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DER PLPH

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## Plato's Pharmacy

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*Kolaphos*:<sup>1</sup> blow to the cheek, knock, slap . . . (*kolaptō*). *Kolaptō*: 1. to go into, penetrate, *εἰπ.*, said of birds, to peck . . . hence, to slash open with the beak . . . by anal., said of a horse striking the ground with his hoof. 2. by extension, to notch, engrave: *gramma eis aigeiron* [poplar] Anth. 9, 341, or *kata phloioū* [bark], Call. fr. 101, an inscription on a poplar or on the bark of a tree (R. *Klaph*; cf. R. *Gluph*, to hollow out, scratch).

A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game. A text remains, moreover, forever imperceptible. Its law and its rules are not, however, harbored in the inaccessibility of a secret; it is simply that they can never be booked, in the *present*, into anything that could rigorously be called a perception.

And hence, perpetually and essentially, they run the risk of being definitively lost. Who will ever know of such disappearances?

The dissimulation of the woven texture can in any case take centuries to undo its web: a web that envelops a web, undoing the web for centuries; reconstituting it too as an organism, indefinitely regenerating its own tissue behind the cutting trace, the decision of each reading. There is always a surprise in store for the anatomy or physiology of any criticism that might think it had mastered the game, surveyed all the threads at once, deluding itself, too, in wanting to look at the text without touching it, without laying a hand on the "object," without risking—which is the only chance of entering into the game, by getting a few fingers caught—the addition of some new thread. Adding, here, is nothing other than giving to read. One must manage to think this out: that it is not a question of embroidering upon a text, unless one considers that to know how to embroider still means to have the ability to follow the given thread. That is, if you follow me, the hidden thread. If reading and writing are one, as is easily thought these days, if reading *is* writing, this oneness designates neither undifferentiated

1. TN. It should be noted that the Greek word *κολαφός*, which here begins the essay on Plato, is the last word printed in Littré's long definition of the French word *coup*, with which the *Hors-livre* has just playfully left off.

(con)fusion nor identity at perfect rest; the *is* that couples reading with writing must rip apart.

One must then, in a single gesture, but doubled, read and write. And that person would have understood nothing of the game who, at this [*du coup*], would feel himself authorized merely to add on; that is, to add any old thing. He would add nothing: the seam wouldn't hold. Reciprocally, he who through "methodological prudence," "norms of objectivity," or "safeguards of knowledge" would refrain from committing anything of himself, would not read at all. The same foolishness, the same sterility, obtains in the "not serious" as in the "serious." The reading or writing supplement must be rigorously prescribed, but by the necessities of a *game*, by the logic of *play*, signs to which the system of all textual powers must be accorded and attuned.

# I

To a considerable degree, we have already said all we *meant to say*. Our lexicon at any rate is not far from being exhausted. With the exception of this or that supplement, our questions will have nothing more to name but the texture of the text, reading and writing, mastery and play, the paradoxes of supplementarity, and the graphic relations between the living and the dead: within the textual, the textile, and the histological. We will keep within the limits of this *tissue*: between the metaphor of the *histos*<sup>2</sup> and the question of the *histos* of metaphor.

Since we have already said everything, the reader must bear with us if we continue on awhile. If we extend ourselves by force of play. If we then *write* a bit: on Plato, who already said in the *Phaedrus* that writing can only repeat (itself), that it "always signifies (*sémainei*) the same" and that it is a "game" (*paidia*).

## 1. Pharmacia

Let us begin again. Therefore the dissimulation of the woven texture can in any case take centuries to undo its web. The example we shall propose of this will not, seeing that we are dealing with Plato, be the *Statesman*, which will have come to mind first, no doubt because of the paradigm of the weaver, and especially because of the paradigm of the paradigm, the example of the example—writing—which immediately precedes it.<sup>3</sup> We will come back to that only after a long detour.

2. "*Histos: anything set upright*, hence: I. *mast*. II. *beam* of a loom, which stood upright, instead of lying horizontal as in our looms (except in the weaving methods used by the Gobelins and in India) to which the threads of the warp are attached, hence: I. *loom*; 2. *the warp fixed to the loom*, hence, *the woof*; 3. *woven cloth, piece of canvas*; 4. by anal. *spider web*; or *honeycomb of bees*. III. *rod, wand, stick*. IV. by anal. *shinbone, leg*."

3. "*Stranger*: It is difficult, my dear Socrates, to demonstrate anything of real importance without the use of examples. Every one of us is like a man who sees things in a dream and

We will take off here from the *Phaedrus*.<sup>4</sup> We are speaking of the *Phaedrus* that was obliged to wait almost twenty-five centuries before anyone gave up the idea that it was a badly composed dialogue. It was at first believed that Plato was too young to do the thing right, to construct a well-made object. Diogenes Laertius records this "they say" (*logos [sc. esti], legetai*) according to which the *Phaedrus* was Plato's first attempt and thus manifested a certain juvenile quality (*meirakiōdēs ti*).<sup>5</sup> Schleiermacher thinks this legend can be corroborated by means of a ludicrous argument: an aging writer would not have condemned writing as Plato does in the *Phaedrus*. This argument is not merely suspect in itself: it lends credit to the Laertian legend by basing itself

on the assumption that he knows them perfectly and then wakes up, as it were, to find he knows nothing. *Young Socrates*: What do you mean by this? *Stranger*: I have made a real fool of myself by choosing this moment to discuss our strange human plight where the winning of knowledge is concerned. *Young Socrates*: What do you mean? *Stranger*: Example, my good friend, has been found to require an example. *Young Socrates*: What is this? Say on and do not hesitate for my sake. *Stranger*: I will—in fact, I must, since you are so ready to follow. When young children have only just learned their letters . . . (*botan arti grammatiōn empeiroi gignōntai . . .*)" (277d-e, trans. Skemp). And the description of the interweaving (*sumplokē*) in writing necessitates recourse to the paradigm in grammatical experience, and then progressively leads to the use of this procedure in its "kingly" form and to the example or paradigm of weaving.

4. TN. The basic English-language of Plato's dialogues to which I shall refer is *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns), Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961). The dialogues have been translated by the following: Hugh Tredennick (*Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*); Benjamin Jowett (*Charmides*, *Laches*, *Menexenus*, *Lesser Hippias*, *Cratylus*, *Timaeus*, *Greater Hippias*); J. Wright (*Lysis*); Lane Cooper (*Euthyphro*, *Ion*); W. D. Woodhead (*Gorgias*); W. K. C. Guthrie (*Protagoras*, *Meno*); W. H. D. Rouse (*Euthydemus*); R. Hackforth (*Phaedrus*, *Philebus*); Michael Joyce (*Symposium*); Paul Shorey (*Republic*); F. M. Cornford (*Theaetetus*, *Parmenides*, *Sophist*); J. B. Skemp (*Statesman*); A. E. Taylor (*Critias*, *Laws*, *Epinomis*); L. A. Post (*Letters*).

I have also consulted and sometimes partially adopted the renditions given in the following: *Phaedrus*, trans. W. C. Helmbold and W. G. Rabinowitz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, The Library of Liberal Arts, 1956); *Gorgias*, trans. W. Hamilton (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1960); *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1951); *Republic*, trans. F. M. Cornford (New York & London: Oxford University Press, 1941); *The Laws*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (New York: Penguin Books, 1970).

In addition, I have occasionally modified the wording or word order of the Platonic texts in order to bring them into line with the parenthetical Greek inserts. Some minor adjustments have also been made when it seemed necessary to achieve a closer parallel to the French version with which Derrida is working.

The parenthetical numbers given after the quotations are the standard references to the Stephanus edition of Plato's works, traditionally reproduced in all translations.

5. On the history of interpretations of the *Phaedrus* and the problem of its composition, a rich, detailed account can be found in L. Robin's *La Théorie platonicienne de l'amour*, 2d ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), and in the same author's Introduction to the Budé edition of the *Phaedrus*.

on a second legend. Only a blind or grossly insensitive reading could indeed have spread the rumor that Plato was *simply* condemning the writer's activity. Nothing here is of a single piece and the *Phaedrus* also, in its own writing, plays at saving writing—which also means causing it to be lost—as the best, the noblest game. As for the stunning hand Plato has thus dealt himself, we will be able to follow its incidence and its payoff later on.

In 1905, the tradition of Diogenes Laertius was reversed, not in order to bring about a recognition of the excellent composition of the *Phaedrus* but in order to attribute its faults this time to the senile impotence of the author: "The *Phaedrus* is badly composed. This defect is all the more surprising since it is precisely there that Socrates defines the work of art as a living being. But the inability to accomplish what has been well conceived is precisely a proof of old age."<sup>6</sup>

We are no longer at that point. The hypothesis of a rigorous, sure, and subtle form is naturally more fertile. It discovers new chords, new concordances; it surprises them in minutely fashioned counterpoint, within a more secret organization of themes, of names, of words. It unties a whole *sumplokē* patiently interlacing the arguments. What is magisterial about the demonstration affirms itself and effaces itself at once, with suppleness, irony, and discretion.

This is, in particular, the case—and this will be our supplementary thread—with the whole last section (274b ff.), devoted, as everyone knows, to the origin, history, and value of writing. That entire hearing of the *trial of writing* should some day cease to appear as an extraneous mythological fantasy, an appendix the organism could easily, with no loss, have done without. In truth, it is rigorously called for from one end of the *Phaedrus* to the other.

Always with irony. But what can be said of irony here? What is its major sign? The dialogue contains the only "rigorously original Platonic myths: the fable of the cicadas in the *Phaedrus*, and the story of Theuth in the same dialogue."<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Socrates' first words, in the opening lines of the conversation, had concerned "not bothering about" mythologemes (229c–230a). Not in order to reject them absolutely, but, on the one hand, not bothering them, leaving them alone, making room for them, in order to free them from the heavy serious naïveté of the scientific "rationalists," and

6. H. Raeder, *Platons philosophische Entwicklung* (Leipzig, 1905). A critique of this view, "Sur la composition du *Phédré*," by E. Bourguet, appeared in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 1919, p. 335.

7. P. Frutiger, *Les Mythes de Platon* (Paris: Alcan, 1930).

on the other, not bothering *with* them, in order to free *oneself* for the relation with oneself and the pursuit of self-knowledge.

To give myths a send-off: a salute, a vacation, a dismissal; this fine resolution of the *khairein*, which means all that at once, will be twice interrupted in order to welcome these "two Platonic myths," so "rigorously original." Both of these myths arise, moreover, in the opening of a question about the status of writing. This is undoubtedly less obvious—has anyone ever picked up on it?—in the case of the cicada story. But it is no less certain. Both myths follow upon the same question, and they are only separated by a short space, just time enough for a detour. The first, of course, does not answer the question; on the contrary, it leaves it hanging, marks time for a rest, and makes us wait for the reprise that will lead us to the second.

Let us read this more closely. At the precisely calculated center of the dialogue—the reader can count the lines—the question of *logography* is raised (257c). Phaedrus reminds Socrates that the citizens of greatest influence and dignity, the men who are the most free, feel ashamed (*aiskhunontai*) at "speechwriting" and at leaving *sungrammata* behind them. They fear the judgment of posterity, which might consider them "sophists" (257d). The logographer, in the strict sense, is a *ghost writer* who composes speeches for use by litigants, speeches which he himself does not pronounce, which he does not attend, so to speak, in person, and which produce their effects in his absence. In writing what he does not speak, what he would never say and, in truth, would probably never even think, the author of the written speech is already entrenched in the posture of the sophist: the man of non-presence and of non-truth. Writing is thus already on the scene. The incompatibility between the *written* and the *true* is clearly announced at the moment Socrates starts to recount the way in which men are carried out of themselves by pleasure, become absent from themselves, forget themselves and die in the thrill of song (259c).

But the issue is delayed. Socrates still has a neutral attitude: writing is not in itself a shameful, indecent, infamous (*aiskron*) activity. One is dishonored only if one writes in a dishonorable manner. But what does it mean to write in a dishonorable manner? and, Phaedrus also wants to know, what does it mean to write beautifully (*kalos*)? This question sketches out the central nervure, the great fold that divides the dialogue. Between this question and the answer that takes up its terms in the last section ("But there remains the question of propriety and impropriety in writing, that is to say the conditions which make it proper or improper. Isn't that so?")

274b), the thread remains solid, if not easily visible, all through the fable of the cicadas and the themes of psychagogy, rhetoric, and dialectics.

Thus Socrates begins by sending myths off; and then, twice stopped before the question of writing, he invents two of them—not, as we shall see, entirely from scratch, but more freely and spontaneously than anywhere else in his work. Now, the *khairein*, in the *Phaedrus*' opening pages, *takes place in the name of truth*. We will reflect upon the fact that the myths come back from vacation at the time and in the name of writing.

The *khairein* *takes place in the name of truth*: that is, in the name of knowledge of truth and, more precisely, of truth in the knowledge of the self. This is what Socrates explains (230a). But this imperative of self-knowledge is not first felt or dictated by any transparent immediacy of self-presence. It is not perceived. Only interpreted, read, deciphered. A hermeneutics *assigns* intuition. An inscription, the *Delphikon gramma*, which is anything but an oracle, prescribes through its silent cipher; it signifies as one signifies an order—autoscopy and autognosis. The very activities that Socrates thinks can be contrasted to the hermeneutic adventure of myths, which he leaves to the sophists (229d).

And the *khairein* *takes place in the name of truth*. The *topoi* of the dialogue are never indifferent. The themes, the topics, the (common-)places, in a rhetorical sense, are strictly inscribed, comprehended each time within a significant site. They are dramatically staged, and in this theatrical geography, unity of place corresponds to an infallible calculation or necessity. For example, the fable of the cicadas would not have taken place, would not have been recounted, Socrates would not have been incited to tell it, if the heat, which weighs over the whole dialogue, had not driven the two friends out of the city, into the countryside, along the river Ilissus. Well before detailing the genealogy of the genus cicada, Socrates had exclaimed, "How welcome and sweet the fresh air is, resounding with the summer chirping of the cicada chorus" (230c). But this is not the only counterpoint-effect required by the space of the dialogue. The myth that serves as a pretext for the *khairein* and for the retreat into autoscopy can itself only arise, during the first steps of this excursion, at the sight of the Ilissus. Isn't this the spot, asks Phaedrus, where Boreas, according to tradition, carried off Orithyia? This riverbank, the diaphanous purity of these waters, must have welcomed the young virgins, or even drawn them like a spell, inciting them to play here. Socrates then mockingly proposes a learned explanation of the myth in the rationalistic, physicalist style of the *sophoi*: it was while she was playing with Pharmacia (*sun Pharmakeiai paizousan*) that the boreal wind (*pneuma*

*Boreou*) caught Orithyia up and blew her into the abyss, "down from the rocks hard by," "and having thus met her death was said to have been seized by Boreas . . . For my part, Phaedrus, I regard such theories as attractive no doubt, but as the invention of clever, industrious people who are not exactly to be envied" (229d).

This brief evocation of Pharmacia at the beginning of the *Phaedrus*—is it an accident? An *hors d'œuvre*? A fountain, "perhaps with curative powers," notes Robin, was dedicated to Pharmacia near the Ilissus. Let us in any case retain this: that a little spot, a little stitch or mesh (*macula*) woven into the back of the canvas, marks out for the entire dialogue the scene where that virgin was cast into the abyss, surprised by death *while playing with Pharmacia*. Pharmacia (*Pharmakeia*) is also a common noun signifying the administration of the *pharmakon*, the drug: the medicine and/or poison. "Poisoning" was not the least usual meaning of "pharmacia." Antiphon has left us the logogram of an "accusation of poisoning against a mother-in-law" (*Pharmakeias kata tēs mētryias*). Through her games, Pharmacia has dragged down to death a virginal purity and an unpenetrated interior.

