Jacques Derrida

Dissemination

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Plato's Pharmacy

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Kolaphos:[1] blow to the cheek, knock, slap . . . (*kolaptō*). *Kolaptō*: 1. to go into, penetrate, *esp., 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 phloiou* [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 κσλαφος, 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*[2] 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 (*sēmainei*) 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.[3] 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: 1. *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*.[4] 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*).[5] 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

thinks 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 . . . (*hotan arti grammatōn empeiroi gignōntai . . .*)" (277*d–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 Shorley (*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 paranthetical 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."[6]

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 (274*b* 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."[7] Interestingly, Socrates' first words, in the opening lines of the conversation, had concerned "not bothering about" mythologemes (229*c–*230*a*). 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 Entwickelung* (Leipzig, 1905). A critique of this view, "Sur la composition du *Phèdre*," 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 (257*c*). 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" (257*d*). 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 (259*c*).

But the issue is delayed. Socrates still has a neutral attitude: writing is not in itself a shameful, indecent, infamous (*aiskhron*) 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 (*kalōs*)? 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?"

274*b*), 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 (230*a*). 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 (229*d*).

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" (230*c*). 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" (229*d*).

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[8] for getting me out (*dokeis moi tēs emēs exocou to pharmakon hēurēkenai*). 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 (230*d–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 ōn tōn nun graphein*). 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 you cloak, for I surmise that it is the actual discourse (*ton logon auton*)" (228*d*). 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 (*ek bibliou*), or coming across a couple of ordinary drugs (*pharmakiois*), without any real knowledge of medicine' " (268*c*).

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* (274*e*).

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 (*to men tekhnēs te kai atekhnias logōn*)"[9] (274*b*). And yet it is at this moment of general exhaustion that the question of writing is set out.[10] 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'oeuvre, the chapter Rousseau devotes to

owed earlier by the use of the word *aiskhron* (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?" (274*b*).

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 *akoē*, 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?" (274*c*).

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 determination 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 *akoē*, 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.

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.").

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. (274*c–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[11] 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 depreciate 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" (275*e*).

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*)" (275*b*). *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, ō 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 (260*e*-261*a*).

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" (*patēr tou logou*) (177*d*).

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*, 260*a*), more precisely a *living* being. *Logos* is a *zōon*. An animal that is born, grows, belongs to the *phusis*. 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.[12]

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 (264*b–c*).

The organism thus engendered must be well born, of noble blood: "*gennaia*!," 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!" (264*a*). 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.[13] 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). *Patēr* 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, 506*e*), 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 *patēr* 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 (*tou patros ekgonous tokous pollaplasious*), foster the drone and pauper element in the state" (555*e*).

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, 515*c* 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 (*hon tagathon egennēsen analogon heautōi*), 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" (508*c*).

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

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 tōi logōi*)" (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 (*tou tokou*)" (507*a*).

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 differance 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 tou tokou*). *Kibdēleuma* is fraudulent merchandise. The corresponding verb (*kibdēleuō*) 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.[14] 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 logois*) and seek there the truth of things. . . . So, basing myself in each case on the idea (*logon*) that I judged to be the strongest . . ." (99*d*–100*a*).

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 (508*a*). 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 Louis 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.[15] 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. Sauneron'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.[16] 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 *tekhnē* 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."[17] Ra (the sun) is god the creator, and he engenders through the mediation of the word.[18] 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.[19] 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 *amoini* means 'come,' 'come to me'; it is a fact, furthermore, that certain hymns begin with the words *Amoini 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,"[20] 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.[21] 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.[22] 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.[23] (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 accursèd part [*la part 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, *hermēneus*. 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 languages 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 (ionh) the two skies with your beauty and your rays*'—*and thus the moon (ioh) 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."[24]

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,[25] "initiated men into arts and letters," and "created hieroglyphic writing to enable them to fix their thoughts."[26] 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.[27] 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.[28]

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.[29]

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 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).

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.[30] 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."[31] 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."[32] 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.[33] And also the scene of the last judgment: in the underworld, opposite Osiris, Thoth records the weight of the heart-souls of the dead.[34]

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

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."[35] 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.*"[36] The dead man can also simply be identified with Thoth: "he is simply called a god; he is Thoth, *the strongest of the gods.*"[37]

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,"[38] turns toward the west. He is the god of the moon, either as identified with it or as its protector.[39]

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 (*kubeia*) and draughts (*petteia*) (274*d*). 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[40] 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.[41] 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.[42]

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 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 Babylonie 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 Babylonie* (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).

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

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.[43]

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

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.

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 *poles*. 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.[44] 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, 909*b–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, 333*e*. 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 (*tounantion*) 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*) (354*a*). The *pharmakon* is always caught in the mixture (*summeikton*) mentioned in the *Philebus* (46*a*), examples of which are *hubris*, that violent, unbounded excess of pleasure that makes the profligate cry out like a madman (45*e*), and "relieving an itch by rubbing, and anything that can be treated by such a remedy (*ouk allēs deomena pharmaxeōs*)." 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 gegrammena* [22*b*, 23*a*]), 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 katharseōs*) of physicians; for diseases unless they are very dangerous should not be irritated by medicines (*ouk erethisteon pharmakeiais*), 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 (*pharmakeiais*), 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 (*pharmakeuonta*) (89*a–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, 381*b–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*, 479*b*), 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 grammatōn*), your paternal goodwill has led you to pronounce the very opposite (*tounantion*) 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 hupomnēseōs, 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 (*doxosophoi*), not men of wisdom (*anti sophōn*)." (274*e* – 275*b*)

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.[45] Memory and truth cannot be separated. The movement of *alētheia* 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*, 268 *c*). 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*: Nor 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 . . . (368*a–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*, 285*c–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 . . . (285*d–e*).

In truth, the sophist only pretends to know everything; his "polymathy" (*The Sophist*, 232*a*) 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, "mime 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 mnesic 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 nonpresent, 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*, 533*b*).

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 unbridgable 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[46] 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 *ontōs 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,[47] 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*, 402*d*). 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 (*prostagmata*), once put into writing (*en grammasi tethenta*), 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 logois*). (X, 891*a*. I am still quoting from an authorized translation,[48] 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, 7935*b–c*).

The italicized Greek words amply demonstrate it: the *prostagmata* of the law can be *posited* only in writing (*en grammasi tethenta*). *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" (957*c*).

Inversely, symmetrically, the rhetors had not waited around for Plato in order to *translate writing into judgment*. For Isocrates,[49] 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 (*paradeigmasin*: 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 epōidai*) 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.[50]

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 disculpating this victim, Gorgias indicts *logos* in its capacity to lie. "By introducing some reasoning (*logismon*) 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*, 220*c–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*, 203*c,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 (*thusias-teletas-epōdas-manteian*)" (202*e*).

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

Who reminds us that Socrates' brand of magic is worked through *logos* without the aid of any instrument, through the effects of a voice without accessories, without the flute of the satyr Marsyas:

> And aren't you a piper as well? I should think you were—and a far more wonderful piper than Marsyas, who had only to put his flute to his lips to bewitch mankind. . . . His tunes will still have a magic power, and by virtue of their own divinity they will show which of us are fit subjects for divine initiation. Now the only difference, Socrates, between you and Marsyas is that you can get just the same effect without any instrument at all (*aneu organōn*)—with nothing but a few simple words (*psilois logois*[51]). . . ." (215*c–d*)

When confronted with this simple, organless voice, one cannot escape its penetration by stopping up one's ears, like Ulysses trying to block out the Sirens (216*a*).

The Socratic *pharmakon* also acts like venom, like the bite of a poisonous snake (217–18). And Socrates' bite is worse than a snake's since its traces invade the soul. What Socrates' words and the viper's venom have in common, in any case, is their ability to penetrate and make off with the most concealed interiority of the body or soul. The demonic speech of this thaumaturge (en)trains the listener in dionysian frenzy and philosophic *mania* (218*b*). And when they don't act like the venom of a snake, Socrates' pharmaceutical charms provoke a kind of *narcosis*, benumbing and paralyzing into aporia, like the touch of a sting ray (*narkē*):

> *Meno*: Socrates, even before I met you they told me that in plain truth you are a perplexed man yourself and reduce others to perplexity. At this moment I feel you are exercising magic and witchcraft upon me and positively laying me under your spell until I am just a mass of helplessness (*goēteueis me kai pharmatteis kai atekhnōs katepaideis, hōste meston aporias gegonenai*). If I may be flippant, I think that not only in outward appearance (*eidos*) but in other respects as well you are exactly like the flat stingray (*narkē*) that one meets in the sea. Whenever anyone comes into contact with it, it numbs him, and that is the sort of thing that you seem to be doing to me now. My mind and my lips are literally numb, and I have nothing to reply to you. . . . In my opinion you are well advised not to leave Athens and live abroad. If you behaved like this as a foreigner in another country, you would most likely be arrested as a wizard (*goēs*). (*Meno*, 80*a–b*)

51. "Bare, ungarnished voice, etc."; *psilos logos* also has the sense of abstract argument or simple affirmation without proof (cf. *Theaetetus*, 165*e*).

Socrates arrested as a wizard (*goēs* or *pharmakeus*): that will have to wait.

What can be said about this *analogy* that ceaselessly refers the socratic *pharmakon* to the sophistic *pharmakon* and, proportioning them to each other, makes us go back indefinitely from one to the other? How can they be distinguished?

Irony does not consist in the dissolution of a sophistic charm or in the dismantling of an occult substance or power through analysis and questioning. It does not consist in undoing the charlatanesque confidence of a *pharmakeus* from the vantage point of some obstinate instance of transparent reason or innocent *logos*. Socratic irony precipitates out one *pharmakon* by bringing it in contact with another *pharmakon*. Or rather, it reverses the *pharmakon*'s powers and turns *its* surface over[52]—thus taking effect, being recorded and dated, in the act of *classing* the *pharmakon*, through the fact that the *pharmakon* properly consists in a certain inconsistency, a certain impropriety, this nonidentity-with-itself always allowing it to be turned against itself.

What is at stake in this overturning is no less than science and death. Which are consigned to a single type in the structure of the *pharmakon*, the one and only name for that potion that must be awaited. And even, in Socrates' case, deserved.

52. Alternately and/or all at once, the Socratic *pharmakon* petrifies and vivifies, anesthetizes and sensitizes, appeases and anguishes. Socrates is a benumbing stingray but also an animal that needles: we recall the bee in the *Phaedo* (91*c*); later we will open the *Apology* at the point where Socrates compares himself precisely to a gadfly. This whole Socratic configuration thus composes a bestiary. Is it surprising that the demonic inscribes itself in a bestiary? It is on the basis of this zoopharmaceutical ambivalence and of that other Socratic *analogy* that the contours of the *anthrōpos* are determined.

II

The use Socrates makes of the *pharmakon* does not have as its goal the guaranteeing of the *pharmakeus*' power. The technique of infiltration or paralysis can even eventually be turned against its user although one must always, in the symptomatological manner of Nietzsche, be careful to diagnose the *economy*, the investment and deferred benefit behind the sign of pure renunciation or the *bidding* of disinterested sacrifice.

The nakedness of the *pharmakon*, the blunt bare voice (*psilos logos*), carries with it a certain mastery in the dialogue, on the condition that Socrates overtly renounce its benefits: knowledge as power, passion, pleasure. On the condition, in a word, that he consent to die. The death of the body, at least: that is the price that must be paid for *alētheia* and the epistēmē, which are also powers.

The fear of death is what gives all witchcraft, all occult medicine, a hold. The *pharmakeus* is banking on that fear. Hence the Socratic pharmacy, in working to free us from it, corresponds to an operation of *exorcism*, in a form that could be envisaged and conducted from the side and viewpoint of God. After wondering whether some God had given men a drug to induce fear (*phobou pharmakon*), the Athenian of the *Laws* dismisses the idea: "Let's repeat the point we were making to the legislator: 'Agreed then: there is probably no such thing as a drug (*pharmakon*) to produce fear, either by gift or human contrivance (I leave quacks (*goētas*) out of account: they're beyond the pale). But is there a drink that will produce a lack of fear (*aphobias*) and stimulate overconfidence about the wrong thing at the wrong moment? What do we say to this?'" (649*a*).

It is the child in us that is afraid. The charlatans will all disappear when the "little boy within us" no longer fears death as he fears a *mormolukeion*, a scarecrow set up to frighten children, a bogeyman. And incantations must be redoubled daily in order to free the child from this fantasy: "*Cebes*: Probably even in us there is a little boy who has these childish terrors. Try to

persuade him not to be afraid of death as though it were a bogey.—What you should do, said Socrates, is to say a magic spell over him every day until you have charmed his fears away.—But, Socrates, said Simmias, where shall we find a magician (*epōdon*) who understands these spells now that you are leaving us?" (*Phaedo*, 77*e*). In the *Crito*, too, Socrates refuses to give in to the people who "conjure up fresh hordes of bogeys to terrify our childish minds, by subjecting us to chains and executions and confiscations of our property" (46*c*).

The counterspell, the exorcism, the antidote, is dialectics. In answer to Cebes, Socrates recommends seeking not only a magician but also—the surest incantation—training in dialectics: "Seek for him among all peoples, far and wide, sparing neither pains nor money; for there is no better way of spending your money. And you must seek among yourselves, too; for you will not find others better suited for the task" (*Phaedo*, 78*a–b*).

To seek "among yourselves" by mutual questioning and self-examination, to seek to know oneself through the detour of the language of the other, such is the undertaking presented by Socrates, who recalls the Delphic inscription (*tou Delphikou grammatos*), to Alcibiades as the antidote (*alexipharmakon*), the counterpotion. In the text of the *Laws* which we left off quoting earlier, when the necessity of the letter has been firmly laid down, the introjection or internalization of the *grammata* into the judge's soul—their most secure dwelling-place—is then prescribed as an antidote. Let us pick up the thread of the text again:

> He that would show himself a righteously equal judge must keep these matters before his eyes; he must procure books 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—else 'twould be for nothing that the law which so stirs our worship and wonder bears a name so cognate with that of understanding [*nomos/nous*]. Furthermore, consider all other discourse, poesy with its eulogies and its satires, or utterances in prose, whether in literature or in the common converse of daily life, with their contentious disagreements and their too often unmeaning admissions. The one certain touchstone of all is the writings of the legislator (*ta tou nomothetou grammata*). *The good judge will possess those writings within his own soul* (*ha dei kektēmenon en hautōi*) *as antidotes* (*alexipharmaka*) *against other discourse*, and thus he will be the state's preserver as well as his own. He will secure in the good the retention and increase of their rectitude, and in the evil, or those of them whose

> vicious principles admit remedy, will promote, so far as he can, conversion from folly, from profligacy, from cowardice, in a word, from all forms of wrong. As for those who are fatally attached to such principles, if our judges and their superiors prescribe death as a cure (*iama*) for a soul in that state, they will, as has been more than once said already, deserve the praise of the community for their conduct (XII, 957*c*–958*a*; emphasis mine).

Anamnesic dialectics, as the repetition of the *eidos*, cannot be distinguished from self-knowledge and self-mastery. Those are the best forms of exorcism that can be applied against the terrors of the child faced with death and the quackery of the bogeyman. Philosophy consists of offering reassurance to children. That is, if one prefers, of taking them out of childhood, of forgetting about the child, or, inversely, but by the same token, of speaking first and foremost *for* that little boy within us, of teaching him to speak—to dialogue—by displacing his fear or his desire.

One could play at classifying, within the weave of the *Statesman* (280*a* ff), that species of protection (*amuntērion*) that is called dialectics and apprehended as a counter-poison. Among the things that can be called artificial (manufactured or acquired), the Stranger distinguishes those with the function of doing something (tending toward *poiein*) and those, called defenses (*amuntēria*), with the function of preventing suffering (*tou me paskhein*). Among the latter, one can distinguish (1) *antidotes* (*alexipharmaka*), which can be either human or divine (and dialectics is from this perspective the very antidoteness of the antidote in general, before any possibility of dividing it up between the human and the divine. Dialectics is precisely the passage between the two) and (2) *problems* (*problēmata*): what stands before one—obstacles, shelters, armor, shields, defenses. Leaving antidotes aside, the Stranger pursues the division of the *problēmata*, which can function either as armaments or as fences. The *fences* (*phragmata*) are screens or protections (*alexētēria*) against storm and heat; these *protections* can be housings or coverings; *coverings* can be spread below (like rugs) or wrapped around, etc. The process of division goes on through the different techniques for manufacturing these wraps until it reaches the woven garment and the art of weaving: the *problematic* space of protection. This art would thus rule out, if one follows the divisions literally, all recourse to antidotes, and consequently, to that species of antidote or inverted *pharmakon* constituted by dialectics. The text excludes dialectics. And yet, it will nevertheless be necessary later to distinguish between two sorts of texture, if one bears in mind that dialectics is also an art of weaving, a science of the *sumplokē*.

