

Geschlecht I

Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference

Derrida confesses himself riveted by Heidegger's use of the word *Geschlecht*. Derrida's two principal sources in the initial *Geschlecht* article are, to repeat, Heidegger's 1928 logic lectures, especially the tenth and eleventh sections of the course, and the 1953 essay on Trakl, "Language in the Poem: A Placement of Georg Trakl's Poem." The more positive side of Derrida's reading claims that Heidegger is seeking something like a pre-dual sexuality, that is, an erotic power that is not married, as it were, to binary difference and male-female opposition. The less positive side of his reading wonders whether the "order of implications" that Heidegger tries to institute in fundamental ontology—for example, his desire to distinguish ontological semination or bestrewal (*die Streuung*) from ontic dispersion and dissemination (*die Zerstreung*), and yet to prevent the "ontic" from becoming something merely negative and nugatory on account of that distinction—can be sustained. *Geschlecht I* therefore closes by confronting the method of "privative interpretation" in and for existential analysis and the vast problem of *just-plain-life*, that is, of life as *nur-noch-Leben*, interpreted *per impossibile* as Dasein minus care—*per impossible* since Dasein minus care equals zero. Yet a more detailed synopsis is called for.

Derrida begins his *Geschlecht* article by noting that it is easy to see and to say that Heidegger nowhere writes about sex and sexual difference. All too easy. Perhaps facile, therefore—whether in discussions among "Heideggerians" themselves or among nonphilosophers who concern themselves with "sexual politics." The complaint is of course not without justification. One looks in vain for the German equivalents of the words *erotic* and *sexual*, or even *male* and *female*, in Heidegger's magnum opus, *Being and Time*. And even if "birth" becomes an important theme there,

nativity rather than or in addition to fatality (SZ 372–74), it turns out that it is not a woman but a *Dasein* that gives birth.¹ What can one therefore make of Heidegger’s silence concerning sex and the sexes—doubtless one of his several notorious silences? Derrida notes that neither “sexuality” nor “politics” are major items in Heidegger’s vocabulary, so that it is not surprising that “sexual politics” is clearly beneath him (Ps 397/9).² Yet Derrida is not in a hurry to correct Heidegger’s oversights or to fill his silences. His concern is to think through “the ontological difference” in Heidegger’s thought, especially as he develops it during the years 1927–28, and to bring a number of questions surrounding “sexual difference” into rapport with the ontological.

The exemplary being for the existential analysis of *Being and Time*, which is to prepare the way for the question of the meaning of being in general, is *Dasein*. The *Da-* of *Dasein* does not manifest sexual difference, at least in any obvious way. Such a difference, along with all the adventures, joys, and calamities that accompany it, Heidegger would presumably relegate to some regional ontology or to one or other constellation of the “sciences of man,” to biology or anthropology, sociology or psychology, or perhaps even religion. Or would he? *Could* he? What about that extraordinary discovery of Heidegger’s called *Befindlichkeit*, which is the initial yet global disclosure of the being of *Dasein*, the disclosure by which *Dasein* “finds itself to be”? True, we translate *Befindlichkeit* hopelessly and helplessly into English as “state of mind” or “disposition,” even though it is clear that Heidegger means something quite different and much more fundamental. If we stay with the awkward expression, how-we-find-ourselves-to-be, is it entirely clear that not merely at first and for the most part but fundamentally such “finding ourselves” has nothing to do with our sexual being, our sexual relations, and our sexual confusions? Do our moods and attunements to the world, our *Stimmungen*, in all their astonishing variety and intensity, have nothing to do with our being sexed and gendered creatures? Does that famous hormonal spectrum we learned about long ago display no rainbow hues of sexuality? Or does the word *spectrum* imply that the sliding scale of hormones flattens sexuality and sexual difference out, as it were, to sheer indifference? In any case, can we

1. SZ refers to Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 12th ed. (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1972), a reprint of the seventh edition, released in 1953; the first edition was published in 1927. I refer to the 12th edition by page (as here) or section number throughout.

2. In the body of my text I will refer to the articles in the *Geschlecht* series, at least when the particular source is clear, merely by a page reference to the French and English editions.

truly conceive of a *Mitsein* and a *Mitdasein*, that is, a being with others, other Daseins, that would not be at least influenced by the gender and genital identities, perplexities, boondoggles, and dreams of every Dasein we have ever met? And what about that *Berühren*, that “touching” which no chair can do to a wall but which the French *chair*, that is, the flesh, does every day and every night? Are the disclosures of touch ever slack? Does the erotic tension ever diminish to the zero point? Is such tension unrelated to those mighty magnetisms, those famous reasons of the heart, that do not yield so quickly to our understanding? Are we entirely clear that these mighty lodestones have nothing to do with fundamental differences, with the multiple and proliferating *existentials*—for are not sex and gender differences a prime case of the *daseinsmäßig*, that is, of qualities that are “of the measure of Dasein” and that will not yield to categories? Why else would all the world be so terrified of them and fling labels over them so desperately and pass civil and religious laws concerning them and, if the laws will not stop them, how about mobs? Finally, can Heidegger be certain that the ontological difference, namely, the difference that opens up in the clearing of being in order to let beings show themselves *as* themselves, has nothing to do with gender and sexual differences? Derrida does not spell out all of these questions as I have done here, but I suspect that such issues as *Befindlichkeit*, *Berühren*, and *Mitdasein* prompt and prod his desire to juxtapose sexual and ontological differences. Yet let me rein in my wild steed, whether stallion or mare I cannot tell, and return to Derrida’s and Heidegger’s texts.