Only a little further on, Socrates compares the written texts Phaedrus has brought along to a drug (*pharmakon*). This *pharmakon*, this "medicine," this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be—alternately or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent. The *pharmakon* would be a *substance*—with all that that word can connote in terms of matter with occult virtues, cryptic depths refusing to submit their ambivalence to analysis, already paving the way for alchemy—if we didn't have eventually to come to recognize it as antisubstance itself: that which resists any philosopheme, indefinitely exceeding its bounds as nonidentity, nonessence, nonsubstance; granting philosophy by that very fact the inexhaustible adversity of what funds it and the infinite absence of what founds it.

Operating through seduction, the *pharmakon* makes one stray from one's general, natural, habitual paths and laws. Here, it takes Socrates out of his proper place and off his customary track. The latter had always kept him inside the city. The leaves of writing act as a *pharmakon* to push or attract out of the city the one who never wanted to get out, even at the end, to escape the hemlock. They take him out of himself and draw him onto a path that is properly an *exodus*:

*Phaedrus*: Anyone would take you, as you say, for a foreigner being shown the country by a guide, and not a native—you never leave

town to cross the frontier nor even, I believe, so much as set foot outside the walls.

*Socrates*: You must forgive me, dear friend; I'm a lover of learning, and trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in the town do. Yet you seem to have discovered a drug<sup>8</sup> for getting me out (*dokeis moi tēs emēs exocou to pharmakon hērēkenai*). A hungry animal can be driven by dangling a carrot or a bit of greenstuff in front of it; similarly if you proffer me speeches bound in books (*en bibliois*) I don't doubt you can cart me all round Attica, and anywhere else you please. Anyhow, now that we've got here I propose for the time being to lie down, and you can choose whatever posture you think most convenient for reading, and proceed (230d–e).

It is at this point, when Socrates has finally stretched out on the ground and Phaedrus has taken the most comfortable position for handling the text or, if you will, the *pharmakon*, that the discussion actually gets off the ground. A spoken speech—whether by Lysias or by Phaedrus in person—a speech proffered *in the present, in the presence* of Socrates, would not have had the same effect. Only the *logoi en bibliois*, only words that are deferred, reserved, enveloped, rolled up, words that force one to wait for them in the form and under cover of a solid object, letting themselves be desired for the space of a walk, only hidden letters can thus get Socrates moving. If a speech could be purely present, unveiled, naked, offered up in person in its truth, without the detours of a signifier foreign to it, if at the limit an undeferred *logos* were possible, it would not seduce anyone. It would not draw Socrates, as if under the effects of a *pharmakon*, out of his way. Let us get ahead of ourselves. Already: writing, the *pharmakon*, the going or leading astray.

In our discussion of this text we have been using an authoritative French translation of Plato, the one published by Guillaume Budé. In the case of the *Phaedrus*, the translation is by Léon Robin. We will continue to refer to it, inserting the Greek text in parentheses, however, whenever it seems opportune or pertinent to our point. Hence, for example, the word *pharmakon*. In this way we hope to display in the most striking manner the regular, ordered polysemy that has, through skewing, indetermination, or overdetermination, but without mistranslation, permitted the rendering of the same word by "remedy," "recipe," "poison," "drug," "philter," etc. It will also be seen to what extent the malleable unity of this concept, or rather its rules and the strange logic that links it with its signifier, has been dis-

8. TN. Hackforth translates "recipe"; Helmbold & Rabinowitz, "remedy."

persed, masked, obliterated, and rendered almost unreadable not only by the imprudence or empiricism of the translators, but first and foremost by the redoubtable, irreducible difficulty of translation. It is a difficulty inherent in its very principle, situated less in the passage from one language to another, from one philosophical language to another, than already, as we shall see, in the tradition between Greek and Greek; a violent difficulty in the transference of a nonphilosopheme into a philosopheme. With this problem of translation we will thus be dealing with nothing less than the problem of the very passage into philosophy.

The *biblia* that will draw Socrates out of his reserve and out of the space in which he is wont to learn, to teach, to speak, to dialogue—the sheltered enclosure of the city—these *biblia* contain a text written by “the ablest writer of our day” (*deinotatos ὡν τὸν νῦν γραψεῖν*). His name is Lysias. Phaedrus is keeping the text or, if you will, the *pharmakon*, hidden under his cloak. He needs it because he has not learned the speech by heart. This point is important for what follows, the problem of writing being closely linked to the problem of “knowing by heart.” Before Socrates had stretched out on the ground and invited Phaedrus to take the most comfortable position, the latter had offered to reconstitute, without the help of the text, the reasoning, argument, and design of Lysias’ speech, its *dianoia*. Socrates stops him short: “Very well, my dear fellow, but you must first show me what it is that you have in your left hand under your cloak, for I surmise that it is the actual discourse (*τὸν λόγον αὐτον*)” (228d). Between the invitation and the start of the reading, while the *pharmakon* is wandering about under Phaedrus’ cloak, there occurs the evocation of *Pharmacia* and the send-off of myths.

Is it after all by chance or by harmonics that, even before the overt presentation of writing as a *pharmakon* arises in the middle of the myth of Theuth, the connection between *biblia* and *pharmaka* should already be mentioned in a malevolent or suspicious vein? As opposed to the true practice of medicine, founded on science, we find indeed, listed in a single stroke, empirical practice, treatments based on recipes learned by heart, mere bookish knowledge, and the blind usage of drugs. All that, we are told, springs out of *mania*: “I expect they would say, ‘the man is mad; he thinks he has made himself a doctor by picking up something out of a book (*εκ βιβλίου*), or coming across a couple of ordinary drugs (*pharmakiois*), without any real knowledge of medicine’” (268c).

This association between writing and the *pharmakon* still seems external; it could be judged artificial or purely coincidental. But the intention and intonation are recognizably the same: one and the same suspicion envelops

in a single embrace the book and the drug, writing and whatever works in an occult, ambiguous manner open to empiricism and chance, governed by the ways of magic and not the laws of necessity. Books, the dead and rigid knowledge shut up in *biblia*, piles of histories, nomenclatures, recipes and formulas learned by heart, all this is as foreign to living knowledge and dialectics as the *pharmakon* is to medical science. And myth to true knowledge. In dealing with Plato, who knew so well on occasion how to treat myth in its archeo-logical or paleo-logical capacity, one can glimpse the immensity and difficulty of this last opposition. The extent of the difficulty is marked out—this is, among a hundred others, the example that retains us here—in that the truth—the original truth—about writing as a *pharmakon* will at first be left up to a myth. The myth of Theuth, to which we now turn.

Up to this point in the dialogue, one can say that the *pharmakon* and the grapheme have been beckoning to each other from afar, indirectly sending back to each other, and, as if by chance, appearing and disappearing together on the same line, for yet uncertain reasons, with an effectiveness that is quite discrete and perhaps after all unintentional. But in order to lift this doubt and on the supposition that the categories of the voluntary and the involuntary still have some absolute pertinence in a reading—which we don’t for a minute believe, at least not on the textual level on which we are now advancing—let us proceed to the last phase of the dialogue, to the point where Theuth appears on the scene.

This time it is without indirection, without hidden mediation, without secret argumentation, that writing is proposed, presented, and asserted as a *pharmakon* (274e).

In a certain sense, one can see how this section could have been set apart as an appendix, a superadded supplement. And despite all that calls for it in the preceding steps, it is true that Plato offers it somewhat as an amusement, an *hors d’œuvre* or rather a dessert. All the subjects of the dialogue, both themes and speakers, seem exhausted at the moment the supplement, writing, or the *pharmakon*, are introduced: “Then we may feel that we have said enough both about the art of speaking and about the lack of art (*το μὲν τεκhnēς τε καὶ ατεκhnias λόγον*)” (274b). And yet it is at this moment of general exhaustion that the question of writing is set out.<sup>10</sup> And, as was foreshad-

9. Here, when it is a question of *logos*, Robin translates *tekhnē* by “art.” Later, in the course of the indictment, the same word, this time pertaining to writing, will be rendered by “technical knowledge” [*connaissance technique*].

10. While Saussure, in his *Course in General Linguistics*, excludes or settles the question of writing in a sort of preliminary excursus or *hors d’œuvre*, the chapter Rousseau devotes to

owed earlier by the use of the word *aiskron* (or the adverb *aiskhrōs*), the question of writing opens as a question of morality. It is truly *morality* that is at stake, both in the sense of the opposition between good and evil, or good and bad, and in the sense of mores, public morals and social conventions. It is a question of knowing what is done and what is not done. This moral disquiet is in no way to be distinguished from questions of truth, memory, and dialectics. This latter question, which will quickly be engaged as *the question of writing*, is closely associated with the morality theme, and indeed develops it by affinity of essence and not by superimposition. But within a debate rendered very real by the political development of the city, the propagation of writing and the activity of the sophists and speechwriters, the primary accent is naturally placed upon political and social proprieties. The type of arbitration proposed by Socrates plays within the opposition between the values of seemliness and unseemliness (*euprepeia/*  
*aprepeia*): "But there remains the question of propriety and impropriety in writing, that is to say the conditions which make it proper or improper. Isn't that so?" (274b).

Is writing seemly? Does the writer cut a respectable figure? Is it proper to write? Is it done?

Of course not. But the answer is not so simple, and Socrates does not immediately offer it on his own account in a rational discourse or *logos*. He lets it be heard by delegating it to an *akōē*, to a well-known rumor, to hearsay evidence, to a fable transmitted from ear to ear: "I can tell you what our forefathers have said about it, but the truth of it is only known by tradition. However, if we could discover that truth for ourselves, should we still be concerned with the fancies of mankind?" (274c).

The truth of writing, that is, as we shall see, (the) *nontruth*, cannot be discovered in ourselves by ourselves. And it is not the object of a science, only of a history that is recited, a fable that is repeated. The link between writing and myth becomes clearer, as does its opposition to knowledge, notably the knowledge one seeks in oneself, by oneself. And at the same time, through writing or through myth, the genealogical break and the estrangement from the origin are sounded. One should note most especially that what writing will later be accused of—repeating without knowing—here defines the very approach that leads to the statement and determina-

writing in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages* is also presented, despite its actual importance, as a sort of somewhat contingent supplement, a makeup criterion, "another means of comparing languages and of judging their relative antiquity." The same operation is found in Hegel's *Encyclopedia*; cf. "Le Puits et la pyramide," (1-1968) in *Hegel et la pensée moderne*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970, coll. "Epiméthée.").

tion of its status. One thus begins by repeating without knowing—through a myth—the definition of writing, which is to repeat without knowing. This kinship of writing and myth, both of them distinguished from *logos* and dialectics, will only become more precise as the text concludes. Having just repeated without knowing that writing consists of repeating without knowing, Socrates goes on to base the demonstration of his indictment, of his *logos*, upon the premises of the *akōē*, upon structures that are readable through a fabulous genealogy of writing. As soon as the myth has struck the first blow, the *logos* of Socrates will demolish the accused.

## 2. The Father of Logos

The story begins like this:

*Socrates*: Very well. I heard, then, that at Naucratis in Egypt there lived one of the old gods of that country, the one whose sacred bird is called the ibis; and the name of the divinity was Theuth. It was he who first invented numbers and calculation, geometry and astronomy, not to speak of draughts and dice, and above all writing (*grammata*). Now the King of all Egypt at that time was Thamus who lived in the great city of the upper region which the Greeks call the Egyptian Thebes; the god himself they call Ammon. Theuth came to him and exhibited his arts and declared that they ought to be imparted to the other Egyptians. And Thamus questioned him about the usefulness of each one; and as Theuth enumerated, the King blamed or praised what he thought were the good or bad points in the explanation. Now Thamus is said to have had a good deal to remark on both sides of the question about every single art (it would take too long to repeat it here); but when it came to writing, Theuth said, "This discipline (*to mathēma*), my King, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories (*sophōterous kai mnēmonikōterous*): my invention is a recipe (*pharmakon*) for both memory and wisdom." But the King said . . . etc. (274c-e).

Let us cut the King off here. He is faced with the *pharmakon*. His reply will be incisive.

Let us freeze the scene and the characters and take a look at them. Writing (or, if you will, the *pharmakon*) is thus presented to the King. Presented: like a kind of present offered up in homage by a vassal to his lord

(Theuth is a demigod speaking to the king of the gods), but above all as a finished work submitted to his appreciation. And this work is itself an art, a capacity for work, a power of operation. This artefactum is an art. But the value of this gift is still uncertain. The value of writing—or of the *pharmakon*—has of course been spelled out to the King, but it is the King who will give it its value, who will set the price of what, in the act of receiving, he constitutes or institutes. The king or god (Thamus represents<sup>11</sup> Ammon, the king of the gods, the king of kings, the god of gods. Theuth says to him: *Ō basileu*) is thus the other name for the origin of value. The value of writing will not be itself, writing will have no value, unless and to the extent that god-the-king approves of it. But god-the-king nonetheless experiences the *pharmakon* as a product, an *ergon*, which is not his own, which comes to him from outside but also from below, and which awaits his condescending judgment in order to be consecrated in its being and value. God the king does not know how to write, but that ignorance or incapacity only testifies to his sovereign independence. He has no need to write. He speaks, he says, he dictates, and his word suffices. Whether a scribe from his secretarial staff then adds the supplement of a transcription or not, that consignment is always in essence secondary.

From this position, without rejecting the homage, the god-king will deprecate it, pointing out not only its uselessness but its menace and its mischief. Another way of not receiving the offering of writing. In so doing, god-the-king-that-speaks is acting like a father. The *pharmakon* is here presented to the father and is by him rejected, belittled, abandoned, disparaged. The father is always suspicious and watchful toward writing.

Even if we did not want to give in here to the easy passage uniting the figures of the king, the god, and the father, it would suffice to pay systematic attention—which to our knowledge has never been done—to the permanence of a Platonic schema that assigns the origin and power of speech, precisely of *logos*, to the paternal position. Not that this happens especially and exclusively in Plato. Everyone knows this or can easily imagine it. But the fact that “Platonism,” which sets up the whole of Western metaphysics in its conceptuality, should not escape the generality of this structural constraint, and even illustrates it with incomparable subtlety and force, stands out as all the more significant.

11. For Plato, Thamus is doubtless another name for Ammon, whose figure (that of the sun king and of the father of the gods) we shall sketch out later for its own sake. On this question and the debate to which it has given rise, see Frutiger, *Mythes*, p. 233, n. 2, and notably Eisler, “Platon und das ägyptische Alphabet,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1922; Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (art. Ammon); Roscher, *Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (art. Thamus).

Not that *logos* is the father, either. But the origin of *logos* is its *father*. One could say anachronously that the “speaking subject” is the *father* of his speech. And one would quickly realize that this is no metaphor, at least not in the sense of any common, conventional effect of rhetoric. *Logos* is a son, then, a son that would be destroyed in his very *presence* without the present *attendance* of his father. His father who answers. His father who speaks for him and answers for him. Without his father, he would be nothing but, in fact, writing. At least that is what is said by the one who says: it is the father’s thesis. The specificity of writing would thus be intimately bound to the absence of the father. Such an absence can of course exist along very diverse modalities, distinctly or confusedly, successively or simultaneously: to have lost one’s father, through natural or violent death, through random violence or patricide; and then to solicit the aid and attendance, possible or impossible, of the paternal presence, to solicit it directly or to claim to be getting along without it, etc. The reader will have noted Socrates’ insistence on the misery, whether pitiful or arrogant, of a *logos* committed to writing: “. . . It always needs its father to attend to it, being quite unable to defend itself or attend to its own needs” (275e).

This misery is ambiguous: it is the distress of the orphan, of course, who needs not only an attending presence but also a presence that will attend to its needs; but in pitying the orphan, one also makes an accusation against him, along with writing, for claiming to do away with the father, for achieving emancipation with complacent self-sufficiency. From the position of the holder of the scepter, the desire of writing is indicated, designated, and denounced as a desire for orphanhood and patricidal subversion. Isn’t this *pharmakon* then a criminal thing, a poisoned present?