The dialectical inversion of the *pharmakon* or of the dangerous supplement makes death both acceptable and null. Acceptable because it is annulled. In making us welcome death, the immortality of the soul, which acts like an antibody, dissipates its terrifying fantasy. The inverted *pharmakon*, which scatters all the hobgoblins, is none other than the origin of the *epistēmē*, the opening to truth as the possibility of repetition and the submission of that "greed for life" (*epithumein zēn*, *Crito*, 53*e*) to law (the good, the father, the king, the chief, the capital, the sun, all of which are invisible). It is the laws themselves that, in the *Crito*, urge one not to "cling so greedily to life, at the price of violating the most stringent laws."

What indeed does Socrates say when Cebes and Simmias ask him to provide them with a magician? He urges them to practice the philosophic dialogue and seek its most worthy object: the truth of the *eidos* as that which is identical to itself, always the same as itself and therefore simple, incomposite (*asuntheton*), undecomposable, invariable (78*c*,*e*). The *eidos* is that which can always be repeated as *the same*. The ideality and invisibility of the *eidos* are its power-to-be-repeated. Now, law is always a law of repetition, and repetition is always submission to a law. In the personification of the Laws in the *Crito*, Socrates is called upon to accept both death and law *at once*. He is asked to recognize himself as the offspring, the son or representative (*ekgonos*) or even the slave (*doulos*) of the law that, in uniting his father and mother, made possible his birth. Violence is thus even more sacrilegious when it offends the law of the mother/country than when it wounds the father and mother (51*c*). This is why, say the Laws, Socrates must die in conformity with the law and within the confines of the city—Socrates, who was (almost) always reluctant to go outside:

> Are you so wise as to have forgotten that compared with your mother and father and all the rest of your ancestors your country is something far more precious, more venerable, more sacred, and held in greater honor both among gods and among all reasonable men? . . . Violence is a sin even against your country. . . . Socrates, we have substantial evidence that you are satisfied with us and with the state (*polis*). You would not have been so exceptionally reluctant to cross the borders of your country (*polis*) if you had not been exceptionally attached to it. You have never left the city to attend a festival or for any other purpose, except on some military expedition. You have never traveled abroad as other people do, and you have never felt the impulse to acquaint yourself with another country or constitution. You have been content with us and with our city (*polis*). You have definitely chosen

> us, and undertaken to observe us in all your activities as a citizen. (51*a*,*c*—51*b*–*c*)

The Socratic word does not wander, stays at home, is closely watched: within autochthony, within the city, within the law, under the surveillance of its mother tongue. This will take on its full significance further on, when writing will be described as errancy as such, mute vulnerability to all aggression. In nothing does writing reside.

The *eidos*, truth, law, the *epistēmē*, dialectics, philosophy—all these are other names for that *pharmakon* that must be opposed to the *pharmakon* of the Sophists and to the bewitching fear of death. It is *pharmakeus* against *pharmakeus*, *pharmakon* against *pharmakon*. This is why Socrates heeds the Laws as though, through their voices, he were under the power of an initiatic spell, a sonorous spell, then, or rather, a phonic spell, one that penetrates and carries away the inner courts of the soul. "That, my dear friend Crito, I do assure you, is what I seem to hear them saying, just as a Corybant seems to hear the strains of music, and the sound of their arguments (*hē ēkhē toutōn tōn logōn*) rings so loudly in my head that I cannot hear the other side" (54*d*). Those Corybants, that music, are evoked by Alcibiades in the *Symposium* in his efforts to describe the effects of the Socratic utterance: "the moment I hear him speak I am smitten with a kind of sacred rage, worse than any Corybant, and my heart jumps into my mouth" (215*e*).

The philosophical, epistemic order of *logos* as an antidote, as a force *inscribed within the general alogical economy of the pharmakon* is not something we are proposing here as a daring interpretation of Platonism. Let us, rather, look at the prayer that opens the *Critias*: "I call on the god to grant us that most effective medicine (*pharmakon teleōtaton*), that best of all medicines (*ariston pharmakōn*): knowledge (*epistēmēn*)." And one could also consider the astonishing dramatic staging of the first act of the *Charmides*. It should be followed moment by moment. Dazzled by the beauty of Charmides, Socrates wants above all to undress the soul of this young man who loves philosophy. Charmides is sent for so that he can be presented to a doctor (Socrates) who can relieve him of his headaches and his weakness. Socrates accepts to pass himself off as a man who knows a cure for headaches. There then ensues a "cloak" scene similar to the one in the *Phaedrus*, involving a certain *pharmakon*:

> When Critias told him that I was the person who had the cure (*ho to pharmakon epistamenos*), he looked at me in an indescribable manner, and made as though to ask me a question. And all the people in the palaestra crowded about us, and at that moment, my good friend, I glanced through the opening of his garment, and was inflamed by his beauty. Then I could no longer contain myself. . . . But still when he asked me if I knew the cure for the headache (*to tēs kephalēs pharmakon*) . . . I replied that it was a kind of leaf, which required to be accompanied by a charm (*epōdē de tis epi tōi pharmakōi*), and if a person would repeat the charm at the same time that he used the cure, he would be made whole, but that without the charm the leaf would be of no avail. —Then I will write out the charm from your dictation, he said (155*d* – 156*a*. Cf. also 175 – 176).[53]

But the head cannot be cured separately. Good doctors take care of "the whole," and it is by caring for the whole that they have been inspired by a Thracian physician, "one of the physicians of the Thracian king Zalmoxis who are said to be able even to give immortality," Socrates shows that the whole of the body can only be cured at the source—the soul—of all its goods and evils. "And the cure of the soul, my dear youth, has to be effected by the use of certain charms (*epōdais tisin*), and these charms are fair words, and by them temperance (*sōphrosunēn*) is implanted in the soul, and where temperance comes and stays, there health is speedily imparted, not only to the head, but to the whole body" (157*a*). And the discussion turns to the essence of temperance, the best *pharmakon*, the capital cure.

Philosophy thus opposes to its other this transmutation of the drug into a remedy, of the poison into a counterpoison. Such an operation would not be possible if the *pharmako-logos* did not already harbor within itself that complicity of contrary values, and if the *pharmakon* in general were not, prior to any distinction -making, that which, presenting itself as a poison, may turn out to be a cure, may retrospectively reveal itself in the truth of its curative power. The "essence" of the *pharmakon* lies in the way in which, having no stable essence, no "proper" characteristics, it is not, in any sense

53. The reader will have noted that this scene makes a strange, inverse and symmetrical pendant to the one in the *Phaedrus*. It is inverted in that the unit which, under the cloak, allowed a text and a *pharmakon* to (e)merge is *preinscribed* in the *Phaedrus* (the *pharmakon* is the text already written by "the ablest writer of our day"), and only *prescribed* in the *Charmides* (the prescription for the *pharmakon* Socrates recommends must be taken down under his dictation). The Socratic prescription here is oral, and speech accompanies the *pharmakon* as the condition of its effectiveness. Within the thickness and depth of this scene, one should reread, from the middle of the *Statesman*, the critique of the written medical prescription, the "*hypomnēmata graphein*" whose rigidity does not allow it to adapt to the specificity and the progress of the disease: this is an illustration of the political problem of written laws. Like the doctor who comes back to visit his patient, the legislator must be able to modify his initial prescriptions (294*a*–297*b*; see also 298*d*–*e*).

(metaphysical, physical, chemical, alchemical) of the word, a *substance*. The *pharmakon* has no ideal identity; it is aneidetic, firstly because it is not monoeidetic (in the sense in which the *Phaedo* speaks of the *eidos* as something simple, noncomposite: *monoeides*). This "medicine" is not a simple thing. But neither is it a composite, a sensible or empirical *suntheton* partaking of several simple essences. It is rather the prior medium in which differentiation in general is produced, along with the opposition between the *eidos* and its other; this medium is *analogous* to the one that will, subsequent to and according to the decision of philosophy, be reserved for transcendental imagination, that "art hidden in the depths of the soul," which belongs neither simply to the sensible nor simply to the intelligible, neither simply to passivity nor simply to activity. The element-medium will always be analogous to a mixed-medium. In a certain way, Plato thought about and even formulated this ambivalence. But he did so in passing, incidentally, discreetly: in connection with the union of opposites within virtue, not the union of virtue with its opposite:

> *Stranger*: But in those of noble nature from their earliest days whose nurture too has been all it should be, the laws can foster the growth of this common bond of conviction and only in these. This is the talisman (*pharmakon*) appointed for them by the design of pure intelligence. This most godlike bond alone can unite the elements of virtue which are diverse in nature and would else be opposing in tendency. (*Statesman*, 310*a*)

This pharmaceutical nonsubstance cannot be handled with complete security, neither in its being, since it has none, nor in its effects, the sense of which is always capable of changing. In this way, writing, touted by Theuth as a remedy, a beneficial drug, is later overturned and denounced by the king and then, in the king's place, by Socrates, as a harmful substance, a philter of forgetfulness. Inversely, and although in a less immediately readable manner, the hemlock, that potion which in the *Phaedo* is never called anything but a *pharmakon*,[54] is presented to Socrates as a poison; yet it is transformed, through the effects of the Socratic *logos* and of the philosophical demonstration in the *Phaedo*, into a means of deliverance, a way toward salvation, a cathartic power. The hemlock has an *ontological*

54. The opening lines of the dialogue are: "*Echecrates*: Were you there with Socrates yourself, Phaedo, when he drank the poison (*pharmakon*) in his cell?" (57*a*).

Near the end of the dialogue: "*Socrates*: . . . I prefer to have a bath before drinking the poison (*pharmakon*), rather than give the women the trouble of washing me when I am dead" (115*a*). Cf. also 117*a*.

effect: it initiates one into the contemplation of the *eidos* and the immortality of the soul."[55] *That is how Socrates takes it.*

Is this crossed connection-making the result of mere artifice or play? There is certainly *play* in such a movement, and this chiasmus is authorized, even prescribed, by the ambivalence of the *pharmakon*. Not only by the polarity good/evil, but by the double participation in the distinct regions of the soul and the body, the invisible and the visible. This double participation, once again, does not mix together two previously separate elements; it refers back to a *same* that is not the identical, to the common element or medium of any possible dissociation. Thus, writing is *given* as the sensible, visible, spatial surrogate of the *mnēmē*; it later turns out to be harmful and benumbing to the invisible interior of the soul, memory and truth. Inversely, the hemlock is given as a poison that harms and benumbs the body. But it later turns out to be helpful to the soul, which it delivers from the body and awakens to the truth of the *eidos*. If the *pharmakon* is "ambivalent," it is because it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.). It is on the basis of this play or movement that the opposites or differences are stopped by Plato. The *pharmakon* is the movement, the locus, and the play: (the production of) difference. It is the differance of difference. It holds in reserve, in its undecided shadow and vigil, the opposites and the differends that the process of discrimination will come to carve out. Contradictions and pairs of opposites are lifted from the bottom of this diacritical, differing, deferring, reserve. Already inhabited by differance, this reserve, even though it "precedes" the opposition between different effects, even though it preexists differences as effects, does not have the punctual simplicity of a *coincidentia oppositorum*. It is from this fund that dialectics draws its philosophemes. The *pharmakon*, without being anything in itself, always exceeds them in constituting their bottomless fund [*fonds sans fond*]. It keeps itself forever in reserve even though it has no fundamental pro-

55. One could therefore also consider the hemlock as a sort of *pharmakon* of immortality. Such an interpretation is invited by the ritual, ceremonial form with which the *Phaedo* closes (116*b–c*). In his "*Festin d'immortalité*" (*Esquisse d'une étude de mythologie comparée indo-européenne* 1924), G. Dumézil refers to certain "traces, in Athens, of a cycle of Theseus correlated with the *Thargelia*" (we will later have occasion to speak of a certain relation between the Thargelia and the birth and death of Socrates), and notes: "Neither Pherecydes nor Appollodorus has set down the rites that must have corresponded, in a certain district of Greece, to the story of the *pharmakon* of immortality desired by the *Giants*, and to that of the 'artificial Goddess,' *Athena*, who caused the Giants to lose their immortality" (p. 89).

fundity nor ultimate locality. We will watch it infinitely promise itself and endlessly vanish through concealed doorways that shine like mirrors and open onto a labyrinth. It is also this store of deep background that we are calling the *pharmacy*.

6. The Pharmakos

It is part of the rules of this game that the game should *seem to stop*. Then the *pharmakon*, which is older than either of the opposites, is "caught" by philosophy, by "Platonism" which is constituted by this apprehension, as a mixture of two pure, heterogeneous terms. And one could follow the word *pharmakon* as a guiding thread within the whole Platonic problematic of the mixture. Apprehended as a blend and an impurity, the *pharmakon* also acts like an aggressor or a housebreaker, threatening some internal purity and security. This definition is absolutely general and can be verified even in cases where such forced entries are valorized: the good remedy, Socratic irony, comes to disturb the intestinal organization of self-complacency. The purity of the inside can then only be restored if the *charges are brought home* against exteriority as a supplement, inessential yet harmful to the essence, a surplus that *ought* never to have come to be added to the untouched plenitude of the inside. The restoration of internal purity must thus reconstitute, *recite*—and this is myth as such, the *mythology* for example of a *logos* recounting its origin, going back to the eve of the pharmakographic aggression—that to which the *pharmakon* should not have had to be added and attached like a *literal parasite*: a *letter* installing itself inside a living organism to rob it of its *nourishment* and to *distort* [like static, = "*bruit parasite*"] the pure audibility of a voice. Such are the relations between the writing supplement and the *logos-zōon*. In order to cure the latter of the *pharmakon* and rid it of the parasite, it is thus necessary to put the outside back in its place. To keep the outside out. This is the inaugural gesture of "logic" itself, of good "sense" insofar as it accords with the self-identity of *that which is*: being is what it is, the outside is outside and the inside inside. Writing must thus return to being what it *should never have ceased to be*: an accessory, an accident, an excess.

The cure by *logos*, exorcism, and catharsis will thus eliminate the excess. But this elimination, being therapeutic in nature, must call upon the very thing it is expelling, the very surplus it is *putting out*. The pharmaceutical operation must therefore *exclude itself from itself*.

What does this mean about what (it is) to write?

Plato does not make a show of the chain of significations we are trying progressively to dig up. If there were any sense in asking such a question, which we don't believe, it would be impossible to say to what extent he manipulates it voluntarily or consciously, and at what point he is subject to constraints weighing upon his discourse from "language." The word "language," through all that binds it to everything we are putting in question here, is not of any pertinent assistance, and to follow the constraints of a language would not exclude the possibility that Plato is playing with them, even if his game is neither representative nor voluntary. It is in the back room, in the shadows of the pharmacy, prior to the oppositions between conscious and unconscious, freedom and constraint, voluntary and involuntary, speech and language, that these textual "operations" occur.

Plato seems to place no emphasis on the word *pharmakon* at the point where writing's effects swerve from positive to negative, when poison, under the eyes of the king, appears as the truth of the remedy. It is not said that the *pharmakon* is the locus, the support, and the executor of this mutation. Later—we will come to this—while expressly comparing writing to painting, Plato will not explicitly put this judgment together with the fact that elsewhere he refers to painting as a *pharmakon*. For in Greek, *pharmakon* also means paint, not a natural color but an artificial tint, a chemical dye that imitates the chromatic scale given in nature.

Yet all these significations nonetheless appear, and, more precisely, all these words appear in the text of "Plato." Only the chain is concealed, and, to an inappreciable extent, concealed from the author himself, if any such thing exists. One can say in any event that all the "pharmaceutical" words we have been pointing out do actually make an "act of presence," so to speak, in the text of the dialogues. Curiously, however, there is another of these words that, to our knowledge, is never used by Plato. If we line it up with the series *pharmakeia-pharmakon-pharmakeus*, we will no longer be able to content ourselves with reconstituting a chain that, for all its hiddenness, for all it might escape Plato's notice, is nevertheless something that passes through certain discoverable *points of presence* that can be seen in the text. The word to which we are now going to refer, which is present in the language and which points to an experience that was present in Greek culture even in Plato's day, seems strikingly absent from the "Platonic text."

