Soliciting the Decisions of Philosophy

An exposition of "Plato's Pharmacy" by Jacques Derrida

by

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so·lic|it (sè lis'it) vfl. [ME
soliciten < MFr solliciter < L
sollicitare < L sollus "the
whole" + citare "to put into
motion" (i.e. "to shake the
totality")]}
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Introduction

On the Way to the Pharmacy

There are perhaps few other names that polarize people in the way that the name Jacques Derrida does. Geoffrey Galt Harpham in surveying Derrida's reception by the academic community notes that this polarization has progressed to the point where "some anti-Derrideans apparently feel they can say anything."¹ In support of this claim Harpham quotes Roger Scruton who cautions that anyone who follows Derrida will "wander from their purpose, in a desert of unmeaning, and dwindle into parched unwholesome remnants of themselves."² This poetic condemnation of the way of deconstruction is confirmed by most opponents who feel that Derrida is a "'cognitive minimalist' who would 'ban recourse to such flagrantly bourgeois concepts' as 'social contracts and laws of human nature'...he is 'an intellectual nihilist'...his work is an affair of 'monotony and hermeticism.'³

² Ibid.
This polarization has led me to this thesis where I examine the work of Derrida in order to determine if these charges have any merit. This thesis begins by surveying recent *Phaedrus* scholarship in order to provide a bigger context in which to view Derrida's essay on the *Phaedrus*, "Plato's Pharmacy." On Derrida's own terms this first chapter can be viewed as the "indispensable guardrail" of traditional criticism which forms the basis for any further critical work.

Chapters two and three are largely exegetical. My goal here is to parse "Plato's Pharmacy" and illuminate recurring trends within the essay itself and Derrida's larger oeuvre. This illumination takes place largely through Derrida's other writings, and a few references to important members of Derrida's genealogy, such as Saussure and Nietzsche. These two chapters are intended to provide a clear exposition of "Plato's Pharmacy" as well as the tools for further forays into Derrida's work.

The fourth chapter is a systematic exploration of some key points that recur in "Plato's Pharmacy" with a view to seeing these notions in Derrida's work as a whole. Through the exploration of generalized writing, philosophy as decision, and the ethics of deconstruction I engage both positive and negative critics of Derrida in order to show how his work has been received. The purpose of this chapter is to present Derrida in a systematic light in the larger philosophical context of his peers.

The final chapter is a playful reinscription of Derrida within the genre of detective stories. I use the TV show "Columbo" in order to highlight Derrida's contribution to the philosophical enterprise from a different angle. After presenting Derrida as Columbo I reverse roles and present Derrida as a suspect in order to suggest a possible critique of Derrida's methodology.
This Indispensable Guardrail

When Derrida speaks of his method for reading a text he speaks of two moments. The first moment is a "doubling commentary" in which the reader reproduces, as nearly as possible, "the conscious, voluntary, intentional relationship that the writer institutes in his exchanges with the history to which he belongs thanks to the elements of language."¹ This is a necessary moment requiring careful reading and understanding of the text at hand. Without "doubling commentary" Derrida has no illusions about the result:

To recognize and respect all its [doubling commentary's] classical exigencies is not easy and requires all the instruments of traditional criticism. Without this recognition and this respect, critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything.

But this indispensable guardrail has always only protected, it has never opened, a reading.²

Doubling commentary, then, is the reading with the author which forms the possibility for any further critical work. In keeping with Derrida's own understanding of critical production, a

¹ Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, tr. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 158.
² Ibid., my emphasis on "indispensable guardrail".

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survey of recent scholarship on the *Phaedrus* forms a necessary propadeutic and provides a background against which "Plato's Pharmacy" must be evaluated.

The history of *Phaedrus* scholarship has been particularly divergent, owing primarily to the dialogue's uncommon structure relative to Plato's other works. The relative date of the *Phaedrus* vacillated between extremes. Schleiermacher claimed that its nascent containment of all later Platonic ideas marked it as Plato's first dialogue. Other dating methods based on a distillation of the Platonic ideas contained within it and their relative development shuffled the *Phaedrus* between the early, middle, and late dialogues. The advent of stylistic chronologies, however, has tentatively placed the *Phaedrus* as a middle dialogue.

The relative placement of the *Phaedrus* among Plato's other works, however, leaves many important questions about the dialogue itself unanswered. Chief among these unanswered questions is the unity of *Phaedrus*. Upon reading the dialogue, one is struck by the abrupt change in tone and execution after Socrates' second speech (257c). Socrates meets Phaedrus on his way outside the city for a walk. Phaedrus mentions that he has been with Lysias all morning in conversation. This piques Socrates interest as he accompanies Phaedrus outside the wall to learn more of what Lysias has said about the non-lover. After finding a suitable place by the river, Socrates finally entreats Phaedrus to read this speech of Lysias, which he espied hidden under Phaedrus' cloak. Phaedrus quotes the entire speech extolling the virtues of the non-lover, and Socrates responds critically to the speech:

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8 Ibid., 249-52.
9 When referring to the text of the *Phaedrus* the Stephanus numbering system will be employed. All translations will be Fowler's from the Loeb edition unless otherwise noted.
Soc. What? Are you and I to praise the discourse because the author has said what he ought, and not merely because all the expressions are clear and well rounded and finely turned? For if that is expected I must grant it for your sake, since, because of my stupidity, I did not notice it. I was attending only the rhetorical manner, and I thought even Lysias himself would not think that satisfactory. It seemed to me Phaedrus, unless you disagree, that he said the same thing two or three times, as if he did not find it easy to say many things about one subject, or perhaps he did not care about such a detail; and he appeared to me in youthful fashion to be exhibiting his ability to say the same thing in two different and in both ways excellently.

Phdr. Nonsense, Socrates! Why that is the especial merit of the discourse. He has omitted none of the points that belong to the subject, so that nobody could ever speak about it more exhaustively or worthily than he has done.

Soc. There I must cease to agree with you; for the wise men and women of old, who have spoken and written about these matters, will rise up to confute me, if, to please you, I assent.

Phdr. Who are they? and where have you heard anything better than this?

Soc. I cannot say, just at this moment; but I certainly must have heard something, either from the lovely Sappho or the wise Anacreon, or perhaps from some prose writers. What ground have I for saying so? Why, my dear friend, I feel that my own bosom is full, and that I could make another speech different from this and quite as good. (234e-235c).

This claim is more than Phaedrus can stand, so he implores Socrates to make a better speech. Socrates, however, keeps deferring to his lack of skill and preparation. Phaedrus can finally stand it no more, and he plays the trump card that will surely loosen Socrates' tongue:

Phdr. Now listen to me. Stop trying to fool me; for I can say something which will force you to speak.

Soc. Then pray don't say it.
Phdr. Yes, but I will. And my saying shall be an oath. I swear to you by—by what god? By this plane tree? I take my solemn oath that unless you produce the discourse in the very presence of this plane tree, I will never read you another or tell you of another.

Soc. Oh! Oh! You wretch! How well you found out how to make a lover of discourse do your will!

(236d-e).

Socrates responds to this oath with the promised speech, a discourse extolling the virtues of the non-lover, to exceed the speech of Lysias.

Socrates' speech works in praise of the non-lover only by negation:

Soc. ...There it is, Phaedrus! Do not listen to me any longer; let my speech end here.

Phdr. But I thought you were in the middle of it, and would say as much about the non-lover as you have said about the lover. to set forth all his good points and show that he ought to be favoured. So now, Socrates, why do you stop?

Soc. Did you not notice, my friend, that I am already speaking in hexameters, not mere dithyrambs, even though I am finding fault with the lover? If I begin to praise the non-lover, what kind of hymn do you suppose I shall raise? I shall surely be possessed of the nymphs to whom you purposely exposed me. So, in a word, I say that the non-lover possesses all the advantages that are opposed to the disadvantages we found in the lover. Why make a long speech? I have said enough about both of them. And so my tale shall fare as it may; I shall cross this stream and go away before you put some further compulsion on me (241d-242a).

Upon further reflection Socrates begins to have doubts about his speech. He fears that he is guilty of some impiety and that he must somehow recant. This prompts Socrates to compose a palinode in praise of the lover that he might repent of speaking ill against Eros.

Soc. ...before suffering any punishment for speaking ill of Love, I will try to atone by my recantation, with my head bare this time, not, as before, covered through shame.

Phdr. This indeed, Socrates, is the most delightful thing you could say.
Soc. Just consider, my good Phaedrus, how shameless the two speeches were, both this of mine and
the one you read out of the book. For if any man of noble and gentle nature, one who was himself in
love with another of the same sort, or who had ever been loved by such a one, had happened to hear
us saying that lovers take up violent enmity because of small matters and are jealously disposed and
harmful to the beloved, don't you think he would imagine he was listening to people brought up
among low sailors who had never seen a generous love? Would he not refuse utterly to assent to our
censure of Love?

Phdr. I declare, Socrates, perhaps he would.

Soc. I therefore, because I am ashamed at the thought of this man and am afraid of Love himself,
wish to wash out the brine from my ears with the water of sweet discourse. And I advise Lysias also
to write as soon as he can, that other things being equal, the lover should be favoured rather than the
non-lover (243c-d).

At this point Socrates launches into a speech in praise of Eros that dwarfs both previous speeches
in content, sweep, and rhetorical skill. Socrates introduces ideas such as the immortality of the
soul, the charioteer of the soul, and contemplation of the Forms. The end of Socrates' last speech,
however, marks the end of the rhetorical pyrotechnics and shifts the dialogue into a more
conventional Platonic effort. It is this shift between styles that has been the cause of much
consternation among Plato scholars.

Socrates and Phaedrus begin talking about the nature of writing which leads to a dialogue
concerning speaking:

Soc. We should, then, as we were proposing just now, discuss the theory of good (or bad) speaking
and writing.

Phdr. Clearly.

Soc. If a speech is to be good, must not the mind of the speaker know the truth about the matters of
which he is to speak (259e).
This line of thought is pursued by Socrates and Phaedrus through the method of "division and bringing together" (*diaireseon kai sunagōgon*) (266b) for the remainder of the dialogue which ends with a prophecy concerning Isocrates and a prayer to Pan. The epideictic heights and rhetorical pyrotechnics effected in Socrates' monological recantation of both earlier speeches abruptly become a dialogical discussion of rhetoric and writing. The explanation of this shift has prompted the minute combing of the dialogue for themes and literary devices that provide unity.

Perhaps the most common unifying theme proposed to pull the two halves of the *Phaedrus* together is rhetoric. The choice is easily understood since a rhetoric is performed in the first half of the dialogue, and then rhetoric is placed under Socratic scrutiny in the second half of the dialogue. This performative connection has prompted James S. Murray to see the development of a true philosophical rhetoric as the theme which holds the *Phaedrus* together. He writes: "Thus, I wish to argue that Plato could, and actually did, in the *Phaedrus*, envisage a true philosophical rhetoric which worked by means of 'disputation' and 'deception' and yet was useful in leading men to knowledge of the Forms."¹⁰

The *Phaedrus* has also been seen as a development or corrective to earlier dialogues. As far as the theme of rhetoric is concerned, the *Phaedrus* has been understood as the growth in Plato's conception of rhetoric development since the *Gorgias*. Rollin W. Quimby observes that, "[t]he *Phaedrus* plainly shows the application of Plato's mature use of dialectic to rhetoric."¹¹ For Quimby it is not a question of Plato equivocating between eulogy and villification of rhetoric, but a process of maturation reaching its culmination in the *Phaedrus*. Quimby elaborates:

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It might be better to think of the *Gorgias* as a transition, a bridge, a way station between Plato's earlier, half-puzzled observations and the rounded theory found in the *Phaedrus*, for it is in the *Phaedrus* that the perplexities of twenty years are cleared away. Plato did not vacillate between praise and blame of rhetoric. He unfolded a theory as it developed in his mind.  

Malcolm Brown and James Coulter also see rhetoric as the unifying theme in the *Phaedrus*. They write: "Our main argument aims at the conclusion that in the middle speech Plato is sketching a certain type of rhetorical sophist whose philosophy (or more accurately 'philodoxy') is totally unPlatonic." According to their view, the *Phaedrus* is an attack upon Athenian rhetorical practice, which is set up by Socrates' first speech, which in this context is understood as ironic.

One last example of rhetoric forming the thematic unity of the *Phaedrus* comes from Luc Brisson. It is his contention that the pericope alluding to Pericles (269e-270a) provides an understanding of what the true rhetor must be:

Suivant l'interprétation proposée dans cet article, l'allusion à Pélicès et à Anaxagore en *Phdr.* 269e-270a illustre la doctrine exprimée dans le membre de phrase: *adoleskhias kai meteōrologias phuseōs peri*, qui résume l'attitude de Platon à l'égard de la rhétorique dans le *Phèdre*. Définie comme l'art qui permet d'avoir une influence sur les âmes au moyen du discours, la rhétorique doit s'interroger sur la nature de l'âme en général et se poser la question de la vérité. Même Hippocrate qui, comme médecin, s'intéresse au corps doit prendre en considération la nature de l'univers et la vérité. Puisqu'elle est subordonnée à une autre technique – la dialectique –, qu'elle doit prendre en considération un système de valeurs, qui se fonde ultimement sur une ontologie et qu'elle doit plaire aux dieux qui sont les maîtres des hommes, la rhétorique ne peut prétendre à l'autonomie complète qu'elle revendique. Elle reste subordonnée à la philosophie. En d'autres termes, aucun discours ne

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12 Ibid.
The *Phaedrus* is unified by the subordination of rhetoric to a commitment of the nature of things, to an understanding of the true and the good.

Another common theme used to unify the *Phaedrus* is Eros. Since the first half of the dialogue is made up of three speeches with Eros as their theme, it is not surprising that some scholars have tried to connect it to the second half of the dialogue where it is not mentioned explicitly. Stanley Rosen in connecting the two parts of the dialogue uses the figure of the non-lover: "My immediate purpose is to cast light upon the philosophical function of the much and unjustly maligned character, the non-lover." For Rosen the non-lover forms a foil against which a complete exposition of Eros can be articulated.

Gerasimos Santas sees the *Phaedrus* as correcting the view of Eros espoused in the *Symposium*. According to Santas, Plato nuances the unemotional treatment of Eros in the *Symposium* with the passion of the *Phaedrus*. He writes:

Our hypothesis is that in the *Phaedrus* Plato is trying to remedy a defect of his own theory of Eros in the *Symposium*. To accomplish this, he 1) makes a distinction between human and divine madness, 2) brings in the immortality and tripartite division of the soul, and 3) makes use of the theory of forms.

Two other uncommon themes that have been used to unite the *Phaedrus* are the metaphysical concepts that Plato relies on to articulate his position in the *Phaedrus*, and the concept of writing. David A. White is the proponent of the metaphysical unity. He writes:

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The approach taken in this study is based on the premise that the *Phaedrus* can be read as an account of reality, and of how human nature must confront that reality in order to speak, and to live, as wisely and well as possible. Thus, one way in which the unity of the *Phaedrus* becomes apparent is to read the dialogue as a variegated exercise in—to use a non-Platonic word—metaphysics, the Platonic concern to describe "the things that are." This approach is not without drawbacks. To sustain it throughout a convoluted dialogue means that some aspects of the *Phaedrus* will receive scrutiny only as they bear on the structure of reality animating the dialogue as a whole. But the unavoidable loss of interpretive discussion that results will, I feel, be more than compensated for by situating these issues within a more articulated metaphysical position. The *Phaedrus* has yet to receive its due as a concentrated discourse on metaphysical considerations, both in substance and method. The following study is a tentative first step in that direction.\(^\text{17}\)

While White sees the drawbacks to his attempts at unity, ultimately he feels that the unity he forges is superior to other attempts.

Plato's treatment of writing has long puzzled scholars. How can one write a condemnation of writing without being self-referentially incoherent? Is Plato merely recording Socrates' position on the matter? Is there some clue in the dialogue that written dialogues do not fall under this condemnation? Is Socrates merely being ironic? Whatever is made of the condemnation of writing in the *Phaedrus*, it is generally treated as an epilogue, inconsequential to the dialogue as a whole. In distinction from most scholars Ronna Burger has set herself apart by suggesting that the concept of writing provides unity to the *Phaedrus*.\(^\text{18}\) She writes:

If "all logos" and "every logos" must be constructed like a living animal, the problem of the unity of the separate parts within this dialogue ought to reflect the problem of the unity of the Platonic corpus as a whole, of which the *Phaedrus* represents one part parading as a whole. Precisely that function that the *Phaedrus* serves in the structure of the whole composed of all the dialogues, then, might

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\(^{18}\) Ronna Burger, *Plato's Phaedrus: A Defense of the Philosophic Art of Writing*. 

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reveal the theme which determines its own internal completeness as an organic whole. If the Platonic corpus is indeed the "many-membered body of a living animal," the *Phaedrus* is that member which serves to examine the character of the whole as an imitation produced by the art of writing. If the role of the *Phaedrus* within the corpus of dialogues illuminates its own internal unity, the Platonic defense of the art of writing must provide for the *Phaedrus* itself the hidden bond between the speeches on *erōs* and the discussion on rhetoric and dialectics.  

According to Burger, the condemnation of writing is not only ironic, but also forms the underlying unity of the dialogue. Clues to this irony and unity are revealed throughout the dialogue.

Besides thematic unity, many attempts have been made to understand the unity of the *Phaedrus* through literary devices. The distinction between thematic unity and the unity of literary devices is not without overlap, however. Kenneth Dorter makes a strong case for the necessary examination of the literary devices in the *Phaedrus*. He notes: "It would therefore be helpful if one could show, not so much that the dialogues can be interpreted through their literary form, but they demand such an interpretation." Dorter goes on to elucidate the importance of the imagery in the *Phaedrus*, and how it provides unity to the dialogue. He concludes:

This examination has shown, I think, two things. First, that the imagery displays too much consistency, intricacy, and design not to have been carefully and thoughtfully planned. And second, that the inference, that such care and energy would not have been expended except on an element of central importance to the dialogue, is confirmed by the light which a study of the imagery sheds on the structure of the dialogue and import of the arguments.

Michael Stroeber suggests that perhaps it is the character of Phaedrus which provides the unity of the dialogue:

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19 Ibid., 4.
21 Ibid., 286.
My intention, therefore, is to focus on Phaedrus. By clarifying his literary role and methodological significance, I hope to show both how these features draw the themes of love and rhetoric together, and how Phaedrus's location and status in the dialogue illustrate Plato's own allegorical rhetoric as it is poetically expressed in the myth of the soul.\textsuperscript{22}

Stroeber goes on to delineate how the character of Phaedrus concretely embodies Plato's conception of the soul. Phaedrus demonstrates the propensity of the soul to fight against itself in his connection to Lysias and Socrates.\textsuperscript{23}

In an article that bridges the boundary between thematic and literary unity, Jane V. Curran upholds Plato's self-referential coherence. She claims that that which Plato upholds concerning rhetoric in the second half of the dialogue he performs in the structure of the Socratic speeches.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, the rhetorical technique is commensurate with the rhetorical theory, which provides unity to the dialogue as a whole.

C.J. Rowe in his commentary on the \textit{Phaedrus} also sees his task as discovering unity. He writes:

The chief task of any interpreter of the \textit{Phaedrus} is to identify the thread, or threads, which hold its various parts together; and in particular, to understand the relationship between the first half, which culminates in a long and powerful speech by Socrates on the nature of ideal love, and the second, the larger part of which is occupied by a rather more prosaic discussion of rhetorical theory and practice.\textsuperscript{25}

In determining what those threads are, Rowe opts for form and content. The formal thread of the dialogue is very similar to Curran's argument. The speeches of the first part prepare the way for

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 278-80.
\textsuperscript{25} C.J. Rowe, \textit{Plato: Phaedrus}, 7.
the discussion of rhetoric and dialectic in the second part. Concerning the content, Rowe notes the initial complication that love is not mentioned explicitly in the second half of the dialogue. He solves this problem by way of analogy:

There is, then, a clear formal relationship between the two parts of the dialogue. But despite appearances there is also a relationship between them in terms of content. The second part ends by identifying the true teacher with the philosopher or dialectician, who as he watches the seed he has sown bear fruit in his pupil's mind is "as happy as it is possible for a man to be" (276e-277a); and this idea clearly echoes the description of the ideal lover in Socrates' second speech, who is inspired by his love to a blissful life of philosophy with his chosen partner (256a-b). The relationship between lover and beloved represents a poetic or mythical version of that between teacher and pupil....

One final example of the literary structure providing unity to the *Phaedrus* is G.R.F. Ferrari's commentary enigmatically, but appropriately entitled, *Listening to the Cicadas*. For Ferrari it is the setting of the dialogue that provides unity:

...I will argue that by considering how Socrates and Phaedrus orient themselves in their physical environment, and by recognising what this reveals of their characters, the reader is oriented to the dialogue's major concerns; for in its opening pages Socrates and Phaedrus exhibit in their behaviour or allude to much of what is then explicitly analysed in the remainder of the dialogue, both in the speeches on love and in the critique of rhetoric....Plato redirects our attention to the conversational ambience at the crucial juncture between the two parts of the dialogue in order to guide our reading of its curious structure. The admonitions to which Socrates is prompted by the presence of the cicadas extend not only to Phaedrus but also to the reader. What is more, this mode of exposition—Plato's device of orienting his readers by narrating how his characters orient themselves

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26 Ibid., 8.
27 Ibid., 8-9, italics his.
in their landscape—is no literary toy. I will urge, but, given the concerns of this dialogue, has philosophic purpose.  

Ultimately, Ferrari is ambivalent about the unity of the *Phaedrus*. He ends his commentary rather laconically: "Let us not struggle too hard, then, to unify the *Phaedrus*, for the real struggle is elsewhere." Josef Pieper also shares this ambivalence concerning the unity of the *Phaedrus*, refusing to look for it in his commentary. "Nor will we be primarily concerned with looking for a single underlying idea. We shall also not look for a formula that might summarize the entire content of the dialogue in the manner of a headline."  