The status of this orphan, whose welfare cannot be assured by any attendance or assistance, coincides with that of a *graphein* which, being nobody’s son at the instant it reaches inscription, scarcely remains a son at all and no longer *recognizes* its origins, whether legally or morally. In contrast to writing, living *logos* is alive in that it has a living father (whereas the orphan is already half dead), a father that is *present*, *standing* near it, behind it, within it, sustaining it with his rectitude, attending it in person in his own name. Living *logos*, for its part, recognizes its debt, lives off that recognition, and forbids itself, thinks it can forbid itself patricide. But prohibition and patricide, like the relations between speech and writing, are structures surprising enough to require us later on to articulate Plato’s text between a patricide prohibited and a patricide proclaimed. The deferred murder of the father and rector.

The *Phaedrus* would already be sufficient to prove that the responsibility

for *logos*, for its meaning and effects, goes to those who attend it, to those who are present with the presence of a father. These "metaphors" must be tirelessly questioned. Witness Socrates, addressing Eros: "If in our former speech Phaedrus or I said anything harsh against you, blame Lysias, the father of the subject (*ton tou logou patera*)" (275b). *Logos*—"discourse"—has the meaning here of argument, line of reasoning, guiding thread animating the spoken discussion (the *Logos*). To translate it by "subject" [*sujet*], as Robin does, is not merely anachronistic. The whole intention and the organic unity of signification is destroyed. For only the "living" discourse, only a spoken word (and not a speech's theme, object, or subject) can have a father; and, according to a necessity that will not cease to become clearer to us from now on, the *logoi* are the children. Alive enough to protest on occasion and to let themselves be questioned; capable, too, in contrast to written things, of responding when their father is there. They are their father's responsible presence.

Some of them, for example, descend from Phaedrus, who is sometimes called upon to sustain them. Let us refer again to Robin, who translates *logos* this time not by "subject" but by "argument," and disrupts in a space of ten lines the play on the *tekhnē tō logōn*. (What is in question is the *tekhnē* the sophists and rhetors had or pretended to have at their disposal, which was at once an art and an instrument, a recipe, an occult but transmissible "treatise," etc. Socrates considers the then classical problem in terms of the opposition between persuasion [*peithō*] and truth [*alētheia*] {260 a}.)

*Socrates*: I agree—if, that is, the arguments (*logoi*) that come forward to speak for oratory should give testimony that it is an art (*tekhnē*). Now I seem, as it were, to hear some arguments advancing to give their evidence that it tells lies, that it is not an art at all, but an artless routine. "Without a grip on truth," says the Spartan, "there can be no genuine art of speaking (*tou de legein*) either now or in the future."

*Phaedrus*: Socrates, we need these arguments (*Toutōn dei tōn logōn, ὁ Sōkrates*). Bring the witnesses here and let's find out what they have to say and how they'll say it (*ti kai pōs legousin*).

*Socrates*: Come here, then, noble brood (*gennaia*), and convince Phaedrus, father of such fine children (*kallipaida te Phaidron*), that if he doesn't give enough attention to philosophy, he will never become a competent speaker on any subject. Now let Phaedrus answer (260e-261a).

It is again Phaedrus, but this time in the *Symposium*, who must speak first because he is both "head of the table" and "father of our subject" (*pater tou logou*) (177d).

What we are provisionally and for the sake of convenience continuing to call a metaphor thus in any event belongs to a whole system. If *logos* has a father, if it is a *logos* only when attended by its father, this is because it is always a being (*on*) and even a certain species of being (the *Sophist*, 260a), more precisely a *living* being. *Logos* is a *zōon*. An animal that is born, grows, belongs to the *physis*. Linguistics, logic, dialectics, and zoology are all in the same camp.

In describing *logos* as a *zōon*, Plato is following certain rhetors and sophists before him who, as a contrast to the cadaverous rigidity of writing, had held up the living spoken word, which infallibly conforms to the necessities of the situation at hand, to the expectations and demands of the interlocutors present, and which sniffs out the spots where it ought to produce itself, feigning to bend and adapt at the moment it is actually achieving maximum persuasiveness and control.<sup>12</sup>

*Logos*, a living, animate creature, is thus also an organism that has been engendered. An organism: a differentiated body *proper*, with a center and extremities, joints, a head, and feet. In order to be "proper," a written discourse *ought* to submit to the laws of life just as a living discourse does. Logographical necessity (*anangkē logographikē*) ought to be analogous to biological, or rather zoological, necessity. Otherwise, obviously, it would have neither head nor tail. Both *structure* and *constitution* are in question in the risk run by *logos* of losing through writing both its tail and its head:

*Socrates*: And what about the rest? Don't you think the different parts of the speech (*ta tou logou*) are tossed in hit or miss? Or is there really a cogent reason for starting his second point in the second place? And is that the case with the rest of the speech? As for myself, in my ignorance, I thought that the writer boldly set down whatever happened to come into his head. Can you explain his arrangement of the topics in the order he has adopted as the result of some principle of composition, some logographic necessity?

12. The association *logos-zōon* appears in the discourse of Isocrates *Against the Sophists* and in that of Alcidamas *On the Sophists*. Cf. also W. Süss, who compares these two discourses line by line with the *Phaedrus*, in *Ethos: Studien zur älteren griechischen Rhetorik* (Leipzig, 1910), pp. 34 ff) and A. Diès, "Philosophie et rhétorique," in *Autour de Platon* (Paris: Garbriel Beauchesne, 1927) I, 103.

*Phaedrus*: It's very kind of you to think me capable of such an accurate insight into his methods.

*Socrates*: But to this you will surely agree: every discourse (*logon*), like a living creature (*ōsper zōon*), should be so put together (*sunestanai*) that it has its own body and lacks neither head nor foot, middle nor extremities, all composed in such a way that they suit both each other and the whole (264b-c).

The organism thus engendered must be well born, of noble blood: "gennata!," we recall, is what Socrates called the *logoi*, those "noble creatures." This implies that the organism, having been engendered, must have a beginning and an end. Here, Socrates' standards become precise and insistent: a speech must have a beginning and an end, it must begin with the beginning and end with the end: "It certainly seems as though Lysias, at least, was far from satisfying our demands: it's from the end, not the beginning, that he tries to swim (on his back!) upstream through the current of his discourse. He starts out with what the lover ought to say at the very end to his beloved!" (264a). The implications and consequences of such a norm are immense, but they are obvious enough for us not to have to belabor them. It follows that the spoken discourse behaves like someone attended in origin and present in person. *Logos*: "*Sermo tanquam persona ipse loquens*," as one Platonic Lexicon puts it.<sup>13</sup> Like any person, the *logos-zōon* has a father.

But what is a father?

Should we consider this known, and with this term—the known—classify the other term within what one would hasten to classify as a metaphor? One would then say that the origin or cause of *logos* is being compared to what we know to be the cause of a living son, his father. One would understand or imagine the birth and development of *logos* from the standpoint of a domain foreign to it, the transmission of life or the generative relation. But the father is not the generator or procreator in any "real" sense prior to or outside all relation to language. In what way, indeed, is the father/son relation distinguishable from a mere cause/effect or generator/engendered relation, if not by the instance of *logos*? Only a power of speech can have a father. The father is always father to a speaking/living being. In other words, it is precisely *logos* that enables us to perceive and investigate something like paternity. If there were a simple metaphor in the

13. Fr. Ast, *Lexique platonicien*. Cf. also B. Parain, *Essai sur le logos platonicien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), p. 211; and P. Louis, *Les Métaphores de Platon* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1945), pp. 43-44.

expression "father of logos," the first word, which seemed the more *familiar*, would nevertheless receive more meaning from the second than it would transmit to it. The first familiarity is always involved in a relation of cohabitation with *logos*. Living-beings, father and son, are announced to us and related to each other within the household of *logos*. From which one does not escape, in spite of appearances, when one is transported, by "metaphor," to a foreign territory where one meets fathers, sons, living creatures, all sorts of beings that come in handy for explaining to anyone that doesn't know, by comparison, what *logos*, that strange thing, is all about. Even though this hearth is the heart of all metaphoricity, "father of logos" is not a simple metaphor. To have simple metaphoricity, one would have to make the statement that some living creature incapable of language, if anyone still wished to believe in such a thing, has a father. One must thus proceed to undertake a general reversal of all metaphorical directions, no longer asking whether *logos* can have a father but understanding that what the father claims to be the father of cannot go without the essential possibility of *logos*.

A *logos* indebted to a father, what does that mean? At least how can it be read within the stratum of the Platonic text that interests us here?

The figure of the father, of course, is also that of the good (*agathon*). *Logos* represents what it is indebted to: the father who is also chief, capital, and good(s). Or rather *the* chief, *the* capital, *the* good(s). *Pater* in Greek means all that at once. Neither translators nor commentators of Plato seem to have accounted for the play of these schemas. It is extremely difficult, we must recognize, to respect this play in a translation, and the fact can at least be explained in that no one has ever raised the question. Thus, at the point in the *Republic* where Socrates backs away from speaking of the good in itself (VI, 506e), he immediately suggests replacing it with its *ekgonos*, its son, its offspring:

... let us dismiss for the time being the nature of the good in itself, for to attain to my present surmise of that seems a pitch above the impulse that wings my flight today. But what seems to be the offspring (*ekgonos*) of the good and most nearly made in its likeness I am willing to speak if you too wish it, and otherwise to let the matter drop.

Well, speak on, he said, for you will duly pay me the tale of the parent another time.

I could wish, I said, that I were able to make and you to receive the payment, and not merely as now the interest (*tokous*). But at any rate receive this interest and the offspring of the good (*tokon te kai ekgonon autou tou agathou*).

*Tokos*, which is here associated with *ekgonos*, signifies production and the product, birth and the child, etc. This word functions with this meaning in the domains of agriculture, of kinship relations, and of fiduciary operations. None of these domains, as we shall see, lies outside the investment and possibility of a *logos*.

As product, the *tokos* is the child, the human or animal brood, as well as the fruits of the seed sown in the field, and the interest on a capital investment: it is a *return* or *revenue*. The distribution of all these meanings can be followed in Plato's text. The meaning of *pater* is sometimes even inflected in the exclusive sense of financial capital. In the *Republic* itself, and not far from the passage we have just quoted. One of the drawbacks of democracy lies in the role that capital is often allowed to play in it: "But these money-makers with down-bent heads, pretending not even to see the poor, but inserting the sting of their money into any of the remainder who do not resist, and harvesting from them in interest as it were a manifold progeny of the parent sum (*ton patros ekgonous tokous pollaplastous*), foster the drone and pauper element in the state" (555e).

Now, about this father, this capital, this good, this origin of value and of appearing beings, it is not possible to speak simply or directly. First of all because it is no more possible to look them in the face than to stare at the sun. On the subject of this bedazzlement before the face of the sun, a rereading of the famous passage of the *Republic* (VII, 515c ff) is strongly recommended here.

Thus will Socrates evoke only the visible sun, the son that resembles the father, the *analogon* of the intelligible sun: "It was the sun, then, that I meant when I spoke of that offspring of the Good (*ton tou agathou ekgonon*), which the Good has created in its own image (*ton tagathon egennesen analogon beautoi*), and which stands in the visible world in the same relation to vision and visible things as that which the good itself bears in the intelligible world to intelligence and to intelligible objects" (508c).

How does *Logos* intercede in this *analogy* between the father and the son, the *nooumena* and the *horomena*?

The Good, in the visible-invisible figure of the father, the sun, or capital, is the origin of all *onta*, responsible for their appearing and their coming into *logos*, which both assembles and distinguishes them: "We predicate 'to be' of many beautiful things and many good things, saying of them severally that they *are*, and so define them in our speech (*einai phamen te kai diorizomen tois logois*)" (507 b).

The good (father, sun, capital) is thus the hidden illuminating, blinding source of *logos*. And since one cannot speak of that which enables one to

speak (being forbidden to speak of it or to speak to it face to face), one will speak only of that which speaks and of things that, with a single exception, one is constantly speaking of. And since an account or reason cannot be given of what *logos* (account or reason: *ratio*) is accountable or owing to, since the capital cannot be counted nor the chief looked in the eye, it will be necessary, by means of a discriminative, diacritical operation, to count up the plurality of interests, returns, products, and offspring: "Well, speak on (*lege*), he said, for you will duly pay me the tale of the parent another time—I could wish, I said, that I were able to make and you to receive the payment, and not merely as now the interest. But at any rate receive this interest and the offspring of the good. Have a care, however, lest I deceive you unintentionally with a false reckoning (*ton logon*) of the interest (*ton tokou*)" (507a).

From the foregoing passage we should also retain the fact that, along with the account (*logos*) of the supplements (to the father-good-capital-origin, etc.), along with what comes above and beyond the One in the very movement through which it absents itself and becomes invisible, thus requiring that its place be supplied, along with difference and diacriticity, Socrates introduces or discovers the ever open possibility of the *kibdēlon*, that which is falsified, adulterated, mendacious, deceptive, equivocal. Have a care, he says, lest I deceive you with a false reckoning of the interest (*kibdēlon apodidous ton logon ton tokou*). *Kibdēleuma* is fraudulent merchandise. The corresponding verb (*kibdēleuo*) signifies "to tamper with money or merchandise, and, by extension, to be of bad faith."

This recourse to *logos*, from fear of being blinded by any direct intuition of the face of the father, of good, of capital, of the origin of being in itself, of the form of forms, etc., this recourse to *logos* as that which *protects us from the sun*, protects us under it and from it, is proposed by Socrates elsewhere, in the *analogous* order of the sensible or the visible. We shall quote at length from that text. In addition to its intrinsic interest, the text, in its official Robin translation, manifests a series of slidings, as it were, that are highly significant.<sup>14</sup> The passage in question is the critique, in the *Phaedo*, of "physicalists":

Socrates proceeded:—I thought that as I had failed in the contemplation of true existence (*ta onta*), I ought to be careful that I did not lose the eye of my soul; as people may injure their bodily eye by observing

14. I am indebted to the friendship and alertness of Francine Markovits for having brought this to my attention. This text should of course be placed alongside those of books VI and VII of the *Republic*.

and gazing on the sun during an eclipse, unless they take the precaution of only looking at the image (*eikona*) reflected in the water, or in some analogous medium. So in my own case, I was afraid that my soul might be blinded altogether if I looked at things with my eyes or tried to apprehend them with the help of the senses. And I thought that I had better have recourse to the world of *idea* (*en logoi*) and seek there the truth of things. . . . So, basing myself in each case on the *idea* (*logon*) that I judged to be the strongest . . ." (99d–100a).

*Logos* is thus a *resource*. One must *turn* to it, and not merely when the solar source is *present* and risks burning the eyes if stared at; one has also to turn away toward *logos* when the sun seems to withdraw during its eclipse. Dead, extinguished, or hidden, that star is more dangerous than ever.

We will let these yarns of suns and sons spin on for a while. Up to now we have only followed this line so as to move from *logos* to the father, so as to tie speech to the *kurios*, the master, the lord, another name given in the *Republic* to the good-sun-capital-father (508a). Later, within the same tissue, within the same texts, we will draw on other filial filaments, pull the same strings once more, and witness the weaving or unraveling of other designs.

### 3. The Filial Inscription: Theuth, Hermes, Thoth, Nabû, Nebo

Universal history continued to unroll, the all-too-human gods whom Xenophanes had denounced were demoted to figures of poetic fiction, or to demons—although it was reported that one of them, Hermes Trismegistus, had dictated a variable number of books (42 according to Clement of Alexandria; 20,000 according to Iamblicus; 36,525 according to the priests of Thoth—who is also Hermes) in the pages of which are written all things. Fragments of this illusory library, compiled or concocted beginning in the third century, go to form what is called the *Corpus Hermeticum*...