But what does *absent* or *present* mean here? Like any text, the text of "Plato" couldn't not be involved, at least in a virtual, dynamic, lateral manner, with all the words that composed the system of the Greek language. Certain forces of association unite—at diverse distances, with

different strengths and according to disparate paths—the words "actually present" in a discourse with all the other words in the lexical system, whether or not they appear as "words," that is, as relative verbal units in such discourse. They communicate with the totality of the lexicon through their syntactic play and at least through the subunits that compose what we call a word. For example, "pharmakon" is already in communication with all the words from the same family, with all the significations constructed out of the same root, and these communications do not stop there. The textual chain we must set back in place is thus no longer simply "internal" to Plato's lexicon. But in going beyond the bounds of that lexicon, we are less interested in breaking through certain limits, with or without cause, than in putting in doubt the right to posit such limits in the first place. In a word, we do not believe that there exists, in all rigor, a Platonic text, closed upon itself, complete with its inside and its outside. Not that one must then consider that it is leaking on all sides and can be drowned confusedly in the undifferentiated generality of its element. Rather, provided the articulations are rigorously and prudently recognized, one should simply be able to untangle the hidden forces of attraction linking a present word with an absent word in the text of Plato. Some such force, given the *system* of the language, cannot *not* have acted upon the writing and the reading of this text. With respect to the weight of such a force, the so-called "presence" of a quite relative verbal unit—the word—while not being a contingent accident worthy of no attention, nevertheless does not constitute the ultimate criterion and the utmost pertinence.

The circuit we are proposing is, moreover, all the more legitimate and easy since it leads to a word that can, on one of its faces, be considered the synonym, almost the homonym, of a word Plato "actually" used. The word in question is *pharmakos* (wizard, magician, poisoner), a synonym of *pharmakeus* (which Plato uses), but with the unique feature of having been overdetermined, overlaid by Greek culture with another function. Another *role*, and a formidable one.

The character of the *pharmakos* has been compared to a scapegoat. The *evil* and the *outside*, the expulsion of the evil, its exclusion out of the body (and out) of the city—these are the two major senses of the character and of the ritual.

Harpocration, commenting on the word *pharmakos*, describes them thus: "At Athens they led out two men to be purifications for the city; it was at the Thargelia, one was for the men and the other for the women."[56] In

56. The principal sources that enable us to describe the ritual of the *pharmakos* are collected in W. Mannhardt's *Mythologische Forschungen* (1884). These sources are themselves referred to in particular by J. G. Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (New York: S. G. Phillips, 1959), pp. 540 ff; by J. E. Harrison in *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (New York: Meridian, 1903), pp. 95 ff, and in *Themis, a Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (1912, p. 416); by Nilsson in *History of Greek Religion* (1925), p. 27; and by P. M. Schuhl in *Essai sur la formation de la pensée grecque* (1934), pp. 36–37. One can also consult the chapter Marie Delcourt devotes to Oedipus in her *Légendes et culte des héros en Grèce* (1942), p. 101; see also by the same author, *Pyrrhos et Pyrrha: Recherches sur les valeurs du feu dans les légendes helléniques* (1965), p. 29, and especially *Oedipe ou la légende du conquérant* (1944), pp. 29–65.

This is doubtless the moment to point out, in connection with the clear necessity of bringing together the figures of Oedipus and the *pharmakos*, that, despite certain appearances, the discourse we are holding here is not in a strict sense a psychoanalytical one. This is true at least to the extent that we are drawing upon the same textual stores (Greek culture, language, tragedy, philosophy, etc.) which Freud had to begin by tapping and to which he never ceased to refer. It is precisely these stores, this fund, that we propose to interrogate here. This does not, however, mean that the distance we have thus taken with respect to a psychoanalytical discourse which might evolve naïvely within an insufficiently deciphered Greek text is of the same order as that maintained for example by Delcourt, *Légendes*, pp. 109, 113, etc.; or J. P. Vernant "Oedipe sans complexe," in *Raison présente* (1967).

After the first publication of this text, there appeared the remarkable essay by J. P. Vernant, "Ambiguité et renversement: sur la structure énigmatique d'Oedipe-Roi" in *Echanges et Communications, mélanges offerts à Claude Lévi-Strauss* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970) [translated by Page du Bois as "Ambiguity and Reversal: On the Enigmatic Structure of *Oedipus Rex*", in *New Literary History* 10, no. 3 (1978)]. One can read, in particular, the following passage, which seems to confirm our hypothesis (cf. note 52): "How could the city admit into its heart one who, like Oedipus, 'has shot his bolt beyond the others' and has become *isotheos*? When it establishes ostracism, it creates an institution whose role is symmetrical to and the inverse of the ritual of the Thargelia. In the person of the ostracized, the city expels what in it is too elevated, what incarnates the evil which can come to it from above. In the evil of the *pharmakos*, it expels what is the vilest in itself, what incarnates the evil that menaces it from below. By this double and complementary rejection it delimits itself in relation to what is not yet known and what transcends the known: it takes the proper measure of the human in opposition on one side to the divine and heroic, on the other to the bestial and monstrous" [Eng. trans. pp. 491–92]. See also (notably on the *poikilon* which we will mention later) "La metis d'Antiloque," *Revue des Etudes grecques*, January/December 1967, and "La metis du renard et du poulpe," ibid. July/December 1969. An additional confirmation can be found in the *Oeuvres* of Marcel Mauss, which appeared in 1969. One can read the following:

"Moreover, all these ideas are double-faced. In other Indo-European languages, it is the notion of poison which is not certain. Kluge and the etymologists are right in comparing the *potio*, "Poison," series with *gift*, *gift* ["gift," which means "present" in English, means "poison" or "married" in other Germanic languages.—Trans.]. One can also read with interest the lively discussion by Aulus-Gellius (12) on the ambiguity of the Greek *pharmakon* and the Latin *venenum*. Indeed, the *Lex Cornelia de Sicariis et veneficis*, of which Cicero has fortunately preserved for us the actual "recitation," still specifies *venenum malum* (13). The magic brew, the delectable charm (14), can be either good or bad. The Greek *philtron* is not necessarily a sinister word, either, and the potion of friendship or love is only dangerous if the enchanter so desires."

(12) 12, 9, with apt quotations from Homer.

(13) *Pro Cluentio*, 148. In the Digesta, it is still recommended that one specify what sort of "venenum," "bonus sive malum," is intended.

(14) If the etymology linking *venenum* (see Walde, Lat. etym. Wört.) with Venus and the skr. *van*, *vanati* is correct, which seems probable.

("*Gift-gift*" (1924), first published in *Mélanges offerts à Charles Andler par ses amis et élèves*, Istra, Strasbourg; in *Oeuvres* III, 50 (Editions de Minuit, 1969).)

general, the *pharmakoi* were put to death. But that, it seems,[57] was not the essential end of the operation. Death occurred most often as a secondary effect of an energetic fustigation. Aimed first at the genital organs.[58] Once the *pharmakoi* were cut off from the space of the city, the blows[59] were designed to chase away or draw out the evil from their bodies. Did they burn them, too, in order to achieve purification? In his *Thousand Histories*,

This brings us to *The Gift* [*L'Essai sur le don*], which refers to the above article:

"(*Gift, gift*: *Mélanges. Ch. Andler*, Strasburg, 1924.) We asked why we do not examine the etymology of *gift* as coming from the Latin *dosis*, Greek δόσις, a dose (of poison). It would suppose that High and Low German had retained a scientific word for a common event, and this is contrary to normal semantic rules. Moreover, one would have to explain the choice of the word *Gift*. Finally, the Latin and Greek *dosis*, meaning poison, shows that with the Ancients as well there was association of ideas and moral rules of the kind we are describing.

"We compare the uncertainty of the meaning of *Gift* with that of the Latin *venenum* and the Greek φίλτρον and φάρμακον. Cf. also *venia*, *venus*, *venenum*—*vanati* (Sanskrit, to give pleasure) and *gewinnen* and win." [trans. Ian Cunnison (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1954), p. 127.]

57. Cf. Harrison, p. 104

58. "Similarly, the object of beating the human scapegoat on the genital organs with squills [a herbaceous, bulbous plant, sometimes grown for its pharmaceutical, esp. diuretic, properties] must have been to release his reproductive energies from any restraint or spell under which they might be laid by demoniacal or other malignant agency . . ." Frazer (1954 ed.), p. 541.

59. We recall the presumed etymology of *pharmakon*/*pharmakos*, detailed in E. Boisacq, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*. "*Pharmakon*: charm, philter, drug, remedy, poison. *Pharmakos*: magician, wizard, poisoner; the one sacrificed in expiation for the sins of a city (cf. Hipponax; Aristophanes), hence, rascal;* *pharmassō*: Attic, *-ttō*, work on or alter by means of a drug.

*Havers, *Indogermanische Forschungen* XXV, 375–92, on the basis of the relation *parempharaktos*: *parakekommenos*, derives *pharmakon* from *pharma*: "blow," and the latter from R. *bher*: to strike, cf. Lith. *buriu*, so that *pharmakon* can be said to signify: "that which pertains to an attack of demonic possession or is used as a curative against such an attack," given the common popular belief that illnesses are caused by the doings of demons and cured in the same way. Kretschmer Glotta III, 388 ff, objects that *pharmakon*, in epic, always designates a substance, an herb, a lotion, a drink, or other matter, but not the act of healing, charming, or poisoning; Havers' etymology adds only one possibility among others, for example the derivation from *pherō*, *pherma*, "*quod terra fert*."

Cf. also Harrison, p. 108: ". . . *pharmakos* means simply 'magic-man.' Its Lithuanian cognate is *burin*, magic; in Latin it appears as *forma*, formula, magical spell; our *formulary* retains some vestige of its primitive connotation. *Pharmakon* in Greek means healing drug, poison, and dye, but all, for better or worse, are magical."

In his *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), Northrop Frye sees in the figure of the *pharmakos* a permanent archetypal structure in Western literature. The exclusion of the *pharmakos*, who is, says Frye, "neither innocent nor guilty" (p. 41), is repeated from Aristophanes to Shakespeare, affecting Shylock as well as Falstaff, Tartuffe no less than Charlie Chaplin. "We meet a *pharmakos* figure in Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, in Melville's Billy Budd, in Hardy's Tess, in the Septimus of *Mrs. Dalloway*, in stories of persecuted Jews and Negroes, in stories of artists whose genius makes them Ishmaels of a bourgeois society" (p. 41, cf. also pp. 45–48, p. 148–49).

Tzetzes gives the following account, based on certain fragments by the satirical poet Hipponax, of the ceremony: "The (rite of the) *pharmakos* was a purification of this sort of old. If a calamity overtook the city by the wrath of God, whether it were famine or pestilence or any other mischief, they led forth as though to a sacrifice the most unsightly of them all as a purification and a remedy to the suffering city. They set the sacrifice in the appointed place, and gave him cheese with their hands and a barley cake and figs, and seven times they smote him with leeks and wild figs and other wild plants. Finally they burnt him with fire with the wood of wild trees and scattered the ashes into the sea and to the winds, for a purification, as I said, of the suffering city."

The city's body *proper* thus reconstitutes its unity, closes around the security of its inner courts, gives back to itself the word that links it with itself within the confines of the agora, by violently excluding from its territory the representative of an external threat or aggression. That representative represents the otherness of the evil that comes to affect or infect the inside by unpredictably breaking into it. Yet the representative of the outside is nonetheless *constituted*, regularly granted its place by the community, chosen, kept, fed, etc., in the very heart of the inside. These parasites were as a matter of course domesticated by the living organism that housed them at its expense. "The Athenians regularly maintained a number of degraded and useless beings at the public expense; and when any calamity, such as plague, drought, or famine, befell the city, they sacrificed two of these outcasts as scapegoats."[60]

The ceremony of the *pharmakos* is thus played out on the boundary line between inside and outside, which it has as its function ceaselessly to trace and retrace. *Intra muros*/*extra muros*. The origin of difference and division, the *pharmakos* represents evil both introjected and projected. Beneficial insofar as he cures—and for that, venerated and cared for—harmful insofar as he incarnates the powers of evil—and for that, feared and treated with caution. Alarming and calming. Sacred and accursed. The conjunction, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, ceaselessly undoes itself in the passage to decision or crisis. The expulsion of the evil or madness restores *sōphrosunē*.

These exclusions took place at critical moments (drought, plague, famine). *Decision* was then repeated. But the mastery of the critical instance requires that surprise be prepared for: by rules, by law, by the regularity of repetition, by fixing the date. This ritual practice, which took place in Abdera, in Thrace, in Marseilles, etc., was reproduced *every year* in Athens.

60. Frazer, (1954 ed.), pp. 540–41. Cf. also Harrison, p. 102.

And up through the fifth century. Aristophanes and Lysias clearly allude to it. Plato could not have been unaware of it.

The date of the ceremony is noteworthy: the sixth day of the Thargelia. That was the day of the birth of him whose death—and not only because a *pharmakon* was its direct cause—resembles that of a *pharmakos* from the inside: Socrates.

Socrates, affectionately called the *pharmakeus* in the dialogues of Plato; Socrates, who faced with the complaint (*graphē*) lodged against him, refused to defend himself, declined the logographic offer of Lysias, "the ablest writer of our time," who had proposed to ghost-write a defense for him; Socrates was born on the sixth day of the Thargelia. Diogenes Laertius testifies to this: "He was born on the sixth day of Thargelion, the day when the Athenians purify the city."

7. The Ingredients: Phantasms, Festivals, and Paints

The rite of the *pharmakos*: evil and death, repetition and exclusion.

Socrates ties up into a system all the counts of indictment against the *pharmakon* of writing at the point at which he adopts as his own, in order to uphold it, interpret it, and make it explicit, the divine, royal, paternal, solar word, the capital sentence of Thamus. The worst effects of writing were only predicted by that word. The king's speech was not demonstrative; it did not pronounce knowledge—it pronounced itself. Announcing, presaging, cutting. It is a *manteia*, Socrates suggests (275*c*). The discourse of Socrates will hence apply itself to the task of translating that *manteia* into philosophy, cashing in on that capital, turning it to account, taking account of it, giving accounts and reasons, upholding the reasoning of that basileo-patro-helio-theological dictum. Transforming the *mythos* into *logos*.

What indeed would be the first thing a disdainful god would find to criticize in that which seems to lie outside his field of effectiveness? Its ineffectiveness, of course, its improductiveness, a productiveness that is only apparent, since it can only repeat what in truth is already there. This is why—Socrates' first argument—writing is not a good *tekhnē*, by which we should understand an art capable of engendering, pro-ducing, bringing forth: the clear, the sure, the secure (*saphes kai bebaion*). That is, the *alētheia* of the *eidos*, the truth of being in its figure, its "idea," its nonsensible visibility, its intelligible invisibility. The truth of what is: writing literally

hasn't a damn sight to do with it. It has rather a blindness to do with it. Whoever might think he has pro-duced truth through a grapheme would only give proof of the greatest foolishness (*euētheia*). Whereas the sage Socrates knows that he knows nothing, that nitwit would not know that he already knows what he thinks he is learning through writing, and which he is only recalling to mind through the types. Not remembering, by anamnesis, the *eidos* contemplated before the fall of the soul into the body, but reminding himself, in a hypomnesic mode, of that of which he already has mnesic knowledge. Written *logos* is only a way for him who already knows (*ton eidota*) to remind himself (*hupomnēsai*) of the things writing is about (*ta gegrammena*) (275*d*). Writing thus only intervenes at a time when a subject of knowledge already possesses the signifieds, which are then only given to writing on consignment.

Socrates thus adopts the major, decisive opposition that cleaves the *manteia* of Thamus: *mnēmē*/*hupomnēsis*, the subtle difference between knowledge as memory and nonknowledge as rememoration, between two forms and two moments of repetition: a repetition of truth (*alētheia*) which presents and exposes the *eidos*; and a repetition of death and oblivion (*lēthē*) which veils and skews because it does not present the *eidos* but re-presents a presentation, repeats a repetition.[61]

Hupomnēsis, which is here what forecasts and shapes the thought about writing, not only does not coincide with memory, but can only be constructed as a thing dependent on memory. And consequently, on the presentation of truth. At the moment it is summoned to appear before the paternal instance, writing is determined within a problematic of knowing-remembering. It is thus from the start stripped of all its own attributes or path-breaking powers. Its path-breaking force is cut not by repetition but by the ills of repetition, by that which within repetition is doubled, redoubled, that which repeats repetition and in so doing, cut off from "good" repetition (which presents and gathers being within living memory), can always, left to itself, stop repeating itself. Writing would be pure repetition, dead repetition that might always be repeating nothing, or be unable *spontaneously* to repeat itself, which also means unable to repeat anything *but* itself: a hollow, cast-off repetition.

