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Geschlecht : Sex and Species, Being and Difference

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Geschlecht : Sex and Species, Being and Difference

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Abstract

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This dissertation attempts to think through an extremely rich and polysemic word, “*Geschlecht*,” particularly as it plays a central role in Freud’s writings on the intellectual development of children and in Derrida’s four-part series on Heidegger and *Geschlecht*, paying special attention to the newly discovered (and forthcoming) “*Geschlecht III*.” Meaning sex, species, genus, stock, house, family, lineage, clan, tribe, race, people, generation, this word provides a favorable point of entry for relating seemingly independent issues philosophy and psychoanalysis tend to treat as mutually exclusive. I argue that “*Geschlecht*” invites us to think these politico-sexual problems together without for all that erasing an irreducible polysemy – as Heidegger does – at the heart of “*Geschlecht*” that we might more rigorously, following Derrida, call dissemination.

In chapter 1, I examine the aforementioned manifold meaning of “*Geschlecht*” by means of a detailed analysis of the principal areas of meaning of this word as listed in the Brother’s Grimm dictionary. I then turn to Aristotle’s intricate theory of homonymy as a way to introduce an Aristotelianism at the center of Heidegger’s interpretation of this word. The second half of the chapter follows Freud’s oscillation between the two main meanings of “*Geschlecht*” – sex and species which, as I show, can be translated into two kinds of difference, sexual and ontological – in relation to the question that inaugurates intellectual life in children, an indecision that Freud will embrace by affirming an element of chance endemic to *Geschlecht* that complicates Heidegger’s Aristotelianism. In chapter 2, I broach Derrida’s treatment of this politico-sexual *Geschlecht* problematic by means of a reading of “*Geschlecht I*.” I retrace the complicated steps Derrida takes in order to see an opening – despite what is thereby potentially closed off – of Heideggerian thought unto a “pre-dual sexual difference” which Derrida is trying to think and affirm, too, his reservations with Heidegger’s maneuver notwithstanding. In chapter 3, I turn to the second of Derrida’s *Geschlechter* – and to the 1984-85 seminar from which it was “transcribed” – in order to pursue the more political vein of *Geschlecht* vis-à-vis a counterband national-humanism Heidegger’s purportedly anti-humanist and anti-nationalist thought nevertheless surreptitiously affirms. The final chapter of the dissertation further explores Derrida’s denunciation of Heidegger’s national-humanism in the newly discovered “*Geschlecht III*.” I demonstrate how an uncanny doubling of narratological structures in Heidegger’s essay on Trakl which Derrida reads in “*Geschlecht III*” – according to which Heidegger speaks of himself when speaking of Trakl – is symptomatic of a subtle and yet deeply problematic nationalistic undercurrent in Heidegger’s thought of “*Ein (one) Geschlecht*,” which incidentally brings the dissertation back to the supposed Aristotelian unity that Heidegger wants to retrieve, and Derrida, to deconstruct.

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Introduction: The Forthcoming *Geschlecht*

A new archival discovery is bound to reconfigure the relation between the thought of Jacques Derrida and that of Martin Heidegger. “*Geschlecht III*,” the third and missing installment of Derrida’s four part series on Heidegger and *Geschlecht*, has now been found. Its forthcoming publication marks an event for thought in at least two senses. First, it presents us with the *Geschlecht* that acted like a “magnet” vis-à-vis the other three: as Derrida tells us right at the start of “*Geschlecht I*,” Heidegger’s second essay on Trakl in *On the way to language*, “Language in the poem: a situation of Georg Trakl’s poem,” provided Derrida with an orientation “towards which” he “pursued” his reading of *Geschlecht* in Heidegger, an orientation that had “already” begun to “draw” Derrida’s reading “as toward a magnet.” “*Geschlecht III*” is precisely the *place* where Derrida pursued his reading of the aforementioned Heidegger essay, a reading which he undertook “as slowly as possible” given that Derrida considered “Language in the Poem” to be “one of Heidegger’s richest texts: subtle, overdetermined, more untranslatable than ever, and, of course, one of the most problematic.” Though Derrida did provide us with a “very brief outline” of *Geschlecht III*’s “principal concern” as the last five pages of “*Geschlecht II*,” it goes without saying that “the hundred or so pages” of “*Geschlecht III*” give us much more than its concise outline which has besides been largely neglected hitherto by both Derrida and Heidegger scholarship alike. “*Geschlecht III*” is then one of Derrida’s most frontal and incisive *Auseinandersetzungen* with Heidegger, a German word we could translate as “encounter” but that Derrida hears it in the more polemic

sense of confrontation when describing what he is doing to and with Heidegger: he is having it out with Heidegger (*une explication avec Heidegger*).

The second reason why “*Geschlecht III*” is an event is more to do with its rather burning content. Like its antecedent “*Geschlecht II*,” “*Geschlecht III*” opens up a “less visible dimension” of Heidegger’s political involvement by focusing not so much on that involvement per se but by calling attention to a subterranean nationalistic undercurrent in Heidegger’s thought even, and *especially*, where to all appearances Heidegger seems to be the least nationalistic. This dissertation is an attempt to follow Derrida’s denunciation in “*Geschlecht III*” of Heidegger’s subtle and deeply problematic nationalism, which has been somewhat elided by the recent scholarship on Heidegger’s *Black Notebooks*. A discrete but troubling irony seems to haunt the Heidegger reader of today inclined to take seriously the new and undeniable evidence of the most vulgar and stereotypical signs of nationalism (and of anti-Semitism, of course) on Heidegger’s part; signs that some Heideggerians think they can quickly dismiss (or even excuse) by merely pointing out that the very same Heidegger repeatedly denounces and renounces the biogenico-racial ideology of the Nazi Party as an unfounded metaphysical prejudice. The irony is that, *by this very gesture*, Heidegger ends up surreptitiously affirming a more “profound” kind of nationalism that is then complicit with (if not an alibi for) the very political crimes from which Heidegger often tries to exculpate himself. This dissertation teases out this paradoxical logic of what Derrida called “philosophical nationality and nationalism” by taking its departure from Derrida’s “*Geschlecht I*” and his 1984-85 seminar – given under this general title and from which “*Geschlecht III*” is extracted – where Derrida’s reading of Heidegger is part of a “sequence of German national-philosophism” that extends from

Fichte to Adorno, finding a problematic solidarity between the opposite ends of the political spectrum. The dissertation relates this hitherto largely unpublished or unappreciated material from the seminar to the forthcoming “*Geschlecht III*.” I argue that our reading of “*Geschlecht III*” needs to be informed by the politico-theoretical context of Derrida’s 1984-85 seminar where we find an unapologetic denunciation of (philosophical) nationalism, a motif that could not be more topical in the terrifying upsurge of nationalisms today.

The decision to publish “*Geschlecht III*” merits an introductory remark. Though he never published it as such, Derrida refers to “*Geschlecht III*” at least twice by name. In “*Geschlecht II*,” he writes:

I will not give this part of my lecture, which should have been titled “*Geschlecht III*” and whose (typed) manuscript has been photocopied and distributed to some of you so that a discussion of it might be possible.¹

At first, it would appear that “*Geschlecht III*” would correspond to the part of the lecture Derrida did not give at the premiere of “*Geschlecht II*.” All that is left of “*Geschlecht III*” would seem to be the “(typed) manuscript” Derrida distributed to some of the participants of a conference organized by John Sallis at Loyola University in March 1985. On this occasion, the full published version of “*Geschlecht II*” was delivered. Access to what is left of “*Geschlecht III*” would thus seem to be an exclusive privilege of those few

¹ Derrida 2008, 51.

conference participants to whom Derrida entrusted the aforementioned typescript. This is no longer the case.

David Farrell Krell was the first to announce that “*Geschlecht III*” is not to be equated with the Loyola typescript. Krell writes:

The text in question is part of the missing *Geschlecht III*, which I have written about so often and which I now believe has to derive from Derrida’s 1984-1985 seminar *Nationalité et nationalisme philosophiques: le fantôme de l’autre*.²

The “text in question” is precisely the Loyola typescript, “now” said to be only a “part” of “*Geschlecht III*.” Krell seems to be suggesting that the aforementioned seminar would contain the whole of “*Geschlecht III*” and not just a part of it. This is indeed his claim as attested by another passage from his 2013 *Derrida and Our Animal Others*:

Derrida refers in this context to Heidegger’s second Trakl essay, “Die Sprache im Gedicht: Eine Erörterung von Georg Trakls Gedicht” (US 35-82), which lies at the center of his seminar titled “Nationalité et nationalisme philosophiques: le fantôme de l’autre,” conducted in 1984-1985. The typescript of the course can be found at the Institut Memoires d’Editions Contemporaines (IMEC), Abbaye d’Ardenne, Caen, in Box 52, code DRR 175 (1984-1985; 1987-1988). It is here that one will have to look for what I have called the missing third of Derrida’s *Geschlecht* series.³

Following Krell’s lead, I paid a visit to IMEC in July 2014 in the hope of finding “*Geschlecht III*.” I had reason to suppose that Krell was indeed right in his suggestion. My reasons came from Derrida himself and were manifold. First, it was apparent to me

² Krell 2012, 101.

³ Ibid., 27.

why “*Geschlecht III*” was not simply to be equated with the Loyola typescript. A closer look at “*Geschlecht II*” reveals that the typescript was only a “first French version, incomplete and provisional” of a text amounting to a “hundred or so pages.” Derrida was in fact reading from these pages:

On the one hand, it is too late, and rather than continue to read the hundred or so pages I have devoted to this text on Trakl – whose first French version, incomplete and provisional, has been communicated to some of you – I will simply take a few minutes and outline their principal concern, inasmuch as it can be translated into a series of suspended or suspensive questions.⁴

As early as 2006, the same David Krell had also announced himself to be in possession of a copy of the Loyola typescript, which he had simply kept well guarded since the conference of March 1985.⁵ While Krell then followed Derrida’s instructions “not to circulate or cite” the Loyola transcript, he made no secret of the fact that the latter amounted to “thirty three pages.”⁶ It then becomes clear that “*Geschlecht III*” is to be equated not with the thirty-three page Loyola typescript but, instead, with these “hundred or so pages” Derrida speaks of in “*Geschlecht II*.” These “hundred or so pages” correspond to the full lecture Derrida would have given at Loyola had it not been “too late.” These “hundred or so pages” are the full part of the lecture Derrida did not give at the premiere of “*Geschlecht II*” and which “should have been titled ‘*Geschlecht III*’.”

My second reason for believing David Krell to be right was far more simple. As late as 1993 – nearly a decade after the Loyola conference – Derrida still had “*Geschlecht*

⁴ Derrida 2008, 56.

⁵ Krell 2006., 1.

⁶ Ibid.

III” in his mind. This is made apparent by the second instance in which he calls “*Geschlecht III*” by name. In a footnote to “*Geschlecht IV*,” Derrida writes:

I will take up this text in a forthcoming essay (*Geschlecht III*); I refer you to David Krell’s remarkable works, notably *Intimations of Mortality*, Pennsylvania State University Press, London, 1986, p. 163 sq. and « Passage à la sœur, Heidegger et *Geschlecht* », in *Le Passage des frontières*, Galilée, 1994, p. 459.⁷

The sheer existence of a “*Geschlecht IV*” clearly suggests that Derrida intended to publish “*Geschlecht III*” at some point given that he left room for it. He speaks of “*Geschlecht III*” in “*Geschlecht IV*” as if it had already been written but waiting still for publication, “à paraître.” If Derrida seems to have skipped over “*Geschlecht III*” with the publication of “*Geschlecht IV*,” he nevertheless continues to promise “*Geschlecht III*.” Such a promise was, in fact, the inspirational source for the entire *Geschlecht* series from its very inception. As Derrida tells us at the very opening of “*Geschlecht I*”:

This essay (first published in the issue of the *Cahier de l’Herne* devoted to Heidegger and edited by Michel Haar in 1983), like the following one (“Heidegger’s Hand [*Geschlecht II*]”), will have to content itself with sketching in a preliminary fashion an interpretation to come in 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,

⁷ Derrida 1994, 271. My translation.

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 remark 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: Eine Erörterung von Georg Trakls Gedicht" (1953), in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959); "Language in the Poem: A Discussion on Georg Trakl's Poetic Work," in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).⁸

It seemed to me only a matter of time before Derrida's *Geschlecht* project eventually arrived at its magnetic source. It also seemed certain that such an arrival would have to take place by way of Derrida's reading of the aforementioned Heidegger essay. Did such a reading ever happen? Where did it happen? Perhaps in those "hundred or so pages" Derrida had devoted to Heidegger's text on Trakl? Where are these pages?

It is Derrida himself who tells us where "*Geschlecht III*" is to be found. Twice in "*Geschlecht II*" Derrida alludes to the work he had been pursuing in his seminar that year. He writes:

I must begin with some precautions. They all come down to asking for your leniency and your indulgence for what in particular touches on the form and status of this "lecture," on all the presuppositions I must ask you to accept. I am assuming, in fact, that you have read a brief and modest essay published under the title "*Geschlecht I: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference.*" This essay,

⁸ Derrida 2008, 7.

published and translated more than a year ago, was the beginning of a project that I have taken up again only this year in the course of a seminar I am giving in Paris under the title “Philosophical Nationality and Nationalism.”⁹

Just two sentences later, Derrida further specifies what exactly he was working on:

Another precaution, another call for your indulgence: for lack of time, I will present only a part, or rather several fragments, at times a little discontinuous, of the work I am pursuing this year at the slow pace of a seminar engaged in a difficult reading—one I would like to be as meticulous and prudent as possible—of certain texts of Heidegger's, notably *Was heisst Denken?* and above all the lecture on Trakl in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*.¹⁰

Taking Derrida at his word, it was quite evident that “the hundred or so pages” he had devoted to Heidegger’s Trakl essay had to coincide with the “meticulous and prudent” reading of the very same Heidegger text he had undertaken in the seminar mentioned above. It thus becomes clear why David Krell was more than likely right to “derive” “*Geschlecht III*” from Derrida’s 1984-85 seminar “Philosophical Nationality and Nationalism.”

My study of this seminar at the Derrida Archive at IMEC convinced me that “*Geschlecht III*” existed. I was able to locate in it 115 pages containing Derrida’s reading of Heidegger’s essay on Trakl “Language in the Poem.” These 115 pages add up to just over six seminar sessions conducted in the first three months of 1985 at the EHESS in Paris. These sessions correspond to those “hundred or so pages” in which Derrida had pursued his reading of Heidegger’s Trakl essay. These 115 pages make up the full part of

⁹ Ibid, 27.

¹⁰ Ibid.

the lecture Derrida did not give at Loyola in the March of that year. These are the pages “which should have been titled *Geschlecht III*.”

The 115 pages of “*Geschlecht III*” beg for publication on many counts. First, these pages contain Derrida’s most decisive encounter with Heidegger. Nowhere else does Derrida more clearly expose the difference between deconstruction and Heidegger’s thought. This difference emerges most forcefully in a text devoted to the question of difference – sexual or ontological – in Heidegger. “*Geschlecht III*” lets us see a difference between the two most important thinkers of difference. As such, it remains decisive for difference itself.

Secondly, “*Geschlecht III*” gives us the magnetic source and culminating endpoint of Derrida’s entire *Geschlecht* project. “*Geschlecht III*” situates and organizes the other *Geschlechter*. The publication of “*Geschlecht III*” thus affects the other three indirectly. It is as if the entire *Geschlecht* series were being published anew. “*Geschlecht III*” writes itself into the other three. “*Geschlecht III*” must then be read into the other three. As their magnetic source and culminating endpoint, “*Geschlecht III*” rewrites its counterparts after the fact. It comes belatedly to leave its mark on the very mark of *Geschlecht*, the mark of its imprint, strike or blow (*Schlag*). “*Geschlecht III*” remarks the very mark of the mark.

Thirdly, “*Geschlecht III*” performs an extremely careful reading of Heidegger. Derrida moves through the Trakl essay with “micrological insistence” as he himself tells us at the very opening of “*Geschlecht III*”:

So, how are we going to read this text and what are we going to think of it? [...] I must warn you right away: our progression will be slow, irregular in its rhythm, following a trajectory which, I believe, no linear picture could account for. “Progression” is already a stretch when speaking of a pace that might give the feeling, distressing perhaps to some, that it allows itself to be paralyzed by its very insistence: we are not moving forward, we are turning in circles within micrological insistence, we are backtracking.¹¹

There can be no doubt that “*Geschlecht III*” gives us Derrida at his best. Even though Derrida never authorized the publication of the last 115 pages of his 1984-85 seminar, we can be fairly certain of their publishable quality for a variety of reasons. First, the published version of “*Geschlecht II*” reveals that it is almost an exact replica of sessions six and seven of the 84-85 seminar. Derrida had done nothing but transcribe the seminar text of these two sessions into a slightly polished version for the Loyola conference of March 1985. A marginal note from the seminar’s typescript clearly shows this is indeed the case. Right at the point when “*Geschlecht II*” breaks off and Derrida summarizes the “hundred or so pages” – 115 – of “*Geschlecht III*” into “five foci,” we find in the corresponding typescript page of the seminar the following two words

¹¹ Since the publication of “*Geschlecht III*” is yet to appear in either French or English, I will provide the French in footnotes for my English translations and reference the text by the session number and typescript page of Derrida’s 1984-85 seminar “Philosophical Nationality and Nationalism.” I thank Katie Chenoweth for her incisive comments and elegant suggestions where both my English and French failed me. “Alors: comment allons nous lire ce texte et qu’allons nous penser de ce texte? [...] Je dois vous en prévenir tout de suite: notre progression sera lente, irrégulière dans son rythme, suivant un trajet dont aucune représentation linéaire ne pourrait, je crois, rendre compte. Progression, c’est déjà trop dire d’une démarche dont on peut avoir le sentiment, irrité peut-être chez certains, qu’elle se laisse paralyser par l’insistance même: on n’avance pas, on tourne en rond dans l’insistance micrologique, on revient sur ses pas.” Session seven, typescript page 12.

penciled in at the left margin: “*arrêter ici.*” The instruction to “stop here” no doubt refers to where “*Geschlecht II*” stops and the part of the lecture Derrida did not give at Loyola begins. It thus becomes abundantly clear that Derrida was reading out loud to his Loyola audience a near verbatim version of the lectures his seminar participants had heard only weeks before. Thus, if Derrida authorized the publication of a text that almost exactly mirrors sessions six and seven of his 1984-85 seminar, there is every reason to suppose that the six following sessions of that seminar – the “hundred or so pages” Derrida devoted to Heidegger’s Trakl essay, the 115 pages of “*Geschlecht III*” – would likewise be of the same publication caliber.

The newly discovered Loyola typescript corroborates this hypothesis.¹² As I was able to study Derrida’s transcription of nearly thirty five seminar pages into the thirty-three page Loyola typescript, I observed that Derrida was in fact merely transcribing “*Geschlecht III*” just as he had transcribed “*Geschlecht II.*” The reason why the Loyola typescript remained incomplete is also given in the same breath that testifies to its status as a transcription: “*faute de temps pour transcrire,*” “lack of time for transcribing,” as Derrida writes in the last page of the typescript. It is only logical to assume that the remaining part of the 84-85 seminar that Derrida did not have time to transcribe *would* have been transcribed in a manner resembling the parts of the seminar that *were* transcribed. As the differences between the existing transcription and seminar original are rather marginal – two very brief paragraphs on Lacoue-Labarthe and a passage from Heidegger’s “What is Called Thinking” – we can confidently identify the last six sessions of the 84-85 seminar as a near verbatim version of what a fully transcribed “*Geschlecht*

¹² The thirty-three-page Loyola typescript can be found at the Derrida Archive at IMEC (Caen, France) in in Box 52, code DRR 175.

III” would have looked like, had Derrida had more time.¹³ As always in Derrida, original and transcription are never mutually exclusive.

Fourthly, “*Geschlecht III*” stayed on Derrida’s mind until the very end. As late as the last two-year seminar “*The Beast and the Sovereign*,” Derrida refers to “*Geschlecht III*” twice indirectly. In the tenth session of the first year, Derrida writes:

And this sort of sovereignty, as you have heard, concerns, under the sign of the *Unheimliche*, a certain experience of foreignness, not only of the strange, but of the Foreigner (a figure who will be relayed later on texts on Trakl, in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, which I studied in earlier seminars, a long time ago).¹⁴

The French editorial team attaches a footnote to this passage indicating that the seminar in question is the 1984-85 “Philosophical Nationality and Nationalism: The Phantom of the Other.” The same editorial team includes in another footnote to the

¹³ These two moments aside, seminar and typescript remain nearly identical, save a word change here and there. See the following sample: “Je dois vous en prévenir tout de suite: notre progression sera lente, irrégulière dans son rythme, suivant un trajet dont aucune représentation linéaire ne pourrait, je crois, rendre compte. Progression, c’est déjà trop dire d’une démarche dont on peut avoir le sentiment, irrité peut-être chez certains, qu’elle se laisse paralyser par l’insistance même: on n’avance pas, on tourne en rond dans l’insistance micrologique, on revient sur ses pas. Apparemment sans gagner de terrain, sans occuper de position, sans souci de stratégi[r]e discursive. Et puis tout à coup des [d]sauts , des bonds, des zig-[g]zags , de singulières ruptures dont on ne sait pas si elles ont été minutieusement calculées ou si elles ont surpris le discours, venues à lui comme l’événement de l’autre. C’est d’abord la manière de Heidegger que je décris ainsi, d’autres diraient son style” (Seminar version). “Notre progression sera lente. Irrégulière dans son rythme, suivant un trajet dont aucune représentation linéaire ne pourrait rendre compte. Progression, n’est-ce pas déjà trop dire d’une démarche dont on peut avoir le sentiment, irrité chez certains, qu’elle se laisse paralyser par l’insistance même : on n’avance pas, on tourne en rond, on revient sur ses pas. Apparemment sans gagner de terrain, sans occuper de position, renonçant à tout souci de stratégie discursive. Et puis tout à coup des sauts brusques, des bonds, des zig-zags, chaque fois décidés, de singulières ruptures dont on ne sait pas si elles ont été minutieusement calculées ou si elles ont surpris le discours, venues à lui comme l’événement de l’autre, depuis l’autre décidées” (Loyola typescript).

¹⁴ Derrida 2009, 266.

second seminar volume Derrida's spoken and second indirect reference to "*Geschlecht III*." Glossing Heidegger's claim that poetry is the sister of philosophy, Derrida stopped reading from the seminar typescript and was recorded on tape saying the following:

The sister is closer. So we'd have to follow the sister in Heidegger, which would go via Trakl. But I can't get into that this evening.¹⁵

"*Il faudrait*," one "would have to," "it would be necessary to," "one ought to follow the sister in Heidegger," says Derrida. The injunction is strong enough to call for a self-response in the form of a deferral: "not this evening." Perhaps some evening then? Perhaps Derrida had not abandoned the magnetic source and culminating endpoint of his entire *Geschlecht* series? Perhaps Derrida intended to fulfill the promise to read Heidegger's Trakl essay?

Fifthly, Derrida explicitly alludes to this promise in at least two other places in his published work. In *Of Spirit*, he writes:

This Erörterung of Trakl's Gedicht is, so it seems to me, one of Heidegger's richest texts: subtle, overdetermined, more untranslatable than ever. And, of course, one of the most problematic. [...] As I am continuing to study this text, on the other hand, with a more fitting patience, I hope one day to be able – beyond what a lecture allows me to do today – to do justice to it by also analyzing its gesture, its mode, and its status (if it has one), its relationship with philosophical discourse, with hermeneutics and poetics, but also what it says of *Geschlecht*, of

¹⁵ Derrida 2011, 96.

the word *Geschlecht*, and also of the place (*Ort*), and of animality. For the moment, I shall follow only the passage of spirit.¹⁶

This remark helps us understand why Derrida hesitated to publish “*Geschlecht III*.” For it seemed at times to pose an insurmountable challenge which Derrida felt he was not up to as he says to his seminar participants on March 5th, 1997:

Here the temptation emerges of going back on the tracks of seminars from ten years ago (Georg Trakl, and *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, “Language in the Poem” [...]). One would have to go over – this time by letting ourselves be guided by our meditation on hospitality – all that we tried to think in an earlier lecture about the difference between the stranger and the others, the blow (*Schlag*) of *Geschlecht* as human species and as sex, sexual difference, the rapport between brother and sister. We wouldn’t have the time for it, and I don’t feel up to it.¹⁷

“*Je n’en ai pas le courage*,” says Derrida’s French for the last clause.¹⁸ Why is “*Geschlecht III*” so daunting to Derrida? Is this why he never saw the publication of “*Geschlecht III*” through the press?

The foregoing remarks are militant in their nature. I have tried to show why the last 115 pages of Derrida’s 1984-85 seminar can be *philosophically* identified as “*Geschlecht III*.” On the one hand, it matters little that Derrida himself never published “*Geschlecht III*” as such. One has learned by now, and from Derrida first of all, not to

¹⁶ Derrida 1989, 87.

¹⁷ Derrida 2002, 403. Translation slightly modified.

¹⁸ I thank Gil Anidjar for providing Derrida’s French for this yet unpublished text.

bank naively on the distinction between published and non-published writing.¹⁹ It would be far too simplistic to think Derrida did not publish “*Geschlecht III*” because he did not have the nerve for it. On the other hand, the fact that Derrida did not publish “*Geschlecht III*” has, however, in itself philosophical import. Silences too deserve to be read.

How is one to read such silences? Why even bother? Is it not obvious that we will never know exactly why Derrida did not publish “*Geschlecht III*”? Be that as it may, there might be a way of framing the problem internally. In other words, how does the very text of “*Geschlecht III*” understand its publication or lack thereof?

Let us pause over this question. Though Derrida, to my knowledge, never formulated this problem in this exact form, he undoubtedly poses the question of how a text reads itself.²⁰ According to Derrida, a text already provides the position from which it may be read. A text already stages the scene of its reading. To ask how a text reads itself is thus to locate the position from which it speaks about itself. In speaking about itself, a text reflects on its own status vis-à-vis its readers. A text asks why and how to be read in advance and not after the fact. In so doing, it addresses why it exists. By the same token, it tells us too what it would mean for it not to exist.

In what follows, I shall attempt to situate how “*Geschlecht III*” reads itself and its (non)publication. This will entail considering the position “*Geschlecht III*” occupies within the *Geschlecht* series. This position is further complicated by an internal aspect of “*Geschlecht III*.” For “*Geschlecht III*” *explicitly* stages its scene of reading. *The scene of reading is its scene of reading.* Derrida in fact begins “*Geschlecht III*” by asking the question of reading, precisely:

¹⁹ See Derrida 1978, p. 138 sq.

²⁰ See Derrida 1980, 413 sq.

So, how are we going to read this text and what are we going to think of it? [...] I must warn you right away: our progression will be slow, irregular in its rhythm, following a trajectory which, I believe, no linear picture could account for. “Progression” is already a stretch when speaking of a pace that might give the feeling, distressing perhaps to some, that it allows itself to be paralyzed by its very insistence: we are not moving forward, we are turning in circles within micrological insistence, we are backtracking. Seemingly without gaining ground, without taking a stance, without concern for discursive strategy. And then all of a sudden there are jumps, leaps, zigzags, and odd ruptures concerning which we do not know whether they were meticulously calculated or if they took the discourse by surprise, arriving upon it as the event of the other.