The matter of ambivalence toward the unity of the *Phaedrus* is a rarity. Ferrari ends his commentary by discounting the search for unity while he has spent a great deal of the book demonstrating a very subtle narrative cohesion based on the setting of the dialogue. Pieper, inversely, begins his study dismissing the need to understand the *Phaedrus* as a unity, and yet, by the end of his commentary has managed to find beauty as that which holds the dialogue together.

Recent *Phaedrus* scholars cannot ignore the unity question and invariably treat it whether as a stated intention or not. The *Phaedrus* appears to these scholars as a puzzle that needs to be solved. The *prima facie* incongruity between the two parts of the dialogue remain intolerable until they are resolved into a deeper underlying unity. It is as if the two halves of the dialogue are the black and white horses of Plato's myth of the soul. The wild, pyrotechnical first half is the difficult to control black horse, a foreign rhetoric in Plato's generally placid dialogue. The second half is the familiar dialectic, the good white steed. Who is the charioteer that holds this team

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29 Ibid., 232.
1  Josef Pieper, *Enthusiasm and Divine Madness*, xv.
31 Ibid., 98.
together, giving unity to this dialogue? Each commentator has seemingly given a different identity
to the charioteer – Rhetoric, Eros, Writing, Metaphysics, Phaedrus, Cicadas, Structure, Beauty.
Is there one, true name? If there is not a true name, there is at least one assumption that unites all
of these suggestions. Without exception the unity of the *Phaedrus*, whether thematic or literary is
traced back to the authorship of Plato. Plato, himself, is the unity behind all the unities
suggested for the *Phaedrus*. This may seem like an innocuous point, but it is indespensible for
understanding Derrida’s reading of the *Phaedrus*. It is precisely concerning the source of the
unity of the *Phaedrus* that Derrida diverges from *Phaedrus* scholarship.

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32 In a round about way Robert Zaslavsky in "A Hitherto Unremarked Pun in the *Phaedrus*," *Apeiron* 15
(1981): 115-6, points to this unanimity by noting that perhaps Plato refers to himself in the dialogue with a
disproportionate number of references to the plane tree (*platanos*) which could be a play on Plato’s own name
(*Platon*)

16
The (ex)Plicit *Phaedrus*

*Dissemination* is a collection of four essays. The first essay is "Outwork" which is a meditation on the idea of a preface, particularly as Hegel has problematized the idea in the prefaces to his works. Derrida ends "Outwork" with a series of puns on the word *coup*.

The second essay in *Dissemination*, "Plato's Pharmacy" is introduced with an epigraph. The epigraph comes from Littre's definition of the French word *coup*. *Coup* covers a rather wide semantic domain, meaning variously: "blow, stroke, hit, thump, knock, stab, thrust, beat, draft, clap, charge, gust, throw, shot, moment, bout, attempt, deed, event." The meaning grows even more complicated as one takes into account the range of meanings possible when *coup* is combined in idiomatic expressions such as *le coup de grâce* (the finishing stroke) or *le coup de téléphone* (telephone call). To further complicate matters the section of Littre's definition that Derrida chooses for his epigraph comes from the etymological source of *coup*, the Greek word *kolaphos*. A *kolaphos* is a box on the ears. It is what Callicles says should happen to Socrates, and later what Socrates says should happen to Callicles in the *Gorgias*.^34^ The meaning

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^33^ These translations come from *Cassell's French & English Dictionary*.

^34^ See Plato's *Gorgias* (485, 527).
of the epigraph is not unproblematic. Three suggestions may be offered. The play on the word *coup* also appears again at the end of "Plato's Pharmacy". Perhaps Derrida is suggesting that *coup* provides a thread that can be traced throughout this piece. Connected with the range of the word *coup* is the idea of force as Derrida explores it in "Force and Signification". In "Force and Signification" Derrida is criticizing structuralism and using the notion of force as that which escapes structure and provides the conditions for structure's possibility. Derrida writes:

> Our intention here is not, through the simple motions of balancing, equilibration or overturning, to oppose duration to space, quality to quantity, force to form, the depth of meaning or value to the surface of figures. Quite to the contrary. To counter this simple alternative, to counter the simple choice of one of the terms or one of the series against the other, we maintain that it is necessary to seek new concepts and new models, an *economy* escaping this system of metaphysical oppositions. This economy would not be an energetics of pure, shapeless force. The differences examined simultaneously would be differences of site and differences of force. If we appear to oppose one series to the other, it is because from within the classical system we wish to make apparent the noncritical privilege naively granted to the other series by a certain structuralism. Our discourse irreducibly belongs to the system of metaphysical oppositions. The break with structure of belonging can be announced only through a *certain* organization, a certain *strategic* arrangement which, within the field of metaphysical opposition, uses the strengths of the field to turn its own stratagems against it, producing a force of dislocation that spreads itself throughout the entire system, fissuring it in every direction and thoroughly *delimiting* it.

In the same way that Derrida applied a certain force to structuralism, through the concept of a certain force, in "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida will enact *le coup de l'écriture* (the trick of writing). A third possibility for this particular epigraph comes from the fact that it is in Greek. Derrida is

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36 "Force and Signification," 19-20, italics his.
37 "Plato's Pharmacy," 170; "La Pharmacie de Platon," 196.
delimiting metaphysics, inaugurated by the "decision of Platonism." Perhaps this delimitation could be seen as a coup des orielles (a box on the ears) of metaphysics. It is not necessary at this point to untangle these possibilities, to decide for one. They merely provide a site for the reading of "Plato's Pharmacy".

Derrida begins "Plato's Pharmacy" with an untitled section that discusses what a text is and how one is to approach it. Derrida writes:

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.

A text for Derrida has several facets. First a text is not immediately apparent. There is no self-present meaning which is transferred without interpretation to the reader. A text is not a mathematical equation seeking univocity. Second, a text is governed by rules, the rules of a game. There are limits to critical production. A text will not support every reading. Thirdly, in distinction to the limits of critical production, there is a certain open-endedness to the rules. They cannot be "booked". This play on booking refers to Derrida's previous essay "Outwork" where he explores the preface as that which begins the book, but the which is also outside the book, thus

39 "Plato's Pharmacy," 63, "La Pharmacie de Platon," 71, italics his. From this point on all references to "Plato's Pharmacy" will be in the text followed by references to "La Pharmacie de Platon."
40 Here I think Derrida is referring to specific texts such as the Phaedrus. He does not here seem to be indicating his concept of the general text, textuality or "contextuality" (as Simon Critchley in The Ethics of Deconstruction (London: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 31-44, calls it), although this notion is not far in the background.
destroying the completeness of the book. A text can never be totalized. One cannot contain all that a text is within a perception. For Derrida this is not a possibility.

Derrida also has a particular understanding of how one is to read a text. He writes.

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[41] 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 (63/71).

Because of the nature of texts as Derrida understands them it takes centuries to follow and unravel all threads in a given text. Derrida sees each reading of a text as a decision that cuts the web instead of following its threads. For Derrida there is no possibility of reading a text without the reader becoming involved in the text. There are no objective readings; the subject is always involved. The reader always gets her hands dirty. Consequently, reading is always productive. A new thread will be added to the text by every reader. This is the risk involved in reading.

Because of this productive aspect to reading Derrida writes:

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[41] I cannot help but think that this is a reference to Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, a critical methodology in which all texts must fit into one of the archetypes. Derrida shows that he is aware of the work by referring to it later on in "Plato's Pharmacy" (132, n.59).

[42] This idea of a decision that cuts will become important as "Plato's Pharmacy" is explored.
If reading and writing are one, as is easily thought these days, if reading is writing, this oneness designates neither undifferentiated (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, 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 (63-4/71-2, italics his).

To read is to write for Derrida, but these two related operations are not identical. Texts are not produced in their entirety intersubjectively as Stanley Fish would have it. This first section seems to have the same force as "The Exorbitant Question of Method" quoted above. In both cases Derrida is concerned to say that one inevitably affects the texts one reads, but this affectation is not authorization to introduce whatever one wishes. The critical production based on a text is limited by the rules of the text. The rules, however, are not the rules of logic, but the rules of a game. There is a certain allusiveness, a certain nuance that makes a text what it is, that cannot be captured by logic. It is this "wanton chase", this something else, that one seeks in a text in order to open it.

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43 The "not serious" and the "serious" will resurface later in "Plato's Pharmacy", 156-8.
44 The "supplement" is also important for Derrida. He examines it at great length in Of Grammatology, 141-164. Its importance for "Plato's Pharmacy" is also great as Derrida explicitly connects the pharmakon to the supplement, 110/126, 153/177.
46 See above, 3. For the full text see Of Grammatology, 157-64.
47 On the allusive nature of artworks see Calvin Seerveld, Rainbows for the Fallen World (Toronto: Tuppence Press, 1980), 104-37. The difference between Seerveld's conception of allusivity and Derrida's text
After the preliminary discussion of method "Plato's Pharmacy" is divided into two untitled sections. The first section has five chapters, and each chapter deals with an explicit aspect of the Phaedrus. Before the first chapter there is an interlude that connects the introduction to the first chapter and the rest of the work. Derrida writes:

To a considerable degree, we have already said all we meant to say (voulons dire). 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 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) (65/73, emphasis his).

With this interlude Derrida places his work within the margins of the Phaedrus and Platonic scholarship. He has already said all he meant to say. He just has a few threads that he wants to follow. Threads concerning "the textual, the textile, and the histological." Derrida will keep himself "within the limits of this tissue." The limits of this fabric are not immediately apparent, however. Derrida provides a footnote elucidating what he means by histos: "anything set upright" but this does not immediately clarify things. The semantic range of the word includes everything from ship masts to spider webs. It is presumably the connection with weaving which prompts beyond logic is that for Seerveld allusiveness has ontic status, whereas for Derrida this is merely an effect of syntax.

48 The two essays following "Plato's Pharmacy" in Dissemination, "The Double Session" and "Dissemination" are also divided into two parts.

49 The vouloir-dire is an important notion for Derrida in his critique of Husserl's concept of the sign. See, Speech and Phenomenon tr. by David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 32-47; and "Plato's Pharmacy." 95/108.
Derrida to mark out this territory: "between the metaphor of the histos and the question of the histos of metaphor". Derrida intends to explore the interweaving (sumploke) of the Platonic text, and what authorizes its choice of metaphors. Derrida intends to write about this, knowing full well the condemnation he stands under from the Platonic point of view. He will only be capable of repetition, and reduced to playing a game. What he writes cannot be the truth, it can only imitate.

1. Pharmacia

Having said that there is so little to do, only to write a little, Derrida decides to begin again. He begins again with the Phaedrus, a much maligned dialogue according to the brief history Derrida gives of it. "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" (66/74). The reason for the inadequacies of the dialogue were first attributed to Plato's youth, but then to his old age. "We are no longer at that point. The hypothesis of a rigorous, sure, and subtle form is naturally more fertile" (67/75). Derrida posits the Phaedrus as a well-woven text, then proceeds to name the "supplementary thread" he will follow: writing. The trial of writing once thought to be extraneous and unnecessary "is rigorously called for from one end of the Phaedrus to the other" (67/75).

The trial of writing is called for throughout the dialogue, but it makes its first appearance in the two myths of the Phaedrus: the cicadas and Theuth. The connection of the myth of the cicadas and writing is less apparent so Derrida elucidates the affiliation. The question of speech writing (logography) comes up at the center of the dialogue:
Phdr. I join in your prayer, Socrates, and pray that this may come to pass, if this is best for us. But all along I have been wondering at your discourse, you made it so much more beautiful than the first; so that I am afraid Lysias will make a poor showing, if he consents to compete with it. Indeed, lately one of the politicians was abusing him for this very thing, and through all his abusive speech kept calling him a speech-writer (logographon); so perhaps out of pride he may refrain from writing.

Soc. That is an absurd idea, young man, and you are greatly mistaken in your friend if you think he is so much afraid of noise. Perhaps, too, you think the man who abused him believed what he was saying.

Phdr. He seemed to believe, Socrates; and you know yourself that the most influential and important men in our cities are ashamed to write speeches and leave writings behind them, through fear of being called sophists by posterity (257c-d).

Derrida characterizes the logographer as "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" (68/76). Derrida sets up the logographer as the antithesis of the Platonic position. "In writing what he does not speak...the author of the written speech is already entrenched in the posture of the sophist: the man of non-presence and of non-truth" (68/76).

Socrates remains neutral for the time being, however: "But the disgrace, I fancy, consists in speaking or writing not well, but disgracefully and badly" (258d). The question of what it means to write disgracefully and what it means to write beautifully remains open. "This question sketches out the central nervure, the great fold that divides the dialogue" (68/77). It is also precisely at this point that the myth of the cicadas arises, interrupting the flow of questions, and connecting the myth to writing. "Between this question and the answer that takes up its terms in
the last section (274b) the thread remains solid, if not easily visible, all through the fable of the
cicadas and the themes of psychagogy, rhetoric, and dialectics" (68-9/77).

The topic of writing is present throughout the dialogue. Its trial is called for throughout
the dialogue. But, what is the site of the dialogue? What is its *topos*? The dialogue occurs
outside the walls of the city, along the banks of the river Ilissus. It was a beautiful spot along the
river, perhaps the very spot where Orithyia while she was playing with Pharmacia was carried off
by Boreas. "This brief evocation of Pharmacia at the beginning of the *Phaedrus*—is it an
accident? An hors d'oeuvre?...Let us in any case retain this: that a little spot, a little stitch or
mesh (*macula*)\(^5\) 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*
(70/78). This reconnoitring of the *Phaedrus*’ site reveals that it takes place where Pharmacia
plays. The importance of play for Derrida has previously been noted, but what is the significance
of Pharmacia? "Pharmacia (*Pharmakeia*) is also a common noun signifying the administration of
the *pharmakon*, the drug: the medicine and/or poison" (70/78).

This is the first reference to the *pharmakon* chain in Derrida's text and in the *Phaedrus*.
The second reference to the *pharmakon* chain comes just a little further on in the *Phaedrus* when
Socrates compares the texts in Phaedrus' hand to a *pharmakon* which has drawn him out of his
natural habitat, the city. Already it seems that this chain of signifiers is at least ambivalent. The
dialogue takes place within the context of Pharmacia leading a virgin to her death. A little further
on the *pharmakon* is that which causes Socrates to wander. The *pharmakon* in this case is
writing, particularly the writing bound in books. From the very inception of the dialogue there is

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5. The insertion of the Latin word "macula" is Derrida's which can also be translated "spot, stain, or
blemish."
the introduction of an ambivalent chain of signifiers, and it is connected with writing. Through this connection Derrida intends to demonstrate that the trial of writing is called for throughout the dialogue, and in the very moment when Plato has properly marginalized writing he is subject to it.

Because of the ambivalence of the word *pharmakon* Derrida briefly explores how the word has been variously translated. Derrida writes:

> We will continue to refer to it [the Robin translation of the *Phaedrus*], 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 dispersed, 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 (71-2/80).

The task of translating one language into another is an emblematic exercise fraught with difficulty, according to Derrida. The Robin translation from Greek to French, for example, re-enacts an earlier translation, the translation from nonphilosophemes (or mythemes) to philosophemes. The decision of this incorporation was an incision for the sake of concept formation and univocity.⁵¹

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The cut of philosophy was not clean, however. There remain sinuous connections between the concept as it is demarcated within philosophy and the word's previous polysemy. This polysemy manifests itself in the ambivalence of philosophical concepts and the metaphors chosen to describe these concepts. In "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida intends to show the connection of writing with the *pharmakon* chain. Derrida understands this as Plato excluding writing from philosophy, but ultimately Plato reintroduces writing as the privileged metaphor, the writing of truth on the soul. For Derrida the possibility of writing as excluded and writing as privileged metaphor is the result of translating a nonphilosopheme into a philosopheme, in this case *pharmakon*. The *pharmakon* because of its ambivalence points to the nonphilosophical which invades every philosophical enterprise. Difficulty in translation between languages is merely a symptom. Derrida writes:

> 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 (70/78-9).

In "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida is showing how the *pharmakon* chain not only makes this Platonic text possible, but also radically delimits it.

The final part of chapter one sets the scene for the myth of Theuth, the myth of the invention of writing, because it is in this myth that the connection between writing and the *pharmakon* are made explicit. The myth of Theuth (274c) comes at a "moment of general exhaustion" giving the impression that the discussion of writing is supplementary, a mere

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appendix. 

Beyond the auxiliary position of the question of writing there is the status of the myth of Theuth. The case against writing will not begin within *logos* but rather an *akoe* "a well-known rumor, a fable transmitted from ear to ear" (74/83). "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 *akoe*, 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" (75/84).

2. The Father of Logos

Derrida begins this chapter by quoting the beginning of the myth of Theuth. Theuth, the inventor of writing presents his gift to the king/god Thamus. Most importantly, however, for Derrida, Theuth calls writing a *pharmakon* "of memory and wisdom" (274e). Before the Thamus is allowed to pass judgement on the gift of Theuth Derrida interrupts the myth to analyze structurally the scene and the characters. Two things are going on in the myth up to this point. First, the *pharmakon* is presented to Thamus (whom Derrida reckons is Ammon, sun king and father of the gods). Thamus is the kings of kings, the king of the gods, the god of the gods, and Theuth is a demigod paying homage to him. For it is only by the judgement of Thamus that the value of things can be determined. Thamus is the source of all value, all being. In linguistic terms Thamus is the transcendental signified, the one stable object that grants meaning. The second

54 Fowler translates this *pharmakon* as "elixir".
item of importance in the myth is Thamus' experience of the gift of writing. It does not come from him. It is not his creation. It is someone else's work. Writing comes from outside and below. The appurtenant position of the myth within the Phaedrus is recapitulated within the myth itself, as writing is seen as an ancillary art presented from outside and below. The structure of the passage adumbrates Thamus' decision. "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" (76/86).

Another interesting aspect that Derrida notes concerning Thamus is his inability to write. He has no need of it. He speaks and it is so. Thamus is the producer of speech, the father of logos. This connection is not incidental. Plato 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 (76/86).

Derrida adds a little complexity to this analysis by saying, "not that logos is the father, either. But the origin of logos is its father" (77/86). The relationship of logos to father is analogous to the speaker and the speech that is produced. Without the speaker the speech is dead. Without the father speech is mere writing. "The specificity of writing would thus be intimately bound to the absence of the father" (77/86). Writing is an orphan, fatherless. It is in the pitiable position of having no one to defend it, but writing's orphanhood is somewhat sinister. There is the suggestion of patricide in writing's orphanhood. "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?" (77/87).

Derrida continues to contrast speech and writing by showing that Plato considers a logos to be a living organism, a zoon. "An animal that is born, grows, belongs to the phusis. Linguistics, logic, dialectics, and zoology are all in the same camp" (79/89). A logos is a living entity born of a father. Not only this, but the logos must be well-born (gennaia).

Derrida now turns to the use of the term father in the Platonic text. In an interesting reversal he suggests that the expression "father of logos" should be understood in terms of the logos rather than in terms of a father/son relationship. Derrida writes:

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 the origin or cause of logos is being compared to what we know to the cause of a living son, his father. One would understand or imagine the birth and development of the 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.... 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....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 (80-1/90-1).

The relation of father and son, according to Derrida, cannot be understood outside of logos and
its source. This is logocentrism. All metaphors are generated and understood by their relation
to logos.

After examining what it means to be the son, the logos, Derrida next focuses on what it
means to be the father. The father is the source and protector of the logos. This connects it to
the other source words in the Platonic text: the good, the chief, the capital, the sun, the origin,
 etc. The sources are invisible and only represented by the logos. The logos is empowered by the
sun, but it also protects from the sun. One cannot look directly into that which makes sight
possible without blindness. "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 the eclipse" (84/95). Logos is the (almost)
perfect representation of its origin. It shields from the origin in its presence, and supplants it in
the origin's absence.

The purpose of this chapter of "Plato's Pharmacy" was to introduce the myth of Theuth.
In the myth the pharmakon and writing are explicitly connected. Derrida only examines part of
the myth up to the judgement of Thamus, however. This section of the myth allows Derrida to
explore the relation of speech and writing as they are represented in father/son imagery in the
myth. Writing, it seems, has the (non)position of an orphan, an orphan suspected of patricide, at

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56 Logocentrism has the wider scope in Derrida of indicating the Western philosophical tradition's
dependence on reason, but this is not unrelated to the power accorded logos in the above passage.
57 I believe Derrida italicizes resource to indicate that the logos itself becomes a new source representing/
supplanting the origin.
The logos, though, is the well-born son, the son able to represent the father in his absence. Derrida writes:

We will let these yarns of suns and sons spin on for a while. Up to now we have only followed this line so as to move from logos to the father, so as to tie speech to the kurios, the master, the lord, another name given in the Republic to the good-sun-capital-father (508a). Later, within the same tissue, within the same texts, we will draw on other filial filaments, pull the same strings once more, and witness the weaving or unraveling of other designs (84/95).

Having explored the structural relation of father/son, Derrida now turns to those other "filial filaments" the life of Theuth and his counterparts in other mythologies.

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

Derrida begins this chapter with three epigraphs: two from Jorge Luis Borges\(^58\) and one from James Joyce. From the beginning Derrida has expressed his admiration for the work of Joyce. In Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction, Derrida writes:

Since equivocity always evidences a certain depth of development and concealment of a past... one has when facing this equivocity, the choice of two endeavors. One would resemble that of James Joyce: to repeat and take responsibility for all equivocation itself, utilizing a language that could equalize the greatest possible synchrony with the greatest potential for buried, accumulated, and interwoven intentions within each linguistic atom, each vocable, each word, each simple proposition, in all worldly cultures and their most ingenious forms (mythology, religion, sciences, arts, literature, politics, philosophy, and so forth). And, like Joyce this endeavor would try to make the structural unity of all empirical culture appear in the generalized equivocation of a writing that, no longer

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translating one language into another on the basis of their common cores of sense, circulates throughout all languages at once, accumulates their energies actualizes their most secret consonances, discloses their furthermore common horizons, cultivates their associative syntheses instead of avoiding them, and rediscovers the poetic value of passivity. In short, rather than put it out of play with quotation marks, rather than "reduce" it, this writing resolutely settles itself within the labyrinthian field of culture "bound" by its own equivocations, in order to travel through and explore the vastest possible historical distance that is now at all possible.