This pure repetition, this "bad" reissue, would thus be tautological. Written *logoi* "seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if

61. It could be shown that all of Husserl's phenomenology is systematically organized around an analogous opposition between presentation and re-presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*/*Vergegenwärtigung*), and between primary memory (which is part of the originary "in an extended sense") and secondary memory. Cf. *La Voix et le phénomène* {*Speech and Phenomena*}.

you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever (*hen ti sēmainei monon tauton aei*)" (275*d*). Pure repetition, absolute self-repetition, repetition of a self that is already reference and repetition, repetition of the signifier, repetition that is null or annulling, repetition of death—it's all one. Writing is not the living repetition of the living.

Which makes it similar to painting. And just as the *Republic*, in its condemnation of the imitative arts, links poetry and painting together; just as Aristotle's *Poetics* associates them under the single heading of *mimēsis*; so too Socrates here compares a piece of writing to a portrait, the *graphēma* to the *zōgraphēma*. "You know, Phaedrus, that's the strange (*deinon*) thing about writing, which makes it truly analogous to painting (*homoion zōgraphiai*). The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive (*hōs zōnta*), but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic (*semnōs*) silence. It is the same with written words. . . ." (275*d*).

The impotence to answer for itself, the unresponsiveness and irresponsibility of writing, is decried again by Socrates in the *Protagoras*. Bad public speakers, those who cannot answer "a supplementary question," are "like books: they cannot either answer or ask a question on their own account" (329*a*). That is why, says the Seventh Letter, "no intelligent man will ever be so bold as to put into language those things which his reason has contemplated, especially not into a form that is unalterable—which must be the case with what is expressed in written symbols" (343*a*; cf. also *Laws* XII, 968*d*).

What, in depth, are the resemblances underlying Socrates' statements that make writing homologous to painting? From out of what horizon arise their common silence, their stubborn muteness, their mask of solemn, forbidding majesty that so poorly hides an incurable aphasia, a stone deafness, a closedness irremediably inadequate to the demands of *logos*? If writing and painting are convoked together, summoned to appear with their hands tied, before the tribunal of *logos*, and to respond to it, this is quite simply because both are being *interrogated*: as the presumed representatives of a spoken word, as agents capable of speech, as depositaries or even fences for the words the court is trying to force out of them. If they should turn out not to be up to testifying in this hearing, if they turn out to be impotent to represent a live word properly, to act as its interpreter or spokesman, to sustain the conversation, to respond to oral questions, then bam! they are good for nothing. They are mere figurines, masks, simulacra.

Let us not forget that painting is here called *zōgraphia*, inscribed representation, a drawing *of the living*, a portrait of an animate model. The model

for this type of painting is representative painting, which conforms to a live model. The word *zōgraphēma* is indeed sometimes shortened to *gramma* (*Cratylus*, 430*e* and 431*c*). Similarly, writing was supposed to paint a living word. It thus resembles painting to the extent that it is conceived—in this whole Platonic problematic, this massive and fundamental determination can be stated in a word—on the basis of the particular model of phonetic writing, which reigned in Greek culture. The signs of writing functioned within a system where they were supposed to represent the signs of voice. They were signs of signs.

Thus, just as painting and writing have faithfulness to the model as their model, the resemblance between painting and writing is precisely *resemblance itself*: both operations must aim above all at resembling. They are both apprehended as mimetic techniques, art being first determined as mimesis.

Despite this resemblance of resemblance, writing's case is a good deal more serious. Like any imitative art, painting and poetry are of course far away from truth (*Republic* X, 603*b*). But these two both have mitigating circumstances. Poetry imitates, but it imitates voice by means of voice. Painting, like sculpture, is silent, but so in a sense is its model. Painting and sculpture are arts of silence, as Socrates, the son of a sculptor who at first wanted to follow in his father's footsteps, very well knows. He knows this and says it in the *Gorgias* (450 *c–d*). The silence of the pictorial or sculptural space is, as it were, normal. But this is no longer the case in the scriptural order, since writing gives itself as the image of speech. Writing thus more seriously denatures what it claims to imitate. It does not even substitute an image for its model. It inscribes in the space of silence and in the silence of space the living time of voice. It displaces its model, provides no image of it, violently wrests out of its element the animate interiority of speech. In so doing, writing estranges itself immensely from the truth of the thing itself, from the truth of speech, from the truth that is open to speech.

And hence, from the king.

Let us recall the famous indictment of pictorial mimetics in the *Republic* (X, 597).[62] First, it is a question of banning poetry from the city, and this time, in contrast to what occurs in books II and III, for reasons linked essentially with its mimetic nature. The tragic poets, when they practice imitation, corrupt the minds of the listeners (*tēs tōn akouontōn dianoias*) if these do not possess an antidote (*pharmakon*, 595*a*). This counterpoison is "knowledge of the real nature of things" (*to eidenai auta hoia tungkhanei*

62. I shall study this passage from another viewpoint in a forthcoming text, "Entre deux coups de dés."

onta). If one considers that imitators and masters of illusion will later be presented as charlatans and thaumaturges (602*d*)—species of the genus *pharmakeus*—then once again ontological knowledge becomes a pharmaceutical force opposed to another pharmaceutical force. The order of knowledge is not the transparent order of forms and ideas, as one might be tempted retrospectively to interpret it; it is the antidote. Long before being divided up into occult violence and accurate knowledge, the element of the *pharmakon* is the combat zone between philosophy and its other. An element that is *in itself*, if one can still say so, *undecidable*.

Of course, in order to define the poetry of imitation, one has to know what imitation in general is. This is where that most *familiar* of examples comes in: the origin of the bed. Elsewhere, we will be able to take the time to inquire about the necessity governing the choice of this example and about the switch in the text that makes us slide insensibly from the table to the bed. The already made bed. In any case, God is the true father of the bed, of the clinical *eidos*. The carpenter is its "Demiurge." The painter, who is again called a zoographer, is neither its generator (*phutourgos*: author of the *phusis*—as truth—of the bed), nor its demiurge. Only its imitator. It is thus by three degrees that he is separated from the original truth, the *phusis* of the bed.

And hence, from the king.

"This, then, will apply to the maker of tragedies also, if he is an imitator and is in his nature at three removes from the king and the truth, as are all other imitators" (597*e*).

As for couching this *eidōlon* in written form, writing down the image that poetic imitation has already made, that would be equivalent to moving to a *fourth degree* of distance from the king, or rather, through a change of order or of element, wandering into an excessive estrangement from him, if Plato himself did not elsewhere assert, speaking of the imitative poet in general, that "he is always at an infinite remove from truth" (*tou de alēthous porrō panu aphestōta*) (605*c*). For in contrast to painting, writing doesn't even create a phantasm. The painter, of course, does not produce the being-true but the appearance, the *phantasm* (598*b*), that is, what is already a simulation of the copy (*Sophist*, 236*b*). In general, *phantasma* (the copy of a copy) has been translated as "simulacrum."[63] He who writes with the alphabet no longer

63. On the place and evolution of the concept of *mimēsis* in Plato's thought, we refer the reader primarily to V. Goldschmidt's *Essai sur le Cratyle* (1940) (esp. pp. 165 ff). What is made clear there is the fact that Plato did not always and everywhere condemn *mimēsis*. But one can at any rate conclude this: whether or not Plato condemns imitation, he poses the question of poetry by determining it as *mimēsis*, thus opening the field in which Aristotle's

even imitates. No doubt because he also, in a sense, imitates perfectly. He has a better chance of reproducing the voice, because phonetic writing decomposes it better and transforms it into abstract, spatial elements. This *de-composition* of the voice is here both what best conserves it and what best corrupts it. What imitates it perfectly because it no longer imitates it at all. For imitation affirms and sharpens its essence in effacing itself. Its essence is its nonessence. And no dialectic can encompass this self-inadequation. A perfect imitation is no longer an imitation. If one eliminates the tiny difference that, in separating the imitator from the imitated, by that very fact refers to it, one would render the imitator absolutely different: the imitator would become another being no longer referring to the imitated.[64] Imitation does not correspond to its essence, is not what it is —imitation— unless it is in some way at fault or rather in default. It is bad by nature. It is only good insofar as it is bad. Since (de)fault is inscribed within it, it has no nature; nothing is properly its own. Ambivalent, playing with itself by hollowing itself out, good and evil at once—undecidably, *mimēsis* is akin to the *pharmakon*. No "logic," no "dialectic," can consume its reserve even though each must endlessly draw on it and seek reassurance through it.

And as it happens, the technique of imitation, along with the production of the simulacrum, has always been in Plato's eyes manifestly magical, thaumaturgical:

> And the same things appear bent and straight to those who view them in water and out, or concave and convex, owing to similar errors of vision about colors, and there is obviously every confusion of this sort in our souls. And so scene painting (*skiagraphia*) in its exploitation of

Poetics, entirely subsumed under that category, will produce *the concept* of literature that reigned until the nineteenth century, up to but not including Kant and Hegel (not including them at least if *mimēsis* is translated as *imitation*).

On the other hand, Plato condemns under the name *phantasm* or *simulacrum* what is being advanced today, in its most radical exigency, as writing. Or at any rate that is what one can call, *within* philosophy and "mimetology," that which exceeds the conceptual oppositions within which Plato defines the phantasm. Beyond these oppositions, beyond the values of truth and nontruth, this excess (of) writing can no longer, as one might guess, be qualified simply as a simulacrum or phantasm. Nor can it indeed be named by the classical concept of writing.

64. "Let us suppose the existence of two objects (*pragmata*). One of them shall be Cratylus, and the other the image of Cratylus, and we will suppose, further, that some god makes not only a representation such as a painter would make of your outward form and color, but also creates an inward organization like yours, having the same warmth and softness, and into this infuses motion, and soul, and mind, such as you have, and in a word copies all your qualities, and places them by you in another form. Would you say that this was Cratylus and the image of Cratylus, or that there were two Cratyluses? *Cratylus*: I should say that there were two Cratyluses" (432*b–c*).

> this weakness of our nature falls nothing short of witchcraft (*thaumatopoia*), and so do jugglery (*goēteia*) and many other such contrivances. (*Republic* X, 602*c–d*; cf. also 607*c*).[65]

The antidote is still the *epistēmē*. And since hybris is at bottom nothing but that excessive momentum that (en)trains being in(to) the simulacrum, the mask, the festival, there can be no antidote but that which enables one to remain *measured*. The *alexipharmakon* will be the science of measure, in every sense of the word. The text goes on:

> But satisfactory remedies have been found for dispelling these illusions by measuring (*metrein*), counting (*arithmein*), and weighing (*histanai*). We are no longer at the mercy of an appearance (*phainomenon*) of difference in size and quantity and weight; the faculty which has done the counting and measuring or weighing takes control instead. And this can only be the work of the calculating or reasoning element (*tou logistikou ergon*) in the soul. (The word translated as "remedies" is the word used in the *Phaedrus* to qualify the attendance, the assistance [*boētheia*] that the father of living speech ought always to provide for writing, which is quite helpless in itself.)

The illusionist, the technician of sleight-of-hand, the painter, the writer, the *pharmakeus*. This has not gone unnoticed: ". . . isn't the word *pharmakon*, which means color, the very same word that applies to the drugs of sorcerers or doctors? Don't the casters of spells resort to wax figurines in pursuing their evil designs?"[66] Bewitchment [*l'envoûtement*] is always the effect of a *representation*, pictorial or scriptural, capturing, captivating the form of the other, par excellence his face, countenance, word and look, mouth and eye, nose and ears: the *vultus*.

The word *pharmakon*, then, also designates pictorial color, the material in which the *zōgraphēma* is inscribed. Turn to the *Cratylus*: in his exchange with Hermogenes, Socrates examines the hypothesis according to which names imitate the essence of things. He compares, in order to make a distinction between them, musical or pictorial imitation, on the one hand, and nominal imitation, on the other. What he does then is interesting to us not only because he refers to the *pharmakon* but also because another necessity imposes itself on him, one on which we will henceforth progressively attempt to shed some light: at the moment he takes up the question of the differential elements of nominal language, he is obliged, as is

65. On all these themes, see esp. P. M. Schuhl, *Platon et l'Art de son temps*.
66. Schuhl, p. 22. Cf. also *l'Essai sur la formation de la pensée grecque*, pp. 39 ff.

Saussure after him, to suspend the insistence on voice as sonority imitative of sounds (imitative music). If the voice names, it is through the differences and relations that are introduced among the *stoikheia*, the elements or letters (*grammata*). The same word (*stoikheia*) is used for both elements and letters. And one ought to reflect upon what here appears to be a conventional or pedagogical necessity: phonemes in general, vowels—*phōnēenta*[67] —and consonants, are designated by the letters that inscribe them.

> *Socrates*: . . . But how shall we further analyze them, and when does the imitator begin? Imitation of the essence is made by syllables and letters. Ought we not, therefore, first to separate the letters, just as those who are beginning rhythm first distinguish the powers of elementary sounds (*stoikheiōn*) and then of compound sounds, and when they have done so, but not before, proceed to the consideration of rhythms?
>
> *Hermogenes*: Yes.
>
> *Socrates*: Must we not begin in the same way with letters—first separating the vowels (*phōnēenta*), and then the consonants and mutes (*aphōna kai aphthonga*), into classes, according to the received distinctions of the learned, also the semivowels, which are neither vowels nor yet mutes, and distinguishing into classes the vowels themselves. And when we have perfected the classification of things, we shall give their names, and see whether, as in the case of letters, there are any classes to which they may all be referred, and hence we shall see their natures, and see, too, whether they have in them classes as there are in the letters. And when we have well considered all this, we shall know how to apply them to what they resemble, whether one letter is used to denote one thing, or whether there is to be an admixture of several of them, just as, in painting, the painter who wants to depict anything sometimes uses purple only, or any other color (*allo tōn pharmakōn*), and sometimes mixes up several colors, as his method is when he has to paint flesh color or anything of that kind—he uses a particular color (*pharmakou*) as his figures appear to require it. And so, too, we shall apply letters to the expression of objects, either single letters when required, or several letters, and so we shall form syllables, as they are called, and from syllables make nouns and verbs, and thus, at last, from the combination of nouns and verbs arrive at language,

67. Cf. also Philebus, 18*a–b*.

> large and fair and whole, just as the painter used his paint (*tēi graphikēi*) to reproduce a living creature (*zōon*). (424*b* – 425*a*)

And further on:

> *Socrates*: Very good, but if the name is to be like the thing, the letters out of which the first names are composed must also be like things. Returning to the image of the picture, I would ask how anyone could ever compose a picture which would be like anything at all, if there were not pigments (*pharmakeia*) in nature which resembled the things imitated, and out of which the picture is composed. (434*a*–*b*)

The *Republic* also calls the painter's colors *pharmaka* (420*c*). The magic of writing and painting is like a cosmetic concealing the dead under the appearance of the living. The *pharmakon* introduces and harbors death. It makes the corpse presentable, masks it, makes it up, perfumes it with its essence, as it is said in Aeschylus. *Pharmakon* is also a word for perfume. A perfume without essence, as we earlier called it a drug without substance. It transforms order into ornament, the cosmos into a cosmetic. Death, masks, makeup, all are part of the festival that subverts the order of the city, its smooth regulation by the dialectician and the science of being. Plato, as we shall see, is not long in identifying writing with festivity. And play. A certain festival, a certain game.

8. The Heritage of the Pharmakon: Family Scene

We have now penetrated into another level of the Platonic reserves. This pharmacy is also, we begin to perceive, a theater. The theatrical cannot here be summed up in speech: it involves forces, space, law, kinship, the human, the divine, death, play, festivity. Hence the new depth that reveals itself to us will necessarily be another scene, on another stage, or rather another tableau in the unfolding of the play of writing. After the presentation of the *pharmakon* to the father, after the put-down of Theuth, Socrates takes the spoken word back to his own account. He seems to want to substitute *logos* for myth, discourse for theater, demonstration for illustration. And yet, within his very explanations, another scene slowly comes to light, less immediately visible than the preceding one, but, in its muffled latency, just as tense, just as violent as the other, composing with it, within

the pharmaceutical enclosure, an artful, living organization of figures, displacements, repetitions.