It is first of all Heidegger’s manner that I describe in this way — others would say his style.²¹

Almost imperceptibly, Derrida slides into the description of Heidegger’s manner with the same exact words he had described his own. It becomes apparent that a doubling of sorts

²¹ Session seven, typescript page 12. “Alors: comment allons nous lire ce texte et qu’allons nous penser de ce texte? Tout ce que je viens d’en dire démontre qu’à l’évidence il relève bien de notre problématique (nationalité et nationalisme philosophiques) telle que nous l’avons engagée jusqu’ici (question de l’idiome, intraduisibilité, thème du *Geschlecht*, de l’homme, de l’humanité et de l’humanisme, destin de l’Occident, etc). Cela va de soi. Je dois vous en prévenir tout de suite: notre progression sera lente, irrégulière dans son rythme, suivant un trajet dont aucune représentation linéaire ne pourrait, je crois, rendre compte. Progression, c’est déjà trop dire d’une démarche dont on peut avoir le sentiment, irrité peut-être chez certains, qu’elle se laisse paralyser par l’insistance même: on n’avance pas, on tourne en rond dans l’insistance micrologique, on revient sur ses pas. Apparemment sans gagner de terrain, sans occuper de position, sans souci de stratégi[r]e discursive. Et puis tout à coup des [d]sauts , des bonds, des zig-[g]zags , de singulières ruptures dont on ne sait pas si elles ont été minutieusement calculées ou si elles ont surpris le discours, venues à lui comme l’événement de l’autre. C’est d’abord la manière de Heidegger que je décris ainsi, d’autres diraient son style.”

is at work here. What is here being doubled is precisely the scene of reading: Derrida reads how he will read Heidegger in the manner that Heidegger's texts read themselves. Derrida reads Heidegger like Heidegger. The text being read thus reads itself and the very reading reading it. Save for the fact that the thematizing of this issue happens first not in Heidegger but in Derrida.

This is in fact what most intrigued Derrida's reading of Heidegger's 1953 Trakl essay. In session nine of the 84-85 seminar, Derrida writes:

In truth, I place in this excursus what interests me the most, perhaps, in the reading of this text. What does Heidegger do? Which movement, which path, which madness, which sense or other sense does he describe, of what and of whom does he speak in this so called situation of Trakl's *Gedicht*[?] Take a good look. He speaks, I will not say of himself, Martin Heidegger, but surely of his own approach. [...]

In any case, whatever conclusion we may draw from this, we cannot omit, and this is what I wanted to mark by this excursus, this situation of Heidegger himself, and the scene according to which he speaks of himself or rather of his own place, of his own steps, of his own pace, in short, of his signature. And this is not in my view a critique. It is no doubt the condition of any situation.²²

²² Session nine, typescript pages 8-9: "En vérité, je mets dans cet excursus ce qui m'intéresse le plus, peut-être, dans la lecture de ce texte. Que fait Heidegger? Quel mouvement, quel chemin, quelle folie, quel sens ou autre sens décrit-il, de quoi et de qui parle-t-il dans cette prétendue situation du *Gedicht* de Trakl [?]. Regardez bien. Il parle, je ne dirai pas de lui, Martin Heidegger, mais assurément de sa propre démarche. [...] En tous cas, quoi qu'on en conclue, on ne peut pas omettre, et c'était ce que je voulais marquer dans cet excursus, cette situation de Heidegger lui-même, et la scène selon laquelle il parle de lui-même ou plutôt de son propre lieu, de son propre pas, de son

“*Geschlecht III*” thus stages “the scene according to which” Heidegger speaks of himself when speaking of Trakl. However, “*Geschlecht III*” too is forced to comply with the very regulations it so perceptively describes. “*Geschlecht III*” must then have a “situation” in its turn. Its situation is its situation. Something abyssal is opened up when the situation of a text is that very situation itself. This situation of situation can itself be situated only then to lend itself to the same gesture it performs. So much so that here one does not know who situates and who is being situated by this very situation itself.

It is thus not too surprising to find Derrida complicating even further the scene of reading of “*Geschlecht III*.” He writes:

Because in order to “read” Heidegger, in order to follow him without barbaric violence, I mean without unjust or unfaithful violence, in order to hear him first without, however, walling oneself up within the deaf passivity of commentary, one must at once — if this is possible —synchronize one’s gait to his (13) and disrupt it, unsettle its cadence: slow down sometimes when he goes too fast, interrupt a jump, suspend its movement or, instead, leap in a single bound towards a certain detour, at the turning point of a long-lasting procedure.²³

A certain irreducible violence is thus at work between Derrida and Heidegger. If the point is to read Heidegger “without barbaric violence,” Derrida seems to affirm the need for a “just” or “faithful” violence nevertheless. If Derrida is forced to “synchronize” his steps

propre cheminement, de sa signature en somme. Et ceci n’est pas à mes yeux une critique. C’est sans doute la condition de toute situation.”

²³ Session seven typescript pages 12-13 : “Car pour “lire” Heidegger, pour le suivre sans violence barbare, je veux dire sans violence injuste ou infidèle, pour l’entendre d’abord sans toutefois se murer dans la passivité sourde du commentaire, il faut à la fois, si c’est possible, régler son pas sur le sien (13) et le dérégler, en perturber la cadence: décélérer parfois quand il va trop vite, interrompre un saut, en suspendre le geste ou au contraire bondir d’un coup vers tel détour, au tournant d’une procédure de longue durée.”

to Heidegger's, he only does so in order to trip Heidegger up. Such would be the justified violence with which Derrida reads Heidegger without merely doubling Heidegger. Such would be Derrida's (in)fidelity to Heidegger that allows him to "hear" Heidegger, without "walling himself up" in "deaf" commentary.

This paradoxical scene of (in)fidelity should complicate any simple attempt to situate the scene of reading of "*Geschlecht III*." Yet a further complication enters the scene here. For "*Geschlecht III*" was already announced in "*Geschlecht I*" as the "magnet" pulling and orienting Derrida's entire *Geschlecht* project. The scene of reading of "*Geschlecht III*" is thus marked by a magnetic polarity of sorts. How is one to understand this magnetism and its associated polarity?

Here, we might turn to *Of Grammatology* for help. Though Derrida does not use the word "magnet" in this text, he here indirectly characterizes the scene of reading of any text as magnetically charged. Let us pause over this moment in order to understand what is at stake in the explicitly magnetic scene of reading of "*Geschlecht III*."

How does Derrida arrive at this magnetism of reading? In the context of his reading of Rousseau, Derrida lays out a working distinction for articulating how Rousseau's text declares an official interpretation of itself but, in so doing, ends up describing something that "forbids us from thinking it," as Derrida says. This declaration-description distinction could be said to be a reiteration of a pair of terms used much earlier in *Of Grammatology* to characterize Saussure's text. Derrida writes:

Yet, the intention that institutes general linguistics as a science remains in this respect within a contradiction. Its declared statement indeed confirms, saying what goes without saying, the subordination *Of Grammatology*, the historico-metaphysical reduction of writing to the rank of an instrument enslaved to a full and originarily spoken language. But another gesture (not another statement, for here what does not go without saying is done without being said, written without being uttered) liberates the future of a general grammatology of which linguistics-phonology would be only a dependent and circumscribed area. Let us follow this tension between gesture and statement in Saussure.²⁴

Later on in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida comes back to “this tension between gesture and statement,” this time reiterated as the “gap between the description and the declaration” of Rousseau’s text.²⁵ This brings to mind, of course, one of *Of Grammatology*’s clearest articulations of this question of method:

And Rousseau’s text must ceaselessly be considered as a complex, layered structure: in it, certain propositions can be read as interpretations of other propositions that we are, up to a certain point and with certain precautions, free to read otherwise. Rousseau says A, then for reasons that we must determine, interprets A as B. A, which was already an interpretation, is reinterpreted as B. After taking note of that fact we can, without leaving Rousseau’s text, isolate A from its interpretation as B and discover in it possibilities and resources in it that indeed belong to Rousseau’s text, but have not been produced or exploited by

²⁴ Ibid., 30. Translation slightly modified. For the other places where Derrida invokes the statement-other gesture distinction, see too pp. 58 and 66.

²⁵ See too pp. 326, 334, 338-40, 345, 348, 356 and 372.

him which, for reasons that are also legible, he *preferred to cut short* by a gesture that is neither conscious nor unconscious.²⁶

The tension between A and B, between what Rousseau declares and describes, is indirectly characterized as magnetic by Derrida. It is indeed striking that a doubling of sorts is at work here. After laying out Rousseau's declaration and description concerning the origin of languages, Derrida borrows the magnetic features of Rousseau's description in order to describe – to declare, rather – how this very description-declaration distinction is itself magnetic. Let us first understand what is magnetic about Rousseau's description, if not his declaration, of the origin of languages.

Language is born in the south, declares Rousseau. In the south, language is allowed to sing freely since passion has been freed from the restraining conditions of need associated mostly with the weather of a particular region. As language moves north and weather conditions deteriorates, so goes Rousseau's official declaration, it becomes increasingly affected by the very thing which it "left behind" at the moment of its inception. At that moment, language had just emerged, bringing the human just out of the state of need into the state of passion. But – and here we begin sliding into Rousseau's description – if the state of need continues to operate within each language as we move further north, this means that each language has within itself a polar opposition that prevents any language from having a simple origin and being simply from either the south or the north, as Derrida argues:

The division between languages, the apportionment in the formation of languages, between the systems turned toward the North and the systems turned toward the

²⁶ Ibid., 434. Trans. by Geoffrey Bennington.

South – that interior limit – already leaves its furrow in language in general and each language in particular. Such at least is our interpretation. Rousseau *would like* that the opposition between southern and northern placed a *natural* frontier between different types of languages. However, what he *describes* forbids us from thinking it. That description shows that the opposition north/south being rational and not natural, structural and not factual, relational and not substantial, traces an axis of reference inside each language. No language is from the south or the north, no real element of the language has an absolute situation, only a differential one. That is why the polar opposition does not divide a set of already existing languages; it is described, though not declared, by Rousseau to be the origin of languages. We must measure this gap between the description and the declaration.²⁷

What Derrida here calls the “axis of reference inside each language” may call to mind how magnets work. A magnet has poles. When freely suspended, a magnet’s poles each point to one of the poles of the earth. The magnet’s poles are thus aligned in accordance with the earth’s North and South Poles. Each point within a (bar) magnet can however be said to be a little magnet in itself: cut a bar magnet into little pieces, each magnet bit will have a north and south pole in its turn.

Such a magnetic polarity seems to be operative in Rousseau’s description of the origin of languages despite his declaration that all language finds an origin in what he calls the “Absolute South.” What Rousseau “says without saying” forbids us from ignoring that each language across the south-north line functions like a little bit of a

²⁷ Ibid.

broken magnet, having an “axis of reference” within itself that is pulled and torn between two poles and not an absolute origin.

Teasing out the deconstructive gesture of Rousseau’s description from the metaphysical solidarity of his declaration, Derrida goes on to double the magnetic features of Rousseau’s description in order to declare how his (Derrida’s) own declaration-description distinction turns out to be itself magnetic. Derrida writes:

But here again, what is unrepresentable is the fact that this distancing brings closer to the origin. The northern languages lead back to that need, to that physics, to that nature to which the southern languages, which had just left it, were in the closest possible proximity. Again the impossible design, the unbelievable line of the supplementary structure. Although the difference between south and north, passion and need, explains the origin of languages, it persists in the constituted languages, and at the limit, the north comes back to the south of the south, which puts the south to the north of the north. Passion animates need more or less and from the inside. Need constrains passion more or less, and from the inside. This polar difference should rigorously prevent the distinction of two series simply exterior to one another. But we know now why Rousseau is determined to maintain that impossible exteriority. His text moves, then, between what we have called *description* and *declaration*, which are themselves structural poles rather than natural and fixed points of reference.²⁸

As Geoffrey Bennington has remarked, it is indeed “striking” that Derrida should describe the “much-used pair of declaration and description [...] as being *itself* a polar

²⁸ Derrida 1967, 311-12. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington.

structure.”²⁹ Bennington is referring precisely to the moment above where Derrida alludes to declaration and description as being “structural poles” in between which Rousseau’s text “moves.” This is what allows one to say that Derrida understands the scene of reading of any text as magnetically charged by the “structural poles” of declaration and description. Though Bennington seems somewhat suspicious of this “mere ‘polar’ structure” at the heart of the scene of reading of any text, I will attempt to show that the polarity emphasized by Derrida seems to be particularly appropriate for understanding what reading is for him. Reading would be polar and perhaps even *bipolar*.

This already complicated scene of reading becomes even more complex when one remembers the bipolar status Rousseau’s magnetic polarity has in *Of Grammatology*. It will have become apparent by now that Derrida sees this magnetic polarity to be on the side of Rousseau’s description and not his declaration. Let us follow now the same Derrida diagnosing this magnetic polarity to be Rousseau’s most official declaration, his metaphysical gesture par excellence.

What is metaphysical about Rousseau’s magnetic polarity? Derrida locates Rousseau’s polar movement unfolding between two poles: the origin and the end. The inner logic of this movement is spelled out relatively early in *Of Grammatology*, still within the context of Derrida’s reading of Lévi-Strauss. Derrida writes:

As always, this archeology is also a teleology and an eschatology; the dream of a full and immediate presence closing history, the transience and indivision of a

²⁹ Bennington 2011, 3.

parousia, the suppression of contradiction and difference. The anthropologist's mission, as Rousseau would have assigned it, is to work toward such an end.³⁰

Here, Derrida relies on an archeo-teleological movement to explain Lévi-Strauss' mission, as Rousseau "would have assigned it." Later on in *Of Grammatology*, it becomes clear why exactly Rousseau would have done so:

Thus, even while apparently affirming that the original language was figurative, Rousseau upholds the proper: as *arche* and as *telos*. At the origin, since the first idea of passion, its first representer, is properly ex-pressed. In the end, because the enlightened spirit stabilizes the proper meaning.³¹

This passage is now describing the very same movement between Rousseau's South and North Pole. As language moves north, it no longer properly expresses passion but it is still proper in another sense. In the North, languages grow cold and attain a proper relation to what was only metaphorically intended down south. In both instances, argues Derrida, "Rousseau upholds the proper." Rousseau's polar movement would thus unfold between the two poles of origin and end. The further one moves from the origin the closer one moves to the origin in accordance with a desire to retrieve the lost presence of that origin. Derrida speaks of this quest for the lost origin several times in *Of Grammatology*. This journey finds itself magnetized between two poles as well. As Derrida puts it, in a slightly different context:

There was a natural universality of a sort in the most archaic degree of writing: painting, as much as the alphabet, is not tied to any determined language. Capable of reproducing all sensible being, it is a sort of universal writing. But its liberty

³⁰ Ibid., 116.

³¹ Ibid., 302. Translation modified.

with reference to languages is due not to the distance which separates painting from its model but to the imitative proximity which binds them. Under a universal appearance, painting would thus be perfectly empirical, multiple, and changeful like the sensory units that it represents outside of any code. By contrast, the ideal universality of phonetic writing is due to its infinite distance with respect to the sound (the primary signified of that writing which marks it arbitrarily) and to the meaning signified by the spoken word. Between these two poles, universality is lost. I say between these two poles since, as I have confirmed, pure pictography and pure phonography are two ideas of reason. Ideas of pure presence: in the first case, presence of the represented thing in its perfect imitation, and in the second, the self-presence of speech itself. In both cases, the signifier tends to be effaced in the presence of the signified.³²

Though here Derrida glosses Rousseau's declaration vis-à-vis the history of writing, there can be no doubt that this is the same archeo-teleological schema operative in the polar scenes described above. For Rousseau, the need and coldness of the north introduce reason and abstraction into the history of writing. As we move away from the passionate origin of the south, language increasingly loses its sung character in order to become more consonantal, articulated, in a word, written. The history of written language follows, in turn, the same polar movement towards formalization and abstraction. What was once a perfect imitation of the signified or the thing itself in the first pole of universal writing, i.e. painting, becomes the perfect milieu for the same signified or thing itself. In this second pole of universal writing, i.e. phonetic writing, the written signifier

³² Ibid., 302.

is able to vanish “in the time of a breath,” as Derrida says earlier in *Of Grammatology*.³³ What is decisive here is that these two poles enforce an archeo-teleological polarity that guarantees that the full presence of the origin will be retrieved at the end. Derrida explicitly diagnoses this archeo-teleological polarity just a little earlier in the same chapter of *Of Grammatology*:

It is therefore the history of knowledge—of philosophy—which, tending to multiply books, pushes toward formalization, abbreviation, algebra. By the same movement, separating itself from the origin, the signifier is hollowed and desacralized, “demotized,” and universalized. The history of writing, like the history of science, would circulate between the two epochs of universal writing, between two simplicities, between two forms of transparence and univocity: an absolute pictography doubling the totality of the natural entity in an unrestrained consumption of signifiers, and an absolutely formal *graphie* reducing the signifying expense to almost nothing. There would be no history of writing and of knowledge—one might simply say no history at all—except between these two poles. And if history is not thinkable except between these two limits, one cannot disqualify the mythologies of universal script—pictography or algebra—without suspecting the concept of history itself. If one has always thought the contrary, opposing history to the transparence of true language, it was no doubt through blindness toward the archeological or eschatological limits, in terms of which the concept of history was formed.³⁴

³³ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁴ Derrida 1967, 310-11.

Though the polar movement described above stems from Derrida's reflections on Warburton's (and Condillac's) history of writing, it will be observed that the archeo-teleological polarity described above maps nicely onto the Rousseauian south-north polarity. As history unfolds, so goes the Warburton-Condillac-Rousseau story, an archeo-teleological movement departs from an origin of universal writing only to arrive in another one at the end. Even if the signifier "separates" itself from the origin as writing is no longer pictographic, the further it moves away from the origin is also the closest it moves to the origin, as it approaches the other pole of universality. As soon as writing ceases to be purely pictographic, it is already on its way to becoming algebraic. In so doing, writing moves, as Derrida glosses the declaration of Rousseau's epoch, between "two poles" that assure that the origin will always be reached. To leave the origin is to approach the origin. What awaits at the end of the line is the very beginning of the line.

At this point, certain questions must arise. First, if Rousseau's magnetic polarity seems to be his most official *declaration*, what of his *description*? Second, how can it be right for Derrida to read Rousseau's most official declaration as "the unbelievable line of the supplementary structure," that is, as the description Rousseau "says without saying"? And thirdly, how can Derrida in turn use Rousseau's archeo-teleological polarity in order to describe – to declare, rather – how reading happens in any text?

Let us patiently work through these questions. The first one seems to invalidate the others. If the formula above is Rousseau's declaration, Derrida would seem to be a bit quick in (1) reading this archeo-teleological polarity in Rousseau as the *description* that

deconstructs his *declaration* – given that he Derrida so perceptively diagnoses this south-north polarity as Rousseau’s declaration – and (2) appropriating this archeo-teleological polar movement to describe – to declare, rather – how reading happens in a text. Let us come back to the passage in *Of Grammatology* where Derrida *seems* to have made a simple mistake.

It will be remembered that Derrida had been astonished at how “unrepresentable” Rousseau’s south-north polarity turned out to be. The “unbelievable line of the supplementary structure” had to do with the vertiginous polar movement according to which moving away from the origin simultaneously means moving closer to the origin. To our surprise, however, the very same vertiginous polarity is also said to be the archeo-teleological movement guaranteeing that the origin will always be retrieved *in the end*. Is this a contradiction?

As always, things are more complicated. One of *Of Grammatology’s* main insights is to find resources in the text being read that allow us to read that text otherwise. Though Rousseau *would like* this archeo-teleological movement to confirm metaphysics, we are “free to read” this movement otherwise, as Derrida says.³⁵ The very same thing is at once part of Rousseau’s declaration and his description. Here is how Derrida chooses to read Rousseau’s south-north metaphysical polarity otherwise:

The progress of writing is thus a natural progress. And it is a progress of reason. Progress as regression is the growth of reason as writing. Why is that dangerous progress *natural*? No doubt because it is *necessary*. But also because necessity operates within language and society, according to ways and powers that belong

³⁵ Ibid., 434.

to the state of pure *nature*. A pattern that we have already encountered: it is need and not passion that substitutes light for heat, clarity for desire, precision for strength, ideas for sentiment, reason for heart, articulation for accent. The natural, that which was inferior and anterior to language, acts within language *after the fact*, operates there after the origin, and provokes decadence or regression. It then becomes the posterior seizing the superior and dragging it toward the inferior. Such would be the strange time, the indescribable diagram of writing, the unrepresentable movement of its forces and its menaces.³⁶

There is something catastrophic haunting this archeo-teleological structure from within, argues Derrida. Just when we thought writing was about to bring us back to the origin it once left, it catastrophically falls short of the origin. The telos of writing thus provokes a vertiginous fall towards a pre-origin which turns out to have haunted this entire movement from its very inception. The pre-origin of writing and speech acts *après coup* as a natural necessity orienting the progress of history towards a disorientation and regression. It is precisely this disorientation in Rousseau's polar movement that had so interested Derrida earlier on:

Language is a *structure*—a system of oppositions of places and values—and an *oriented* structure. Let us rather say, only half in jest, that *its orientation is a disorientation*. One will be able to call it a *polarization*. Orientation gives direction to movement by relating it to its origin as to its dawning. And it is starting from the light of origin that one thinks of the West, the end and the fall, cadence or check, death or night. According to Rousseau, who appropriates here a

³⁶ Ibid., 310.

most banal opposition from the seventeenth century, language *turns, so* to speak, as the earth turns. Here neither the orient nor the occident is privileged. The references are to the extremities of the axis around which the globe *turns (polos, polein)* and which is called the *rational* axis: the South Pole and the North Pole.³⁷

Thus, Derrida is neither too quick in reading Rousseau's declaration as his description – since the description amounts to reading the same declaration otherwise – nor is he inadvertently borrowing a metaphysical south-north polarity in order to declare how reading happens in any text.

Such a disoriented polarity seems to be fully at work in Derrida's *Geschlecht* series. There can be no doubt that "*Geschlecht III*" acts as a magnetic source and culminating endpoint of Derrida's entire *Geschlecht* project. The decisive question to ask here, however, hinges on how to understand this archeo-teleological structure in a Derridean way. The brief excursus through *Of Grammatology* has already opened up possibilities within that structure that are not easily subsumed under a simple metaphysics of presence. The Rousseauian north-south polarity abyssally disorients the reading of any text as Derrida goes on to declare that declaration and description are themselves to be thought of as "structural poles." The scene of reading of "*Geschlecht III*" would thus be *especially* marked by such a disorientation: insofar as "*Geschlecht III*" explicitly stages the scene of reading, its scene of reading is its scene of reading. Its disorientation is thus double and doubled. Is it then surprising that *Geschlecht III* never found its way towards publication?

³⁷ Ibid.

Let us now follow the movement according to which the archeo-teleological structure of Derrida's *Geschlecht* series is both affirmed *and* dismantled. First, let us reconstitute that structure in its full metaphysical appurtenance. In other words, how does Derrida merely double Heidegger and the archeo-teleological structure Heidegger's reading scene enacts? In other words, how does Derrida speak of his own approach in describing Heidegger's approach to Trakl? If Derrida is right and this is the "condition of any situation," he too will double Heidegger just as Heidegger had doubled Trakl. Just as Heidegger speaks of the stranger in Trakl's poem as having a destination which he Heidegger likewise has, Derrida too has a destination of sorts. More precisely, Derrida's entire *Geschlecht* project is architecturally structured around such a destination. Let us reread the very beginning of *Geschlecht* I:

And it certainly is a matter of "*Geschlecht*" [...] in that word, Heidegger will much later remark 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: Eine Erörterung von Georg Trakls Gedicht*" (1953), in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* [...].³⁸

It has become abundantly clear that the Heidegger text in question is the object of Derrida's analysis in "*Geschlecht* III." Thus, Derrida's *Geschlecht* project is oriented towards "*Geschlecht* III" from its very inception. Derrida pursues, the French verb is *poursuivre*, his reading of *Geschlecht* on the way towards what looks like a final destination. This final destination does not simply lie at the end of Derrida's way. As a

³⁸ Derrida 2008, 7.

telos, it functions as a magnetic arche. Derrida's beginning is *aimantée*, "already being drawn as toward a magnet," just as Heidegger's movement is magnetized. As Derrida himself puts it:

However, and we can pursue this analysis also in this sense, I mean the analysis of a text by Heidegger which is in the end Heidegger's signature, imprint or stroke, we can pursue it by saying, as he himself says of the stranger (*fram, frem*) that he is walking, on the way, in a pilgrimage but that (and here my question to come on determination announces itself a little) his path has a destination, as he himself said of the stranger on the road (*fram*), he does not go wherever, he does not read and write any which way, he does not err when he jumps from a poem to another or from a verse to another. I will not say that he knows where he is going, because this destination, this determination in the destination, this *Bestimmung*, is not of the order of knowledge, but ultimately, *he has an orientation and a path (sent, set), a Sinn that preorients or magnetizes or draws like a magnet [aimante] his movement as well as his conversation with Trakl.*³⁹

The same verb *aimer* is thus used to describe both Heidegger's and Derrida's scene of reading. The publication of "*Geschlecht III*" would thus amount to Derrida's arrival at the

³⁹ My italics. Session nine, typescript page 9: "Cependant, et on peut poursuivre cette analyse aussi dans ce sens, je veux dire l'analyse d'un texte de Heidegger qui n'est en somme que la signature ou l'empreinte ou le coup de Heidegger, on peut la poursuivre en disant, comme il le dit lui-même de l'étranger (*fram, frem*) qu'il est en marche, en voie, en pérégrination mais que (et la s'annonce un peu ma question à venir sur la détermination), son chemin a une destination (*Bestimmung*), comme il le disait lui-même de l'étranger en route (*fram*), il ne va pas n'importe où, il ne lit pas et n'écrit pas n'importe comment, il n'erre pas quand il saute d'un poème ou d'un vers à l'autre. Je ne dirai pas qu'il sait où il va, car cette destination, cette détermination dans la destination, cette *Bestimmung* n'est pas de l'ordre du savoir, mais enfin, il a une orientation et un chemin (*sent, set*), un *Sinn* qui pré-orienté ou magnétise ou aime sa démarche, comme son entretien avec Trakl."

magnetic source and culminating endpoint of the entire *Geschlecht* series. To write “*Geschlecht III*” once and for all means to arrive at the site from which Derrida’s *Geschlechter* spring and back to which they recoil. “*Geschlecht III*” would be a sort of archaeological telos or teleological arche around which all the *Geschlechter* gather. “*Geschlecht III*” would thus situate and organize the scatter of all the *Geschlechter*. “*Geschlecht III*” would thus enframe *Geschlecht* as such.

Such would be *one* way in which “*Geschlecht III*” reads its publication or lack thereof. Yet another doubling of sorts is at work here. For it has by now become apparent that both Heidegger and Derrida attempt to situate *Geschlecht*. It is simply uncanny that Derrida makes the exact same promise as Heidegger in his Trakl essay “Language in the Poem.” Let us reread yet again Derrida’s promise at the beginning of “*Geschlecht I*”:

This essay [...], like the following one (“Heidegger's Hand [*Geschlecht II*]”), will have to content itself with sketching in a preliminary fashion an interpretation to come in which I would like to situate *Geschlecht* in Heidegger's path of thought.⁴⁰

To situate, *situer*, in Heidegger’s German *er-örtern*, is exactly what Heidegger does to *Geschlecht*. Heidegger in fact begins his Trakl essay by explicitly situating his own subtitle in terms of a literal reading of *erörtern* as “to situate”:

⁴⁰ Derrida 2008, 7.

To discuss (*erörtern*) initially means here: to point into the site (*Ort*). It then signifies: to pay heed to the site. Both of these, the pointing into the site and the paying heed to the site, are the preparatory steps of a discussion (*Erörterung*).⁴¹

Heidegger's subtitle, "A Discussion (*Erörterung*) of Georg Trakl's poem," is thus displaced into the meaning of *Ort* as site. This site is the sole object of Heidegger's reading of Trakl: "The discussion (*Erörterung*) speaks of Georg Trakl only in such a way that it bears in mind the site of his poem."⁴² The poem's site turns out to be, argues Heidegger, "that site which gathers Georg Trakl's poetizing saying into its poem."⁴³ On this read, every poetic work by Trakl would spring from and ultimately flow back to the site of Trakl's poem. The latter remains unspoken, Heidegger argues:

The poem of a poet remains unspoken. None of the individual poetic works, not even their sum, says everything. Nevertheless, each poetic work speaks from out of the whole of one poem and says this each time. From the poem's place springs the wave, which in each case moves the saying as a poetizing one. The wave abandons however the poem's place so little that its springing lets instead all the moving of the saying flow back into the ever more veiled origin.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Heidegger 1972, 37. "Erörtern meint hier zunächst: in den Ort weisen. Es heißt dann: den Ort beachten. Beides, das Weisen in den Ort und das Beachten des Ortes, sind die vorbereitenden Schritte einer Erörterung."