The other endeavor is Husserl's: to reduce or impoverish empirical language methodically to the point where its univocal and translatable elements are actually transparent, in order to reach back and grasp again at its pure source a historicity or traditionality that no de facto historical totality will yield itself. This historicity or traditionality is always already presupposed by every Odyssean repetition of Joyce's type...[59]

Derrida's admiration of a Joycean type of writing is present throughout "Plato's Pharmacy" but it is important to note that this admiration does not diminish the necessity of a Husserlian type of writing. Derrida wants to demonstrate the complicity of several mythologies in a system of oppositions that prescribes them, trying "to make the structural unity of all empirical culture appear in the generalized equivocation of a writing that...discloses their furthermore common horizons...."

The common horizons that determine the Greek and Middle Eastern mythologies that Derrida is exploring is a series of general "structural laws" such as "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. (85/96)." These mythologies all have a similar god of writing, who is both subject

to and contaminates these oppositions. By examining the relation between these structural
necessities Derrida hopes "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" (85/96).

Before pursuing the family resemblance among the gods of writing the purtenance of this
type of structural analysis should be examined. Derrida's claim is that Western philosophy works
according to certain structural laws. These structural laws "govern and articulate" certain binary
oppositions. Within philosophy, however, these binarisms do not result in a dualism. One term is
always privileged over the other. This privileging of one term (all of the first terms in the above
list is the privileged term) is called a decision by Derrida. Because of this decision of philosophy
the binarisms are now related to one another as a "hierarchy of appurtenance".60 This relationship
places the privileged term as the center and the unprivileged term as the margin. Part of Derrida's
project in the deconstruction of Western philosophy is to show how the margin is implicated in
the center and the center is implicated in the margin. The reason for demonstrating this
implication is not to subvert the hierarchy.61 This type of subversion could be dismissed as mere
Romanticism. The reason for demonstrating this implication is to give an account of how
philosophical language works. In order for philosophy to make a decision there must be a prior
condition of undecidability. Undecidability is not indecision, nor is it indeterminacy. It is simply
the prior condition for making any decision. To illustrate this concept in the most banal way: A
woman decides to buy a car. She has the choice of two colors, red or blue. Before she decides

60 This phrase comes from Of Grammatology, 13.
61 Derrida writes, "To counter this simple alternative, to counter the simple choice of one of the terms or
one of the series against the other, we maintain that it is necessary to seek new concepts and new models, an
economy escaping this system of metaphysical oppositions." "Force and Signification," 19. For the full quote see
above, 18-9.
which color to choose she is in a position of undecidability. It is not that she will never choose a color, and hence be in a position of indecision, nor is it that she is uncertain what her color choices actually are, and hence indeterminacy. It is simply that she is faced with choosing between two options. Her choice will not be without consequences, and it may not be without regret, but she will decide. Derrida writes concerning undecidability:

I do not believe I have ever spoken of "indeterminacy," whether in regard to "meaning" or anything else. Undecidability is something else again. While referring to what I have said above and elsewhere, I want to recall that undecidability is always a determined oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibilities are themselves highly determined in strictly defined situations (for example, discursive—syntactical or rhetorical—but also political, ethical, etc.). They are pragmatically determined. The analyses that I have devoted to undecidability concern just these determinations and these definitions, not at all some vague "indeterminacy." I say "undecidability" rather than "indeterminacy" because I am interested more in relations of force, in differences of force, in everything that allows, precisely, determinations in given situations to be stabilized through a decision of writing (in the broad sense I give to this word, which also includes political action and experience in general). There would be no indecision or double bind were it not between determined (semantic, ethical, political) poles, which are upon occasion terribly necessary and always irreplaceably singular. Which is to say that from the point of view of semantics, but also of ethics and politics, "deconstruction" should never lead either to relativism or to any sort of indeterminism.62

In this chapter Derrida begins to move toward the matrix of undecidability within which the Platonic text is inscribed. The steps in this direction are made by examining in detail the character of Thoth63 and his mythological counterparts, and how Thoth points to a condition that antedates the decision of Platonism.

63 In keeping with the text of "Plato's Pharmacy" I will use Theuth when it refers to the Phaedrus (or the
Derrida has several points which he wishes to illustrate within this chapter. The first point is that the similarity of character traits among the various gods of writing points to a "more deeply buried necessity." This deeply buried necessity which requires Plato to retell the myth within strictly defined parameters is the philosophical necessity of construing the world in metaphysical oppositions. These same general structural laws are also at work in Babylonian, Egyptian, and Assyrian mythology, which delimits the possibility of myth production. Since all of these mythologies are inscribed within a set of structural laws the way in which certain aspects of the world are construed (i.e., writing) will be similar. This explains the similar positions among the various gods of writing in the various pantheons.

The Derridean project, however, does not stop with this demonstration. The continuation of the above structural analysis (and second point) is to "open onto the general problematic of the relations between the mythemes and the philosophemes that lie at the origin of western logos" (86/98). For Derrida myths represent an alterity that is subject to the same textual laws as philosophy. This subjection makes the translation of mythemes into philosophemes possible. However, since mythemes represent an alterity they must be appropriated and subjugated by philosophy. Myths cannot remain alterior within philosophy. Philosophy expends its energy subordinating mythos to logos. "History...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" (86/98). Alterity cannot be completely erased, though. There always remains a trace which disrupts philosophical discourse.

This trace which disrupts philosophical discourse is the final point which Derrida wishes to elucidate in this chapter. This trace is Thoth as he functions in Egyptian mythology who works...
"at the subversive dislocation of identity in general..."(86/97). Derrida demonstrates this "dislocation of identity" in several ways. He first notes that in the *Phaedrus*, the god of writing is a "subordinate character, a second, a technocrat without power of decision" (86/98). Theuth thus occupies the position of the excluded term in the system of metaphysical oppositions.

Having noted the position of Theuth in the *Phaedrus*, Derrida begins to explore Thoth's position in Egyptian mythology. Derrida sees a similarity in that Thoth calls himself the son of Ammon-Ra (Thamus). This places Thoth in the position of being engendered, as a product of the origin, whom he also represents through speech. Ra thinks the original creative word, and Thoth merely bears the message. As the bearer of Ra's messages Thoth is also the interpreter and introduces plurality into language. Thoth is the moon god supplementing Ra's position as sun god. Most important for Derrida, however, Thoth is the god of writing. This connection with writing, representing deference, difference, substitution, and subversion, illustrates how Thoth (and by extension writing and *pharmakon*) displaces identity.

This displacement of identity is not necessarily peaceful. Derrida writes:

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 (89/101).

In the character of Thoth and his relationship to Ra, Derrida sees illustrated the relation among signifiers. Derrida approaches language with the Saussurian terminology of signifier and signified. Within this terminology Derrida utilizes two particular advances of Saussurian linguistics. The first is the inseparability of signifier and signified. Saussure writes: "The linguistic sign is then a
two-sided psychological entity. The two elements [concept (signified), sound-image (signifier)] are intimately united, and each recalls the other.\textsuperscript{64} This unity points to the arbitrariness of the sign. For Saussure (and for Derrida) this does not mean that each individual produces the connection between the signifier and signified, but rather that there is no necessary connection between the signifier and the thing that it signifies. Neither Saussure (nor Derrida) are Realists when it comes to linguistics.\textsuperscript{65}

The second important point that Derrida draws from Saussure is that language is a system of differences. For Saussure a word is a word not by virtue of anything in itself, but by its difference from other words. For example, the word "cat" is understood by \textit{not} being "bat", "mat", "cad", etc. Saussure writes:

\begin{quote}
...in language there are only differences...a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up: but in language there are only differences \textit{without positive terms}. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

The nature of the linguistic system as Saussure sees it allows Derrida to see language as a "process of substitution...a pure play of traces."\textsuperscript{67}

Derrida continues to follow the threads that demonstrate Thoth as the appurtenant part of the governing hierarchies. Thoth is also the god of death in Egyptian mythology. The god of writing and the god of death fit nicely together. The connection between writing and death is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{65} For Saussure's comments on the "Arbitrary Nature of the Sign" see, \textit{Course in General Linguistics}, 67-70.
\item \textsuperscript{66} For Derrida's use of this Saussurian principle see, \textit{Of Grammatology}, 44-65.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Saussure, \textit{Course in General Linguistics}, 120.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Derrida's relationship with any body of thought is always ambivalent. It is never a matter of simply appropriating anyone's model (in this case Saussure's) into his own thought. Derrida's use of another's thought is always by way of deconstruction, that is through a delimiting of the metaphysics at work within that thought. In \textit{Positions} Derrida indicates the importance of Saussure's work in his own thought (the two noted above), but then proceeds directly to criticisms of Saussure's work. See \textit{Positions}, 17-24.
\end{itemize}

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clear to Plato as he condemns writing as that which "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..." (92/104). The position of Thoth as representing Ra's other in every conceivable way, and also the connection of Thoth with writing as the god of writing is completed with one final addendum. Thoth is also the 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" (94/107).

The position of Thoth within Egyptian mythology serves to adumbrate the function of the pharmakon within the Platonic text. Thoth is not only placed in a subservient position to Ra, he also subverts Ra's position as he represents and imitates Ra. Derrida writes:

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

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68 "Supplement" should be read in Derrida with the double meaning of adding to that which is already full and filling up a lack. See, Of Grammatology, 141-64.
sort of joker, a floating signifier, a wild card, one who puts play into play.... 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 (92-3/105).

Derrida sees Thoth as representing the conditions of both possibility and impossibility for the maintenance of the hierarchy within which he is inscribed. Thoth is the indispensable supplement to the work of Ra. At the same time, however, Thoth subverts the position of Ra, representing him, speaking for him, being him. One would be tempted, according to Derrida, to see Thoth as either a coincidentia oppositorum or the sublation of two antitheses. This is an inappropriate assignation. Both of these responses to opposites require a third identity, which is precisely what Thoth does not have. He looks like dialectic, but it is only because he mimics it, ultimately preventing it. This character of Thoth, invading the Platonic text as Theuth points to something that Platonism cannot contain, the pharmakon.

4. The Pharmakon

In this chapter Derrida returns to the Platonic text. He gives a brief explanation of his method before picking up the pharmakon chain again. What allows Derrida to follow this chain throughout the Platonic text is not by reiterating what Plato "meant-to-say" (vouloir-dire), but by calling into question the opposition between voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious by exposing the "mode of 'submission' to the necessities of a given 'language'." The...assuming we have ever really left it" (95/108). Once again drawing on Saussure, Derrida is indicating that language as a differential structure defies the simple opposition between the inside and outside of a text. This understanding also forms the basis of the two parts of "Plato's Pharmacy". Part I concerns those parts of the pharmakon chain which are explicit in the Phaedrus. Part II concerns those parts of the chain which are not in the Phaedrus but still implicated. This explicit/implicit pharmakon chain weaving in and out of the Phaedrus also provided the chapter titles for this thesis.

This sounds like a very Heideggerian point with resonances from "Language," Poetry, Language, Thought, tr. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 190: "Language speaks." And no doubt the influence of Heidegger is ubiquitous throughout Derrida's work. As I noted before, however, it is never a matter of
question of authorial intent as the guiding thread for interpretation is so problematic as to suggest
"that there is some malformation in the question" (96/108).71

Having briefly surveyed his reading methodology, Derrida connects the previous chapter
to this one. "We have just sketched out the correspondence between the figure of the Thoth in
Egyptian mythology and 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" (96/109).

Derrida in beginning this essay wanted to "embroider" on the Platonic text. In looking at the text
he found that the trial of writing at the end of the text was called for throughout the text. Writing
is called a pharmakon so Derrida decides to follow this chain through a Greek mythology to
Egyptian mythology. It now seems that this word pharmakon will be the thread to which all the
other threads in this embroidery refer.

With this explicit intention in mind Derrida returns to the problem of translation. Robin
translates pharmakon as remedy. This translation is not only correct, but it is in keeping with
what Theuth wishes to convey to Thamus, that writing is a good thing, beneficial to memory. The
problem with the translation is that it erases the ambiguity present in the word. It excludes "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"
(97/110). Derrida is concerned about the decision of the translator because of what it does to the

simply appropriating another's thought undigested. Derrida does not stand before language with the theological
reverence of a Heideggerian Sprache, and mitigates the connection by placing language within scare quotes. To
put Derrida's point as minimally as possible language cannot be mastered by an author's intent.

The question of authorial intent is not irrelevant, though. As I have quoted above (and Derrida footnotes
himself at this point) all the methods of traditional criticism (including authorial intent) provide an "indispensable
guardrail" but this type of criticism only protects, it never opens up a text. See, Of Grammatology, 157-164. The
footnote (96, n. 43/109, n. 40) is also important because it directly connects pharmakon to supplement in his
reading of Rousseau in Of Grammatology.

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text. The translation of *pharmakon* as remedy only allows one pole of a word to be shown that also contains within it its opposite.\(^7\)

The decision of the translator is the repetition of the decision of Platonism. Platonism was inaugurated by carefully distinguishing opposites and valorizing the appropriate term, destroying the medium that made that distinction possible. Derrida writes:

> 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 interpretive 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 (98-9/111-2).

The *pharmakon* is the site of undecidability which precedes not only Robin's translation but the decision of Platonism. The effect of such a translation is to destroy the ambiguity of the *pharmakon*, which at the same time removes one from the play presented by it.

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\(^7\) This way of understanding a word is also related to Saussure's understanding of language as a system of differences. A word is itself by not being another word, so a word's opposite is always implicated within it. A word like *pharmakon* is a special example of this as the opposition within the word is explicit, and becomes a problem of translation. Derrida writes: "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" (98/111).
The problems of the *pharmakon* exceed the difficulties of translation. Even before one side of the *pharmakon* is chosen in translation, "Plato is suspicious of the *pharmakon* in general" (99/112). Plato is suspicious of the *pharmakon* for two reasons. "First of all because the beneficial essence or virtue of a *pharmakon* does not prevent it from hurting....Then again, more profoundly, even beyond the question of pain, the pharmaceutical remedy is essentially harmful because it is artificial" (99/113). Derrida notes in this second suspicion Plato is following the doctors of Cos, in believing in the natural life of health as well as disease. Anything that disturbs this natural growth is the enemy of the living. The *pharmakon* falls into this category. "Contrary to life, writing—or, if you will, the *pharmakon*—can only displace or even aggravate the ill" (100/113). This is Thamus' objection to Theuth's invention: it does not aid memory; it destroys it, producing lifeless memory (*hupomnēsis*), speechless monuments.

To illustrate this predictable response Derrida looks first at a passage from the *Timaeus* (89a-d) before resuming the myth of Theuth which he interrupted at the beginning of chapter two (75/85). In the *Timaeus* passage Derrida notes four features concerning the *pharmakon*:

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

"Now of all motions that is the best which 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 it is that which moves the body, when at rest, in parts only and by some external agency. Wherefore of all modes of purifying and reuniting the body the best is gymnastic; 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 maybe 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 (*iēs 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 (*τε τον ζωὸν φύσει*) 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 the triangles in us are originally framed with power to last for a certain time, beyond which no man can prolong his life. And this holds also of the constitution of diseases: if any one 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*)" (89a-d), tr. by Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*. The inserted Greek terms are the ones to which Derrida wished to draw attention.
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 pathogenicity 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 immortality and perfection of a living being would consist in its having no relation at all with any outside. That is the case with God (cf. Republic II, 381b-c). God has no allergies. Health and virtue (hugieia kai arete), which are often associated in speaking of the body and, analogously, of the soul (cf. Gorgias, 479b), always proceed from within. The pharmakon is that which, always springing up from without, acting like the outside itself, will never have any definable virtue of its own (101-2/115).

These four features of Plato's dislike of the pharmakon are repeated in Thamus' dismissal of writing in the myth of Theuth.74

74 Soc. "...But Thamus replied, 'Most ingenious Theuth (O tekhnikoiote Theuth), one man has the ability to beget arts, but the ability to judge of their usefulness or harmfulness to their users belongs to another; and now you, who are the father of letters (patér on grammation), have been led by your affection to ascribe to them a power the opposite of that which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practise their memory (lethen men en psukhais parexei ameletesia). Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves (dia pistin graphes exothen hup' allotrition tupon), will discourage the use of their own memory within them (ouk endothen autous hup' hauton anamimmeskomomenous). You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding (oukoun mnemes alla hupomneseos pharmakon heures); and you offer your pupils the appearance (doxan) of wisdom (sophias), not true wisdom (alitheian), for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise (anti sophon), but only appear wise (doxosophoi)" (274e-275b), tr. by Harold North Fowler, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus. Again, the inserted Greek terms are those to which Derrida wishes to draw attention. Notice that Fowler, presumably for the sake of parallelism translates alitheian as "true wisdom" rather than "truth".
Theuth presents the *pharmakon* as beneficent power, while Thamus rejects it as producing the opposite effect. This possibility of producing two opposite effects points to an ambiguity within the *pharmakon* itself. "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" (103/117). Plato has pronounced his *decision* through the mouth of the King. The ambiguity of writing's (*pharmakon's*) power is reduced to a univocity that relegates it to an appurtenant position under speech. Plato is seeking to regulate writing as the simple opposition to speech by cutting *pharmakon* in half. While he intends to show only the unnecessary side of writing (when compared to speech) Plato cannot help articulating writing as dangerous. This paradox places Plato in a difficult situation as Derrida notes:

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 the 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 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

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it—one would then have to bend into strange contortions what could no longer even be called logic or discourse (103/117-8).

At this point it is apparent that Derrida is attempting more than a new reading of the *Phaedrus*. The paragraph just quoted shows that Derrida is interested in much more than Plato. He is pursuing an understanding and a criticism of all Western philosophy through this *pharmakon*.

As noted earlier, Derrida sees all of Western metaphysics as governed by a series of oppositions. Metaphysics understands these oppositions to be primordial. Derrida’s contention is that for the decision of philosophy to be made there must be a prior matrix which holds these oppositions together, a matrix of undecidability, which makes all decision possible. This undecidability is suppressed by the decision of philosophy, but it cannot be eradicated. It leaves behind a trace, a certain ambiguity which disrupts the clean oppositions founding philosophy. In the case of the *Phaedrus* the trace is the word *pharmakon*.

Derrida’s task, then, is not the subversion of these oppositions, but rather, the articulation of the conditions of possibility for these oppositions. In doing this Derrida is not proposing a Hegelian sublation, (although he is mimicking it) in which all oppositions are taken up into the

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75 See above, 35.
76 To even say that the trace “is” something is problematic, as Derrida sees the trace as being prior to and founding the presence/absence opposition of philosophy, and the question of quiddity as the philosophical question *par excellence*.
77 On the connection and distinction between Hegel and himself, Derrida writes, “In fact, I attempt to bring the critical operation to bear against the unceasing reappropriation of this work of the simulacrum by a dialectics of the Hegelian type (which idealizes and ‘semantizes’ the value of work), for Hegelian idealism consists precisely of a *relève* of the binary oppositions of classical idealism, a resolution of contradiction into a third term that comes in order to *aufheben*, to deny while raising up, while idealizing, while sublimating into an anamnestic interiority (*Errinnerung*), while *interning* difference in a self-presence. Since it is still a question of elucidating the relationship to Hegel—a difficult labor, which for the most part remains before us, and which in a certain way is interminable, at least if one wishes to execute it rigorously and minutely—I have attempted to distinguish *differance* (whose *a* marks, among other things, its productive and conflictual characteristics) from Hegelian difference, and have done so precisely at the point at which Hegel, in the greater *Logic*, determines difference as contradiction only in order to resolve it, to interiorize it, to lift it up (according to the syllogistic process of speculative dialectics) into the self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis. *Differance* (at a point of almost absolute proximity to Hegel, as I have emphasized, I think, in the lecture and elsewhere: everything, what is most decisive, is played out, here, in what Husserl called ‘subtle nuances,’ or Marx ‘micrology’).
"Geist" and made one. This matrix of undecidability is not simple, not oneness, but complex, plural. Thus, "the pharmakon is neither remedy or poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing."78 but holds the founding opposites of Platonism together in its ambiguity. This ambiguity is not an empirical matter of a word's broad semantic domain, but rather a structural matter that inhabits all of language.79 "I have called undecidables, that is unities of simulacrum, 'false' verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, without ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of a speculative dialectics."80 While recognizing the necessity of oppositions Derrida goes on to note that there is something more which cannot be contained within these oppositions, which is repressed by them and leaves only a trace. The opening up of this inadequacy is the proper task of deconstruction. Derrida writes:

To this oppositional logic, which is, necessarily, legitimately, a logic of "all or nothing" and without which the distinction and the limits of a concept would have no chance, I oppose nothing, least of all a logic of approximation, a simple empiricism of difference in degree; rather I add a supplementary complication that calls for other concepts, for other thoughts beyond the concept and another form of "general theory," or rather another discourse, another "logic" that accounts for the impossibility of

must sign at the point at which one breaks with the system of Aufhebung and with the speculative dialectics. Since this conflictuality of différence—which can be called contradiction only if one demarcates it by means of a long work on Hegel's concept of contradiction—can never be totally resolved, it makes its effects in what I call the text in general, in a text which is not reduced to a book or a library, and which can never be governed by a referent in the classical sense, that is, by a thing or by a transcendental signified that would regulate its movement. You can well see that it is not because I wish to appease or reconcile that I prefer to employ the mark 'differance' rather than refer to the system of difference-and-contradiction." (Positions, 43-4). See also, Gasché, The Tain of the Mirror, who sees Hegel as the culmination of the "philosophy of reflection" and Derrida as the only philosopher who successfully reinscribes the founding metaphor of reflection.