—Jorge Luis Borges, "The Fearful Sphere of Pascal"

A sense of fear of the unknown moved in the heart of his weariness, a fear of symbols and portents, of the hawk-like man whose name he bore soaring out of his captivity on osier woven wing, of Thoth, the god of writers, writing with a reed upon a tablet and bearing on his narrow ibis head the cusped moon.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Another school declares that *all time* has already transpired and that our life is only the crepuscular and no doubt falsified and mutilated memory or reflection of an irrecoverable process. Another, that the history of the universe—and in it our lives and the most tenuous detail of our lives—is the scripture produced by a subordinate god in order to communicate with a demon. Another, that the universe is comparable to those cryptographs in which not all the symbols are valid . . .

—Jorge Luis Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"

Our intention here has only been to sow the idea that the spontaneity, freedom, and fantasy attributed to Plato in his legend of Theuth were actually supervised and limited by rigorous necessities. The organization of the myth conforms to powerful constraints. These constraints coordinate as a system certain rules that make their presence known, sometimes in what is empirically partitioned off for us as "Greek language" or "culture," and sometimes, from without, in "foreign mythology." From which Plato has not simply borrowed, nor borrowed a simple element: the identity of a character, Thoth, the god of writing. One cannot, in fact, speak—and we don't really know what the word could mean here anyway—of a borrowing, that is, of an addition contingent and external to the text. Plato had to make his tale conform to structural laws. The most general of these, those that govern and articulate the oppositions speech/writing, life/death, father/son, master/servant, first/second, legitimate son/orphan-bastard, soul/body, inside/outside, good/evil, seriousness/play, day/night, sun/moon, etc., also govern, and according to the same configurations, Egyptian, Babylonian, and Assyrian mythology. And others, too, no doubt, which we have neither the intention nor the means to situate here. In concerning ourselves with the fact that Plato has not merely borrowed a simple element, we are thus bracketing off the problem of factual genealogy and of the empirical, effective communication among cultures and mythologies.<sup>15</sup> What we wish to do here is simply to point to the internal, structural necessity which alone has made possible such communication and any eventual contagion of mythemes.

15. We can here only refer the reader to all the existing studies of the communications between Greece and the East or Middle East. Such scholarship abounds. On Plato, his relations with Egypt, the hypothesis of his voyage to Heliopolis, the testimony of Strabo and Diogenes Laertius, one can find the references and essential documentation in Festugière's *Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1944–54), vol. 1; R. Godel's *Platon à Héliopolis d'Egypte* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956); and S. Sauveterre's *Les Prêtres de l'ancienne Egypte* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1957).

Plato, of course, does not describe Theuth as a character. Not a single concrete characteristic is attributed to him, neither in the *Phaedrus* nor in the very brief allusion in the *Philebus*. That is at least how things appear. But in looking more closely, one comes to recognize that the situation he occupies, the content of his speeches and operations, and the relations among the themes, concepts, and signifiers in which his interventions are engaged, all organize the features of a strongly marked figure. The structural analogy that relates these features to other gods of writing, and mainly to the Egyptian Thoth, can be the effect neither of a partial or total borrowing, nor of chance or Plato's imagination. And in the simultaneous insertion, so rigorous and closely fit, of these traits into the systematic arrangement of Plato's philosophemes, this meshing of the mythological and the philosophical points to some more deeply buried necessity.

No doubt the god Thoth had several faces, belonged to several eras, lived in several homes.<sup>16</sup> The discordant tangle of mythological accounts in which he is caught should not be neglected. Nevertheless, certain constants can be distinguished throughout, drawn in broad letters with firm strokes. One would be tempted to say that these constitute the permanent identity of this god in the pantheon, if his function, as we shall see, were not precisely to work at the subversive dislocation of identity in general, starting with that of theological regality.

What then, are the pertinent traits for someone who is trying to reconstitute the structural resemblance between the Platonic and the other mythological figures of the origin of writing? The bringing out of these traits should not merely serve to determine each of the significations within the play of thematic oppositions as they have been listed here, whether in Plato's discourse or in a general configuration of mythologies. It must open onto the general problematic of the relations between the mythemes and the philosophemes that lie at the origin of western *logos*. That is to say, of a history—or rather, of History—which has been produced in its entirety in the philosophical difference between *mythos* and *logos*, blindly sinking down into that difference as the natural obviousness of its own element.

In the *Phaedrus*, the god of writing is thus a subordinate character, a second, a technocrat without power of decision, an engineer, a clever, ingenious servant who has been granted an audience with the king of the gods. The king has been kind enough to admit him to his counsel. Theuth presents a *tekhne* and a *pharmakon* to the king, father, and god who speaks or commands with his sun-filled voice. When the latter has made his sentence

16. Cf. Jacques Vandier, *La Religion égyptienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949), esp. pp. 64–65.

known, when he has let it drop from on high, when he has in the same blow prescribed that the *pharmakon* be dropped, Theuth will not respond. The forces present wish him to remain in his place.

Doesn't he have the same place in Egyptian mythology? There too, Thoth is an engendered god. He often calls himself the son of the god-king, the sun-god, Ammon-Ra: "I am Thoth, the eldest son of Ra."<sup>17</sup> Ra (the sun) is god the creator, and he engenders through the mediation of the word.<sup>18</sup> His other name, the one by which he is in fact designated in the *Phaedrus*, is Ammon. The accepted sense of this proper name: the hidden.<sup>19</sup> Once again we encounter here a hidden sun, the father of all things, letting himself be represented by speech.

The configurative unity of these significations—the power of speech, the creation of being and life, the sun (which is also, as we shall see, the eye), the self-concealment—is conjugated in what could be called the history of the egg or the egg of history. The world came out of an egg. More precisely, the living creator of the life of the world came out of an egg: the sun, then, was at first carried in an eggshell. Which explains a number of Ammon-Ra's characteristics: he is also a bird, a falcon ("I am the great falcon, hatched from his egg"). But in his capacity as origin of everything, Ammon-Ra is also the origin of the egg. He is designated sometimes as the bird-sun born from the primal egg, sometimes as the originary bird, carrier of the first egg. In this case, and since the power of speech is one with the power of creation, certain texts speak of "the egg of the great cackler." It would make no sense here to ask the at once trivial and philosophical

17. Cf. S. Morenz, *La Religion égyptienne* (Paris: Payot, 1962), p. 58. This formulation is noteworthy, according to Morenz, through its use of the first person. "This rarity seems remarkable to us because such formulae are common in the hymns composed in Greek which involve the Egyptian goddess Isis ("I am Isis," etc.); there is thus good reason to wonder whether this does not point to some extra-Egyptian origin of these hymns."

18. Cf. S. Sauneron, p. 123: "The initial god had only to speak to create; and the beings and things evoked were born through his voice," etc.

19. Cf. Morenz, p. 46, and S. Sauneron, who provides the following account: "What his name signifies exactly, we do not know. But it was pronounced in the same way as another word meaning 'to hide,' 'to conceal oneself,' and the scribes played on that assonance so as to define Ammon as the great god who masks his real countenance before his children. . . . Some went even further than that: Hecataeus of Abdera records a sacerdotal tradition according to which this name (Ammon) is supposed to be the expression used in Egypt to call someone. . . . It is indeed true that the word *amoni* means 'come,' 'come to me'; it is a fact, furthermore, that certain hymns begin with the words *Amoni Amoun* . . . 'Come to me, Ammon.' The similarity of sound alone between these two words made the priests suspect that there was some intimate link between them—to see therein an explanation of the divine name: thus, in addressing the primordial god . . . as an invisible, hidden being, they invite and exhort him, calling him Ammon, to show himself to them and unmask himself" (p. 127).

question of "the chicken or the egg," of the logical, chronological, or ontological priority of the cause over the effect. This question has been magnificently answered by certain sarcophagi: "O Ra, who art in thy egg." If we add that this egg is also a "hidden egg,"<sup>20</sup> we shall have constituted but also opened up the system of these significations.

The subordination of Thoth, the ibis, eldest son of the original bird, is marked in several ways: in the Memphitic doctrine, for example, Thoth is the executor, through language, of Horus' creative project.<sup>21</sup> He bears the signs of the great sun-god. He interprets him as a spokesman, a standard-bearer. And like his Greek counterpart, Hermes, whom Plato moreover never mentions, he occupies the role of messenger-god, of clever intermediary, ingenious and subtle enough to steal, and always to steal away. The signifier-god. Whatever he has to enounce or inform in words has already been thought by Horus. Language, of which he is depositary and secretary, can thus only represent, so as to transmit the message, an already formed divine thought, a fixed design.<sup>22</sup> The message itself is not, but only represents, the absolutely creative moment. It is a second and secondary word. And when Thoth is concerned with the spoken rather than with the written word, which is rather seldom, he is never the absolute author or initiator of language. On the contrary, he introduces difference into language and it is to him that the origin of the plurality of languages is attributed.<sup>23</sup> (Later, we will ask, turning back to Plato and to the *Philebus*, whether differentiation is really a second step and whether this "secondarity" is not the emergence of the grapheme as the very origin and possibility

20. Cf. Morenz, pp. 232-33. The paragraph that is about to end here will have marked the fact that this pharmacy of Plato's also brings into play [*entraîne*] Bataille's text, inscribing within the story of the egg the sun of the accursed part [*la partie maudite*]; the whole of that essay, as will quickly become apparent, being itself nothing but a reading of *Finnegans Wake*.

21. Cf. Vandier, p. 36: "These two gods Horus and Thoth were said to have been associates in the creative act, Horus representing the thought that conceives and Thoth the speech that executes" (p. 64). Cf. also A. Erman, *La Religion des Egyptiens* (Paris: Payot), p. 118.

22. Cf. Morenz, pp. 46-47; and Festugière, pp. 70-73. As a messenger, Thoth is consequently also an interpreter, *hermèneus*. This is one, among numerous others, of the features of his resemblance with Hermes. Festugière analyzes this in chapter 4 of his book.

23. J. Černý cites a hymn to Thoth beginning in the following terms: "Hail to thee, Moon-Thoth, who made different the tongue of one country from another." Černý had thought this document unique, but soon discovered that Boylan (*Thoth: The Hermes of Egypt* [London, 1922]) had quoted (p. 184) another analogous papyrus ("you who distinguished [or separated] the tongue of country from country") and still another (p. 197) ("you who distinguished the tongue of every foreign land"). Cf. J. Černý, "Thoth as Creator of Languages," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 34 (1948): 121 ff; S. Saunerson, *La Différenciation des langues d'après la tradition égyptienne*, Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale du Caire (Cairo, 1960).

of *logos* itself. In the *Philebus*, Theuth is evoked indeed as the author of difference: of differentiation within language and not of the plurality of languages. But it is our belief that at their root the two problems are inseparable.)

As the god of language second and of linguistic difference, Thoth can become the god of the creative word only by metonymic substitution, by historical displacement, and sometimes by violent subversion.

This type of substitution thus puts Thoth *in Ra's place* as the moon takes the place of the sun. The god of writing thus supplies the place of Ra, supplementing him and supplanting him in his absence and essential disappearance. Such is the origin of the moon as supplement to the sun, of night light as supplement to daylight. And writing as the supplement of speech. "One day while Ra was in the sky, he said: 'Bring me Thoth,' and Thoth was straightway brought to him. The Majesty of this god said to Thoth: 'Be in the sky in my place, while I shine over the blessed of the lower regions. . . You are in my place, my replacement, and you will be called thus: Thoth, he who replaces Ra.' Then all sorts of things sprang up thanks to the play of Ra's words. He said to Thoth: 'I will cause you to embrace (ionb) the two skies with your beauty and your rays'—and thus the moon (ionb) was born. Later, alluding to the fact that Thoth, as Ra's replacement, occupies a somewhat subordinate position: 'I will cause you to send (hôb) greater ones than yourself—and thus was born the Ibis (hib), the bird of Thoth.'<sup>24</sup>

This process of substitution, which thus functions as a pure play of traces or supplements or, again, operates within the order of the pure signifier which no reality, no absolutely external reference, no transcendental signified, can come to limit, bound, or control; this substitution, which could be judged "mad" since it can go on infinitely in the element of the linguistic permutation of substitutes, of substitutes for substitutes; this unleashed chain is nevertheless not lacking in violence. One would not have understood anything of this "linguistic" "immanence" if one saw it as the peaceful milieu of a merely fictional war, an inoffensive word-play, in contrast to some raging *polemos* in "reality." It is not in any reality foreign to the "play of words" that Thoth also frequently participates in plots, perfidious intrigues, conspiracies to usurp the throne. He helps the sons do away with the father, the brothers do away with the brother that has become king. Nout, cursed by Ra, no longer disposed of a single date, a single day of the calendar on which she could give birth. Ra had blocked from her all time, all the days and periods there were for bringing a child into the world. Thoth, who also had a power of calculation over the institution of the

24. Erman, pp. 90-91.

calendar and the march of time, added the five epagomenic days. This supplementary time enabled Nout to produce five children: Haroeris, Seth, Isis, Nephtys and Osiris, who would later become king in the place of his father Geb. During the reign of Osiris (the sun-king), Thoth, who was also his brother,<sup>25</sup> "initiated men into arts and letters," and "created hieroglyphic writing to enable them to fix their thoughts."<sup>26</sup> But later, he participates in the plot led by Seth, Osiris' jealous brother. The famous legend of the death of Osiris is well known: tricked into being shut up in a trunk the size of his body, he is dismembered, and his fourteen parts are scattered to the winds. After many complications, he is found and reassembled by his wife Isis, all except for the phallus, which has been swallowed by an Oxyrhynchus fish.<sup>27</sup> This does not prevent Thoth from acting with the cleverest and most oblivious opportunism. Isis, transformed into a vulture, lies on the corpse of Osiris. In that position she engenders Horus, "the child-with-his-finger-in-his-mouth," who will attack his father's murderer. The latter, Seth, tears out Horus' eye while Horus rips off Seth's testicles. When Horus can get his eye back, he offers it to his father—and this eye is also the moon: Thoth, if you will—and the eye brings Osiris back to life and potency.

In the course of the fight, Thoth separates the combatants and, in his role of god-doctor-pharmacist-magician, sews up their wounds and heals them of their mutilation. Later, when the eye and testicles are back in place, a trial is held, during which Thoth turns on Seth whose accomplice he had nevertheless once been, and confirms as true the words of Osiris.<sup>28</sup>

As a substitute capable of doubling for the king, the father, the sun, and the word, distinguished from these only by dint of representing, repeating, and masquerading, Thoth was naturally also capable of totally supplanting them and appropriating all their attributes. He is added as the essential attribute of what he is added to, and from which almost nothing distinguishes him. He differs from speech or divine light only as the revealer from the revealed. Barely.<sup>29</sup>

25. Ibid. p. 96.

26. Vandier, p. 51.

27. Ibid. p. 52.

28. Erman, p. 101

29. Thus it is that the god of writing can become the god of creative speech. This is a structural possibility derived from his supplementary status and from the logic of the supplement. The same can also be seen to occur in the evolution of the history of mythology. Festugière, in particular, points this out: "Thoth, however, does not remain content with this secondary rank. At the time when the priests in Egypt were forging cosmogonies in which the local clergy of each area sought to give the primary role to the god it honored, the

But before, as it were, his adequacy of replacement and usurpation, Thoth is essentially the god of writing, the secretary of Ra and the nine gods, the hierogrammate and the hypomnetographer.<sup>30</sup> Now, it is precisely by pointing out, as we shall see, that the *pharmakon* of writing is good for *hypomnēsis* (re-memoration, recollection, consignation) and not for the *mnēmē* (living, knowing memory) that Thamus, in the *Phaedrus*, condemns it as being of little worth.

