

**Pharmakon.fr****Seminar 21-02-2012****First class****From Nicholas Carr to Plato  
From pharmacology to organology****(Translated by Terence Blake)**

Reminder concerning last year

Last year we situated this seminar in the context of the industrialisation of tertiary retentions (R3) so that the question became, as query, via search engines or heuristic machines, an object of economic exploitation founded on a new organology.

This organology will be the object of our research this year, and as such we will find it on a hermeneia of Plato, who we will read on the basis of

1. the course on pharmakon.fr consecrated to the Republic, i.e. for this year to the Phaedrus (next year's course will be entitled Republic 2),
2. the questions that Nicholas Carr poses in THE SHALLOWS

A few words on this book: Carr poses the problem of intellectual technologies such that, in practicing them, he experiences what in TAKING CARE I described as a diseconomy of attention, which is equally a libidinal diseconomy (but Carr does not see that).

In doing this,

1. he refers to the Phaedrus, as well as to certain commentators on Plato, in particular to Havelock and Ong,
2. he mobilises the new resources provided by the neurosciences of reading to understand what the literal pharmakon does not only to the psychic apparatus, but to

its cerebral support (and in passing he refers to Freud's Outline of a Scientific Psychology, written in 1895, to which we will evidently return).

What Alain Giffard (I have sent you a text by him, which we will of course come back to later) has shown is that this «double-sided» economy of attention, of which Google is the principal representative and which is thus also a diseconomy of attention, is not the object, in *THE SHALLOWS*, of a pharmacological approach: the book does not present itself as a research on the possibilities of elaborating a therapeutics of this pharmakon that is the digital writing constituted by the industrial R3s of our time.

I insist here with you on the thesis that I am advancing here only in passing: the «digital» is the latest form of writing – it is part of the process of grammatisation – and it is by taking up again the question of writing (and of reading) at its root that one can question the industrial R3.

Finally, this year I would like to show how and why a pharmacology must be founded on a general organology: we shall see that this question can be posed on the basis of Plato himself, and why here Nicholas Carr constitutes a valuable resource.

To carry out this programme during the next 8 classes,

1. we shall return to the Phaedrus and the stakes of what is elaborated there, and which will be fully deployed in the Republic, namely the dialectic,
2. next we will read Nicholas Carr himself,
3. we will go further into these questions with Jacob von Uexküll: «A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans», and Bowlby «Attachment and Loss», Winnicott, Freud and diverse other references.

We shall also see that Carr's approach lacks an inscription in the general context of the industries of the capture of attention which arose in the 20th Century. Their psychopathology, studied by Zimmerman and Christakis, whose work is currently being taken up in various ways, for example in France with Michel Desmurget, must be included in our reflection.

Now, for this class and no doubt for the next one, let us return to Plato and to the end of the dialogue of the *Phaedrus*.

\*

After Socrates emphasizes that **he is in a delirium because of Phaedrus**, which, he says, gives to his ideas a «poetic cast», the dialogue turns to **Lysias and his written discourse** – in comparison to that of Socrates.

Phaedrus informs us that in Athens at the end of the 5th Century B.C., a «politician» (*politikon*) has accused Lysias of being a **logographon**, a **speech-writer or discourse-monger**.

A long exchange then takes place between Socrates and Phaedrus over **the vices and the virtues of the practice of writing** in the service of the **preparation in advance of written discourses**, fruits of «logography».

However, it must be emphasized here **for Socrates, there can be «dignity in writing» or in «being a writer»**: speech writers can write **in vain**, but some of them write **advisedly**, and this is why one must stipulate:

1. that «**the mere fact of writing speeches is not shameful**» (258d), and that **the question is to know what distinguishes writing well and writing badly (*tou kalos te kai mè graphein*).**

2. Further, Socrates adds that the question concerning writing bears on speech equally:

Ugliness consists in not **speaking** (*legein*), in not writing (*graphein*) well. 258d.

On the other hand, Socrates does not confuse **logographs** and **writers**, i.e. «those who are **worthy to write**» (*axios einai suggraphein*).