78 Derrida, Positions, 43.
79 This observation is made by way of seeing language as a system of differences à la Saussure. With this view of language the opposite of every word is implicated within it. Alterity is never simply exterior, it is always constitutive.
80 Derrida, Positions, 43.
concluding such a "general theory." This other discourse doubtless takes into account the conditions of this classical and binary logic, but it no longer depends entirely upon it. If the proponents of binary opposition think that the "ideal purity" to which they are obliged to appeal reveals itself to be "illusory", as you say, then they are obliged to account for this fact. They must transform concepts, construct a different "logic," a different "general theory," perhaps even a discourse that, more powerful than this logic, will be able to account for it and reinscribe its possibility. This is what I try to do. I try to show not only that the ideal purity of the distinctions proposed...is inaccessible, but also that its practice would necessitate excluding certain essential traits of what it claims to explain or describe—and yet cannot integrate into the "general theory".81

The \textit{pharmakon} is that which the classical logic of oppositions could not contain. The \textit{pharmakon} is that which calls for new theories, for new concepts. The \textit{pharmakon} destroys the purity of the distinctions proposed by philosophy, not by the "simple empiricism of difference in degree," but by the structure of language. Derrida's project reinscribes the general structural laws which govern philosophy within a context of undecidability, which delimits (not negates) these structural laws.82

Derrida is aware that he is no longer doing either a commentary of Plato or philosophy in the traditional sense. The relationship of Derrida's work to traditional philosophy might best be illustrated as analogous to Gödel's relationship to Russel and Whitehead's \textit{Principia Mathematica}. Derrida writes concerning Gödel's \textit{On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems}: "An undecidable proposition, as Gödel demonstrated in 1931, is a proposition which, given a system of axioms governing a multiplicity, is neither an analytical nor deductive consequence of those axioms, nor in contradiction with them, neither true

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81 Derrida, \textit{Limited, Inc.}, 117, italics his.
82 I am greatly indebted to Rodolphe Gasché's, \textit{The Tain of The Mirror}, for so clearly elucidating this aspect of Derrida's work.
nor false with respect to those axioms. *Tertium datur*, without synthesis." Gödel's point was not to dismantle the *Principia Mathematica*, but to demonstrate that what claimed to be a self-sufficient totality in fact generated propositions over which it had no control, and could not be reappropriated back into the system. In an analogous way, Derrida's project approaches philosophy which sees itself as a self-sufficient system, and demonstrates that there are undecidables which exceed the binarisms of classical philosophy and the sublations of Hegelian Idealism. Beyond this, Derrida's claim is that these undecidables, these traces account for the system of philosophy and that which exceeds it.

Returning to the text of "Plato's Pharmacy" and the king's judgement against writing Derrida begins discussing the difference between the sophists, men of writing, champions of *hypomnēsis*, and Plato, defender of living memory, speech, *mnēme*. Derrida's interest is twofold. To show how each side of a heretofore thought clean distinction is implicated in the other, the dependence of that which Plato wishes to valorize (speech, *mnēme*) on what he excludes (writing, *hypomnēsis*), and the articulation of "some entirely-other" (108/123) which makes their co-dependence possible. This deconstruction is not a simple subversion of the excluded term over the included term. It "is at no time spurred on by some slogan or password of a 'back-to-the-sophists' nature" (108/123).

To accomplish this twofold task Derrida examines the Platonic and the sophistic case against writing. For Plato writing is dangerous because it is artificial, a prosthesis to living memory. In relation to the originary type, writing is "the sign of a sign" (110/125). As the sign of a sign writing can imitate the truth without being the truth. As the appearance of truth it can infect the truth. "Thus, even though writing is external to (internal) memory, even though

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hypomnesia is not in itself memory, it affects memory and hypnotizes it in its very inside. That is the effect of this *pharmakon*” (110/125).

To combat this *pharmakon* Plato piles up contradictory arguments analogous to the "kettle logic" Freud articulated in *On the Interpretation of Dreams*. Derrida reconstructs Plato's arguments against writing in this way:

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 every comes to leave its traces. Writing has no effect on memory (111/126).

Plato wishes to exclude writing on the basis of the *mnēme/hypomnēsis* distinction, but he seems to be having difficulty keeping the two separate. Both work by way of repetition. "Live memory repeats the presence of the eidos, and truth is also the possibility of repetition through recall" (111/126). Live memory must repeat by way of signifiers, however, which introduces the possibility of dead memory, of monuments, of *hypomnēsis*.

The sophists also wish to exclude writing, because it is powerless, breathless. For the sophist writing does not understand *kairos*. It does not know the appropriate word for the situation. The sophist prefers the living word (*zoon logon*) a word that is able to speak to the situation. "The only ones who take refuge in writing are those who are no better speakers than...

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84 In the logic of dreams defendants muster contradictory arguments to support their case: "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" (111).

85 The opposition between *mnēme* 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" (111).

86 The introduction of signification into pure ideality in order for it to be repeated is the crux of Derrida's critique of Husserl's history and consciousness. See Edumund Husserl's *Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, and *Speech and Phenomena*, respectively.
the man in the street... Writing is considered a consolation, a compensation, a remedy for sickly speech" (115/131). The *logos* of the rhetors, however, is not already connected to truth and goodness as it is in Plato. Their *logos* is a bit more ambivalent, a bit more uncertain, a bit more pharmacological. "If one were justified in trying to capture it [*logos*] 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*..." (115/131).

Derrida sees the sophistic and Platonic recourse to a *logos* more effective than writing and a *logos* that conveys the *eidos* respectively as relying on something prior, as relying on a *pharmakon*. Because of this prior reliance Derrida sees Plato and the sophists as two sides of the same sheet, as articulated in the structure of the sign. The sophists correspond to the signifier, and Plato corresponds to the signified. "In being inaugurated in this manner, philosophy and dialectics are determined in the act of determining their other" (112/127). The effect of the decision of Platonism has served to suppress this prior matrix of the *pharmakon*, and widen the gap between Platonism and sophistry. "The *pharmakon* is *comprehended* in the structure of *logos*. This comprehension is an act of both *domination* and *decision*" (117/133).

5. The Pharmakeus

In this final chapter of the first section of "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida begins to follow the *pharmakon* chain out of the Platonic text. He does so by characterizing Socrates as a *pharmakeus*. The description is never applied to Socrates directly, but Derrida sees a thinly veiled

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87 Derrida is here speaking specifically of the Attic school of Gorgias, Isocrates, and Alcidamas (113-5/129-131).

88 This connection between the sophistic *logos* and the *pharmakon* will serve as bridge to the next chapter in which Derrida presents Socrates as a magician (*pharmakeus*).
allusion in Diotima's portrait of Eros.\(^89\) Beyond this allusion Socrates is described as a sorcerer (goēs) by Meno.\(^90\) Socrates is a *pharmakeus* wielding the *pharmakon* of *logos*. Derrida purpose in describing Socrates as a *pharmakeus* is to complicate further the distinction between sophistics and Platonism. Derrida connects these *logoi* and *pharmaka*:

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—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 (119/135-6).

Derrida ends with an allusion to that *pharmakon* which will take Socrates' life, that hemlock which itself transmutes life into immortality.

In the first half of "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida has been a seamstress, following a certain thread, adding an embroidery. The thread Derrida has followed is a chain of signifiers, the *pharmakon* chain. This thread is barely visible at the beginning of the *Phaedrus*, a frayed edge around the myth of Orythia. The thread resurfaces again near a chorus of cicadas. Its color is uncertain. Derrida here begins to articulate a certain pattern, which is repeated in his embroidery.

\(^89\) *Symposium* (203c-e).
\(^90\) *Meno* (80a-b).
This ambiguous thread continually resurfaces in connection with writing. Writing is suddenly guilty by association, intertwined with this thread which opens the dialogue drowning a virgin. This *pharmakon* / writing weave does not come as a surprise, as Plato intends to dismiss writing as detrimental to memory, which is for Plato no small matter. To have a bad memory is tantamount to living without truth. Plato intends to gain control over this *pharmakon* by excluding it from the examined life, but it is slippery. It keeps wrapping itself around pure things like the repetition of the eidos. This *pharmakon* even threatens to blur that all important distinction between Platonism and sophistry.

In this thread Derrida sees more than just a slippery word. In fact, this same state of affairs would exist within the Platonic text if Plato never used the word *pharmakon*. Derrida writes:

"Undecidability" is not caused here by some enigmatic equivocality, some inexhaustible ambivalence of a word in a "natural" language...In dealing here with [*pharmakon*], it is not a matter of repeating what Hegel undertook to do with German words like *Aufhebung*, *Urteil*, *Meinen*, *Beispiel*, etc., marveling over that lucky accident that installs a natural language within the element of speculative dialectics. What counts here is not the lexical richness, the semantic infiniteness of a word or concept, its depth or breadth, the sedimentation that has produced inside it two contradictory layers of signification (continuity and discontinuity, inside and outside, identity and difference, etc.). What counts here is the formal or syntactical praxis that composes and decomposes it. We have indeed been making believe that everything could be traced to the word [*pharmakon*]. But the irreplaceable character of this signifier, which everything seemed to grant it, was laid out like a trap. This word, this syllepsis, is not indispensable; philology and etymology interest us only secondarily, and the loss of the "[*pharmakon*]" would not be irreparable for [the *Phaedrus*]. It produces its effect first and
foremost through syntax...that the suspense is due only to the placement and not the content of words.  

This state of affairs which is adumbrated in the signifier pharmakon indicates a certain delimitation of the Platonic text specifically and Western metaphysics in general. Platonism is seen as a decision which construes the world in hierarchies of appurtenance. Derrida's contention is that there must be a prior matrix in which these hierarchies of appurtenance are held in tension. This prior matrix for the Platonic text is pharmakon. Derrida has followed this thread through the Phaedrus and seen that it connects the text with its other in unresolvable tension. In the second half of "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida will follow the thread beyond the confines of the Platonic text to point to that alterity which makes something like Platonism possible and at the same time delimits it.

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91 Derrida, "The Double Session," Dissemination, 220. I have replace the word hymen with pharmakon in the text. On the analogical nature of Derridean undecidables Derrida writes, "What holds for 'hymen' also holds, mutatis mutandis, for all other signs...like pharmakon, supplément, différence, and others...." in "The Double Session," 221. See also, Gasché, The Tain of the Mirror, 184.
Derrida continues to embroider on the Platonic text by following the thread connecting Socrates as *pharmakeus* and his *pharmakon*, the *logos*. What Derrida wants to explore in this introductory section to Part II of "Plato's Pharmacy" is the power Socrates wields in the dialogue and the implications of this power. The power that Socrates wields in the dialogue is the power of dialectics. Derrida examines the Socratic position within the dialogues rhetorically, that is, the examination of dialectics as a rhetorical trope, a means of force, rather than self-evident and neutral. "The nakedness of the pharmakon, the blunt bare voice (*psilos logos*), carries with it certain mastery in the dialogue..." (120/137).

From the viewpoint of rhetoric Socrates' discursive strategy of choice is the use of antithesis, a rhetorical trope positing two mutually exclusive positions. It is an either/or construction, creating two poles or positions. At any given moment within a discussion using antithesis, one pole is true and one pole is false. Successful defence of one position is an indictment of the other position; defence of one position immediately impugns the other. As a
trope of mutual exclusivities, antithesis does not deal in gradations. The possibility of a mediating position (or positions) is not allowable. The one wielding antithesis must paint in broad strokes of black and white. This lack of gradations creates a particularly incisive tool that immediately creates a discursive structure of separation. One cut creates two sides.

Socrates' univocal view of truth necessitates the use of this rhetorical strategy. Dialectic works by making divisions and then discarding that which is refutable. What remains after this process of refinement is the truth. Antithesis creates a discursive framework which allows this view of truth to flourish. A seemingly minor concession often required by Socrates at the opening of the dialogues—92—to speak exclusively in terms of antithesis (dialectic)—creates a discursive framework which determines the possibilities of the dialogue. To speak in such a way that defines all positions in terms of mutual exclusivity sharpens discussion and brings difference into greater relief. The use of antithesis always clearly marks both sides. Socrates' case against rhetoric is also greatly facilitated by the connection between antithesis and phusis. If that which antithesis defends is a manifestation of the way things really are, then the distinction remains so for all time. Reality is divided eternally.93

The suspicion that Derrida has of the Socratic dialogue comes from a Nietzschean sensibility. "...[O]ne 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" (120/137). The textual operation that Derrida is alluding to through this compact reference is the conviction that behind any text, regardless of its altruistic

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92 See, for example, Gorgias, 449b-c; 461d; 471d-472c; 490d.
protestations, there is a will to power at work.94 In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche is quite harsh on Socrates. He sees Socrates as a lower-class buffoon, a shrewd self-deceiver, having captured the fancy of the Athenian aristocracy. Socrates was not unique as a wielder of dialectic; he was merely the most interesting. For Neitzsche, however, it is another manifestation of the will to power (Socrates is taking revenge on those in power), disguised in the antiseptic garb of rationality. "As a dialectician one is in possession of a pitiless instrument; with its aid one can play the tyrant; one compromises by conquering. The dialectician leaves it to his opponent to demonstrate he is not an idiot; he enrages, he at the same time makes helpless. The dialectician devitalizes his opponent's intellect. —What? is dialectics only a form of revenge in the case of Socrates?"95 Socrates is willing to sacrifice his life to wield the *logos*, but this sacrifice becomes a passage to immortality.

It is this connection between what Socrates appears to be giving up as administrator of the *logos* (his life), and what he receives as a gift deferred in his death (immortality), that occupies Derrida in this introductory section to Part II. To make this connection Derrida examines how Socrates characterizes himself and his task. To begin with Socrates sees himself as a physician/magician able to prescribe the proper medicine, able to incant the proper spell. "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" (120/137).

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This cure for the fear of death that holds everyone in superstition and irrationality is the \textit{logos} of Socrates. "The counterspell, the exorcism, the antidote, is dialectics" (121/138). This cure results in self-knowledge and self-mastery. Dialectics is that counter-\textit{pharmakon} which Socrates opposes to the \textit{pharmakon} of the Sophists which keeps the people in the cave of forgetfulness. "The \textit{eidos}, truth, law, the \textit{epistême}, dialectics, philosophy—all these are other names for that \textit{pharmakon} that must be opposed to the \textit{pharmakon} of the Sophists and to the bewitching fear of death. It is \textit{pharmakeus} against \textit{pharmakeus}, \textit{pharmakon} against \textit{pharmakon}" (124/142).

It is important to understand the move Derrida makes here to follow his argument in the rest of the piece. Within the Platonic corpus there are two opposed forces: death/sophistry and life/dialectics (along with all the other cardinal oppositions of Platonism). Each of these forces are characterized as a \textit{pharmakon}, two \textit{pharmaka} opposed to one another. Derrida's contention is that if two opposed forces within the same text can be characterized with the same grapheme, then this suggests a prior undecidable matrix within which both oppositions are inscribed without resolution. "The philosophical, epistemic order of \textit{logos} [is] an antidote,...a force inscribed within the general alogical economy of the \textit{pharmakon}" (124/142). Derrida writes:

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 \textit{pharmako-logos} did not already harbor within itself that complicity of contrary values, and if the \textit{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 \textit{pharmakon} lies in the way in which, having no stable essence, no "proper" characteristics, it is not, in any sense (metaphysical, physical, chemical, alchemical) of the word, a \textit{substance}. The \textit{pharmakon} has no ideal identity; it is aneidetic, firstly because it is not monoeidetic (in the sense in which the \textit{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 (125-6/143-4).

It is only the decision of philosophy (and translation) that arrests the play of this matrix and creates a hierarchy of appurtenance.

The miscegenation of these *pharmaka* is what makes the Socratic alchemy possible: the transmutation of the sophistic *pharmakon* into its opposite dialectic *pharmakon*. This possibility becomes most poignant at the death of Socrates.

[T]he hemlock, that potion which in the *Phaedo* is never called anything but a *pharmakon*, 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 effect: it initiates one into the contemplation of the *eidos* and the immortality of the soul. *That is how Socrates takes it* (126-7/144-5).

The *pharmakon* that was given to kill Socrates was transmuted by his dialectic into a *pharmakon* that freed him from the prison-house of his soul, his body.

At this point Derrida stops to give an account of his method up this point. Is he merely playing games? Is this evidence of the textual nihilism of which he is often accused? All this
switching between the uses of pharmakon, surely there is a more conventional explanation for it.

What authorizes Derrida to say what he does? He writes:

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 a 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 différence 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 différence, 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. It keeps itself forever in reserve even though it has no fundamental profundity 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 (127-8/145-6).

In this paragraph Derrida is summarizing what he has unraveled in the text of Plato. Plato
philosophy depends on a series of binary oppositions, a system of differences. Along with
Heidegger,96 Derrida notes that any system of differences implies an underlying sameness (not
identity) that makes the differences possible and meaningful. Derrida's conclusion then is that
there must be something prior to the distinctions that makes Platonism possible. This something
would account for the distinctions, and the fact that these distinctions demonstrate a certain
supplementary relationship to one another that cannot be accounted for on the basis of these
distinctions. Derrida names this underlying sameness, suppressed by the decision of Platonism,
but leaving a trace in the word pharmakon, Plato's pharmacy.

6. The Pharmakos

In this chapter Derrida seeks to transgress the boundary set up by the Platonic text. He
wants to irrupt the line between the inside and the outside of the text. Derrida embroiders beyond
the fabric of the Platonic text by following the same thread he has worked on throughout the
essay: pharmakon. Derrida has seen this pharmakon chain functioning within the Platonic text as
a trace that points to a state of affairs prior to any philosophical decision, before any binarisms.
Because the pharmakon is prior to any distinction making one of the key oppositions that it
delimits is the opposition between inside and outside. Philosophy, however, works on such
distinctions as between inside and outside. "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:

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being is what it is, the outside is outside and the inside inside" (128/147). The decision of philosophy will seek to arrest the play of the prior undecidable matrix through the pure separation of its heterogeneous elements creating a hierarchy of appurtenance. Derrida's contention is that if these distillations arise from a mixed medium, then the distillation will never be pure. The inside will always already be contaminated by the outside, and this contamination will manifest itself in the threads of a text, in this case as \textit{pharmakon}. The great irony that Derrida exposes in his reading of the Platonic text is that the "cure by \textit{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 \textit{exclude itself from itself} " (128/147). What is excluded will usually be reappropriated metaphorically, and Derrida will examine this aspect in detail later in the essay. 

Derrida wishes to follow the thread of the \textit{pharmakon} beyond the confines of what is (too rigorously) called the Platonic text. Up to this point Derrida has followed this chain of signifiers (\textit{pharmakeia-pharmkon-pharmakeus}) as they have manifested themselves in "points of presence" (129/148) throughout the Platonic corpus. There is another word that belongs to this chain of signifiers that is palpably absent from the Platonic text. A word separated from the \textit{pharmakon} by only one letter. A word connected in meaning to the chain as the synonym of \textit{pharmakeus}. The word is also connected by way of the religious practices of Plato's day. It is a word that constantly beckoned to Plato, but was never put within his text. The word is \textit{pharmakos}. Derrida responds to those who might consider his method of word study unorthodox:

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97 I have also examined this phenomena in the text of \textit{Pluralisms & Horizons} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) by Richard Mouw and Sander Griffioen in my "The Loupe of Myopia: The Supplement of Christian Vision."

98 Recall the above discussion (38ff) of Saussure and language as system of differences.
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 (130/149).

Derrida sees language as a system of forces that prevents words or a chain of significations from being simply present or absent. Derrida wishes to follow the *pharmakon* chain beyond what is graphically present to the word *pharmakos* which is present by way of the force it exhibits on the Platonic text. This movement calls into question the notion of a text absolutely enclosed upon itself, allowing no intrusion from the outside. Beyond this it delimits the very idea of outside and inside as a determining criterion.

The methodological criterion for following a chain of significations from the "inside" of a text to its "outside" that Derrida provides is rigor and prudence. This might strike one as odd given Derrida's reputation as free-wheeling, sloppy exegete of texts. If Derrida's texts are subjected to the same microscopic exegesis to which he subjects texts, one discovers that in "Plato's Pharmacy" the *Phaedrus* does not dissipate into an undifferentiated mush of opposing forces at play. One discovers, rather, that from the outset Derrida defends Plato's text as a
carefully constructed dialogue (67/75). The defense of this hypothesis is part of the
methodological prudence which Derrida seeks. Beyond this Derrida demonstrates his rigor by
spending the larger part of the essay vindicating Plato. It is only after this vindication that Derrida
proceeds to step beyond the bounds of the Platonic text. Rigor and prudence do not provide the
(putative) certainty of a rationalist methodology, but as a philosopher who is trying to delimit the
rationalist conceptualization of the world it is not the kind of certainty Derrida wants.

The remaining part of this chapter is mainly historical, much like chapter three "The Filial
Inscription." Derrida examines the function of the pharmakos beyond its synonymity with
pharmakeus. "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" (130/149).

Derrida relates a series of historical accounts of pharmakoi within Greece. They were
usually put to death. "Death [however] occurred most often as a secondary effect of an energetic
fustigation. Aimed first at the genital organs. Once the pharmakoi were cut off from the space of
the city, the blows were designed to chase away or draw out the evil from their bodies"
(132/151-2). The scapegoats were killed as a purification for a city smitten by the gods.

Beyond this what interests Derrida is the structural relationship between the pharmakoi
and the city for which they were sacrificed. "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"
(133/152).99 Derrida writes:

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 sōphrosune (133/153).

Not only is the pharmakos the outside incarnated, but that outside is maintained, harbored, nourished within the inside. This maintenance of the outside within the inside transpired until the moment of crisis (drought, plague, famine, etc.), then a decision was required, the decision of expulsion, the decision to keep the outside out and the inside in. "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" (133/153). That date was the sixth of 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" (134/153). The inclusion of pharmakos within the pharmakon chain does not remove the reader as far from the Platonic text as may have originally been thought.

7. The Ingredients:
Phantasms, Festivals, and Paints

The structure of the pharmakos ceremony is exactly parallel to the inaugural decision of philosophy. In the decision of philosophy is the expulsion of all that contaminates it. Derrida continues to pursue the decision of Platonism as he returns to the text of the Phaedrus and Socrates' discussion of the myth of Theuth. "The discourse of Socrates will hence apply itself to
the task of translating that *manteia* [prophesy] 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*" (134/154).

Thamus has denigrated writing, that which is beyond his power, as powerless. Socrates, likewise, impugns writing because it is a poor *tekhnē*; that is, it is unable to achieve the desired results (improvement of memory) through rational means. When it comes to manifesting the truth of the forms writing is simply incapable, according to the Platonic scheme. It works only by way of reminding (*hupomnēsis*), not by remembering (*anamnēsis*). "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" (135/155).