In later episodes of the Osiris cycle, Thoth also becomes the scribe and bookkeeper of Osiris, who, it should not be forgotten, is then considered his brother. Thoth is represented as the model and patron of scribes, so important to the chancelleries of the Pharaohs: "while the sun god is the universal master, Thoth is his top functionary, his vizir, who stands near him in his ship in order to submit his reports."<sup>31</sup> As "Master of the books," he becomes, by dint of consigning them, registering them, keeping account of them, and guarding their stock, the "master of divine words."<sup>32</sup> His female counterpart writes, too: her name, Seshat, doubtless means *she-who-writes*. "Mistress of libraries," she records the exploits of the kings. The first goddess versed in the art of engraving, she marks the names of the kings on a tree in the temple of Heliopolis, while Thoth keeps account of the years on a notched pole. There is also the famous scene of the royal intitulation reproduced on the bas-reliefs of numerous temples: the king is seated beneath a persea-tree while Thoth and Seshat inscribe his name on the leaves of a sacred tree.<sup>33</sup> And also the scene of the last judgment: in the underworld, opposite Osiris, Thoth records the weight of the heart-souls of the dead.<sup>34</sup>

For it goes without saying that the god of writing must also be the god of death. We should not forget that, in the *Phaedrus*, another thing held

theologians of Hermopolis, who were competing with those of the Delta and of Heliopolis, elaborated a cosmogony in which the principal share fell to Thoth. Since Thoth was a magician, and since he knew of the power of sounds which, when emitted properly, unfailingly produce their effect, it was by means of voice, of speech, or rather, incantation, that Thoth was said to have created the world. Thoth's voice is thus creative: it shapes and creates; and, condensing and solidifying into matter, it becomes a being. Thoth becomes identified with his breath; his exhalation alone causes all things to be born. It is not impossible that these Hermopolitan speculations may offer some similarity with the *Logos* of the Greeks—at once Speech, Reason, and Demiurge—and with the *Sophia* of the Alexandrian Jews; perhaps the Priests of Thoth even underwent, well before the Christian era, the influence of Greek thought, but this cannot be solidly affirmed" (p. 68).

30. Ibid.; cf. also Vandier, *passim*, and Erman, *passim*.

31. Erman, p. 81.

32. Ibid.

33. Vandier, p. 182.

34. Vandier, pp. 136-37; Morenz, p. 173; Festugière, p. 68.

against the invention of the *pharmakon* is that it substitutes the breathless sign for the living voice, claims to do without the father (who is both living and life-giving) of *logos*, and can no more answer for itself than a sculpture or inanimate painting, etc. In all the cycles of Egyptian mythology, Thoth presides over the organization of death. The master of writing, numbers, and calculation does not merely write down the weight of dead souls; he first counts out the days of life, *enumerates* history. His arithmetic thus covers the events of divine biography. He is "the one who measures the length of the lives of gods and men."<sup>35</sup> He behaves like a chief of funereal protocol, charged in particular with the dressing of the dead.

Sometimes the dead person takes the place of the scribe. Within the space of such a scene, the dead one's place [*la place du mort*; also = the dummy, in bridge] then falls to Thoth. One can read on the pyramids the celestial history of one such soul: " 'Where is he going?' asks a great bull threatening him with his horn" (we should note in passing that another name for Thoth, Ra's nocturnal representative, is the "bull among the stars"). " 'He's going full of vital energy to the skies, to see his father, to contemplate Ra,' and the terrifying creature lets him pass." (The books of the dead, placed in the coffin next to the corpse, contained in particular formulas enabling him to "go out into the light of day" and see the sun. The dead person must see the sun: death is the prerequisite, or even the experience, of that face-to-face encounter. One thinks of the *Phaedo*.) God the father welcomes him into his bark, and "it even happens that he lets off his own celestial scribe and puts the dead man *in his place*, so that he judges, arbitrates, and gives orders to one who is greater than himself."<sup>36</sup> The dead man can also simply be identified with Thoth: "he is simply called a god; he is Thoth, the strongest of the gods."<sup>37</sup>

The hierarchical opposition between son and father, subject and king, death and life, writing and speech, etc., naturally completes its system with that between night and day, West and East, moon, and sun. Thoth, the "nocturnal representative of Ra, the bull among the stars,"<sup>38</sup> turns toward the west. He is the god of the moon, either as identified with it or as its protector.<sup>39</sup>

The system of these traits brings into play an original kind of logic: the figure of Thoth is opposed to its other (father, sun, life, speech, origin or

35. Morenz, pp. 47-48.

36. Erman, p. 249.

37. Ibid. p. 250.

38. Ibid. p. 41.

39. Boylan, pp. 62-75; Vandier, p. 65; Morenz, p. 54; Festugière, p. 67.

orient, etc.), but as that which at once supplements and supplants it. Thoth extends or opposes by repeating or replacing. By the same token, the figure of Thoth takes shape and takes its shape from the very thing it resists and substitutes for. But it thereby opposes *itself*, passes into its other, and this messenger-god is truly a god of the absolute passage between opposites. If he had any identity—but he is precisely the god of nonidentity—he would be that *coincidentia oppositorum* to which we will soon have recourse again. In distinguishing himself from his opposite, Thoth also imitates it, becomes its sign and representative, obeys it and *conforms* to it, replaces it, by violence if need be. He is thus the father's other, the father, and the subversive movement of replacement. The god of writing is thus at once his father, his son, and himself. He cannot be assigned a fixed spot in the play of differences. Sly, slippery, and masked, an intriguer and a card, like Hermes, he is neither king nor jack, but rather a sort of *joker*, a floating signifier, a wild card, one who puts play into play.

This god of resurrection is less interested in life or death than in death as a repetition of life and life as a rehearsal of death, in the awakening of life and in the recommencement of death. This is what *numbers*, of which he is also the inventor and patron, mean. Thoth repeats everything in the addition of the supplement: in adding to and doubling as the sun, he is other than the sun and the same as it; other than the good and the same, etc. Always taking a place not his own, a place one could call that of the dead or the dummy, he has neither a proper place nor a proper name. His propriety or property is impropriety or inappropriateness, the floating indetermination that allows for substitution and play. *Play*, of which he is also the inventor, as Plato himself reminds us. It is to him that we owe the games of dice (*kubieia*) and draughts (*petteia*) (274d). He would be the mediating movement of dialectics if he did not also mimic it, indefinitely preventing it, through this ironic doubling, from reaching some final fulfillment or eschatological reappropriation. Thoth is never present. Nowhere does he appear in person. No being-there can properly be *his own*.

Every act of his is marked by this unstable ambivalence. This god of calculation, arithmetic, and rational science<sup>40</sup> also presides over the occult sciences, astrology and alchemy. He is the god of magic formulas that calm the sea, of secret accounts, of hidden texts: an archetype of Hermes, god of cryptography no less than of every other -graphy.

40. Morenz, p. 95. Another of Thoth's companions is Maat, goddess of truth. She is also "daughter of Ra, mistress of the sky, she who governs the double country, the eye of Ra which has no match." Erman, in the page devoted to Maat, notes: ". . . one of her insignia, God knows why, was a vulture feather" (p. 82).

Science and magic, the passage between life and death, the supplement to evil and to lack: the privileged domain of Thoth had, finally, to be medicine. All his powers are summed up and find employment there. The god of writing, who knows how to put an end to life, can also heal the sick. And even the dead.<sup>41</sup> The steles of Horus on the Crocodiles tell of how the king of the gods sends Thoth down to heal Harsiesis, who has been bitten by a snake in his mother's absence.<sup>42</sup>

The god of writing is thus also a god of medicine. Of "medicine": both a science and an occult drug. Of the remedy and the poison. The god of writing is the god of the *pharmakon*. And it is writing as a *pharmakon* that he presents to the king in the *Phaedrus*, with a humility as unsettling as a dare.

41. Vandier, pp. 71 ff. Cf. especially Festugière, pp. 287 ff. where a number of texts on Thoth as the inventor of magic are assembled. One of them, which particularly interests us, begins: "A formula to be recited before the sun: 'I am Thoth, inventor and creator of philters and letters, etc.' " (292).

42. Vandier, p. 230. Cryptography, medicinal magic, and the figure of the serpent are in fact intertwined in an astonishing folk tale transcribed by G. Maspéro in *Les Contes populaires de l'Egypte ancienne* (Paris: E. Guilmoro, 1911). It is the tale of Satni-Khamois and the mummies. Satni-Khamois, the son of a king, "spent his days running about the metropolis of Memphis so as to read the books written in sacred script and the books of the *Double House of Life*. One day a nobleman came along and made fun of him. —'Why are you laughing at me?' The nobleman said: —'I am not laughing at you; but can I help laughing when you spend your time here deciphering writings that have no powers? If you really wish to read effective writing, come with me; I will send you to the place where you will find the book which Thoth himself has written with his own hand and which will place you just below the gods. There are two formulas written in it: if you recite the first, you will charm the sky, the earth, the world of night, the mountains, the waters; you will understand what the birds of the sky and the reptiles are all saying, as they are; you will see the fish, for a divine force will make them rise to the surface of the water. If you read the second formula, even if you are in the grave you will reassume the form you had on earth; even shall you see the sun rising in the sky, and its cycle, and the moon in the form it has when it appears.' Satni cried: 'By my life! let me know what you wish and I will have it granted you; but take me to the place where I can find the book!' The nobleman said to Satni: 'The book in question is not mine. It is in the heart of the necropolis, in the tomb of Nenoferkeptah, son of king Minebptah. . . . Take great heed not to take this book away from him, for he would have you bring it back, a pitchfork and a rod in his hand, a lighted brazier on his head. . . .' Deep inside the tomb, light was shining out of the book. The doubles of the king and of his family were beside him, 'through the virtues of the book of Thoth.' . . . All this was repeating itself. Nenoferkeptah had already himself lived Satni's story. The priest had told him: 'The book in question is in the middle of the sea of Coptos, in an iron casket. The iron casket is inside a bronze casket; the bronze casket is inside a casket of cinnamon wood; the casket of cinnamon wood is inside a casket of ivory and ebony. The casket of ivory and ebony is inside a silver casket. The silver casket is inside a golden casket, and the book is found therein. [Scribe's error? the first version I consulted had consigned or reproduced it; a later edition of Maspéro's book pointed it out in a note: "The scribe has made a mistake here in his enumeration. He should have said: *inside* the iron casket is . . . etc." (Item left as evidence for a logic of inclusion).] And there is a schoene [in Ptolemy's day, equal to about 12,000 royal cubits of

#### 4. The Pharmakon

This is the malady in them all for which law must find a *pharmakon*. Now it is a sound old adage that it is hard to fight against two enemies at once—even when they are enemies from opposite quarters. We see the truth of this in medicine and elsewhere.

Let us return to the text of Plato, assuming we have ever really left it. The word *pharmakon* is caught in a chain of significations. The play of that chain seems systematic. But the system here is not, simply, that of the intentions of an author who goes by the name of Plato. The system is not primarily that of what someone *meant-to-say* [*un vouloir-dire*]. Finely regulated communications are established, through the play of language, among diverse functions of the word and, within it, among diverse strata or regions of culture. These communications or corridors of meaning can sometimes be declared or clarified by Plato when he plays upon them "voluntarily," a

0.52m] of serpents, scorpions of all kinds, and reptiles around the casket in which the book lies, and there is an immortal serpent coiled around the casket in question. . . . After three tries, the imprudent hero kills the serpent, drinks the book dissolved in beer, and thus acquires limitless knowledge. Thoth goes to Ra to complain, and provokes the worst of punishments.

Let us note, finally, before leaving the Egyptian figure of Thoth, that he possesses, in addition to Hermes of Greece, a remarkable counterpart in the figure of Nabu, son of Marduk. In Babylonian and Assyrian mythology, "Nabu is essentially the son-god and, just as Marduk eclipses his father, Ea, we will see Nabu usurping Marduk's place." (E. Dhorme, *Les Religions de Babylone et d'Assyrie* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France], pp. 150 ff.) Marduk, the father of Nabu, is the sun-god. Nabu, "lord of the reed," "creator of writing," "bearer of the tables of the fates of the gods," sometimes goes ahead of his father from whom he borrows the symbolic instrument, the *marru*. "A votive object made of copper, uncovered in Susa, representing a snake holding in its mouth a sort of pall," was marked with the inscription 'the *marru* of the god Nabu' " (Dhorme, p. 155). Cf. also M. David, *Les Dieux et le Destin en Babylone* (Paris: P.U.F., 1949), pp. 86 ff.

One could spell out one by one the points of resemblance between Thoth and the biblical Nabu (Nebo).

word we put in quotation marks because what it designates, to content ourselves with remaining within the closure of these oppositions, is only a mode of "submission" to the necessities of a given "language." None of these concepts can translate the relation we are aiming at here. Then again, in other cases, Plato can *not* see the links, can leave them in the shadow or break them up. And yet these links go on working of themselves. In spite of him? thanks to him? in *his* text? *outside* his text? but then where? between his text and the language? for what reader? at what moment? To answer such questions in principle and in general will seem impossible; and that will give us the suspicion that there is some malformation in the question itself, in each of its concepts, in each of the oppositions it thus accredits. One can always choose to believe that if Plato did not put certain possibilities of passage into practice, or even interrupted them, it is because he perceived them but left them in the impracticable. This formulation is possible only if one avoids all recourse to the difference between conscious and unconscious, voluntary and involuntary, a very crude tool for dealing with relations in and to language. The same would be true of the opposition between speech—or writing—and language if that opposition, as is often the case, harked back to the above categories.

This reason alone should already suffice to prevent us from reconstituting the entire chain of significations of the *pharmakon*. No absolute privilege allows us absolutely to master its textual system. This limitation can and should nevertheless be displaced to a certain extent. The possibilities and powers of displacement are extremely diverse in nature, and, rather than enumerating here all their titles, let us attempt to produce some of their effects as we go along, as we continue our march through the Platonic problematic of writing.<sup>43</sup>

We have just sketched out the correspondence between the figure of Thoth in Egyptian mythology and a certain organization of concepts, philosophemes, metaphors, and mythemes picked up from what is called the Platonic text. The word *pharmakon* has seemed to us extremely apt for the task of tying all the threads of this correspondence together. Let us now reread, in a rendering derived from Robin, this sentence from the *Phaedrus*: "Here, O King, says Theuth, is a discipline (*mathēma*) that will make the Egyptians wiser (*sophōterous*) and will improve their memories (*mnēmonikōter-*

43. I take the liberty of referring the reader, in order to give him a preliminary, indicative direction, to the "Question of Method" proposed in *De la grammatologie* [translated by Gayatri Spivak as *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976)]. With a few precautions, one could say that *pharmakon* plays a role *analogous*, in this reading of Plato, to that of *supplément* in the reading of Rousseau.

*ous*): both memory (*mnēmē*) and instruction (*sophia*) have found their remedy (*pharmakon*)."

The common translation of *pharmakon* by *remedy* [*remède*]—a beneficent drug—is not, of course, inaccurate. Not only can *pharmakon* really mean *remedy* and thus erase, on a certain surface of its functioning, the ambiguity of its meaning. But it is even quite obvious here, the stated intention of Theuth being precisely to stress the worth of his product, that he *turns* the word on its strange and invisible pivot, presenting it from a single one, the most reassuring, of its *pôles*. This medicine is beneficial; it repairs and produces, accumulates and remedies, increases knowledge and reduces forgetfulness. Its translation by "remedy" nonetheless erases, in going outside the Greek language, the other pole reserved in the word *pharmakon*. It cancels out the resources of ambiguity and makes more difficult, if not impossible, an understanding of the context. As opposed to "drug" or even "medicine," *remedy* says the transparent rationality of science, technique, and therapeutic causality, thus excluding from the text any leaning toward the magic virtues of a force whose effects are hard to master, a dynamics that constantly surprises the one who tries to manipulate it as master and as subject.

