶ μάλα καλῶς οἶδα· καθορῶ γὰρ ἑκάστοτε αὐτοὺς ἄνωθεν ἀπὸ τοῦ βήματος κλάοντάς τε καὶ δεινὸν ἐμβλέποντας καὶ συνθαμβοῦντας τοῖς λεγομένοις. δεῖ γάρ με καὶ σφόδρ᾽ αὐτοῖς τὸν νοῦν προσέχειν· ὡς ἐὰν μὲν κλάοντας αὐτοὺς καθίσω, αὐτὸς γελάσομαι ἀργύριον λαμβάνων, ἐὰν δὲ γελῶντας, αὐτὸς κλαύσομαι ἀργύριον ἀπολλύς.

Soc: And are you aware that you produce similar effects on most spectators?
Ion: Only too well; for I look down upon them from the stage, and behold the various emotions of pity, wonder, sternness, stamped upon their countenances when I am speaking: and I am obliged to give my very best attention to them; for if I make them cry I myself shall laugh, and if I make them laugh I myself shall cry when the time of payment arrives.

<div align="right">Plato, Ion 535e [Eng. tr. by W.R.M. Lamb 1925, Cambridge MA]</div>

Ion's objection is enough to cast some perplexity on the validity of Socrates' theory as far as rhapsodes are concerned.[28] But what then about poets? If the rhapsode, interpreter (or performer) of the poet's words thanks to what Socrates identifies as an uncontrolled and divinely originated excitement, is able to stage an apparently conscious and realistic performance of madness, is then the poet, interpreter of the god, able to stage inspiration as well, exacerbating or diminishing its traits according to his will? Socrates cannot explicitly elaborate on this point, because otherwise he would end up like the historical Socrates himself, i.e. tried for blasphemy. Nonetheless, he seems here to be aware of two important points. First: the series of actions which constitute the identity of a group, traditionally thought of as arising from a supernatural cause and therefore uncontrollable, are actually

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[28] This passage has caused several difficulties, and responses to it have been very different. A common view, however, is that it is impossible to consider rhapsodic inspiration as a real one. Compare for instance Tigerstedt 1969: 21 (with a discussion of previous studies), for whom the "incompatibility of the rhapsode's conscious interest in the public's reaction with a real state of possession" shows that "such a possession cannot be Ion's lot" to Murray 1996: 123 "Ion's words show that, despite his emotional transport, he is nevertheless in control of his faculties, a paradox which is not as inconceivable as it sounds if we think in terms of theatrical performance. Actors are both absorbed in the parts they are playing and yet aware of the effects they are having on an audience. […]. But the readiness with which Ion reveals the true object of his concern, viz. money, and the flippant manner in which he makes his point undercuts any idea of the rhapsode being divinely inspired". See also Ferrari 1989: 96, Asmis 1992: 34.

in partial or even full control of the person who performs them. Second: the social status of the performer depends on the correct performance of these actions. This view is close to the core of Sacks's theory: every category defines its identity as a category by performing a set of topic actions, the reiteration of which guarantees the illusion of natural necessity.

For Nietzsche as well, madness is but a series of actions which, after long training, can be imitated in order to acquire the social prestige it provides. Divine madness in ancient Greece was shared by different categories of individuals (in both religion, like prophets, Bacchae, and Corybants; and culture, such as poets), in modern times as well different categories of individuals tried to heighten their social role by claiming to be inspired by divine madness, or, more precisely, by being able to accomplish the actions typical of divine madness. It is actually possible to describe divine madness as a prestigious CBA whose ownership has been disputed among different identity categories over the centuries. Nietzsche's views on it are straightforward:[29]

„Durch den Wahnsinn sind die grössten Güter über Griechenland gekommen," sagte Plato mit der ganzen alten Menschheit. Gehen wir noch einen Schritt weiter: allen jenen überlegenen Menschen, welche es unwiderstehlich dahin zog, das Joch irgend einer Sittlichkeit zu brechen und neue Gesetze zu geben, blieb, *wenn sie nicht wirklich wahnsinnig waren*, Nichts übrig, als sich wahnsinnig zu machen oder zu stellen — und zwar gilt diess für die Neuerer auf allen Gebieten, nicht nur auf dem der priesterlichen und politischen Satzung: — selbst der Neuerer des poetischen Metrums musste durch den Wahnsinn sich beglaubigen. (Bis in viel mildere Zeiten hinein verblieb daraus den Dichtern eine gewisse Convention des Wahnsinns: auf welche zum Beispiel Solon zurückgriff, als er die Athener zur Wiedereroberung von Salamis aufstachelte.) — „Wie macht man sich wahnsinnig, wenn man es nicht ist und nicht wagt, es zu scheinen?" diesem entsetzlichen Gedankengange haben fast alle bedeutenden Menschen der älteren Civilisation nachgehangen; eine geheime Lehre von Kunstgriffen und diätetischen Winken pflanzte sich darüber fort, nebst dem Gefühle der Unschuld, ja Heiligkeit eines solchen Nachsinnens und Vorhabens."

"The greatest blessings have come to Greece by way of madness," said Plato, in accord with all of ancient humanity. Let us go one step further: *provided they weren't actually mad*, all those superior people who were irresistibly compelled to cast off the yoke of any sort of morality and to devise new laws had no choice other than to drive themselves, or to pretend, to madness – and indeed this

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[29]   For the views expressed in this passage, see the commentary in Schmidt 2015: 91-100. For the reference to Plato, see Ghedini 2005.

applies to innovators in all spheres and not merely those of priestly and political caste – even the innovator of poetic meter had to authenticate himself through madness. (Thus even down to gentler ages madness remained a kind of convention in poets, of which Solon, for instance, took advantage when urging the Athenians to reconquer Salamis.) "How do you make yourself mad if you aren't and don't dare to appear so?" Virtually all significant people of ancient civilization have pursued this dreadful train of thought; a clandestine doctrine of techniques and dietary hints on the subject proliferated, together with a feeling for the innocence, indeed, the sacredness of this type of contemplation and aspiration.

F. Nietzsche, *Dawn*, 1881, Book 1, Aph. 14, *KSA* III, 1, 26-29
(emphasis in the original) [Eng. tr. by B. Smith 2011, Stanford]

This kind of madness is also typical of inspiration, as the comparison between the actions characteristic of madness in this passage and in the description of philosophical inspiration in *Ecce homo* shows:

„Ach, so gebt doch Wahnsinn, ihr Himmlischen! Wahnsinn, dass ich endlich an mich selber glaube! Gebt Delirien und Zuckungen, plötzliche Lichter und Finsternisse, schreckt mich mit Frost und Gluth, wie sie kein Sterblicher noch empfand, mit Getöse und umgehenden Gestalten, lasst mich heulen und winseln und wie ein Thier kriechen: nur dass ich bei mir selber Glauben finde!"

"Ah, grant me madness at last, ye heavenly hosts! Madness that I might at long last believe in myself! Grant deliriums and convulsions, sudden illuminations and tenebrosities; terrify me with frost and flame such as no other mortal has yet experienced, with a deafening din and roaming apparitions; let me howl and moan and cringe like a beast: that I might only come to believe in myself!"

F. Nietzsche, *Dawn*, 1881, Book 1, Aph. 14, *KSA* III, 1, 26-29
[Eng. tr. by B. Smith 2011, Stanford]

In the case of madness-driven inspiration, poets and artists were able to understand the prestige conferred by it, and managed to hide the mere craft in the process of creation at the basis of their work with the mask of a superhuman originality:[30]

Die Künstler haben ein Interesse daran, dass man an die plötzlichen Eingebungen, die sogenannten Inspirationen glaubt; als ob die Idee des Kunstwerks, der Dichtung, der Grundgedanke einer Philosophie, wie ein Gnadenschein vom Himmel herableuchte. In Wahrheit producirt die Phantasie des guten Künstlers

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[30]   On this passage see RIDLEY 2007: 46-51.

oder Denkers fortwährend, Gutes, Mittelmässiges und Schlechtes, aber seine *Urt-heilskraft*, höchst geschärft und geübt, verwirft, wählt aus, knüpft zusammen; wie man jetzt aus den Notizbüchern Beethoven's ersieht, dass er die herrlichsten Melodien allmählich zusammengetragen und aus vielfachen Ansätzen gewisser-maassen ausgelesen hat.