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 (*aletheia*) 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 (135/155).

Writing, according to Socrates, is not to be trusted, because it gives the appearance of reason, but is in fact dead repetition unable to respond to the questions of an interlocutor. It imitates (living) memory, but is in fact, dependent on memory, living repetition of the forms.

Because writing is dead repetition, it is very much like painting (*zographēma*); "for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence." The reason that both writing and painting are held in contempt for their silence

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100 On Socrates' distinction between *techne* and *empeirian* or *tribē* see the *Gorgias* (462b ff) and my "The Subversion of Rhetoric: Text and Subtext in Plato's Gorgias."

101 *Phaedrus*, 275d.
is because they are both supposed to be representatives of speech, agents of a living *logos*. If, however, "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" (136/156-7). "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" (137/157).

There is a difference, however, between the mimesis of painting and the mimesis of writing. The mimesis of painting has a silent model to imitate, so it is not completely surprising when a painting is unable to speak back. Writing, on the other hand, seeks to imitate the spoken word, but can only imitate in silence. "Writing thus more seriously denatures what it claims to imitate....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" (137/157-8).

The connection of writing, painting, mimesis and the *pharmakon* prompts a brief discussion of mimesis from Derrida. Plato indicts "pictorial mimetics in the *Republic* (X, 597)" (137/158). This indictment is specifically linked to the mimetic character of the arts. One is in danger of a corrupted mind, unless an antidote (*pharmakon*) is possessed. The *pharmakon* that is to be opposed to the *pharmakon* of mimesis is "true knowledge" of the *onta*. Derrida writes:

...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

102 "Speaking in confidence, for I should not like to have my words repeated to the tragedians and the rest of the imitative tribe—but I do not mind saying to you, that all poetical imitations are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers, and that the knowledge of their true nature (to eidennai auta hoia tunkhanei onta) is the only antidote (*pharmakon*) to them" (*Republic*, 595b).
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 (138/158).

At yet another point in the relationship between speech and writing, form and copy, the pharmakon has played the pivotal role, articulating the possibility for both sides of the opposition. "Ambivalent, playing with itself by hollowing itself out, good and evil at once—undecidably, mimesis 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" (139/160).

One final thread ties these ingredients (writing, painting, speech, and the forms) together. Derrida fails to mention until the end of the chapter (for rhetorical effect, no doubt) that pharmakon has another meaning within the Platonic text. In the Cratylus pharmakon is used to designate the painter's colors:

> "...just, as in painting, the painter who wants to depict anything sometimes uses purple only, or any other color (allo ton pharmakon)..." (Cratylus, 424b-425a).

> "How could any one 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?" (Cratylus, 434a-b).

> "Suppose that we are painting a statue, and some one came up to us and said, 'Why do you not put the most beautiful colours (pharmaka) on the most beautiful parts of the body?..." (Republic, 420c).

In the Gorgias, Socrates calls cosmetics the knack (tribe) of gymnastics, the irrational attempt to imitate the effects of gymnastics, the true art (techne) of maintaining the body (464b-466a).
The festival of the *pharmakos*, where the always already contaminated inside tries to expel its other, is repeated in Plato's relation to the mimetic arts. Plato tries desperately to keep speech and writing (and anything else that might damage the *logos*) apart, but the mechanism he uses to do this is folded in on itself. The division between speech and writing manifests itself as two types of repetition. The *mnēmē/hupomnēsis* division points to a prior matrix in which these two repetitions are held in an undecidable state. This matrix Derrida has provisionally called *pharmakon*.

8. The Heritage of the Pharmakon: Family Scene

With an examination of the familial metaphors in the Platonic text Derrida penetrates "into another level of the Platonic reserves. This pharmacy is also, we begin to perceive, a theater" (142/164). This description of the pharmacy as a theater is more than just a convenient picture. In "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation" Derrida writes:

Theatrical art should be the primordial and privileged site of this destruction of imitation [mimesis]: more than any other art, it has been marked by the labor of total representation in which the affirmation of life lets itself be doubled and emptied by negation. This representation, whose structure is imprinted not only on the art, but on the entire culture of the West (its religions, philosophies, politics), therefore designates more than just a particular type of theatrical construction.\(^{106}\)

Derrida sees in the practice of a certain type of theater (in this case Artaud's) a delimitation phonocentrism and its concomitant artistic theory of mimesis.\(^{107}\) In the same way *pharmakon* in

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\(^{106}\) Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," *Writing and Difference*, 234.

\(^{107}\) Derrida explicitly connects Platonic and Aristotelian mimetics: "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 *mimesis*; so too Socrates here compares a piece of writing to a portrait..." "Plato's Pharmacy," 136/156.
the text of Plato indicates a certain delimitation of not only Platonic metaphysics, but all of Western metaphysics.

The network of family metaphors "all about fathers and sons, about bastards unaided by public assistance, about glorious, legitimate sons, about inheritance, sperm, sterility" (143/164) is Derrida's focus in this chapter. These descriptions in the text of Plato become a series of binary oppositions which demarcate the relationship between speech and writing.

Derrida rejoins the text of the Phaedrus just after Socrates notes the similarities between the offspring (ekgona) of painting and writing. After this Socrates goes on to compare writing to a defenseless child, needing a parent to come to its aid. Derrida says the reason for describing writing in this way is that writing is understood as "written down...speech" (143/165). "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" (143/165). Writing is that unprotected offspring of a logos that no longer watches over it.

This waywardness of writing brings out two responses in Socrates. On the one hand, writing is very much like an orphan. It has no father, no one to protect it, to speak for it. Writing has no position, no citizenship, no inheritance. On the other hand, the absent father embroils writing in charges of patricide. Writing in its presence proclaims the absence of the father, proclaims the death of the father.

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 Fowler overtranslates this as "creatures" (275d), which is not unrelated to Derrida's earlier point concerning the relationship between the decisions of philosophy and the decisions of translation.
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 *laisse* is produced that can no longer be thought about within the familiar opposition of father to son. speech to writing (146/169).

This paragraph recalls the discussion from chapter two "The Father of Logos" where Derrida discusses the chain of signifiers father-king-chief-capital-sun. All of these names for the source of the *logos* are invisible and must be represented by the *logos*. It is this necessary movement of repetition from the origin to its representation that introduces inscription as a prior condition of possibility and disturbs the oppositions presence/absence, father/son, speech/writing.

With the characterization of writing as an orphan and patricide—as an outsider "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" (149/172). The insertion of writing as a metaphor for *logos* has been foreshadowed throughout the entire text of "Plato's Pharmacy." The ambivalence of the *pharmakon*, the connection between Plato and the sophists, two kinds of memory as two kinds of repetition, one *pharmakon* opposed to another *pharmakon*, all of these adumbrated one small point in the Platonic text that casts its shadow over all of Western metaphysics. Derrida writes:

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 it 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 (149/172).

Derrida conceives of language as an interwoven system in which all the words are connected as a
system of differences. Because of this conception the clean incisions that philosophy dreams of
are contaminated. This contamination is controlled by relegating what is to be excluded to the
level of metaphor. If one could see behind language to the meanings that are embodied in it, then
the incision would be clean, the oppositions would remain pure. This recourse to a
literal/metaphorical split, and to a semantic/syntactical distinction is precisely what Derrida is
trying to expose and delimit.

In "White Mythology" Derrida has closely examined the philosophical concept of the
metaphor.110 His contention in this essay is that:
metaphor remains, in all its essential characteristics, a classical philosopheme, a metaphysical concept. It is therefore enveloped in the field that a general metaphorology of philosophy would seek to dominate. Metaphor has been issued from a network of philosophemes which themselves correspond to tropes or to figures, and these philosophemes are contemporaneous to or in systematic solidarity with these tropes or figures. This stratum of "tutelary" tropes, the layer of "primary" philosophemes (assuming that the quotation marks will serve as a sufficient precaution here), cannot be dominated. It cannot dominate itself, cannot be dominated by what it itself has engendered, has made to grow on its own soil, supported on its own base. Therefore, it gets "carried away" each time that one of its products—here, the concept of metaphor—attempts in vain to include under its own law the totality of the field to which the product belongs. 111

Derrida is here making a point similar to Gödel's—when describing a set of things, the set itself is neither a member of the set, nor not a member of the set. Any statements made about the members of a set are neither true nor false in relation to the set itself. When philosophy tries to make an all encompassing concept of the metaphor, the one thing that this definition will always fail to encompass is the conditions for the very possibility of metaphoricity: "the metaphor of metaphor."112 A metaphor is that which as a concept is determined by the cardinal oppositions of philosophy, but which also disrupts these oppositions:

The other self-destruction of metaphor thus resembles the philosophical one to the point of being taken for it. This time, then, in traversing and doubling the first self-destruction, it passes through a supplement of syntactic resistance, through everything (for example in modern linguistics) that disrupts the opposition of the semantic and the syntactic, and especially the philosophical hierarchy that submits the latter to the former.113

Derrida sees the metaphor of writing disrupting the speech/writing opposition within the text of Plato. The important thing for Derrida is that it is the excluded term, writing, that provides the metaphor. Speech does not provide the metaphor for writing; it is writing that is used to describe speech. Writing provides the context in which both speech and writing may be understood. Speech is good writing, and writing thus becomes bad writing. "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..." (149/172).

This contamination of the speech/writing opposition through the metaphor of writing is indicative of the situation of all philosophy. For Derrida all the cardinal oppositions of metaphysics may be generated from the speech/writing binarism, and the contamination of this opposition indicates a necessary contamination in all of the other oppositions. "Metaphoricity is the logic of contamination and the contamination of logic" (149/172).

Derrida moves from contamination to dissemination as he explores the agricultural metaphor that arises next in the *Phaedrus*.

Within this text arises an analogy—bad writing : good writing :: disseminated seed : cultivated seed. At this point Derrida gives a warning that is applicable not only to the examination of this metaphor, but to his readings of texts in general:

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114 Soc. ...Now tell me this. Would a sensible husbandman, who has seeds which he cares for (*hon spermatoû kēdōto*) and which he wishes to bear fruit, plant them with serious purpose (*spoudē*) in the heat of summer in some garden of Adonis, and delight in seeing them appear in beauty in eight days, or would he do that sort of thing, when he did it at all, only in play (*paidias*) and for amusement (*heortēs kharin*)? Would he not, when he was in earnest, follow the rules of husbandry, plant his seeds in fitting ground, and be pleased when those which he had sowed reached their perfection in the eighth month?

*Phdr.* Yes. Socrates, he would, as you say, act in that way when in earnest and in the other way only for amusement.

*Soc.* And shall we suppose that he who has knowledge of the just and the good and beautiful has less sense about his seeds than the husbandman?

*Phdr.* By no means.

*Soc.* Then he will not, when in earnest (*spoudē*), write them in ink (*en hudati grapsei*), sowing them through a pen with words (*melani speiron dia kalamou meta logōn*) which cannot defend (*boethēn*) themselves by argument and cannot teach the truth effectually. (276b-c. The Greek terms are the ones inserted in Derrida's text).
"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" (150/173). "The entrance of the pharmakon on the scene, the evolution of the magic powers, the comparison with painting, the politico-familial violence and 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" (149-50/173). The inscription of truth on the soul is the serious (spoude) business of someone following the rules. Writing, however, is a game, something done in play (paidia).

Writing is also done in water (en hudati grapsei)\textsuperscript{115} which also connects it to the pharmakon. "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" (152/175). "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" (152/175).

Derrida reinscribes the speech/writing opposition in terms of the trace. "One, writing, is a lost trace, a nonviable seed, everything sperm that overflows wastefully, a force wandering outside the domain life, incapable of engendering anything of picking itself up, of regenerating itself" (152/176). Writing is that wasted seed, the seed sown in the heat of the summer in the garden of Adonis. This seed is not sown in seriousness. It is only by way of a game. It is questionable in what sense it even remains seed, since it is not sown according to the rules. "On

\textsuperscript{115} Fowler translates this as "in ink," and this may certainly be intended, but "to write in water" is also an idiomatic expression referring to the transience of something, equivalent to "to write in sand." Derrida notes this on 151/175.
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" (152/176).
Living speech is that well-sown seed, destined to bear fruit. There is no question concerning its
presence. It is here, now defending itself completely present.

Derrida notes, however, that the use of the graphic metaphor to describe speech is not a
valorization of writing on Plato's part. There is no dissemination in the writing on the soul. The
writing on the soul is maintained "within a problematic of truth....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" (154/178). This inscription on the soul is for Plato the repetition of truth without the need for
signification, self-present meaning. "But what Plato dreams of is a memory with no sign. That is,
with no supplement. A mnēmē with no hypomnēsis, no pharmakon" (109/124).

Derrida ends the chapter by returning to the text of Phaedrus and the space Socrates
leaves for writing. Writing it seems is suitable for a hobby, something to pass the time in one's
old age. "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

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Socrates: ...The gardens of letters he will, it seems, plant for amusement (paidias kharin), and will write.
when he writes to treasure up reminders (hupomnēmata) for himself, when he comes to the forgetfulness of old age,
and for others who follow the same path (tauton ichnos), and he will be pleased when he sees them putting forth
tender leaves. When others engage in other amusements, refreshing themselves with banquets and kindred
entertainments, he will pass the time in such pleasures as I have suggested.

Phaedrus: A noble pastime, Socrates, and a contrast to those base pleasures, the pastime of the man who can
find amusement in discourse (en logos), telling stories about justice, and the other subjects of which you speak.

Socrates: Yes, Phaedrus, so it is; but, in my opinion, serious discourse (spoudē) about them is far nobler, when
one employs the dialectic method and plants and sows in a fitting soul intelligent words (phuteue te kai speire met'
epistemes logos) which are able to help (bēthein) themselves and him who planted them, which are not fruitless,
but yield seed from which there spring up in other minds other words (en allois ethesi) capable of continuing the
process for ever, and which make their possessor happy, to the farthest possible limit of human happiness
(276d-277a, Again, Derrida provides the inserted Greek words).
family. Hence the dialectician will sometimes write, amass monuments, collect *hupomnēmata*, just for fun" (154-5/178-9). This writing always remains subjugated to dialectics. As long as the writings are used didactically "in order to leave a trace (*ikhmos*) for whoever might want to follow in his footsteps on the pathway to truth" (155/179).

Derrida has circled around many ideas in this chapter, shuttling from familial metaphors to agricultural metaphors to play. He continues to demonstrate two things. First, that Platonism (and by association all of Western philosophy) is governed by a series of binary oppositions (father/son, speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) in which one term governs the other term. Second, these oppositions are unable to maintain their purity. The higher term is found to be always already contaminated by the lower term. This contamination points to a medium which contains both the conditions of possibility and the conditions of impossibility of articulating the opposition. Within this medium there is a play between the two terms, an undecidable, interminable play, that is only stopped by the decision of philosophy. It is to this play that Derrida now (re)turns.

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

Derrida begins this final chapter with an examination of Platonic play and its relationship to writing. It seems that Plato's understanding of play is always in terms of an opposition between seriousness (*spoude*) and play (*paidia*). For Derrida this hierarchical opposition is one in a long series of founding oppositions created by the decision of philosophy; as such, it needs to be delimited in terms of the antecedent matrix of undecidability.
The opposition *spoudë/paidia* will never be one of simple symmetry. *Either play is nothing* (and that is its only *chance*\(^{117}\)); 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 onton* 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 before truth, etc. The point is that 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 *graphe* are constantly disappearing as they go along. They cannot, in classical affirmation, be affirmed without being negated (156-7/180-1).

The problem with the Platonic appropriation of play is that it is subsumed under the aegis of presence. Play is presented as *something*, an entity, a quiddity. When play is arrested under presence it cannot fail to produce a supplementary relationship with the other pole of the opposition—seriousness. This occurs because play—the movement between two undecidable terms—is essentialized into the hierarchical opposition, instead of being recognized as the possibility of differentiation. Play is reduced to games, rule bound exercises governed by an overarching seriousness which creates a teleology directing this reduced play to a hoped for moment of perfect play, which would be at the same time perfect seriousness. "Play is always lost when it seeks salvation in games" (158/182).

For Derrida neither play nor writing are governable by logic, a scene which is replayed "at least in Rousseau, and then in Saussure" (158/183).\(^{118}\) The introduction of writing and play into a


\(^{118}\) Cf. *Of Grammatology* which discusses both Rousseau and Saussure.
system of binary oppositions always creates a "contradiction"—that which exceeds the binary oppositions created by the decision of philosophy. To understand the law that governs this 'contradiction'... one must 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 (158/183).

By "a generalized sort of writing" Derrida means the possibility of inscription or arche-writing. At this point it is important to recall that, following Saussure, the possibility of inscription is a system of differences, a system of spacing that allows one thing to be differentiated from another.

Derrida writes concerning arche-writing and its relationship to material inscription:

An arche-writing whose necessity and new concept I wish to indicate and outline here; and which I continue to call writing only because it essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing. The latter could not have imposed itself historically except by the dissimulation of the arche-writing, by the desire for a speech displacing its other and its double and working to reduce its difference. If I persist in calling that difference writing, it is because, within the work of historical repression, writing was, by its situation destined to signify the most formidable difference. It threatened the desire for the living speech from the closest proximity, it breached living speech from within and from the very beginning.119

Writing in general is called writing because it has an essential connection with material inscription. Both point to difference and the interruption of presence. As the possibility of difference writing is also the possibility of presence. This understanding of writing is what enables Derrida to say

119 Derrida, Of Grammatology, 56-7.
that writing is prior to speech. It is not an historical declaration, but a structural declaration. Nothing can be understood apart from its opposite, not even presence. What most clearly illustrates this relationship of opposites is writing in general. It accounts for both the articulation of hierarchical oppositions, and that which exceeds these oppositions: a system of differentiation prior to all oppositions.¹²⁰

The "contradiction" of writing is its supplementary or pharmaceutical relationship to speech. It is outside, so it is of no consequence to speech. Speech remains pure and unaffected by writing. Speech is virginal interiority, and writing is an unnecessary appendage. At the same time, however, writing is also considered dangerous. Writing contains within it the possibility of contaminating speech, of sullying its good reputation. Herein lies the "contradiction": if writing is so exterior, so far removed from speech, so harmless, why all the protection, why all the precautions, why, in fact, is writing treated as if it were so dangerous? "Thus it is that the 'linguistics' elaborated by Plato, Rousseau, and Saussure must both put writing out of the question and yet nevertheless borrow from it, for fundamental reasons, all its demonstrative and theoretical resources" (158-9/183). It is this pharmaceutical relationship that Western metaphysics cannot give an account of, and precisely where Derrida begins his work.

For Derrida there is no distinction between syntax and semantics (or form and content); to make such a distinction would be to repeat the most fundamental decision of philosophy.¹²¹ A "literary" work then is not a contingent graphic receptacle which contains immutable truth or meaning. The truth of a literary work is one effect created by a particular concatenation of graphemes. This, of course, implies that a literary work creates many effects. Many connections

¹²¹ See above, 70-2.
between the text and what is rigorously considered outside the text may be made. In fact, a text is necessarily connected to its other, because a text by definition is a system of differences. To go beyond the metaphysical form/content distinction is to exceed traditional criticism at every level. It is to exceed the "indispensable guardrail" of classical reading.

Plato's relationship to his own writing because of these three factors (see above, 77) remains ambivalent. Plato "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" (159/183).

Derrida, at this point, begins to examine the points in the Platonic text in which the alphabet is used. "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..." (159/183). For Derrida the points at which the alphabetic analogies arise are very telling. For example "tupos can designate with equal pertinence the graphic unit and the eidetic model" (159/183). It seems that the scriptural metaphor manifests itself everytime Plato needs to discuss limits, whether cosmogonic, political, or linguistic limits. These limits are never present in the Platonic text (because presence always presupposes a place to be present), that can only be indicated by metaphors. "Here, in any case, the turns of phrase that are somewhat awkwardly called 'Plato's metaphors' are exclusively and irreducibly scriptural" (160/184).122 "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

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122 Derrida marshalls several texts in this regard: Republic 368c-e; 402a-b; Timaeus 34a-35a; 52b-c; Philebus 17a-b; 18a-d; Sophist 241d-242b.
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" (163/189).

The question of limits turns to the question of parricide that writing entails. "Writing is parricidal. Is it by chance, for the Stranger in the Sophist, the necessity and inevitability of parricide...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'?" (164/189). Writing is not mentioned by name in the list that the Stranger gives, but Derrida has anagrammatically demonstrated the connection of writing to these other simulacra. In order to speak about the repetitions and simulacra of being, being itself cannot be pure presence, and non-being cannot be pure absence. This contamination introduced into being in order to speak about the false is the play of writing and the writing of play.

To control this contamination of being, this parricide, Plato prioritizes logic over grammar. Plato does this for two reasons: "on the one hand, the linguistic units it is concerned with are larger than the word (Cratylus, 385a-393d); on the other, dialectics is always guided by an intention of truth" (166/192). But this prioritization is based on a de jure distinction that

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[23] Str. I have a yet more urgent request to make.
Theaet. Which is—?
Str. That you will promise not to regard me as a parricide.
Theaet. And why?
Str. Because, in self-defence, I must test the philosophy of my father Parmenides (Ton tou patros Parmenidou logon), and try to prove by main force that in a certain sense not-being (mē on) is, and that being (on), on the other hand, is not.
Theaet. Some attempt of the kind is clearly needed (Phainetai to toiouton diamacheteon en tois logos). Str. Yes, a blind man, as they say, might see that, and, unless these questions are decided in one way or another, no one when he speaks of false words, or false opinion, or idols, or images, or imitations, or appearances, or about the arts which are concerned with them, can avoid falling into ridiculous contradictions.
Theaet. Most true.
Str. And therefore I must venture to lay hands on my father's argument (tō patrikō logō); for if I am to be over-scrupulous, I shall have to give the matter up.
Theaet. Nothing in the world should ever induce us to do so (Sophist 241c-242a. Inserted Greek terms are Derrida's).
requires the full presence of the eidos. This de jure distinction cannot, however, be maintained de facto, because the very possibility of discussing the true is delimited by its relationship with the false which necessarily contaminates any pure presence. "And that is the difference that prevents there being in fact any difference between grammar and ontology" (166/192).124

The ability and necessity of the repetition of the origin implies the origin's invisibility and "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 ies ousias" (167/193). Within discourse one never has recourse to the full presence of the origin, otherwise discourse would be unnecessary. All that one has is a system of supplements with no transcendental signified to regulate their play. To say that no transcendental signified regulated the play of signifiers is not to say that the play is unregulated. One always makes decisions of regulation. The decisions one makes, however, will inevitably exclude that which is necessary to the possibility of such a decision. These exclusions manifest themselves in incorrigible relationships between the excluded and the included. Much of "Plato's Pharmacy" has been concerned with showing the consequences of the decisions of philosophy and translation.