This scene has never been read for what it is, for what is at once sheltered and exposed in its metaphors: its *family* metaphors. It is all about fathers and sons, about bastards unaided by any public assistance, about glorious, legitimate sons, about inheritance, sperm, sterility. Nothing is said of the mother, but this will not be held against us. And if one looks hard enough as in those pictures in which a second picture faintly can be made out, one might be able to discern her unstable form, drawn upside-down in the foliage, at the back of the garden. In the garden of Adonis, *eis Adōnidos kēpous* (276*b*).

Socrates has just compared the offspring (*ekgona*) of painting with those of writing. He has ridiculed their self-satisfied unsatisfactoriness, the solemn tautological monotony of the responses they give whenever we interrogate them. He goes on:

> And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its aid, being unable to defend itself or attend to its own needs. (275*e*)

The anthropomorphic or even animistic metaphor can doubtless be explained by the fact that what is written down is *speech* (*logos gegrammenos*). As a living thing, *logos* issues from a father. There is thus for Plato no such thing as a written thing. There is only a *logos* more or less alive, more or less distant from itself. Writing is not an independent order of signification; it is weakened speech, something not completely dead: a living-dead, a reprieved corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath. The phantom, the phantasm, the simulacrum (*eidōlon*, 276*a*) of living discourse is not inanimate; it is not insignificant; it simply signifies little, and always the same thing. This signifier of little, this discourse that doesn't amount to much, is like all ghosts: errant. It rolls (*kulindeitai*) this way and that like someone who has lost his way, who doesn't know where he is going, having strayed from the correct path, the right direction, the rule of rectitude, the norm; but also like someone who has lost his rights, an outlaw, a pervert, a bad seed, a vagrant, an adventurer, a bum. Wandering in the streets, he doesn't even know who he is, what his identity—if he has one—might be, what his name is, what his father's name is. He repeats the same thing every time he

is questioned on the street corner, but he can no longer repeat his origin. Not to know where one comes from or where one is going, for a discourse with no guarantor, is not to know how to speak at all, to be in a state of infancy. Uprooted, anonymous, unattached to any house or country, this almost insignificant signifier is at everyone's disposal,[68] can be picked up by both the competent and the incompetent, by those who understand and know what to do with it [*ceux qui entendent et s'y entendent*] (*tois epaîousin*), and by those who are completely unconcerned with it, and who, knowing nothing about it, can inflict all manner of impertinence upon it.

At the disposal of each and of all, available on the sidewalks, isn't writing thus essentially democratic? One could compare the trial of writing with the trial of democracy outlined in the *Republic*. In a democratic society, there is no concern for competence: responsibilities are given to anyone at all. Magistracies are decided by lots (557*a*). Equality is equally dispensed to equal and unequal alike (558*c*). Excess, anarchy; the democratic man, with no concern for hierarchy, "establishes and maintains all his pleasures on a footing of equality, forsooth, and so lives turning over the guardhouse of his soul to each as it happens along until it is sated, as if it had drawn the lot for that office, and then in turn to another, disdaining none but fostering them all equally. . . . And he does not accept or admit into the guardhouse reason (*logon*) or truth (*alēthē*) when anyone tells him that some pleasures arise from honorable and good desires, and others from those that are base, and that we ought to practice and esteem the one and control and subdue the others, but he shakes his head at all such admonitions and avers that they are all alike and to be equally esteemed" (561*b*—*c*).

68. J. P. Vernant calls attention to such "democratization" of and through writing in classical Greece. "To this importance assumed by speech, which from that time forward became the instrument par excellence of political life, there also corresponds a change in the social significance of writing. In the kingdoms of the Near East, writing was the privilege and specialty of scribes. Writing enabled the royal administration to control the economic and social life of the State by keeping records of it. Its purpose was to constitute archives which were always kept more or less secret inside the palace. . . ." In classical Greece, "instead of being the exclusive privilege of one caste, the secret belonging to a class of scribes working for the palace of the king, writing becomes the 'common property' of all citizens, an instrument of publicity. . . .Laws had to be written down. . . . The consequences of this change in the social status of writing will be fundamental for intellectual history" (Vernant, *Mythe et Pensée*, pp. 151–52; cf. also pp. 52, 78, and *Les Origines de la pensée grecque*, pp. 43–44). Could it not be said, then, that Plato is continuing to think of writing from the viewpoint of the king, presenting it within the outmoded structures of the *basileia*? Structures which no doubt adhere to the mythemes informing his thought? But on the other hand, Plato believes in the need for written laws; and the suspicion against the occult virtues of writing would be aimed rather toward a non-"democratic" politics of writing. One must untangle all these threads and respect all these strata and discrepancies. In any event, the development of phonetic writing is inseparable from the movement of "democratization."

This errant democrat, wandering like a desire or like a signifier freed from *logos*, this individual who is not even perverse in a regular way, who is ready to do anything, to lend himself to anyone, who gives himself equally to all pleasures, to all activities—eventually even to politics or philosophy ("at another time seeming to occupy himself with philosophy, and frequently he goes in for politics and bounces up and says and does whatever enters his head" 561*d*)—this adventurer, like the one in the *Phaedrus*, simulates everything at random and is really nothing. Swept off by every stream, he belongs to the masses; he has no essence, no truth, no patronym, no constitution of his own. Moreover, democracy is no more a true constitution than the democrat has a character of his own: "I certainly think, said I, that he is a manifold man stuffed with the most excellent differences, and that like that city he is the fair and many-colored (*poikilon*) one whom many a man and woman would count fortunate in his life, as containing within himself the greatest number of patterns of constitutions and qualities" (561*e*). Democracy is orgy, debauchery, flea market, fair, "a bazaar (*pantopōlion*) of constitutions where one can choose the one to make one's own" (557*d*).

Whether it is seen as graphics or as politics, or, better—as the whole eighteenth century in France will do, especially Rousseau—as politico-graphics, such degradation can always be explained in terms of a bad relation between father and son (cf. 559*a*-560*b*). Desires, says Plato, should be raised like sons.

Writing is the miserable son. *Le misérable*. Socrates' tone is sometimes *categorical* and condemnatory—denouncing a wayward, rebellious son, an immoderation or perversion—and sometimes touched and condescending—pitying a defenseless living thing, a son abandoned by his father. In any event the son is *lost*. His impotence is truly that of an orphan[69] as much

69. The orphan is always, in the text of Plato—and elsewhere—the model of the persecuted creature. We had begun by stressing the affinity between writing and *mythos* created by their common opposition to *logos*. Orphanhood is perhaps another side of their kinship. *Logos* has a father; the father of a myth is almost impossible to find. Hence the need for assistance (*boētheia*) mentioned by the *Phaedrus* in connection with writing as an orphan. This also appears elsewhere: "*Socrates*: . . . And no one was left to tell Protagoras' tale, or yours either, about knowledge and perception being the same thing. *Theaetetus*: So it appears. *Socrates*: I fancy it would be very different if the author of the first story were still alive. He would have put up a good fight for his offspring. But he is dead, and here we are trampling on the orphan. Even its appointed guardians, like Theodorus here, will not come to the rescue (*boēthein*). However, we will step into the breach ourselves and see that it has fair play (*boēthein*). *Theodorus*: . . . I shall be grateful for any succor (*boēthēis*) you can give him. *Socrates*: Very good, Theodorus. You shall see what my help (*boētheian*) will amount to . . ." (*Theaetetus*, 164*d*–165*a*).

as that of a justly or unjustly persecuted patricide. In his commiseration, Socrates sometimes gets quite carried away: alongside the living discourses persecuted and deprived of the aid of a logographer (this was the case with Socrates' own spoken words), there are also half-dead discourses—writings—persecuted for lack of the dead father's voice. Writing can thus be attacked, bombarded with unjust reproaches (*ouk en dikēi loidorētheis*) that only the father could dissipate—thus assisting his son—if the son had not, precisely, killed him.

In effect, the father's death opens the reign of violence. In choosing violence—and that is what it's all about from the beginning—and violence against the father, the son—or patricidal writing—cannot fail to expose himself, too. All this is done in order to ensure that the dead father, first victim and ultimate resource, not be there. Being-there is always a property of paternal speech. And the site of a fatherland.

Writing, the outlaw, the lost son. Plato, we recall, always associates speech and law, *logos* and *nomos*, and laws speak. In the personification in the *Crito*, they speak to Socrates directly. And in the tenth book of the *Republic*, they address themselves precisely to the father who has lost his son, they console him and urge him to resist his grief:

> When a good and reasonable man, said I, experiences such a stroke of fortune as the loss of a son or anything else that he holds most dear, we said, I believe, then too, that he will bear it more easily than the other sort. . . .Now is it not reason and law (*logos kai nomos*) that exhorts him to resist, while that which urges him to give way to his grief is the bare feeling itself (*auto to pathos*)?. . . The law declares (*legei pou ho nomos*) that it is best to keep quiet as far as possible in calamity. . . . (603*e*—604*a–b*)

What is the father? we asked earlier. The father is. The father is (the son lost). Writing, the lost son, does not answer this question—it writes (itself): (that) the father *is not*, that is to say, is not present. When it is no longer a spoken word fallen away from the father, writing suspends the question *what is*, which is always, tautologically, the question "what is the father?" and the reply "the father is what is." At that point a flap is produced that can no longer be thought about within the familiar opposition of father to son, speech to writing.

The time has come to recall the fact that Socrates, in the dialogues, plays the role of father, *represents* the father. Or the elder brother. We will see in a minute what the story is with the elder brother. And Socrates reminds the Athenians, like a father speaking to his children, that in killing him it is

themselves they will hurt most. Let us listen to him in his prison cell. His ruse is infinite—and therefore naive or null (keep me alive—since I am already dead—for you):

> Remember my request to give me a hearing without interruption. . . . I assure you that if I am what I claim to be, and you put me to death, you will harm yourselves more than me. . . .If you put me to death, you will not easily find anyone to take my place. It is literally true, even if it sounds rather comical, that God has specially appointed me to this city, as though it were a large thoroughbred horse which because of its great size is inclined to be lazy and needs the stimulation of some stinging fly. It seems to me that God has attached me to this city to perform the office of such a fly, and all day long I never cease to settle here, there, and everywhere, rousing, persuading, reproving every one of you. You will not easily find another like me, gentlemen, and if you take my advice you will spare my life. I suspect, however, that before long you will awake from your drowsing, and in your annoyance you will take Anytus' advice and finish me off with a single slap, and then you will go on sleeping till the end of your days, unless God in his care for you sends someone to take my place (*epipempseie*). If you doubt whether I am really the sort of person who would have been sent to this city as a gift from God, you can convince yourselves by looking at it in this way. Does it seem natural that I should have neglected my own affairs and endured the humiliation of allowing my family to be neglected for all these years, while I busied myself all the time on your behalf, going to see each one of you privately like a father or an elder brother (*hōsper patera ē adelphon presbuteron*), and urging you to set your thoughts on goodness? (*Apology*, 30*c*–31*b*).

And what pushes Socrates to take the place [*suppleér*] of the father or elder brother toward the Athenians—a role in which he, too, will have to be replaced—is a certain voice. Which forbids, moreover, more than it bids; and which he obeys spontaneously, like the good horse in the *Phaedrus*, for whom the commands of the voice, of *logos*, suffice:

> The reason for this is what you have often heard me say before on many other occasions—that I am subject to a divine or supernatural experience [*phōnē*], which Meletus saw fit to travesty in his indictment (*ho dē kai en tēi graphēi epikōmōidōn Meletos egrapsato*). It began in my early childhood—a sort of voice (*phōnē*) which comes to me, and when it comes it always dissuades me from what I am proposing to do, and never urges me on. (31*c–d*)

As the bearer of this sign from God (*to tou theou sēmeion*, 40 *b*, *c* ; *to daimonion sēmeion*, *Republic* VI, 496*c*), Socrates thus takes voice from the father; he is the father's spokesman. And Plato writes *from out of his death*. All Plato's writing—and we are not speaking here about what it means, its intended content: the reparations of and to the father made against the *graphē* that decided his *death*—is thus, *when read from the viewpoint of Socrates' death*, in the situation of writing as it is indicted in the *Phaedrus*. These scenes enclose and fit into each other endlessly, abyssally. The pharmacy has no foundation.

Now, what about the accused? Up to now writing—written speech—has had no other status, as it were, than that of an orphan or moribund parricide. And while it becomes perverted in the course of its adventures by breaking with its origin, nothing has yet indicated that that origin was itself already bad. But it now appears that written discourse, in its "proper" meaning—that which is inscribed in sensible space—is deformed at its very birth. It is not well born: not only, as we have seen, because it is not entirely viable, but because it is not of good birth, of legitimate birth. It is not *gnēsios*. It is not exactly a commoner; it is a bastard. By the voice of its father it cannot be avowed, recognized. It is outside the law. After Phaedrus has agreed, Socrates goes on (276*a*–*b*):

> *Socrates*: But now tell me, is there another sort of discourse, that is brother to the written speech, but of unquestioned legitimacy (*adelphon gnēsion*)? Can we see how it originates, and how much better and more effective it is than the other?
>
> *Phaedrus*: What sort of discourse have you now in mind, and what is its origin?
>
> *Socrates*: The sort that goes together with knowledge and is written in the soul of the learner (*hos met'epistēmēs graphetai en tēi tou manthanontos psuchēi*), that can defend itself (*dunatos men amunai heautōi*), and knows to whom it should speak and to whom it should say nothing.
>
> *Phaedrus*: Do you mean the discourse of a man who really knows (*tou eidotos logon*), which is living and animate (*zōnta kai empsukhon*)? Would it be fair to call the written discourse only a kind of ghost (*eidōlon*) of it?
>
> *Socrates*: Precisely.

In its content, this exchange has nothing original about it. Alcidamas[70] said more or less the same thing. But it marks a sort of reversal in the

70. Cf. M. J. Milne, *A study in Alcidamas and his relation to contemporary sophistic* (1924) and P. N. Schuhl, *Platon et l'Art de son temps*, p. 49.

There is another allusion to the legitimate sons in 278*a*. On the opposition between

functioning of the argument. While presenting writing as a false brother—traitor, infidel, and simulacrum—Socrates is for the first time led to envision the brother of this brother, the legitimate one, as *another sort of writing*: not merely as a knowing, living, animate discourse, but as an *inscription* of truth in the soul. It is no doubt usually assumed that what we are dealing with here is a "metaphor." Plato—why not and so what?—thought so, too, perhaps, at the moment the history of this "metaphor" (inscription, imprint, mark, etc., in the wax of the mind or soul) was being engaged, or even inaugurated; a "metaphor" philosophy will never thereafter be able to do without, however uncritical its treatment might be. But it is not any less remarkable here that the so-called living discourse should suddenly be described by a "metaphor" borrowed from the order of the very thing one is trying to exclude from it, the order of its simulacrum. Yet this borrowing is rendered necessary by that which structurally links the intelligible to its repetition in the copy, and the language describing dialectics cannot fail to call upon it.

According to a pattern that will dominate all of Western philosophy, good writing (natural, living, knowledgeable, intelligible, internal, speaking) is opposed to bad writing (a moribund, ignorant, external, mute artifice for the senses). And the good one can be designated only through the metaphor of the bad one. Metaphoricity is the logic of contamination and the contamination of logic. Bad writing is for good a model of linguistic designation and a simulacrum of essence. And if the network of opposing predicates that link one type of writing to the other contains in its meshes all the conceptual oppositions of "Platonism"—here considered the dominant structure of the history of metaphysics—then it can be said that philosophy is played out in the play between two kinds of writing. Whereas all it wanted to do was to distinguish between writing and speech.

It is later confirmed that the conclusion of the *Phaedrus* is less a condemnation of writing in the name of present speech than a preference for one sort of writing over another, for the fertile trace over the sterile trace, for a seed that engenders because it is planted inside over a seed scattered wastefully outside: at the risk of *dissemination*. This, at least, is presumed by that. Before trying to account for this in terms of the general structure of Platonism, let us follow this movement.