⁴² Ibid. "Die Erörterung spricht von Georg Trakl nur in der Weise, daß sie den art seines Gedichtes bedenkt."

⁴³ Ibid. "[...] der das dichtende Sagen Georg Trakls zu seinem Gedicht versammelt."

⁴⁴ Ibid., 37-38. "Das Gedicht eines Dichters bleibt ungesprochen. Keine der einzelnen Dichtungen, auch nicht ihr Gesamt, sagt alles. Dennoch spricht jede Dichtung aus dem Ganzen des einen Gedichtes und sagt jedesmal dieses. Dem Ort des Gedichtes entquillt die Woge, die jeweils das Sagen als ein dichtendes bewegt. Die Woge verläßt jedoch den Ort des Gedichtes so wenig, daß ihr Entquellen vielmehr alles Bewegen der Sage in den stets verhüllteren Ursprung zurückfließen läßt."

The site of Trakl's poem thus functions like an organizing principle for every single poem Trakl ever wrote. As a site, it gathers all scattered poems into their source. This source is a culminating point, too. Heidegger here mobilizes the resources of Old High German in order to execute a further displacement: "Originally, the name site (*Ort*) means the tip of the spear. In it, everything converges."⁴⁵ As Heidegger sees it, this spearpoint gathers all Trakl poems to their "highest and outermost" peak.⁴⁶ This culminating endpoint in turn "penetrates and essences through" every word of every single Trakl poem.⁴⁷ It is thus, writes Heidegger, "a matter of situating that site which gathers Georg Trakl's poetizing saying into its poem, the site of its poem."⁴⁸ The fundamental tone of Trakl's poem would thus "attest to the singular unison" of Trakl's poem. At the end of his Trakl essay, Heidegger claims to have located this unique tone:

This stressed "*one Geschlecht*" harbors the fundamental tone, from out of which this poet's poem silences the mystery. The unity of this *one Geschlecht* springs from the stroke which, from out of departedness, from out of the prevailing quieter quietude in departedness, [...] gathers in a simple manner the dissent between the *Geschlechter* into the gentler twofold.⁴⁹

It thus becomes clear that Heidegger's attempt to situate the site of Trakl's poem is tantamount to situating *Geschlecht*, the fundamental tone of every Trakl poetic work.

⁴⁵ Ibid. "Ursprünglich bedeutet der Name "Ort" die Spitze des Speers. In ihr läuft alles zusammen."

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. "Jetzt gilt es, denjenigen Ort zu erörtern, der das dichtende Sagen Georg Trakls zu seinem Gedicht versammelt, den Ort seines Gedichtes."

⁴⁹ Ibid., 78. "Dieses betonte "*Ein Geschlecht*" birgt den Grundton, aus dem das Gedicht dieses Dichters das Geheimnis schweigt. Die Einheit des *einen Geschlechtes* entquillt dem Schlag, der aus der Abgeschiedenheit her, aus der in ihr waltenden stilleren Stille [...] die Zwietracht der *Geschlechter* einfaltig in die sanftere Zwiefalt versammelt."

This “*one Geschlecht*” is said to be struck in such a way that it gathers the *Geschlechter* into a gentle twofold. Such was too the architectural position of Derrida’s “*Geschlecht III*” as the magnetic source and culminating endpoint of his entire *Geschlecht* project. One could expect from Derrida’s “*Geschlecht I*” that Derrida too was looking for a “pre-dual sexuality” that neutralizes the discord between the sexes but not sexuality as such. Derrida writes:

If *Dasein* as such belongs to neither of the two sexes, that does not mean that it is deprived of sex. On the contrary: here one must think of a pre-differential, or rather a pre-dual, sexuality—which, as we shall see later, does not necessarily mean unitary, homogeneous, and undifferentiated.⁵⁰

“Later” here means “*Geschlecht III*,” where Derrida would eventually take head on the question of a gentle twofold between the sexes. It is around this precise question that the architectural center of Derrida’s *Geschlecht* series collapses.

For Derrida declares war in “*Geschlecht III*” against Heidegger’s attempt to think sexual difference as the “gentleness of a simple twofold.”⁵¹ The promise to situate *Geschlecht* into the “gentler twofold” was never fulfilled. What the text of “*Geschlecht III*” makes clear is that the magnetic source and culminating endpoint of Derrida’s *Geschlecht* series was imploded from within. “*Geschlecht III*” thus marks the site where Derrida’s project succumbs. Structurally speaking, it shifted from a condition of possibility to a condition of impossibility of the *Geschlecht* series. Just when we thought the *Geschlecht* series to be approaching its magnetic source and culminating endpoint, it catastrophically reaches its end. The *end* of *Geschlecht* is the *end* of *Geschlecht*. Its

⁵⁰ Derrida 2008, 158.

⁵¹ Heidegger 1972, 78.

archeo-teleological movement thus reaches its end by destroying the very structure it provisionally relied on. No wonder, one would hasten to add, it never got published.

As always, things are more complicated. For the non-publication of “*Geschlecht III*” can be read in yet another way. Even the non-publication of “*Geschlecht III*” performs a Heideggerian gesture of sorts in its deferral. Taken quite literally, “*Geschlecht III*” is the *Geschlecht* “à paraître,” “à venir.” It is Derrida’s promise of “an interpretation to come.”⁵² In Heidegger, *Geschlecht* is also coming. As Heidegger repeats Trakl’s phrase of a “homecoming *Geschlecht*”:

Trakl’s poetry sings the song of the soul which, as “something strange on the earth,” first wanders through the earth as the stiller home of the homecoming *Geschlecht*.⁵³

This *Geschlecht* to come never comes. It arrives only as a promise to remain on the way towards the earth. It thus never reaches a final destination even if it should not roam about willy-nilly. Its destination is to remain on the way, coming and always to come. As Heidegger puts it:

The poet names the soul “something strange on the earth.” Whereto its wandering could not yet reach is precisely the earth. The soul solely *seeks* the earth, it does not flee it. To seek the earth while wandering, so that it can build and dwell

⁵² Derrida 2008, 7 and 1994, 271.

⁵³ Heidegger 1972, 80. “Trakls Dichtung singt den Gesang der Seele, die, “ein Fremdes auf Erden,” erst die Erde als die stillere Heimat des heimkehrenden *Geschlechtes* erwandert.”

poetically on the earth and only then be able to save the earth as earth, is what fulfills the soul's essence.⁵⁴

There can be no doubt that Heidegger explicitly links the earth's salvation with the promise of a *Geschlecht* to come. "His [Trakl's] poetry sings the destiny of the stroke which strikes, that is, saves the human *Geschlecht* into its hitherto reserved essence."⁵⁵

Trakl's poetry saves both the earth and *Geschlecht*. The two are inextricably linked by the stroke that opens the way to a being-underway. The soul can only be saved if it is allowed to wander through the earth. The earth in turn can be saved if it remains that towards which the soul is on the way. They both depend on a way that is first opened up by a stroke, in German, *ein Schlag*. To be on the way is to strike a direction, as Heidegger sees it:

Sinnan originally signifies: to travel, to drive towards..., to strike a direction; the Indo-Germanic root *sent* and *set* signifies way. The departed is the insane (*Wahnsinnige*) because he is on the way towards elsewhere.⁵⁶

Eine Richtung einschlagen, un frayage, a path-breaking is what being-underway means. The soul qua stranger is nothing more than this being-underway. Departing from the common sense of others, the soul remains sensing in the new sense Heidegger has given

⁵⁴ Ibid., 41. "Der Dichter nennt die Seele "ein Fremdes auf Erden." Wohin ihr Wandern bisher noch nicht gelangen konnte, ist gerade die Erde. Die Seele *sucht* die Erde erst, flieht sie nicht. Wandernd die Erde zu suchen, daß sie auf ihr dichterisch bauen und wohnen und so erst die Erde *als* die Erde retten könne, erfüllt das Wesen der Seele."

⁵⁵ Ibid. "Seine Dichtung singt das Geschick des Schlages, der das Menschen*Geschlecht* in sein noch vorbehaltenes Wesen verschlägt, d. h. rettet."

⁵⁶ Ibid., 53. "*Sinnan*" bedeutet ursprünglich: reisen, streben nach ..., eine Richtung einschlagen; die indogermanische Wurzel *sent* und *set* bedeutet Weg. Der Abgeschiedene ist der *Wahnsinnige*, weil er anderswohin unterwegs ist. "

to *sinnan*. The soul strikes a path. This is its meaning as “something strange on the earth”:

What does “strange” mean? One usually understands by the strange the non-familiar, what does not speak to us, that which rather bothers and troubles us. However, strange (*fremd*), Old High German “*fram*,” actually means: ahead towards elsewhere, on the way towards ..., in the direction of what has been kept reserved.⁵⁷

“*Dem Voraufbehaltenen entgegen*” is where the soul is headed towards. This should of course be related to the *vorbehaltenes Wesen* (reserved essence) of the human *Geschlecht* described above. The human soul and human *Geschlecht* are headed towards their essence, towards what is store for them. This is precisely their essence: to be on the way and thus never arrive anywhere.

Twice Heidegger emphasizes that this destination is never reached. Trakl’s poetry both “silences the mystery” and gathers its poetic saying into the “ever more veiled origin.”⁵⁸ To save *Geschlecht* means to strike *Geschlecht* with the very stroke (*Schlag*) of *Geschlecht*: to be casted adrift (*verschlägt*) as on its way towards being-underway. This does not entail a pure and simple going awry. The being-driven-off-course of *Geschlecht* is what makes *Geschlecht Geschlecht*. Never to arrive at its destination is its destination. Not to have a destiny is its destiny. To strike out each time a new path is its never ending

⁵⁷ Ibid., 41. “Doch, was heißt “fremd”? Man versteht unter dem Fremdartigen gewöhnlich das Nichtvertraute, was nicht anspricht, solches, das eher lastet und beunruhigt. Allein, “fremd,” althochdeutsch “*fram*,” bedeutet eigentlich: anderswohin vorwärts, unterwegs nach ..., dem Voraufbehaltenen entgegen.”

⁵⁸ Qtd. Above.

journey. This is why Heidegger emphasizes that the human *Geschlecht* is brought each time to the “*beginning* of its journey.”⁵⁹ Its journey is to begin anew, again and again.

The non-publication of “*Geschlecht III*” seems then loyal to Heidegger on at least two counts. First, it puts on hold the catastrophic fall of the entire *Geschlecht* project. Secondly, it allows *Geschlecht* to wander, to remain always forthcoming. Is this then how “*Geschlecht III*” speaks of its own non-publication? If only this question were not already part of the abyssal situation in which these remarks have been ventured. “*Geschlecht III*” situates any situation trying to situate it. The very attempt to situate “*Geschlecht III*” and its scene of reading is a doubling of the already doubled scene of reading of “*Geschlecht III*.” Just as Heidegger speaks of himself in speaking of Trakl, just as Derrida speaks of himself in speaking of Heidegger, I too have to be speaking of myself in speaking of Derrida. To situate “*Geschlecht III*” cannot mean then to attain a bird’s eye view over Derrida’s *Geschlecht* series within which “*Geschlecht III*” would find its proper place. To situate “*Geschlecht III*” would have to mean taking into account the fact that the act of situating “*Geschlecht III*” is the very situation of “*Geschlecht III*” itself. A fold folds “*Geschlecht III*” unto itself: just when one thought to be situating “*Geschlecht III*,” one is in fact being situated by “*Geschlecht III*.” One keeps folding the text one wished to unfold. One keeps folding *Geschlecht* into “its ever more veiled origin,” as Heidegger (but not Derrida) would say.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 52.

Chapter I: The Manifold Meaning of *Geschlecht*

This chapter takes a step back in order to provide us with some background to Derrida's newly discovered "*Geschlecht* III." We shall take our departure from a philological analysis of the word "*Geschlecht*" in the Brothers Grimm dictionary. This will allow us to understand why the word "*Geschlecht*" plays such a pivotal and multifaceted role in Derrida's reading of Heidegger. A turn to Freud will put us in a position from which to evaluate the special status "*Geschlecht*" is granted by both Heidegger and Derrida. Not just any old word, "*Geschlecht*" will prove to be a *Ur-Wort* that condenses the very birth of philosophy into two meanings of "*Geschlecht*," sexual and ontological difference. As we shall see, everything hinges on how to understand these seemingly antithetical meanings as part of the same problem. Aristotle's intricate theory of homonymy will help us see a differential way of understanding the relation between *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht*. This will prepare us to take stock of how Derrida and Heidegger understand *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* differently, precisely because what is at stake in "*Geschlecht*" for both of them is difference itself.

Geschlecht is said in many ways. The *Deutsches Wörterbuch* lists six areas of meaning for this word.⁶⁰ Its first sense is articulated as the “totality of those stemming from one patriarch” (*die Gesamtheit der von einem Stammvater herkommenden*). Under this valence, the dictionary further specifies eight shades of meaning revolving around the notion of family, tribe, clan, race or people. Goethe provides the example of how this sense of *Geschlecht* may be used in a sentence (Goethe’s play *Iphigenia in Tauris*): “*Ich bin aus Tantalus Geschlecht,*” usually translated as “I am from the House of Tantalus.”⁶¹ Here, “House” means the family lineage from which Iphigenia descends. In the play, she tries dissuading an unwanted suitor by reminding him of her accursed *Geschlecht*. For Iphigenia was a descendent of the demigod Tantalus whose family lineage was struck with a divine curse on account of his offenses to the gods. This curse consisted in the familicides of every subsequent generation, the most famous example of which being that of Tantalus’s great-grandson, Agamemnon, who had traded his eldest daughter, Iphigenia, with the goddess Diana in exchange for a favorable sea voyage to Troy and whose wife, Clytemnestra, went on to murder him on the wrong assumption he had murdered Iphigenia, whose brother and sister, Orestes and Electra, went on in their turn to murder their mother in order to avenge their father’s death. Orestes, fearing the same fate he had inflicted on his mother, seeks the advice of the Delphic oracle of Apollo who tells him that the only way to lift the curse is to bring “the sister” to Athens. Supposing this “sister”

⁶⁰ For what follows, I have consulted the online edition of the long-standing and authoritative *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm* in “*Der digitale Grimm*” (<http://dwb.uni-trier.de/>, under entry “*Geschlecht*”).

⁶¹ Goethe 1996, 12.

to be Diana, Apollo's twin sister, Orestes sets out on a journey to steal the statue of Diana from her temple in Tauris, the patron city of the goddess who had saved Iphigenia and where she had been serving as a priestess since then. To follow the "sister" is thus to go after a god's twin, only to find one's own sister resurrected, ready to lift the curse on *Geschlecht*, her own *Geschlecht*.

Goethe's retelling of Euripides's "Iphigenia in Tauris" provides the semantic network within which we may situate the manifold meaning of this German word "*Geschlecht*." Returning to the Brothers Grimm's dictionary, we notice that the six principal areas of meaning of "*Geschlecht*" are rather nicely exemplified by the plot of "Iphigenia in Tauris." Let us retell this story, this time calling out each different meaning of "*Geschlecht*" as the story unfolds.

Right away, one meaning of *Geschlecht* comes to the fore. Tantalus is said to be of the demigod species, the demigod *Geschlecht*. The Grimm Brothers articulate this sense of *Geschlecht* as species as "*Gattung, Art überhaupt*," that is, "genus, species in general." Several examples are given under this umbrella: "the fish species" (*das Geschlecht der Fische*), "the several species of saltwater tuna" (*etliche Geschlecht der meerthunnen*), "the various species of animals" in Africa (*in Affrica gibt es mancherlei Geschlechter der thieren*), "the four species of [the plant] stonecrop" (*des mauerpfeffer findet man vier Geschlecht*), "the species of comets" (*das Geschlecht der kometen*) as Kant calls it, "a curved line of the first, other, third, etc., genus" (*eine krumme linie von dem ersten, anderen, dritten u. s. w. Geschlechter*), *Geschlecht* here being the German translation of Descartes' Latin word *genus* used in a mathematical sense. Prominent among this usage of *Geschlecht* as species is the "human species" (*das*

Menschengeschlecht). These relations are “transferred” into the “supernatural,” says the dictionary, referencing Schiller’s “the divine species” (*dem göttlichen Geschlecht*). Tantalus’ demigod species or *Geschlecht* is thus situated between two species or two *Geschlechter*: between the gods and man. Tantalus’ *Geschlecht* is the site of difference between man and the gods.

As we have seen, Tantalus gets too close to the gods to the point of offending them: he pretends not to know he is offering his own son Pelops to the gods as their meal, so as to test their omniscience. Offended at this attempt at deception, the gods in turn strike Tantalus and his descendants with a curse. It is precisely a certain strike that marks *Geschlecht* in general according to the Deutsches Wörterbuch. *Geschlecht* is the “collectivum of slaht,” an Old High German word meaning to strike, mint or smite. The German Ge- prefix retains the gathering force of the Old High German ancestor of “Geschlecht”: “gislahti” collects the strikes and blows that coin and stamp a *Geschlecht* into its mold or imprint. The dictionary refers to this imprint as the look of *Geschlecht*: “to appear in one *Geschlecht*, to bear a certain family trait in one’s face” (*in ain geschlächht sehen, ein gewisses familiengeprähe in seinen zügen tragen*). Thus, *Geschlecht* is etymologically derived from the strike of the German word Schlag meaning blow, stroke, punch but also kind, type or mold. The German word “*Menschenschlag*” meaning breed or type of person echoes the blow of *Geschlecht*. No *Geschlecht* without a type, imprint or signature of sorts. *Geschlecht* is written on the face, as we say.

The Tantalus *Geschlecht* is however remarked by a second strike. This strike affects every subsequent generation of the Tantalus *Geschlecht*. Every descendant of Tantalus is born into the curse striking his entire bloodline: to have members of a given

generation commit familicides of all sorts. Iphigenia uses her own family curse as an alibi for not generating offspring that would fatefully murder her and itself.

Unbeknownst to us, four related and yet slightly different meanings of *Geschlecht* have just now been hinted at. Generation, descendant, bloodline and offspring are each possible English translations of *Geschlecht*, depending on the historical context, to be sure. The curse on the Tantalus *Geschlecht* spreads to all these senses of *Geschlecht* as it seeks to destroy that very *Geschlecht* itself by means of the *Geschlechter* of this *Geschlecht*, *Geschlechter* being the plural form of *Geschlecht* in the sense of children, family members, generations and descendants of the same bloodline. The second strike of the *Geschlechter* of the Tantalus *Geschlecht* strikes this very *Geschlecht* itself by its own hands, so to speak.

It is not entirely accidental, perhaps, that a given *Geschlecht* should be cursed. What if the very thing that made *Geschlecht* *Geschlecht* consisted in a curse? The *Schlag* (strike or blow) of *Geschlecht* would be indissociably linked to the curse each *Geschlecht* is struck with. The *schlagen* of each and every *Geschlecht* would scar each and every *Geschlecht*. To belong to a *Geschlecht* would thus be to be struck or smitten with a blow that befalls one's destiny. The Greek verb πλήσσω and its corresponding noun πληγή seem to attest this conceptual solidarity between strike and curse. The Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon lists literal meanings for these words accompanied by a metaphorical displacement.⁶² Πληγή and πλήσσω are primarily associated with a strike or blow – as when Odysseus strikes Thersites' back and shoulders with his sword (σκήπτρω δὲ μετάφρενον ἠδὲ καὶ ὤμω

⁶² Liddell and Scott 1996.

πλήξεν) or when he threatens to “send thee [Thersites] wailing to the swift ships, beaten out of the agora with shameful blows” (αὐτὸν δὲ κλαίοντα θοὰς ἐπὶ νῆας ἀφήσω πεπλήγων ἀγορήθεν ἀεικέσσι πληγῆσιν). This literal strike of πληγή and πλήσσω is then displaced into a metaphorical sense of misfortune, curse or plague, the English cognate of πληγή. More often than not, the plague or curse one is struck with – it is no accident that in English we say that a curse strikes – comes from Zeus: the “stroke of Zeus” (Διὸς πλαγᾶν) strikes repeatedly throughout Ancient Greek Literature, denoting a “heaven-sent plague,” as Liddell-Scott have it. It will be remembered that it was a heavenly sent plague that struck the Tantalus *Geschlecht* with an auto-immune drive to self-extinction. The Tantalus *Geschlecht* is thus struck in this double Greek sense of πληγή: to receive a blow that befalls as a curse. It is tempting then to generalize this relation and to hear the Schlag of each and every *Geschlecht* with Greek ears. With German ears, one could perhaps then be forgiven for ignoring the philologically attested roots of *Geschlecht* and hear this word only synchronically: *Ge-schlecht* would then be a condensation of *schlecht*, of all that is evil, wicked, bad, curse- and plague-like in *Geschlecht*. In a word, *Ge-schlecht* is *schlecht*, that is, *Geschlecht* is bad.

Yet another valence of *Geschlecht* has yet to be mentioned. This meaning seems to be particularly important as it leaves its mark on the others. House, family, tribe, clan, species, bloodline, descendants, offspring, generation are each divided in accordance with the fourth principal area of meaning of *Geschlecht* specified by the Grimm Brothers: “the natural sex, male or female” (*das natürliche, männliche oder weibliche Geschlecht*). The examples the dictionary gives are manifold: “the sex of the natural genitals” (*Geschlecht*

der natürlichen glider) in the sense of the sexual difference between them; “the male sex” (männlich *Geschlechts*); “the stronger sex” (*starken Geschlechtes*) as opposed to “the weaker sex” (*schwache Geschlecht*) as Schiller and Goethe respectively characterize the male and female sex; the “so called fair sex” (*das sogenannte schöne Geschlecht*) as Ewald von Kleist rehearses the doxa of how the female sex is sometimes referred to; “Karl’s carelessness towards the *Geschlecht*” (*Karls leichtsinn gegen das Geschlecht*) as J. Paul writes in his novel *Titan*, *Geschlecht* here being equivalent to the French use of “*le sexe*” referring exclusively to the female sex.

It would seem that this sense of *Geschlecht* as sex is especially prominent throughout Goethe’s “Iphigenia in Tauris.” After all, the curse that strikes the Tantalus *Geschlecht* is often played out between family members of the opposite sex: the father Agamemnon tries to sacrifice the daughter Iphigenia, the wife Clytemnestra murders her husband Agamemnon, the son Orestes murders his mother Clytemnestra and sets out to rescue “the sister” in order to lift the curse on his and her *Geschlecht*. The war that reigns over the Tantalus *Geschlecht* is a war of the sexes. Suffice it to remember the name of the sister who had aided Orestes in killing their mother Clytemnestra: Electra. Had Freud in fact not at least considered – if only to reject it – Electra’s name as an (in)eligible candidate for the girl-version of the Oedipus complex?

Let us take stock of the aforementioned senses of the word “*Geschlecht*.” It seems like we might be justified in simplifying matters a bit and condensing the six principal meanings of *Geschlecht* down to two semantic zones. Though *Geschlecht* as sex internally differentiates every other meaning of *Geschlecht* – so that family, tribe, clan, people, race, generation, descendants, offspring, bloodline and species are each in turn

differentiated into the sexes – there seems to be a more pronounced distance between the sexual zone and the others. Family, tribe, clan, people, etc. seem to enjoy a proximity to each other that is not as readily apparent as in the case of species and sex, for example. We may then class *Geschlecht* as sex on one side and lump together all the more immediately related meanings on the other. This overdetermined side of multiple neighboring meanings of *Geschlecht* can be organized further to align these senses under the umbrella of *Geschlecht* as species. As the overarching sense that unites these near-synonyms is that of a common feature binding a member into a whole, the term species seems especially well-suited for naming this side of *Geschlecht*: of all the terms, it is the one that best neutralizes the differences of the others in favor of the most abstract commonality that would gather two families or two peoples under the same species, for example. *Geschlecht* as sex, by contrast, is, of all the terms, the one that least neutralizes difference and most explicitly acts as a differentiating principle within the semantic zone of *Geschlecht* that tends to emphasize a gathering feature rather than a dispersion. Though the sexual difference of *Geschlecht* has historically been associated with a binary opposition of sorts – so that difference could be said to be neutralized here, too – this differentiated meaning of *Geschlecht* into two can be diametrically opposed to the gathered meaning of *Geschlecht* as the species of all. From two to all, from the most specific difference in its minute form to the largest group *Geschlecht* can form: such would be the two meanings of *Geschlecht*, the two sides of its coin.

After boiling *Geschlecht* down to two main meanings, sex and species, we may ask if and how these two meanings relate to each other. Here, we may turn to Aristotle's distinction between accidental and non-accidental homonyms for help in how to

conceptualize the relation between words that are spelled the same but mean something different in each case. Is it a mere accident that *Geschlecht* comes to have these two sides? Or is there something non-fortuitous at work here?

Aristotle opens the *Categories* by drawing a distinction between homonyms and synonyms, ὁμώνυμα and συνώνυμα, what Boethius translates into Latin as *aequivoca* and *univoca* respectively. Boethius' translation can still be heard in the English translations of Aristotle of today. *Aequivoca* and *univoca* are usually translated in English by the cognates equivocal and univocal, repeating thereby the erasure of ὄνομα, the name. ὁμώνυμα are words that have the same name but mean something different in each case, as Aristotle tells us: "Things are equivocally named, when they have the name only in common, the definition (or statement of essence) corresponding with the name being different (Ὅμώνυμα λέγεται ὅν ὄνομα μόνον κοινόν, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος)."⁶³ Here, Aristotle uses the Greek word ζῶον as an example of homonymy. Having two unrelated meanings, ζῶον can be predicated of both man and portrait alike, writes Aristotle: "For instance, a man and a portrait can both be called a ζῶον" (οἶον ζῶον ὅ τε ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ γεγραμμένον).⁶⁴ This is because the word ζῶον can designate either a "living being" (e.g. the animal man) or a mere "image, figure, not necessarily of animals," as the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon specifies the two meanings of ζῶον. Aristotle then justifies his terminological usage by emphasizing that, as in the case of ζῶον as living being and ζῶον as portrait, the similarity between homonyms lies in the "common name alone." Homonyms, writes Aristotle, do not partake of the same λόγος which is singular in each case: "For if you are asked to define what a being-ζῶον means in

⁶³ Aristotle, *The Categories*, 1a.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

the case of man and portrait, you give in either case a definition appropriate to that case alone” (ἂν γὰρ τις ἀποδιδῶ τί ἐστὶν αὐτῶν ἑκατέρῳ τὸ ζῶν εἶναι, ἴδιον ἑκατέρου λόγον ἀποδώσει).⁶⁵ Would Aristotle then see a homonymy between *Geschlecht* as species and *Geschlecht* as sex? Would there be no *conceptual* relation – at the level of λόγος and not merely of ὄνομα – between *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht*?

Aristotle continues his rhetorical analysis in the *Categories* by articulating a conceptual relation between words used univocally, the συνώνυμα. He writes: “Things are univocally named, when not only they bear the same name but the name means the same in each case—has the same definition corresponding” (συνώνυμα δὲ λέγεται ὅν τό τε ὄνομα κοινὸν καὶ ὁ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ὁ αὐτός).⁶⁶ He again gives the example of ζῶον, of which both man and ox can be predicated: “For instance, a man and an ox are called ζῶον” (οἷον ζῶον ὃ τε ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὁ βούς).⁶⁷ This is because both man and ox can be said to belong to the genus “living being,” the *Geschlecht* or *Gattung* ζῶον. Aristotle makes clear that, this time, it is not simply a matter of having a common name – as man and ox do when they are both called ζῶον – but of sharing an identical λόγος common to both species under one genus or one *Geschlecht*.

In Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explicitly relates two συνώνυμα to their common γένος. Drawing a distinction between universal and particular injustice, Aristotle explains why they are nevertheless both called by the same name univocally (συνωνύμως) and not merely equivocally (ὁμωνύμως):

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1b.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Hence it is manifest that there is another sort of Injustice besides universal Injustice, the former being part of the latter. It is called by the same name because its definition falls in the same genus, both sorts of injustice being exhibited in a man's relation to others.⁶⁸

συνώνυμα thus shares the same ὀρισμός and λόγος τῆς οὐσίας insofar as their γένος is the same. In this context, both senses of injustice derive their meaning from the genus or sphere of ethical affairs with others. Falling under this same genus, each sense of injustice is differentiated and specified further into its species, what the scholastics referred to as the *differentia specifica* of the *genus proximum*. One type of injustice is restricted to matters involving money, honor or security – everything that Aristotle understands as relating to the pleasure of gain – while the other is said to encompass “all things that are the sphere of justice.”⁶⁹ Similarly, both man and ox fall under the same genus ζῶον (living being), but can be differentiated further into their species as ζῶον λόγον ἔχον and ζῶον ἄλογον respectively, what is usually and inadequately translated into English as ratiōn and irratiōn animal. Would Aristotle see a synonymy between *Geschlecht* as sex and *Geschlecht* as species? Would there be a genus under which *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* would fall as two types of the concept of *Geschlecht*?

Let us pause over this question. It would seem unlikely that one even could conceptualize a generic concept for *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht*. For one of the sides of *Geschlecht* means precisely “genus, species in general,” as the Brothers Grimm tell us. It would seem to be unwarranted to privilege the side of *Geschlecht* meaning genus-species in order to capture the other side of *Geschlecht* as sex as *itself* straightforwardly

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1130b.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

belonging to a genus as a species. Who is to say that the side of *Geschlecht* as sex obeys the taxonomic principle laid out by the other?

Are we then forced back into a merely homonymous relation of *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht*? If it is illegitimate to thrust *Geschlecht* as sex simply under *Geschlecht* as species – not to mention the doubling of *Geschlecht* as species-genus that would explain *Geschlecht* (away), only to remain *itself* unexplained – would there be no further alternative in Aristotle for understanding the relation between *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* as something other than accidental homonymy?

Aristotle seems to grant us, however, with the possibility for thinking a homonymy that is neither accidental nor subordinated to the genus-species hierarchy. Aristotle sometimes finds the need to specify that homonyms are accidental, fortuitous or contingent (ἄπο τύχης). At other times, however, Aristotle seems to allow for a homonymy that is not characterized as ἄπο τύχης. Let us now follow this distinction.

At the opening of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle takes Plato's understanding of the good to task. Arguing that "good" has as many senses as the word "being" – so that "good" will mean intelligence with respect to substance, excellence with respect to quality, moderate amount with respect to quantity, a favorable opportunity with respect to time – Aristotle rejects Plato's understanding of *the* good, that is, an idea or genus containing a univocal definition of "good." This leads Aristotle to ask in what way the manifold senses of "good" are nevertheless interrelated, even if this relation is not one of the genus-species type. He asks:

But in what sense then are different things called good? For they do not seem to be a case of things that bear the same name merely by chance. Possibly things are

(a) called good in virtue of springing from one meaning and each leading back to that one meaning. Or (b) perhaps it is *rather* by way of analogy : that is, as sight is good in the body, so intelligence is good in the soul, and similarly another thing in something else.⁷⁰

Aristotle reposes the question of the manifold meaning of “good,” this time on a different foundation. This foundation entails a common element linking the senses of “good” so that accidental homonymy and generic univocity are discarded. We can see Aristotle struggling to find his way here. He seems to have arrived at a fork: either (a) the homonyms of “good” spring from and lead back towards one meaning of “good” (not that of the genus “good”) or (b) they are to be analogically related. Whatever the case, we can see a new path being forged along the lines of what has been called “moderate” or “attenuated” homonymy by recent Aristotelian scholarship, what I negatively characterized above as “non-accidental” homonymy. Would *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* be marked by such a non-fortuitous homonymy?

Let us pursue this question a little further. For there seem to be at least two types of non-accidental homonymy, as Aristotle tells us above. While one type hangs on a primary meaning of good from which the homonyms of good would spring and lead back towards, the other seems to posit no such hierarchy. Would there be a primary meaning of *Geschlecht* from which *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* derive and ultimately boil down to? *Or rather* – as Aristotle’s Greek could suggest – would *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* posit no such primary meaning and relate only analogically?

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1096b30.

Aristotle himself never cared to fix these two types of non-accidental homonymy by means of a terminological distinction. The Scholastics were certainly attentive to this problem. It is no accident that they coined the terms *analogia attributionis* and *analogia proportionalitatis* to name this conceptual difference between the aforementioned types of homonymy. Both types are now analogies, each of a different sort. Aristotle seems to have the first analogy in mind at the beginning of *Metaphysics*' Book θ . He writes:

We have now dealt with being in the primary sense, which all the other categories of being lead back towards; i.e. substance. For it is from the concept of substance that all the other modes of being take their meaning; both quantity and quality and all other such terms; for they will all involve the concept of substance, as we stated it in the beginning of our discussion.⁷¹

Aristotle explicitly delimits the field of inquiry within which the *analogia attributionis* finds its foothold. Often in Aristotle, the famous formulation (“being means many things”) is followed by an articulation of the *analogia attributionis* model *within* the conceptual domain of οὐσία, what is often translated into English as substance. οὐσία, Aristotle tells us, is the primary meaning of being from which the other modes of being falling under the jurisdiction of οὐσία take their sense in turn. οὐσία thus functions as the nexus that holds together the many senses of categorical being as their underlying principle (ὑποκείμενον) and common root (κοινόν τι).

It should be noted, however, that the scope of οὐσία and its many determinations as quality, quantity, time, etc. is *itself* inscribed in and only as part of a larger network. Aristotle lists the manifold senses of being in chapter two of Book VI of the *Metaphysics*

⁷¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1045b.

where it becomes abundantly clear that οὐσία – with its ten categorical senses – is *itself* only one way in which “being” makes sense for Aristotle:

The simple term “being” is used in various senses, of which we saw that (1) one was accidental, and (2) another true (non-being being used in the sense of “false”); and (3) besides these there are the categories, e.g. the “what,” quality, quantity, place, time, and any other similar meanings; and (4) further besides all these the potential and actual.⁷²

It is then prudent to wonder if these four senses of being are to be united, without further ado, simply in accordance with the way in which one of these four senses is *itself* structured. It then becomes tempting to look to that other sense of analogy in Aristotle that does not comply with the regulations of categorical being. Let us now briefly address the *analogia proportionalitatis* in order to come back to the question of how *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* relate.

Immediately following the passage from Book θ quoted above, Aristotle clearly distinguishes between two kinds of analogy at work in the Greek word δύναμις (usually translated as potency, potentiality or power when used in its mathematical sense). Relying on the Greek parallel terms (*hosai men, hosai de*) in order to juxtapose and oppose these two analogies – the *analogia attributionis* and *analogia proportionalitatis* – Aristotle writes:

We have made it plain elsewhere that δύναμις has several senses. [1. As *analogia proportionalitatis*] All senses which are merely equivocal may be dismissed; for some are used on the basis of a certain likeness, as in geometry; and we call things

⁷² Ibid., 1025b.

possible or impossible because they “are” or “are not” in some particular way. [2. As *analogia attributionis*] But the potentialities which conform to the same type are all principles, springing from and leading back towards the primary meaning of δύναμις, which is the source of change in some other thing, or in the same thing qua other.⁷³

In his 1931 lecture on *Metaphysics* θ, Heidegger identifies the first analogy of δύναμις as an example of the *analogia proportionalitatis*. Heidegger’s reason for reading the homonymy of δύναμις in its geometrical and ontological senses as having a signifying proportional nexus between them – the *analogia proportionalitatis* and not *attributionis* – stems from Aristotle’s text. For Aristotle describes the other sense of δύναμις – δύναμις as “the source of change in some other thing, or in the same thing qua other” – with similar terms he characterizes the *analogia attributionis* with respect to categorical being. As the passage above attests, Aristotle sees the many senses of δύναμις springing from and leading back towards a primary sense of δύναμις as the heteronomous principle of change. This is the same schema according to which we have already seen Aristotle trying to understand how the many senses of categorical being or the word “good” lead back towards and spring from a primary meaning in each case. Over and against this mode of signification of the *analogia attributionis*, Aristotle posits another analogical mode that functions sheerly by means of a differential relation between analogical pairs. In the case of the many senses of “good,” we saw Aristotle tentatively leaning towards – by means of *he mallon* – the *analogia proportionalitatis* as the adequate way to understand how the many senses of “good” share a signifying nexus without for all that

⁷³ Ibid.

positing a unifying genus or a primary meaning. In the case of δύναμις, Aristotle tells us very little about how the geometrical and ontological senses of δύναμις relate by means of the *analogia proportionalitatis*, which leads Heidegger to read the passage from Book θ together with the passage from Book Δ – to which Aristotle himself refers us – where Aristotle calls the *analogia proportionalitatis* by the name μεταφορά. Heidegger then mobilizes a literal translation of μεταφορά into the German *Übertragung* and draws on it in order to understand the *analogia proportionalitatis* of “good” in the example Aristotle gives us in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (body : vision :: soul : intelligence). Heidegger writes:

Aristotle knows still another form of analogy, [...] the *analogia proportionalitatis* — correspondence in the manner of a likeness of proportion; [...] see *Nicomachean Ethics*, A4, 1096b28f.: “As vision is to the bodily eyes, so (correspondingly) is mental perception (reason) to the eyes of the soul” (eyes of the soul, *ibid.* Z13, 1144a30). Accordingly, in the correspondence a *transfer* (*Übertragung*) occurs from the proportionality between the eyes and vision in the physical onto the proportionality in the mental—a transfer: a *metaphora*; every “metaphor” is an “analogy” (but not in the sense of an *analogia attributionis*). Eye and eye mean here something different, but this is by no means a mere accidental and unfounded identity of the name, but rather a certain correspondence (ὁμοιότης τι) in the matter. It is in this sense that δύναμις is being used here, and Aristotle refers to the meanings meant in this way in the first group (*Metaphysics* θ I, 1046a6-8).⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Heidegger 1995a, 48.

Heidegger seems to be identifying here a metaphoricity that does not rely on any primary meaning whatsoever. In the four part analogy body : vision :: soul : intelligence, the word “good” names a relation that is itself understood in terms of another relation. What is thus transferred is not a literal and proper meaning but a relation that is itself determined retroactively, by means of another relation that depends on the very relation depending on it. This co-dependence means that none of the terms of the analogy have an independent meaning but make sense only relationally, by means of relations that will have constituted the terms *après-coup*. The relations between the terms precede and exceed each of the terms which, in and of themselves, have no positive meaning. And yet, meaning happens horizontally, by means of relational forces that are themselves left unexpressed: a system of differences without positive terms, as Saussure would have said.

Let us reflect on the possibilities Aristotle opens up for us. In order to understand how the homonyms *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* may relate, we took a detour through Aristotle’s intricate theory of homonymy. We began with Aristotle’s classic definition of homonymy and contrasted accidental homonyms with univocal synonyms. Aristotle’s example of the Greek word ζῶον helped us understand both cases. We then noticed that these two alternatives do not exhaust homonymy for Aristotle. Using the Scholastic distinction between *analogia attributionis* and *analogia proportionalitatis* as our analytical framework, we pursued the issue of homonymy further in Aristotle. We observed that Aristotle allows us to conceive of a non-fortuitous homonymy of sorts which is itself divided into two kinds of analogy. The first kind – what was later called

analogia attributionis by the Scholastics – posits a primary meaning from which the analogical meanings spring and lead back towards. By contrast, the second kind of analogy – the *analogia proportionalitatis* – posits no such meaning but operates sheerly by means of a transference (μεταφορά) of one relation into another.

It is time we attempted to situate *Geschlecht* within this Aristotelian schema. It will be remembered that the manifold meanings of *Geschlecht* can be organized around two semantic fields, species and sex. *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* can thus be said to be two words written the same way but meaning something different in each case. As it has become clear why *Geschlecht* cannot have the status of a genus, we are left with a decision to make: is the homonymy between *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* entirely accidental or is there an affinity of sorts between them? And if so, which kind of likeness, that of *analogia attributionis* or that of *analogia proportionalitatis*? In other words, assuming such similarity, will *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* posit a primary meaning from which they spring and lead back towards? Or will *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* make sense only relationally, by means of a transference (μεταφορά)?

In the wake of these questions, let us now turn to Freud in order to call attention to a particularly striking juxtaposition of *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht*. As we shall see, Freud cannot *not* mobilize *Geschlecht* as species without mobilizing *Geschlecht* as sex. *And vice-versa*. Does that mean *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* are two sides of the same coin, two homonyms for the same problem? Is there anything but contingency at work here?

The word “*Geschlecht*” appears several times throughout Freud’s writings. Its most famous occurrence is no doubt in the title of one of Freud’s most important pieces

on sexual difference precisely, as its title suggests: “Some psychological consequences based on an anatomical distinction between the sexes” (*Einige psychische Folgen des anatomischen Geschlechtsunterschieds*). Here, Freud’s aim is to provide a parallel account of the Oedipus complex as it develops in girls. As Freud puts it, psychoanalytic research had “been in the habit of taking as the subject of our investigations the male child, the little boy.”⁷⁵ He then ventures the hypothesis that “with little girls [...] things must be similar, though in some way or other they must nevertheless be different.”⁷⁶ Just a little later, we learn what this difference is, according to Freud:

In little girls the Oedipus complex raises one problem more than in boys. In both cases the mother is the original object; and there is no cause for surprise that boys retain that object in the Oedipus complex. But how does it happen that girls abandon it and instead take their father as an object? In pursuing this question I have been able to reach some conclusions which may throw light precisely on the prehistory of the Oedipus relation in girls.⁷⁷

What sets the little girl apart from the little boy is that she must “abandon” the original object, that is, the mother, and “instead take her father as an object.”⁷⁸ Whereas a boy will simply “retain” the first object of his psychic life – the mother who nursed him during the previous pre-Oedipal stages – a girl, argues Freud, needs to abandon her first object (which too is the mother) in order to enter an Oedipal relation with her father. Freud’s question here is how this switch from mother to father comes about in little girls, that is,

⁷⁵ Freud 1925, SE XIX 245.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 251.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

what is it that could possibly lead a girl to abandon that awfully important first object of her life, the same object the boy obstinately clings to?

Penis-envy is Freud's answer. While investigating the "long prehistory" of the Oedipal complex in girls – so long in fact that the Oedipus complex is downgraded to the status of a "secondary formation" – Freud hones in on a discovery the little girl is "destined to make."⁷⁹ As he writes:

Be that as it may, the genital zone is discovered at some time or other, and there seems no justification for attributing any psychical content to the first activities in connection with it. But the first step in the phallic phase which begins in this way is not the linking-up of the masturbation with the object-cathexes of the Oedipus complex, but a momentous discovery which little girls are destined to make. They notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis.⁸⁰

Precisely at this point, Freud articulates the promise made in the title to read "sexual difference" (*Geschlechtsunterschied*). Freud is willing to give girls a privilege with respect to sexual difference vis-à-vis boys. The difference between the sexes has to do precisely with how each sex deals with the difference between the sexes. While a boy will, when faced with the genital of the other sex, "show irresolution and lack of interest, [...] see nothing or disavow what he has seen," a girl will do "otherwise," argues Freud:

⁷⁹ Ibid., 252.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

It is otherwise with the little girl. She makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it.⁸¹

As Freud now goes on to enumerate the “psychical consequences of envy for the penis” in girls, he arrives on the reasons that would lead a little girl to abandon the mother and switch her libidinal investment to an Oedipal father.⁸² Assuming a little girl’s libido will not henceforth “become absorbed in the reaction-formation of the masculine complex” – so that she will either entertain the “hope of some day obtaining a penis in spite of everything and so of becoming like man” or disavow the whole thing altogether so as to believe “she does possess a penis” – the mother comes to be blamed for “sending the little girl into the world so insufficiently equipped.”⁸³ According to Freud, the little girl’s mother “is almost always held responsible for her lack of a penis.”⁸⁴ This newly assigned blame on the mother could begin to explain what Freud calls the third consequence of penis-envy, that is, “the loosening of the girl’s affectionate relation with her mother as a love object.”⁸⁵ It would then seem that this third consequence fully answers the question Freud had posed in the beginning of his essay. The reason why little girls abandon the mother has to do with a newly developed hatred for the mother as the person to be blamed for their ill-equipped condition.

It is, however, striking that Freud goes on to list yet a fourth and final consequence of penis-envy which he calls “undoubtedly the most important of all.”⁸⁶ As Freud sees it, penis-envy’s most fateful consequence is to be observed in the “narcissistic

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 253.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 254.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 255.

sense of humiliation” the girl comes to experience in relation to clitoral masturbation. Being unable to “compete with boys” in this respect, the little girl will give masturbation up, argues Freud:

I cannot explain the opposition which is raised in this way by little girls to phallic masturbation except by supposing that there is some concurrent factor which turns her violently against that pleasurable activity. Such a factor lies close at hand. It cannot be anything else than her narcissistic sense of humiliation which is bound up with penis-envy, the reminder that after all this is a point on which she cannot compete with boys and that it would therefore be best for her to give up the idea of doing so. Thus the little girl's recognition of the anatomical distinction between the sexes forces her away from masculinity and masculine masturbation onto new lines which lead to the development of femininity.⁸⁷

It is at this point that Freud is ready to answer the main question of his essay. The narcissistic “scar” left by the recognition of sexual difference on the little girl’s psyche prompts her to associate her clitoris with this painful wound and renounce – if only partially, *de facto* – clitoral masturbation. This in turn allows her libido to “slip into a new position,” writes Freud:

But now the girl's libido slips into a new position along the line—there is no other way of putting it—of the equation ‘penis-child’. She gives up her wish for a penis and puts in place of it a wish for a child: and *with that purpose in view* she takes her father as a love-object. Her mother becomes the object of her jealousy. The

⁸⁷ Ibid.

girl has turned into a little woman. If I am to credit a single analytic instance, this new situation can give rise to physical sensations which would have to be regarded as a premature awakening of the female genital apparatus.⁸⁸

Freud goes indeed very far here. By having penis-envy motivate the disinvestment of the clitoris in favor of what Freud calls the “premature awakening” of the vagina, Freud has to concede that little girls “recognize” sexual difference.⁸⁹ It is this “recognition” that forces the girl’s libido to adopt a new configuration best described as that of a “little woman” who substitutes her wish for a child for her previous wish for a penis.⁹⁰ Since the child is to come from her father, the little girl’s mother becomes the “object of her jealousy.”⁹¹ Thus, the little girl has switched from mommy to daddy is the Oedipus complex is now up and running.

The point that most immediately interests us here centers around a footnote that Freud attaches to this essay. Taking very seriously his discovery that little girls as a rule recognize sexual difference, Freud is led to rectify a statement he had made “many years ago” concerning the sexual interest of children.⁹² Freud’s correction will bring us back to the manifold meaning of *Geschlecht*. Freud writes:

This is an opportunity for correcting a statement which I made many years ago. I believed that the sexual interest of children, unlike that of pubescents, was aroused, not by the difference between the sexes, but by the problem of where babies come from. We now see that, at all events with girls, this is certainly

⁸⁸ Ibid., 256.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 252.

not the case. With boys it may no doubt happen sometimes one way and sometimes the other; or with both sexes chance experiences may determine the event.⁹³

Let us dwell on this incredibly bizarre footnote. It is initially plausible that Freud should want to correct his long-held theory that the sexual interest of children is awakened not by the difference between the sexes but, instead, by the impending question of where do babies come from. As we have seen, interest in the sexual difference of the other sex turns out to be a normal piece of development in little girls. So much so that Freud seems initially to invert the order in which these questions are asked by the little girl, only then to contradict himself bluntly: is it “certainly not the case” that a girl’s sexual interest will be first aroused by the question of where do babies come from – and not by sexual difference instead – or is it rather the case that “chance experiences may determine the event”?⁹⁴ Why the confusion? And what is being confused here?

Geschlecht is the answer. In other words, what *Geschlecht* comes first in the psycho-sexual development of children, *Geschlecht* as the origin of the species or *Geschlecht* as sexual difference? Must these questions be different questions, as Freud seems to think? What if one question always pulled the other along with it? Would this explain why it is not an accident that Freud, much like the little girl or boy he is describing, should go back and forth on *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* for nearly two decades?

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Let us now backtrack nearly twenty years in order to follow Freud's oscillation between *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht*. As early as 1907, Freud had juxtaposed two meanings of *Geschlecht* in his narrative of how the sexual interest of children is aroused. In an open letter to Doctor M. Fürst who had asked Freud to speak if, at what age and how children should be enlightened about the riddles of sex, Freud emphatically notes the spontaneity with which a certain little boy stumbled upon the problem of sexual difference (*das Problem des Geschlechtsunterschiedes*). Remarking that the boy's prediction that his little sister's clitoris would eventually grow into the size of his own widdler is exemplary of all boys that age ("*Aber ihr Wiwimacher ist noch klein. Wenn sie wächst, wird er schon größer werden.*"), Freud stresses the inevitability of such an attitude towards *Geschlecht* as sex – and towards *Geschlecht* as "*le sexe.*"⁹⁵ Little Hans, the four-year-old boy in question, was simply, as Freud writes, "innocently expressing his mental processes" so as to be exemplary of how early children naturally encounter *Geschlecht* as sex.⁹⁶ Second to *Geschlecht* as sex comes the problem of another *Geschlecht*, that is, *Geschlecht* as species or the origin of the species, the *Geschlecht* of *Geschlecht*, that is, the lineage or provenance (*Geschlecht* as *Herkunft*) of *Geschlecht*. As Freud writes:

The second great problem which exercises a child's mind—only at a somewhat later age, no doubt—is the question of the origin (*Herkunft*) of babies. This is usually started by the unwelcome arrival of a *small brother or sister*. It is the oldest and most burning question that confronts young humanity. Those who

⁹⁵ Freud 1907, SE IX 135.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

understand how to interpret myths and legends can detect it in the riddle which the Theban Sphinx set to Oedipus.⁹⁷

The second and yet oldest, most burning problem: already here we see an anachronism between the individual's childhood and the species' childhood. If sex is the first problem of childhood, it remains, at best, an ontic or ontogenetic problem pre-dated by the problem of all problems, the *Geschlecht* of *Geschlecht*. Even though Freud here puts the question of sexual difference first in line, this does not preclude him from somewhat diminishing its importance when compared to what comes first phylogenetically speaking. As we have already seen, it is not until 1925, almost twenty years later, that Freud puts the question of woman first in line and *Geschlecht* as sex is salvaged from oblivion. I say oblivion because *Geschlecht* as sex was not even a problem ontogenetically speaking – even if Freud calls it one in the letter. A passage from a text shortly following in 1908 will indeed erase any trace of *Geschlecht* as sex from early childhood:

The first of the sexual theories of children starts out from the neglect of the differences between the sexes [*Vernachlässigung der Geschlechtsunterschiede*] on which I laid stress at the beginning of this paper as being characteristic of children. It consists in attributing to everyone, including females, the possession of a penis, such as the boy knows from his own body. It is precisely in what we must regard as the 'normal' sexual constitution that already in childhood the penis is the leading erotogenic zone and the chief auto-erotic sexual object; and the boy's estimate of its value is logically reflected in his inability to imagine a person like

⁹⁷ Ibid.

himself who is without this essential constituent. When a small boy sees his little sister's genitals, what he says shows that his prejudice is already strong enough to falsify his perception. He does not comment on the absence of a penis, but invariably says, as though by way of consolation and to put things right: 'The ... is still quite small. But when she gets bigger it'll grow all right.'⁹⁸

“Der ... ist aber noch klein; nun wenn sie größer wird, wird er schon wachsen.” Thus spoke Little Hans, almost verbatim as we have already heard Freud ventriloquize him in the aforementioned letter from just months before. Almost verbatim: here an ellipsis substitutes Little Hans' word for his sister's widdler. Why? Why does Freud silence Little Hans precisely on the word designating his sister's genital? Answer: because it is as though her genital mattered so little that it did not even deserve a name. Little Hans disavows what he sees to the point of not seeing the absence that is really there. The ellipsis is the absence of this absence which, as the neglect of *Geschlecht*, is “characteristic of children,” as Freud says. This is why it is not so surprising to find Freud apparently contradicting what he had written in the letter in another passage from this 1908 text concerning exactly which problem occupies the child's thoughts first:

If we could divest ourselves of our corporeal existence, and could view the things of this earth with a fresh eye as purely thinking beings, from another planet for instance, nothing perhaps would strike our attention more forcibly than the fact of the existence of two sexes among human beings, who, though so much alike in other respects, yet mark the difference between them with such obvious external signs. But it does not seem that children choose this fundamental fact in the same way as the starting-point

⁹⁸ Freud 1908, SE IX 215-26.

of their researches into sexual problems. Since they have known a father and mother as far back as they can remember in life, they accept their existence as a reality which needs no further enquiry, and a boy has the same attitude towards a little sister from whom he is separated by only a slight difference of age of one or two years. A child's desire for knowledge on this point does not in fact awaken spontaneously, prompted perhaps by some inborn need for established causes; it is aroused under the goad of the self-seeking instincts that dominate him, when—perhaps after the end of his second year—he is confronted with the arrival of a new baby. And a child whose own nursery has received no such addition is able, from observations made in other homes, to put himself in the same situation. The loss of his parents' care, which he actually experiences or justly fears, and the presentiment that from now on he must for evermore share all his possessions with the newcomer, have the effect of awakening his emotions and sharpening his capacities for thought. [...] At the instigation of these feelings and worries, the child now comes to be occupied with the first, grand problem of life and asks himself the question: 'Where do babies come from?' — a question which, there can be no doubt, first ran: 'Where did this particular, intruding baby come from?' We seem to hear the echoes of this first riddle in innumerable riddles of myth and legend.⁹⁹

Freud here only makes clear what he had written just a few months earlier: even if Freud put the problem of sexual difference first in line in the 1907 letter, this problem was never really first in line because it was never a *problem*. As Freud insists, the boy has *no problem* with the clear external signs of sexual difference present in his parents or

⁹⁹ Ibid., 211.

siblings. Since *Geschlecht* as sex remains a ... for the boy, he can deal with it by not dealing with it, letting it be covered over by the spaces between three dots. *Geschlecht* as sex is muted so as to give rise to “the first grand problem of life” formulated as the question ‘where do babies come from?’ This question will always haunt and be haunted by the other question of the other *Geschlecht* which the boy had no eyes for. *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* are not the same thing and yet seem to need each other, each calling the other each time if only to repress it.

Let us attempt to measure the stakes of this situation. Each time Freud asks which question first awakes the child’s sexual interest, we already know that the answer is a flip of a coin with *Geschlecht* on each side. Much like the boy or the girl caught between *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht*, sex and species, Freud cannot *not* speculate on one *Geschlecht* without mobilizing the other, if only to say “no” to – to disavow perhaps – the other. Repeatedly throughout Freud’s writings one observes that *Geschlecht* as species is *most especially not* *Geschlecht* as sex and vice-versa. When *Geschlecht* is on the table, it is immediately and automatically to be distinguished from the other *Geschlecht*, first and foremost. In each instance, *Geschlecht* is *tout contre* *Geschlecht*, as Geoffrey Bennington would perhaps say.