Ontological difference, or perhaps the pre-ontological difference (SZ 13, 16–17, 65), is marked by the capacity of a being to ask questions, including the question of the meaning of being. For Heidegger, such a capacity has the highest possible value—it is the difference of all differences, the difference that makes all the difference when speaking of being. Thus “sexual” difference does not seem to occupy the same “height,” *hauteur* (396/8), as ontological difference. “Sexual” difference is perhaps *ontic* difference, difference with an *existentiel* import, but with no *existential* significance. Yet it is not as though human sexuality invites commentary only from the hacks who write for the illustrated weeklies that pile up in slovenly stacks at hair studios. Would philosophy consist of footnotes to Plato if Plato had not had his beloved Socrates, who in turn “loved what is most alive”? And what of “solider” Aristotle, the doctor’s son? And in modernity, what could ever relieve the laboriousness of bachelor Kant if not his incisive pragmatic discourse on the wiles of womanhood? What tempts Schelling to sail off to the ancient isle of Samothrace, there to seek

the pristine deity in Demeter and Persephone, while his friend Hegel, thinking of Schlegel's *Lucinde*, grows grim about the mouth and drops dialectic for vitriol? What forces Nietzsche to admit that, after all, these jibes of his at *das Weib* are merely "his" truths? Where would philosophy and philology be without the spark of Eros? Does that spark not attain to the heights of questioning? Has Heidegger merely *silenced* sex? And has he done so merely by chance? That seems unlikely. Derrida wagers that such silence and such a silencing are worth investigating.

Heidegger is unwilling, in his fundamental ontology of Dasein, to visit the parlous realms of gender and sexuality; it is as though sexual difference is neither here nor there for the "here" and "there," the *Da-*, of *Da-sein*. In spite of what we have said above concerning the existential structure of *Befindlichkeit*, a Heideggerian of the strict persuasion could certainly argue that sexuality as such offers no royal road to the structures of being-in-the-world, care, temporality, and so on, although "everydayness" has a much better chance. Yet Heidegger himself revisits—or confronts for the first time—the question of sexual difference soon after the publication of *Being and Time*, in section 10 of his 1928 lecture course, "The Metaphysical Underpinnings of Logic, with Leibniz as Point of Departure."³ Here, in sections 10 and 11, Heidegger offers some "guidelines" concerning the problem of the "transcendence" of Dasein in *Being and Time*. He confirms what he says peremptorily in that book: for the purposes of the question of being, the exemplary being is the one that *questions*. That interrogating, interrogative being "we grasp terminologically as Dasein" (SZ 12; Ps, 399/11). In the 1928 course Heidegger explains that it is the *neutrality* of the neuter-gendered term *das Dasein* that justifies its use for ontology. The neutrality of Dasein is clearly quite general in its scope: Heidegger means to exclude all "ontic" relations, such as race, nationality, age, personality type, intelligence, education, health, sex, gender, sexual preference, and all matters of lifestyle and personal taste. These facets of existence might pertain to a philosophical anthropology or an ethics; they might even be discussed in what Heidegger calls—quite mysteriously—a "metaphysics of Dasein." Yet they play no role in fundamental ontology, which is the ontology of neutral Dasein. Dasein is, as it were, the

3. Published as Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, Gesamtausgabe vol. 26 (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1978). Section 10 offers some "guidelines" for the interpretation of *Being and Time*; section 11 deals with the problem of *transcendence* in that work. For a detailed discussion, see IM, ch. 2, and DL, chs. 5, 7, and 8, esp. 184–89, 248–51, and 252–65.

text from which the meaning of being can be read or deciphered (SZ 7). Here Derrida repeats the point he makes in virtually every prior text of his on Heidegger: even though the existential-ontological self-examination of the *questioner* appears to guarantee the *proximity* of the research(er) to its object, with the questioner questioning the (existence of) the questioner him- or herself, Derrida—perhaps recalling the traditional definition of thought-thinking-itself in Aristotle and Hegel—raises a suspicion. Even if Heidegger is careful to cite repeatedly the problem of phenomenological *access* to the matter in question, is there not something axiomatic and even peremptory in this initial decision? It is a decision to *name*, to give a *neutral, neuter name*, to the questioner: “This being that we ourselves in each case are and that, among other things, has the ontological possibility of questioning, we grasp terminologically as *Dasein*” (ibid.). If such “grasping,” *fassen*, seems peremptory—Derrida does not shy from calling it elliptical and even brutal (399/11)—Heidegger takes pains in his 1928 lecture course to justify that decision. The very first justification, in the form of a “guideline,” involves the choice of a *neuter* word, *das Dasein*, rather than the masculine *der Mensch*. The neuter word means to neutralize all aspects of the being of the questioner except this one, to wit, questioning. Neuter and neutral *Dasein* is not indifferent to its being, to be sure. Neuter and neutral *Dasein* is *the questioner*—and otherwise, in the purview of ontology, *nothing*.

The elimination of all ontic characterizations of *Dasein*, its sex, ethnic origin, place and date of birth, and so on, is surely bound up with the ontological priority that modern philosophy gives to the *thinking* subject, the Cartesian *cogito*. Derrida himself describes Heidegger’s reduction of *Dasein* to the *questioner* as *le trait nu de ce rapport à soi* (Ps 399). In my first letter to him, dated January 3, 1983, which was in response to the *typescript* of this first *Geschlecht*, I agreed that the “terminological” decision in *Sein und Zeit* appears to be “already framed in metaphysical subjectivity.” However, I asked whether the emphasis on *Mitsein* in the 1928 lectures (the emphasis on at least *two* in the *Da-* of *Da-sein*) did not “help to de-center the *Selbstsein* of *Dasein*.” I suggested that there is, at least by 1928, something like a profound and primordial *Mitsein*, and that Derrida himself might wish to highlight—and even radicalize—his treatment of *Mitsein* in this first *Geschlecht*.⁴

4. The correspondence with Derrida is available at the IMEC Archive in Caen.

And yet, whatever one may say of *Dasein* as *Mitsein*, the only neutrality Heidegger discusses or even mentions, as though leaping ahead into uncharted territory, which is the territory into which his *second* guideline leads us, is that of a neither-nor with regard to sexual difference. Neutral *Dasein* is marked (preeminently?) by *Geschlechtslosigkeit*, “sexlessness,” “asexuality.” One is surprised by this leap ahead, and, although Derrida does not venture such an absurdity, one may in the confusion of the moment be tempted to translate *Neutralität* quite falsely as “neutered.” *Dasein* is “also,” and Derrida underscores Heidegger’s “also,” “neither of the two sexes.” Heidegger thus appears to be certain that there are only two, but he does not ask whether this duality is an ontic-existential happenstance or an ontological desideratum. The being that or who *we* are, viewed ontologically, is neither female nor male. In “our” factual concretion, “we” may presumably be one or the other; as those who are involved in their being, however, we are neither. Yet why neutralize sexuality first of all, and not only first of all but exclusively, since no other ontic quality or characteristic is mentioned? And why confirm the duality of the sexes by this very neutralization? From the outset, one must say, Derrida is gripped by this *keines von beiden*, “neither of the two,” of Heidegger’s proclamation, *keines von beiden Geschlechtern ist*.