Artists have an interest in the existence of a belief in the sudden occurrence of ideas, in so-called inspirations; as though the idea of a work of art, a poem, the basic proposition of a philosophy flashed down from heaven like a ray of divine grace. In reality, the imagination of a good artist or thinker is productive continu-ally, of good, mediocre and bad things, but this *power of judgment*, sharpened and practised to the highest degree, rejects, selects, knots together; as we can now see from Beethoven's notebooks how the most glorious melodies were put together gradually and as it were culled out of many beginnings.

F. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 1878, I, 155, *KSA* VI, 2 148-149
(emphasis in the original) [Eng. tr. by R.J. Hollingdale 1996, Cambridge]

Artists are therefore depicted here as a category which, thanks to its ability in performing, has been able to persuade other people that inspiration was their own CBA. The artists' mimetic ability is a major theme in Nietzsche's works, as is evident from the example of Richard Wagner, considered by Nietzsche the most typical representative of the modern *décadent* artists (both from the poetical and from the musical perspective).[31] His artistic qualities are a direct consequence of his almost supernatural histrionic fac-ulty, i.e. his talent in acting and performing:[32]

War Wagner überhaupt ein Musiker? Jedenfalls war er etwas Anderes *mehr*: näm-lich ein unvergleichlicher *Histrio*, der grösste Mime, das erstaunlichste Theater-Genie, das die Deutschen gehabt haben, unser *Sceniker* par excellence. […] Er war auch als Musiker nur Das, was er überhaupt war: er *wurde* Musiker, er *wurde* Dich-ter, weil der Tyrann in ihm, sein Schauspieler-Genie ihn dazu zwang. Man erräth Nichts von Wagner, so lange man nicht seinen dominirenden Instinkt errieth.

Was Wagner a musician at all? In any case he was something else *to a much greater degree* — that is to say, an incomparable *histrio*, the greatest mime, the most astounding theatrical genius that the Germans have ever had, our scenic

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[31]   On the relationship between Nietzsche and Wagner, and on what the composer represents in Nietzsche's philosophy, an introductory account with further bibliography can be found in Scruton 2014, and Ridley 2007, Appendix. On Nietzsche and music in general see Ridley 2014, with bibliography.
[32]   On this representation of Wagner as an actor and mime, see the commentary in Sommer 2013: 120-121.

artist *par excellence*. [...] As a musician he was no more than what he was as a man, he *became* a musician, he *became* a poet, because the tyrant in him, his actor's genius, drove him to be both. Nothing is known concerning Wagner, so long as his dominating instinct has not been divined.

<div align="right">

F. Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, 1888, *KSA* VI, 3, 24 (emphasis in the original) [Eng. tr. by A.M. Ludovici 1911, Edinburgh and London]

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According to Nietzsche, the successful appropriation of madness by poets mirrors the failure of philosophers at vindicating their own right to inspiration. Although, Nietzsche states, their doctrines stem from contact with a divine entity, philosophers have not understood the benefits coming from the concept of inspiration, and therefore have always claimed a false, rational origin for their most important ideas:[33]

Was dazu reizt, auf alle Philosophen halb misstrauisch, halb spöttisch zu blicken, ist [...] dass es bei ihnen nicht redlich genug zugeht: während sie allesammt einen grossen und tugendhaften Lärm machen, sobald das Problem der Wahrhaftigkeit auch nur von ferne angerührt wird. Sie stellen sich sämmtlich, als ob sie ihre eigentlichen Meinungen durch die Selbstentwicklung einer kalten, reinen, göttlich unbekümmerten Dialektik entdeckt und erreicht hätten (zum Unterschiede von den Mystikern jeden Rangs, die ehrlicher als sie und tölpelhafter sind — diese reden von „Inspiration" —): während im Grunde ein vorweggenommener Satz, ein Einfall, eine „Eingebung", zumeist ein abstrakt gemachter und durchgesiebter Herzenswunsch von ihnen mit hinterher gesuchten Gründen vertheidigt wird [...].

What goads us into regarding all philosophers with an equal measure of mistrust and mockery is there is not enough genuine honesty about them [*scil.* philosophers]: even though they all make a huge, virtuous racket as soon as the problem of truthfulness is even remotely touched upon. They all act as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic (in contrast to the mystics of every rank, who are more honest than the philosophers and also sillier – they talk about "inspiration" –): while what essentially happens is that they take a conjecture, a whim, an "inspiration" or, more typically, they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract – and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact.

<div align="right">

F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886, *KSA* VI, 2, 12-13
[Eng. tr. by J. Norman 2002, Cambridge]

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[33] See the commentary in Sommer 2016: 98-101 for further references and a parallel with the *Ecce homo* episode of inspiration.

At any rate, although philosophers had lost their chance to appropriate inspiration, this is not the only struggle for disputed CBAs to be found in Nietzsche's philosophical system. The operation described in the afore-mentioned passage from *Dawn* is just a specific case of a more general strategy: the performance of the CBAs of another, more prestigious category with the purpose of being assimilated into it and survive as a parasite of that category. This is what happened (and, as Nietzsche suspects, is still happening) to philosophers with regard to the more socially prestigious category of the "clergymen":

> Drücken wir den ganzen Thatbestand in kurze Formeln zusammen: der philo-sophische Geist hat sich zunächst immer in die *früher festgestellten Typen* des contemplativen Menschen verkleiden und verpuppen müssen, als Priester, Zau-berer, Wahrsager, überhaupt als religiöser Mensch, um in irgend einem Maasse *auch nur möglich zu sein*: das *asketische Ideal* hat lange Zeit dem Philosophen als Erscheinungsform, als Existenz-Voraussetzung gedient, — er musste es darstellen, um Philosoph sein zu können, er musste an dasselbe glauben, um es darstellen zu können. Die eigenthümlich weltverneinende, lebensfeindliche, sinnenungläu-bige, entsinnlichte Abseits-Haltung der Philosophen, welche bis auf die neue-ste Zeit festgehalten worden ist und damit beinahe als *Philosophen-Attitüde an sich* Geltung gewonnen hat, — sie ist vor Allem eine Folge des Nothstandes von Bedingungen, unter denen Philosophie überhaupt entstand und bestand: inso-fern nämlich die längste Zeit Philosophie auf Erden *gar nicht möglich gewesen* wäre ohne eine asketische Hülle und Einkleidung, ohne ein asketisches Selbst-Missverständniss. Anschaulich und augenscheinlich ausgedrückt: der asketische Priester hat bis auf die neueste Zeit die widrige und düstere Raupenform abge-geben, unter der allein die Philosophie leben durfte und herumschlich… Hat sich das wirklich *verändert*?

> Let us set out the whole state of affairs briefly: the philosophic spirit has always had to disguise and cocoon itself among *previously established* types of contem-plative man, as a priest, magician, soothsayer, religious man in general, in order for its existence *to be possible* at all: the *ascetic ideal* served the philosopher for a long time as outward appearance, as a precondition of existence, – he had to *play* that part in order to be a philosopher, he had to *believe* in it in order to be able to play it. The peculiarly withdrawn attitude of the philosophers, denying the world, hating life, doubting the senses, desensualized, which has been main-tained until quite recently to the point where it almost counted for the *philosoph-ical attitude as such*, – this is primarily a result of the desperate conditions under which philosophy evolved and exists at all: that is, philosophy would have *been absolutely impossible* for most of the time on earth without an ascetic mask and

suit of clothes, without an ascetic misconception of itself. To put it vividly and clearly: the *ascetic priest* has until the most recent times displayed the vile and dismal form of a caterpillar, which was the only one philosophers were allowed to adopt and creep round in . . . Have things really *changed*?