The entrance of the *pharmakon* on the scene, the evolution of the magic powers, the comparison with painting, the politico-familial violence and

bastards and well-born sons (*nothoi/gnēsioi*), cf. notably, *Republic* (496*a*: "sophisms" have nothing "gnēsion" about them), and the *Statesman* (293*e*: "imitations" of constitutions are not "well born") Cf. also *Gorgias*, 513*b*; *Laws*, 741 *a*, etc.

perversion, the allusion to makeup, masks, simulacra—all this couldn't *not* lead us to games and festivals, which can never go without some sort of urgency or outpouring of sperm.

The reader will not be disappointed, provided he accepts a certain scansion of the text and agrees not to consider as mere rhetorical contingencies the terms of the analogy proposed by Socrates.

Here is the analogy: simulacrum-writing is to what it represents (that is, true writing—writing which is true because it is authentic, corresponds to its value, conforms to its essence, is the writing of truth in the soul of him who possesses the *epistēmē*) as weak, easily exhausted, superfluous seeds giving rise to ephemeral produce (floriferous seeds) are to strong, fertile seeds engendering necessary, lasting, nourishing produce (fructiferous seeds). On the one hand, we have the patient, sensible farmer (*ho noun ekhōn geōrgos*); on the other, the Sunday gardener, hasty, dabbling, and frivolous. On the one hand, the serious (*spoudē*); on the other, the game (*paidia*) and the holiday (*heortē*). On the one hand cultivation, agri-culture, knowledge, economy; on the other, art, enjoyment and unreserved spending.

> *Socrates*: . . . and now tell me this. If a sensible farmer[71] had some seeds to look after (*hōn spermatōn kēdoito*) and wanted them to bear fruit,

71. An analogous allusion to the farmer or husbandman is found in the *Theaetetus* (166*a*, ff); it is caught in a similar problematic, in the middle of the extraordinary defense Socrates puts in Protagoras' mouth, making him sound off about his four (non)truths, which are of the utmost importance to us here: it is a point at which all the corridors of this pharmacy intersect.

"*Socrates*: No doubt, then, Protagoras will make all the points we have put forward in our attempt to defend him, and at the same time will come to close quarters with the assailant, dismissing us with contempt. Your admirable Socrates, he will say, finds a little boy who is scared at being asked whether one and the same person can remember and at the same time not know one and the same thing. When the child is frightened into saying no, because he cannot foresee the consequence, Socrates turns the conversation so as to make a figure of fun of my unfortunate self. . . . For I do indeed assert that the truth is as I have written (*hōs gegrapha*). Each one of us is a measure of what is and of what is not, but there is all the difference in the world between one man and another (*murion mentoi diapherein heteron heterou antōi toutōi*). . . . In this statement (*logon*), again, don't set off in chase of words (*tōi rhēmati*), but let me explain still more clearly what I mean. Remember how it was put earlier in the conversation. To the sick man his food appears sour and is so; to the healthy man it is and appears the opposite. Now there is no call to represent either of the two as wiser—that cannot be—nor is the sick man to be pronounced unwise because he thinks as he does, or the healthy man wise because he thinks differently. What is wanted is a change (*metablēteon*) to the opposite condition, because the other state is better.

"And so too in education a change has to be effected from the worse condition to the better; only whereas the physician produces a change by means of drugs (*pharmakois*) the Sophist does it by discourse (*logois*). . . .And as for the wise (sophous), my dear Socrates, so far from calling them frogs, I call them, when they have to do with the body, physicians, and when they have to do with plants, husbandmen. . . . In this way it is true both that some men are wiser (*sophóteroi*) than others and that no one thinks falsely. . . ."

> would he with serious intent (*spoudēi*) plant them during the summer in a garden of Adonis,[72] and enjoy watching it produce fine fruit within eight days? If he did so at all wouldn't it be in a holiday spirit (*heortēs . . . Kharin*) just for fun (*paidias*)?[73] For serious purposes wouldn't he behave like a scientific farmer, sow his seeds in suitable soil, and be well content if they came to maturity within eight months? . . . And are we to maintain that he who has knowledge of what is just, honorable, and good has less sense than the farmer in dealing with his seeds? . . . Then it won't be with serious intent (*spoudēi*) that he will "write them in water" (*en hudati grapsei*, an expression equivalent to "writing in sand") or in that black fluid we call ink, using his pen to sow words (*melani speirōn dia kalamou meta logōn*) that can't either speak in their own support (*boēthein*) or teach the truth adequately. (276*b–c*)

72. "At the feasts of Adonis," notes Robin, "it was customary to grow, out of season, in a seashell, in a basket, in a vase, certain short-lived plants: offerings that symbolized the premature end of Aphrodite's beloved." Adonis, who was born in a tree—a metamorphosis of Myrrha—was loved and pursued by Venus, then hunted by Mars, who, jealous, changed into a boar, killed him with a wound in the thigh. In the arms of Venus who arrived too late, he became an anemone, an ephemeral spring flower. Anemone: that is, breath.

The opposition farmer/gardener (fruits/flowers; lasting/ephemeral; patience/haste; seriousness/play, etc.) can be juxtaposed to the theme of the double gift in the *Laws*:

"As to the fruit harvest, there must be an accepted general understanding to some effect as this. Two gifts are bestowed on us by the bounty of the goddess of harvest, one the 'ungarnered nursling of Dionysus' (*paidian Dionusiada*), the other destined for storage. So our law of fruits shall impose the following rules. If a man taste the common sort of fruit, whether grapes or figs, before Arcturus have brought round the season of vintage . . . he shall incur a fine in honor of Dionysus, of fifty drachmas" (VIII, 844*d–e*).

Within the problematic space that brings together, by opposing them, writing and agriculture, it could easily be shown that the paradoxes of the supplement as *pharmakon* and as writing, as engraving and as bastardy, etc., are the same as those of the graft [*greffe*], of the operation of grafting [*greffer*] (which means "engraving"), of the grafter [*greffeur*], of the *greffier* (a clerk of the court; a registrar), of the grafting-knife [*greffoir*], and of the scion [*greffon*]. [The sense of "graft" in English as political or financial corruption is not irrelevant here, either.—Trans.] It could also be shown that all the most modern dimensions (biological, psychical, ethical) of the problem of graft, even when they concern parts believed to be hegemonic and perfectly "proper" to what one thinks belongs to the individual (the intellect or head, the affect or heart, the desires or loins) are caught up and constrained within the graphics of the supplement.

73. Alcidamas, too, had defined writing as a game (*paidia*). Cf. Paul Friedlander, *Platon: Seinswahrheit und Lebenswirklichkeit*, part 1, chap. 5, and A. Diès, p. 427.

Sperm, water, ink, paint, perfumed dye: the *pharmakon* always penetrates like a liquid; it is absorbed, drunk, introduced into the inside, which it first marks with the hardness of the type, soon to invade it and inundate it with its medicine, its brew, its drink, its potion, its poison.

In liquid, opposites are more easily mixed. Liquid is the element of the *pharmakon*. And water, pure liquidity, is most easily and dangerously penetrated then corrupted by the *pharmakon*, with which it mixes and immediately unites. Whence, among all the laws governing an agricultural society, comes the one severely protecting water. Principally against the *pharmakon*:

> Water, above all things, is exceptionally necessary for the growth of all garden produce, but is easily corrupted. It is not easy to affect the other contributory causes of the growth of products of the ground—the soil, the sunlight, the winds—by doctoring (*pharmakeusesin*), diverting, or intercepting the supply, but water can be tampered with in all these ways and the law must accordingly come to the rescue. So we shall meet the case by enacting as follows. If one man intentionally tampers with another's supply, whether of spring water or standing water, whether by way of drugging (*pharmakeiais*), of digging, or of abstraction, the injured party shall put the amount of damage on record, and proceed at law before the urban commissioners. A party convicted of putting poison (*pharmakeiais*) in the waters, shall, over and above the payment of the fine imposed, undertake the purification of the contaminated springs or reservoir in such fashion as the canon law may direct this purification to be performed in the individual case. (*Laws* VIII, 845*d–e*)

Writing and speech have thus become two different species, or values, of the trace. One, writing, is a lost trace, a nonviable seed, everything in sperm that overflows wastefully, a force wandering outside the domain of life, incapable of engendering anything, of picking itself up, of regenerating itself. On the opposite side, living speech makes its capital bear fruit and does not divert its seminal potency toward indulgence in pleasures without paternity. In its seminar, in its seminary, it is in conformity with the law. In it there is still a marked unity between *logos* and *nomos*. What is the law in question? Here is how the Athenian states it:

> That was exactly my own meaning when I said I knew of a device for establishing this law of restricting procreative intercourse to its natural function by abstention from congress with our own sex, with its deliberate murder of the race and its wasting of the seed of life on a stony and rocky soil, where it will never take root and bear its natural fruit, and equal abstention from any female field whence you would desire no harvest. Once suppose this law perpetual and effective—let it be, as it ought to be, no less effective in the remaining cases than it actually is against incest with parents—and the result will be untold good. It is dictated, to begin with, by nature's own voice, leads to the suppression of the mad frenzy of sex, as well as marriage breach of all kinds, and all manner of excess in meats and drinks, and wins men to affection of their wedded wives. There are also numerous other blessings which will follow, if one can only compass the establishment of such a law. Yet should some young and lusty bystander of exuberant virility (*pollou spermatos mestos*) overhear us as we propose it, he might probably denounce our enactments as impracticable folly and make the air ring with his clamor. (*Laws* VIII, 838*e*–839*b*)

One could cite here both the writing *and* the pederasty of a young man named Plato. And his ambiguous relation to the paternal supplement: in order to make up for the father's death, he transgressed the law. He repeated the father's death. These two gestures contradict each other or cancel each other out. Whether it be a question of sperm or of writing, the transgression of the law is a priori subject to a law of transgression. Transgression is not thinkable within the terms of classical logic but only within the graphics of the supplement or of the *pharmakon*. Of that *pharmakon* which can *equally well* serve the seed of life and the seed of death, childbirth and abortion. Socrates was well aware of that:

> *Socrates*: Moreover, with the drugs (*pharmakia*) and incantations they administer, midwives can either bring on the pains of labor or allay them at their will, make a difficult labor easy, and at an early stage cause a miscarriage if they so decide.(*Theaetetus*, 149*c–d*)

The scene becomes more complicated: while condemning writing as a lost or parricidal son, Plato behaves like a son *writing* this condemnation, at once repairing and confirming the death of Socrates. But in this scene where we have remarked the apparent absence of the mother, Socrates is not really the father, either; only the *surrogate* father. This *accoucheur*, the son of a midwife, this intercessor, this go-between is neither a father, even though he takes the father's place, nor a son, even though he is the son's comrade or brother and obeys the paternal voice of God. Socrates is the supplementary relation between father and son. And when we say that Plato writes *from out of* the father's death, we are thinking not only of some event entitled "the death of Socrates" which, it is said, Plato did not attend (*Phaedo*, 59*b*: "I

believe that Plato was ill"); but primarily of the sterility of the Socratic seed left to its own devices. Socrates knows that he will never be a son, nor a father, nor a mother. The knowledge the go-between needs for matchmaking should have been the same as the knowledge the midwife needs for delivering ("Consider the knowledge of that sort of plant or seed that should be sown in any given soil. Does that not go together with skill in tending and harvesting the fruits of the earth?" *Theaetetus*, 149*e*), if prostitution and transgression of the law had not kept them separate. If Socrates' art is still better than that of a matchmaker-midwife, it is no doubt because his task is to distinguish between apparent or false fruit (*eidōlon kai pseudos*) and true living fruit (*gonimon te kai alēthes*). But for the essential, Socrates shares the lot of the midwife: sterility. "I am so far like the midwife that I cannot myself give birth to wisdom. . . . Heaven constrains me to serve as a midwife, but has debarred me from giving birth." And let us recall the ambiguity of the Socratic *pharmakon*, both anxiogenic and tranquilizing: "My art has power to bring on these pangs or to allay them" (150*a*–151*b*).

The seed must thus submit to *logos*. And in so doing, it must do violence to itself, since the natural tendency of sperm is opposed to the law of *logos*: "The marrow . . . we have named semen. And the semen, having life and becoming endowed with respiration, produces in that part in which it respires a lively desire of emission, and thus creates in us the love of procreation. Wherefore also in men the organ of generation becoming rebellious and masterful, like an animal disobedient to reason (*tou logou*), and maddened with the sting of lust, seeks to gain absolute sway" (*Timaeus*, 91*b*).

One must here take care: at the moment Plato seems to be raising writing up by turning live speech into a sort of psychic *graphē*, he maintains this movement within a problematic of *truth*. Writing *en tēi psuchēi* is not pathbreaking writing, but only a writing of transmission, of education, of demonstration, or at best, of dis-covering, a writing of *alētheia*. Its order is didactic, maieutic, or at any rate elocutionary. Dialectical. This type of writing must be capable of sustaining itself in living dialogue, capable most of all of properly teaching the true, as it is *already* constituted.

This authority of truth, of dialectics, of seriousness, of presence, will not be gainsaid at the close of this admirable movement, when Plato, after having in a sense reappropriated writing, pushes his irony—and his seriousness—to the point of rehabilitating a certain form of play. Compared with other pastimes, playful hypomnesic writing, second-rate writing, is preferable, should "go ahead." Ahead of the other brothers, for there are even worse seeds in the family. Hence the dialectician will sometimes write,

amass monuments, collect *hupomnēmata*, just for fun. But he will do so while still putting his products at the service of dialectics and in order to leave a trace (*ikhnos*) for whoever might want to follow in his footsteps on the pathway to truth. The dividing line now runs less between presence and the trace than between the dialectical trace and the nondialectical trace, between play in the "good" sense and play in the "bad" sense of the word.

> *Socrates*: He will sow his seed in literary gardens, I take it, and write when he does write by way of pastime (*paidias kharin*), collecting a store of reminders (*hupomnēmata*) both for his own memory, against the day "when age oblivious comes," and for all such as tread in his footsteps (*tauton ikhnos*), and he will take pleasure in watching the tender plants grow up. And when other men resort to other pastimes, regaling themselves with drinking parties and suchlike, he will doubtless prefer to indulge in the recreation I refer to.
>
> *Phaedrus*: And what an excellent one it is, Socrates! How far superior to the other sort is the recreation that a man finds in words (*en logois*), when he discourses about justice and the other topics you speak of.
>
> *Socrates*: Yes indeed, dear Phaedrus. But far more excellent, I think, is the serious treatment (*spoudē*) of them, which employs the art of dialectic. The dialectician selects a soul of the right type, and in it he plants and sows his words founded on knowledge (*phuteuēi te kai speirēi met' epistēmēs logous*), words which can defend (*boēthein*) both themselves and him who planted them, words which instead of remaining barren contain a seed whence new words grow up in new characters (*en allois ēthesi*), whereby the seed is vouchsafed immortality, and its possessor the fullest measure of blessedness that man can attain unto. (276*d*–277*a*)

9. Play: From the Pharmakon to the Letter and from Blindness to the Supplement

"Kai tēi tēs spoudēs adelphēi paidiai"

—*Letter* VI, 323*d*

"Logos de ge ēn hē tēs sēs diaphorotētos hermēneia"

—*Theaetetus*, 209*a*

It has been thought that Plato simply condemned play. And by the same token the art of *mimēsis* which is only a type of play.[74] But in all questions involving play and its "opposite," the "logic" will necessarily be baffling. Play and art are lost by Plato as he saves them, and his logos is then subject to that untold constraint that can no longer even be called "logic." Plato does very well speak of play. He speaks in praise of it. But he praises play "in the best sense of the word," if this can be said without eliminating play beneath the reassuring silliness of such a precaution. The best sense of play is play that is supervised and contained within the safeguards of ethics and politics. This is play comprehended under the innocent, innocuous category of "fun." Amusement: however far off it may be, the common translation of *paidia* by *pastime* [*divertissement*] no doubt only helps consolidate the Platonic repression of play.

The opposition *spoudē*/*paidia* will never be one of simple symmetry. *Either* play is *nothing* (and that is its only *chance*); either it can give place to no activity, to no discourse worthy of the name—that is, one charged with truth or at least with meaning—and then it is *alogos* or *atopos*. *Or else* play begins to *be* something and its very presence lays it open to some sort of dialectical confiscation. It takes on meaning and works in the service of seriousness, truth, and ontology. Only *logoi peri ontōn* can be taken seriously. As soon as it comes into being and into language, play *erases itself as such*. Just as writing must erase itself as such before truth, etc. The point is that

74. Cf. *Republic*, 60*a*–*b* ff; *Statesman*, 288*c*–*d*; *Sophist*, 234 *b*–*c*; *Laws* II, 667*e*–668*a*; *Epinomis*, 975*d*, etc.

there *is* no *as such* where writing or play are concerned. Having no essence, introducing difference as the condition for the presence of essence, opening up the possibility of the double, the copy, the imitation, the simulacrum—the game and the *graphē* are constantly disappearing as they go along. They cannot, in classical affirmation, be affirmed without being negated.