In an apparently very different context, *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* come to be, yet again, right up against each other. In “*Geschlecht* I,” Derrida diagnoses a similar most-especially-not-type logic at work precisely around *Geschlecht* in Heidegger. Taking his bearings from Heidegger’s 1928 lecture course *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, Derrida goes on to locate the exact passage where Heidegger speaks of a certain

sexlessness (*Geschlechtslosigkeit*) implied by the neutral term Dasein. Justifying his choice of the word Dasein for naming that exceptional being for whom its own being is a question, Heidegger, much like Freud, finds the need to specify the very first thing Dasein is not:

1. The term man was not used for that being which is the theme of the analysis. Instead, the neutral term Dasein was chosen. By this we designate the being for which its own proper mode of being in a definite sense is not indifferent.
2. The peculiar neutrality of the term “Dasein” is essential, because the interpretation of this being must be carried out prior to any factual concretion. This neutrality also indicates that Dasein is neither of the two sexes (*keines von beiden Geschlechtern ist*).¹⁰⁰

Insofar as Heidegger’s thinking proposes, by way of a preliminary formal indication, to raise the everyday way of being into our conceptual view, a certain averageness proves to be essential to Heidegger’s project. If Heidegger’s ontology is to have its feet on the ground by taking its departure from an unshakeable foundation, the analytic of Dasein has to remain as ontically non-committal as possible so as not to risk compromising the validity of the analysis by making it too narrow and distinct: what Heidegger says of Dasein should be equally applicable (*gleich-gültig*) to any Dasein regardless of (*gleichgültig ob*) the idiosyncrasies and ontic specificities of any particular Dasein. Heidegger thus can only begin to read the being of the only being troubled about its being by neutralizing the ontic particularities of that being articulating thereby the way in which

¹⁰⁰ Heidegger 1984, 136-37 .

this being has to be initially and for the most part in the neutral or undifferentiated mode of average everydayness. What Derrida finds particularly interesting here is that, of all the ontic attributes to be neutralized, one seems to stand out: the ontic thing that Dasein most is *not* is *Geschlecht* as being differentiated into one of the two sexes. So much so that one could see in this first order of business the business of philosophy *tout court*: to exclude first and foremost sexual difference in order to constitute a horizon wherein ontological difference occludes sexual difference and thus becomes possible on the basis of this repression. Is this not the exact same gesture whereby a boy asks the oldest and most burning question of life on the basis of the exact same indifference to sexual difference? Is Heidegger here not simply being a quintessential philosophy boy?

No is Derrida's suggestion. For Heidegger will speak of a positivity of the apparently negatively charged neutral Dasein precisely when it comes to *Geschlecht* as sex. This sexual positivity otherwise said to be a power (*Macht*) by Heidegger leads Derrida into a very generous – even for Derridean standards – reading of *Geschlecht* as sex in Heidegger. Derrida's reading goes as follows: the neutered neutral Heideggerian Dasein is asexual only with respect to a binary oppositionality between the sexes which is – as Derrida ventriloquizes Heidegger – no sexual difference at all but a mere dichotomy organized by (not-)sameness. By thus neutralizing the identity of this sexual difference, Heidegger opens up the positivity and power of a much more original difference between the sexes not reducible to an antagonistic dual between man and woman. Those too quick to criticize Heidegger for disavowing sexual difference fail to notice that the joke is on them: they are the ones disavowing sexual difference in favor of a negative and weak dyad. Dasein is thus charged with a neutrality that is anything but neutered.

But let us not get ahead of ourselves. Have we, in fact, already gone too fast in lumping Heidegger and Freud together? By what rights do we link *Geschlecht* as “where do babies come from?” to Heidegger's ontological question? Heidegger may well bracket *Geschlecht* as sex – just like the Freudian boy – but he surely does so not in order to ask where babies come from. Unlike Freud and his boy, Heidegger is famously thought to be indifferent to babies and where they might come from. Such a question regarding the origin of the species is nothing but an ontic question which, like sexual difference, would itself have to be bracketed if the question of being is to be adequately posed. On this read, *Geschlecht* as species would be just as irrelevant as *Geschlecht* as sex for the question concerning the being of beings and not their ontic origin or provenance.

Let us entertain this Heideggerian objection. To all appearances, Heidegger would have been pleased to find Freud *apparently* confirming that the ontic question “where do babies come from?” is *the* childish question par excellence. Endorsing a long Platonic tradition according to which the “first step” in understanding the problem of being consists in suspending ontico-mythological narratives about the origin of beings, Heidegger subscribes to this filiation twice in *Being and Time*. He writes:

What is asked about in the question to be worked out is being, that, which determines beings as beings, that, on the basis of which beings are each time already understood, whatever be said of them. The being of beings “is” not itself a being. The first philosophical step in understanding the problem of being consists in not μῦθόν τινα διηγείσθαι, “not telling a story,” i.e. not determining beings as

beings by tracing them back in their origin to another being, as if being had the character of a possible being.¹⁰¹

As Derrida has perceptively noted, though Heidegger's "not telling a story" seems to be only a translation of Plato's *Sophist*, 242c, this phrase in quotation marks could be taken as a reference to Husserl's first footnote in *Ideas I*. On at least two counts, then, Heidegger situates his ontological project on the back of a philosophical tradition that distinguishes itself from mere storytelling. As Plato's Stranger tells us in the *Sophist*, such storytelling is, strictly speaking, for children alone:

Stranger: It seems to me that Parmenides and all who ever undertook a critical definition of the number and nature of beings have talked to us in too easy a manner.

Theaetetus : How so?

Stranger: Every one of them seems to tell us a story, as if we were children. One says there are three principles, that some of them are sometimes waging a sort of war with each other, and sometimes become friends and marry and have children and bring them up and another says there are two, wet and dry or hot and cold, which he settles together and unites in marriage.¹⁰²

As Plato's Stranger runs through the bedtime stories the Pre-Socratics tell concerning being ($\tau\acute{o} \acute{o}\nu$), it becomes clear that they behave much like Freud's boy in search of an answer to where he came from. Be it water, earth, air or fire, or whatever relation emerging between these so called first principles, the origin of the whole occludes the problem of being, perverting the ontological problematic by reducing it to a mythological

¹⁰¹ Heidegger 2010, 5.

¹⁰² Plato, *Sophist*, 242c.

narrative in search of an ontic origin, a “once upon a time,” As Plato’s Stranger goes on to tell us, all of this presupposes that one already knew “what one means when one uses the word being.” Whatever being(s) gives rise to the whole, they still themselves have first, as beings, to be. This would indicate that the problem of being should take precedence over ontic narratives, however plausible or implausible they may turn out to be.

It is striking that Plato should call such ontic-oriented philosophies childish. Some twenty five hundred years later, Freud would *seem* to confirm and back Plato up. Is it not tempting to think of Plato’s Pre-Socratics as baby philosophers wanting to draw a family tree in order to explain (away) being? Is it then at all surprising that their mythological narrative should take us back to a nuptial wedding primal scene yielding offspring born of ? Would Freud not see here an only very slight displacement of the “where do babies come from?” question every child at some point asks? Conversely, would Plato and Heidegger not in turn smile at the little boy’s question, taking it as a forerunner of all the philosophical fables yet to emerge? Would they not preemptively deprive the “where do babies come from?” question of any ontological validity and pertinence?

“Not so fast,” Freud might have us say. Let us now study in detail Freud’s description of this investigative scene. As we shall see, there is nothing easy or light about it, as Plato’s Stranger might lead us to think. This will bring us back to *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* in Freud-Heidegger-Derrida. We have not lost sight of the burning question of this chapter: how do *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* relate? How would Aristotle place these two homonyms? In order to hear the proper tone of this question, we are

attempting to understand the particularly intriguing way in which *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* always rub elbows with each other in Heidegger and Freud. So much so that one thing by now seems clear: however *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* relate, this relation is anything but a simple coincidence in the manner of accidental homonymy. That *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* should each time be right up against each other, that is precisely the enigma this dissertation is trying to grapple with.

An enigma, too, is how Freud describes the question “where do babies come from?” to be. In a 1915 section added to his 1905 *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud discusses the process according to which the drive to know (*Wißtrieb*) is first awakened (*geweckt*) in infantile life. He writes:

It is not by theoretical interests but by practical ones that activities of research are set going in children. The threat to the bases of a child's existence offered by the discovery or the suspicion of the arrival of a new baby and the fear that he may, as a result of it, cease to be cared for and loved, make him thoughtful and clear-sighted. And the first problem, in accordance with this story of awakening, with which the child deals is not even the question of the sexual difference but the riddle (*Rätzel*): “where do babies come from?”. This, in a distorted form which can easily be rectified, is the same riddle that was propounded by the Theban Sphinx.¹⁰³

As Freud argues, the drive to know and the ensuing sexual researches it brings about is “set going” by an existential threat (*Bedrohung seiner Existenzbedingungen*). The child, in fear that he may no longer enjoy the exclusive rights to his parents’ love and caretaking due to the possible arrival of a baby brother or sister on the scene, now goes on to ask

¹⁰³ Freud 1905, SE VII 195.

how it is at all possible for babies to be born in the first place. This question, asked in fear for one's life, terrorizes the child who is bound to experience the deepest sense of isolation and alienation, says Freud:

The fable of the stork is often told to an audience that receives it with deep, though mostly silent, mistrust. There are, however, two elements that remain undiscovered by the sexual researches of children: the fertilizing role of semen and the existence of the female vagina (*Geschlechtsöffnung*)—the same elements, incidentally, in which the infantile organization is itself undeveloped. It therefore follows that the efforts of the childish investigator are habitually fruitless, and end in a renunciation which not infrequently leaves behind it a permanent injury to the drive to know. The sexual researches of these early years of childhood are always carried out in isolation (*einsam*). They constitute a first step towards taking an independent orientation in the world, and bring about a strong sense of alienation (*Entfremdung*) of the child from the people in his environment who formerly enjoyed his complete confidence.¹⁰⁴

Nothing mythological can possibly satisfy the child's existential curiosity. As Freud says, the fable of the stork falls on deaf ears and it matters little that science may or may not confirm the child's hypotheses or suspicions. Freud ultimately grounds the sexual researches of children in a horizon constituted organically, that is, in accordance with the psycho-sexual development of the body of a little boy or little girl. "We can say in general of the sexual theories of children that they are reflections (*Abbilder*) of their own

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 197.

sexual constitution [...].”¹⁰⁵ Even if the child were given the most scientifically accurate account of where babies come from, this scientific ontic narrative resonates just as little with the child as the fable of the stork, the reason being that the child is organically unequipped to form a mental image (*Abbild*) that reflects “semen” and “the existence of the vagina.”¹⁰⁶ As Freud insists, these are precisely the “elements” still lacking in infantile organization, not being surprising that their theoretical existence should then be unthinkable for the child.

But the child is pensive (*nachdenkenlich*), nevertheless. So much so that the uniform answer at which every child arrives – “people get babies by eating some particular thing (as they do in fairy tales) and babies are born through the bowel like a discharge of feces” – is far from being satisfactory.¹⁰⁷ As Freud tells us, as a consequence of the child’s underdeveloped reproductive organs, the “efforts” of infantile sexual research remain fruitless (*bleibt unfurchtbar*) and are ultimately renounced (*Verzicht*), not without first leaving behind a permanent injury (*dauernde Schädigung*) to the child’s psyche. Faced with an impending threat to his or her existence, the child realizes no one can help answer the question which must be asked in solitude. Just as the child is trying to grapple with the origin of his *Geschlecht*, the child ceases to be a part of it, being cast out of the circle of trust between those closest to him, the “people of his environment who formerly enjoyed his complete confidence,” as Freud writes.¹⁰⁸ The child is expelled from his *Geschlecht* only then to take his first step into the world (*ersten Schritt zur selbständigen Orientierung in der Welt*) where he stands alone, independently

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

and alienated (*eine starke Entfremdung des Kindes*). Just as the child begins to ask about *Geschlecht* as the origin of the species, it leaves that very species behind in order to become an alien within.

The question “where do babies come from?” is thus anything but a baby question. It propels and expels the child out of *Geschlecht* at the very moment *Geschlecht* becomes a question. To ask about the origin of the species is to be thrown out of the species the origin of which one was beginning to question. The question “where do babies come from?” cuts the umbilical cord that tied the child to his family lineage, his species and bloodline. As such, this question may well appear to be a genealogical question. We notice, however, that it exceeds the confines of a genealogical tree. We are left with a being posing a genealogical question while being *itself* outside that genealogy. Something ontological is opened up here: precisely when it is time to tell an ontic narrative about beings with respect to their origin, the being telling this story falls out of its narrative, noticing perhaps that his own being cannot be explained (away) in terms of it. What becomes an enigma for the child is not where he came from but rather where he now is and how he now is. Is this so very different than a Heideggerian baby Dasein asking about the meaning of its own being, trembling in anxiety before death in uncanny solitude, taking his first steps into the world?

Let us return to the main thrust of this chapter. We are attempting to determine in what sense *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* relate. Unbeknownst to us, one such sense has already been hinted at. For the reader will have observed that a certain Freud seems to

privilege one *Geschlecht* over another throughout nearly two decades. In texts such as the 1907 letter to Doctor M. Fürst, the 1908 “On the Sexual Theories of Children” and the 1915 added passage to the *Three Essays*, Freud cannot conceive of *Geschlecht* as sexual difference emerging as a question in the theoretical horizon of infantile life. As we have seen, it is precisely a blindness to sexual difference – more precisely to the “fertilizing role of semen and the existence of the female vagina” – that catapults the child away from his *Geschlecht* as species. But precisely this expulsion is what allows the “where do babies come from?” question to become an ontological question. To put it formally, *Geschlecht* as sexual (in)difference would give rise to – *only to be further occluded by* – *Geschlecht* as species-ontological difference.

Elissa P. Marder has been a radical and lonely voice in taking psychoanalytic research to its limits precisely around this occlusion of *Geschlecht* by *Geschlecht*. Marder’s quite provocative and far-reaching thesis is that *Geschlecht* as species difference serves as a substitute for that other *Geschlecht* as sexual difference. Taking her bearings from Freud’s famous Wolf-Man case, Marder perceptively teases out the same juxtaposition of *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* that interests us here, though she does not mobilize the word *Geschlecht* in order to do so. She writes:

But the very discovery of “sexual difference” (the existence of the vagina) that is revealed *by* the [Wolf-Man's] dream is expressed *in* the dream through the substitution of animals in place of human figures. In the dream[']s [sic] reactivation of the earlier scene during which the child ostensibly witnessed *sexual* difference without understanding it, here multiple wolves (who are not sexually differentiated from one another) become the telltale indicators of human

sexual difference. In other words, the only way *human* sexual difference can be perceived or represented in the scene is through the mediation and substitution of animal figures for human ones. The subsequent emergence of the symptom of the wolf phobia (which is an effect of the dream rather than part of its explicit narrative content) indicates both that sexual difference has been recognized and that it has been repressed.¹⁰⁹

Let us briefly reconstruct Freud's Wolf-Man case in order to understand the basis of Marder's claim. According to Freud, when the Wolf Man was about one year and a half, he woke up one day at five o'clock only to find his parents having intercourse *more ferarum*, that is, copulating from behind in the manner of animals. This doggy-style position afforded the little boy a unique opportunity to glance at his parents' genitals so as to see their differences that, as Freud suggests, would have been less perceptible in other sexual positions. As Freud understands this primal scene of parental coitus (or the primal phantasy thereof), very little is understood by the little boy, even though he certainly "passes a stool" as a way to interrupt the parental scene, demonstrating a certain level of excitement upon his then not so innocent observation. What is decisive for Freud, however, is that a dream should activate this primal scene about two years and half later, during the night just before both Christmas and the little boy's birthday (such coincidence of birthdays between him and Christ would later be the chief motive for his identification with Christ when an obsessional neurosis in the form of religious piety took the place of his wolf-phobia). Prompted by a story the little boy had heard his grandfather read from a book which contained the image of a wolf standing in an upright position with its paws

¹⁰⁹ Marder 2016, 65.

protruding (in addition to the few father-son country trips during which the boy came into contact with sheep and sheep-dogs), the dream enacted (a *Darstellung* in the sense of a *mise-en-scène* and *not at all* a representation), in distorted form, the primal scene of parental coitus by means of the image of five or six white wolves standing upright on top of a walnut tree, staring frozenly at the boy who, in the dream, is woken up by his bedroom window being thrown opened. Without too much difficulty, Freud undoes the distortion produced by the work of condensation and displacement of the dream-work, intended at once to repress and express the unconscious wish that cannot become conscious. The key that seems to open all the dream's mysteries for Freud is the recurring instance of the aforementioned "doggy-style" positioned. It happens in the story told by the grandfather when the wolf asks other wolves to climb upon him in order to get to the top of the tree and devour a tailor; this position, along with what the boy had learned during his sexual researches since he was only one and a half (namely intimations of the reality of castration by the maid Nanya and the tales he heard, not to mention the seduction scene between he and his sister) allowed the primal scene to be enacted in the dream. The dream brings the Wolf-Man back to a scene where, after being woken up at five o'clock (possibly by the malaria he was suffering from), he had seen, but not understood argues Freud, his parents copulating in the manner of dogs or wolves.

As Freud would have us believe, something decisive happens at the level of understanding what the dream did everything to conceal but nevertheless expressed. To put it bluntly, the dream presents the little boy with what he cannot handle: the vagina. The dilemma of sexual difference is what faces the boy after-the-fact, *nachträglich* as Freud says. The boy realizes, according to Freud, that in order to have sex with his father,

he must have what his mother has, that is, currently lose what he has, a penis, in order to arrive at the lack thereof, a vagina. The vagina is, as Freud insists throughout this case, the concrete reality of the possibility of castration. The boy, who had up until then focused his libidinal energy on the cloacal theory, according to which he would copulate with his father by means of his anus, is forced by the dream to see the vagina front and center in a repetition of what he once had “seen” but not understood. What has happened meanwhile? Nothing less than a seduction on the part of his sister who, nine months before the primal scene dream, had played with his penis, forcing him into a passive position which he rather enjoyed. “*Die Sache, nicht der Person,*” “this thing (being touched on the genitals) that I like, but not from my sister,” as Freud tells the little boy’s reaction to his seduction, which perhaps prepared the way for a new seduction by means of the dream. By the time the dream arrives on the scene, the little boy has had already several intimations of the reality of castration, the possibility of which the dream confirms once and for all. If, before the dream, he could switch his libido from his sister to his Nanya only to arrive finally at his father, regardless of the sexual difference between them, after the dream, sexual difference makes him sick. As Freud puts it:

Since his seduction his sexual aim had been a passive one, of being touched on the genitals; it was then transformed, by regression to the earlier stage of the sadistic-anal organization, into the masochistic aim of being beaten or punished. It was a matter of indifference to him whether he reached this aim with a man or with a woman. He had travelled, without considering the difference of sex (*ohne Rücksicht auf den Geschlechtsunterschied*), from his Nanya to his father; he had longed to have his penis touched by his Nanya, and had tried to provoke a beating

from his father. Here his genitals were left out of account; though the connection with them which had been concealed by the regression was still expressed in his phantasy of being beaten on the penis. The activation of the primal scene in the dream now brought him back to the genital organization. He discovered the vagina and the biological significance of masculine and feminine. He understood now that active was the same as masculine, while passive was the same as feminine. His passive sexual aim should now have been transformed into a feminine one, and have expressed itself as ‘being copulated with by his father’ instead of ‘being beaten by him on the genitals or on the bottom’. This feminine aim, however, underwent repression and was obliged to let itself be replaced by fear of the wolf.¹¹⁰

Incidentally, it is precisely on the basis of these Freudian lines that Marder makes her claim that sexual difference is occluded and substituted by a species differentiation of sorts. In this instance, the repression of the vagina gives rise to an animal phobia that is much less scary than sexual difference. For the general anxiety of being castrated by the father is now substituted by a much more restricted fear that arises only in the presence of the animal being feared. With this animal phobia, the human comes to be rigorously distinguished from the very animal he fears. The human comes to be human as a non-animal on the basis of a repression of sexual difference that has *secured* the human *Geschlecht* vis-à-vis other *Geschlechter* (animal species) and *Geschlecht* as sex.

One could relate this repression of sexual difference in the form of species differentiation to the “where do babies come from?” question. There can be no doubt that

¹¹⁰ Freud 1917, 47.

Freud understands this question to be a specifically human question. It is no accident that Freud repeatedly reminds us that this question is easily perceptible, in only a slightly distorted form, in the riddle of the Sphinx as portrayed by Apollodorus and Athenaeus. As we know, the answer to that riddle is expressed in a single word: “ἄνθρωπον” is Oedipus’ answer to the enigma (ἀίνιγμα): “What is that which has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?” Man is the answer, *das MenschenGeschlecht*. The “oldest and most burning question that confronts young humanity (*Menschheit*)” is a question *about* humanity, about the being of the human. In the opening of this question, the human is given a place of pride vis-à-vis all living beings the human is said *not* to be.

We can certainly extend, then, Marder’s claim to the tout-contre logic at work around *Geschlecht* as species and *Geschlecht* as sex in the sexual researches of infantile life. As we have seen, here the question of *Geschlecht* as species takes precedence over *Geschlecht* as sex, too. It would seem, then, that every time Freud articulates the juxtaposition of *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht*, the relation that emerges is anything but neutral. Whenever *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* come up, it seems inevitable for a hierarchy to be established. If, on the surface level, *Geschlecht* as species seems to take the upper hand insofar as *Geschlecht* as sex is occluded and repressed, on the level of forces, *Geschlecht* as species is nothing but a derivative, distorted and repressed form of a more original and proper sense of *Geschlecht* as sex. *Geschlecht* as sex would thus be the primary meaning from which *Geschlecht* as species would spring and ultimately lead back towards *à la* Aristotle’s *analogia attributionis*. Have we then discovered the way *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* relate?

To an experienced reader of Heidegger, such a hierarchical binarism should be deeply problematic on at least two counts. First, it would seem as though Heidegger would be the first to reject a binary opposition between *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* that would subordinate and debase *Geschlecht* as species-ontological difference in favor of *Geschlecht* as sexual difference. Heidegger's reasons are indeed quite strong and of the first order: in addressing *Geschlecht* as sex, one will always have presupposed the irreducibly fundamental problem of the *being* of the sexual *being* one is addressing. It is not that Heidegger would ever deny psychoanalysis – or any ontic science for that matter – its legitimate and rightful place in the most important rank of ontic disciplines. Far from unauthorizing psychoanalytic research of its impressive results, Heidegger would nevertheless accuse psychoanalysis – and any other ontic discipline – of remaining naïve as it continues to ignore the most basic presupposition on which it banks without even knowing it does so. The moment psychoanalytic research and practice begin to unfold positively and empirically, a conceptual field based on an uninterrogated meaning of being will have limited, in advance, the scope and depth of the kinds of questions that can even sprout in such a terrain. More problematically still, the yielding results of positive and empirical research are, *de jure*, unable to challenge the basic assumption on which they rest which finds itself, instead, confirmed and affirmed by the very research it makes possible. A snowball-effect prevents ontic sciences from ever inquiring into what they, qua ontic sciences, will always have presupposed: the meaning of being. Insofar as this meaning is said by Heidegger to be equated with presence when left uninterrogated,

psychoanalysis – or any other ontic science – will always have, at best, reaffirmed this main metaphysical prejudice from which it springs and ultimately leads back towards.

The second reason why Heidegger would think he remains untouched by the attempt to debase ontological difference is slightly more complex. Even assuming Heidegger ever to concede that the priority of the ontological question vis-à-vis the ontic sciences is problematic, the mere inversion of this schema is not something that would trouble this schema in the slightest. In other words, turning Heidegger on his head would only repeat the very schema one thinks to have escaped. Saying that ontological difference is derivative with respect to sexual difference is to buy into the same metaphysical logic that splits *Geschlecht* into two irreconcilable sides of the same problem one has then lost sight of. To posit a primary meaning of *Geschlecht* from which another meaning of *Geschlecht* would merely derive – regardless of which *Geschlecht* derives from and which *Geschlecht* is to be derived of – is to treat *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* as mutually exclusive questions that communicate only by means of a hierarchical binarism one might want to call into question *before* subscribing to it by either affirming or inverting it.

It is in the wake of this possibility that we may now turn to Derrida's *Geschlecht* series. The newly discovered "*Geschlecht* III" will play a major role in the relation between *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht*. For this is the text where Derrida most explicitly deals with Heidegger's attempt to think *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* together, equi-primordially. Has Heidegger found a way to think *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* in the manner of Aristotle's *analogia proportionalitatis*? Is Derrida on board with Heidegger's attempt?

Chapter II: *Geschlecht I*

Geschlecht is said in many ways. Species, race, family, generation, people, type and genus are possible meanings of *Geschlecht* that are each in turn marked by another meaning of *Geschlecht* as sexual difference. As we have seen, two valences of *Geschlecht* can be held apart somewhat more easily than others: it seems like there exists, on the one hand, a principle of gathering, uniting beings into a larger group (be it a family, people, ethnicity, species, etc.) and, on the other hand, a principle of differentiation sexuating each group internally, based on the lowest common denominator, the number two of two sexes, male or female. Whereas *Geschlecht* as family, clan, tribe, people, etc. stresses a gathered totality of many, *Geschlecht* as sex internally splits each many into two, the lowest possible many. No matter how large any given *Geschlecht* may turn out to be, it will always have been cut in half by that other *Geschlecht* called sex.

We have, admittedly with some violence to the complexities at hand, simplified the multivocality of *Geschlecht* into a coin of two sides: one side lumps together all the meanings of *Geschlecht* stressing a co-belonging under the umbrella of “species,” the most suitable catchall for what unites families, tribes, peoples and clans into the species of all; the other side, by contrast, differentiates each gathered collective *Geschlecht* into two sexual halves, male or female, “sex” thus being the watchword of and for this side of sexual difference of *Geschlecht*. *Geschlecht*, then, is a coin with two sides that seem diametrically opposed and as far apart as sameness and difference can be.

It was then all the more striking to find both Heidegger and Freud juxtaposing the seemingly opposed meanings of *Geschlecht*. In Freud, we saw the bipolar meaning of *Geschlecht* appear as the two main questions that occupy every child’s psychic curiosity. We observed how Freud posits a mutually exclusive relation between these two

Geschlecht questions: when Freud has the little boy ask the “where do babies come from?” species-*Geschlecht* question, he finds the need to specify right away that this is *not* the *Geschlecht*-sex question of the difference between the sexes. *And vice-versa*: when Freud finally concedes that little girls “certainly” ask the *Geschlecht*-sex question first, he is voiding the previous original status of the other *Geschlecht*-species question. Even if Freud ultimately gives up on which *Geschlecht* comes first in the psycho-sexual development of boys and girls, leaving it up to “chance circumstances” to decide on *Geschlecht* for “both sexes,” the child’s choices are determined in advance by *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht*, so that a flip of a coin with *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* on its sides decides how the child’s intellectual life begins. Such is the Freudian contribution to our study of *Geschlecht*: not just any old word or problem, the antithetical meaning of *Geschlecht* as species and sex turns out to be the birth of thought, two twins in the midst of which thought begins to unfold in boys and girls.

We then went on to notice how Freud’s vacillation between *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* mirrors Heidegger’s treatment of this problem. After paying attention to the ontological dimension of the *Geschlecht*-species question in Freud, we were in a position to rename *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* as two kinds of difference, sexual and ontological. This led us in turn to Heidegger’s neutralization of sexual difference precisely at the moment the ontological question is to be adequately asked. Yet again, *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* run right up against each other except that this time a hierarchy emerges between them, so that one *Geschlecht* (being) is posited as primary and original while the other *Geschlecht* (sex) is relegated to a secondary and derivative intra-ontic difference.

A similar binary logic is, albeit in inverted form, present in Elissa Marder's work: *Geschlecht* as sexual difference is now said to be the primary and original meaning that *Geschlecht* as ontological difference represses. It would then seem that the question of how *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* relate were stuck in a binary logic according to which one *Geschlecht* will always take precedence over another. This binary logic of original *Geschlecht* versus derivative *Geschlecht* would be one way of explaining why *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* cannot but rub elbows with each other, so that one *Geschlecht* always brings the other along with it.