<div align="right">

F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality,* 1887, Essay 3, *KSA* VI, 2, 378-379
(emphasis in the original) [Eng. transl. by C. Diethe, Cambridge 2007]

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What is worth noting is that a precursor to this original theory can be found precisely in Plato. In his dialogue *Protagoras*, which deals with the figure of the sophists (a sort of V century BC "free thinkers", opposed to by philosophers due to their alleged venality and blasphemy), Plato has the famous sophist Protagoras state that, in previous times, this category of thinkers used to disguise themselves as poets and soothsayers in order to spell out their difficult truths without being socially attacked:[34]

ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν σοφιστικὴν τέχνην φημὶ μὲν εἶναι παλαιάν, τοὺς δὲ μεταχειριζομέ-
νους αὐτὴν τῶν παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν, φοβουμένους τὸ ἐπαχθὲς αὐτῆς, πρόσχημα
ποιεῖσθαι καὶ προκαλύπτεσθαι, τοὺς μὲν ποίησιν, οἷον Ὅμηρόν τε καὶ Ἡσίοδον
καὶ Σιμωνίδην, τοὺς δὲ αὖ τελετάς τε καὶ χρησμῳδίας, τοὺς ἀμφί τε Ὀρφέα καὶ
Μουσαῖον· ἐνίους δέ τινας ᾔσθημαι καὶ γυμναστικήν, οἷον Ἴκκος τε ὁ Ταραντῖ-
νος καὶ ὁ νῦν ἔτι ὢν οὐδενὸς ἥττων σοφιστὴς Ἡρόδικος ὁ Σηλυμβριανός, τὸ
δὲ ἀρχαῖον Μεγαρεύς· μουσικὴν δὲ Ἀγαθοκλῆς τε ὁ ὑμέτερος πρόσχημα ἐποιή-
σατο, μέγας ὢν σοφιστής, καὶ Πυθοκλείδης ὁ Κεῖος καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί.

[*Socrates reports Protagoras' speech*] Now I tell you that sophistry is an ancient art, and those men of ancient times who practised it, fearing the odium it involved, disguised it in a decent dress, sometimes of poetry, as in the case of Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides; sometimes of mystic rites and soothsayings, as did Orpheus, Musaeus and their sects; and sometimes too, I have observed, of athletics, as with Iccus of Tarentum and another still living—as great a sophist as any —Herodicus of Selymbria, originally of Megara; and music was the disguise employed by your own Agathocles, a great sophist, Pythocleides of Ceos, and many more.

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Plato, *Protagoras* 316d [Eng. tr. by W.R.M. Lamb 1924, Cambridge MA]

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It is possible that this passage was present in Nietzsche's mind, but it seems scarcely credible that it was more than a simple point of departure. In fact, while maintaining these views for his rivals in knowledge, Plato never says anything similar about philosophers. I nonetheless claim that Plato's works

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34   For a discussion of this passage, see commentary in Denyer 2008: 86-90 and a detailed discussion in Brancacci 2002.

show how philosophers could well put into action the misdeeds which in *Protagoras* were attributed to sophists only. Instead of being explicitly expressed, this theory is put forward directly in narrative-dramatic form, which is of course ideal for representing a process based on a performance. For instance, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, and in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* as well, we can find an essay on the performative skills of philosophers. By demonstrating their ability either in imitating the CBA of another category, or in recognising the staging of what is an imitation of poetic madness, philosophers deconstruct the poets' claim to an ontologically grounded superiority, while paving the way for replacing them in their prestigious social position.

3. Performing poetical madness

Plato further discusses inspiration in one of his major works, the *Phaedrus*.[35] In this dialogue Socrates meets the young Phaedrus who is having a walk outside Athens after listening to the new speech on love written by the famous orator Lysias. Lysias's new work has excited Phaedrus, who shows all the symptoms of poetic inspiration, and immediately tries to deliver Lysias's speech to Socrates, turning himself into the rhapsode (performer) of Lysias's speech. Phaedrus's declamation in turn inspires Socrates, who, showing all the symptoms of poetic madness, declares he is eager to deliver, under the guidance of the Muses, his own speech on love, in order to correct and improve the theme exploited by Lysias:[36]

ΣΩ. Δαιμονίως μὲν οὖν, ὦ ἑταῖρε, ὥστε με ἐκπλαγῆναι. καὶ τοῦτο ἐγὼ ἔπαθον διὰ σέ, ὦ Φαῖδρε, πρὸς σὲ ἀποβλέπων, ὅτι ἐμοὶ ἐδόκεις γάνυσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου μεταξὺ ἀναγιγνώσκων· ἡγούμενος γὰρ σὲ μᾶλλον ἢ ἐμὲ ἐπαΐειν περὶ τῶν τοιούτων σοὶ εἱπόμην, καὶ ἑπόμενος συνεβάκχευσα μετὰ σοῦ τῆς θείας κεφαλῆς.

ΦΑΙ. Εἶεν· οὕτω δὴ δοκεῖ παίζειν;

ΣΩ. Δοκῶ γάρ σοι παίζειν καὶ οὐχὶ ἐσπουδακέναι;

Soc. Yes, it's the work of a daimon [i.e. superior, divine entity], my friend. I was amazed. And you were the reason I felt this way, Phaedrus, because I was looking at you while you were reading, and it seemed to me that the speech made you glow with pleasure. Assuming that your understanding of these

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[35] Major editions and commentaries of this fundamental text: Hackforth 1952, De Vries 1969, Rowe 1986, Heitsch 1993, Yunis 2002.

[36] On Socrates' first speech, see Rowe 1986: 153 ff., Yunis 2002: 110-112; Görgemanns 1993, Calvo Martínez 1992. On the particular experience of Socrates' inspiration, see Connor 1988.

matters is better than mine, I followed your lead, and so I came to share the ecstasy of your enthusiasm [literally: perform the Bacchic rites with you].

P.   Hmm … does it strike you as something to joke about like this?

Soc. Do you think I'm joking? Do you think I'm anything less than serious?

<div align="right">Plato, *Phaedrus* 234d [Eng. tr. by R. Waterfield 2003, Oxford; with mod.]</div>

ΣΩ. πλῆρές πως, ὦ δαιμόνιε, τὸ στῆθος ἔχων αἰσθάνομαι παρὰ ταῦτα ἂν ἔχειν εἰπεῖν ἕτερα μὴ χείρω. ὅτι μὲν οὖν παρά γε ἐμαυτοῦ οὐδὲν αὐτῶν ἐννενόηκα, εὖ οἶδα, συνειδὼς ἐμαυτῷ ἀμαθίαν· λείπεται δὴ οἶμαι ἐξ ἀλλοτρίων ποθὲν ναμάτων διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς πεπληρῶσθαί με δίκην ἀγγείου. ὑπὸ δὲ νωθείας αὖ καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐπιλέλησμαι, ὅπως τε καὶ ὧντινων ἤκουσα.

Soc. My breast is full, you might say, my friend, and I feel that I could add to what Lysias said on the subject, and do no worse than he did too. But awareness of my own ignorance makes me certain that I didn't gain any of these ideas from my own resources, and so the only alternative, it seems to me, is that I have been filled, like a jug, by streams flowing from elsewhere through my ears. But I've actually forgotten – under the influence of my stupidity again – how and from whom I heard them.

<div align="right">Plato, *Phaedrus* 235c-d [Eng. tr. by R. Waterfield 2003, Oxford]</div>

Although originating from a clear manifestation of inspiration, Socrates's speech cannot be properly compared to any other poetic or rhapsodic declamation. While he is performing his own work, in fact, the philosopher pauses and comments at several points, pointing out to his listener that he presents the symptoms of poetic inspiration and that, in some passages, his speech shows some metrical *tournures* which make it close to poetical diction:

ΣΩ. Ἀτάρ, ὦ φίλε Φαῖδρε, δοκῶ τι σοί, ὥσπερ ἐμαυτῷ, θεῖον πάθος πεπονθέναι;

ΦΑΙ. Πάνυ μὲν οὖν, ὦ Σώκρατες, παρὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς εὔροιά τίς σε εἴληφεν.