Now, *on the one hand*, Plato is bent on presenting writing as an occult, and therefore suspect, power. Just like painting, to which he will later compare it, and like optical illusions and the techniques of *mimēsis* in general. His mistrust of the mantic and magic, of sorcerers and casters of spells, is well attested.<sup>44</sup> In the *Laws*, in particular, he reserves them terrible punishments. According to an operation we will have cause to remember later, he recommends that they be excluded—expelled or cut off—from the social arena. Expulsion and ostracism can even be accomplished at the same time, by keeping them in prison, where they would no longer be visited by free men but only by the slave that would bring them their food; then by depriving them of burial: "At death he shall be cast out beyond the borders without burial, and if any free citizen has a hand in his burial, he shall be liable to a prosecution for impiety at the suit of any who cares to take proceedings" (X, 909b-c).

*On the other hand*, the King's reply presupposes that the effectiveness of the *pharmakon* can be reversed: it can worsen the ill instead of remedy it. Or rather, the royal answer suggests that Theuth, by ruse and/or naïveté, has exhibited the reverse of the true effects of writing. In order to vaunt the

44. Cf. in particular *Republic* II, 364 ff; Letter VII, 333e. The problem is raised with copious and useful references in E. Moutsopoulos, *La Musique dans l'œuvre de Platon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), pp. 13 ff.

worth of his invention, Theuth would thus have denatured the *pharmakon*, said the opposite (*toumantion*) of what writing is capable of. He has passed a poison off as a remedy. So that in translating *pharmakon* by *remedy*, what one respects is not what Theuth intended, nor even what Plato intended, but rather what the King says Theuth has said, effectively deluding either the King or himself. If Plato's text then goes on to give the King's pronouncement as the truth of Theuth's production and his speech as the truth of writing, then the translation *remedy* makes Theuth into a simpleton or a flimflam artist, *from the sun's point of view*. From that viewpoint, Theuth has no doubt played on the word, interrupting, for his own purposes, the communication between the two opposing values. But the King restores that communication, and the translation takes no account of this. And all the while the two interlocutors, whatever they do and whether or not they choose, remain within the unity of the same signifier. Their discourse plays within it, which is no longer the case in translation. *Remedy* is the rendition that, more than "medicine" or "drug" would have done, obliterates the virtual, dynamic references to the other uses of the same word in Greek. The effect of such a translation is most importantly to destroy what we will later call Plato's anagrammatic writing, to destroy it by interrupting the relations interwoven among different functions of the same word in different places, relations that are virtually but necessarily "citational." When a word inscribes itself as the citation of another sense of the same word, when the textual center-stage of the word *pharmakon*, even while it means *remedy*, cites, re-cites, and makes legible that which *in the same word* signifies, in another spot and on a different level of the stage, *poison* (for example, since that it not the only other thing *pharmakon* means), the choice of only one of these renditions by the translator has as its first effect the neutralization of the citational play, of the "anagram," and, in the end, quite simply of the very textuality of the translated text. It could no doubt be shown, and we will try to do so when the time comes, that this blockage of the passage among opposing values is itself already an effect of "Platonism," the consequence of something already at work in the translated text, in the relation between "Plato" and his "language." There is no contradiction between this proposition and the preceding one. Textuality being constituted by differences and by differences from differences, it is by nature absolutely heterogeneous and is constantly composing with the forces that tend to annihilate it.

One must therefore accept, follow, and analyze the composition of these two forces or of these two gestures. That composition is even, in a certain sense, the single theme of this essay. On the one hand Plato decides in favor

of a logic that does not tolerate such passages between opposing senses of the same word, all the more so since such a passage would reveal itself to be something quite different from simple confusion, alternation, or the dialectic of opposites. And yet, on the other hand, the *pharmakon*, if our reading confirms itself, constitutes the original medium of that decision, the element that precedes it, comprehends it, goes beyond it, can never be reduced to it, and is not separated from it by a single word (or signifying apparatus), operating within the Greek and Platonic text. All translations into languages that are the heirs and depositaries of Western metaphysics thus produce on the *pharmakon* an *effect of analysis* that violently destroys it, reduces it to one of its simple elements by interpreting it, paradoxically enough, in the light of the ulterior developments it itself has made possible. Such an interpretative translation is thus as violent as it is impotent: it destroys the *pharmakon* but at the same time forbids itself access to it, leaving it untouched in its reserve.

The translation by "remedy" can thus be neither accepted nor simply rejected. Even if one intended thereby to save the "rational" pole and the laudatory intention, the idea of the *correct* use of the *science or art* of medicine, one would still run every risk of being deceived by language. Writing is no more valuable, says Plato, as a remedy than as a poison. Even before Thamus has let fall his pejorative sentence, the remedy is disturbing in itself. One must indeed be aware of the fact that Plato is suspicious of the *pharmakon* in general, even in the case of drugs used exclusively for therapeutic ends, even when they are wielded with good intentions, and even when they are as such effective. There is no such thing as a harmless remedy. The *pharmakon* can never be simply beneficial.

For two different reasons, and at two different depths. First of all because the beneficial essence or virtue of a *pharmakon* does not prevent it from hurting. The *Protagoras* classes the *pharmaka* among the things than can be both good (*agatha*) and painful (*aniara*) (354a). The *pharmakon* is always caught in the mixture (*summeikton*) mentioned in the *Philebus* (46a), examples of which are *hubris*, that violent, unbounded excess of pleasure that makes the profligate cry out like a madman (45e), and "relieving an itch by rubbing, and anything that can be treated by such a remedy (*ouk allēs deomena pharmaxeōs*)."<sup>1</sup> This type of painful pleasure, linked as much to the malady as to its treatment, is a *pharmakon* in itself. It partakes of both good and ill, of the agreeable and the disagreeable. Or rather, it is within its mass that these oppositions are able to sketch themselves out.

Then again, more profoundly, even beyond the question of pain, the pharmaceutical remedy is essentially harmful because it is artificial. In this,

Plato is following Greek tradition and, more precisely, the doctors of Cos. The *pharmakon* goes against natural life: not only life unaffected by any illness, but even sick life, or rather the life of the sickness. For Plato believes in the natural life and normal development, so to speak, of disease. In the *Timaeus*, natural disease, like *logos* in the *Phaedrus*, is compared to a living organism which must be allowed to develop according to its own norms and forms, its specific rhythms and articulations. In disturbing the normal and natural progress of the illness, the *pharmakon* is thus the enemy of the living in general, whether healthy or sick. One must bear this in mind, and Plato invites us to do so, when writing is proposed as a *pharmakon*. Contrary to life, writing—or, if you will, the *pharmakon*—can only *displace* or even *aggravate* the ill. Such will be, in its logical outlines, the objection the king raises to writing: under pretext of supplementing memory, writing makes one even more forgetful; far from increasing knowledge, it diminishes it. Writing does not answer the needs of memory, it aims to the side, does not reinforce the *mnēmē*, but only *hypomnēsis*. And if, in the two texts we are now going to look at together, the formal structure of the argument is indeed the same; if in both cases what is supposed to produce the positive and eliminate the negative does nothing but *displace* and at the same time *multiply* the effects of the negative, leading the lack that was its cause to proliferate, the necessity for this is inscribed in the *sign pharmakon*, which Robin (for example) dismembers, here as remedy, there as drug. We expressly said the *sign pharmakon*, intending thereby to mark that what is in question is *indissociably* a signifier and a concept signified.

A) In the *Timaeus*, which spreads itself out, from its opening pages, in the space between Egypt and Greece as in that between writing and speech ("You Hellenes are never anything but children, and there is not an old man among you," whereas in Egypt "everything has been written down by us of old": *panta gegrammaena* [22b, 23a]), Plato demonstrates that, among all the body's movements, the best is natural motion, which spontaneously, from within, "is produced in a thing by itself":

Now of all motions that is the best which is produced in a thing by itself, for it is most akin to the motion of thought and of the universe, but that motion which is caused by others is not so good, and worst of all is that which moves the body, when at rest, in parts only and by some agency alien to it. Wherefore of all modes of purifying and reuniting the body the best is gymnastics; the next best is a surging motion, as in sailing or any other mode of conveyance which is not

fatiguing; the third sort of motion may be of use in a case of extreme necessity, but in any other will be adopted by no man of sense—I mean the purgative treatment (*tēs pharmakeutikēs katharsēs*) of physicians; for diseases unless they are very dangerous should not be irritated by medicines (*ouk erististeon pharmakeiai*), since every form of disease is in a manner akin to the living being (*tēi tōn zōōn phusei*), whose complex frame (*sustasis*) has an appointed term of life. For not the whole race only, but each individual—barring inevitable accidents—comes into the world having a fixed span. . . . And this holds also of the constitution of diseases; if anyone regardless of the appointed time tries to subdue them by medicine (*pharmakeiai*), he only aggravates and multiplies them. Wherefore we ought always to manage them by regimen, as far as a man can spare the time, and not provoke a disagreeable enemy by medicines (*pharmakeonta*) (89a-d)

The reader will have noted that:

1. The noxiousness of the *pharmakon* is indicted at the precise moment the entire context seems to authorize its translation by "remedy" rather than poison.

2. The natural illness of the living is defined in its essence as an *allergy*, a reaction to the aggression of an alien element. And it is necessary that the most general concept of disease should be *allergy*, from the moment the natural life of the body ought only to follow its own endogenous motions.

3. Just as health is auto-nomous and auto-matic, "normal" disease demonstrates its autarky by confronting the pharmaceutical aggression with *metastatic* reactions which displace the site of the disease, with the eventual result that the points of resistance are reinforced and multiplied. "Normal" disease defends itself. In thus escaping the supplementary constraints, the superadded pathogeny of the *pharmakon*, the disease continues to follow its own course.

4. This schema implies that the living being is finite (and its malady as well): that it can have a relation with its other, then, in the allergic reaction, that it has a limited lifetime, that death is already inscribed and prescribed within its structure, in its "constitutive triangles." ("The triangles in us are originally framed with the power to last for a certain time beyond which no man can prolong his life." *Ibid.*) The immortality and perfection of a living being would consist in its having no relation at all with any outside. That is the case with God (cf. *Republic* II, 381b-c). God has no allergies. Health and virtue (*hugieia kai aretē*), which are often associated in speaking of the body and, analogously, of the soul (cf. *Gorgias*, 479b), always proceed from

within. The *pharmakon* is that which, always springing up from without, acting like the outside itself, will never have any definable virtue of its own. But how can this supplementary parasite be excluded by maintaining the boundary, or, let us say, the triangle?

B) The system of these four features is reconstituted when, in the *Phaedrus*, King Thamus depresses and depreciates the *pharmakon* of writing, a word that should thus not too hastily be considered a metaphor, unless the metaphorical possibility is allowed to retain all its power of enigma. Perhaps we can now read the King's response:

But the king said, "Theuth, my master of arts (*Ō tekhnikōtate Theuth*), to one man it is given to create the elements of an art, to another to judge the extent of harm and usefulness it will have for those who are going to employ it. And now, since you are father of written letters (*patēr ōn grammatiōn*), your paternal goodwill has led you to pronounce the very opposite (*touariantion*) of what is their real power. The fact is that this invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it because they will not need to exercise their memories (*lēthēn men en psuchais parexei mnēmēs ameletēsiai*), being able to rely on what is written, using the stimulus of external marks that are alien to themselves (*dia pistin graphēs exōthen hup' allotriōn tupōn*) rather than, from within, their own unaided powers to call things to mind (*ouk endothen autous huph' hautōn anamimnēskomenous*). So it's not a remedy for memory, but for reminding, that you have discovered (*oukoun mnēmēs, alla hupomnēsōs, pharmakon hēures*). And as for wisdom (*sophias de*), you're equipping your pupils with only a semblance (*doxan*) of it, not with truth (*alētheian*). Thanks to you and your invention, your pupils will be widely read without benefit of a teacher's instruction; in consequence, they'll entertain the delusion that they have wide knowledge, while they are, in fact, for the most part incapable of real judgment. They will also be difficult to get on with since they will be men filled with the conceit of wisdom (*doxosphor*), not men of wisdom (*anti sophōn*)."  
(274e – 275b)

The king, the father of speech, has thus asserted his authority over the father of writing. And he has done so with severity, without showing the one who occupies the place of his son any of that paternal good will exhibited by Theuth toward his own children, his "letters." Thamus presses on, multiplies his reservations, and visibly wants to leave Theuth no hope.

In order for writing to produce, as he says, the "opposite" effect from what one might expect, in order for this *pharmakon* to show itself, with use, to be injurious, its effectiveness, its power, its *dunamis* must, of course, be ambiguous. As is said of the *pharmakon* in the *Protagoras*, the *Philebus*, the *Timaeus*. It is precisely this ambiguity that Plato, through the mouth of the King, attempts to master, to dominate by inserting its definition into simple, clear-cut oppositions: good and evil, inside and outside, true and false, essence and appearance. If one rereads the reasons adduced by the royal sentence, one will find this series of oppositions there. And set in place in such a way that the *pharmakon*, or, if you will, writing, can only go around in circles: writing is only apparently good for memory, seemingly able to help it from within, through its own motion, to know what is true. But in truth, writing is essentially bad, external to memory, productive not of science but of belief, not of truth but of appearances. The *pharmakon* produces a play of appearances which enable it to pass for truth, etc.

But while, in the *Philebus* and the *Protagoras*, the *pharmakon*, because it is painful, seems bad whereas it is beneficial, here, in the *Phaedrus* as in the *Timaeus*, it is passed off as a helpful remedy whereas it is in truth harmful. Bad ambiguity is thus opposed to good ambiguity, a deceitful intention to a mere appearance. Writing's case is grave.

It is not enough to say that writing is conceived out of this or that series of oppositions. Plato thinks of writing, and tries to comprehend it, to dominate it, on the basis of *opposition* as such. In order for these contrary values (good/evil, true/false, essence/appearance, inside/outside, etc.) to be in opposition, each of the terms must be simply *external* to the other, which means that one of these oppositions (the opposition between inside and outside) must already be accredited as the matrix of all possible opposition. And one of the elements of the system (or of the series) must also stand as the very possibility of systematicity or seriality in general. And if one got to thinking that something like the *pharmakon*—or writing—far from being governed by these oppositions, opens up their very possibility without letting itself be comprehended by them; if one got to thinking that it can only be out of something like writing—or the *pharmakon*—that the strange difference between inside and outside can spring; if, consequently, one got to thinking that writing as a *pharmakon* cannot simply be assigned a site within what it situates, cannot be subsumed under concepts whose contours it draws, leaves only its ghost to a logic that can only seek to govern it insofar as logic arises from it—one would then have to *bend* [*plier*] into strange contortions what could no longer even simply be called logic or discourse. All the more so if what we have just imprudently called a *ghost*

can no longer be distinguished, with the same assurance, from truth, reality, living flesh, etc. One must accept the fact that here, for once, to leave a ghost behind will in a sense be to salvage nothing.

This little exercise will no doubt have sufficed to warn the reader: to come to an understanding with Plato, as it is sketched out in this text, is already to slip away from the recognized models of commentary, from the genealogical or structural reconstitution of a system, whether this reconstitution tries to corroborate or refute, confirm or "overturn," mark a return-to-Plato or give him a "send-off" in the quite Platonic manner of the *khairein*. What is going on here is something altogether different. That too, of course, but still completely other. If the reader has any doubt, he is invited to reread the preceding paragraph. Every model of classical reading is exceeded there at some point, precisely at the point where it attaches to the inside of the series—it being understood that this excess is not a *simple exit out* of the series, since that would obviously fall under one of the categories of the series. The excess—but can we still call it that?—is only a *certain displacement* of the series. And a certain *folding back* [*repli*]—which will later be called a *re-mark*—of opposition within the series, or even within its dialectic. We cannot qualify it, name it, comprehend it under a simple concept without immediately being off the mark. Such a functional displacement, which concerns differences (and, as we shall see, "simulacra") more than any conceptual identities signified, is a real and necessary challenge. It writes itself. One must therefore begin by reading it.