We were able to locate in Aristotle's theory of homonymy a way of understanding this relation the Scholastics called the *analogia attributionis*. But what of Aristotle's alternative for understanding the relation between non-accidental homonyms, what the Scholastics called *analogia proportionalitatis*? Have we exhausted the possibilities for thinking *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* in the manner of Aristotle's *analogia proportionalitatis*? Could *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* relate without positing a primary meaning? Could *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* be equiprimordial?

This is where we left off in the previous chapter. Before turning to Derrida's "Geschlecht III" where he explicitly deals with Heidegger's attempt to think *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* equiprimordially, let us reconstruct the philosophical background of "Geschlecht III." This entails that we become attentive to the broader framework within which "Geschlecht III" is inserted as a third installment. What is at stake in Derrida's *Geschlecht* series and what is the role "Geschlecht III" plays in this tetralogy?

“*Geschlecht I*” begins by way of a provocative subtitle. “Sexual difference, ontological difference” announces from the first word of the essay what the main concern of Derrida’s four-part *Geschlecht* series will be. The colon in the English translation justifiably adds to the French title, splitting in seemingly equal halves what the French text expresses by means of a subtitle literally under the title “*Geschlecht I*,” seems to indicate a relation of equivalence or, at the very least, a translation exchange between title and subtitle, between “*Geschlecht*” and “sexual difference, ontological difference.” It would seem as though Derrida had anticipated our work here of identifying “*Geschlecht*” as the place-holder for two problems condensed into one word.

Let us therefore try to do justice to “*Geschlecht I*.” This is an extremely difficult text that gives us a somewhat ambiguous Derrida on Heidegger and sexual difference. The text seems to remain undecided between two apparently mutually exclusive options: does Heidegger begin to think an original “pre-dual sexuality” Derrida is no doubt enthusiastic about, or does Heidegger actually “derive” sexuality “with the force of a new rigor,” as Derrida also puts it?¹¹¹

Let us patiently lay out this tension in “*Geschlecht I*.” It is somewhat easier to single out the more positive side of Derrida’s argument. He begins “*Geschlecht I*” by casting suspicion on the apparently well-known fact that Heidegger never speaks of sex. He writes:

Of sex, one can easily remark, yes, Heidegger speaks as little as possible, perhaps he has never spoken of it. Perhaps he has never said anything, by that name or the names under which we recognize it, about the “sexual-relation,” “sexual

¹¹¹ Derrida 2008a, 7.

difference,” or indeed about “man-and-woman.” This silence, therefore, is easily remarked. *Which means that the remark is a bit facile.* A few indications, concluding with “everything happens as if ...,” would suffice. Without trouble, *but not without risk*, the dossier could then be closed: it is as if, according to Heidegger, there were no sexual difference, and nothing in this aspect of man, which is to say in woman, to interrogate or suspect, nothing worthy of questioning (*fragwürdig*).¹¹²

“Where is the risk?” – one is tempted to ask. And what is facile about it? It seems as though Derrida were expressing hesitation about assuming that Heidegger never speaks of sex just because he says nothing about what we all too easily deem sex to be. What if Heidegger did in fact speak of sex not only under a different name but also on the basis of another understanding of what he, Heidegger, takes sexuality to be?

Derrida goes on to fantasize about the existence of a “reading machine” that would plow through everything Heidegger ever wrote in order to find the word “sex” in it, a 1985 version of what we today would call a word-search in a document:

Is it imprudent to trust Heidegger's apparent silence? Will this apparent fact later be disturbed in its nice philological assurance by some known or unpublished passage when some reading machine, while combing through the whole of Heidegger, manages to hunt out the thing and snare it? Still, one must think of programming the machine, think, think of it and know how to do it. What will the index be? What words will it rely on? Will it be only on nouns? And on what

¹¹² Ibid., 8-9.

syntax, visible or invisible? Briefly, by what signs will you recognize his speaking or remaining silent about what you all too easily call “sexual difference”?¹¹³

Derrida’s suspicion here seems to be that we simply take for granted that we already know what sexual difference is and then proceed to want to find the same unquestioned understanding under the same name. Should we not find what we are looking for, we then avail ourselves of the entire psychoanalytic panoply in order to name Heidegger’s error:

We can wager that nothing is at a standstill in these places where the arrows of the aforesaid panoply would pin things down with a name: omission, repression, denial, foreclosure, even the unthought.¹¹⁴

And yet, as Derrida picks up on Heidegger’s rhetorical use of “*und dennoch!*” translating it as “*et pourtant !*” (and yet!), things are not so simple. For the fact of the matter is that Heidegger does speak of sex in at least two texts from 1928 (the lecture course *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* and the essay “The Essence of Ground”) and one from 1953, the aforementioned essay on Trakl that had pulled Derrida’s reading of *Geschlecht* in Heidegger “toward a magnet.” “*Geschlecht I*” focuses on the former two, though it hints at the latter at least twice. Let us see how Derrida introduces the question of sexual difference in Heidegger’s 1928 lecture course:

It is by the *name* of *Dasein* that I will here introduce the question of sexual difference. Why call the being that constitutes the theme of this analytic *Dasein*? Why is *Dasein* the “term” given to this thematic? In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger had justified the choice of the exemplary being for the *reading* of the meaning of being [...]. This “terminological” choice undoubtedly finds its profound

¹¹³ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

justification in the whole enterprise and in the whole book by making explicit a *there* and a *being-there* that (almost) no other predetermination could command. But that does not remove the decisive, brutal, and elliptical appearance from this preliminary statement, this declaration of name. On the contrary, it happens that in the Marburg lecture course, the term *Dasein* — its sense as well as its name — is more patiently qualified, explained, evaluated. Now, the first trait that Heidegger underlines is its *neutrality*.¹¹⁵

Derrida then goes on to explain what this neutrality is. It is essential to Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* not to compromise the validity of his analytic of *Dasein* by making the analysis too narrow or distinct. The meaning of being was to be read in a particular being Heidegger names *Dasein*, "the being we ourselves are," as Heidegger puts it. However, though *Dasein* is the particular being to be read, nothing too particular about any given *Dasein* is of interest to Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein*. The point is to bring the being of *Dasein* into view without blocking access to the understanding of being that *Dasein* always already possesses. The analytic is thus committed to being as non-committal as possible so that no ontic idiosyncrasy should get in the way between *Dasein* and *Sein*. As Derrida puts it, a sort of "bare relation" or "naked trait" exists between *Dasein* and its being. This is what provides Heidegger with an indubitable starting point: though we may not conceptually grasp what being means, each single *Dasein* "always already moves within an understanding of being," as Heidegger says at the opening of *Being and Time*:

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

The question to be formulated is about the meaning of being. [...] As a seeking, questioning needs prior guidance from what it seeks. The meaning of being must therefore already be available to us in a certain way. We intimated that we always already move within an understanding of being. From this grows the explicit question of the meaning of being and the tendency towards its concept. We do not know what being means. But already when we ask, “what is ‘being’?” we hold ourselves in an understanding of the “is” without being able to determine conceptually what the “is” means.¹¹⁶

Just a few pages later, Heidegger specifies that the understanding of being each Dasein always already possesses is to be located in what he calls “average everydayness.” “Initially and for the most part” (*zunächst und zumeist*), Dasein has a “vague” and “average” understanding of being as it moves through the world surrounding it. No matter how indeterminate this understanding of being may be, it is nevertheless an unshakeable “fact” (*Faktum*) from which the analytic of Dasein is to take its departure. This is what guarantees, in fact, the integrity of the analysis:

Hence the first concern in the question of being must be an analysis of Dasein. But then the problem of gaining and securing the kind of access that leads to Dasein becomes a truly burning one. Expressed negatively, no arbitrary idea of being and reality, no matter how “self-evident” it is, may be brought to bear on this being in a dogmatically constructed way; no “categories” prescribed by such ideas may be forced upon Dasein without ontological deliberation. The manner of access and interpretation must instead be chosen in such a way that this being can

¹¹⁶ Heidegger 2010, 4.

show itself in itself of its own accord. And furthermore, this manner should show that being as it is *initially and for the most part* – in its *average everydayness*.¹¹⁷

The question of access remains a “burning” problem for Heidegger because it decides in advance if the being of Dasein will show itself or not. If we impose on Dasein a conceptual apparatus that is inappropriate to it, Dasein’s being will be forced to comply with modes of being it does not possess as one of its possibilities. For example, if we approached Dasein as we approach a table, we would force Dasein to show itself to us as the kind of being it is not. We would then go on to collect all the data presented to us: size, shape, weight, color, etc., the “categories” Heidegger speaks of in the quote above. However much information we gather about Dasein in this way, we will have missed its being from the start: treating Dasein as though it were something like a table and expecting it to yield up its properties will always fail to see that Dasein is a kind of being radically different from a table, and remains inaccessible if treated as such. As Heidegger puts it, Dasein is to show itself to us “of its own accord,” as it is “in itself” and not as a being it is not. This question of accessing Dasein without falsifying its being is then intrinsically tied to looking at Dasein as it is in an average kind of way when not too many possibilities of its existence have already been decided. This is what will bring us back to the question of neutrality.

Heidegger understands average everydayness in terms of possibilities Dasein neglects or remains indifferent to. He writes:

As a being, Dasein always defines itself in term of a possibility which it *is* and somehow understands in its being. That is the formal meaning of the constitution

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 16.

of the existence of Dasein. [...] However, this cannot mean that Dasein is to be construed in terms of a concrete possible idea of existence. At the beginning of the analysis, Dasein is precisely not to be interpreted in the differentiation of a particular existence; rather, it is to be uncovered in the indifferent way in which it is initially and for the most part. [...] We call this everyday indifference of Dasein *averageness*.¹¹⁸

Dasein always exists concretely, in the here and now of a situation where Dasein has decided to be in such and such way. In average everydayness, Dasein has neglected its own being and the possibility to be itself, relegating to others the burden of having to decide how to be in a given moment. One does things the way “one” (*das Man*) does them simply because that is how one does them. One crosses the street as one crosses the street, one gets on a bus as one gets on a bus. Nothing too particular defines Dasein in its everyday dealings with its world. So much so that Dasein is said to vacate its place during average everydayness, letting the “one” decide over the possibilities of its existence. It is precisely this non-particular, undifferentiated existence that gives Heidegger’s analysis its foundation and anchoring point.

In other words, Heidegger’s ambition is rather modest: all he is doing is letting us see the way in which we already are when moving about and around in the hustle and bustle of the everyday. Dasein will always be grounded in the everyday, even when it exceptionally decides to take matters in its own hands. As Heidegger argues much later in *Being and Time*, authentic action in the world is nothing but a slight modification of inauthentic action, which provides then the basis for the possibility of such a modification.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 41.

This means that Heidegger can at least in principle try to lay out the structures of everyday existence without yet deciding how a particular existing Dasein should act in a given situation. Even though a particular Dasein does always act in a given situation, Heidegger wants to show us how and what it is that allows Dasein to act at all, not yet making judgments as to Dasein's authenticity or inauthenticity. This is why Heidegger does not want to impose on us any "concrete, possible idea of existence" or the "differentiation of a particular existence" when studying Dasein: the point is not to tell us what to do but simply to lay bare the structures of existence allowing one to act in any particular way.

This non-particular, undifferentiated and indifferent way of being of average everydayness is thus neutral with respect to any ontic concretion of a given Dasein, even if it should already prescribe the ways a concretion might be possible. In *Being and Time*, the term "neutral" (*Neutrum*) appears only once. In a somewhat negative characterization that will later interest Derrida, it describes precisely the self of everydayness that has silently robbed Dasein of the possibility to be itself. Heidegger writes:

The everyday possibilities of being of Dasein are at the disposal of the whims of others. These others are not *definite* others. On the contrary, any other can represent them. What is decisive is the inconspicuous domination by others that Dasein as being-with has already taken over unawares. One belongs to the others oneself, and entrenches their power. "The others," whom one designates as such in order to cover over one's own essential belonging to them, are those who are there initially and for the most part in everyday being-with-one-another. The who

is not this one and not that one, not oneself, not some, not the sum of them all.

The “who” is the neuter, the *one*.¹¹⁹

A neutral “one” regulates the possibilities available to Dasein who remains subservient to the “whims of others,” as Heidegger puts it. This “one” is said to be neutral because it negates this or that (ne-uter) concretion at an ontic level. As Heidegger tells us, the “one” is never a definite or particular being though a definite or particular being can always “represent” the one. The “one” is an essential structure of existence, what Heidegger calls an existential. It thus accompanies and in fact precedes every single activity Dasein engages with in its everyday existence. The “one” is a way of being, I do things as *one* does them and not willy-nilly as I see fit. Heidegger’s discovery is that this “I” is not the “who” of everydayness, but it is the neutral “one” who is in charge of being the “who” of everyday existence. In other words, the self of average everydayness is not *a* self but a prescribed way of being that tends to suppress the self of a Dasein, forcing the latter to be as one is.

Despite appearances, Heidegger does not commit this neutral “one” to a moralistic charge of inauthenticity. He wants to understand the “one” as a “positive phenomenon” that philosophy has skipped over. Throughout *Being and Time*, Heidegger insists on the “positivity” and “originarity” of this phenomenon, something that brings us back to the Marburg lecture course Derrida is reading in “*Geschlecht I*.” In this 1928 text, Heidegger speaks of neutrality when justifying his terminological choice of the word “*Dasein*” for naming the “being of we ourselves” that his analytic is to make transparent. Heidegger writes:

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 164.

The term ‘man’ was not used for that being which is the theme of the analysis. Instead the neutral term *Dasein* was chosen. This designates the being for which its own proper mode of being is, in a definite sense, not indifferent.¹²⁰

Heidegger explains that the aim of *Being and Time* is solely oriented towards the question of being (*Sein*). *Da-sein* would thus name a being that has always already begun to understand being, even if this understanding is nothing but a glimpse. This glimpse is the only presupposition Heidegger wishes to impose on the being chosen for the analytic. This is why Heidegger then brackets all other concerns that do not address the being of *Dasein* in its being. As he puts it: “The issue is therefore neither one of anthropology nor of ethics, but of this being in its being as such, and thus of a preparatory analysis concerning it; the metaphysics of *Dasein* is not yet its central focus.”¹²¹ A very minimal pre-determination thus commands Heidegger’s choice: *Dasein* is to be understood merely by means of *Sein* whose meaning is always already *da* (there) for *Da-sein*. It thus remains neutral with respect to all other presuppositions one might be tempted to impose on *Dasein*, such as the term “man.” Not a consciousness nor an ego, *Dasein* thus evades anthropological or ethical concerns that presume already to know what *Dasein* is based on preconceived notions Heidegger wishes to put pressure on. If *Dasein*’s being is to show itself from itself, we must clear the way for it precisely by neutralizing or bracketing the philosophical prejudices that obstruct our access to the being of this being.

What Derrida seems to find striking is that this very general understanding of neutrality should precipitate towards a very particular neutrality, which would then not be so very neutral. As he puts it:

¹²⁰ Heidegger 1984, 136-37.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

Hence there is here a kind of precipitation or acceleration that cannot itself be neutral or indifferent: among all the traits of man's humanity that are thus neutralized, along with anthropology, ethics, or metaphysics, the first that the very word "neutrality" makes one think of, the first that Heidegger thinks of in any case, is sexuality.¹²²

Derrida is noticing that the "guiding principles" Heidegger lists in the 1928 lecture course concerning the project of *Being and Time* take a "surprising" leap after the first one (quoted above) had emphasized that Dasein is not man. Derrida provocatively suggests that it is no accident that Heidegger should want to neutralize sexuality first and foremost. Here, we are slowly approaching a configuration of *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* we are already familiar with and that gives the subtitle of "*Geschlecht I*" its name: "sexual difference, ontological difference." The moment Heidegger names Dasein as Dasein solely with an eye to the ontological priority of Dasein as the only being that understands the difference between being and beings (*Geschlecht* as the ontological difference, then), he cannot but mobilize that other meaning of *Geschlecht* (as sexual difference) seemingly only in order to repress it. Here is the second directive that so impresses Derrida and that names *Geschlecht*:

The peculiar neutrality of the term "Dasein" is essential, because the interpretation of this being must be carried out prior to every factual concretion. This neutrality also indicates that Dasein is neither of the two sexes [*keines von beiden Geschlechtern ist*].¹²³

¹²² Derrida 2008a, 12.

¹²³ Heidegger 1984, 137.

If Heidegger's first guiding principle consists in neutralizing "man," his second would seem to bracket "woman." Neither of the two sexes would have any say in the question of being that begins to be asked once sexual difference is neutralized. However, despite appearances, this neutralization is far from repressing sexuality which would be, instead, liberated by this then not so neutral procedure. This is how Derrida *reads* Heidegger in the strong sense of that word:

Whether one speaks of neutrality or sexlessness (*Neutralität, Geschlechtslosigkeit*), the words strongly emphasize a negativity that manifestly runs counter to what Heidegger is trying thus to mark. [...] 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 the 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.¹²⁴

Those too quick to accuse Heidegger of repressing sexuality would thus fail to see that they are the ones doing the very thing they accuse Heidegger of: insofar as they bank on an understanding of sexual difference as binarity or generic division (man vs. woman), they are not thinking sexual difference at all. As Derrida explains in an interview with

¹²⁴ Derrida 2008a, 14.

Christie McDonald shortly preceding the publication of “*Geschlecht I*,” the thought of sexual opposition falls short of sexual difference as such which it instead tries to erase:

One could, I think, demonstrate this: when sexual difference is determined by opposition in the dialectical sense (according to the Hegelian movement of speculative dialectics which remains so powerful even beyond Hegel's text), one appears to set off the “war between the sexes”; but one precipitates the end with victory going to the masculine sex. The determination of sexual difference in opposition is destined, designed, in truth, for truth; it is so in order to erase sexual difference.¹²⁵

On this reading, rather than damning Heidegger for not embracing the man vs. woman binary, one is tempted to think that Dasein’s neutrality escapes the binary logic that ensures sameness over difference. At the end of his interview, Derrida hesitates to affirm the possibility of such an escape, being content to call it a dream: “of course, it is not impossible that desire for a sexuality without number can still protect us, like a dream, from an implacable destiny that immures everything for life in the number 2.”¹²⁶ Quite dramatically, Derrida finishes the interview by wondering if it is not our fateful “tragedy” to be satisfied with this duality. At which point, he says:

But where would the dream of the innumerable come from, if it is indeed a dream? Does the dream itself not prove that what is dreamt of must be there in order to provide the dream?¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Derrida 1995, 100-01.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 108.

Derrida is then enthusiastically endorsing the need to think a sexual difference not yet determined as a sexual opposition that will always have privileged one side of the binary, the masculine, in order to devalorize the other, the feminine. Derrida's point, as always, is not to rehabilitate the underprivileged term but to question the validity of this oppositional schema in accordance with which each term makes sense to begin with. Insofar as Heidegger's gesture points in the same direction, Derrida is willing to follow Heidegger up to a certain point. For Heidegger too seems to share Derrida's dream of escaping sexual duality and of opening up a "positivity" and "potency" that Derrida wants to call sexual even if Heidegger does not. Here is how Heidegger continues his second directive that will proceed to erase a "negativity that runs counter to what Heidegger is trying to mark," as Derrida had put it:

But this sexlessness is not the indifference of an empty void, the weak negativity of an indifferent ontic nothingness. In its neutrality, Dasein is not the indifferent nobody and everybody, but the original positivity and potency of essence.¹²⁸

The fact that Heidegger calls this sexless neutrality a "potency" and a "positivity" leads Derrida to think that the -less of sex-less only affects the binary sexuality Heidegger is neutralizing. By the same token, Derrida wonders if the neutrality opened up by the bracketing of sexual binarity is not in fact more sexual than the latter since it is more on the side of the "desire to escape the combinatory" of the number two. This then accounts for a complete reversal Derrida brings to bear on the letter of Heidegger's text: though Heidegger's calls Daseins sexually neutral, this asexuality deploys its negativity only with respect to sexual duality which turns out to be not sexual at all since it is precisely

¹²⁸ Heidegger 1984, 137.

this duality that “erases sexual difference,” as Derrida understands it. Though readers of *Being and Time* might be right to suspect that Heidegger is repressing a *certain* sexual difference, the key question to ask is: ‘*which* difference, the binary opposition (which is no difference at all) or the “pre-dual sexuality” that is not for all that “unitary, homogenous and undifferentiated”?’ If we answer ‘the former,’ then Heidegger’s sexless neutrality turns out to be sexual, in fact, whereas the supposedly sexual division of the sexes into two will be on the side of the non-Heideggerian neutrality and asexuality cursorily understood. In other words, what seems sexual turns out to be asexual and vice-versa. Derrida expresses this reversal by showing how two very different neutralities arise from Heidegger’s 1928 lecture-course:

I am tempted to interpret this as follows: 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. Far from constituting a positivity that the asexual neutrality of *Dasein* would annul, sexual binarity itself would be responsible, or rather would belong to a determination that is itself responsible for this negativation. To radicalize or formalize all too quickly the meaning of this movement before retracing it more patiently, we might propose the following schema: it is sexual difference itself *as binarity*, it is the discriminative belonging to one or the other sex, that destines (to) or determines a negativity that must then be accounted for. Going further still, one might even associate sexual difference thus determined (one out of two), negativity, and a certain “impotence.” When returning to the originary of *Dasein*, of this *Dasein*

said to be sexually neutral, “original positivity” and “potency” can be recovered. In other words, despite appearances, the asexuality and neutrality that must first of all be shielded from the binary sexual mark, in the analytic of *Dasein*, are in fact on the same side, on the side of *that* sexual difference—the binary one—to which one might have thought them simply opposed.¹²⁹

If it is a little difficult to understand Derrida’s point here, it is perhaps because he is sometimes referring to “asexuality” and “neutrality” in their ordinary sense while, at other times, appealing to what he has developed as the Heideggerian understanding of these words. Strictly speaking, the “asexuality and neutrality that must first of all be shielded from the binary sexual mark, in the analytic of *Dasein*,” can only be said to be on the same side of binary difference if we hear “asexuality” and “neutrality” in their everyday register of meaning. The Heideggerian “asexuality” and “neutrality,” by contrast, are not at all on the side of binary difference, which seems to be why Derrida is so impressed with Heidegger’s gesture. It is a matter of showing that what we all too easily understand sexual difference to be (man vs. woman) is in fact of a piece with the repression of sexuality we thought we could charge Heidegger with; Heidegger who, instead, “liberates” a sexuality we do not even recognize, let alone understand when “asexuality” names it. The reading machine would collect this “asexuality” as evidence of Heidegger’s repression and fail to see its own repression. Its philological assurance would amount to an excuse for not reading, “*ne pas lire*,” as Derrida would say.

¹²⁹ Derrida 2008a, 15.

It would be one-sided, however, to present “*Geschlecht I*” as though it only applauded Heidegger’s efforts to think a pre-dual sexuality. For one finds that Derrida seems to temper his enthusiasm when wondering if Heidegger’s gesture does not actually make things worse or, as Derrida has it, “derive” sexuality “with the force of a new rigor.” On the surface, it would appear that Derrida cannot possibly be right about expressing both an enthusiasm and a reservation over the same issue in Heidegger. One is tempted to think he is still making up his mind and that a final answer is yet to be given.

Things are never this black and white in deconstruction. What if Heidegger did both these things at once? Let us now pursue the more negative side of “*Geschlecht I*” vis-à-vis Heidegger’s relation to sexuality. As we shall see, this relation seems to be itself highly ambiguous, justifying a certain undecidability on Derrida’s and perhaps on our part when dealing with this issue in Heidegger.

The second Heidegger essay from 1928 that Derrida reads, “On the Essence of Ground,” provides a point of departure for teasing out Heidegger’s tendency to exclude sexual difference in favor of ontological difference. Derrida is struck by the need Heidegger seems to feel to bracket sexual difference immediately after isolating Dasein as the exceptional being through which the difference between being and beings is to be read. We are again dealing with the same juxtaposition between *Geschlecht* and *Geschlecht* that Derrida had singled out in the other 1928 Heidegger text. Whereas an “also” (*aussi* translating “*auch*”) had made Derrida suspicious of Heidegger’s statement in the latter (“This neutrality also indicates that Dasein is neither of the two sexes”) insofar as it “immediately” (*aussitôt*) jumps to the neutralization of sexual difference, in “On the Essence of Ground” an “a fortiori” seems to make matters more explicit.

Commenting on the following Heidegger sentence, “Selfhood [...] is neutral with respect to being an ‘I’ or being a ‘you,’ and a fortiori with respect to such things as “sexuality”,”

Derrida writes:

The word [“sexuality”] occurs in quotation marks, in a parenthetical clause. The logic of the a fortiori raises the tone somewhat there. For, in the end, if it is true that sexuality must be neutralized “à plus forte raison [with all the more reason]” as Henry Corbin's translation reads, or a fortiori, *erst recht*, why insist? Where would be the risk of misunderstanding? Unless the matter does not at all go without saying, and there is still a risk of mingling once more the question of sexual difference with the question of being and ontological difference?¹³⁰

Derrida's suspicion here seems to be that, if the matter did *in fact* go without saying, there would be no need for Heidegger to single out sexuality as what is most in need of neutralization as concerns the selfhood of Dasein. Once more, *Geschlecht* as sexual difference is right up against *Geschlecht* as ontological difference, which leads Derrida to wonder if sexual difference can really be considered as just one ontic predicate among many. In other words, if sexuality takes a pride of place as *the* ontic particularity to be neutralized, it is perhaps because it transcends the ontic and ascends to an ontological level to the point of “mingling” with it. Derrida seems to think that this mixture of ontological difference with sexual difference should in principle destabilize the “order of all derivations” that Heidegger's ontological project has to presuppose. It is precisely this “problematic order” which “becomes a problem” for Derrida insofar as he thinks this runs the risk of “deriving sexuality with the force of a new rigor.”

¹³⁰ Ibid., 16.

Let us try to understand just what exactly this “problematic order” entails and how it is that sexuality threatens to “disrupt” it, as Derrida thinks. Heidegger in fact opens *Being and Time* by establishing a hierarchy between three different types of questions: the positive research of the sciences, the regional ontology that guides a particular field of positive research and, lastly, the fundamental ontology on which each regional ontology is in turn based. Derrida had been interested in this hierarchy as early as 1964 when he takes the time to explain to his students what it consists in:

In section 3 of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger defines the primacy of the question of the meaning of being in relation to the regional disciplines, the particular regional ontologies, each of which concerns a particular type of being. To each science, to each particular discipline, mathematics, physics, biology, historical sciences, theology..., there must correspond an ontology that determines in advance the meaning of the being, the being of the being that is its object. A particular positive science can unfold its theoretical field and determine the unity of its theoretical field only by presupposing that clarity has been achieved as to the meaning of the being or of the particular type of being that it has as its object. [...] Regional ontological difference presuppose, whether they speak of the being of such and such a being or such and such a domain of beings, they presuppose the meaning of being; they have an implicit knowledge of what the word *being* means when they ask what is the physical being, the biological being, the mathematical, historical, being, and so on.¹³¹

¹³¹ Ibid.

Heidegger can speak of an “ontological priority of the question of being” – the title of the section Derrida is reading – because the meaning of being in general is presupposed by each type of being in particular (the physical, mathematical, historical, biological being). Each particular discipline remains derivative with respect to a fundamental question they tend to take for granted and leave uninterrogated, the question not of what it means to be a physical (or mathematical, biological, etc) being but of what it means to be anything at all. As Heidegger puts it:

The question of being thus aims not only at an a priori condition of the possibility of the sciences, which investigates beings as this or that kind of being and which thus always already move within an understanding of being, but also at the condition of the possibility of the ontologies which precede the ontic sciences and found them.¹³²

A tripartite order – which will “become a problem” for Derrida in “*Geschlecht I*” – is thus established at the outset of *Being and Time*: positive research will always have been made possible and delimited in advance by a particular regional ontology that “founds” and “precedes” ontic research while being itself grounded in a more original question. As Derrida reminds us, this does not mean that Heidegger is against positive research and the regional ontologies that “found” it; but it does mean that he is inscribing all ontic disciplines within an ontological framework established solely on the basis of the priority of the question of being. This question then subjugates all others but, as Derrida helps us see, sexuality above all.