At this point in his exposition Derrida himself leaps ahead. He notes that almost thirty years later Heidegger will engage the issue of “*Geschlecht*” in all its multifarious senses. Derrida does not yet mention the title of the relevant essay by Heidegger, but he is clearly referring to the second essay on Georg Trakl in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, “Die Sprache im Gedicht: Eine Erörterung von Georg Trakls Gedicht.” This is the text that “magnetizes” the entire *Geschlecht* series—especially its third, unpublished, generation. To repeat, only in the sense of “sex” will Heidegger be certain that there are but two *Geschlechter*, and he denies that this has simply to do with the grammar of the word. To be fair, one might object that it may have to do with the word itself: *die Geschlechter* could of course refer to manifold generations, tribes, and coinages, and yet the most “natural” translation of the plural will always be “the two sexes.” Yet Derrida would surely reply, and rightly reply: From what nature does this “natural” translation derive? And would grammar alone account for Heidegger’s singling out the *duality* of the *Geschlechter*, neither of which marks the questioner as such? At all events, whether singular or plural, what is this thing called *Geschlecht* all about? And why must it be excluded from fundamental ontology first of all?

Derrida’s opening statement concerning this first generation of *Geschlecht*, footnoted in *Psyché*, merits extended quotation, in part because

it is clear about the “magnetism” of Heidegger’s Trakl essay, but also in part because it mirrors the gesture of Heidegger’s “placement” or “situating” of Trakl—as Heidegger situates Trakl, so Derrida wishes to situate “*Geschlecht*” in Heidegger:

This essay, like the following one (“The Hand of Heidegger: *Geschlecht II*”) . . . will have to content itself with sketching in a preliminary fashion an interpretation to come by which I would like to situate *Geschlecht* in Heidegger’s path of thought. In the path of his writing as well—and the impression, or inscription, marked by the word *Geschlecht* will not have been there for nothing. I will leave this word in its own language for reasons that should impose themselves on us in the course of the reading. And it certainly is a matter of “*Geschlecht*” (the word for sex, race, family, generation, lineage, species, genre), and not of *Geschlecht* as such: one will not so easily clear away the mark of the word (“*Geschlecht*”) that blocks our access to the thing itself (the *Geschlecht*); in that word, Heidegger will much later descry the imprint of a blow or a stroke (*Schlag*). He will do so in a text we will not speak of here but toward which this reading is heading, and by which, in truth, I know it is already being drawn as toward a magnet: *Die Sprache im Gedicht*. (Ps 395/7)

Much could be made of this being magnetized, *aimanté(e)*, a word so close to *aimer*, “to love,” and to the *amant(e)*, “the lover,” a figure that occupies Derrida as much as it does Georg Trakl. Could it possibly have occupied Heidegger? He too would have been fascinated by this word *aimanté*, even if it belongs to the French language, inasmuch as its roots go back to the earliest Greek thinkers. The *Petit Robert*, which is anything but petite, has several listings for this word. The masculine noun *aimant* appears to be a transmogrified *diamant*, our *diamond* or *adamantine* substance, and it means a magnetized stone. Yet the homomorphic adjective *aimant*, from the verb *aimer*, means “naturally inclined to love,” tender and affectionate. *Aimanté(e)*, “magnetized,” would therefore be a word beloved of both Eryximachos the physician and Ion the rhapsode (of Plato’s *Symposium* and *Ion*, respectively); it would be a word also for the omni-magnetized Lucretius, who offers us a vision of the power of an inverted magnet (*exultare etiam Samothracia ferrea vidi / et ramenta simul ferri furere intus ahenis / in scaphiis, lapis hic Magnes cum subditus*

esset: / usque adeo fugere a saxo gestire videtur, "I have even seen Samothracian iron dance, and at the same time iron fillings go mad in a bronze bowl, when this magnet stone was applied underneath: so eager seems the iron to escape from the stone!"—*De rer. nat.* 6:1044–46); finally, to truncate the litany, it would be a word for both Empedocles of Acragas and the greatest of contemporary neo-Empedocleans, Sigmund Freud (SA *Ergänzungsband*, 384–86); it would be one of those macro-microcosmic secret words that joins—by magnetism—human beings to the larger world. "Magnetism," it may be recalled, is the principal category for Schelling's nature philosophy of the 1790s, which seeks the principle that unites the organic and anorganic realms of the universe. A very dramatic word for Derrida to use, no doubt, as though a mere poet, Georg Trakl, had the power to draw a philosophical project entirely to himself. It is above all in the third, unpublished *Geschlecht* that Derrida was to take up Heidegger's 1953 Trakl essay in detail. The fact that precisely this generation of *Geschlecht* is missing is therefore decisive for the "situation" of the entire series. Initially, one may put the question negatively: Where can the entire series be heading if it is missing its second pole, the one to which a certain magnetism draws it? As for the missing generation, only one thing is certain: it is headed toward that blow or stroke, the *coup* or *frappe*, the *Schlag* that is the very root of *Geschlecht*.