ΣΩ. Σιγῇ τοίνυν μου ἄκουε. τῷ ὄντι γὰρ θεῖος ἔοικεν ὁ τόπος εἶναι, ὥστε ἐὰν ἄρα πολλάκις νυμφόληπτος προϊόντος τοῦ λόγου γένωμαι, μὴ θαυμάσῃς· τὰ νῦν γὰρ οὐκέτι πόρρω διθυράμβων φθέγγομαι.

ΦΑΙ. Ἀληθέστατα λέγεις.

ΣΩ. Τούτων μέντοι σὺ αἴτιος. ἀλλὰ τὰ λοιπὰ ἄκουε· ἴσως γὰρ κἂν ἀποτράποιτο τὸ ἐπιόν. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν θεῷ μελήσει, ἡμῖν δὲ πρὸς τὸν παῖδα πάλιν τῷ λόγῳ ἰτέον.

Soc. Anyway, my dear Phaedrus, do you think I've been inspired by a god? I do.

P.   Well, it's certainly true that you're being unusually eloquent, Socrates.

Soc. Keep quiet and listen to me, then. For in fact this spot really does seem infused with divinity, so don't be surprised if, as may happen, I become possessed by

the Nymphs as my speech progresses. As it is I'm already more or less chanting dithyrambs.

P.   You're quite right.

Soc. It's your fault. But listen to the rest of the speech. After all, the fit might be averted, I suppose. But we had better leave this in the hands of the gods, while we resume the speech to the boy.

<div align="right">Plato, Phaedrus 238c-d [Eng. tr. by R. Waterfield 2003, Oxford]</div>

ΣΩ. Οὐκ ᾔσθου, ὦ μακάριε, ὅτι ἤδη ἔπη φθέγγομαι ἀλλ'οὐκέτι διθυράμβους, καὶ ταῦτα ψέγων; ἐὰν δ' ἐπαινεῖν τὸν ἕτερον ἄρξωμαι, τί με οἴει ποιήσειν; ἆρ' οἶσθ' ὅτι ὑπὸ τῶν Νυμφῶν, αἷς με σὺ προύβαλες ἐκ προνοίας, σαφῶς ἐνθουσιάσω;

Soc. Didn't you notice, my friend, that I've stopped chanting dithyrambs and am now coming up with epic verse, even though I'm finding fault with things? So what do you think would happen if I set about praising the non-lover? Don't you realize that I'd certainly be possessed by the Nymphs to whom you have deliberately exposed me?

<div align="right">Plato, Phaedrus 241e [Eng. tr. by R. Waterfield 2003, Oxford]</div>

We can see that Socrates is doing here what Ion claimed he was able to do in the homonymous dialogue. To wit, the philosopher is possessed by the god (and explicitly admitting that he is mocking the poetic inspiration would be blasphemous), but at the same time he is well aware both of his psycho-physical alteration and of how his actions are genuine evidence for his contact with the god (that is to say, that his words are true). This contradiction in logic cannot but be an evidence for the mendacious contents of his *tirade*. In fact, although Socrates' performance proves perfectly persuasive for his audience, at the end of his declamation he explicitly declares that his speech, an excellent product of divine possession, was false and blasphemous:

ΣΩ. Δεινόν, ὦ Φαῖδρε, δεινὸν λόγον αὐτός τε ἐκόμισας ἐμέ τε ἠνάγκασας εἰπεῖν.
ΦΑΙ. Πῶς δή;
ΣΩ. Εὐήθη καὶ ὑπό τι ἀσεβῆ· οὗ τίς ἂν εἴη δεινότερος;

Soc. It was an awful speech, Phaedrus, just awful––the one you brought with you, and the one you forced me to make.

P.   Why?

Soc. It was stupid and almost irreligious, and speeches don't come more awful than that.

<div align="right">Pl., Phdr. 242d [Eng. tr. by R. Waterfield 2003, Oxford]</div>

How could that be? From what follows, it is clear that Socrates is not willing to solve this riddle. Later in the dialogue, he will eventually admit that, with his speeches, he wanted to show how a person, while knowing the truth, can persuade people to follow the false by means of rhetoric; but at the same time he declares that the ones responsible for this false speech are the local divinities who were the causes of his inspiration:[37]

ΣΩ. Καὶ μὴν κατὰ τύχην γέ τινα, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐρρηθήτην τὼ λόγω ἔχοντέ τι παράδειγμα, ὡς ἂν ὁ εἰδὼς τὸ ἀληθὲς προσπαίζων ἐν λόγοις παράγοι τοὺς ἀκούοντας. καὶ ἔγωγε, ὦ Φαῖδρε, αἰτιῶμαι τοὺς ἐντοπίους θεούς· ἴσως δὲ καὶ οἱ τῶν Μουσῶν προφῆται οἱ ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς ᾠδοὶ ἐπιπεπνευκότες ἂν ἡμῖν εἶεν τοῦτο τὸ γέρας· οὐ γάρ που ἔγωγε τέχνης τινὸς τοῦ λέγειν μέτοχος.

Soc. Moreover, it so happens that the two speeches do apparently contain an example of how someone who knows the truth can mislead his audience by playing a joke on them in the course of his speech. For my part, Phaedrus, I can only blame this on the local deities, and perhaps the Muses' representatives who are singing over our heads might also have breathed this gift into us, because I certainly don't have any expertise at speaking.

<div align="right">Pl., Phdr. 262d [Eng. tr. by R. Waterfield 2003, Oxford]</div>

What is certain is that, from Aristotle onwards, subsequent commentators have had no doubt as to the ironic and parodistic intention at the core of this operation.[38] At any rate, even without taking into account Socrates' intention, it is clear that perfectly performed poetic insanity did not produce here a truthful speech, but indeed a false speech which proved nonetheless completely persuasive. Inspiration can be faked. This is why poets should not be credited with any superior knowledge whatsoever.

The process outlined here is far more straightforward in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, but from a different perspective. While in Plato the philosopher is engaged in performing poetic inspiration himself, in Nietzsche he takes advantage of his awareness of inspiration's performative nature to undermine other people's prestige. In particular, in the fourth part of Nietzsche's most famous work, the prophet Zarathustra (famously Nietzsche's *alter*

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[37] It is almost sure that with "two speeches" Socrates refers to his own speeches, not to Lysias's one delivered by Phaedrus: see Rowe 1986: 197 and Yunis 2011: 187. On the serious contradictions in this passage, and the way interpreters have tried to fix them, see Scott 2011: 185-188.

[38] Arist. *Rhet.* 3.1408b12 and the ironical use of poetic language in prose speech "as it is the case with the *Phaedrus*"; see also De Vries 1969: 82, Rowe 1986: 162, Hietsch 1993: 86, Yunis 2011: 112.

ego) is accompanied by several characters who stand for different human types. One of these men is the so-called "Magician", a smart enticer disguised as an elder enchanter. He is nothing but a poetic transposition of Richard Wagner, the artist *par excellence,* whom Nietzsche had already depicted as a sort of sorcerer already in previous works.[39] When he first encounters Zarathustra, the Magician is lying on the ground, pronouncing poetic dirges in order to pity the philosopher. In depicting his sad state, the Magician is drawing heavily from the invocation to insanity as we read it in the passage from *Dawn*:

> Als aber Zarathustra um einen Felsen herumbog, da sahe er, nicht weit unter sich, auf dem gleichen Wege, einen Menschen, der die Glieder warf wie ein Tobsüchtiger und endlich bäuchlings zur Erde niederstürzte. [...] Zuletzt aber, nach vielem Zittern, Zucken und Sich-zusammen-Krümmen, begann er also zu jammern:
>> Wer wärmt mich, wer liebt mich noch?
>> Gebt heisse Hände!
>> Gebt Herzens-Kohlenbecken!
>> Hingestreckt, schaudernd,
>> Halbtodtem gleich, dem man die Füsse wärmt —
>> Geschüttelt, ach! von unbekannten Fiebern,
>> Zitternd vor spitzen eisigen Frost-Pfeilen,
>> Von dir gejagt, Gedanke!
>> Unnennbarer! Verhüllter! Entsetzlicher! [...]
>> All meine Thränen-Bäche laufen
>> Zu dir den Lauf!
>> Und meine letzte Herzens-Flamme —
>> Dir glüht sie auf!
>> Oh komm zurück,
>> Mein unbekannter Gott! Mein Schmerz! Mein letztes — Glück!
>
> 2.
> — Hier aber konnte sich Zarathustra nicht länger halten, nahm seinen Stock und schlug mit allen Kräften auf den Jammernden los. „Halt ein! schrie er ihm zu, mit ingrimmigem Lachen, halt ein, du Schauspieler! Du Falschmünzer! Du Lügner aus dem Grunde! Ich erkenne dich wohl! [...]" — „Lass ab, sagte der alte Mann und sprang vom Boden auf, schlage nicht mehr, oh Zarathustra! Ich trieb's also nur zum Spiele! Solcherlei gehört zu meiner Kunst; dich selber wollte ich auf die Probe stellen, als ich dir diese Probe gab! Und, wahrlich, du hast mich gut durchschaut! [...]" — „Schmeichle nicht, antwortete Zarathustra, immer noch erregt

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39   On this episode see at least LAMPERT 1986: 294-295; ROSEN 1995: 215-216.

und finsterblickend, du Schauspieler aus dem Grunde! Du bist falsch: was redest du — von Wahrheit! Du Pfau der Pfauen, du Meer der Eitelkeit, was spieltest du vor mir, du schlimmer Zauberer, an wen sollte ich glauben, als du in solcher Gestalt jammertest?" *„Den Büsser des Geistes*, sagte der alte Mann, den — spielte ich: du selber erfandest einst diess Wort — den Dichter und Zauberer, der gegen sich selber endlich seinen Geist wendet, den Verwandelten, der an seinem bösen Wissen und Gewissen erfriert. […] Oh Zarathustra, ich suche einen Ächten, Rechten, Einfachen, Eindeutigen, einen Menschen aller Redlichkeit, ein Gefäss der Weisheit, einen Heiligen der Erkenntniss, einen grossen Menschen! Weisst du es denn nicht, oh Zarathustra? Ich suche Zarathustra."

But as Zarathustra made his way around a boulder, he saw someone not far below him on the same path, flailing his limbs like a raving madman, who finally flopped belly-first to the ground. […] At last, however, after much trembling and twitching and writhing he began to wail thus:

Who will warm me, who loves me still?
Give me hot hands!
Give me braziers for my heart!
Laid out, shuddering,
Like something half-dead whose feet one warms –
Racked, oh! by unknown fevers,
Shivering from pointy icy arrows of frost,
Hunted by you, thought!
Unnameable! Disguised! Horrendous one! […]
All my rivers of tears flow
Their course to you!
And my last heart flames –
For you they flicker!
Oh come back,
My unknown god! My pain! My last – happiness!

2.

– But at this point Zarathustra could no longer restrain himself, grabbed his staff and began beating the wailing man with all his strength. "Shut up!" he cried to him, with grim laughter. "Shut up, you actor! You counterfeiter! You liar from top to bottom! I recognize you well! […] "Desist," said the old man and he leaped to his feet. "Beat me no more, oh Zarathustra! I only did this as a game! Such things belong to my art; you yourself I wanted to put to the test, when I gave you this test. And verily, you saw through me well! […]" "Do not flatter," answered Zarathustra, still upset and frowning darkly, "you actor from top to bottom! You're fake – why do you talk – of truth! You peacock of peacocks, you sea of vanity, what are you playing before me, you wicked magician, in whom am I supposed to believe when you wail in this form?" "*The penitent of the spirit*," said the old man.

"Him I played: you yourself once coined this phrase – – the poet and magician who ultimately turns his spirit against himself, the transformed one who freezes to death from his own evil science and conscience. […]. Oh Zarathustra, I seek someone who is genuine, proper, simple, unequivocal, a human being of all honesty, a vessel of wisdom, a saint of knowledge, a great human being! Do you not know it, oh Zarathustra? I seek Zarathustra."

> F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1885, Part 4, "The Magician", *KSA* VI, 1, 311-313 (emphasis in the original) [Eng. tr. by A. Del Caro 2006, Cambridge]

As it is clear from this account, Zarathustra/Nietzsche becomes readily aware of the performative nature of insanity/poetic inspiration, and publicly unveils the Magician's trick. This ambiguous character is doing here what the anonymous seeker of madness was trying to achieve in the aforementioned aphorism from *Dawn*. He is performing madness in order to acquire social prestige, or, in Sacksian terms, he is trying to perform a CBA of a prestigious category (poets) in order to be considered a member of it. In both cases, we witness a performance which, thanks to its exaggerated and parodistic traits, manages to break up the illusion of the naturality of an allegedly natural phenomenon. Although very different in its external features, which in the case of Plato and Nietzsche do not involve any form of physical or dress disguise, the operation outlined here is similar in its effect to what Butler says about the revolutionary aim of the act of drag: "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency".[40] The operation described here is similar to drag in that, in both cases, a group of unentitled people reproduce, in a mere series of actions, what another group of people considers to be its exclusive and natural state of being. In our case, the two processes only differ in their ultimate goal. While the parody at the core of drag aims at the social liberation of oppressed categories, in the case of philosophers and poets (as it appears in Plato and Nietzsche) the performative nature of inspiration is just a weapon for philosophers to replace poets in their privileged social position. The sketching of this process of appropriation and substitution will be the theme of the next and last section of this work.

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[40] Butler 1992²: 175-193, in particular for the quote see p. 186. I thank Antonio Mercuri for this suggestion.

4. Philosophical inspiration

In the final part of the dialogue with the Magician, Zarathustra is labelled by the defeated old enchanter as a "genuine man", a definition which Zarathustra willingly accepts. Actually, the character of Zarathustra is too versed in the art of disguise and imitation to be considered pure and genuine. His ability at recognising the performative nature of poetic inspiration is a direct consequence of his ability to perform it. Previously in the same work, in fact, Zarathustra qualifies himself as a "poet", with an important addition: while poets believe in the divine nature of the excitement which is at the core of their epistemological process, philosophers (represented by Zarathustra) are aware that inspiration is nothing but a chain of "human, all too human" actions, which can only lead to an imperfect and superficial kind of truth.[41] Zarathustra is therefore able to perform what poets usually do, and even to understand how the acquisition of knowledge works for them:

> Doch was sagte dir einst Zarathustra? Dass die Dichter zuviel lügen? — Aber auch Zarathustra ist ein Dichter. Glaubst du nun, dass er hier die Wahrheit redete? Warum glaubst du das? […] Das aber glauben alle Dichter: dass wer im Grase oder an einsamen Gehängen liegend die Ohren spitze, Etwas von den Dingen erfahre, die zwischen Himmel und Erde sind. Und kommen ihnen zärtliche Regungen, so meinen die Dichter immer, die Natur selber sei in sie verliebt: Und sie schleiche zu ihrem Ohre, Heimliches hinein zu sagen und verliebte Schmeichelreden: dessen brüsten und blähen sie sich vor allen Sterblichen! Ach, es giebt so viel Dinge zwischen Himmel und Erden, von denen sich nur die Dichter Etwas haben träumen lassen! Und zumal über dem Himmel: denn alle Götter sind Dichter-Gleichniss, Dichter-Erschleichniss! […] Ich wurde der Dichter müde, der alten und der neuen: Oberflächliche sind sie mir Alle und seichte Meere. […] Zuschauer will der Geist des Dichters: sollten's auch Büffel sein! — Aber dieses Geistes wurde ich müde: und ich sehe kommen, dass er seiner selber müde wird. Verwandelt sah ich schon die Dichter und gegen sich selber den Blick gerichtet. Büsser des Geistes sah ich kommen: die wuchsen aus ihnen.