Derrida speaks of the absent origin that is repeated through discourse as the withdrawal of the face. "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 différence which violently opens writing or, if one prefers, which

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124 It is on the basis of Husserl's de facto/de jure distinction that Derrida's critiques Husserl's notion of history in Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction.
opens itself to writing and which writing opens for itself” (167/193). This movement of differance also, Derrida writes:

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 (167/193-4).

As the prior condition for the differentiation of hierarchical oppositions differance, supplement, pharmakon, etc., also contaminates these oppositions, each pole implicated in its other.

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 tes 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 (168/194).
For Derrida nothing can have absolute identity, everything has only relational identity, inscription within a chain of signifiers. This means that there is no such thing as the absolutely unique word. An absolutely unique word would be unspeakable, unknown, incomprehensible. Everything contains within it the possibility of its own doubling, in order to be known—the absolutely singular is unknowable. Because of the necessity of repetition for knowledge nothing manifests itself uncontaminated. Even truth unveils itself as repeatable, impure, containing within it the possibility of discussing its other.

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 of 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 mneme, logos, and phone. 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 (168-9/194-5).
Truth and falsehood both need repetition to be articulated; because of this Derrida sees behind truth and falsehood a prior matrix of repetition that makes both possible. It is only the decision of philosophy which has separated the two into mutual exclusivities. Within the decision of philosophy truth was considered to be the last word, the transcendental signified: Derrida has reinscribed truth within a matrix of undecidability that makes the distinctions between true and false possible and impossible at the same time. The matrix of undecidability is the condition of im/possibility because both truth and falsehood require repetition, supplementarity, differance, pharmakon in order to be articulated.

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 (169/195).

Within the pharmacy the philosopheemes that seemed so clearly separated after the decision of philosophy reveal their hopeless miscegenation. Within the pharmacy all is medicine and all is poison at the same time, because no prescriptions have been made. The pharmakon is that miscegenated ether that makes the movement of light, truth, good, etc. possible.

The final section of "Plato's Pharmacy" is a description of Plato in his pharmacy. Plato plays a pharmacist closing down shop for the day so that he might return to his dark back room to "distinguish between two repetitions" (169-71/195-7). The difficulty is that the repetitions of the pharmacy are impossible to separate. Plato is reflected in the liquid of the pharmakon. The
echoes of the pharmacy reverberate and recombine. Is the noise from within or without? The origin of the voice is uncertain. Thepharmaka, themselves, prove difficult as well, as they will not neatly separate into poison and remedy. Plato wishes to "distinguish between two repetitions" but in the pharmacy he cannot.

In the second half of "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida continues to embroider along the folds of the Phaedrus. This time, however, Derrida eschews the traditional boundaries of the text and follows thepharmakonthread beyond what has rigorously been delimited as the Platonic text. This thread leads to what is implied within the Platonic text, but never explicitly mentioned: thepharmakosor scapegoat. Following this thread leads to two interlacing threads: festivals and family relationships. Both of these are connected to writing, which Derrida has been interjecting all along. As Derrida continues to stitch, the pattern continues to recur: thepharmakosfestival, the relationship between the father and son, and the bastard and legitimate son, and the Platonic suppression of play all recapitulate the relationship between speech and writing, not only in the Platonic text, but in all of Western metaphysics.

Derrida demonstrates this recapitulation by demonstrating the interrelatedness of the hierarchical opposition created. Derrida demonstrates that structurally the privileged term of the hierarchy is hopelessly implicated in its other. Both poles require the same site for their articulation: repetition, pharmakon, or writing in general. This similar requirement for both sides of an opposition indicates for Derrida a structural sameness prior to the decision of philosophy which separated the terms. This structural sameness is a matrix of undecidability prior to all Platonic oppositions.
Because of this structural sameness truth is no longer the controlling value of philosophy. Derrida sees truth as an effect of this process of differentiation. The value of truth is reinscribed within the economy of *différance*, where the plenitude of presence that truth implies is deferred, endlessly delayed and substituted for, and differed, shown to be infected with its other, falsehood.

In positing *différance* or *pharmakon* or supplement or general writing Derrida is not uncovering the primordial name of Being. There is no Heideggerian nostalgia for finding the great lost name of Being or truth. Derrida writes:

"There is no name for it": a proposition to be read in its *platitud.* This unnameable [*différance*] is not an ineffable Being which no name could approach: God, for example. This unnameable is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures that are called names, the chains of substitutions of names in which, for example, the nominal effect *différance* is itself *enmeshed*, carried off, reinscribed, just as a false entry or a false exit is still part of the game, a function of the system.

What we know, or what we would know if it were simply a question here of something to know, is that there has never been, never will be, a unique word, a master-name. This is why the thought of the letter *a* in *différance* is not the primary prescription or the prophetic annunciation of an imminent and as yet unheard-of nomination. There is nothing kerygmatic about this "word," provided that one perceives its decapita(liza)tion. And that one puts into the name of the name.

There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being. And we must think this without *nostalgia*, that is, outside of the myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost native country of thought. On the contrary, we must *affirm* this, in this sense in which Nietzsche puts affirmation into play, in a certain laughter and a certain step of the dance.125

Derrida wants to affirm that there is no master-name for Being, no pure presence, and no pure truth in the sense that it is regulated by the metaphysics of presence. Derrida wants to affirm a

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125 Derrida, "*Différance,*" Margins of Philosophy, 26-7.
certain play; a play that makes the metaphysics of presence both possible and impossible. The affirmation of this play accounts for the oppositions of Platonism and that which exceeds these oppositions. This play makes decisions necessary, and yet shows them to be inadequate, calling upon what they wish to exclude. This play is writing, a general writing, that Plato wished to separate from speech as unnecessary and dangerous, but in the pharmacy he could not distinguish between two repetitions.
Prescriptions of the Pharmacy

In "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida has touched upon many of the aspects that make Derrida's work unique. These aspects have been seen only as tools functioning within Derrida's work up to this point. In an attempt to gain a different perspective on the work of Derrida this chapter will focus on some key elements in "Plato's Pharmacy" in abstraction. This work of abstraction will be done in tandem with commentators both critical of and sympathetic with Derrida.

Three aspects of Derrida's work that arise in "Plato's Pharmacy" will be focussed upon: generalized writing, philosophy as decision, and ethics. Generalized writing is the aspect perhaps most widely commented upon, as it is one way of approaching the relationship between speech and writing in Derrida. It is a prevalent notion in Of Grammatology which was one of the first books of Derrida translated into English. As a much travelled expression it has undergone several permutations many of which can no longer bear the signature of Jacques Derrida. This is not to say that these understandings of writing, generalized writing, or arche-writing are incorrect or useless. It is to say, however, that many of these understandings may not be imputed to Derrida.
The idea of philosophy as a decision is not an idea in Derrida's work that has been greatly commented on, but its presence in "Plato's Pharmacy" is prevalent enough to warrant further investigation. The characterization of philosophy as a decision clearly involves Derrida's notion of undecidability, which has been greatly commented on. Undecidability has been often used by critics of Derrida to show that his work results in nihilism, skepticism, and relativism. Others object (feminists and Marxists, for example) that undecidability leads to ethical and political inactivity. It is merely theoretical prestidigitation that further separates the academic enterprise from responsibility. Derrida, however, maintains that undecidability is in fact the necessary precursor to any ethical or political action.

Both general writing and philosophy as decision point to an ethical moment. The thought of calling anything Derrida does with texts ethical or leading to a positive ethical position is outrageous to many people both in and out of academia. Derrida is often characterized as a sophist in an attempt to impute all the negative connotations of that word since Plato. Derrida is a nihilist, a relativist, someone merely doing tricks with texts with no regard for morality or even common sense. A term synonymous with sophist that is also applied to Derrida is aesthete. The implications of this term is that Derrida merely enjoys playing with texts. It is all about fun with no concern for the "real world." Historically, the usual response to the charges of sophistry or aestheticism is the demonstration of one's ethics. Derrida's work has grown more explicitly

\[126\] This scenario is continually played out in the history of philosophy. Plato's claim that the sophists were irrational was a moral condemnation. Without reason guided by dialectic, one could never remember the forms. In the *Antidosis*, Isocrates responds to Plato's condemnation, not by claiming that his was the more rational way of looking at things, but that his was the better way to live one's life. This struggle repeats itself in the 12th century, when logic was trying to reassert itself over grammar and rhetoric. Hugh of St. Victor in the *Didascalicon* writes against the logicians in defense of grammar. John of Salisbury writes in the *Metalogicon* against the logicians in defense of rhetoric. Each side is continually calling the other "sophist", and the predictable response of the side impugned is to defend their side on the basis of its ethicalness. This all too cursory footnote is completely indebted to Robert Sweetman's *History of Rhetoric* (Toronto: ICS Graduate Seminar, 1993-4).
ethically in the last ten years, but it is a palpable dimension even in an early work such as "Plato's Pharmacy."

1. Generalized Writing

When examining the notion of writing in Derrida it is important to distinguish between writing as physical inscription (ink on paper), "the vulgar concept of writing," and generalized writing or arche-writing. Because, however, generalized writing "essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing," and each is articulated in terms of the other, it is understandable that some confusion may arise when discussing Derrida's work.127

Geoffrey Bennington provides a helpful entrance into this notion of writing in Derrida.128 Bennington begins by noting several of the structural features of vulgar writing that have caused it to be denigrated by the Western metaphysical tradition. "'[W]riting' implies repetition."129 Writing functions through the repeatability and stability of a series of marks. A piece of writing can be copied and re-copied, which would reproduce the exact same series of marks. The

127 It is even possible to further subdivide Derrida's notion(s) of writing. In tracing the movement from ordinary writing to arche-writing Staffan Carlshamre notes five levels:
   1. ordinary writing.
   2. generalized writing I. This is the level where all linguistic signifiers in the usual sense are treated on a par, and characterized as "graphemes".
   3. generalized writing II. This level comprises not only linguistic signifiers in the usual sense, but also all other objects of awareness, which are characterized as "signs", and a fortiori as "graphemes".
   4. The immotivation of the trace. This is the process...whereby anterior systems of signification give rise to new ones.
   5. Arche-writing.

Carlshamre's distinctions are heuristic at this point, showing a possible way to construe the movement in Derrida's Of Grammatology from ordinary writing to arche-writing. Ultimately, though, Carlshamre reifies these distinctions in order to make the point that when Derrida has recourse to terms prefixed with "arche" he is being too metaphysical. The argument strikes me as circular. The important thing to note here is that if Derrida's use of writing may be construed as operating on five different levels it is easy to see that confusion may arise. See Staffan Carlshamre, Language and Time: An Attempt to Arrest the Thought of Jacques Derrida, (Goteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1986), 176; 210-12.
129 Ibid., 49.
problem with this kind of repetition according to Plato in the *Phaedrus* is that it can only repeat what is already known. It is only a monument. It cannot be the bearer of truth.

Writing also implies absence. The absence is in the first instance the absence of the author who writes knowing that she will not be able to be present. In the act of writing, though, there is also the absence of the reader. The author writes because the reader is absent. There is even absence from self in the act of writing. As an author writes she must minimally read herself. This delay, this gap, this deferment of presence within the act of writing itself implicates writing as a harbinger of absence.

Connected with absence is the possibility of the mortality of both the author and the reader. Because of writing's repeatability, any writing is capable of surviving beyond its author's death. "Writing communicates my thought to far distances during my absence, even after my death. At the moment of reading my letter, the addressee knows that I might have died during the time, however minimal it may be, between the moment at which the letter was finished and the moment of its reception."130 "All sorts of accidents can prevent my letter surviving me de facto: but de jure a letter which was not readable after my death would not be a letter. It is not necessary for me to be dead for you to be able to read me, but it is necessary for you to be able to read me even if I am dead. Derrida calls this sort of possibility...an essential or necessary possibility."131

Finally, connected with these other aspects of writing is the possibility of loss. Because of the absence between sender and addressee, and the necessary possibility of the death of each inscribed within the act of writing, writing can never fully contain the intentions of the writer.

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130 Ibid., 50.
"This 'death' opens writing to the general alterity of its destination, but simultaneously forbids any
sure or total arrival at such a destination."\(^{132}\)

"The point is to show, against the dominant currents of the philosophical tradition, that the
features habitually attributed to writing (distance, death, repetition in the absence of an animating
intention, ambiguity, etc.) are just as applicable to speech."\(^{133}\) Derrida's concern with writing and
its relationship to speech is not to valorize writing, but to show that the denigration of writing
(and the privileging of speech) within the Western metaphysical tradition on the basis of the above
structural elements is based on a decision that cannot be attributed to any logic within the system
of metaphysics. Derrida maintains the term writing because of the structural affinities between
speech and writing. Both rely on the same general economy of repetition, absence, death, and the
possibility of loss.

Rodolphe Gasché deepens Bennington's analysis of generalized writing in Derrida in *The
Tain of the Mirror*. He seeks to show how this notion of generalized writing in Derrida accounts
for "the 'contradictions' of philosophical discourse, the law that explains why and how what is
supposedly pure, ideal, transcendental, and so on is unavoidably contaminated by its opposite, and
why speech in its purity cannot be thought except by referring to writing."\(^{134}\) Gasché sees a
tremendous explanatory power in the work of Derrida. Deconstruction is more than the negative
critique of metaphysics that is often attributed to it. "To deconstruct the ethico-theoretical
hierarchy of speech and writing...is to construct the signifying structure of system of referral that
accounts for both exclusion and contamination [of the pure, ideal, transcendental, etc.]."\(^{135}\)

\(^{133}\) Ibid., 60.
\(^{134}\) Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 273.
\(^{135}\) Ibid.
Gasché uses the term infrastructure to indicate the function that generalized writing plays in the thought of Derrida, and in fact considers generalized writing or arche-writing to be a cluster of infrastructures.\textsuperscript{136} Gasché writes:

Arche-writing is only, if one may say so, the quasitranscendental synthesis that accounts for the necessary corruption of the idealities, or transcendentals of all sorts, by what they are defined against, and at the very moment of their constitution. Arche-writing is a construct aimed at resolving the philosophical problem of the very possibility (not primarily the empirical fact, which always suffers exceptions) of the usurpation, parasitism, and contamination of an ideality, a generality, a universal by what is considered its other, its exterior, its incarnation, its appearance, and so on. It is nothing but the "originary" structural unity that accounts for the philosophical "contradiction," or instance, that the ethos of philosophy, the value of the proximity in the "hearing-oneself-speak," can establish itself only through a reference to what it is not—writing—as well as to what it resents as the practice of writing. It is not writing itself that is at issue here but the system of relations that link it to speech. It is this system that Derrida names general writing.\textsuperscript{137}

Generalized writing is that infrastructure which accounts for the possibility of construing reality hierarchically and the structural contamination of those hierarchies.

In "Plato's Pharmacy" generalized writing as the structural possibility and impossibility for Platonic hierarchies manifests itself in the \textit{pharmakon} chain. Jacques Derychere writes in "Plato en het pharmakon":

The point I—more or less imaginatively—want to make here, is the following: in every text one uncovers the differential ground-structure of language itself. There is always a coordinating and subordinating movement a foot in language, and there is no original instantiation which controls this movement to lead it surely to a restless closure. On the contrary, the sliding, paratactical movement


\textsuperscript{137} Gasché, \textit{The Tain of the Mirror}, 274-5.
continually manifests an unsublateable lack; and the compressing, hypotactical movement constantly produces in this abyss an uncalculable excess. Simultaneously there is a lack and an excess in play: that is why our speech and writing reveals an unbridgeable gap, a break, a struggle. Because the excess sits as a reserve on a lack without a seat, one cannot recapture the excess. It will inevitably be overdetermined as a trace or remnant, supplement, dissemination, "metaphor." It is this double movement within language which Derrida ascribes to writing.\footnote{Jacques Derychere, "Plato en het pharmakon" in Jacques Derrida: Een Inleiding in Zijn Denken, Samuel IJsseling, ed. (Baarn: Ambo, 1986), 135-6. "Wat ik hier—enigszins beeldend—ter sprake wil brengen is het volgende: in elke tekst stoot men op de differentiële grondstructuur van de taal zelf. Onophoudelijk is er in de taal zowel een nevenschikkende als een onderschikkende beweging aan de gang, en er is geen oorspronkelijke instantie in de buurt die deze beweging controleert om ze met sterke hand naar een restloze voleinding te voeren. Integendeel, steeds opnieuw manifesteert de verschuivende, paratactische beweging een onophoefbaar tekort en steeds opnieuw produceert de verdichtende, hypotactische beweging op deze afground een onachterhaalbaar teveel. Er is tegelijk een tekort en een teveel in het spel: daarom openbaart ons spreken en schrijven een niet te dement kloof, een breuk, een strijd. Aangezien het teveel als reserve stoelt op een tekort zonder zit, is het niet te recupereren en wordt het onvermijdelijk als spoor of rest, supplement, verspilling, 'metafoor' overbepaald. Het is deze dubbele beweging in de taal die Derrida het schrift toeschrijft." I am grateful to Stoffel Francké for the translation of this passage, and help with Derychere's essay as a whole.}

For Derrida language, as a differential structure, cannot be arrested through the hierarchical determinations of philosophy. Derrida demonstrates in "Plato's Pharmacy" that the speech/writing hierarchy through which Plato sought to organize the \textit{Phaedrus} in reinscribed within the economy of the \textit{pharmakon}, which accounts for the possibility of the speech/writing opposition and its impossibility, the points at which the opposition breaks down—in the recourse to the scriptural metaphor to explain speech, for example.

The confusion of generalized and vulgar writing perhaps underlies some of Richard Rorty's essays on Derrida, especially "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida."\footnote{Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida," in \textit{Consequences of Pragmatism}, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 90-109.} It is unclear whether Rorty is seeking to articulate what Derrida means by "writing" or whether he is using writing in its vulgar sense. The point that Rorty makes using Derrida is that philosophy is one species or genre of vulgar writing among many others. Derrida's contribution, then, to this...
way of understanding the philosophical tradition is to make "philosophy even more impure—more unprofessional, funnier, more allusive, sexier, and above all more 'written'." 140

Rorty is not unaware of the passages where Derrida speaks of generalized writing, or for that matter in a conspicuously professional, serious, and unsexy tone. He quotes a rather large passage from *Of Grammatology*, and identifies what he considers to be a dangerous tendency in Derrida's thought, naming the Ineffable, the trace, which is represented by writing in its narrow sense. Luckily, for Rorty's understanding of Derrida, Derrida wrote "*Différance*" which corrected this slide toward an usavory later Heideggerianism. Also to Derrida's tremendous credit (as far as Rorty is concerned) is *The Post Card*, 141 which finally demonstrates Derrida's complete disregard for anything (capital "P") Philosophical, and shows Derrida indulging himself in the foibles of the metaphysical tradition. 142

It seems that Rorty wants only a one-sided Derrida, a Derrida who only writes about writing in its vulgar sense. Rorty sees any tendencies toward systematicity in Derrida as a mistake, the residue of an overzealous commitment to certain Heideggerian tendencies. Rorty sees these tendencies as being mitigated in the essay "*Différance*" and completely overcome in *The Post Card*. This turn toward private allusionist is not borne out in Derrida's writings after *The Post Card*. Derrida was always active politically, and his writings have increasingly addressed the ethical and political dimensions of life.143 The systematic nature of Derrida's thought is a constant component throughout his work, to dismiss it is to reduce Derrida to a

140 Ibid., 93.
private allusionist with nothing worthwhile to say about the way philosophers inhabit their own tradition. On Rorty's understanding of Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" becomes nothing more than Derrida chiding Plato for not realizing that the philosophical dialogues he wrote were merely one genre of writing among many.

2. Philosophy as Decision

The notion of philosophy as decision cannot be articulated apart from Derrida's notion of undecidability. It is, in fact, in disruption of the notion of decidability in philosophy that Derrida borrows undecidability from Gödel. Derrida writes:

Furthermore, this unity of geometry's sense, such as it is announced in the Origin, is not a general concept that is extracted or abstracted from various known geometries. On the contrary, it is the primordial concrete essence of geometry that makes such a generalizing operation possible. Nor is this sense-unity to be confused with the concept that Husserl in fact determined as the ideal orienting geometrical practice in geometry's objective thematic field. This concept (already marked by history) is, as we know, that of a "definite" nomology and an exhaustive deductivity. Starting from a system of axioms which "governs" a multiplicity, every proposition is determinable either as analytic consequence or as analytic contradiction. That would be an alternative we could not get beyond. Such confidence did not have long to wait before being contradicted; indeed its vulnerability has been well shown, particularly when Gödel discovered the rich possibility of "undecidable" propositions in 1931.144

As Derrida understands, not only Husserl's Origin of Geometry, but all of philosophy begins with a "system of axioms which 'governs' a multiplicity." This system of axioms is equivalent to the governing hierarchies Derrida elucidates in "Plato's Pharmacy" such as, good/evil, light/dark,

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inside/outside, speech/writing, etc. On the basis of these axioms reality is construed in a certain way. When the axioms themselves are questioned, however, they cannot be justified within the system that they engender. The axioms are believed to be self-evident, beyond question, so it is patently absurd to even raise the question in the first place. One might say the very definition of insanity is the questioning of what every rational being holds to be self-evident. Derrida's contention is that these axioms or hierarchies do not fall out of the sky fully formed, nor are they sent directly from Mt. Olympus as precepts of the gods. The instantiation of these hierarchies is the result of human decision within history. This decision is not the Wille-zur-Macht of some pre-Socratic Übermensch, although the element of human agency is unavoidable. Nor is this decision the decision of Sprache, speaking through those who will sit still long enough to hear it. It is perhaps somewhere between Nietzsche and Heidegger on this score, recognizing the intervention of will even in the pursuit of truth, and also aware that language is bigger than any philosopher, delimiting the possibilities of thought.