Plato thus plays at taking play seriously. That is what we earlier called the stunning hand Plato has dealt himself. Not only are his writings defined as games,[75] but human affairs in general do not in his eyes need to be taken seriously. One thinks of the famous passage in the *Laws*. Let us reread it despite its familiarity, so as to follow the theological assumption of play into games, the progressive neutralization of the *singularity* of play:

> To be sure, man's life is a business which does not deserve to be taken too seriously (*megalēs men spoudēs ouk axia*); yet we cannot help being in earnest with it, and there's the pity. Still, as we are here in this world, no doubt, for us the becoming thing is to show this earnestness in a suitable way (*hēmin summetron*). . . . I mean we should keep our seriousness for serious things, and not waste it on trifles, and that, while God is the real goal of all beneficent serious endeavor (*makariou spoudēs*), man, as we said before,[76] has been constructed as a toy (*paignion*) for God, and this is, in fact, the finest thing about him. All of us, then, men and women alike, must fall in with our role and spend life in making our *play* as perfect as possible—to the complete inversion of current theory. . . . It is the current fancy that our serious work should be done for the sake of our play; thus it is held that war is serious work which ought to be well discharged for the sake of peace. But the truth is that in war we do not find, and we never shall find, either any real play or any real education worth the name, and *these* are the things I count supremely serious for such creatures as ourselves.

75. Cf. *Parmenides*, 137*b*; *Statesman*, 268*d*; *Timaeus*, 59*c*–*d*. On the context and historical background of this problematic of play, cf. notably Schuhl, pp. 61–63.

76. Cf. *Laws* I, 644*d*–*e*: "Let us look at the whole matter in some such light as this. We may imagine that each of us living creatures is a puppet made by gods, possibly as a plaything (*hōs paignion*) or possibly with some more serious purpose (*hōs spoudēi tini*). That, indeed, is more than we can tell, but one thing is certain. These interior states are, so to say, the cords, or strings, by which we are worked; they are opposed to one another, and pull us with opposite tensions in the direction of opposite actions, and therein lies the division of virtue from vice. In fact, so says our argument (*logos*) a man must always yield to one of these tensions without resistance, but pull against all the other strings—must yield, that is, to that golden and hallowed drawing of judgments (*tēn tou logismou agōgēn khrusēn kai hieran*) which goes by the name of the public law of the city. The others are hard and ironlike, it soft, as befits gold, whereas they resemble very various substances."

Let us henceforth keep hold of this rein called *khrusus* or *chrysology*.

> Hence it is peace in which each of us should spend most of his life and spend it best. What, then, is our right course? We should pass our lives in the playing of games—*certain* games, that is, sacrifice, song, and dance—with the result of ability to gain heaven's grace, and to repel and vanquish an enemy when we have to fight him. . . . (803*b–e*)

Play is always lost when it seeks salvation in games. We have examined elsewhere, in "Rousseau's era,"[77] this disappearance of play into games. This (non)logic of play and of writing enables us to understand what has always been considered so baffling:[78] why Plato, while subordinating or condemning writing and play, should have written so much, presenting his writings, *from out of Socrates' death*, as games, *indicting* writing in writing, lodging against it that complaint (*graphē*) whose reverberations even today have not ceased to resound.

What law governs this "contradiction," this opposition to itself of what is said against writing, of a dictum that pronounces itself against itself as soon as it finds its way into writing, as soon as it writes down its self-identity and carries away what is proper to it *against* this ground of writing? This "contradiction," which is nothing other than the relation-to-self of diction as it opposes itself to scription, as it *chases* itself (away) in hunting down what is properly its *trap*—this contradiction is not contingent. In order to convince ourselves of this, it would already suffice to note that what seems to inaugurate itself in Western literature with Plato will not fail to re-edit itself at least in Rousseau, and then in Saussure. In these three cases, in these three "eras" of the repetition of Platonism, which give us a new thread to follow and other knots to recognize in the history of *philosophia* or the *epistēmē*, the exclusion and the devaluation of writing must somehow, in their very affirmation, come to terms with:

1. a generalized sort of writing and, along with it,

2. a "contradiction": the written proposal of logocentrism; the simultaneous affirmation of the being-outside of the outside and of its injurious intrusion into the inside;

3. the construction of a "literary" work. Before Saussure's *Anagrams*, there were Rousseau's; and Plato's work, outside and independent of its logocentric "content," which is then only one of its inscribed "functions," can be read in its anagrammatical texture.

Thus it is that the "linguistics" elaborated by Plato, Rousseau, and Saussure must both put writing out of the question and yet nevertheless

77. Cf. *Of Grammatology*.

78. The principal references are collected in Robin's *La Théorie platonicienne de l'amour*, pp. 54–59.

borrow from it, for fundamental reasons, all its demonstrative and theoretical resources. As far as the Genevans are concerned, we have tried to show this elsewhere. The case is at least equally clear for Plato.

Plato often uses the example of letters of the alphabet in order to come to grips with a problem. They give him a better grip on things; that is, he can use them to explain dialectics—but he never "comes to grips with" the writing he uses. His intentions are always apparently didactic and analogical. But they conform to a constant necessity, which is never thematized as such: what always makes itself apparent is the law of difference, the irreducibility of structure and relation, of proportionality, within analogy.

We noted earlier that *tupos* can designate with equal pertinence the graphic unit and the eidetic model. In the *Republic*, even before he uses the word *tupos* in the sense of model-form (*eidos*) Plato finds it necessary to turn to the example of the letter, still for apparently pedagogical ends, as a model that must be known before one can recognize its copies or icons reflected in water or in a mirror:

> It is, then, said I, as it was when we learned our letters and felt that we knew them sufficiently only when the separate letters did not elude us, appearing as a few elements in all the combinations that convey them, and when we did not disregard them in small things or great and think it unnecessary to recognize them, but were eager to distinguish them everywhere, in the belief that we should never be literate and letter-perfect till we could do this. . . . And is it not also true that if there are any likenesses of letters (*eikonas grammatōn*) reflected in water or mirrors, we shall never know them until we know the originals, but such knowledge belongs to the same art and discipline? (402*a–b*)

We have no doubt already been warned by the *Timaeus*: in all these *comparisons* with writing, we are not supposed to take the letters *literally*. The *stoikheia tou pantos*, the elements (or letters) of the whole are not assembled like syllables (48*c*). "They cannot reasonably be compared by a man of any sense even to syllables."[79] And yet, in the *Timaeus*, not only is the entire mathematical play of proportionalities based on a *logos* that can do without voice, God's calculation (*logismos theou*) (34*a*) being able to express itself in the silence of numbers; but, in addition, the introduction of the *different* and the *blend* (35*a*), the problematic of the *moving* cause and the *place*—the third irreducible class—the duality of paradigms (49*a*), all these things "require" (49*a*) that we define the origin of the world as a *trace*, that

79. As for the use of letters, in the context of a comparison between the *Timaeus* and the *Jafr*, the Islamic science of letters as a science of "permutation," cf. notably H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française), pp. 204ff.

is, a receptacle. It is a matrix, womb, or receptacle that is never and nowhere offered up in the form of presence, or in the presence of form, since both of these already presuppose an inscription within the mother. Here, in any case, the turns of phrase that are somewhat awkwardly called "Plato's metaphors" are exclusively and irreducibly scriptural. Let us, for example, point to a sign of this awkwardness in a certain preface to the *Timaeus*: "In order to conceive of place, one must always, through a process of abstraction that is almost unrealizable in practice, separate or detach an object from the 'place' it occupies. This abstraction, however difficult, is nevertheless imposed upon us by the very fact of change, since two different objects cannot coexist in the same place, and since, without changing place, a same object can become 'other.' But then, we find ourselves unable to represent 'place' itself except by metaphors. Plato used several quite different ones, which have greatly confused modern readers. The 'Place,' the 'locus,' 'that in which' things appear, 'that upon which' they manifest themselves, the 'receptacle,' the 'matrix,' the 'mother,' the 'nurse'—all these expressions make us think of space, which contains things. But later on it is a question of the 'impression-bearer,' the formless 'base,' the completely inodorous substance on which the perfume-maker can fix the scent, the soft gold on which the jeweller can impress many diverse figures" (Rivaud, Budé edition, p. 66). Here is the passage beyond all "Platonic" oppositions, toward the aporia of the originary inscription:

> . . . Then we made two classes; now a third must be revealed. The two sufficed for the former discussion. One, we assumed, was a pattern (*paradeigmatos*) intelligible and always the same, and the second was only the imitation of the pattern, generated and visible. There is also a third kind which we did not distinguish at the time, conceiving that the two would be enough. But now the argument seems to require that we should set forth in words another kind, which is difficult of explanation and dimly seen. What nature are we to attribute to this new kind of being? We reply that it is the receptacle, and in a manner the nurse (*hupodokhēn autēn hoion tithēnēn*), of all generation (*pasēs geneseōs*). . . . [This nurse] must be always called the same, for, inasmuch as she always receives all things, she never departs at all from her own nature and never, in any way or at any time, assumes a form like that of any of the things which enter into her; she is the natural recipient of all impressions (*ekmageion*), and is stirred and informed by them, and appears different from time to time by reason of them. But the forms which enter into and go out of her are the likenesses of eternal realities (*tōn ontōn aei mimēmata*) modeled within her after their patterns (*tupōthenta*) in a wonderful and mysterious manner, which we will hereafter investigate. For the present we have only to conceive of three natures: first, that which is in process of generation; secondly, that in which the generation takes place; and thirdly, that of which the thing generated is a resemblance naturally produced. And we may liken the receiving principle to a mother, and the source or spring to a father, and the intermediate nature to a child, and may remark further that if the model is to take every variety of form, then the matter in which the model is fashioned will not be duly prepared unless it is formless and free from the impress of any of those shapes which it is hereafter to receive from without. . . . Wherefore the mother and receptacle of all created and visible and in any way sensible things is not to be termed earth or air or fire or water, or any of their compounds, or any of the elements from which these are derived, but is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible (48*e*–51*b*; The *khōra* is big with everything that is disseminated here. We will go into that elsewhere).

Whence the recourse to dream a bit further on, as in that text of the *Republic* (533*b*) where it is a question of "seeing" what cannot simply be conceived in terms of the opposition between sensible and intelligible, hypothetical and anhypothetical, a certain *bastardy* whose notion (*nothos*) was probably not unknown to Democritus (cf. Rivaud; *Le Problème du devenir et la notion de la matière* . . . p. 310, n. 744):

> And there is a third nature, which is space and is eternal, and admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things, and is apprehended, when all sense is absent, by a kind of spurious reason (*logismōi tini nothōi*: *bastard* reasoning), and is hardly real—which we, beholding as in a dream, say of all existence that it must of necessity be in some place and occupy a space, but that what is neither in heaven nor in earth has no existence. Of these and other things of the same kind, relating to the true and waking reality of nature, we have only this dreamlike sense, and we are unable to cast off sleep and determine the truth about them. (52*b*–*c*)

Inscription is thus the *production of the son* and at the same time the constitution of *structurality*. The link between structural relations of proportionality on the one hand and literality on the other does not appear only in cosmogonic discourse. It can also be seen in political discourse, and in the discourse of linguistics.

In the political order, structure is a sort of writing. At the moment of ultimate difficulty, when no other pedagogical resource is available, when theoretical discourse cannot find any other way of formulating the order, the world, the *cosmos* of politics, Socrates turns to the grammatical "metaphor." The analogy of the "large letters" and "small letters" comes up in the famous text of the *Republic* (368*c*-*e*) at the point where "keen vision" is necessary, and where it seems to be lacking. Structure is read as a form of writing in an instance where the intuition of sensible or intelligible presence happens to fail.

The same thing occurs in the domain of linguistics. As in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, the scriptural reference becomes absolutely indispensable at the point at which the principle of difference and diacriticity in general must be accounted for as the very condition of signification. This is how Theuth comes to make his second appearance on the Platonic scene. In the *Phaedrus*, the inventor of the *pharmakon* gave a long speech in person and presented his letters as credentials to the king. More concise, more indirect, more allusive, his other intervention seems to us just as philosophically remarkable. It occurs in the name not of the invention of graphics but of grammar, of the science of grammar as a science of differences. It is in the beginning of the *Philebus*: the debate is open on the relations between pleasure (*khairein*) and intelligence or prudence (*phronein*) (11*d*). The discussion soon founders on the problem of *limits*. And hence, as in the *Timaeus*, on the composition of the same and the other, the one and the multiple, the finite and the infinite. ". . . the men of old, who were better than ourselves and dwelt nearer the gods, passed on this gift in the form of a saying. All things, as it ran, that are ever said to be consist of a one and a many, and have in their nature a conjunction (*en hautois sumphuton*) of limit and unlimitedness (*peras de kai apeirian*)." Socrates opposes dialectics, the art of respecting the intermediate forms (*ta mesa*), to eristic, which immediately leaps toward the infinite (16*c*–17*a*). This time, in contrast to what happens in the *Phaedrus*, letters are charged with the task of introducing clarity (*saphēneia*) into discourse:

> *Protarchus*: I think I understand, more or less, part of what you say, Socrates, but there are some points I want to get further cleared up.
> *Socrates*: My meaning, Protarchus, is surely clear in the case of the alphabet; so take the letters of your school days as illustrating it.
> *Protarchus*: How do you mean?
> *Socrates*: The sound (*phōnē*) that proceeds through our mouths, yours and mine and everybody's, is one, isn't it, and also an unlimited variety?

> *Protarchus*: To be sure.
> *Socrates*: And we have no real understanding if we stop short at knowing it either simply as an unlimited variety, or simply as one. What makes a man "lettered" is knowing the number and the kinds of sounds. (17*a*–*b*)

After a detour through the example of musical intervals (*diastēmata*), Socrates goes back to letters in an effort to explain phonic intervals and differences:

> *Socrates*: . . . We might take our letters again to illustrate what I mean now. . . . The unlimited variety of sound was once discerned by some god, or perhaps some godlike man; you know the story that there was some such person in Egypt called Theuth. He it was who originally discerned the existence, in that unlimited variety, of the vowels (*ta phōnēenta*)—not "vowel" in the singular but "vowels" in the plural—and then of other things which, though they could not be called articulate sounds, yet were noises of a kind. There were a number of them, too, not just one, and as a third class he discriminated what we now call the mutes (*aphōna*). Having done that, he divided up the noiseless ones or mutes (*aphthonga kai aphōna*) until he got each one by itself, and did the same thing with the vowels and the intermediate sounds; in the end he found a number of the things, and affixed to the whole collection, as to each single member of it, the name "letters" (*stoikheion*). It was because he realized that none of us could get to know one of the collection all by itself, in isolation from all the rest, that he conceived of "letter" as a kind of bond of unity (*desmon*) uniting as it were all these sounds into one, and so he gave utterance to the expression "art of letters," implying that there was one art that dealt with the sounds. (18*b*–*d*)

The scriptural "metaphor" thus crops up every time difference and relation are irreducible, every time otherness introduces determination and puts a system in circulation. The play of the other within being must needs be designated "writing" by Plato in a discourse which would like to think of itself as spoken in essence, in truth, and which nevertheless is written. And if it is written *from out of the death of Socrates*, this is no doubt the profound reason for it. From out of Socrates' death—that is, it would here be just as well to say, from out of the parricide in the *Sophist*. Without that violent eruption against the venerable paternal figure of Parmenides, against his thesis of the unity of being; without the disruptive intrusion of otherness and nonbeing, of nonbeing as other in the unity of being, writing and its

play would not have been necessary. Writing is parricidal. Is it by chance that, for the Stranger in the *Sophist*, the necessity and inevitability of parricide, "plain enough, as they say, for even the blind (*tuphlōi*) to see" (one ought to say, *especially* for the blind to see), are the condition of possibility of a discourse on the false, the idol, the icon, the mimeme, the phantasm, and "the arts concerned with such things"? And thus, of writing? Writing is not named at this point but that does not prevent—on the contrary—its relation with all the aforementioned concepts from remaining systematic, and we have recognized it as such:

> *Stranger*: We shall find it necessary in self-defense to put to the question that pronouncement of father Parmenides (*Ton tou patros Parmenidou logon*), and establish by main force that what is not (*mē on*), in some respect has a being, and conversely that what is (*on*), in a way is not.
>
> *Theaetetus*: It is plain that the course of the argument requires us to maintain that at all costs (*Phainetai to toiouton diamakheteon en tois logois*).
>
> *Stranger*: Plain enough even for the blind to see, as they say. Unless these propositions are either refuted or accepted, anyone who talks of false statements or false judgment as being images or likenesses or copies or semblances, or of any of the arts concerned with such things, can hardly escape becoming a laughingstock by being forced to contradict himself.
>
> *Theaetetus*: Quite true.
>
> *Stranger*: That is why we must now dare to lay unfililial hands on that paternal pronouncement (*tōi patrikōi logōi*), or else, if some scruple holds us back, drop the matter entirely.
>
> *Theaetetus*: As for that, we must let no scruple hinder us. (241*d*–242*a*)

This parricide, which opens up the play of difference and writing, is a frightening decision. Even for an anonymous Stranger. It takes superhuman strength. And one runs the risk of madness or of being considered mad in the well-behaved, sane, sensible society of grateful sons.[80] So the Stranger

80. It would be interesting to articulate with this analysis that passage from the *Laws* (VIII, 836*b*–*c*), in which a *pharmakon* is sought as a "protection (*diaphugēn*) against this peril," namely, pederasty. The Athenian wonders, without holding out much hope, what would happen "were one to follow the guidance of nature and adopt the law of the old days before Laius (*tēi phusei thēsei ton pro tou Laiou nomon*)—I mean, to pronounce it wrong that male should have to do carnally with youthful male as with female. . . ." Laius, to whom the oracle had predicted that he would be killed by his son, was also the representative of unnatural love. Cf. "*Oedipe*," in Delcourt, p. 103.