In other words, if it is true that writing is a **pharmakon**,

. on the one hand **speech is a pharmakon too** to a certain extent (though differently from writing, and we will try to understand how and why)

. on the other hand this *pharmakon* **can and must be positively practiced**: we have to do here with a **question of therapeutics**. And it is precisely thus that the question of the *pharmakon*, which comes after these considerations, is introduced.

I emphasize these points because a certain reception of *Plato's Pharmacy* has consisted in posing that Plato **condemns** writing. I myself for a long time considered that as established. And many readers of Derrida did the same - including no doubt Derrida himself. But that is not really what happens. This is what Henry Joly maintains in *Le renversement platonicien*, as well as Vicaire and **others**. And this is also the position that Eric Havelock defends in *Preface to Plato*, where he goes much farther - as Nicholas Carr insists, but according to me, and I think that Alain Giffard shares this point of view, without drawing all the conclusions - since Havelock, like Walter Ong, the author of *Orality and literacy, the technologizing of the world*, sees in Plato a critique of poetry i.e. of the oral tradition, and

a plea in favour of the new technology of writing, (88)

Further I myself maintained in last year's course devoted to the *Symposium* that **Plato, between *Meno* and *Phaedrus*, breaks with the tragic age where poetry constitutes a mnemotechnic** and thus a ***hypomnésis*** which is supposed to give access to an *anamnésis* - and when Socrates ironises over the *tekhnè* of the rhapsode Ion (dans *Ion*), these questions are already in play.

The points of view of Havelock and Ong are in total opposition to Derrida's reading of Plato. In fact I think that this subject is less clear than Carr implies, and that **the critique of the oral tradition is not in itself a plea in favour of writing**: it is in both cases the calling into question of *tekhnè* i.e. of *hypomnésis* as against *anamnésis*, which is essentially immunised.

On the other hand, I tried to show last year and again this year that what is at stake here is the passage from a **tragic**, (i.e. also **mystagogic**) **society**,, to a **metaphysical society**, such that it poses in principle the possibility and the necessity of breaking with mysteries and with stories – in favour of a generalisation of the teaching of all things, including of virtue, **which radically contradicts the position of Socrates.**

After this, it is not a question of pleading for the new technology of writing against poetry, but of **giving a new sense to *anamnèsis*, and of opposing it to *hypomnèsis*, poetry just as much as writing proceeding, according to Plato, from *hypomnèsis*, i.e. from *tekhnè*. And *tekhnè* must itself be put under the **control of the dialectic**, i.e.: **of a *logos* which owes nothing to this *tekhnè*** but which, in providing it with **criteria** which **precede** this technicity, i.e. this **pharmacological condition**, constitutes in a way its **therapeutic *a priori*.****

I will try to show here:

- . that there is no *a priori* therapeutic;
- . that the philosopher cannot be a therapist, and that he must be a pharmacologist;
- . that as a citizen he is nevertheless a prescriber of therapeutics, and that in this context he can and must put his pharmacological critiques in the service public debate and of political life insofar as it consists essentially in producing such therapeutics as are formalised by positive law and by «rational» sciences (which also think «de jure», i.e. in passing from fact to right) because conditioned by the respect of the criterium which, as experience of *aletheia*, assembles all the disciplines that form what is called, because of the very possibility of this assembly, *universal knowledge*.

Last year, in this seminar, I defended the thesis that **all these questions arise in the context of a grammatisation of the Greek world.** This is what Walter Ong calls the «technologisation of the world». And I maintained that **it is as a play of R3 that induces a new interplay between R1**

and R2 that writing brings to emergence the question of *aletheia* as ultimate criterium in those operations of selections that retentions and protentions always are – the projection of a common horizon of protentions being the fundamental question of the polis insofar that, as site of *Geschichte* and of *Historie*, which Heidegger underlines in his *Introduction to metaphysics*, it has also become the locus of decision, i.e. of *krisis* and of *krinein*.

(It is because this **critical dimension**, in the historical sense which also designates a **new and extraordinary modality of psychosocial individuation**, is essential to this **temporality** that is historical society, that the **moratorium on critique imposed by the PS will have been a huge caprice** – and one which concerns Deleuze just as much as Derrida.