Astonishingly, yet perhaps also quite fittingly, it may have been Jean Genet who gives Derrida the word *aimanter*, *aimantation*, or gives it *back* to him, as it were. In his homage to Derrida, published by Jean Ristat in a special issue of *Les Lettres françaises* in the spring of 1972, Genet cites the opening lines of Derrida's then recently published *La Pharmacie de Platon*. He compares these lines to the opening lines of Proust's *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*. The "attack" of Derrida's lines, in the musical sense of an instrumentalist's attack, is absolutely singular, according to Genet. Not the usual coarse dynamism of academic prose but a "gentle trembling" leads each phrase to the next one. The *sens* of Derrida's lines, in the sense of both their meaning and their direction, is guided by something entirely new. Genet calls it "a very subtle magnetism [*aimantation*] which would be found, not in the words, but beneath them, almost beneath the page" (cited at BP 293).

Let us return to the "guidelines" of Heidegger's 1928 lecture course, especially the guideline concerning "sexlessness." It is not Heidegger's silence about sex but his precipitation toward it that fascinates Derrida. Neutrality "also" means that *Dasein* is at least in some sense sexless; in spite of the "also," however, sexual difference is, to repeat, precisely where

the examples both begin and end. Perhaps the neither-nor structure of the word *Neutralität*, the *ne-uter* indicating yet also negating binary opposition, leads automatically to the exemplary example of the duality of the sexes. Dasein is not human being, not *der Mensch*, and is thus a fortiori neither man nor woman, neither *Mann* nor *Frau*, and not even the neuter *das Weib*. Leads *automatically*, did we say? Whence the automatism? Whence the precipitation? Whence the exemplarity? Perhaps sex is all the students are interested in, and Heidegger is merely drawn to that example, automatically, by the circumstances of the lecture hall? Here Derrida remains discreet, practicing a silence of his own.

Derrida notes that to pass from the masculine and the feminine to the neuter is clearly, for Heidegger, to pass toward the transcendental, that is, toward a meditation on the conditions of the possibility of the *being* of Dasein. *Sein* is, without any sort of qualification or reservation, that which transcends, *das Transcendens schlechthin* (SZ 38; Ps 400/12). *Sein* also lies beyond any genus or species, and therefore a fortiori beyond anything like male or female. Yet transcendence transcends many things, and so, again, why stress sexlessness? One might think to explain it once again in terms of the duality expressed in the neuter itself, as the two-fold *ne-uter*, “neither-nor.” If Dasein is not *der Mensch*, then a fortiori it can be *ne male uter female*. Obviously. So patently obvious is this that one must ask why Heidegger needs to mention the fact. If fundamental ontology and the existential analytic of Dasein have nothing to do with anthropology and biology, does the special mention of sexual difference suggest that such a difference may be “beyond” biology? And, for that matter, beyond anthropology and even “ethics”? *Beyond* in the sense that sexual difference may have an import and an impact to which none of the “ontic” discourses is equal? Perhaps sexual difference is not a matter of course, not a matter that goes without saying, precisely in an ontology of difference?

Sexlessness, neutrality: apparently the negative is emphasized. And yet. In section 10 of the 1928 Leibniz-logic course Heidegger argues that the neutrality of Dasein with regard to sexuality is anything but impotence. Rather, such neutrality guarantees an “original positivity” and a “might of essence” (*ursprüngliche Positivität, Mächtigkeit des Wesens*) in Dasein. Indeed, Heidegger uses even stronger language—the language of being as such—in order to characterize such mightiness: “Only on the basis of the essence of ‘being’ [*Sein*] and transcendence, only within and on the basis of the full bestrewal [*Streuung*] that pertains to the essence of transcendence (cf. §10, guiding statement no. 6), can this idea of being

as plenipotency [*Übermacht*] be understood; yet not by interpreting it in the direction of an absolute Thou, nor as the good, nor as value, nor as the eternal” (26:211 n. 3).⁵ Derrida takes Heidegger at his word—and the generosity of his reading is nothing less than astonishing:

By means of such manifestly negative predicates, one must be able to read what Heidegger does not hesitate to call a “positivity [*Positivität*],” a richness, and even, in a heavily charged code, a “potency [*Mächtigkeit*].” This clarification suggests that sexless neutrality does not desexualize; on the contrary, its *ontological* negativity is not deployed with respect to *sexuality itself* (which it would instead liberate), but with respect to the marks of difference, or more precisely to *sexual duality*. There would be no *Geschlechtslosigkeit* except with respect to the “two”; sexlessness would be determined as such only to the degree that sexuality is immediately understood as binarity or sexual division. “But here sexlessness is not the indifference of an empty void [*die Indifferenz des leeren Nichtigen*], the weak negativity of an indifferent ontic nothing. In its neutrality Dasein is not the indifferent nobody and everybody, but the primordial positivity [*ursprüngliche Positivität*] and potency of being (or of essence [*Mächtigkeit des Wesens*]). (402/14)⁶

It may be that Heidegger is contemplating an as yet unheard-of sexuality, a sexuality that is “pre-dual,” “pre-differential,” and in some

5. In his review of the second volume of Ernst Cassirer’s *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Heidegger does not hesitate to describe “plenipotency” as the *mana* of so-called primitive belief systems. He writes: “The thrownness of Dasein implies a being delivered over to the world in such a way that being in the world is overwhelmed by that to which it is transposed. Plenipotency can announce itself as such and in general only to a being that is delivered over. . . . In its dependence on the overpowering, Dasein is benumbed by it; only as akin to such a reality, only by belonging to it, can Dasein experience itself. Accordingly, in thrownness every being that is in any way unveiled possesses the ontological trait of plenipotency (mana).” Heidegger’s quite extraordinary review of Cassirer’s *Mythical Thought* appears in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 49, no. 21 (1928): 999–1012; the quotation appears at 1009–10. On the “benumbing” or *Benommenheit* of Dasein, see now the discussion in chapter 4 of Krell, *Derrida and Our Animal Others*.