We also know that according to the *Laws*, there is no greater crime or sacrilege than the murder of the parents: such a murderer should be put to "repeated deaths" (IX, 869*b*). And even receive punishment worse than death, which is not the ultimate chastisement. "Hence we must make the chastisements for such crime here in this present life, if we can, no less stern than those of the life to come" (881*b*).

81. On the problem of the letters of the alphabet, particularly as it is treated in the *Statesman*, cf. V. Goldschmidt, *Le Paradigme dans la dialectique Platonicienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1947), pp. 61–67.

is still afraid of not having the strength, not only to play the fool, but also to maintain a discourse that might—for real—be without head or tail; or, to put it another way, to set off on a path where he might not be able to avoid ending up walking on his head. In any event, this parricide will be just as decisive, cutting, and redoubtable as capital punishment. With no hope of return. One lays one's head, as well as one's chief, on the line. Thus, after having begged Theaetetus, without illusions, not to consider him a patricide (*patraloian*), the Stranger asks another favor:

> *Stranger*: In that case, for the third time, I have a small favor to ask.
>
> *Theaetetus*: You have only to mention it.
>
> *Stranger*: I believe I confessed just now that on this point the task of refutation has always proved too much for my powers, and still does so.
>
> *Theaetetus*: You did say that.
>
> *Stranger*: Well, that confession, I am afraid, may make you think me scatterbrained (*manikos*) when at every turn I shift my position to and fro (*para poda metabalōn emauton anō kai katō*). (242*a*–*b*)

The discourse, then, is off. Paternal *logos* is upside down. Is it then by chance if, once "being" has appeared as a *triton ti*, a third irreducible to the dualisms of classical ontology, it is again necessary to turn to the example of grammatical science and of the relations among letters in order to explain the interlacing that weaves together the system of differences (solidarity-exclusion), of kinds and forms, the *sumplokē tōn eidōn* to which "any discourse we can have owes its existence" (*ho logos gegonen hēmin*) (259*e*)? The *sumplokē*, too, of being and nonbeing (240*c*)? As far as the rules of concordance and discordance, of union and exclusion among different things are concerned, this *sumplokē* "might be said to be in the same case with the letters of the alphabet" (253*a*; cf. the *Statesman* where the "paradigm" of the *sumplokē* is equally *literal*, 278*a*–*b*).[81]

Grammatical science is doubtless not in itself dialectics. Plato indeed explicitly subordinates the former to the latter (253*b–c*). And, to him, this distinction can be taken for granted; but what, in the final analysis, justifies it? Both are in a sense sciences of language. For dialectics is also the science that guides us "*dia tōn logōn*," on the voyage through discourses or arguments (253*b*). At this point, what distinguishes dialectics from grammar appears twofold: on the one hand, the linguistic units it is concerned with are larger than the word (*Cratylus*, 385*a*–393*d*); on the other, dialectics is always guided by an intention of *truth*. It can only be satisfied by the presence of the *eidos*, which is here both the signified and the referent: the thing itself. The distinction between grammar and dialectics can thus only in all rigor be established at the point where truth is fully present and fills the *logos*.[82] But what the parricide in the *Sophist* establishes is not only that any *full*, *absolute* presence of what *is* (of the being-present that most truly "is": the good or the sun that can't be looked in the face) is impossible; not only that any full intuition of truth, any truth-filled intuition, is impossible; but that the very condition of discourse—*true or false*—is the diacritical principle of the *sumplokē*. If truth is the presence of the *eidos*, it must always, on pain of mortal blinding by the sun's fires, come to terms with relation, nonpresence, and thus nontruth. It then follows that the absolute precondition for a rigorous difference between grammar and dialectics (or ontology) cannot in principle be fulfilled. Or at least, it can perhaps be fulfilled *at the root of the principle*, at the point of arche-being or arche-truth, but that point has been crossed out by the necessity of parricide. Which means, by the very necessity of *logos*. And that is the difference that prevents there being *in fact* any difference between grammar and ontology.

But now, what *is* the impossibility of any truth or of any full presence of being, of any fully-being? Or inversely, since such truth would be death as the absolute form of blindness, what is death as truth? Not *what is?* since the form of that question is produced by the very thing it questions, but how is

82. The structure of this problematic is entirely *analogous* in the *Logical Investigations* of Husserl. See *Speech and Phenomena*. One will also reread in a new way, since it is a matter of *sumplokē* and *pharmakon*, the end of the *Statesman*. In his work of weaving (*sumplokē*), the royal weaver will be able to interweave his web through the joining of the opposites of which virtue is composed. Literally, the *sumplokē*, the weaving, is *intrigued* with the *pharmakon*: "But in those of noble nature from their earliest days whose nurture too has been all it should be, the laws can foster the growth of this common bond of conviction (*kata phusin monois dia nomōn emphuesthai*). This is the talisman (*pharmakon*) appointed for them by the design of pure intelligence. This most godlike bond alone can unite the elements of goodness which are diverse in nature and would else be opposing in tendency." (310*a*).

the impossible plenitude of any absolute presence of the *ontōs on* written? How is it inscribed? How is the necessity of the multiplicity of genres and ideas, of relation and difference, prescribed? How is dialectics traced?

The absolute invisibility of the origin of the visible, of the good-sun-father-capital, the unattainment of presence or beingness in any form, the whole surplus Plato calls *epekeina tēs ousias* (beyond beingness or presence), gives rise to a structure of replacements such that all presences will be supplements substituted for the absent origin, and all differences, within the system of presence, will be the irreducible effect of what remains *epekeina tēs ousias*.

Just as Socrates supplements and replaces the father, as we have seen, dialectics supplements and replaces the impossible *noēsis*, the forbidden intuition of the face of the father (good-sun-capital). The withdrawal of that face both opens and limits the exercise of dialectics. It welds it irremediably to its "inferiors," the mimetic arts, play, grammar, writing, etc. The disappearance of that face is the movement of differance which violently opens writing or, if one prefers, which opens itself to writing and which writing opens for itself. All these "movements," in all these "senses," belong to the same "system." Also belonging to that same system are the proposition in the *Republic*, describing in nonviolent terms the inaccessibility of the father *epekeina tēs ousias*, and the patricidal proposal which, proffered by the Stranger, threatens the paternal *logos*. And which by the same token threatens the domestic, hierarchical interiority of the pharmacy, the proper order and healthy movement of goods, the lawful prescription of its controlled, classed, measured, labeled products, rigorously divided into remedies and poisons, seeds of life and seeds of death, good and bad traces, the unity of metaphysics, of technology, of well computed binarism. This philosophical, dialectical mastery of the *pharmaka* that should be handed down from legitimate father to well-born son is constantly put in question by a family scene that constitutes and undermines at once the passage between the pharmacy and the house. "Platonism" is both the general *rehearsal* of this family scene and the most powerful effort to master it, to prevent anyone's ever hearing of it, to conceal it by drawing the curtains over the dawning of the West. How can we set off in search of a different guard, if the pharmaceutical "system" contains not only, in a single stranglehold, the scene in the *Phaedrus*, the scene in the *Republic*, the scene in the *Sophist*, and the dialectics, logic, and mythology of Plato, but also, it seems, certain non-Greek structures of mythology? And if it is not certain that there are such things as non-Greek "mythologies"—the

opposition *mythos/logos* being only authorized *following* Plato—into what general, unnamable necessity are we thrown? In other words, what does Platonism signify as repetition?

To repeat: the disappearance of the good-father-capital-sun is thus the precondition of discourse, taken this time as a moment and not as a principle of *generalized* writing. That writing (is) *epekeina tēs ousias*. The disappearance of truth as presence, the withdrawal of the present origin of presence, is the condition of all (manifestation of) truth. Nontruth is the truth. Nonpresence is presence. Differance, the disappearance of any originary presence, is *at once* the condition of possibility *and* the condition of impossibility of truth. At once. "At once" means that the being-present (*on*) in its truth, in the presence of its identity and in the identity of its presence, *is doubled* as soon as it appears, as soon as it presents itself. *It appears, in its essence, as* the possibility of its own most proper non-truth, of its pseudo-truth reflected in the icon, the phantasm, or the simulacrum. What is is not what it is, identical and identical to itself, unique, unless it *adds to itself* the possibility of being *repeated* as such. And its identity is hollowed out by that addition, withdraws itself in the supplement that presents it.

The disappearance of the Face or the structure of repetition can thus no longer be dominated by the value of truth. On the contrary, the opposition between the true and the untrue is entirely comprehended, *inscribed*, within this structure or this generalized writing. The true and the untrue are both species of repetition. And there is no repetition possible without the *graphics of supplementarity*, which supplies, for the lack of a full unity, another unit that comes to relieve it, being enough the same and enough other so that it can replace by addition. Thus, on the one hand, repetition is that without which there would be no truth: the truth of being in the intelligible form of ideality discovers in the *eidos* that which can be repeated, being the same, the clear, the stable, the identifiable in its equality with itself. And only the *eidos* can give rise to repetition as anamnesis or maieutics, dialectics or didactics. Here repetition gives itself out to be a repetition of life. Tautology is life only going out of itself to come home to itself. Keeping close to itself through *mnēmē*, *logos*, and *phōnē*. But on the other hand, repetition is the very movement of non-truth: the presence of what is gets lost; disperses itself, multiplies itself through mimemes, icons, phantasms, simulacra, etc. Through phenomena, already. And this type of repetition is the possibility of becoming-perceptible-to-the-senses: nonideality. This is on the side of non-philosophy, bad memory, hypomnesia, writing. Here, tautology is life going out of itself beyond return. Death rehearsal. Unreserved spending. The irreducible excess, through the play of the supplement, of any self-intimacy of the living, the good, the true.

These two types of repetition relate to each other according to the graphics of supplementarity. Which means that one can no more "separate" them from each other, think of either one apart from the other, "label" them, than one can in *the pharmacy* distinguish the medicine from the poison, the good from the evil, the true from the false, the inside from the outside, the vital from the mortal, the first from the second, etc. Conceived within this original reversibility, the *pharmakon* is the *same* precisely because it has no identity. And the same (is) as supplement. Or in differance. In writing. If he had *meant* to say something, such would have been the speech of Theuth making of writing as a *pharmakon* a singular present to the King.

But Theuth, it should be noted, spoke not another word.

The great god's sentence went unanswered.

. . . . . .

After closing the pharmacy, Plato went to retire, to get out of the sun. He took a few steps in the darkness toward the back of his reserves, found himself leaning over the *pharmakon*, decided to analyze.

Within the thick, cloudy liquid, trembling deep inside the drug, the whole pharmacy stood reflected, repeating the abyss of the Platonic phantasm.

The analyst cocks his ears, tries to distinguish between two repetitions.

He would like to isolate the good from the bad, the true from the false.

He leans over further: they repeat each other.

Holding the *pharmakon* in one hand, the calamus in the other, Plato mutters as he transcribes the play of formulas. In the enclosed space of the pharmacy, the reverberations of the monologue are immeasurably amplified. The walled-in voice strikes against the rafters, the words come apart, bits and pieces of sentences are separated, disarticulated parts begin to circulate through the corridors, become fixed for a round or two, translate each other, become rejoined, bounce off each other, contradict each other, make trouble, tell on each other, come back like answers, organize their exchanges, protect each other, institute an internal commerce, take themselves for a dialogue. Full of meaning. A whole story. An entire history. All of philosophy.

"*hē ēkhē toutōn tōn logōn*... the sound of these arguments rings so loudly in my head that I cannot hear the other side."

In this stammering buzz of voices, as some philological sequence or other floats by, one can sort of make this out, but it is hard to hear: *logos* beds itself [*le logos s'aime lui-même* = logos loves itself; *s'aime* is a homonym for *sème*: to sow, as in a flower bed.—Trans.] . . . *pharmakon* means *coup* . . . "so that *pharmakon* will have meant: that which pertains to an attack of demoniac possession [*un coup démoniaque*] or is used as a curative *against* such an attack" . . . an armed enforcement of order [*un coup de force*] . . . a shot fired [*un coup tiré*] . . . a planned overthrow [*un coup monté*] . . . but to no avail [*un coup pour rien*] . . . like cutting through water [*un coup dans l'eau*] . . . *en udati grapsei* . . . and a stroke of fate [*un coup du sort*] . . . Theuth who invented writing . . . the calendar . . . dice . . . *kubeia* . . . the calendar trick [*le coup du calendrier*] . . . the unexpected dramatic effect [*le coup de théâtre*] . . . the writing trick [*le coup de l'écriture*] . . . the dice-throw [*le coup de dés*] . . . two in one blow [*le coup double*] . . . *kolaphos* . . . *gluph* . . . *colpus* . . . *coup* . . . glyph . . . scalpel . . . scalp . . . *khrusos* . . . *chrysolite* . . . *chrysology* . . .

Plato gags his ears [*Platon se bouche les oreilles*; *boucher* = to plug up; *bouche* = mouth. —Trans.] the better to hear-himself-speak, the better to see, the better to analyze.

He listens, means to distinguish, between two repetitions.

He is searching for gold. *Pollakis de legomena kai aei akouomena* . . . "Often repeated and constantly attended to for many years, it is at last with great effort freed from all alloy, like gold . . ." and the philosopher's stone. The "golden rule."

One ought to distinguish, between two repetitions.

—But they repeat each other, still; they substitute for each other . . .

—Nonsense: they don't replace each other, since they are added . . .

—Precisely . . .

One still has to take note of this. And to finish that Second Letter: ". . . Consider these facts and take care lest you sometime come to repent of having now unwisely published your views. It is a very great safeguard to learn by heart instead of writing . . . *to mē graphein all'ekmanthanein*. . . . It is impossible for what is written not to be disclosed. That is the reason why I have never written anything about these things . . . *oud'estin sungramma Platōnos ouden oud'estai*, and why there is not and will not be any written work of Plato's own. What are now called his . . . *Sōkratous estin kalou kai neou gegonotos* . . . are the work of a Socrates embellished and modernized. Farewell and believe. Read this letter now at once many times and burn it . . . ."

—I hope this one won't get lost. Quick, a duplicate . . . graphite . . . carbon . . . reread this letter . . . burn it. *Il y a là cendre*. And now, to distinguish, between two repetitions . . .

The night passes. In the morning, knocks are heard at the door. They seem to be coming from outside, this time . . .

Two knocks . . . four . . .

—But maybe it's just a residue, a dream, a bit of dream left over, an echo of the night . . . that other theater, those knocks from without . . .