> Yet what did Zarathustra once say to you? That the poets lie too much? – But Zarathustra too is a poet. Do you believe now that he speaks the truth here? Why do you believe that? […] But this is what all poets believe: that whoever pricks up his ears while lying in the grass or on a lonely slope will divine something about the things that are situated between heaven and earth. And if tender

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41   A commentary to this passage in Lampert 1986: 126-132; Grundlehner 1986: 226 ss., Rosen 1995: 161-163.

stirrings come to them, then the poets always think that nature herself is in love with them: And she creeps up to their ears to tell them secrets and enamored flatteries, the like of which makes them boastful and bloated before all mortals! Indeed, there are so many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have dreamed! And especially above the heavens, for all gods are poets' parable, poets' cock and bull! [...] I became weary of the poets, the old and the new; superficial they all are to me and shallow seas. [...] The spirit of the poet wants spectators: even if they have to be buffaloes! – But I became weary of this spirit, and I foresee that it will become weary of itself. Transformed I have already seen the poets, and turning their gaze against themselves. I saw penitents of the spirit approaching; they grew out of the poets.

<div style="text-align: right">

F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zaratustra*, 1885, Part 2, "On Poets", *KSA* VI, 1, 159-162 [Eng. tr. by A. Del Caro 2006, Cambridge]

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In fact, Zarathustra/Nietzsche is a true poet, and he demonstrates this by appropriating those lines which, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, were attributed to the Magician. In the poetic collection prepared by Nietzsche just before its definitive psychic collapse, the *Dithyrambs of Dionysus* (Dionysus being, in Nietzsche's last works, the divine representative of Nietzschean philosophy), the poem delivered by the Magician undergoes a dramatical transformation.[42] His passionate invocation turns into a monologue by a mythical heroine, Ariadne, longing to be set free from the persecution of an unknown god (i.e., the same who persecuted the Magician with poetical madness).[43] In this way, the confrontation between poetry and philosophy, previously represented by the clash between the two literary figures of the Magician and Zarathustra, is now transposed onto a mythological ground. Nietzsche had already presented the character of Ariadne as the counterpart of Zarathustran philosophy,[44] but it is only in this poetic work that the incorporation of poetry to the greater category of philosophy is completely accomplished. This is evident in the most macroscopic addiction to the former version of the poem, the transformation of the monological lament into a theatrical-like piece (with stage directions included) featuring Ariadne and Dionysus. After the woman (evidently a hypostasis of inspired

[42]   On this work see the introduction to the edition by Groddeck 1991; an introductory overview in Bishop 2012.

[43]   On the changes from the *Zarathustra* to the *Dithyrambs*, see Grundlehner 1986: 225-229, with a rich bibliography, and Theisen 1991.

[44]   On this theme see Grundlehner 1986: 228 ff.

poetry) has delivered her lament, Dionysus himself appears, inviting her to embrace Dionysian wisdom:

Ein Blitz. Dionysos wird in smaragdener Schönheit sichtbar.
Dionysos: Sei klug, Ariadne!…
        Du hast kleine Ohren, du hast meine Ohren:
        steck ein kluges Wort hinein! —
        Muss man sich nicht erst hassen, wenn man sich lieben soll?…
        Ich bin dein Labyrinth…

  A bolt of lightning. Dionysus becomes visible in emerald beauty.
Dionysus: Be clever, Ariadne! …
        You have little ears; you have my ears:
        Put a clever word into them! —
        Does not one first hate oneself if one is to love oneself?
        I am your labyrinth…

F. Nietzsche, *Dionysos-Dithyramben,* 1891, *Lament of Ariadne KSA* VI, 3,
397-401 (emphasis in the original) [Eng. tr. by P. Grundlehner 1986, Oxford]

That Nietzsche considered poetry as a sub-category of philosophy is well known in Nietzschean scholarship.[45] What instead emerges here is that the demonstration of this hierarchical inferiority takes the form of a performance, since this is the most evident way to show the greatest weakness of the poets' claim to superiority: the performative nature of their legitimation tool. *Zarathustra* and related works offer a demonstration (in a performative form) that philosophers can do, at their will and without effort, what poets do only when constrained and in an uncontrollable way for them. As for what philosophers do only when constrained and in a way uncontrollable for them (the access to divine inspiration as described in *Ecce homo*), this is something so sublime and incredible that it is completely out of the reach of any mortal, let alone poets.

A parallel narrative is to be found in Plato's *Phaedrus.* After recognising the blasphemy of his previous thesis, Socrates pronounces a second, truthful speech, which is delivered by Socrates without showing any symptom of poetic inspiration.[46] What is interesting is that, in the same way that Nietzsche did in the *Dithyrambs of Dionysus,* here Socrates appropriates a

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45   For an outline of this idea in Nietzsche's production, see Grundlehner 1986: xiv-xix.
46   On the special character of this fundamental speech, see Yunis 2011: 130 for a general introduction; a more detailed analysis in Demos 1997.

piece of rhetoric whose authorship is originally attributed to a poet. In particular, Socrates compares his previous speech, divinely inspired but blasphemous, with a composition by the lyric poet Stesichorus (VI cent. BC), in which he had "slandered" the already notorious Helen of Troy.[47] According to the legend, the poet, punished by the gods for his arrogance, lost his sight, only to recover it with the composition of a new poem retracting his previous views. Stesichorus, as Socrates says, was a "friend of the Muses" (μουσικός, *mousikòs*) and therefore he was smart enough to become aware of his mistake and give birth to a new work, at the same time truthful and originating from a rational speculation on his unfortunate case:

ΣΩ.   ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν, ὦ φίλε, καθήρασθαι ἀνάγκη· ἔστιν δὲ τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσι περὶ
μυθολογίαν καθαρμὸς ἀρχαῖος, ὃν Ὅμηρος μὲν οὐκ ᾔσθετο, Στησίχορος δέ.
τῶν γὰρ ὀμμάτων στερηθεὶς διὰ τὴν Ἑλένης κακηγορίαν οὐκ ἠγνόησεν ὥσπερ
Ὅμηρος, ἀλλ’ ἅτε μουσικὸς ὢν ἔγνω τὴν αἰτίαν, καὶ ποιεῖ εὐθὺς—
   Οὐκ ἔστ’ ἔτυμος λόγος οὗτος,
   οὐδ’ ἔβας ἐν νηυσὶν εὐσέλμοις,
   οὐδ’ ἵκεο Πέργαμα Τροίας·
καὶ ποιήσας δὴ πᾶσαν τὴν καλουμένην Παλινῳδίαν παραχρῆμα ἀνέβλεψεν.
ἐγὼ οὖν σοφώτερος ἐκείνων γενήσομαι κατ’αὐτό γε τοῦτο· πρὶν γάρ τι
παθεῖν διὰ τὴν τοῦ Ἔρωτος κακηγορίαν πειράσομαι αὐτῷ ἀποδοῦναι τὴν
παλινῳδίαν, τῇ κεφαλῇ καὶ οὐχ ὥσπερ τότε ὑπ’ αἰσχύνης ἐγκεκαλυμμένος. …

Soc.   And so I must purify myself, my friend. Now, there's an ancient tradition governing how those who commit an offence in the domain of story-telling have to purify themselves, which Homer may have failed to recognize, but Stesichorus didn't. After losing his sight as a result of slandering Helen, Stesichorus didn't fail to recognize his fault, as Homer had. No, as a man of the Muses he recognized how he had sinned and immediately composed the following lines:
   False was the tale I told.
   You did not travel on the fair-decked ship,
   Nor came to the citadel of Troy.
And no sooner had he finished composing the entire *Palinode*, as it is called, than he regained his sight. Well, I shall prove myself cleverer than them in one respect, anyway: I shall try to recompense Love with my palinode before anything happens to me as a result of slandering him […]

ΣΩ.   Οὑτωσὶ τοίνυν, ὦ παῖ καλέ, ἐννόησον, ὡς ὁ μὲν πρότερος ἦν λόγος Φαίδρου
τοῦ Πυθοκλέους, Μυρρινουσίου ἀνδρός· ὃν δὲ μέλλω λέγειν, Στησιχόρου τοῦ

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47   On the figure of Stesichorus and the legendary tales about him, see West 1971.