If writing, according to the king and under the sun, produces the opposite effect from what is expected, if the *pharmakon* is pernicious, it is because, like the one in the *Timaeus*, it doesn't come from around here. It comes from afar, it is external or alien: to the living, which is the right-here of the inside, to *logos* as the *zōon* it claims to assist or relieve. The imprints (*tupoi*) of writing do not inscribe themselves this time, as they do in the hypothesis of the *Theaetetus*, in the wax of the soul *in intaglio*, thus corresponding to the spontaneous, autochthonous motions of psychic life. Knowing that he can always leave his thoughts outside or check them with an external agency, with the physical, spatial, superficial marks that one lays flat on a tablet, he who has the *tekhnē* of writing at his disposal will come to rely on it. He will know that he himself can leave without the *tupoi*'s going away, that he can forget all about them without their leaving his service. They will represent him even if he forgets them; they will transmit his word even if he is not there to animate them. Even if he is dead, and only a *pharmakon* can be the wielder of such power, over death but also in cahoots

with it. The *pharmakon* and writing are thus always involved in questions of life and death.

Can it be said without conceptual anachronism—and thus without serious interpretive error—that the *tupoi* are the representatives, the *physical surrogates* of the *psychic* that is absent? It would be better to assert that the written traces no longer even belong to the order of the *phusis*, since they are not alive. They do not grow; they grow no more than what could be sown, as Socrates will say in a minute, with a reed (*kalamos*). They do violence to the natural, autonomous organization of the *mnēmē*, in which *phusis* and *psuchē* are not opposed. If writing does belong to the *phusis*, wouldn't it be to that moment of the *phusis*, to that necessary movement through which its truth, the production of its appearing, tends, says Heraclitus, to take shelter in its crypt? "Cryptogram" thus condenses in a single word a pleonastic proposition.

If one takes the king's word for it, then, it is this life of the memory that the *pharmakon* of writing would come to hypnotize: fascinating it, taking it out of itself by putting it to sleep in a monument. Confident of the permanence and independence of its *types* (*tupoi*), memory will fall asleep, will not keep itself up, will no longer keep to keeping itself alert, present, as close as possible to the truth of what is. Letting itself get stoned [*médusée*] by its own signs, its own guardians, by the types committed to the keeping and surveillance of knowledge, it will sink down into *lēthē*, overcome by non-knowledge and forgetfulness.<sup>45</sup> Memory and truth cannot be separated. The movement of *aletheia* is a deployment of *mnēmē* through and through. A deployment of living memory, of memory as psychic life in its self-presentation to itself. The powers of *lēthē* simultaneously increase the domains of death, of nontruth, of nonknowledge. This is why writing, at least insofar as it sows "forgetfulness in the soul," turns us toward the inanimate and toward nonknowledge. But it cannot be said that its essence simply and *presently* confounds it with death or nontruth. For writing has no essence or value of its own, whether positive or negative. It plays within the simulacrum. It is in its type the mime of memory, of knowledge, of truth, etc. That is why men of writing appear before the eye of God not as wise men (*sophoi*) but in truth as fake or self-proclaimed wise men (*doxosophoi*).

45. We would here like to refer the reader in particular to the extremely rich text by Jean-Pierre Vernant (who deals with these questions with quite different intentions): "Aspects mythiques de la mémoire et du temps," in *Mythe et Pensée chez les Grecs* (Paris: Maspéro, 1965). On the word *tupos*, its relations with *perigraphē* and *paradeigma*, cf. A. von Blumenthal, *Tupos und Paradeigma*, quoted by P. M. Schuhl, in *Platon et l'art de son temps*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952), p. 18, n. 4.

This is Plato's definition of the sophist. For it is above all against sophistics that this diatribe against writing is directed: it can be inscribed within the interminable trial instituted by Plato, under the name of philosophy, against the sophists. The man who relies on writing, who brags about the knowledge and powers it assures him, this simulator unmasked by Thamus has all the features of a sophist: "the imitator of him who knows," as the *Sophist* puts it (*mimētēs tou sophou*, 268c). He whom we would call the graphocrat is as much like the sophist Hippias as a brother. Like the Hippias we see in the *Lesser Hippias*, he boasts about knowing and doing all. And mainly—which Socrates twice, in two different dialogues, ironically pretends he has forgotten to include in his list—about having a better understanding than anyone else of mnemonics and mnemotechnics. This is indeed the power he considers his pride and joy:

*Socrates*: Then in astronomy also, the same man will be true and false?  
*Hippias*: It would seem so.

*Socrates*: And now, Hippias, consider the question at large about all the sciences, and see whether the same principle does not always hold. I know that in most arts you are the wisest (*sophōtatos*) of men, as I have heard you boasting in the Agora at the tables of the money-changers, when you were setting forth the great and enviable stores of your wisdom. . . . Moreover, you told us that you had brought with you poems, epic, tragic, and dithyrambic, as well as prose writings of the most various kinds, and you said that your skill was also pre-eminent in the arts which I was just now mentioning, and in the true principles of rhythm and harmony and of orthography. And, if I remember rightly, there were a great many other accomplishments in which you excelled. I have forgotten to mention your art of memory, which you regard as your special glory, and I dare say that I have forgotten many other things, but, as I was saying, only look to your own arts—and there are plenty of them—and to those of others, and tell me, having regard to the admissions which you and I have made, whether you discover any department of art or any description of wisdom or cunning, whichever name you use, in which the true and false are different and not the same. Tell me, if you can, of any. But you cannot.

*Hippias*: Not without consideration, Socrates.

*Socrates*: Not will consideration help you, Hippias, as I believe, but then if I am right, remember what the consequence will be.

*Hippias*: I do not know what you mean, Socrates.

*Socrates*: I suppose that you are not using your art of memory . . . (368a-d).

The sophist thus sells the signs and insignia of science: not memory itself (*mnēmē*), only monuments (*hypomnēmata*), inventories, archives, citations, copies, accounts, tales, lists, notes, duplicates, chronicles, genealogies, references. Not memory but memorials. He thus answers the demands of the wealthy young men, and that is where he is most warmly applauded. After admitting that his young admirers cannot stand to hear him speak of the greater part of his knowledge (*Greater Hippias*, 285c-d), the sophist must tell Socrates all:

*Socrates*: What then are the subjects on which they listen to you with pleasure and applause? Pray enlighten me; I cannot see.

*Hippias*: They delight in the genealogies of heroes and of men and in stories of the foundations of cities in olden times, and, to put it briefly, in all forms of antiquarian lore, so that because of them I have been compelled to acquire a thorough comprehension and mastery of all that branch of learning.

*Socrates*: Bless my soul, you have certainly been lucky that the Lacedaemonians do not want to hear a recital of the list of our archons, from Solon downward; you would have had some trouble learning it.

*Hippias*: Why? I can repeat fifty names after hearing them once.

*Socrates*: I am sorry, I quite forgot about your mnemonic art . . . (285d-e).

In truth, the sophist only pretends to know everything; his "polymathy" (*The Sophist*, 232a) is never anything but pretense. Insofar as writing *lends a hand* to hypomnesia and not to live memory, it, too, is foreign to true science, to anamnesia in its properly psychic motion, to truth in the process of(its) presentation, to dialectics. Writing can only *mime* them. (It could be shown, but we will spare ourselves the development here, that the problematic that today, and in this very spot, links writing with the (putting in) question of truth—and of thought and speech, which are informed by it—must necessarily exhume, without remaining at that, the conceptual monuments, the vestiges of the battlefield (*champ de bataille*), the signposts marking out the battle lines between sophistics and philosophy, and, more generally, all the buttresses erected by Platonism. In many ways, and from a viewpoint that does not cover the entire field, we are today on the eve of Platonism. Which can also, naturally, be thought of as the morning after

Hegelianism. At that specific point, the *philosophia*, the *epistēmē* are not "overturned," "rejected," "reined in," etc., in the name of something like writing; quite the contrary. But they are, according to a relation that philosophy would call *simulacrum*, according to a more subtle excess of truth, assumed and at the same time displaced into a completely different field, where one can still, but that's all, "mimic absolute knowledge," to use an expression coined by Bataille, whose name will enable us here to dispense with a whole network of references.)

The front line that is violently inscribed between Platonism and its closest other, in the form of sophistics, is far from being unified, continuous, as if stretched between two homogeneous areas. Its design is such that, through a systematic indecision, the parties and the party lines frequently exchange their respective places, imitating the forms and borrowing the paths of the opponent. These permutations are therefore possible, and if they are obliged to inscribe themselves within some common territory, the dissension no doubt remains internal and casts into absolute shadow some entirely-other of *both* sophistics and Platonism, some resistance having no common denominator with this whole commutation.

Contrary to what we have indicated earlier, there are also good reasons for thinking that the diatribe against writing is not aimed first and foremost at the sophists. On the contrary: sometimes it seems to proceed *from* them. Isn't the stricture that one should exercise one's memory rather than entrust traces to an outside agency the imperious and classical recommendation of the sophists? Plato would thus be appropriating here, once again, as he so often does, one of the sophists' argumentations. And here again, he will use it against them. And later on, after the royal judgment, Socrates' whole discourse, which we will take apart stitch by stitch, is woven out of schemes and concepts that issue from sophistics.

One must thus minutely recognize the crossing of the border. And be fully cognizant that this reading of Plato is at no time spurred on by some slogan or password of a "back-to-the-sophists" nature.

Thus, in both cases, on both sides, writing is considered suspicious and the alert exercise of memory prescribed. What Plato is attacking in sophistics, therefore, is not simply recourse to memory but, within such recourse, the substitution of the mnemonic device for live memory, of the prosthesis for the organ; the perversion that consists of replacing a limb by a thing, here, substituting the passive, mechanical "by-heart" for the active reanimation of knowledge, for its reproduction in the present. The boundary (between inside and outside, living and nonliving) separates not only speech from writing but also memory as an unveiling (re-)producing a

presence from re-memoration as the mere repetition of a monument; truth as distinct from its sign, being as distinct from types. The "outside" does not begin at the point where what we now call the psychic and the physical meet, but at the point where the *mnēmē*, instead of being present to itself in its life as a movement of truth, is supplanted by the archive, evicted by a sign of re-memoration or of com-memoration. The space of writing, space as writing, is opened up in the violent movement of this surrogation, in the difference between *mnēmē* and *hypomnēsis*. The outside is already *within* the work of memory. The evil slips in within the relation of memory to itself, in the general organization of the mnemonic activity. Memory is finite by nature. Plato recognizes this in attributing life to it. As in the case of all living organisms, he assigns it, as we have seen, certain limits. A limitless memory would in any event be not memory but infinite self-presence. Memory always therefore already needs signs in order to recall the non-present, with which it is necessarily in relation. The movement of dialectics bears witness to this. Memory is thus contaminated by its first substitute: *hypomnēsis*. But what Plato *dreams* of is a memory with no sign. That is, with no supplement. A *mnēmē* with no *hypomnēsis*, no *pharmakon*. And this at the very moment and for the very reason that he calls *dream* the confusion between the hypothetical and the anhypothetical in the realm of mathematical intelligibility (*Republic*, 533b).

Why is the surrogate or supplement dangerous? It is not, so to speak, dangerous in itself, in that aspect of it that can present itself as a thing, as a being-present. In that case it would be reassuring. But here, the supplement is not, is not a being (*on*). It is nevertheless not a simple nonbeing (*mē on*), either. Its slidings slip it out of the simple alternative presence/absence. *That* is the danger. And that is what enables the type always to pass for the original. As soon as the supplementary outside is opened, its structure implies that the supplement itself can be "typed," replaced by its double, and that a supplement to the supplement, a surrogate for the surrogate, is possible and necessary. Necessary because this movement is not a sensible, "empirical" accident: it is linked to the ideality of the *eidos* as the possibility of the repetition of the same. And writing appears to Plato (and after him to all of philosophy, which is as such constituted in this gesture) as that process of redoubling in which we are fatally (en)trained: the supplement of a supplement, the signifier, the representative of a representative. (A series whose first term or rather whose first structure does not yet—but we will do it later—have to be *kicked up* [*faire sauter*] and its irreducibility made apparent.) The structure and history of *phonetic* writing have of course played a decisive role in the determination of writing as the doubling of a

sign, the sign of a sign. The signifier of a phonic signifier. While the phonic signifier would remain in animate proximity, in the living presence of *mnēmē* or *psuchē*, the graphic signifier, which reproduces it or imitates it, goes one degree further away, falls outside of life, entrains life out of itself and puts it to sleep in the type of its double. Whence the *pharmakon*'s two misdeeds: it dulls the memory, and if it is of any assistance at all, it is not for the *mnēmē* but for *hypomnēsis*. Instead of quickening life in the original, "in person," the *pharmakon* can at best only restore its monuments. It is a debilitating poison for memory, but a remedy or tonic for its external signs, its *symptoms*, with everything that this word can connote in Greek: an empirical, contingent, superficial event, generally a fall or collapse, distinguishing itself like an index from whatever it is pointing to. Your writing cures only the symptom, the King has already said, and it is from him that we know the unbridgeable difference between the essence of the symptom and the essence of the signified; and that writing belongs to the order and exteriority of the symptom.

Thus, even though writing is external to (internal) memory, even though hypomnesia is not in itself memory, it affects memory and hypnotizes it in its very inside. That is the effect of this *pharmakon*. If it were purely external, writing would leave the intimacy or integrity of psychic memory untouched. And yet, just as Rousseau and Saussure will do in response to the same necessity, yet without discovering *other* relations between the intimate and the alien, Plato maintains *both* the exteriority of writing *and* its power of maleficent penetration, its ability to affect or infect what lies deepest inside. The *pharmakon* is that dangerous supplement<sup>46</sup> that breaks into the very thing that would have liked to do without it yet lets itself *at once* be breached, roughed up, fulfilled, and replaced, completed by the very trace through which the present increases itself in the act of disappearing.

If, instead of meditating on the structure that makes such supplementarity possible, if above all instead of meditating on the reduction by which "Plato-Rousseau-Saussure" try in vain to master it with an odd kind of "reasoning," one were to content oneself with pointing to the "logical contradiction," one would have to recognize here an instance of that kind of

46. TN. The expression "that dangerous supplement," used by Rousseau in his *Confessions* to describe masturbation, is the title of that chapter in *Of Grammatology* in which Derrida follows the consequences of the way in which the word *supplément*'s two meanings in French—"addition" and "replacement"—complicate the logic of Rousseau's treatment of sex, education, and writing. Writing, pedagogy, masturbation, and the *pharmakon* share the property of being—with respect to speech, nature, intercourse, and living memory—at once something secondary, external, and compensatory, and something that substitutes, violates, and usurps.

"kettle-logic" to which Freud turns in the *Traumdeutung* in order to illustrate the logic of dreams. In his attempt to arrange everything in his favor, the defendant piles up contradictory arguments: 1. The kettle I am returning to you is brand new; 2. The holes were already in it when you lent it to me; 3. You never lent me a kettle, anyway. Analogously: 1. Writing is rigorously exterior and inferior to living memory and speech, which are therefore undamaged by it. 2. Writing is harmful to them because it puts them to sleep and infects their very life which would otherwise remain intact. 3. Anyway, if one has resorted to hypomnesia and writing at all, it is not for their intrinsic value, but because living memory is finite, it already has holes in it before writing ever comes to leave its traces. Writing has no effect on memory.

The opposition between *mnēmē* and *hypomnēsis* would thus preside over the meaning of writing. This opposition will appear to us to form a system with all the great structural oppositions of Platonism. What is played out at the boundary line between these two concepts is consequently something like the major decision of philosophy, the one through which it institutes itself, maintains itself, and contains its adverse deeps.