To get rid of the question of critique, et **reduce the concept of crisis to its ordinary acception so appreciated by the media, is also to get rid of the question of krinein insofar as it is characteristic of historical time**. Also, **it is to pose as acquired the «end of history»** – I am thinking here of course of the debate opened on the basis of Francis Fukuyama's work. To contest Fukuyama's thesis, is thus to **reevaluate radically the very concept of krisis**. And to this day that remains to be done.)

In this seminar, I would like to revisit all these questions but in integrating, in the wake of Carr's book, *The Shallows*, the question of **psychagogy** as it has been constituted in our time as the stake of a **neuropwer** and **neuropolitics** – and in the context of an epistemic danger: **neurocentrism**. For in fact, **we live in an epoch of the digital R3, which constitutes an industrial pharmakon, and which is even at the heart of industrial development, and of the neurosciences such as they open multiple and eminently pharmacological possibilities, including those of a neuropower which can constitute diverse types of therapeutics or of neglect**.

(It is in this context that we should analyse the current controversy over autism, and which opposes **neurosciences and psychoanalysis** – which we may come back to later).

But we are also going to see that it is possible to **read the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* from this point of view**. This will lead us to the **necessity of apprehending pharmacology on the basis of a general organology** - where the **cerebral organ of the CNS poses new questions** which permit us also to **reread Derrida's questions differently perhaps than Derrida himself did**.

This is also a way for me to tie in with my book *Taking Care* and with the debate that I had opened with Foucault. In effect in that work I underlined that the question of **biopower** and of **biopolitics** had to be enriched and transformed by integrating the constitution of a **psychopower** and of a **noopolitics** such as those the **psychotechnologies**, which became generalised during the 20th Century with the cultural industries and the mass media, will have put at the heart of consumerism and so of capitalism, itself become from this fact intrinsically pulsional.

So it is **neuropower** and **neuropolitics** which **tie these two questions together** - in that precisely we have seen that they must be approached **from both an organological and a pharmacological point of view**.

\*

In this double question of pharmacology and of therapeutics, in this dialogue as in the *Gorgias*, the stake is, precisely in the passage that we are commenting, the relation to **rhetoric** - but to which from now on **must be opposed dialectics**.

So far, I would say that we can find ourselves more or less in agreement with Plato: I believe in effect that we must **distinguish between practices of the *pharmakon*** such as those that exploit its toxic side, i.e. which lead for example to the **confusion of good and evil**, which for us consists in effectuating **short-circuits in the TI (transindividuation)**, and others which, on the contrary, **take care** of their interlocutor.

There can be short-circuits in the TI only because a psychic individuation is always a collective individuation. We could say that **individuation is good, and disindividuation is bad** - it being understood that disindividuation is that which cuts



psychic individuation from collective individuation (this is what Socrates says in the *Gorgias*): this is how one could attempt to pose the question of good and evil differently. And we will return to it no doubt. But we must add that there is a **necessity for disindividuation** and that all this must be thought in the heart of a *différance* with an «a» where disindividuation can be a moment of individuation: such is always the pharmacological point of view where the poles which seem to be opposed in reality are ceaselessly composed. I spoke about this in my last book, and to reply to a question from Ludovic Duhem. I also spoke about it in «Pharmacology of the question».

In the following passage of the dialogue of the *Phaedrus*, I can no longer agree with the progression of Plato's reasoning, when he posits that **to practice writing**, one must **first** have **established the truth** of what will then be written, *after* this establishing. This is what Socrates says in 259 e:

Does not the excellence of a discourse suppose (*uparkhein*), in the spirit of he who speaks, the knowledge of the truth about the question to be dealt with ?

But consequently, that signifies as well that **truth and its consideration precede speech itself**, if it is true that the question which concerns **writing** concerns **equally speech**.

The whole difficulty is there: it is **thus** that **anamnesis is opposed to hypomnesis**, and it is here that I consider that Plato errs.

Here one must also speak of **psychagogy**. What is at stake here? This is a question that we will pose perhaps to Ed Cohen by way of Foucault. Be that as it may, let us say now that it is to be examined in terms of the **question of the relation between R1, 2 and 3**.