6. The second point I raised in my letter of January 3, 1983, was to object to the translation of *Mächtigkeit des Wesens* as *la puissance de l'être*. I suggested that *Wesen* and *Sein* not be conflated. The text as it appears in *Psyché* (402) now reads: “la puissance de l'être (ou de l'essence, *Mächtigkeit des Wesens*).” A small point—except for the fact that every aspect of Heidegger’s attempted metontology of 1928 appears to be large.

sense prior to all binary oppositions. If the duel between the sexes arises from the dual itself, if the war between the sexes arises from such binary opposition, it may be that Heidegger is dreaming of a sexuality that flourishes—and mightily—precisely by escaping the dominion of oppositional struggles for power and the resulting violence. In other words, Derrida suggests, the privation of sexual difference with respect to Dasein may function in the way the privative-alpha of ἀ-λήθεια functions, which is to say, not as a privation at all but as a liberation, emancipation, and upsurge of the truth of being—ontological difference and transcendence as such. To elaborate a bit: the “concealment” and “hiddenness” inherent in the word *Unverborgenheit*, “unconcealment,” is in Heidegger’s view not negative or pejorative. Rather, *Geborgenheit* suggests a being taken into protection, under wing, as it were; revealing does not tear what is hidden out of concealment. To unveil or uncover is thus to safeguard the things. Hölderlin remarks that “love is happy to uncover tenderly” (CHV 2:60), and Heidegger would concur that such gentle discovery is what he understands unconcealing to be. The implication would be that sexual difference, as we know it, namely, as binary opposition, obscures both the ontological difference between being and beings and the pre-ontological difference between Dasein and being; if by means of a metaphysics of Dasein or a metontology we can succeed in remembering the ontological and pre-ontological differences, the oppositional and conflictual traits of sexual difference may vanish. Or, inverting the proposition, if we can envisage the mightiness of essence and original positivity of neutrality in Dasein, we may be able to think ontological and pre-ontological difference more incisively. It is almost as though—Derrida does not go so far, at least not explicitly—Heidegger is joining Freud in the search for a sexual energy, a libido, or an Eros that would be unitary, and in that sense sexless; almost as though Heidegger is joining Lacan in the search for a singular signifier, a phallus that wields the power of essence only by disappearing, either in *pudeur* or repression or even in that feminine flaunting which we recognize in the cock of the walk. This would mean, not that the signifier would have nothing to do with desire and drive, but quite to the contrary, that it would be shared equally by men and women and all third + 1 kinds, indeed, shared as the fundamental source of the upsurge of being, the fecundity of essence, the transcendence of Dasein.

Yet this would mean that sexual difference as we know it is *both* the cause of a certain dispersion or fragmentation of Dasein into the public realm—one is sexual the way “they” say one is to be sexual, whether the

“they” in question is wretchedly conservative or wildly liberated—and the secret resource for a more original fecundity in Dasein. In other words, “by some strange yet very necessary displacement, sexual division itself leads us to negativity; and neutralization is *at once* the effect of such negativity and the erasure to which a thinking must submit this negativity so that an originary positivity can appear” (402/14–15). Derrida is already wondering whether for Heidegger there could be *two* strokes or blows delivered by sexual difference, a more primordial and even transcendental stroke yielding power to Dasein and a second blow driving Dasein into discord, dissension, and vacuous dispersion. If our *Geschlecht* has been subjected to two *Schläge*, how are these two strokes or blows to be envisaged? Which coinage or blow comes first, the neutral duality or the quarrelsome pair? Does one follow upon the other of necessity? And if the deleterious stroke comes second, but comes of necessity, is there any hope of restoration or recovery?

Derrida does note how enigmatic Heidegger’s “guidelines” are, and we may want to pause a moment over the enigma. A metaphysics of Dasein seems to be in search of a certain puissance of essence that hides within the neuter term. What would be our access to it? Existential analytic must be concrete, its descriptions factual and precise, its analyses in no case derived from some unexamined and traditionally inherited and accepted “ideal.” In *Being and Time* these descriptions and analyses seem to culminate in a sense that Dasein is not *mächtig*, is not equal to the thrownness of its existence, in spite of all the talk about resoluteness. Whence, concretely, the appearance of a *mighty* Dasein? In his 1928 lectures, Heidegger refers to an *Ursprung* and even an *Urquell*, an “origin” and “primal font” of existence, without letting us know where such a source may be found. Derrida notes that in the long essay *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, from the same year, Heidegger broaches a similar possibility for neutral, “sexless” Dasein. The issue here is that of “selfhood,” *Selbsttheit*, one of the most problematic concepts of the second division of *Being and Time*. Why problematic? Simply because the “occurring” or “happening” of Dasein, stretched and ecstatically self-stretching between birth and death, does not allow us to conceive of the “self” in any traditional way, as subject, ego, person, consciousness, and so on. In the same way that the interpretation of ecstatic temporality causes all prior interpretations of the “dimensions” of time to tremble, so does the standing-out of Dasein as *Existenz* (or *ek-sistence*) make it difficult to understand why and how Heidegger’s appeal to a “self” is either necessary or possible. To be sure, it

has to do with the individuating of Dasein, *die Vereinzelung*, yet whether the radically individuated Dasein can be called a “self” is unclear.

The problem of the “selfhood” of Dasein continues to trouble Heidegger in the 1928–29 essay—really a small monograph—*Vom Wesen des Grundes*. Derrida locates in this piece one of the rare references to sexuality, or *Geschlechtlichkeit*, once again in terms of *Neutralität*. Heidegger notes that the principal relation of Dasein to world is expressed in the formula, *Das Dasein existiert unwillen seiner*, “Dasein exists for the sake of itself” (W 53). He takes pains, however, to deny that such individuation has anything to do with egotism or “blind self-love.” Neither isolation nor self-aggrandizement is meant, neither selfishness nor altruism, but rather something that lies behind the possibility of all these. Again the founding and grounding language of *Being and Time* appears—what Derrida would call “the order of implication”:

Only because Dasein as such is determined by selfhood can an ego-self relate itself to a thou-self. Selfhood is the presupposition for the possibility of the ego, which only ever discloses itself in the thou. Yet selfhood is never related to the thou; rather, because selfhood first of all makes all these things possible, it is neutral toward I-being and Thou-being and all the more so toward, say, “sexuality.” (W 54)