Beyond this historical understanding of the decision of philosophy there is also a practical aspect that leads Derrida to posit undecidability as the matrix prior to decision making. For a decision to occur there must be the real possibility of deciding among two or more possibilities. A choice of one is no choice at all. Undecidability is the articulation of the economy in which these possibilities are related. This understanding of undecidability is why Plato is pictured at the end of "Plato's Pharmacy" trying to distinguish between two repetitions. The pharmacy is the place prior to all philosophical oppositions, prior to all decisions. In there one finds the hierarchies of philosophy in solution, combined with one another. It will take much work (a
decision) to separate these axioms out of their solution, and in fact, according to Derrida, no one ever succeeds in making the hierarchies pure. There is always contamination.

At this point it is important to distinguish between undecidability, indeterminacy, and indecision. Although there is a certain synonymity among these words, owing mostly to the negative prefix, these words are not synonymous within the thought of Derrida. Indeterminacy refers to vagueness, lack of definition, and is not a term that Derrida has used technically or even frequently. Undecidability, in contrast, is "always the determinate oscillation between possibilities."

Undecidability, then, is the matrix out of which any decision, philosophical, ethical, political, etc., must be made. It is not to be confused with either indeterminacy or indecision. Philosophy, which is founded on the choosing of its own axioms that cannot be justified within the system that these axioms engender, is only philosophy on the basis of a certain undecidability which precedes this choosing, this decision.

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146 Ibid., 116.
It is perhaps confusion concerning undecidability that underlies Yoav Rinon's critique of "Plato's Pharmacy." The first indications of this are in the opening paragraph of the first essay where Rinon says, "This essay tries to point out the blurring moments of the strategy which lead to one of Derrida's most outrageous outcomes, which is that writing precedes speech. This notion, however, is only the starting point; its consequences are the impossibility of communication and the collapse of the Platonic maxims." Rinon is assuming, along with many critics of Derrida, that deconstruction results in a semantic indeterminacy that makes communication impossible. To make the world safe again for communication he seeks to demonstrate that deconstruction is self-referentially incoherent.

According to Rinon, Derrida's deconstructive readings require "that the text must be treated as an ahierarchical phenomenon.... If one would be able to prove that the deconstructive strategy is generally based on the notion of hierarchy and that Derrida himself assumes the existence of hierarchy and utilizes it for his own needs." Rinon's aim is to catch Derrida in a performative contradiction: to show that Derrida's own methods are based on that which he denies—hierarchy.

These interrelated notions of Derrida at work in Rinon's text, that Derrida understands texts as ahierarchical phenomena and that Derrida denies the existence of hierarchies but requires them for his readings, need further scrutiny. The support that Rinon gives for his contention that Derrida understands a text as an ahierarchical phenomenon is from the discussion in "Plato's Pharmacy" concerning Robin's translation of the word *pharmakon*. Rinon understands Derrida to

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149 Ibid., 372.
be making the point that in Robin's decision to translate *pharmakon* as medicine instead of instead of poison he destroys the textuality of Plato's text. This point is true as it regards *translation*, but the mistaken conclusion that Rinon draws from this is that all texts as Derrida understands them suffer from this same fate. In the passage Rinon quotes from "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida is actually defending the subtlety of the Platonic text against the (necessary) truncations of a translator. The point that Derrida wishes to make is that Robin's choice of medicine in the translation is governed by the same hierarchies as the Platonic text. Because of Rinon's misunderstanding of undecidability, at one point he actually makes Derrida's point for him quite succinctly: "Any text, *qua* text, *is* a choice, *is* the exclusion of some context and the inclusion of others. The text is an inevitable selection, for good or bad, from the choices given in the dictionary. The text, therefore, is an either-or phenomenon, a hierarchical phenomenon." Derrida would only add that the choice (for it to be a choice) embodied in any text takes place within the larger economy of undecidability. This larger economy also interrupts the either-or phenomenon of the text, not erasing it, but deferring it.

Philosophy as decision is the recognition of human force in the construction of philosophical systems. For Derrida philosophy is not grounded on the immutable bedrock of Reason, logic, or mathematics. Philosophy tries to ground itself on the choices (normally the adjective conscious or unconscious would qualify "choices," but for Derrida it is perhaps a little of both) of philosophers, through the construction of theories based on unjustifiable axioms. Derrida tries to wipe away the pretensions of a philosophy that grounds itself through privileged access to the immutable by showing that it rests on a pharmacy with no foundation. The economy of

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150 Ibid., 379.
undecidability is the matrix out of which the decisions of philosophy arise, and because of this prior matrix it also contaminates these decisions with what the decision was trying to exclude.

3. The Ethics of Deconstruction

The ethical moment in Derrida's work has been little commented on until recently. This is partly due to the fact that it is only recently that Derrida's writings have become more explicitly concerned with ethics. It is also perhaps due to the North American appropriation of Derrida as a method of literary criticism. With the more recent philosophical engagement of Derrida in North America and the publication of such books as The Ethics of Deconstruction and Against Ethics, Derrida's ethical side is coming to the fore. Finally it seems that a more general acquaintance with the thought of Emmanuel Levinas has made the ethical moment in Derrida's work more clear, as the ethics of deconstruction cannot be understood apart for the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

Derrida's engagement with Levinas began early in his career. "Violence and Metaphysics" (1967) was Derrida's first published piece on Levinas, and in fact the first major engagement with Levinas anywhere. Derrida is profoundly affected by Levinas writing that "the thought of Emmanuel Levinas can make us tremble." Later Derrida says, "Faced with a thinking like that of Levinas, I never have an objection." Presumably Derrida came into contact with Levinas through Levinas' writings on Husserl. Levinas was an important factor in the introduction of phenomenology to France through his commentary on Husserl's work.

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153 Derrida, Writing and Difference, 79-153.
154 Ibid., 82.
It is way beyond the scope of this thesis to even scratch the surface of Levinas' thought; perhaps, though, enough light can be shed on it to see a little more clearly the ethical moment in Derrida's thought.\footnote{Derrida's thought is not simply recapitulation of Levinas. Derrida has a very complex relationship with Levinas, and the influence seems to go both ways. Critchley, as well as many other scholars of the Derrida-Levinas exchanges, believes that the radical changes in thought and writing style between \textit{Totality and Infinity} and \textit{Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence} are a direct result of Derrida's essay "Violence and Metaphysics." See Critchley, \textit{The Ethics of Deconstruction}, 12.} Levinas articulates ethics by way of alterity. Levinas sees in philosophy the tendency to appropriate everything that is other and reduce it to the same. This sameness of philosophy is irrupted at certain points by an alterity that it cannot appropriate. For example, Plato's "Good beyond Being" or Descartes' "infinity" are places where alterity shows itself as a trace within philosophy. These moments are the trace of alterity, an alterity that cannot be appropriated into the thought of Being. Levinas sees this alterity as constitutive of consciousness, thus the relationship to alterity precedes the movement of appropriation. This relationship to alterity is the ethical relationship. Alterity is not only the necessary precondition of consciousness; it is manifested in the unappropriatable face of the other. Everyone is held captive to the other, substituting self for the other.\footnote{See, Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy" and "Substitution," in \textit{The Levinas Reader}, Sean Hand, ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 75-87; 88-125, respectively.}

It is this constitutive relationship with alterity that exposes the ethical moment in Derrida's work. "I mean that deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it."\footnote{Jacques Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other," and interview with Richard Kearney in \textit{Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers}, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 118.} In this response Derrida considers alterity as impinging upon the deconstructive enterprise, and this enterprise as a legitimate response to it. It is this sensitivity to alterity which motivates deconstruction. Among other things Derrida's work manifests a sensitivity to the other of philosophy, that which philosophy seeks to appropriate into its
dialectical machinery, but cannot. "The other, as the other than self, the other that opposes self-identity, is not something that can be detected and disclosed within a philosophical space and with the aid of a philosophical lamp. The other precedes philosophy and necessarily invokes and provokes the subject before any genuine questioning can begin. It is in this rapport with the other that affirmation expresses itself." \(^{159}\) Simon Critchley in *The Ethics of Deconstruction* elucidates this point as follows:

My argument is that an unconditional categorical imperative or moment of affirmation is the source of the injunction that produces deconstruction and is produced through deconstructive reading. Thus there is a duty in deconstruction which both prompts the reader to the rigorous and ascetic labour of reading and produces a reading that commands respect in so far as it opens an irreducible dimension of alterity. In short...this is why one should bother with deconstruction.\(^{160}\)

The ethics of deconstruction begin with the reading of another's text. It is the respect for the other's text, the goal of "doubling commentary," the "indispensable guardrail" of traditional critical work that begins the ethical moment of deconstruction.

The ethics of deconstruction extends beyond this respect for the other's text. As Derrida says, this *indispensable guardrail* has always only *protected*, it has never *opened*, a reading.\(^{161}\)

The opening of a reading is the exposure of the text to the heterogeneous elements within it that have been suppressed by traditional criticism. It is the call of the other within the texts that Derrida reads that motivates the deconstructive enterprise.

\(^{159}\) Ibid., 118.

\(^{160}\) Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 41.

\(^{161}\) Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.
John D. Caputo in *Against Ethics* describes this call of the other as heteronomic. Heteronomy is the law of the other which creates an obligation in the self prior to agency within the self. Caputo writes:

All that I know about obligation, all that I can say, is that I am taken hold of from without, seized by something else, something other, _je ne sais quoi_. The otherness of this something other, the heteronomic force of the other is the dislocating locus or site—I do not say the origin—of obligation. It is the alterity or otherness of the other, the heteronomy, that disrupts me, that is visited upon me, that knocks me out of orbit.  

The otherness of the other is what philosophy seeks to suppress, because alterity plays havoc with the neat distinctions of philosophy, transgressing the boundaries between hierarchies. Philosophy can only give an account of sameness. Otherness can only disturb the identities of philosophy.

The question that remains is the extent to which this ethical concern is present in "Plato's Pharmacy." Yoav Rinon accuses Derrida, in a parting shot, of disconnecting "his deconstructive agents from any subject and therefore from any responsibility." This accusation is created by the same misunderstanding of undecidability that led to Rinon's earlier misreadings of Derrida. According to Derrida's own ethics of reading he gave Plato more credit than most commentators have been historically willing. He set out to treat the *Phaedrus* as a well constructed whole:

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 _sumploke_ patiently interlacing the arguments. What is magisterial about the demonstration affirms itself and effaces itself at once, with suppleness, irony, and discretion (67/75).

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After demonstrating the brilliance of Plato's text, after respecting the otherness of Plato's text, Derrida moves to open Plato's text to its other.

The other immediately apparent within "Plato's Pharmacy" is writing. While Derrida sees Plato's text as calling for the trial of writing from one end of the dialogue to the other, it is precisely writing that Plato cannot give an adequate account of within his own text. This inadequacy of the Platonic text leads Derrida to articulate, by way of resources present within the Platonic text, the logic of the *pharmakon* or generalized writing. This is a logic that accounts for the binarisms that Plato's text is founded on, and the transgression of those binarisms. The ethical moment here is that it enables one to be vigilant about the exclusionary nature of what is considered to be self-evident.

The three aspects of Derrida's work elucidated upon in this chapter, generalized writing, philosophy as decision, and ethics, provide a more systematic look at the thought of Derrida than is possible in the genre of commentary. These woven threads that form a small pattern in the tapestry of Derrida's thought were chosen as a point of entry. There are many areas that lay beyond the scope of this chapter, but there is a certain synchronic continuity to Derrida's thought that allows one to think metonymously.

There is also a diachronic continuity to Derrida's thought. The engagement with the philosophical tradition's relationship to writing form a constant backdrop to most of Derrida's early writings. While writing does not play as prominent a role as it used to in Derrida's thought, the structure of the criticisms is quite similar. The notions of decision and ethics are coming more to the fore as Derrida begins to write explicitly about things such as European identity and justice.
These notions were never absent from Derrida's work, however. From a Levinasian understanding of ethics it is impossible to see Derrida's work as unethical, in any of his writings, early or more recent.
Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Derrida but Were Afraid to Ask Columbo

The connection between Derrida, the world-famous philosopher, and Columbo, the TV homicide detective played by Peter Falk, began at ICS when we were planning a Derrida Symposium. To advertise the event Jeff Dudiak hung a photocopied picture of Derrida on the bulletin board. Tia Frazee commented that Derrida looked like Columbo. Oddly, he did. The disheveled hair, the look on his face, and owing to some loss of detail through the photocopying process—Derrida looked like Columbo. Soon, to let everyone else in on the joke, Ron Kuipers wrote a caption above the picture, "This is Derrida, not Columbo."

Six weeks later, while doing research on Derrida, I was looking through all the pictures of Derrida at the end of Geoffrey Bennington's book, *Jacques Derrida*. To my surprise, there was a picture of Derrida returning from his incarceration in Prague in 1982. Again, the resemblance was uncanny. Derrida is dressed in a light colored shirt, dark tie and tan slacks. The most important part though is Derrida's trenchcoat. Columbo's signature is this rumpled trenchcoat that he wears.
year-round in sunny Los Angeles. In this picture Derrida is also wearing a rumpled trenchcoat, slouching along—looking for all the world like Columbo.

This similarity of appearance (in two photographs) led me to wonder if any more similarities existed between Derrida and Columbo. Fortunately, "Columbo" being on twice a week on the *Arts & Entertainment* network, allowed me to explore the depth of this similarity. Every episode of "Columbo" has a similar structure: The show opens with a conflict between two people. The conflicts are over various things such as money, reputation, or love. As the conflict is presented it is clear that one person stands to lose everything if the other has his or her way. The only resolution, it seems, is to kill the person who threatens the status of the other. If the other person can be killed and the blame deflected, then everything will remain *status quo*. The exposition of the conflict and the murder take up the first part of the episode. As the events are presented it seems that murderer has planned the murder so as to have an air-tight alibi.

It is only after the murder that Columbo appears on the scene. Columbo is a Detective Lieutenant in the Los Angeles Police Department. He does not drive up in a standard issue unmarked police car, though. He drives up in his own car—an old Peugot—a French car, as he is fond of telling those who inquire. By the time Columbo arrives the crime scene is swarming with other police and a medical examiner to take the body. Columbo gets a brief report of what appears to have happened from another officer on the scene. The officer gives an account of what most likely happened, usually an accident or the work of nebulous thugs. After receiving the most probable account of death, Columbo begins to poke around the crime scene, smoking his ubiquitous cigar checking the details to see if they fit the most probable account of death.
Upon leaving the crime scene Columbo begins to talk to friends and relatives of the deceased, just routine questions in order to confirm the most probable account. Without fail Columbo ends up questioning the person who actually committed the murder (it's always an inside job) and forcing that person to give an account of the details that do not conform to the most probable account. The remainder of the show is Columbo pursuing the details that will eventually destroy the alibi of the murderer. Columbo is relentless in the asking of his questions. Each time the murderer is forced to come up with a more unlikely account of the death in order to maintain the alibi, until finally the alibi crumbles. Suddenly, the most probable account of death is murder motivated by personal conflict, accompanied by a cover-up that can only point to malice aforethought.

1. An Exercise in Fatality

In the episode entitled "An Exercise in Fatality" the audience is introduced to Milo Janus, fitness expert and owner of a chain of fitness clubs, which he sells as franchises to individual proprietors. In the contract granting franchise rights there are several stipulations requiring the proprietor to buy all of the equipment and special pharmaceutical products for use at the fitness club. The reason for this stipulation is that Milo owns the supply companies, and is making a tremendous profit on the product mark-up, which the franchise owners are contractually obligated to pay. Milo then takes these profits, smuggles them out of the country through an English travel agency and deposits them in a Swiss bank account where he hopes to escape in just a few months.

The conflict occurs when Gene Stafford, a proprietor of one of the fitness clubs begins to suspect Milo. He begins poring over old invoices, comparing prices, and begins to put together
Milo's whole scheme. Milo goes to meet with Gene to head off any problems, but Gene is determined to bring Milo to the authorities for racketeering. Milo appears nonplussed before Gene, and pleads ignorance to Gene's accusations. It is clear that everything that Milo has worked for will be ruined if Gene carries through with his threats.

As Milo makes preparations to murder Gene the audience is kept guessing as to the relationship between the seemingly disparate activities that lead up to the murder. Milo plans a party at his house, but will be late so he sends his secretary to play hostess until he gets there. Meanwhile, Milo cuts a piece of audio tape out of a phone conversation that he had with Gene Stafford and makes a recording of it at home. After setting up the tape recorder at home Milo returns to the fitness club where Gene is working late, finishing off some Chinese food he had delivered. Milo gets in with a master key. Gene is surprised and angry by Milo's unannounced visit and tells him to leave. Milo, of course, has no intentions of leaving while Gene is still alive. He lunges at Gene with a small lead pipe trying to choke him with it. Gene who was pouring a cup of coffee at the time spills the coffee burning Milo and runs out of the office where Milo catches him and kills him with the lead pipe crushing his wind pipe. Milo then drags Gene's body into the weight room where he dresses him in workout clothes and shoes and places him on a weight bench with a barbell over his neck making the death look like a work-out accident.

Milo leaves the fitness club and returns to the party at his house already in progress. As he walks in the door he makes the excuse that a prospective franchise buyer across town wanted to meet with him. When he got there, however, the place was closed so he turned around and came home. Everyone at the party consoled Milo on his bad luck. At this point Milo goes into his study to start the movie projector which projected onto a screen in the living room. After this
he makes a call to the phone in the living room (two phone lines). When his secretary picks up that phone Milo plays the tape of an earlier conversation with Gene Stafford saying, "Hi, Jessica (the name of Milo's secretary), Gene Stafford...can I speak to him?" Milo returns to the living room where in front of a room full of people Milo apparently has a conversation with Gene Stafford, an iron-clad alibi. Milo generates a one-sided conversation giving the people at the party the impression that Gene Stafford has worked all day and is now in his gym clothes preparing to workout. It appears to be the perfect crime.

Early the next morning the scene shifts back to the fitness club where a number of police cars are parked out front, and Columbo's primer-colored Peugot. Inside the crime scene is bustling with police officers dusting for fingerprints, looking at the body as Columbo walks in. Columbo gets the most probable account of death from another officer: "It looks like he was exercising and either had a heart attack or the bar slipped and killed him." Columbo tracks down the medical examiner to confirm this. The unofficial report is that he was killed by a crushed wind pipe. At this point Columbo begins to wander around the fitness club noticing details that do not seem quite right. Coffee has been recently spilled on the office floor. Mr. Stafford ordered a large meal and then worked out shortly after. There are recent brown scuff marks on the floor between the office and the weight room. Mr. Stafford's gym shoes are tied funny. Mr. Stafford's locker was locked even though he was alone. The dress shoes in Mr. Stafford's locker are still tied. None of these details are enough to question the most probable account, but they present questions that nonetheless must be answered.

Columbo's first stop is the home of Milo Janus where he meets Jessica, Milo's secretary, and Milo himself. It turns out that Columbo is a big fan of Mr. Janus (as is Mrs. Columbo),
familiar with his fitness clubs and his TV show, which saved Mrs. Columbo from depression. During their first meeting Columbo establishes a few details in Milo's alibi. To begin with Milo Janus is definitely placed at his home at a little after 9:00PM before the murder presumably occurred, because of his secretary's phone conversation. Columbo seems satisfied with Janus' alibi for the time being, but on his way out he notices the burn on his arm. Janus' excuse is that it happened while he was shaving, accidently sticking his wrist under the hot water. Columbo replies that the last time he did something like that it was because he spilled coffee on himself.

Columbo's second meeting with Janus again occurs at Janus' home. Columbo is impelled to join Janus on his morning jog on the beach. After they return back to Janus' house Columbo's shoes are filled with sand. While he proceeds to get the sand out of his shoes Columbo asks Janus about his business partners. As Janus answers Columbo breaks a shoe string and is forced to retie his shoe. Janus then switches to offense and asks Columbo directly why he was still hanging around asking questions, since everyone knows Stafford's death was an accident.

It is at this point that Columbo questions the legitimacy of the most probable account for the first time. Columbo's concern centers on the scuff marks found at the crime scene. The scuff marks were definitely made by Mr. Stafford's brown business shoes, and the type of scuffs made could only be made by someone being chased or in a scuffle. It is possible surmises Columbo that somebody killed Stafford and then changed his clothes to make it look like an accident. Janus' response to this problem with the received account is to simply reaffirm his original statement that he spoke to Stafford after he had changed into his gym clothes. This seems to satisfy Columbo for the moment and he prepares to leave. On the way out, however, Janus receives a phone call,
and Columbo notices that one phone light indicating on which line an incoming is being received is out.

In their third meeting Columbo continues to torment Janus with details that are increasingly difficult to account for on the basis of the received account. To begin with the barbell that crushed Stafford's neck was much heavier than Stafford had ever lifted before. Columbo again suggests that if there were a killer, he would have to be very strong. Janus reaffirms his alibi. Another thing that keeps bothering Columbo is Stafford's brown dress shoes. They were still tied, as if they had been removed hurriedly. Why was Stafford in a hurry, if he was there alone? Janus again notes that this is still irrelevant, since he was at home at the time of the murder. Columbo decides to ask one more question before he leaves. He wants to know where Janus was between the time when his secretary saw him at the office and a little after 9:00PM when he arrived home. Janus relates his story of driving across town to meet a client, but upon arriving found his place of business closed. By the end of this conversation Janus is becoming increasingly hostile, and warns Columbo not to bother him anymore with accusation and innuendo.

Columbo meets with Janus a fourth time in a hospital waiting room. Mrs. Stafford, upset about the possibility of Janus cheating her husband, mixed a nearly fatal combination of pills and alcohol. Columbo for the first time directly confronts Janus with the accusation that he killed Stafford. He bases this accusation on the fact that the place where Janus was supposed to have driven before he got home was open during that time, not closed, as Janus claimed. Janus calls Columbo devious and simply retells that part of his story to fit with the new fact. Before Janus leaves he reaffirms his alibi that he was home at the time of the murder. As Columbo leaves he
watches a mother tie her sons shoe. This seems to be important, but its significance is not revealed until Columbo's final meeting with Janus.