Nevertheless, between *mnēmē* and *hypomnēsis*, between memory and its supplement, the line is more than subtle; it is hardly perceptible. On both sides of that line, it is a question of *repetition*. Live memory repeats the presence of the *eidos*, and truth is also the possibility of repetition through recall. Truth unveils the *eidos* or the *ontos on*, in other words, that which can be imitated, reproduced, repeated in its identity. But in the anamnesic movement of truth, what is repeated must present itself as such, as what it is, in repetition. The true is repeated; it is what is repeated in the repetition, what is represented and present in the representation. It is not the repeater in the repetition, nor the signifier in the signification. The true is the presence of the *eidos* signified.

Sophistics—the deployment of hypomnesia—as well as dialectics—the deployment of anamnesia—both presuppose the possibility of repetition. But sophistics this time keeps to the other side, to the other face, as it were, of repetition. And of signification. What is repeated is the repeater, the imitator, the signifier, the representative, in the absence, as it happens, of the *thing itself*, which these appear to reedit, and without psychic or mnesic animation, without the living tension of dialectics. Writing would indeed be the signifier's capacity to repeat itself by itself, mechanically, without a living soul to sustain or attend it in its repetition, that is to say, without truth's *presenting itself* anywhere. Sophistics, hypomnesia, and writing would thus only be separated from philosophy, dialectics, anamnesis, and

living speech by the invisible, almost nonexistent, thickness of that *leaf* between the signifier and the signified. The "leaf": a significant metaphor, we should note, or rather one taken from the signifier face of things, since the leaf with its recto and verso first appears as a surface and support for writing. But by the same token, doesn't the unity of this leaf, of the system of this difference between signified and signifier, also point to the inseparability of sophistics and philosophy? The difference between signifier and signified is no doubt the governing pattern within which Platonism institutes itself and determines its opposition to sophistics. In being inaugurated in this manner, philosophy and dialectics are determined in the act of determining their other.

This profound complicity in the break has a first consequence: the argumentation against writing in the *Phaedrus* is able to borrow all its resources from Isocrates or Alcidamas at the moment it turns their own weapons, "transposing" them,<sup>47</sup> against the sophists. Plato imitates the imitators in order to restore the truth of what they imitate: namely, truth itself. Indeed, only truth as the presence (*ousia*) of the present (*on*) is here discriminative. And its power to discriminate, which commands or, as you will, is commanded by the difference between signified and signifier, in any case remains systematically inseparable from that difference. And this discrimination itself becomes so subtle that eventually it separates nothing, in the final analysis, but the same from itself, from its perfect, almost indistinguishable double. This is a movement that produces itself entirely within the structure of ambiguity and reversibility of the *pharmakon*.

How indeed does the dialectician simulate him whom he denounces as a simulator, as the simulacrum-man? On the one hand, the sophists advised, as does Plato, the exercise of memory. But, as we have seen, it was in order to enable themselves to speak without knowing, to recite without judgment, without regard for truth, in order to give signs. Or rather in order to sell them. Through this economy of signs, the sophists are indisputably men of writing at the moment they are protesting they are not. But isn't Plato one, too, through a symmetrical effect of reversal? Not only because he is actually a writer (a banal argument we will specify later on) and cannot, whether *de facto* or *de jure*, explain what dialectics is without recourse to writing; not only because he judges that the repetition of the same is necessary in anamnesis; but also because he judges it indispensable as an inscription in the type. (It is notable that *tupos* applies with equal

47. We are here using Diès's word, referring to his study of *La transposition platonicienne*, more precisely to his first chapter, "la Transposition de la rhétorique," in *Autour de Platon II*, 400.

pertinence to the graphic impression and to the *eidos* as model. Among many other examples, cf. *Republic*, 402d). This necessity belongs to the order of the law and is posited by the *Laws*. In this instance, the immutable, petrified identity of writing is not simply added to the signified law or prescribed rule like a mute, stupid simulacrum: it assures the law's permanence and identity with the vigilance of a guardian. As another sort of guardian of the laws, writing guarantees the means of returning at will, as often as necessary, to that ideal object called the law. We can thus scrutinize it, question it, consult it, make it talk, without altering its identity. All this, even in the same words (notably *boētheia*), is the other side, exactly opposite, of Socrates' speech in the *Phaedrus*.

*Clinias*: And, mark you, such argument will be a most valuable aid to intelligent legislation (*nomothesia*), because legal prescriptions (*prostagma*), once put into writing (*en grammasi tēbenta*), remain always on record, as though to challenge the question of all time to come. Hence we need feel no dismay if they should be difficult on a first hearing, since even the dull student may return to them for reiterated scrutiny. Nor does their length, provided they are beneficial, make it less irrational than it is impious, in my opinion at least, for any man to refuse such discourse his heartiest support (*to mē ou boēthein toutois tois logos*). (X, 891a. I am still quoting from an authorized translation,<sup>48</sup> including the Greek where pertinent, and leaving the reader to appreciate the usual effects of translation. On the relation between written and unwritten laws, see notably VII, 7935b-c).

The italicized Greek words amply demonstrate it: the *prostagma* of the law can be *posed* only in writing (*en grammasi tēbenta*). *Nomothesia* is engrammatical. The legislator is a writer. And the judge a reader. Let us skip to book XII: "He that would show himself a righteously equal judge must keep these matters before his eyes; he must procure books (*grammata*) on the subject, and must make them his study. There is, in truth, no study whatsoever so potent as this of law, if the law be what it should be, to make a better man of its student" (957c).

Inversely, symmetrically, the rhetors had not waited around for Plato in order to *translate writing into judgment*. For Isocrates,<sup>49</sup> for Alcidamas, *logos*

48. TN. Derrida is quoting from Diès; I am quoting from A. E. Taylor. Interestingly, another of these "effects of translation" is precisely the difficulty involved in translating a discussion of effects of translation.

49. If one holds, as does Robin, that the *Phaedrus* is, despite certain appearances, "an indictment against the rhetoric of Isocrates" (Introduction to the *Phaedrus*, Budé edition, p. clxxiii) and that the latter is more concerned, whatever he may say, with *doxa* than with

was also a living thing (*zōon*) whose vigor, richness, agility, and flexibility were limited and constrained by the cadaverous rigidity of the written sign. The type does not adapt to the changing givens of the present situation, to what is unique and irreplaceable about it each time, with all the subtlety required. While *presence* is the general form of what is, the *present*, for its part, is always different. But writing, in that it repeats itself and remains identical in the type, cannot flex itself in all senses, cannot bend with all the differences among presents, with all the variable, fluid, furtive necessities of psychagogy. He who speaks, in contrast, is not controlled by any preestablished pattern; he is better able to conduct his signs; he is there to accentuate them, inflect them, retain them, or set them loose according to the demands of the moment, the nature of the desired effect, the hold he has on the listener. In attending his signs in their operation, he who acts by vocal means penetrates more easily into the soul of his disciple, producing

*epistēmē* (p. clxviii), one will not be surprised by the title of his discourse, "Against the Sophists." Neither will one be amazed to find, for example, this passage, whose formal resemblance with Socrates' argumentation is blinding: "But it is not these sophists alone who are open to criticism, but also those who profess to teach political discourse (*tous politikous logous*). For the latter have no interest whatever in the truth, but consider that they are masters of an art if they can attract great numbers of students by the smallness of their charges . . . [One should note that Isocrates charged very high fees, and know what the price of truth was when it was speaking through his mouth] . . . For they are themselves so stupid and conceive others to be so dull that, although the speeches which they compose are worse than those which some laymen improvise, nevertheless they promise to make their students such clever orators that they will not overlook any of the possibilities which a subject affords. More than that, they do not attribute any of this power either to the practical experience or to the native ability of the student, but undertake to transmit the science of discourse (*tēn tōn logōn epistēmēn*) as simply as they would teach the letters of the alphabet. . . . But I marvel when I observe these men setting themselves up as instructors of youth who cannot see that they are applying the analogy of an art with hard and fast rules to a creative process. For, excepting these teachers, who does not know that the art of using letters remains fixed and unchanged, so that we continually and invariably use the same letters for the same purposes, while exactly the reverse is true of the art of discourse? For what has been said by one speaker is not equally useful for the speaker who comes after him; on the contrary, he is accounted most skilled in this art who speaks in a manner worthy of his subject and yet is able to discover in it topics which are nowise the same as those used by others. But the greatest proof of the difference between these two arts is that oratory is good only if it has the qualities of fitness for the occasion, propriety of style, and originality of treatment, while in the case of letters there is no such need whatsoever." The conclusion: one ought to pay in order to write. Men of writing should never be paid. The ideal would be that they would always put their pockets on the line. That they would pay, since they are in such need of the help of the masters of *logos*. "So that those who make use of such analogies (*paradeigmatin*: letters) ought more justly to pay out than to accept fees, since they attempt to teach others when they are themselves in great need of instruction" (*Kata tōn sophistōn* XIII, 9, 10, 12, 13 [trans. George Norlin, in *Isocrates*, Loeb Classical Library (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1929) II, 169-71.].

effects that are always unique, leading the disciple, as though lodged within him, to the intended goal. It is thus not its pernicious violence but its breathless impotence that the sophists held against writing. In contrast to this blind servant with its haphazard, clumsy movements, the Attic school (Gorgias, Isocrates, Alcidamas) extolled the force of living *logos*, the great master, the great power: *logos dunastēs megas estin*, says Gorgias in his *Encomium of Helen*. The dynasty of speech may be just as violent as that of writing, but its infiltration is more profound, more penetrating, more diverse, more assured. The only ones who take refuge in writing are those who are no better speakers than the man in the street. Alcidamas recalls this in his treatise "on those who write speeches" and "on the Sophists." Writing is considered a consolation, a compensation, a remedy for sickly speech.

Despite these similarities, the condemnation of writing is not engaged in the same way by the rhetors as it is in the *Phaedrus*. If the written word is scorned, it is not as a *pharmakon* coming to corrupt memory and truth. It is because *logos* is a more effective *pharmakon*. This is what Gorgias calls it. As a *pharmakon*, *logos* is at once good and bad; it is not at the outset governed exclusively by goodness or truth. It is only within this ambivalence and this mysterious indetermination of *logos*, and after these have been recognized, that Gorgias determines truth as a *world*, a structure or order, the counterpart (*kosmos*) of *logos*. In so doing he no doubt prefigures the Platonic gesture. But before such a determination, we are in the ambivalent, indeterminate space of the *pharmakon*, of that which in *logos* remains potency, potentiality, and is not yet the transparent language of knowledge. If one were justified in trying to capture it in categories that are subsequent to and dependent upon the history thus opened up, categories arising precisely in the aftermath of decision, one would have to speak of the "irrationality" of living *logos*, of its spellbinding powers of enchantment, mesmerizing fascination, and alchemical transformation, which make it kin to witchcraft and magic. Sorcery (*goēteia*), psychagogy, such are the "facts and acts" of speech, the most fearsome of *pharmaka*. In his *Encomium of Helen*, Gorgias used these very words to qualify the power of speech.

Sacred incantations sung with words (*hai gar entheoi dia logōn epōdai*) are bearers of pleasure and banishers of pain, for, merging with opinion in the soul, the power of incantation is wont to beguile it (*ethelxe*) and persuade it and alter it by witchcraft (*goēteiai*). There have been discovered two arts of witchcraft and magic: one consists of errors of soul and the other of deceptions of opinion. . . . What cause then

prevents the conclusion that Helen similarly, against her will, might have come under the influence (*humnos*) of speech, just as if ravished by the force of the mighty? . . . For speech constrained the soul, persuading it which it persuaded, both to believe the things said and to approve the things done. The persuader, like a constrainer, does the wrong and the persuaded, like the constrained, in speech is wrongly charged.<sup>50</sup>

Persuasive eloquence (*peithō*) is the power to break in, to carry off, to seduce internally, to ravish invisibly. It is furtive force per se. But in showing that Helen gave in to the violence of speech (would she have yielded to a letter?), in discrediting this victim, Gorgias indicts *logos* in its capacity to lie. "By introducing some reasoning (*logismos*) into speech (*tōi logōi*)," he wishes "to free the accused of blame and, having reproved her detractors as prevaricators and proved the truth, to free her from their ignorance."

But before being reined in and tamed by the *kosmos* and order of truth, *logos* is a wild creature, an ambiguous animality. Its magical "pharmaceutical" force derives from this ambivalence, which explains the disproportion between the strength of that force and the inconsiderable thing speech seems to be:

But if it was speech which persuaded her and deceived her heart, not even to this is it difficult to make an answer and to banish blame as follows. Speech is a powerful lord, which by means of the finest and most invisible body effects the divinest words: it can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity.

Such persuasion entering the soul through speech is indeed a *pharmakon*, and that is precisely what Gorgias calls it:

The effect of speech (*tou logou dunamis*) upon the condition of the soul (*pros tēn tēs psuchēs taxin*) is comparable (*ton auton de logon*) to the power of drugs (*tōn pharmakōn taxis*) over the nature of bodies (*tēn tōn somatōn phusin*). For just as different drugs dispel different secretions from the body, and some bring an end to disease and others to life, so also in the case of speeches, some distress, others delight, some cause fear, others make the hearers bold, and some drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion (*tēn psuchēn epharmakeusan kai exegoēteusan*).

50. [English translation by George Kennedy, in *The Older Sophists*, ed. R. K. Sprague (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 50–54.] On this passage of the *Encomium*, on the relations of *thelgō* and *peithō*, of charm and persuasion, on their use in Homer, Aeschylus, and Plato, see Diès, pp. 116–17.

The reader will have paused to reflect that the relation (the analogy) between the *logos*/soul relation and the *pharmakon*/body relation is itself designated by the term *logos*. The name of the relation is the same as that of one of its terms. The *pharmakon* is comprehended in the structure of *logos*. This comprehension is an act of both *domination* and *decision*.

## 5. The Pharmakeus

For if there were nothing any more to hurt us, we should have no need whatever of any assistance. And thus you see it would then be made apparent that it was only on account of evil that we felt regard and affection for good (*tagathon*), as we considered good to be a medicine (*pharmakon*) for evil, and evil to be a disease. But where there is no disease, there is, we are aware, no need of medicine (*ouden dei pharmakou*). This, then, it appears, is the nature of good. . . . —Yes, he said, that would seem to be true.

—*Lysis*, 220c–d

But if this is the case, and if *logos* is already a penetrating supplement, then isn't Socrates, "he who does not write," also a master of the *pharmakon*? And in that way isn't he the spitting image of a sophist? a *pharmakeus*? a magician? a sorcerer? even a poisoner? and even one of those impostors denounced by Gorgias? The threads of these complicities are almost impossible to disentangle.

Socrates in the dialogues of Plato often has the face of a *pharmakeus*. That is the name given by Diotima to Eros. But behind the portrait of Eros, one cannot fail to recognize the features of Socrates, as though Diotima, in looking at him, were proposing to Socrates the portrait of Socrates (*Symposium*, 203c, d, e). Eros, who is neither rich, nor beautiful, nor delicate, spends his life philosophizing (*philosophōn dia pantos tou biou*); he is a fearsome sorcerer (*deinos goēs*), magician (*pharmakeus*), and sophist (*sophistēs*). A being that no "logic" can confine within a noncontradictory definition, an individual of the demonic species, neither god nor man, neither immortal nor mortal, neither living nor dead, he forms "the medium of the prophetic arts, of the priestly rites of sacrifice, initiation, and incantation, of divination and of sorcery (*thubias-teletas-epōdas-manteian*)" (202e).

In that same dialogue, Agathon accuses Socrates of trying to bewitch him, to cast a spell over him (*Pharmattein boulei me, o Sōkrater*, 194a). The portrait of Eros by Diotima is placed between this exclamation and the portrait of Socrates by Alcibiades.