Εὐφήμου, Ἱμεραίου. λεκτέος δὲ ὧδε, ὅτι Οὐκ ἔστ᾽ ἔτυμος λόγος ὃς ἂν παρόντος ἐραστοῦ τῷ μὴ ἐρῶντι μᾶλλον φῇ δεῖν χαρίζεσθαι, διότι δὴ ὁ μὲν μαίνεται, ὁ δὲ σωφρονεῖ.

Soc. What I'd like you to realize, you gorgeous young man, is that the previous speech was by Phaedrus the son of Pythocles, of the deme Myrrhinous, and that the one I'm just about to give will be by Stesichorus the son of Euphemus, from Himera. Here's what I have to say: ' "False was the tale" that you should gratify a non-lover rather than a lover (supposing you have one), just because a lover is mad and a non-lover is sane […]

<div align="right">Plato, Phaedrus. 243a-b; 243e-244a [Engl. transl. by R. Waterfield, Oxford 2003, with mod.]</div>

Alike what we see in Nietzsche, the words of a poet are here resumed in the words of a philosopher, who expands and ameliorates it, without any form of poetic insanity. This literary allusion to Stesichorus is the tangible evidence of what Socrates will show with a rhetoric demonstration afterwards in his speech: both poets and philosophers are such if possessed by divine insanity (μανία, *manìa*), but the *mania* of the philosophers is superior and fuller. In fact, insanity is the poets' CBA, but intermittently and independently from their will (for this reason they can actually cease to be poets, and be reintegrated into the category of ordinary men, once they are no longer be able to perform insanity):

ΣΩ. τρίτη δὲ ἀπὸ Μουσῶν κατοκωχή τε καὶ μανία, λαβοῦσα ἁπαλὴν καὶ ἄβατον ψυχήν, ἐγείρουσα καὶ ἐκβακχεύουσα κατά τε ᾠδὰς καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην ποίησιν, μυρία τῶν παλαιῶν ἔργα κοσμοῦσα τοὺς ἐπιγιγνομένους παιδεύει· ὃς δ᾽ ἂν ἄνευ μανίας Μουσῶν ἐπὶ ποιητικὰς θύρας ἀφίκηται, πεισθεὶς ὡς ἄρα ἐκ τέχνης ἱκανὸς ποιητὴς ἐσόμενος, ἀτελὴς αὐτός τε καὶ ἡ ποίησις ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν μαινομένων ἡ τοῦ σωφρονοῦντος ἠφανίσθη.

Soc. A third kind of possession and madness comes from the Muses. It takes hold of a delicate, virgin soul and stirs it into a frenzy for composing lyric and other kinds of poetry, and so educates future generations by glorifying the countless deeds of the past. But anyone who approaches the doors of poetic composition without the Muses' madness, in the conviction that skill alone will make him a competent poet, is cheated of his goal. In his sanity both he and his poetry are eclipsed by poetry composed by men who are mad.

<div align="right">Plato, Phaedrus 245a [Engl. transl. by R. Waterfield 2003, Oxford]</div>

On the other hand, philosophers' divine madness is neither a temporary condition nor an uncontrolled being outside one's mind. According to Plato, the true philosopher continually strives to recall in his memory the contemplation of the true Forms of the Being, and in doing so he perpetually accomplishes in his mind the rites pertaining to such a divine contemplation. This state of unending rapture results, from a social perspective, in what seems an abnormal behaviour to profane people:[48]

ΣΩ. διὸ δὴ δικαίως μόνη πτεροῦται ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου διάνοια· πρὸς γὰρ ἐκείνοις ἀεί ἐστιν μνήμη κατὰ δύναμιν, πρὸς οἷσπερ θεὸς ὢν θεῖός ἐστιν. τοῖς δὲ δὴ τοιούτοις ἀνὴρ ὑπομνήμασιν ὀρθῶς χρώμενος, τελέους ἀεὶ τελετὰς τελούμενος, τέλεος ὄντως μόνος γίγνεται· ἐξιστάμενος δὲ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων σπουδασμάτων καὶ πρὸς τῷ θείῳ γιγνόμενος, νουθετεῖται μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν ὡς παρακινῶν, ἐνθουσιάζων δὲ λέληθεν τοὺς πολλούς.

Soc. That is why only the mind of a philosopher deserves to grow wings, because it uses memory to remain always as close as possible to those things proximity to which gives a god his divine qualities. By making correct use of reminders of these things a man, being constantly initiated into the most perfect rites of all, becomes the only one who is truly perfect. But since he is remote from human concerns and close to divinity, he is criticized by the general run of mankind as deranged, because they do not realize that he is possessed by a god.

Plato, *Phaedrus* 249c-d [Engl. transl. by R. Waterfield 2003, Oxford]

We have here two specular situations. Poets state that insanity *tout court* is their CBA, i.e. a series of easily recognisable actions which are nonetheless reproducible and obtainable by other categories as well. Philosophers, on the other hand, claim that everything they do is insanity, as any act of theirs (often in contradiction with common sense and standard opinions, and therefore apparently insane) is the result of their condition of perpetual contact with a superior knowledge. Divine insanity here is no longer related to actions which are performed, but it is a state of being, a condition which is far more difficult to imitate than actions. Philosophical insanity, therefore, cannot be reproduced by any other category (unlike what philosophers did with poetic inspiration) and in this way philosophers' epistemological superiority cannot be questioned. We are here in the presence of a strategy by which not only is a CBA "taken away" from a

48   On madness and philosophy in the *Phaedrus* see Harris 2006, Scott 2011a, Morgan 2010.

category by a competing one through imitation, but which also operates in order not to be replicable again with regard to the same CBA. Philosophers first unveiled the performative nature of one prestigious CBA, by demonstrating their ability at reproducing it. But this operation did not lead to a dismissal of the concept of inspiration. Philosophers claimed to be the only ones entitled to inspiration and to the benefits deriving from it, presenting inspiration not as a series of actions, but as a state of being which no other category could imitate. Their CBAs are once again ontologically founded.

The operation which leads to hiding the performative nature of inspiration to secure an appropriation of it also occurs in another, controversial passage from the Platonic corpus. In the *Seventh Letter*, an autobiographic account of Plato's political career, whose authenticity, undisputed in Antiquity, has been put into question by modern critics, we read a detailed description of philosophical inspiration.[49] Platonic doctrines, the author states, are not teachable. Their generation and understanding are due to a series of indispensable requirements, such as attentive speculation and dialectical confrontation, after which, suddenly and overwhelming, the idea flashes out:[50]

οὔκουν ἐμόν γε περὶ αὐτῶν ἔστιν σύγγραμμα οὐδὲ μήποτε γένηται· ῥητὸν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἐστιν ὡς ἄλλα μαθήματα, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκ πολλῆς συνουσίας γιγνομένης περὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτὸ καὶ τοῦ συζῆν ἐξαίφνης, οἷον ἀπὸ πυρὸς πηδήσαντος ἐξαφθὲν φῶς, ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γενόμενον αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ ἤδη τρέφει.

[*Plato speaks about his doctrines*] There does not exist, nor will there ever exist, any treatise of mine dealing therewith. For it does not at all admit of verbal expression like other studies, but, as a result of continued application to the subject itself and communion therewith, it is brought to birth in the soul on a sudden, as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself.