In their final meeting Columbo gets to Janus' office before him to stage a phone call in which the taped voice of Gene Stafford speaks to Janus. Janus confronts Columbo, and Columbo offers a different version of the death of Gene Stafford which accounts for both Janus' alibi, and its downfall through details for which it could not account. Janus, however, has one final card to play: Columbo has no proof.

In a fitting irony, though, Columbo does have proof, in the form of Janus' own statement about his alleged phone call with Gene Stafford. Janus' statement emphatically confirmed that Gene Stafford was in his gym clothes when he called. Columbo demonstrates by way of tying his own shoes and showing that when someone else ties the shoes that the bows end up reversed. The bows on Mr. Stafford's brown dress shoes were exactly opposite to his gym shoes. From this Columbo concludes that someone else must have tied them. This would not be damning proof except for Janus' sworn statement that Gene Stafford was in his gym clothes. The undeniable conclusion is that only Milo Janus could have changed Gene Stafford's clothes. Columbo concludes the show by saying, "You tried to contrive a perfect alibi, sir, and it's your perfect alibi that's going to hang you."

2. Derrida via Columbo

Perhaps this Columbo excursion may now be reinscribed within a Derridean framework for the further elucidation of Derrida's thought. To begin with the images that lead me to connect Columbo and Derrida in the first place can be thought of in terms of general repetition. In
"Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida discovered two moments of repetition in Plato. One moment was the living repetition of the *eidos* through speech, the legitimate son. The second moment was the dead repetition of writing, that which could call to mind only what was already known, the bastard son. For Derrida these two moments of repetition point to a general economy of repetition which precedes the distinction between legitimate and bastard. This general economy of repetition is the system of substituting signifiers, which introduces spacing and delay in the articulation of anything whether it be the *eidos* or writing. Consequently, the general economy of repetition also made possible the production of a picture which could bear the caption "Derrida" and the recontextualization of this picture under the caption "Columbo."\(^{164}\)

The complex system of signifiers such as "rumpled trenchcoat" and "disheveled hair" that usually signify "Columbo" are able to be reappropriated *via* the economy of repetition to signify "Derrida" or more precisely both at the same time. This confusion of identity is due to the necessary introduction of the sign, of a certain graphic relationship, into the repetition of any identity, be it the ideal identity of Husserl's geometry (or self-consciousness), the Platonic forms, or a chance photograph. The introduction of the sign, because of the differential structure and delay introduced by any system of significations, also introduces non-identity, non-self-presence into any identity and self-presence. If "Columbo" were an absolutely singular signifier it would be unintelligible (unrepeatable). It is only because the system of signifiers that usually indicates "Columbo" is able to be reappropriated under the name "Derrida" (or any other context) that it can signify "Columbo" in the first place.

\(^{164}\) Derrida calls this infinite capacity for recontextualization "iterability" in *Limited, Inc.*
3. Deconstruction via Columbo

Columbo's case "An Exercise in Fatality" provides an excellent opportunity to illustrate deconstruction, if the reader will permit a little allegory. Let us view Milo Janus as a great philosopher, someone adept at creating totalities. Milo's totality controlled both the production and distribution of fitness products. Milo's machine is working smoothly until it is irrupted by Gene Stafford, alterity personified. This alterity threatens to disrupt Milo's totality. Totalities invariably see alterity as a threat and seek to make it the same. Milo attempts to bring Gene back into the fold by denying any wrong doing. Gene, however, persists in making noises of disruption. This persistence leaves Milo no alternative except to suppress the alterity in order to maintain his totality. Milo murders Gene with the intent of leaving no trace pointing back to himself.

As Derrida understands totalities they are inherently violent. They necessarily result in the suppression of alterity within that totality. However, a trace invariably remains of that alterity pointing beyond the totality system to its other. In this particular case that trace is bound up in shoes: shoes that leave scuff marks, tied shoes that should be untied, and shoes tied by someone else. These shoes connect fortuitously with Derrida's thought in two ways: first, Derrida has an extended meditation on shoes in *The Truth in Painting*, and second, the word trace, as it is used philosophically, is a translation of *ichnos*, which also means footprint.

Columbo responds to the violence of murder with a violence of his own. He is relentless in his pursuit of the suspect, showing up at odd times in unexpected places, and always with one more irritating question. Columbo is determined to shake the totality (*solicit* in its etymological
sense, as Derrida is fond of using it) that has suppressed the other through murder. Similarly, Derrida has no illusions that he brings his accusations of violence without violence, a necessary violence. "That necessary violence responds to a violence that was no less necessary." Derrida pursues texts with relentless questions. Levinas said that he was tormented (tourmenté) by Derrida's questions.

These relentless questions also share a similar object in both Columbo and Derrida. Their questions are always about details, traces, scuffs, shoes, that cannot be accounted for within the most probable account of death. This account is always given, always in place when Columbo/Derrida arrive on the scene. The account works for the most part. It gives a reasonable suggestion about the cause and time of death, and also places all the suspects somewhere else at the alleged time of death. Certain marginal things, certain traces, however, refuse to be comprehended within the received account, and it is these that are pursued until the received account is deconstructed and reinscribed within an economy that accounts for not only the possibility of construing the evidence in such a way as to give the murderer an alibi, but also the impossibility of that alibi—the general economy of repetition.

It is also important to note concerning the question of methodology that these details, these traces are found within the received account. Columbo brings no special expertise to bear on his cases, and for Derrida the means of deconstruction always manifest themselves within a

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168 It is not that Columbo has no methodology, nor that his subjectivity does not impinge upon the case. Rather, Columbo brings no special knowledge to the case in the way that Sherlock Holmes does (e.g. knowledge of numerous kinds of tobacco ashes). That kind of knowledge is usually provided for Columbo by "the boys in the lab."
text. Just as Columbo discovered the curious scuff marks on the gym floor, Derrida noticed a word, *pharmakon*, that concealed as much as it revealed in the Platonic text. The *pharmakon* pointed to that which the Platonic text could not account for: a certain supplementary relationship between the cardinal oppositions of Platonism. Derrida pursued this *pharmakon* chain both in and out of Plato's text until it was shown to be a point of irruption, a trace left behind of a suppressed alterity. In the same way that alibis deconstruct themselves for Columbo ("You tried to contrive a perfect alibi, sir, and it's your perfect alibi that's going to hang you."), texts deconstruct themselves for Derrida.

The result of this deconstruction is justice. In an episode of "Columbo" justice is the dénouement of revelation and arrest. For Derrida justice is the exposure of a totality to the alterity which it sought to suppress. "Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. Nor more than deconstruction, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice."169 Derrida's work is motivated by the call of alterity, the suppressed other crushed by the totalities of philosophy.

This little allegory is not without its problems, the parallels between Columbo and Derrida break down. (If they did not, it would cease to be an allegory.) To begin with there is the problem of placing Derrida in the role of a police officer. This characterization results in a delicious irony, as the photograph in which Derrida looks most like Columbo is the one where he has just been released from prison. Beyond this, however, Derrida does not see himself in the role of the law enforcer. In fact, he is interested in showing a certain play in the law, a certain

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supplementarity for which the law cannot account. Ultimately, the comparison between Columbo and Derrida says more about me than it does about Derrida.

The second difficulty with the allegory I will label the problem of realism. Within the self-enclosed world of a TV show it is quite easy to control all the variables, and make sure the show progresses smoothly to a satisfying conclusion. "Columbo" is an odd mystery show, in that there is really no mystery. The audience knows who committed the crime from the beginning. The enjoyment of the show comes from watching Columbo deconstruct a bullet proof alibi via the little details that do not quite fit into the most probable account. At the end of the show the audience is quite satisfied that justice will be done, because the account that Columbo gives which reinscribes the alibi as false into another account at the conclusion of the show corresponds to what really happened at the beginning of the show. Because of the omniscient audience with privileged access to the true nature of things, and the need for closure in TV programs in general, the gap between Columbo's account and what really happened is not explored.

Columbo enters the picture with no information. He is given a most probable account of what occurred, and on the basis of that given tries to recreate the crime, fitting in all the details found at the crime scene. When these details interrupt the received account Columbo is forced to reconstruct the crime in opposition to the received account. All the while this reconstruction is perceived by the audience and presumably Columbo as getting down to what really happened.

Derrida does not have the luxury of an omniscient audience (or screen writers for that matter) to goad him back to what really happened. All that Derrida finds himself with is the most probable account which uses language in such a way that it cannot account for its own tropes within the terms of the most probable account. For example, it seems that Plato wants to put
writing in its place, subservient to speech, but his use of the metaphor of inscription to describe both speech and writing calls this hierarchy into question. In order to account for this contamination of the speech/writing hierarchy, Derrida supposes an arche-writing, a generalized writing, an economy of inscription that accounts for both speech and writing.

In giving this new account Derrida is not under the illusion that he has now cut through all the interpretive structures of consciousness to see the Dinge an Sich, to see things as they really are. Derrida wants to show the closure of metaphysics, but this closure is not to be conceived as a prison wall which a few brave souls have scaled. Metaphysics is not Alcatraz, rather, Derrida says:

In a certain sense it is true to say that "deconstruction" is still in metaphysics. But we must remember that if we are indeed inside metaphysics, we are not inside it as we might be inside a box or a milieu. We are still in metaphysics in the special sense that we are in a determinate language. Consequently, the idea that we might be able to get outside of metaphysics has always struck me as naive. So that when I refer to the "closure" of metaphysics, I insist that it is not a question of considering metaphysics as a circle with a limit or simple boundary. The notion of the limit and boundary of metaphysics is not linear or circular in any indivisible sense. And as soon as we acknowledge that the limit-boundary of metaphysics is divisible, the logical rapport between inside and outside is no longer simple. Accordingly, we cannot really say that we are "locked into" or "condemned to" metaphysics, for we are, strictly speaking, neither inside nor outside. In brief, the whole rapport between the inside and the outside of metaphysics is inseparable from the question of the finitude and reserve of metaphysics as language. But the idea of the finitude and exhaustion of metaphysics does not mean that we are incarcerated in it as prisoners or victims of some unhappy fatality. It is simply that our belonging to, and inherence in, the language of metaphysics is something that can only be rigorously and adequately thought from another topos or space where our problematic rapport with boundary of metaphysics can be seen in a more radical light. Hence my
attempts to discover the non-place or non-lieu which would be the "other" of philosophy. This is the task of deconstruction.170

In his "attempts to discover the non-place or non-lieu which would be the 'other' of philosophy" Derrida is not resurrecting the neutrality postulate, claiming that he is looking for a place to stand to view philosophy that would be unaffected by his subjectivity. In saying "non-place" Derrida is recognizing that the concept of place is always already determined within metaphysics. There is no non-metaphysical concept of place, a concept of place that can be thought apart from the metaphysics of presence. Non-place is analogous to non-concept for Derrida. It is a recognition of the role metaphysics has in determining these words, and an attempt to delimit them. Derrida wants to show where the decisions of philosophy impinge upon discourse. He wants to give an account of what makes these decisions possible, and also where these decisions break down, in the form of supplementary relationships between concepts. Derrida writes, "I add a supplementary complication that calls for other concepts, for other thoughts beyond the concept and another form of 'general theory,' or rather another discourse, another 'logic' that accounts for the impossibility of concluding such a 'general theory'."171

4. A Modest Proposal

Now that Derrida has been cast as Columbo, it is time to reverse roles and place Derrida in the position of murderer. Deconstruction is a two-edged sword that must invariably cut the texts one reads as well as the texts one writes. The running assumption in the above exercise is that every text suppresses some sort of violence. Every text is an alibi in need of exposure. What

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170 Kearny, Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers, 111-2.
murder is "Plato's Pharmacy" an alibi for? What are the lines of force and desire that Derrida has hidden in his reading of Plato. Surely, this text is not a matter of pure induction, simply laying bare the Ding-an-Sich of the text. There is interpretation here. Derrida has embroidered on this text. He has necessarily added to it. Perhaps there is a loose thread [laisse] here or there in Derrida's embroidery that suggests more than Derrida meant-to-say [vouloir-dire].

Throughout "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida is consistently reminding the reader of the structure of Plato's thought. Derrida sees Plato's thought as being conceived upon binary oppositions that are hierarchically related. For Plato (according to Derrida) these oppositions are self-evident as is their appurtenant relation to one another. Derrida sees within the texts of Plato, however, a certain supplementary relationship between the oppositions that suggests transgression and contamination rather than mutual exclusivity. This transgression is manifested in the signifier pharmakon in Plato's work.

This pharmakon points to the prior undecidable matrix of the conditions of possibility and impossibility of construing reality in terms of binary oppositions. The structure of this move sounds somewhat Hegelian as Derrida sees two opposed terms being borne out of a prior matrix. The difference between Derrida's move and Hegel's Aufhebung is that for Derrida the opposed terms are not resolved into a third term such as Absolute Reason or Geist. In "Plato's Pharmacy" we see Derrida trying to walk that very fine line between Hegelianism and Platonism. In walking this line Derrida reinscribes the Platonic dialectic within the larger economy of undecidability. Derrida also parodies Hegelianism by appropriating some of its structural

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172 This may explain Derrida's rather enigmatic statement, "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" (107-8/122-3).
components, but ultimately frustrating the Aufhebung by maintaining the determinate oscillation between the oppositions, rather than their sublation into a third term.

To balance himself on this tight-rope walk Derrida is very careful to maintain that pharmakon is not to be construed as a Hegelian synthesis. The pharmakon is the principle of non-identity. It is that which continually interrupts not only any move to keep the oppositions of Platonism separate, but also any move to sublate the oppositions into a new identity. The pharmakon contaminates Platonic oppositions, while it jams Hegelian synthesis. The pharmakon would be like a coincidentia oppositorum except that it "does not have the punctual simplicity." Metaphysics for Derrida is ultimately dependent on something other that metaphysics, and Derrida shows this by reinscribing Platonic dialectics and parodying Hegelian dialectics.

It is this double move of reinscription and parody that seems to conceal more than it reveals. Perhaps it is an alibi for a certain indebtedness that would remain better concealed. It seems that within "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida has set himself the task of finding within Plato's text that which not only delimits Plato, but confounds Hegel as well. Derrida clearly engages Plato throughout "Plato's Pharmacy," but one gets the feeling that it is with Hegel that he is truly jousting. This war on two fronts that Derrida seems determined to wage manifests itself in the need to posit an antidialectic. This antidialectic serves its purpose well in showing the limitations of both Platonic and Hegelian thought, but it also places limitations on Derrida's thought.

For Derrida to place himself in opposition to Platonic and Hegelian thought he necessarily overdetermines his own thought by demarcating the horizons within which he could engage Platonism and Hegelianism. Derrida writes, "One of them [the senses of undecidability]

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173 "Plato's Pharmacy." (127/146). Derrida discusses the metaphysical heritage of the point (stigme) in "Ousia and Gramme: Note on a Note from Being and Time," Margins of Philosophy, 40-46.
determines in a manner that is still too antidialectical, hence too dialectical, that which resists binarity or even triplicity (see in particular *Dissemination*)."\(^{174}\) Perhaps in this role reversal the above quotation could be construed as an admission of guilt. Derrida's *pharmakon* was determined in opposition to binarity and triplicity. This determination delimited the possible ways in which *pharmakon* could be construed. Because it was the dialectics of binarity and triplicity which formed the horizon within which Derrida articulated the *pharmakon*, the *pharmakon* remains within this framework rather than surpassing it. Derrida has let in both Plato and Hegel through the back door while seeming to have surpassed them both. Derrida has turned himself in.

The question now is what to do with this confession. Should Derrida be arrested? The crime was so long ago, perhaps the statute of limitations has run out. No, there is no statute of limitations on murder. Does Derrida's alibi completely crumble? Is there enough proof to convict? Should he be released on his own recognizance? These legal questions reverberate endlessly.

This confession has not taken the form of a recantation. Derrida has not stopped the publication of *Dissemination* to atone for this violence. He has in fact continued to publish not only *Dissemination*, but other texts as well. The texts after *Dissemination* have changed, though. One does not find the same desire to reinscribe Platonic dialectics and parody Hegelian dialectics. In *Limited, Inc.* for example, Derrida still seeks to give an account of the conditions of possibility and impossibility of Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* and Searle's reply to "Signature Event Context," but Derrida does not go about it in the same manner. This change in strategy has a great deal to do with the fact that neither Austin nor Searle use a Platonic or Hegelian dialectic in their theorizing, and since Derrida's work is almost exclusively a response to other texts the

\(^{174}\) *Limited, Inc.*, 116.
antidialectical posture evidenced in "Plato's Pharmacy" is lacking. Beyond this, however, Derrida sees the entire Western metaphysical tradition as delimited by certain structural necessities that make something like Plato's dialectic possible. These structural necessities also form the horizons of Austin's and Searle's work. Because of the structural continuity stretching from Plato to Austin it is conceivable that Derrida could have taken a similar antidialectical posture in *Limited, Inc.* Instead, however, Derrida chose to deconstruct Austin's work by way of the notion of iterability, as the prior condition of any speech-act. Derrida's reply to Searle, in addition to extending the notion of iterability, attempted to perform the notion of iterability by continually recontextualizing Searle's remarks.

This performative critique of Searle brings up a larger question of Derrida's methodology. In any of his deconstructive readings must he necessarily take up an oppositional position such that his thought will inevitably be overdetermined by what he trying to delimit? To rephrase Derrida's critique of his notion of undecidability: one sense of iterability determines in a manner that is still too *antispeech*-act, hence too *speech*-act, that which resists authorial intent or even context. Is Derrida's adversarial stance a necessary result of his methodology? Is this the violence that is continually suppressed by his texts? Are his texts the alibi to this murder? Perhaps, but Columbo will have to wait until the next episode to pursue this mystery.

5. *Via Conclusio*

This thesis has been an embroidery of sorts, attempting to tie the disparate threads of *Phaedrus* scholarship with the thought of Jacques Derrida. The survey of *Phaedrus* scholarship was an attempt to place Derrida's thought in a larger context. In the survey it seemed that the
overriding concern of recent *Phaedrus* scholarship has been to establish the unity of a dialogue that was long thought to be badly composed. Every scholar had a different angle on the unity of the *Phaedrus*, but all were convinced of its unity to some degree. There must be an overarching theme or literary device that holds the two parts of the dialogue together. Regardless of the variety of possibilities that were suggested as a solution to the unity problem, one underlying assumption remained constant: Plato was the architect of this unity.

This unanimity among recent *Phaedrus* scholarship provided an excellent background against which to view Derrida's essay "Plato's Pharmacy," a guardrail, as it were. Even though Derrida staunchly defends Plato's genius in constructing the dialogue, there are, for Derrida, factors beyond Plato's control that delimit the possibilities of the dialogue. These factors are the binary oppositions which demarcate the field in which Plato could write. As Derrida begins to untangle the threads of the *Phaedrus* he continually points out how Plato's thought is governed by certain hierarchical oppositions. Derrida explores these hierarchical relations through Egyptian mythology, and particularly the position of writing. It seems that in Plato's text writing is always connected to the signifier *pharmakon*. It is this *pharmakon* thread that Derrida wants to follow in and out of Plato's text. The second chapter of this thesis is concerned with Derrida's following of the *pharmakon* thread within Plato's text.

The third chapter of this thesis follows Derrida and the *pharmakon* thread beyond what is rigorously called the Platonic text, but what is necessarily suggested within it. With this move Derrida seeks to delimit the notion of inside and outside and all the other hierarchical oppositions which can be generated from it. Through an exposition of the pharmakon chain as it impinges on the Platonic text Derrida seeks to show that the privilege accorded to the higher term in the
oppositional hierarchies of Western metaphysics is based on an incision that cannot be textually maintained. When Plato seeks to articulate the relationship of speech to writing he will do so by way of a metaphor derived from the lower position, writing. Derrida sees this borrowing as contamination of the oppositions. Derrida seeks to account for this contamination through the *pharmakon* chain he has been following. Derrida sees the *pharmakon* because of its ambivalence, containing both sides of the oppositions. This *pharmakon* points to a prior matrix of undecidability which accounts for the possibility and impossibility of maintaining the hierarchical oppositions. Derrida concludes "Plato's Pharmacy" with Plato trying unsuccessfully to separate out his *pharmaka* into poisons and cures. Chapters two and three were largely exegetical in nature attempting to provide the reader with a commentary on what Derrida said and why he said it with recourse to Derrida's other writings and his intellectual genealogy.

The fourth chapter of this thesis takes a more systematic look at some of the notions that animate Derrida's work: generalized writing, philosophy as decision, and the ethics of deconstruction. These particular notions were chosen because of their pertinence to Derrida's thought in general and "Plato's Pharmacy" in particular. This chapter engaged both positive and negative critics of Derrida concerning his methodology and direction. Criticisms of Derrida's work charging him with nihilism and political irresponsibility upon closer examination stem from a poor reading of Derrida's texts.

This final chapter was a playful attempt to explain and re-evaluate Derrida from a different angle. The chance similarity between a photograph of Derrida and Columbo provided an opportunity to examine Derrida's notion of repetition and his methodology. Viewed in this light Derrida becomes a textual detective exposing the violence suppressed in the texts of philosophy.
When the roles are reversed, and Derrida becomes the suspect, it seems that he is also guilty of a certain violence. His methodology requires an oppositional stance that ultimately overdetermines his own writings within the horizon he is trying to delimit. Derrida would not deny the violence in his writings. The question remains, however, how much that violence determines his possible response to the Western metaphysical tradition.

In the end, I find Derrida's project very compelling. He has opened up texts in a way that was not thinkable before. I am especially appreciative of Derrida's more recent work in ethics. It seems to me that Derrida's writings hold the potential to bear the most fruit, not just within philosophical discourse, but in pedagogy, institutional theory, politics, and many other fields. The greatest danger in Derrida's thought, though, is his followers who have the ability to mutate Derrida's thought so quickly as to make it unpalatable for many. Regardless of his appropriation by others, I think Derrida will remain an important catalyst in disturbing the consolations of philosophy.
Bibliography