At least two things are very odd in this passage, and Derrida notes one of them. Why does Heidegger emphasize sexuality here? Why *und erst recht . . .*? This is an a fortiori, to be sure, an “all the more so.” I and Thou *and all the more so sexuality* are neutral in selfhood. Yet the phrase is even stronger than this in colloquial German. It suggests: “To say nothing of . . .,” “And what *really first of all* applies here . . .” In other words, sexuality—if *Geschlechtlichkeit* may be Latinized—would be the prime case of neutrality, the very first item that would have to be neutralized. As in the Leibniz course, no other ontic feature of selfhood is mentioned, neither race nor ethnic origin nor family nor generation, even though *Geschlecht* could mean all of these. Strangest of all, however, is the “say,” *etwa*, on which Derrida does not comment. It translates the Latin *aliquando*, “sometime,” which also comes to mean “somewhere” and even “somehow” or “in some sense, say. . . .” Its gesture is one of uncertainty and indeterminacy, amounting to a “for example, perhaps”; it is often invoked in conditional clauses, expressing something that may or may

not prove to be appropriate. It is as though Heidegger were casting about for a convenient example, perhaps looking up in the air and moving his hand in rapid circles, seeking an object as yet unascertained, waiting for something to occur to him. As in the Leibniz course, however, sexuality is all he can come up with.

Another very odd thing about the passage is Heidegger's asserting, very much in passing, that the ego can disclose itself only in the Thou: "Selfhood is the presupposition for the possibility of an ego, which only ever discloses itself in the thou." Whether Heidegger means the presupposed selfhood as such or the derivative possibility of the ego is difficult to say; what seems clear is that something very close to "me" only ever discloses itself (*sich erschließt*) in the Thou (*immer nur im Du*). It is almost as though he has heard the ego-psychologists assert that the infant swallows his or her identity with the mother's milk, that is, swallows the mother *with* her milk, such that identity is always of the (m)other. Almost—although any communication between Heidegger and ego psychology seems highly unlikely. By contrast, Heidegger is clearly aware of Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, published four years earlier. And it almost seems as though there is a surreptitious reference to the voice of the "friend" that Dasein, when it comes to the disclosure of its ownmost possibilities, "always carries with itself"—the very theme that will dominate the fourth generation of Derrida's *Geschlecht*. If this seems too fanciful, consider the final sentence of Heidegger's small monograph on the essence of ground: "And only by our being able to listen into the remoteness does there temporalize for Dasein as a self the incipient answer that arises from our Dasein-with, from our being-with-others, such that the ego can apply itself to the task of achieving for itself a proper self" (W 71). Periphrastically remote though he or she may be, the approaching friend alone extends to "me" the possibility of selfhood. This is one of the passages I would love to have discussed with Derrida. For it would take *Mitsein* in a new direction, perhaps toward that *Urquell*, introducing *Mitsein* to a dimension in which the "with" pertains to *Sein* as such. Much later in his life, Derrida writes the strange sentence, "The animals are not alone," *Les bêtes ne sont pas seules*, which might also be rendered, "Animals are not solitary" (B2 27; AO 38). It is as though after reading Heidegger's "On the Essence of Ground," along with his 1928 lecture course, one could write the even odder sentence, a sentence that might expand into an entire novel, "Being is not alone."

The uncanniness of a sexuality that pops up whenever ontological, metaphysical, and even transcendental matters are under discussion

reappears during Heidegger's 1928–29 “Introduction to Philosophy,” a course that demonstrates how demanding Heidegger is on students at the “introductory” level—taking up for discussion the most obstreperous problems of his own not yet fully formed fundamental ontology.⁷ In the present “introduction,” he is discussing the ontological basis of community, *Gemeinschaft*, arguing that it is to be found, not in the altruism of an I-Thou relationship, but in a more primordial being-with-one-another (*das Miteinander*). Yet once again sexual (or gender) difference announces itself as soon as the neutrality of Dasein (the word and the “thing”) is invoked:

In its essence, the being that we in each case are, human being [*der Mensch*], is something neutral [*ein Neutrum*]. We designate this being as *das Dasein*. Yet it pertains to this neutral essence that, inasmuch as it exists factually in each case, it has necessarily broken its neutrality [*notwendig seine Neutralität gebrochen hat*, that is, “broken,” “broken with,” or perhaps “refracted,” in the sense that sexuality “refracts” the beam of light that passes through a prism, so that sexuality as such would be “refractory”—D. F. K.]; that is to say, Dasein, as factual, is in each case either masculine or feminine; it is a sexual essence [*ein Geschlechtswesen*, perhaps a “sexed creature,” although Heidegger normally uses *Wesen* in the sense of an essence or an “essential unfolding”—D. F. K.]; this implies a quite determinate being-with and being-toward one another [*ein ganz bestimmtes Mit- und Zueinander*]. The limit and the scope of the impact of this characteristic is factually different in each case; one can only show which possibilities of human existence are not necessarily determined by the sexual relation [*das Geschlechtsverhältnis*]. Precisely this sexual relation is possible, however, only because Dasein in its metaphysical neutrality is already determined by the with-one-another. If every Dasein, which in each case is factually either male or female, were not already in essence with-one-another, the sexual relation as a human relation would be simply impossible. (27:146)

7. I am grateful to William C. McNeill for this reference to Heidegger's 1928–29 *Einleitung in die Philosophie* and for our discussions about it. Derrida had no access to this course.

To be sure, one must ask: If a neutral Dasein is always already refracted into sexuality, that is, if its neutrality with regard to the sexes is factually and in fact broken a priori, whence the metaphysical puissance or plenipotence of that neutrality? What do we who dwell under the multicolored dome of eternity know of white light? Furthermore, what is the status of the (empirical? transcendental?) claim that sexuality is “entirely determined” as an either/or, either masculine or feminine? What if the prism itself were a hormonal *spectrum*, rather than an either/or?