μόγις δὲ τριβόμενα πρὸς ἄλληλα αὐτῶν ἕκαστα, ὀνόματα καὶ λόγοι ὄψεις τε καὶ αἰσθήσεις, ἐν εὐμενέσιν ἐλέγχοις ἐλεγχόμενα καὶ ἄνευ φθόνων ἐρωτήσεσιν καὶ ἀποκρίσεσιν χρωμένων, ἐξέλαμψε φρόνησις περὶ ἕκαστον καὶ νοῦς, συντείνων ὅτι μάλιστ᾽ εἰς δύναμιν ἀνθρωπίνην.

49   On the history of this debate, see the quick overview by Knab 2006: 1-6. The most recent and detailed discussion (arguing against Platonic authorship) is Burnyeat and Frede 2015; but see also a critique of their thesis in Lewis 2017's review of it.
50   On this specific passage, see Edelstein 1966: 78; Isnardi Parente 2002, with a discussion of several positions by contemporary scholars. On the imagery of lightning in Plato see the still seminal work by Stenzel 1926.

> After much effort, as names, definitions, sights, and other data of sense, are brought into contact and friction one with another, in the course of scrutiny and kindly testing by men who proceed by question and answer without ill will, with a sudden flash there shines forth understanding about every problem, and an intelligence whose efforts reach the furthest limits of human powers.
>
> Plato, *Epistle* 7, 341c-d; 344c [Engl. transl. by J. Harward 1932, Cambridge]

Whether the *Seventh Letter* is genuinely Platonic or not, what is sure is that in Antiquity a detailed description of the philosophers' creative process was present, in terms that linked it undoubtedly to an irrational and unrepeatable origin. Inspiration is not envisaged here as something visible from outside, potentially translatable in a behaviour which can be shared by other people in a given circumstance. It is an inner process which escapes physical manifestation, and which therefore cannot be subject to external control. Even if this text is not explicitly quoted in *Ecce homo*, we can safely assume that this autobiographical work, quite popular in Antiquity, was present in Nietzsche's mind when the German philosopher wrote his account of inspiration in his own autobiography. As he himself admits, before any action typical of madness could take place, it is the "ray of grace", the "thought that like a flash of lightning flares up" which is at the beginning of the creative experience; and as for a supernatural origin of it no one (unlike what happened to poets) can question.

Conclusions

At the end of this analysis, the expectations about the complex and contradictory nature of the concept of "inspiration" have been confirmed. As an important legitimation tool, inspiration has been disputed and handled, over the centuries, by different categories of people in the field of epistemology, who have had to continuously demonstrate their entitlement to possessing it. I have maintained that, throughout the narrative in written philosophical sources, people who are able to continuously perform the actions traditionally associated with poetic inspiration (i.e. actions typical of insanity) were assumed to have access to a superior form of knowledge. Therefore, I have proposed to read the most important works by Plato and Nietzsche on this issue through the lens of performativity. From this perspective, it has been possible to understand the reiterated performances of poetic inspiration in the works of the two philosophers as an attempt at

deconstructing the poets' claim of possessing an ontologically grounded epistemological superiority. It is therefore clear that, even in theories developed in very remote times, performativity was acknowledged as a valid tool to question normativity and its social framework. Since the narrative on inspiration has deeply influenced the debate between philosophers and poets, contributing greatly to the still visible delegitimation of poetry as a valid vehicle to transmit knowledge in comparison to other forms of scientific and academic discourse, we have here a neat and authoritative historical example of performativity's subversive power.

Furthermore, philosophers' representation of the debate on inspiration as a clash between two different *social* categories (philosophers *vs* poets) has made it possible to widen the discourse from the history of philosophy to sociology. The strategy put forward by philosophers is suitable to be transposed into the theoretical frame provided by Harvey Sacks's studies on the interactions of identity categories, which share with performativity the idea that performances of actions are at the core of the constitution of personal and group identity. Thanks to Sacks's tools, our case can be summarised in this way: "In a set of hierarchically ordered identity categories, an identity category can claim superiority over another competing category by demonstrating its own ability to perform one of more CBAs of the competing category in a mimetic way, at their free will, and in accordance with rational schemes which do not involve ontologically defined requirements.[51]" In particular, at the end of this process, the category whose CBAs have been imitated is reconfigured as a sub-category of the imitating one. This particular case of interaction is not included in Sacks's discussion. In fact, Sacks takes into account the mechanism of imitation only when it is set into action by an inferior category towards a superior one. In this case, the imitated category does not recognise the correct performance of

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[51]   For the eventuality of "positioned", i.e. hierarchically ordered categories, see Sacks 1992: I, 584-585 "By 'positioned' I mean such a matter as, that 'B' could be said to be higher than 'A, ' and if 'B' is lower than 'C' then 'A' is lower than 'C,' etc. And I'm not specifically intending that by 'higher' or 'lower' what we'll be talking about is anything like the mere fact that there's an age progression. [...] If there is an activity 'bound' to some category of the positioned collection, then one thing that we may find about it is that if a person is a member of another such category and does that action which is bound to this category, then he can be said to be 'acting like an X', that X being whatever category the activity is bound to. And when "You're acting like an X" or things to that effect are said, that turns out to be one of two sorts of actions. If the activity is bound to a category lower than the one the person is in, then the statement is a 'degradation'. If the activity is bound to a higher category than he is in, then the statement is 'praise'".

a CBA as such, and rank the other's performance as a second-rate one, an "imitation".[52] While in Sacks's framework the two categories are neatly distinct as a superior one and an inferior one, in our case poetry and philosophy were not so distant in Plato's or Nietzsche's time, and it was at least conceivable that philosophy could engage in a quarrel with poetry in matters of epistemology. As a consequence, neither can dismiss the other's performance as a mere imperfect copy of their CBAs. These categories are in competition, and the strategy here outlined is one of the ways by which identity categories can undergo changes in their social prestige and importance. In order to properly describe the procedure outlined here, I propose to use "reproduction", a more neutral term in comparison to "imitation", since it does not convey the idea of original-and-copy, but rather that of "re-performance".

This more general scheme of "reproduction" is potentially a valid hermeneutic tool to understand similar situations of competition between categories. For instance, it could be used to shed new light on the mechanism of so-called *deep learning*, the ever more sophisticated ability of machines to perform actions traditionally regarded as exclusive characteristics of human beings (e.g.: playing chess), according to rational processes which still escape human understanding.[53] Reading this case from the perspective of performativity could not only be useful to explain the mechanism at the core of it, but also to develop a strategy of resistance to the threat to all mankind of becoming a sub-category of AI.[54] This is only one of the many fascinating fields to which performativity, and the hermeneutical strategies related to it, can be profitably applied.

In the end, I hope that this study has contributed in showing the relevance of performativity, and of the theoretical disciplines related to it, to the study of the past. Alongside the instruments provided by the historical and philological sciences, a modern developed hermeneutic tool like

[52]   On the concept of imitation see Sacks 1992: I, 70 "When one normally deals with the activities of a Member, apparently one takes it that they have some right to do some class of activities, and that when one engages in making out what they're doing, one takes it that what one sees them doing is what they are doing. 'Imitation' seems to involve a way of characterizing some action which somebody does when they are unentitled to do that class of action. And if you watch the way the Negro slaves got talked about, or the way the emerging Negro is talked about, you can see how marvelous a category 'imitation' is, because it turns out that everything whites can do Negroes can imitate, but they can't do any of these things that whites can do".

[53]   For a first, general introduction to this topic, see Knight 2017.

[54]   This point was kindly brought to my attention by Davide Burgio.

performativity has helped in understanding some important and neglected aspects of a much debated and venerable issue. Furthermore, it has played a crucial role in making this problem relevant to the present day. Philosophers and poets are perhaps no longer the most important categories in the field of knowledge, and the debate on inspiration can be seen as outdated. Nonetheless, thanks to the theoretical frame provided by performativity and sociology, we have been able to understand a general scheme of interaction which could still be relevant for us in the present. New social and epistemological categories are increasing, but it is difficult to imagine that they will not make use of the procedures already put into action by their predecessors. What is sure is that not only the understanding, but even the perception of the existence of similar procedures is not possible if history and theory remain distinct and separated.

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Acknowledgments

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