¹³² Heidegger 2010, 45.

Towards the end of “*Geschlecht I*,” Derrida wonders what the relation between this “order of implication” and sexuality is. He writes:

How is this question of *order* important to a “situation” of sexual difference? Thanks to a prudent derivation that in turn becomes problematic for us, Heidegger can at least reinscribe the theme of sexuality, in rigorous fashion, within an ontological questioning and an existential analytic.¹³³

It is curious that Derrida should have a problem with a gesture that he does not hesitate to call “prudent” or “rigorous.” More strangely still, Derrida tells us on the very last page of “*Geschlecht I*” that “this order of implications opens thinking to a sexual difference that would not yet be sexual duality, difference as dual.” As we know from the interview with Christie McDonald, Derrida dreams and affirms the possibility of such a “pre-dual sexuality.” So much so that it is puzzling to see him have a problem with the very thing that seems to “open” this possibility to begin with. Is this a sheer contradiction?

In order to measure the stakes of this simultaneous enthusiasm and reservation on Derrida’s part vis-à-vis Heidegger’s attempt to think a “pre-dual sexuality,” let us return to the interview with Christie Macdonald conducted just a year before the publication of “*Geschlecht I*.” There we find Derrida alluding to his reading of Heidegger in what would soon appear as Derrida’s first *Geschlecht*. He writes:

[...] the emphasis that I have put on re-sexualizing a philosophical or theoretical discourse, which has been too “neutralizing” in this respect, was dictated by those very reservations that I just mentioned concerning the strategy of neutralization (whether or not it is deliberate). Such re-sexualizing must be done without

¹³³ Derrida 2008a, 22.

facileness of any kind and, above all, without regression in relation to what might justify, as we saw, the procedures – or necessary steps – of Levinas or Heidegger, for example.¹³⁴

Here, Derrida is positioning himself explicitly against the neutralizing tendency of philosophical discourse. He speaks of the need to “re-sexualize” philosophy “without facileness of any kind,” which I take it to mean without resorting to a binaristic understanding of sexuality and sexual difference that precisely “erases” this difference as we saw earlier. Derrida then recognizes the necessity of Levinas’s and Heidegger’s gestures vis-à-vis this (in)difference, the binary one. Which is not to say that these gestures are entirely unproblematic either, at least as far as Derrida is concerned. Let us pause over Derrida’s “reservations” as he expresses them in the interview. This will help us understand why Derrida worries in “*Geschlecht I*” that the “price” of Heidegger’s prudence is that it risks “deriving sexuality with the force of a new rigor.”

Derrida is perhaps moving rather quickly in lumping Levinas and Heidegger together, as though their neutralizing gestures amounted to the same thing. The reference to Levinas, in the context of the interview at least, seems to fall under an example of what Derrida calls the “classical interpretation [that] gives a masculine sexual marking to what is presented either as a neutral originarity or, at least, as prior and superior to all sexual markings.” Somewhat surprisingly, Derrida seems to think that the Levinasian gesture to call neutrality “masculine” is analogous, if not identical, to the Hegelian dialectical operation that neutralizes sexual binarity in favor of masculinity. As Derrida puts it:

¹³⁴ Derrida 1995, 102.

The dialectical opposition neutralizes or supersedes the difference. However, according to a surreptitious operation that must be flushed out, one ensures phallogocentric mastery under the cover of neutralization every time.¹³⁵

This classical interpretation is then the risk Levinas runs, according to Derrida: “whatever the force, seductiveness or necessity of this reading, does it not risk restoring – in the name of ethics as that which is irreproachable – a classical interpretation, and thereby enriching what I would call its panoply in a manner surely as subtle as it is sublime?”¹³⁶

Derrida briefly explains that what Levinas neutralizes is not so much sexuality as such but sexual division into masculinity and femininity. Levinas can still maintain the possibility of ethics – which cannot be predicated of the particularity of each sex – all the while affirming that the human is originally sexual but not yet sexuated into the sexes at the level of Spirit. Sexual division befalls the human as an accident that does not disturb the human in his humanity, the main possibility of which is to be ethical in the strong sense Levinas gives to this word. Here is Derrida’s summary of a reading of Levinas he had developed more extensively elsewhere:

Since you quote Genesis, I would like to evoke the marvelous reading that Levinas has proposed of it [...] There would, of course, be a certain secondariness to woman, Ischa. The man, Isch, would come first; he would be number one; he would be at the beginning. Secondariness, however, would not be that of woman or femininity, but the *division* between masculine and feminine. It is not feminine sexuality that would be second but only the relationship to sexual difference. At the origin, on this side of and therefore beyond any sexual mark, there was

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 109.

humanity in general, and this is what is important. Thus the possibility of ethics could be saved, if one takes ethics to mean that relationship to the other as other which accounts for no other determination or sexual characteristic in particular.¹³⁷

However impressed Derrida may be with Levinas's gesture – insofar as it does not buy into the original status of the masculine-feminine binary, leaving open the possibility of that pre-dual sexuality Derrida dreams about – it is still of a piece with the Hegelian dialectical operation that “ensures phallogentric mastery under the cover of neutralization every time.” In Levinas's case, this operation is not so subtle or disguised: according to what Derrida calls a “self-interested contradiction,” Levinas places “masculinity in command and at the beginning (the arche), on a par with Spirit.” This is why, then, Levinas runs the risk of “restoring” the classical interpretation that places masculinity on the top and thereby “erases” sexual difference.

After identifying Levinas's gesture, Derrida goes on to list a few instances throughout history that repeat the dialectical tendency to favor masculinity under the guise of a then not so neutral neutralization:

This gesture carries with it the most self-interested of contradictions; it has repeated itself, let us say, since “Adam and Even,” and persists – in analogous form – into “modernity,” despite all the differences of style and treatment. [...] Whatever the complexity of the itinerary and whatever the knots of rhetoric, don't you think that the movement of Freudian thought repeats this “logic”? Is it not also the risk that Heidegger runs? One should perhaps say, rather, the risk that is

¹³⁷ Ibid., 102.

avoided because phallogocentrism is insurance against the return of what certainly has been feared as the most agonizing risk of all.¹³⁸

Quite strikingly, “phallogocentrism” substitutes Heidegger’s name as though Heidegger’s neutralization amounted to the same privileging of masculinity over femininity. Whereas there might be some virtue to Levinas’s explicit phallogocentrism – insofar as it least brings the problem front and center – Heidegger’s phallogocentrism would then seem to be of the worst kind as it surreptitiously reinforces phallic mastery all the while passing itself for a neutrality that is neither masculine nor feminine. For Heidegger, unlike Levinas, does not mobilize the “self-interested contradiction” that explicitly calls the origin masculine. Is this then why Derrida had to temper his enthusiasm in “*Geschlecht I*” vis-à-vis Heidegger’s attempt to think a pre-dual sexuality?

It might seem as though the 1982 interview came as a cold shower to those of us who had shared Derrida’s enthusiasm about a pre-dual sexuality in Heidegger. Far from being the first philosopher not to privilege *Geschlecht* as ontological difference over *Geschlecht* as sexual difference, Heidegger would be the worst philosophy boy insofar as he “derives sexuality with the force of a new rigor.” Contrary to appearances, that “reading machine” would have been actually more right than it knew: it is not that Heidegger simply does not talk about sexual difference – since he actually does – the problem is that when he *does* talk about it, he erases that difference like never before. And so, “*Geschlecht I*” would also “close the dossier” on Heidegger and sexuality.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

It has already become apparent that the issue cannot possibly be this simple. A few questions are bound to arise at this point: 1. If Heidegger's neutralizing gesture is so straightforward a repetition of phallogocentrism, why does the word "phallogocentrism" not even appear in "*Geschlecht I*"? Is it because "deriving sexuality with the force of a new rigor" is *the* phallogocentric gesture par excellence and thus goes without saying? In other words, are the "reservations" Derrida speaks of in the interview tantamount to the "problem" Derrida has with Heidegger's "order of implications"? Or (2) has Derrida somewhat changed his mind as to what really constitutes Heidegger's gesture? If so, why is Heidegger's "order of implications" problematic for Derrida? Why does it risk deriving sexuality all the more forcefully without simply being a phallogocentric gesture? In other words, if Heidegger's neutralization of sexuality does not readily lend itself to a phallogocentric critique, wherein lies the risk and what is the "price" to pay for Heidegger's prudent gesture?

In what follows, I will be suggesting that the answer lies somewhere between these two sets of alternatives. Let us return now to "*Geschlecht I*" in order to see how Derrida's reservations with sexuality in Heidegger have changed somewhat in tone and in content without being any less serious or worth thinking about. Let us return then to what Derrida says of the relation between this "order of implications" and sexuality in Heidegger, using what we know from the interview as a point of contact between two not entirely identical Derridas.

It would seem that this order of implications is linked to Heidegger's prudence – conceived as the force of a new rigor – Derrida is no doubt impressed with even if should become a problem for him. In the interview, after alluding to the "force" of Levinas's

gesture, Derrida goes on to speak of the “strengths” of Heidegger’s “powerful discourse.” He writes:

And one of the strengths of this [Heidegger’s] discourse may be stated [...] like this: it begins by denying itself all accepted forms of security, all the sedimented presuppositions of classical ontology, anthropology, the natural or human sciences, until it falls back this side of such values as the opposition between subject/object, conscious/unconscious, mind/body, and many others as well.¹³⁹

Prominent among such “values” is the binary opposition between the sexes, as we have seen. The strength and rigor of Heidegger’s powerful discourse vis-à-vis sexuality is that it does not tranquilly accept the metaphysical presuppositions and distinctions that would allow it already to know what sexual difference is. This brings us back to the need to neutralize all these oppositions if the meaning of being that Dasein already understands is to be read without our access to it being blocked by oppositional binaries. Thus, according to a gesture Derrida calls “prudent,” Heidegger does not avail himself of a ready-made answer for determining what sexuality or sexual difference is. Sexual difference thus “remains to be thought,” as Derrida puts it:

Sexual difference remains to be thought, from the moment one no longer pins one’s hopes on a common *doxa* or a bio-anthropological science, both of which are sustained by a metaphysical pre-interpretation. But the price of that prudence? Is it not to distance sexuality from all originary structures? To deduce it? Or in

¹³⁹ Ibid.

any case to derive it, and thus to confirm the most traditional philosophemes by repeating them with the force of new rigor?¹⁴⁰

Derrida's suspicion that Heidegger's prudence serves to "confirm the most traditional philosophemes" offers us a point of contact between "*Geschlecht I*" and the 1982 interview where Derrida wonders if Levinas and Heidegger do not risk "restoring a classical interpretation" according to which neutrality lets masculinity sneak in the back door. However, in "*Geschlecht I*," there is no mention of neutrality surreptitiously reinforcing masculinity, leading one to think that what is being "repeated" here is something slightly different than the "well-known paradoxes" of masculine neutralities Derrida alludes to in the interview. When one looks at the context of "*Geschlecht I*" in which Derrida's suspicion is inserted, one finds that it comes up at the end of a sequence where Derrida reads through the other "guiding principles" of Heidegger's ontological project that mention "sexuality" with reference to "dissemination." Let us then look more closely into this motif in order to see why it leads Derrida to be suspicious of Heidegger's prudent gesture.

The last word of "*Geschlecht I*" leaves the reader with the impression that the virtue of Heidegger's "order of implications" – which remains problematic in other respects – is that it neutralizes sexual opposition while leading to a dispersion and multiplicity of a sexuality no longer marked by the number two:

This order of implications opens thinking to a sexual difference that would not yet be sexual duality, difference as dual. As we have already observed, what the lecture course neutralized was less sexuality itself than the "generic" mark of

¹⁴⁰ Derrida 2008a, 22.

sexual difference, belonging to one of the two sexes. Hence, in leading back to dispersion and multiplication (*Zerstreuung, Mannigfaltigung*), might one not begin to think of a sexual difference (without negativity, let us be clear) that would not be sealed by the two?¹⁴¹

In the 1928 lecture course, the question of Dasein's neutrality led Heidegger to inquire into what makes it possible for Dasein to be particularly determined by what Heidegger calls "factual concretion" in the second directive we have already looked at. Just a few directives later, Heidegger again mobilizes a neutralization of one *Geschlecht* (sexual difference) in order to let another *Geschlecht* (ontological difference) become visible. It seems like the reason why Dasein is "above all" not sexual has to do with Dasein being situated prior to any ontico-factual concretion, the most concrete example of which – the only one Heidegger mentions at any rate – seems to be the dispersion into a sexual body that Dasein always already is. Sexuality seems, once more, to have a pride of place as the most factually concrete possibility of Dasein's factual concretion. "Prior to every factual concretion" seems to mean prior to a *sexual* concretion, above all:

Dasein as such harbors the intrinsic possibility for being factually dispersed into bodiliness and thus into sexuality. The metaphysical neutrality of the human, isolated in its innermost core as Dasein, is not the empty abstraction from the ontic, a neither-nor, but instead the properly concrete aspect of the origin, the not-yet of factual dispersion. As factual, Dasein is, among other things, always

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 26.

divided up into a body and concomitantly in each case split into a particular sexuality.¹⁴²

Derrida is impressed that, even though Heidegger calls Dasein's neutrality the "not-yet of factual dispersion," he nevertheless places another sort of dispersion at the core of Dasein. It is this more originary dissemination – what Heidegger calls *Streuung* – that provides the condition of possibility for there to be scatter (*Zer-streuung*) into the two sexes. Heidegger seems to think that a more originary multiplicity is to be found before difference becomes arrested in the body which serves as an "organizing factor," as he puts it:

We are not dealing with the notion of a large primal being in its simplicity becoming ontically split into many individuals, but with the clarification of the intrinsic possibility of multiplication which, as we shall see more precisely, is present in every Dasein and for which embodiment presents an organizing factor. However, the multiplicity is also not mere formal plurality of determinations, but belongs to being itself. In other words, in its metaphysically neutral concept, Dasein's essence already contains an original dissemination that is, in a definite respect, a dispersion.¹⁴³

Derrida thinks he has discovered a "pre-dual" sexuality (under the name neutrality) in Heidegger that lets us "begin to think" a sexual difference "no longer sealed by the number two," that is, prior to an anatomical or biological determination of sexual difference by means of the organizing (one is tempted to say repressing) factor of the body. This pre-dual sexual difference is not necessarily pre-differential as Derrida

¹⁴² Heidegger 1984, 137.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

reminds us: “here one must think of a pre-differential, or *rather* a pre-dual, sexuality—which, as we shall see later, does not necessarily mean unitary, homogeneous, and undifferentiated.”¹⁴⁴ “Later” here might be referring to the *Streuung* that Heidegger places at the heart of Dasein’s essence and the multiplicity that “belongs to being itself.” Or perhaps later, to “*Geschlecht III*” where a “gentle two-fold” will be differentiated from a dualistic opposition between the sexes. Be that as it may, Heidegger’s neutralization of the sexual binary opens the door to the sexual multiplicity Derrida is, without a doubt, interested in, as the following passage from the interview reminds us once more:

This indeed revives the following question: what if we were to reach [...] a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminative? The relationship would not be a-sexual, far from it, but would be sexual otherwise: beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition feminine/masculine, beyond bisexuality as well, beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality which come to the same thing. As I dream of saving the chance that this question offers, I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices.¹⁴⁵

We have not yet begun to deal with what is potentially problematic about Heidegger’s neutralization of the sexual binary that resonates with Derrida’s “dream” of thinking beyond (a)sexual duality. One thing, however, seems to have become apparent: whatever Derrida’s reservations in “*Geschlecht I*” with Heidegger’s neutralization may be, it is rather unlikely that they amount to a quick dismissal of Heidegger’s prudent

¹⁴⁴ Derrida 2008a, 14.

¹⁴⁵ Derrida 1995, 108.

gesture as the simple reinforcement of masculinity under the cover of neutralization. One could venture to guess that, at the time of the interview, Derrida had not yet fully worked out his reading of Heidegger in “*Geschlecht I*” where he came to realize that Heidegger’s neutralization “leads” to dispersion and multiplicity instead of a surreptitious victory of phallogocentrism.

And yet! What is then the “price” of Heidegger’s prudent order of implications, why is it a problem for Derrida if it “opens thinking to a sexual difference that would not yet be sexual duality”?

“*Geschlecht I*” seems to tease out a problem in Heidegger’s prudent gesture that Derrida had not yet picked up on in the interview. After rehearsing through Heidegger’s guiding principles that emphasize a hierarchy between existential structures of neutral Dasein and examples of ontico-factual concretion of a particular existing Dasein, Derrida realizes that this ontico-ontological schema serves to subjugate the sexual to original structures of existence that would have nothing sexual about it. He writes:

This brief recourse to *Sein and Zeit* has perhaps allowed us to better understand the meaning and necessity of the *order of implications* that Heidegger wants to preserve. Among other things, that order may also account for the predicates used by all discourse on sexuality. There is no properly sexual predicate; at least there is none that does not refer back, in its meaning, to the *general* structures of *Dasein*. So that to know what one is talking about, and how, when one names sexuality, one must indeed rely on the very thing described by the analytic of

Dasein. Inversely, so to speak, that disimplication allows the general sexuality or sexualization of discourse to be understood: sexual connotations can mark discourse, to the point of complete takeover, only to the extent that they are homogeneous with what every discourse implies, for example the topology of those irreducible “spatial meanings” (*Raumbedeutungen*), but also so many other traits we have situated in passing. What would a “sexual” discourse or a discourse “on-sexuality” be that did not evoke remoteness, the inside and the outside, dispersion and proximity, the here and the there, birth and death, the between-birth-and-death, being-with and discourse?¹⁴⁶

Derrida’s point is that Heidegger’s prudence and rigor not to bank naively on metaphysical presuppositions that every discourse on sexuality must rely on drives him to subordinate the question of sexuality to what he deems to be the more fundamental questions of the very presuppositions on which a discourse on sexuality is dependent. Even though this prudent gesture opens the way to a multiplicity and dispersion, it does so by means of a hierarchy that keeps the sexual at bay and institutes an internal axiomatics between original and derivative dispersion and multiplicity. It is tempting to see the sexual in Heidegger on the side of an always derivative dispersion and multiplicity, the neutrality of which is “marked twice” in *Being and Time*, as Derrida’s “brief excursus to *Sein und Zeit*” demonstrates:

Dispersion is thus marked *twice*: as a general structure of *Dasein* and as mode of inauthenticity. One might say the same of the neutral: no hint of the negative or pejorative when it is a question of *Dasein's* neutrality in the lecture course;

¹⁴⁶ Derrida 2008a, 25-26.

whereas in *Sein and Zeit*, the “neutral” may also be used to characterize the “one,” that is, what becomes of the “who” in everyday ipseity: the “who,” then, becomes the neuter (*Neutrum*), *the one* (§ 27).¹⁴⁷

This rather classically Derridean gesture here is first to tease out a “differential and hierarchizing emphasis” of neutrality and dispersion in Heidegger – as though there were a “good” neutral dispersion that came to be affected and corrupted by a “bad” one – and then to ask how this supposedly accidental contamination was possible to begin with. Derrida thinks that this ambiguous status of a neutral dispersion ultimately condemns the “bad” sort to be inevitably associated with an “ethico-religious” valence:

Yet, even if not rigorously legitimate, it is difficult to avoid a certain contamination by negativity, that is, by ethico-religious associations that would come to align this dispersion with a fall or some sort of corruption of the pure, originary possibility (*Streuung*), which would seem to be affected by some sort of supplementary turn. It will also be necessary to elucidate the possibility or fatality of this contamination.¹⁴⁸

We are perhaps beginning to understand why Derrida remains somewhat on the fence in “*Geschlecht I*” vis-à-vis Heidegger’s attempt to think a “pre-dual” sexuality. This hesitation seems to come from Heidegger himself, whose neutral dispersion remains deeply ambiguous. So much so that it would not be a matter of simply choosing the “good” sexuality in favor of the “bad” one, but of asking why Heidegger has to reinstall a binarism between these two (the “problematic order” or “order of implications” that we have been alluding to). If the possibility of contamination is co-original with the then not

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 26.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

so “pure” origin, one could venture to say that *Geschlecht* comes to “disrupt the order of all derivations,” as Derrida puts it. If sexual difference “mingles” with ontological difference, it does so in order to destabilize the security of the ontico-ontological schema within which we will always risk “deriving” sexuality.

Heidegger’s neutralization is then ambiguous: it both lets us have a glimpse of a non-binary sexual dissemination *and* forecloses this opening by relying too heavily on the very ontico-ontological schema that it too threatens to deconstruct. We could venture to extract from this a formalized principle of Derridean deconstruction: the very thing that opens up a possibility is in turn threatened by the very possibility it opens and, as a consequence, shrinks back from the opening it then also tends to foreclose. The condition of possibility of Heidegger’s original “pre-dual”sexuality is the very thing (the ontico-ontological prudent and rigorous order) that makes it possible for sexuality not to be derivative. The possibility of an original pre-dual sexuality in Heidegger is its impossibility. An opening is always a closure at the same time. *And that’s deconstruction*, one is tempted to say.

Chapter III: “*Geschlecht II*”

Let us now turn to the second installment of Derrida’s *Geschlecht* series. “*Geschlecht II*” is, unlike “*Geschlecht I*,” a subtitle. The main title of the text emphasizes the theme of Derrida’s essay: “Heidegger’s Hand.” Even though “*Geschlecht II*” had originally been written as part of Derrida’s first seminar at the EHESS in the academic year of 1984-85, it proved to be fairly independent and relatively self-contained when Derrida read out loud a near verbatim version of it – in an English translation by John Leavey which was subsequently published – at a conference at Loyola University organized by John Sallis in the spring of 1985. Derrida begins the text by alluding to what he calls the “invisible contexts” of the theoretical “landscape” of “*Geschlecht II*”:

For lack of time I can reconstitute neither the introductory article entitled “*Geschlecht I*” (it discusses the motif of sexual difference in a course almost contemporary with *Sein and Zeit*), nor all the developments that form, in my

seminar on “Philosophical Nationality and Nationalism,” the contextual landscape of the reflections I will present to you today. Nevertheless I will try to make the presentation of these few reflections, which are still preliminary, as intelligible and independent of all these invisible contexts as possible.¹⁴⁹

Though Derrida implies that he will significantly alter the seminar text in order to make it “intelligible” or “independent” for his Loyola audience, on a close examination of the seminar and the Loyola (and then published) version, one finds that very little has indeed changed. It might nevertheless be helpful to reconstitute the aforementioned landscape by turning to the initial five sessions that precede the place of “*Geschlecht II*” in the seminar. As “*Geschlecht III*” immediately picks up where “*Geschlecht II*” breaks off, consisting in the last six sessions of the seminar, this detour will also help situate “*Geschlecht III*” vis-à-vis its “invisible contexts.”

Derrida opens the 84-85 seminar by means of an aporia: the idiom as “both a *scandal* and as the very *chance* of philosophy.”¹⁵⁰ Derrida teases out a paradoxical logic according to which philosophy both needs and dispenses with a given language. Insofar as philosophy needs a given idiom in order “to speak itself, to be discussed, to get (itself) across,” the idiom is its chance and “only possibility” for doing so; insofar as philosophy thinks of itself as “essentially universal and cosmopolitan,” so that no particularity such as a given language would remain irreducible to it, the idiom is a scandal because it “would be an aggression or a profanation with regard to the philosophical as such.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Derrida 2008b, 28.

¹⁵⁰ Derrida 1992, 3; Geoffrey Bennington has translated into English the first session of this seminar with the added title, by Derrida, “Onto-Theology of National-Humanism (Prolegomena to a Hypothesis).”

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Derrida is thus interested in what he calls the “aporias of the philosophical translation of philosophical idioms” which, in their idiomaticity, resist both translation and the universalizing tendency of philosophy to erase signifiers in favor of transcendental signifieds that do not depend on any idiomaticity in order to be philosophical.¹⁵² Except that Derrida also stresses that there is no philosophy without an idiom either, which leads him to wonder what the relationship between a self-proclaimed universal philosophy and the indispensable particular idiom of this philosophy is. This constitutes Derrida’s main “concern” in the seminar, as he puts it:

When I say that my principal *concern*, at least in this seminar, is primarily that of philosophical idiom or translatability, and immediately afterwards the link of that idiom to a national characteristic, what does this mean [...]?¹⁵³

Notice that Derrida “immediately” links a “national characteristic” to the problem of philosophical idiom. As he explains, the question of an irreducibly idiomatic philosophy that nevertheless claims itself to be “essentialist, universal and cosmopolitan” is of a piece with the question of nationalism and nationality. So much so that it justifies the (sub)title – or rather general heading – of the seminar, “Philosophical Nationality and Nationalism”:

And given this, if I say that my most proper concern in this seminar is idiomatic difference in philosophy, it is nonetheless not entirely in an accessory or absent-minded manner that I chose for its title, “Philosophical nationality and nationalism.” So the question would be, if you would be so kind as to take this title seriously: what is a national idiom in philosophy? How does a philosophical

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

idiom pose itself, claim its rights, appear to itself, attempt to impose itself as a national idiom?¹⁵⁴

Throughout this first session of the seminar, Derrida diagnoses a peculiar logic on the basis of which philosophy attempts to reconcile the two sides of the aporia of the idiom. Derrida finds that, given this irreducibility of the idiom in philosophy, an irreducibility that goes against the grain of philosophy qua universal and cosmopolitan, the way for philosophy to deal with this necessary scandal is to universalize and essentialize this idiomaticity in turn so that what is said in *a* national language becomes an example for *all* nations. This is why there is a solidarity and complicity between what Derrida calls “philosophical nationality and nationalism” on the one hand and universalism and cosmopolitanism (and an essentialism Derrida will call “humanism” in “*Geschlecht II*”) on the other. He writes:

What I am saying concerns the structure of national consciousness, feeling and demand which means that a nation posits itself not only as bearer of a philosophy but of an exemplary philosophy, i.e. one that is both particular and potentially universal—and which is philosophical by that very fact. Not only does nationalism not happen like an accident or evil to a philosophy supposedly stranger to it and which would, by essential vocation, be cosmopolitan and universalist, it is a philosophy, a discourse which is, structurally, philosophical. And it is universalist or cosmopolitan.¹⁵⁵

Derrida thinks that nationalism is not simply reducible to “an empirical, natural character of the type” so that it would simply be one form of racism or biologism that would carry

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 10.

no philosophical weight.¹⁵⁶ Derrida's gesture is, by contrast, to single out nationalism as *the* philosophical gesture par excellence. Every philosophy would affirm an universalizing cosmopolitanism by making an example of itself, of what is irreducibly idiomatic about it and what thus better represents the universal essence of the human, access to which can be gained by means of *this* philosophical idiom alone. As Derrida puts it:

The national problem, as we shall have ceaselessly to verify, is not one problem among others, nor one philosophical dimension among others. [...] the affirmation of a nationality or even the claim of nationalism does not happen to philosophy by chance or from the outside, it is essentially and thoroughly philosophical, *it is a philosopheme*.