Heidegger’s obvious scorn for the altruistic I-Thou, a scorn much more pronounced here than in *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, leads him to launch a polemic against “coarse materialism” in general. Only a Feuerbach or a Freud (the second not mentioned by name) would stoop so low as to mock the essential neutrality of Dasein. The polemic against coarse materialism in turn leads Heidegger to contrast sexual relations with “genuine and grand” *friendship*. Friends, such as Goethe and Schiller, are comrades in the good fight, passionate for whatever the object of that fight may be. Friends, presumably unlike lovers, do not “exchange sentimental gazes [*einander rührselig anschauen*],” and they do not “entertain” one another with “the insignificant exigencies of their psyches [*ihren belanglosen Seelennöten*]” (27:147).

It is important to state the conclusion to which Derrida is drawn by these strange discussions in *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, discussions that are even more unsettling in the 1928–29 *Einleitung in die Philosophie*. It may be that in these discussions of a metaphysical neutrality for Dasein Heidegger merely stumbles across the example of sexuality, perhaps because (*etwa*) his students are more than mildly interested in it; but so also is his *reading* audience interested in it, and this is an audience one would have expected to be immensely learned and hence above all that sort of thing. The logic of Heideggerian “selfhood” and of the “being-with” that is inherent in such selfhood is ultimately quite strange. Derrida notes that the *erst recht* or a fortiori is “irreproachable” only on one condition, namely, “on condition that the said ‘sexuality’ (in quotation marks) be the certain predicate of whatever is made possible by or from ipseity, here, for example, the structures of ‘me’ and ‘you,’ yet that it not belong, as ‘sexuality,’ to the structure of ipseity, of an ipseity not as yet determined as human being, me or you, conscious or unconscious subject, man or woman” (404/16).

The problem is reminiscent of the conundrum that hounded Schelling (7:406–408; cf. 8:279–315): if difference may be traced back

to an earlier identity, that identity—if indeed it comes to differentiate itself—must contain the seed of difference, and that seed must already in some sense be bifurcated. There must already be the dotted line along which one tears. For example, if (1) good and evil are different from one another, yet (2) both partake of the “essence,” at least if (3) that essence be human, which however (4) is said to derive from nothing other than the divine, then the essence itself must itself be predisposed to divorce the two—there must be a tendency toward what Schelling calls *Scheidung*, the “scission” or “separation” always already at work in both the human and the divine. Essence is therefore riven. Or, to take the reverse as our example, body and soul would never have been joined in the human identity if they themselves were not at some point identical. Essence is therefore uniform. If selfhood and its with-one-another are neutral, and yet if *ab ovo* they separate out into either male or female, and if such a separation, *horribile dictu*, results not only in sexual congress but also in sexual conflict, what is it about this “selfhood” and its “with-one-another” that so compel separation and strife? Is this not the classic metaphysical problem, namely, the attempt to ground negativity and dispersion on what ought to have been purely positive and unified? Is Heidegger not yet ready to surrender this kind of thinking?

It may be that a certain suspicion weighs on Heidegger, one that he would love to banish but cannot. In Derrida’s words, “What if ‘sexuality’ already marked the most originary *Selbstheit*? What if it were an ontological structure of ipseity? What if the *Da* of *Dasein* were already ‘sexual?’” (404/17). To be sure, such a *Geschlechtlichkeit* would be quite different from the dual sexuality that begs to be neutralized or neutered. Is Heidegger trying nonetheless to envisage it? What if something like “sexuality” were to mark (*etwa*) the very “selfhood” of *Dasein*, the “selfhood” and the individuation, the “in each case mineness,” on which fundamental ontology bases its entire analysis? What if the analysis of those beings that are of the measure of *Dasein*, *daseinsmäßiges Seiendes*, *Dasein* as *Mitsein* and *Miteinandersein*, and perhaps even of those beings that are not of that measure, *nicht daseinsmäßig*, along with the analyses of appropriateness and inappropriateness, or authenticity and inauthenticity, *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit*, were ineluctably bound up with something like Eros? What if something like “sexuality” were a primordial ontological and transcendental structure of ipseity, of remoteness and nearness? What if sexual difference “were already marked in the opening to the question of the meaning of being and to ontological difference, so that, by that very fact,

neutralization would be a violent operation?" (ibid.). The suggestion may even be broached as to whether the clearing of being, that is, Heidegger's *Lichtung des Seins*, along with the very granting of time and being, the themes that occupy Heidegger toward the end of his life, may have to do with something other than *Mensch*. If that word too has to be crossed out, so that only the *Da-* of *Da-sein* is left, would thoughtful *questioning* in and of itself reveal the survival of differences, multiple and protean differences, subtle yet unmistakable differences, that call for a rethinking of sexuality? The only possible answer to such a question, in Derrida's view, lies in the hope that both the word and the thing called *Geschlecht* can come to mean something other than the dual sexuality and the two genders as we know them, or believe we know them. Derrida leaves in suspense—as though it were a question for a missing generation—the possibility that “another *Geschlecht* will come to inscribe itself in ipseity, or will come to derange the order of all derivations, for example, that of a more ordinary *Selbstheit*, one that would make possible the emergence of the ego and of the you” (ibid.).

The key to an answer, if there is one, lies in the words *Streuung* and *Zerstreuung*. The first means a scattering of seed, a sowing, strewing, or *bestrewal*. The second, which merely adds the emphatic prefix *Zer-* to the word, means something like a being scattered to the winds, a chaotic dispersion and the resulting distraction. In Latinate languages, we often translate the *Zer-* as *dis-*, the problem being that the Greek *διά*, from which the *dis-* derives, may be taken in either a strongly pejorative or a quite neutral sense. The *διά* of “difference,” for example, simply means that something has been “carried through” or “borne out,” and that need not be bad. When and how does the *through*, the French *parcours*, become the *dis-* of I can't get no satisfaction? Even though Heidegger consistently denies the negative impact of the words that arise from his worst nightmares, *Zerstreuung*, *Zerstreutheit*, *Zerstörung*, *Zersplitterung*, *Zerspaltung*, scattering, distraction, destruction, fragmentation, bifurcation, these are the words that he uses when he wishes things were otherwise. Yet the problem is not merely with the words. *Dasein* itself is strewn into radical individuality, and the most serious task of fundamental ontology is to help *Dasein* confront its radical individuation. When the “mightiness of essence” strews *Dasein*, which is in each case my own, radically individualized, why is such bestrewal more acceptable and even desirable than that more emphatic dispersion that makes of me a sexual token? What can the positive neutrality of *Dasein* have been thinking when it allowed itself to

be sundered and scattered? Derrida returns to the 1928 logic course in order to note how recalcitrant the problem of bestrewal is.⁸

Heidegger notes that Dasein contains within itself the tendency toward a *Mannigfaltigung* or *Vermannigfaltigung*, that is, a tendency toward the “manifold,” literally, toward “multiple folds” of “development.” Such “manifolding” or “proliferating” pertains to the might and positivity of the essence that propels it. The mightiness of essence, unfolding itself positively, produces “a factual dispersion” (*faktische Zerstreung*) into “corporality” (*in die Leiblichkeit*). “And,” Heidegger now adds (26:173), “thereby into sexuality” (*und damit in die Geschlechtlichkeit*). The “thereby,” or “with that,” or “ipso facto,” conceals the problem. A first scattering or sowing of seed reflects the mightiness of essence; it is what makes Dasein *concrete* and *embodied*, “growing together” in itself. A second scattering, when the wind comes up, produces what everyone has to admit is a boondoggle. Even Kant called the division of humankind into the sexes an “abyss” that pure reason will never plumb. Yet worse is to come. For Dasein is not merely dispersed in sexual difference but always falls on one side of the line of that dispersion, so that one must say that each individualized Dasein is *zersplittert*, “split” or “fragmented,” and *zweispältig*, “riven” in a particular, determined sexuality (*in eine bestimmte Geschlechtlichkeit*). Hegel too complained of this split in his 1805–06 Jena lectures on genital difference: human beings never achieve the genus of their humanity, inasmuch as the products of their mating forever fall on one side of the gender line. Such endlessly one-sided repetition is what he will later call “bad infinity.” Derrida uses the word *morcellement* to translate this *Zersplitterung*, and this reminds us of Lacan’s use of the word “morcelized” (*d’une image morcelée, ce corps morcelé*) in his famous mirror-phase essay (És 97). The infant or small child takes delight in its

8. The problem of a not merely neutral but positive and powerful *Streueung* (“bestrewal”), which when emphasized as *Zer-streueung* (“dispersion,” “distraction”) becomes essentially negative and pejorative, elicited my longest comment in the letter of January 3, 1983. I hope to be forgiven the self-quotation, if only because the issue is so important and so baffling: “Yes, *Zer-* suggests *auseinander* [a driving apart], and so is related to *dis-*, ‘two-fold, dual.’ But nowadays *Zer-* seems to be a form of emphasis or intensification: cf. *stören, zerstören* [disturb, destroy], *drücken, zerdrücken* [press, squash]. Not so much a driving apart as driving to an ultimate or extreme point. This is important because it indicates what you are calling ‘the order of implications.’ Perhaps it is crucial in the order of *Streueung* (dissemination) and *Zerstreuung* (dispersion)? *Streueung* belongs to the order of *Sein*, *Zer-streueung* to the order of *Dasein*. The question of the *Zer-* is the question of implication as such! *Da-Sein ist Zer-Sein!!* Etc.”

image, yet is already struck by the contrast between its apparent completeness of figure—a body nicely outlined and silhouetted in the glass—and the chaos of its uncontrolled movements and the hunger raging inside. All its life will be spent trying to satisfy that image of completeness, trying like Alfred Hitchcock to walk into its silhouette and fill it out, whether that image be of itself or conjured in the alluring figure of an other, *etwa* in the Thou of selfhood. Derrida makes no reference to Lacan here, nor does he comment on the technologies by which we might hope to do battle against gender *Zersplitterung*. Surely, by means of multiple surgeries (stopping just short of apotemnophilic amputations) and delicately mixed hormonal cocktails we can exchange one morsel for another? The only thing that is missing, apparently, is the technology that will make us happy under our skin—although I read that the psychopharmaceutical firms have promised that this cocktail too is right around the corner. For the moment, however, morcelization. That too cannot be good.

Yet precisely this “cannot be good” is what Heidegger denies. None of these emphatic *Zer-* words, he insists, is meant pejoratively. While rejecting the Aristophanic solution that so attracted Freud (SA 3:266 n. 2), namely, the fantasy of a lunar sex of which today’s males and females are the sundered parts, each part mad for its other, Heidegger affirms the multiplication or manifolding of corporality, which, Heidegger says, serves as an “organizational factor” for sexuality. The metonymy of *Dasein*, it seems, does not shy from euphemism.⁹

Whatever appears to be the result of scattering and dispersion, *Zerstreuung*, derives from “an original dissemination,” or “an original bestrewal” (*eine ursprüngliche Streuung*), which, while not exaggerated, is mighty. (Derrida says that the word *Streuung* appears only once in these Heidegger texts, yet it appears three times, each time trying desperately to distinguish between a fecund multiplication and a sterile scattering.) As Derrida notes, understating the matter somewhat, the distinction is difficult to maintain. “Yet, even if not rigorously legitimate, it is difficult to avoid a certain contamination by negativity, that is, by ethico-religious

9. It is difficult to follow Heidegger’s sense here—of what serves as an “organizational factor” for what. Derrida’s typescript originally had it as follows: “cette multiplication qui représente pour le corps propre du *Dasein* un ‘facteur d’organisation.’” In my letter of January 3, 1983, I suggested that Heidegger’s text had to be translated differently: “cette multiplication pour qui le corps propre du *Dasein* représente un ‘facteur d’organisation.’” In the version that appears in *Psyché* (407), Derrida corrected my grammar, replacing my *qui* with *laquelle*. Yet he seemed to accept my exclamation at the end of the note, “This subordination of the body is very, very important!!”