What does this mean? It means at least that a national identity is never posited as an empirical, natural character, of the type: such and such a people or such and such a race has black hair or is of the dolicephalic type, or else we recognise ourselves by the presence of such and such a characteristic. The self-positing or self-identification of the nation always has the form of a *philosophy* which, although better represented by such and such a nation, is none the less a certain relation to the universality of the philosophical.¹⁵⁷

At this point in the seminar, Derrida turns to Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*. This is the text that Derrida explicitly relates to his reading of Heidegger in "Geschlecht II." The seminar is a little easier to understand because it situates Derrida's reading of Fichte (and later of Heidegger) within this broader theoretical problem of philosophical

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

nationality and nationalism and its paradoxical link to universalism, cosmopolitanism, essentialism and, finally, humanism. Let us then dwell a little longer on the seminar in order to see how Fichte and Heidegger are instances in the “sequence of German national-philosophism” that Derrida sketches still in the first session of the seminar.¹⁵⁸

What initially interests Derrida in Fichte’s *Addresses to the German Nation* is the appearance of the word “*Geschlecht*” in a pivotal moment of the seventh address. There, Fichte writes:

That which believes in spirituality and in the freedom of this spirituality, what desires the eternal progress of this spirituality through freedom – wherever it be born and whichever language it speak – is of our *Geschlecht*, belongs to us and will join us.¹⁵⁹

Derrida comments on how hard it is to translate “*Geschlecht*” in this context, given that Fichte himself is preemptively emptying out all the biogenico-racial (even linguistic) overtones that would justify translating it as “blood” or “race,” as two existing English translations have it. In fact, as Derrida says in relation to the French translation by S. Jankélévitch, given how “open” and “undetermined” this word seems to be, there might be grounds for omitting it altogether, without “losing much,” as Derrida entertains. This because, as Derrida explains, the “only” analytic determination presupposed by “*Geschlecht*” in Fichte’s context is that of a “we” itself constituted on the basis of the infinite free spirituality that “announces itself to itself,” as Derrida puts it:

So this *Geschlecht* is not determined by birth, native soil, or race; it has nothing to do with the natural or even the linguistic, at least not in the usual sense of this

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵⁹ Fichte 2008, 97. Translation modified.

term [...]. The sole analytic and unimpeachable determination of *Geschlecht* in this context is the “we,” the belonging to the “we” that speaks to us at this moment, at the moment that Fichte addresses himself to this supposed but still to be constituted community, a community that, strictly speaking, is neither political, nor racial, nor linguistic, but that can receive his allocution, his address, or his apostrophe (*Rede an . . .*), and can think with him, can say “we” in some language and from a particular birthplace. *Geschlecht* is a whole, a gathering (one could say *Versammlung*), an organic community in a nonnatural but spiritual sense, one that believes in the infinite progress of the spirit through freedom. So it is an infinite “we,” a “we” that announces itself to itself from the infinity of a *telos* of freedom and spirituality, and that promises, engages, or allies itself according to the circle (*Kreis, Bund*) of this infinite will.¹⁶⁰

In the seminar, Derrida explains what he calls the “paradoxical consequence” of this Fichtean gesture: given how minimally predetermined the “we” of *Geschlecht* is, one can choose to read it “either as an expansion of generosity, or as the imperialist expansionism of a people sure of itself, dominant.”¹⁶¹ Though it may seem unwarranted for Derrida to be so suspicious of Fichte’s good intentions, he makes a convincing case by showing that Fichte is not prepared to deny the German idiom an exemplary status, even if Fichte is clearly not relying on the “usual sense” of idiom as the language of one’s homeland. In a gesture that both impresses and troubles Derrida, Fichte tries to think an “idiom of the idiom,” the “enigma” of which “remains to be thought.” Let us now turn to what is

¹⁶⁰ Derrida 2008b, 29.

¹⁶¹ Derrida 1992, 12.

potentially problematic about Fichte's attempt without losing sight of the interesting possibilities this gesture nevertheless allows us to think.

Fichte's appeal to a non-empirical German idiom as the site of human (thus philosophical) exemplarity happens most clearly in the fourth address of his *Addresses to the German Nation*. He writes:

I shall take as my example the three notorious words 'humanity' [*Humanität*], 'popularity' [*Popularität*] and 'liberality' [*Liberaltät*]. These words, when they are spoken to the German who has learned no other language, are to his ears a wholly empty noise; he is reminded of nothing with which he is already familiar by any resemblance of sound and is thus wrenched completely from the sphere of his intuition and *indeed of all possible intuition (aller möglichen Anschauung)*. [...] Do not think it is so very different with neo-Latin peoples, who utter those words supposedly belonging to their mother tongue. Without a learned study of antiquity and its actual language, they no more understand the roots of these words than does the German. If instead of the word *Humanität* we had used the word *Menschlichkeit*, as the former must literally be translated, then the German would have understood us without need for further historical explanation; but he would have added: to say one is a human being and not a wild animal is to say very little. Thus would a German speak, as a Roman would never have spoken, because humanity [*Menschheit*] in general has remained only a sensuous concept [*sinnlicher Begriff*] in his language and has never, as it did with the Romans, become the symbol [*Sinnbild*] of a supersensuous concept.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Fichte 2008, 55.

Derrida relates this passage from Fichte's fourth address to the "we" of "*our Geschlecht*" of the aforementioned passage from the seventh address. Whereas the latter seemed virtually all-inclusive and solely predicated of an address, the former imposes the restriction that his address must be made in German, a German "more essential than all the phenomena of empirical Germanity" but, as Derrida specifies, "some German [*de l'allemand*]" nevertheless. This because, as Derrida argues:

The "we" finally comes down to the humanity of man, to the teleological essence of a humanity that is announced par excellence in *Deutschheit*. *MenschenGeschlecht* is often used for 'humankind,' 'human species,' 'human race.' [...] Already, for Fichte, it is not the same thing to say the "humanity" of man and *Menschlichkeit*. When he says "*ist unsers Geschlechts*," he is thinking of *Menschlichkeit* and not of *Humanität* with its Latin derivation. The fourth *Discourse* is consonant with those Heidegger texts to come on Latinness.¹⁶³

The reason why Fichte privileges the German language as the site of "humanity" – the whole point is that he would have said *Menschlichkeit* or *Menschheit* – is that these last two words seem to remain closer to a gut-level intuition that dispenses with "further historical explanation." Say *Menschheit* (or *Geschlecht*) to a German and he will understand you immediately because, says Fichte, this word has remained a "sensuous concept" as opposed to the Roman parallel *Humanität*, a "supersensuous" concept or mere "image" (or phantom) "cut off" from what Fichte calls the "living root" of a language that no longer develops "uninterruptedly out of the actual common life of a people" or that does not express an "actually lived intuition of this people," as Fichte says

¹⁶³ Derrida 2008, 30.

just a little earlier in the fourth address.¹⁶⁴ But what seems to be a more troublesome point on Fichte's part is that the word *Humanität* remains "dead" not just for the German but also, and especially, for the Roman or neo-Latin. It is a dead word that has no chance of gaining access to the humanity (or *Menschheit*) it (does not) signify, relegating those who say it to be outside the very humanity they (do not) say, not unless they speak German and say *Menschheit* or *unsers Geschlecht*.

In the seminar, Derrida spends some time on the troublesome dead status of the foreigner or non-German (and thus non-human or non-philosophical) in Fichte. Picking up from the passage from Fichte's seventh discourse where anyone – or anything as Fichte's German is "*was*" – who believes in the eternal progress of free spirituality is said to be German or of "our *Geschlecht*" even if he was not born in Germany or does not even speak German, Derrida goes on to notice how Fichte's apparently anti-racist, anti-biological, anti-linguistic or even anti-ethnocentric discourse remains not entirely or unequivocally divorced from these ordinary forms of nationalism. Derrida writes:

[...] this essentially philosophical nationalism (as I believe every nationalism is philosophical, and this is the main point I wanted to emphasise at the outset) claims to be totally foreign to any naturalism, biologism, racism, or even ethnocentrism—it does not even want to be a political nationalism, a doctrine of the Nation-State. It is, further, a cosmopolitanism, often associated with a democratic and republican politics, a progressivism, etc. But you can see quite

¹⁶⁴ Fichte 2008, 53-56.

clearly that everything that ought thus to withdraw it from reappropriation into a Nazi heritage (which is biologising, racist, etc.) remains in essence equivocal.¹⁶⁵

Derrida's reasons for worrying so much about what he calls the "extreme and threatening, worrying, murky equivocality of the signs" in Fichte's nationalistic discourse seem to stem from Fichte's text itself.¹⁶⁶ For Fichte in fact explicitly associates death with anything that does not unconditionally embrace his *Geschlecht* by affirming or renewing the bond that lets the German people become "what it ought to be," on the basis of an "origin" that "breaks forth into the light of day of modern times" and that thereby announces itself as the telos of philosophy and humanity or as philosophy and humanity *tout court*. Anything that does not believe in this telos as the best telos that announces itself to the German people as the "clear conception" of what Germans already were "without being distinctly conscious of it," the "mirror" that allows the German nation to recognize itself and move towards its "whole" self, anything straying from this path towards a fulfilled Germany that passes itself for the best (in truth, the one and only) philosophy and humanity, the archeo-teleological infinite progress of free spirituality, anything refusing to believe in any of this is dead, says Fichte:

Whoever believes in stagnation, retrogression, and the round dance of which we spoke, or who sets a dead nature at the helm of the world's government, wherever he may have been born and whatever language he speaks, is non-German and a stranger to us; and it is to be wished that he would separate himself from us completely. [...]

¹⁶⁵ Derrida 1992, 16.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

On the basis of what we said above about freedom, we can reveal at last and unmistakably to all those who have ears to hear what that philosophy, which with good reason calls itself German philosophy really wants, and wherein it is strictly, earnestly, and inexorably opposed to any foreign philosophy that believes in death. Let it appear before you, not in the least with the intention of making *the dead* understand it, which is impossible, but so that it may be harder for the dead to twist its words, and to spread the belief that they themselves fundamentally want or mean more or less the same thing we do.¹⁶⁷

Fichte's fear that a dead philosophy, a dead language or a dead *Geschlecht* would come back to haunt the German seems to have inspired Derrida's choice of the title of the 84-85 seminar, "Phantom of the Other," the first of a four-year sequence of seminars all falling under the general heading "Philosophical nationality and nationalism." Though "*Le fantôme de l'autre*" appears on the front page of the typescript's first page, written in capital letters by a blue pen with a parenthetical "*(titre)*" next to it, in the text of the seminar "fantôme" is not a recurring word, making it then noteworthy that it should appear for the first time in Derrida's discussion of Fichte's nationalism. After commenting on the "odd" logic of the Fichte passage we have last quoted – insofar as it both affirms and denies the "dead one" by dismissing it as what cannot possibly "understand" life and by warning the "living" (who, by the same token, do not need to be reminded that they are alive just as the dead cannot be taught to live) of the danger these then not very dead "dead ones" pose insofar as they "twist words," Derrida writes:

¹⁶⁷ Fichte 2008, 97.

Between life and death, nationalism has as its own proper space the experience of haunting. There is no nationalism without some ghost.¹⁶⁸

We shall meet “*fantôme*” again when we come to “*Geschlecht III*” where it will haunt Heidegger’s essay on Trakl “Language in the Poem.” Suffice it for now to stress that the ghost haunts Fichte’s text, threatening to come back and corrupt the real sense of German words. This in turn leads Derrida to identify language, even if it is not one’s native German language commonly understood, but a language of language or “idiom of the idiom” nevertheless as the “sole true foundation of German nationality as German philosophy.”¹⁶⁹ He writes:

But what must be saved above all, and this is the point I was keen to emphasize here, is language, the language, the true destination of words, their living destination which is still exposed to the return of the dead one, the malfeasant haunting of the foreigner who can still corrupt the language— which is, as we shall see later, the sole true foundation of German nationality as German philosophy.¹⁷⁰

Despite appearances, then, Fichte’s putatively universal and cosmopolitan all-inclusive gesture remains nationalistic and humanistic because it establishes an internal border between German and non-German, *Menschheit* and *Humanität*, native and foreigner, life and death, purity and corruption. As we saw, it is on the basis or for the sake of the eternally creative and progressive life of spirit in its infinite freedom that the dead (the natural (non)philosophy of foreigners) are to be cancelled out, eliminated or eradicated

¹⁶⁸ Derrida 19992, 15.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

from within, “separated from us” as Fichte says. This is why Derrida is not being melodramatic or exaggerating when he writes, diagnosing that “extreme and threatening, worrying, murky equivocality of the signs” which are “preparatory, in the shadow of the shadows, of the most sinister and unavoidable modernity”:

But you can see quite clearly that everything that ought thus to withdraw it [Fichte’s “essentially philosophical nationalism”] from reappropriation into a Nazi heritage (which is biologising, racist, etc.) remains in essence equivocal. It is in the name of a philosophy of life (even if it is spiritual life) that it sets itself apart from naturalising biologism. And it is perhaps of the essence of every nationalism to be philosophical, to present itself as a universal philosophy, to sublimate or *aufheben*, to sublimate its philosophy of life into a philosophy of the life of the spirit—and as for cosmopolitanism, this is a fearfully ambiguous value: it can be annexionist and expansionist, and combat in the name of nationalism the enemies within, the false Germans who, even though they speak German, are Germans living on the German soil, are essentially less authentically German than certain 'foreigners' who, etc.¹⁷¹

We are now in a better position from which to understand what is potentially problematic about Fichte’s recourse to the “idiom of the idiom” as the sole foundation of his nationalism and humanism. Fichte, to quote Derrida once more, “essentialises Germanity to the point of making it an entity bearing the universal and the philosophical as such,” to the point of confusing this essential Germanity with the best (only) philosophy and

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 16.

humanity there is.¹⁷² This is why, as Derrida insists throughout this opening pages of the seminar, philosophy and nationalism go hand-in-hand so as to merge into one telos that includes some and excludes others depending on how they relate themselves to the German of German, a German not reducible to a common linguistic understanding of language as native tongue, but a German nevertheless. What is then, for Derrida, the “enigma” of this German, why does it “remain to be thought” as the “secret idiom of the idiom”?

At the very end of the first session of the 84-85 seminar, Derrida arrives at what he calls a paradox, a paradigm and an aporia.” He writes:

If, in conclusion, I have insisted so much on language today, this is also to recognize a paradox, a paradigm and an aporia. 1) Final recourse of a universalistic philosophical nationalism, language is not language (Fichte). 2) One can denounce, suspect, devalorize, combat philosophical nationalism only by taking the risk of reducing or effacing linguistic difference or the force of the idiom, thus in making that metaphysico-technical gesture which consists in instrumentalising language (but is there a language which is purely non-instrumental?), making it a medium which is neutral, indifferent and external to the philosophical act of thought. Is there a thought of the idiom that escapes this alternative?¹⁷³

The virtue of Fichte’s nationalism seems to be that, however problematic its “final recourse” to an idiom more idiomatic than a simple native fluency may be, it at least resists the “metaphysico-technical gesture” to “erase” the idiom altogether in the name or

¹⁷² Ibid., 11.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 23.

in the service of a “philosophical act of thought” which would itself have nothing idiomatic about it. Fichte’s gesture, insofar as it relies on this “force of the idiom,” seems then to help Derrida think of an “alternative” that would not debase the idiom to a “neutral, indifferent and external” medium without for all that subscribing to any exemplarity accorded to this idiom by the nationalistic and humanistic gesture.

In the opening of the second session of the seminar, Derrida comes back to this aporia in order to complicate it even further. It turns out that the denunciation of nationalism that Derrida is undertaking runs the risk of surreptitiously reinforcing another kind of nationalism, what Derrida here calls a “computer language (*langue de computer*).”¹⁷⁴ Even though Derrida is not ready to embrace the Heideggerian notion of a “purely non-instrumental” language, he nevertheless worries about the political consequences a full instrumentalization of language would bring about once the denunciation of nationalism has erased all idiomatic difference. Or *almost* all: the so-called “computer language” can “reintroduce” the idiom in a disguised manner, being complicitous with the nationalistic gesture it claimed to “neutralize,” as Derrida argues:

Parce que [...] *l'aporie* qui nous gênera toujours dans la dénonciation de tout nationalisme, c'est, en raison de ce problème justement de l'idiome, que la condamnation politique du nationalisme philosophique risque toujours de s'accompagner d'une dénonciation visant à discréditer l'idiome et donc de s'accoupler à une philosophie de la langue ou du langage faisant de ceux-ci des instruments objectifs, de simples techniques de communication totalement

¹⁷⁴ Derrida 1984, 1; As this second session of the seminar has not yet been translated into English, I will be quoting from it in French and providing the seminar typescript page numbers after the year when the seminar was given.

instrumentalisées et formalisables. [...] Ce technologisme linguistique, cet instrumentalisme – avec tous les enjeux modernes que je n’ai pas besoin de souligner – pose aussi des problèmes politiques aussi graves que ceux du nationalisme ; et l’universalisation d’une langue de computer peut d’ailleurs, loin de s’opposer, comme elle en a l’air, aux idiomes particuliers, réintroduire subrepticement la domination déguisée d’un idiome et donc n’être pas étrangère aux visées nationalistes qu’elle prétendrait neutraliser.

But what seems to be even more grave for Derrida is that the “critique of linguistic nationalism” could have, as its “historical destiny,” the “destruction” of what Derrida is ready to call “trace”: “la critique du nationalisme linguistique peut avoir pour destinée historique la destruction d’une certaine expérience de la langue passant par une idiomaticité – appelez-la poétique, si vous voulez – qui dit la vérité non-communicationnelle de la langue ou plutôt de l’écriture, du texte comme trace de l’autre ou pour l’autre, comme idiome différentiel.”¹⁷⁵ In a sentence glowing with Heideggerian overtones, Derrida gives us a hint of how he wants to understand the idiom: as a “differential [with an “a”] idiom,” which might put him at a distance towards another Heidegger less welcoming of the other, the trace of or for the other in its idiomatic otherness as the force of the idiom, the force of *différance*.

This seems like a good occasion to bid farewell to the seminar and come back to Derrida’s reading of Heidegger in “*Geschlecht II*.” It is true that, in the seminar, between

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

the opening sessions and the sixth session that contains the seminar version of “*Geschlecht II*,” Derrida deals with an array of different thinkers (Marx, Adorno, Arendt, Wittgenstein, Tocqueville, Adonis) who help him reconstitute the “Germano-American dimension” of what he calls “national-philosophism before and after the 19th century.” However uniquely different Derrida’s analyses of each of these thinkers are, they seem to be a theoretical application of the conceptual matrix we saw Derrida lay out in his initial reading of Fichte. Theaporetic structure of the question of the idiom with its two kinds of nationalisms (the “secret idiom of the idiom” versus “*la langue de computer*”) that each claim to represent humanity better is what drove Derrida to look for an “alternative” that escapes the nationalistic-humanistic binary. When he arrives at Heidegger, staying with him for the second half of the seminar (*Geschlecht II* and *III*), Derrida’s implicit question is how Heidegger’s thinking of the idiom fits in this problematic of national-humanism. As we shall see, Heidegger’s mobilization of “our language (*unsere Sprache*)” in decisive moments in his essay on Trakl will lead Derrida to be suspicious of Heidegger’s tendency to think the idiom (and the human) solely on the basis of *our* idiom, *unsere Sprache*, German. Is there an alternative that does not reduce the idiom to the proper of our language, is there a way for thinking the radical otherness of the idiom in a language that is anything but ours?

In the published version of “*Geschlecht II*,” Derrida marks the troublesome link between philosophical nationalism on the one hand and humanism on the other. This is Derrida’s way of trying to reconstitute the main theoretical background of the seminar in which the *Geschlecht* problematic (in Fichte or in Heidegger) needs to be situated. As we have seen, “*Geschlecht*” in Fichte names an “essential *Deutschheit*” that proves to be

indispensable to “our” (*unseres*, of course) access to a humanity (*Menschheit*, of course) that is best “incarnated” by one nation as the *example* of humanity. “*Geschlecht*” would thus be the site where nationalism and humanism intersect, making it amenable to a deconstructive gesture looking for an “alternative” to think the idiom without subscribing to an implicit national-humanism. Derrida is then suspicious of how this irreducibly idiomatic German word seems to grant the German language the exclusive rights for representing humanity (*das MenschenGeschlecht*) better than other languages of other nations. His explicit gesture will be to denounce this national-humanism all the while pursuing certain possibilities national-humanism preserves and lets us think.

Heidegger seems to be a limit case for Derrida to test his hypothesis of a national-humanism that is of a piece with philosophy. In “*Geschlecht II*,” Derrida comes to Heidegger first via Heidegger’s letter addressed to the Academic Rectorate of Albert-Ludwigs-Universität from December 1945. There, trying to exculpate himself of having been a whole-hearted supporter of the National-Socialist Party, Heidegger writes:

I believed that Hitler, after he assumed responsibility for the whole nation in 1933, would rise above the party and its doctrine and everything would come together, through a renewal and a rallying, in an assumption of responsibility for the West. This belief proved erroneous, as I recognized from the events of June 30, 1934. It had brought me in 1933/34 to the intermediate position where I affirmed the national and the social (not the nationalistic) and rejected its spiritual and metaphysical grounding on the basis of the biologism of the Party doctrine,

because the social and the national, as I saw them, were not essentially tied to a biological-racist ideology.¹⁷⁶

Derrida is relating Heidegger's "condemnation of biologism and racism" to Fichte's non-biological and non-racist "*Geschlecht*" which, as we saw, seems not to depend on any simple notion of nativeness, be it biological, ethnic and even, to a certain point, linguistic. However, just as Fichte's discourse remains not entirely unequivocal with respect to the most vulgar forms of nationalisms – so that it too wants to "separate out" the dead non-German from within – Heidegger's apparent distance towards a "biological-racist ideology" still proves to be problematic as Derrida sees it. Even though Derrida goes on to say that he will not reopen the "dossier of Heidegger's 'politics'," he nevertheless characterizes what he is about to do in "*Geschlecht II*" as having an "indirect relation to another dimension [...] of the *same* drama."¹⁷⁷ This other "less visible" dimension seems to be part and parcel of the problematic of philosophical national-humanism that Derrida had been developing up to the sixth session of the seminar where his reading of Heidegger begins. Is there a philosophical national-humanism (with all its troubling risks of annexionism, expansionism and purificationism) also at work in Heidegger?

Derrida begins to tackle this question by way of Heidegger's interpretation of three verses of Hölderlin's poem "Mnemosyne" in *What is Called Thinking*. Derrida is initially struck by how the French translation he is using renders the German noun "*Zeichen*" – which ordinarily means "sign" – as "*monstre*" (the cognate of the English

¹⁷⁶ Cited in Derrida 2008b, 32.

¹⁷⁷ Derrida 2008b, 32.

“monster”). Though Derrida confesses to have at first found this translation “a bit precious and gallicizing,” he nevertheless came to see a “triple virtue” in it.¹⁷⁸ He writes:

The translation of *Zeichen* by *monstre* has a triple virtue. It recalls a motif at work ever since *Sein and Zeit*: the bond between *Zeichen* and *zeigen* or *Aufzeigung*, between the sign and monstration. [...] The second virtue of the French translation by “*monstre*” has value only in the Latin idiom, since the translation stresses this gap in relation to the normality of the sign, a sign that for once is not what it should be, shows or signifies nothing, shows the *pas de sens*, no-sense, and announces the loss of the tongue. The third virtue of this translation poses the question of man.¹⁷⁹

Just about a page earlier, Derrida had announced that he would be speaking of monstrosity in Heidegger which was itself “another detour through the question of man (*Mensch* or *Homo*) and of the ‘we’ that gives its enigmatic content to a *Geschlecht*.”¹⁸⁰

Here, after relating the translation of “*Zeichen*” as “*monstre*” to the question of man, Derrida omits a “long digression” from the published version of “*Geschlecht II*” that we would do well to reproduce once it directly links Heidegger’s “responsibility for the West” to Derrida’s hypothesis of a philosophical national-humanism in Heidegger profoundly linked to an “Europocentric universalism”:

Je ne reviens pas, une fois de plus, sur le rapport équivoque qui lie l’affirmation nationale, voire son exaspération nationaliste paradoxalement à un certain humanisme métaphysique et universaliste, l’exaltation nationale se faisant

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 35.

toujours au nom d'une certaine identification de *Geschlecht* national au *Geschlecht* humain, genre de la gens nationale au genre humain représenté, incarné ou identifié par excellence dans telle ou telle nation qui se trouve être la nôtre. [...] Quand dans le texte de Heidegger, dans sa lecture au Recteur de l'Université Albert Ludwig de 1945, il justifie ou explique ou excuse son engagement momentané en invoquant la responsabilité de l'Occident [...], le thème occidentaliste [...] est un thème universaliste qui n'en est pas moins européocentrique et qui repose les décalant à peine sur les questions sur le national universalisme que nous avons déjà posées.¹⁸¹

Moving to Heidegger's interpretation of "Mnemosyne" and commenting on the third virtue of translating "*Zeichen*" as "*monstre*," Derrida stresses that, if "we are a monster deprived of meaning" ("*nous somme un monstre privé de sens*" as the French translation renders the first verse of the poem, "*ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos*"), this "we" without sense resists a humanist reading as "we men" that Derrida is willing to accuse Heidegger of:

The "we" of "*Ein Zeichen sind wir*," is it indeed a "we men"? Numerous indications would lead one to think that the response of the poem remains rather ambiguous. If "we" were "we men," this humanity would indeed be determined in a way that was rather monstrous, apart from the norm, and notably from the humanist norm. But Heidegger's interpretation that prepares and commands this Hölderlin quotation says something about man, and then too about *Geschlecht*,

¹⁸¹ Derrida 1984, Session 6, p. 9; session not yet translated into English.

about the *Geschlecht* and the word "*Geschlecht*" that still awaits us in the text on Trakl in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*.¹⁸²

The reason why "monster" puts pressure on the question of man is that it is a fitting name for a "sign" that does not signify, a sign that is outside the norms of a sign (which presumably is to signify) and is thus denaturalized with respect to its most basic function into a mutation, an anomaly or monstrosity that "we are," as Hölderlin says without normalizing this then monstrous "we" into a human "we men." As Derrida intimates, "numerous indications" in Hölderlin's poem seem to suggest that Hölderlin's "we" is so monstrous in fact that it does not abide by the "humanist norm" that Heidegger seems eager to enforce. It is here that Heidegger's "hand" comes up:

In a word, to save time, let me just say that it is about the hand, about the hand of man, about the relation of the hand to speech and to thought. And even if the context is not at all classical, at issue is an opposition that is posed very classically, very dogmatically and metaphysically (even if the context is far from dogmatic and metaphysical), between the hand of man and the hand of the ape.¹⁸³

What "prepares and commands" Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin's "Mnemosyne" is a "dogmatic" and "metaphysical" opposition that Heidegger sets up between "the hand of man and the hand of the ape."¹⁸⁴ Let us now turn to Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking* in order to see how exactly this opposition is established.

Heidegger opens his 1951-52 lecture course by making an assertion that risks sounding "arrogant": "what is most thought-provoking about our thought provoking age

¹⁸² Derrida 2008b, 35.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

is that we are not yet thinking.” Heidegger finds that the “danger” to mistake thinking is “particularly great” in the university, precisely the place that, more than others, seems to make us “rack our brains” as we engage in scientific work at “research and teaching institutions.” The trouble with the university is that it is the place where thinking is “immediately” linked to the sciences which cannot, qua science, understand their own “essential realm” that Heidegger identifies as the “essence of modern technology.” Though Heidegger is far from simply rejecting science, his point is that scientific work – as well as philosophical work – is usually so embedded in metaphysical presuppositions that it is unable to “leap back to the source” where these unfounded and assumptions sprang from in the first place. Over and against both science and philosophy, thinking alone can take us to places “where only a leap helps further,” a leap (*Sprung*) that is able to “discover” the sciences in their source (*Ursprung*) and shed light into what is “positively essential” about them. It is just this “clarity” on the essence of science that both scientists and philosophers working at the university of Heidegger’s days “shrink away from,” as Heidegger writes:

When we speak of the sciences as we pursue our way, we shall be speaking not against but for them, for clarity concerning their essential nature. This alone implies our conviction that the sciences are in themselves positively essential. However, their essence is admittedly of a different sort from what our universities today still fondly imagine it to be. In any case, we still shrink away from taking seriously the provoking fact that today’s sciences belong in the realm of the

essence of modern technology, and nowhere else. Be it noted that I am saying “in the realm of the *essence* of technology” and not simply in technology.¹⁸⁵

This essential realm is afflicted with a “fog” that hovers over both science and technology and that “rises from the region of what is most thought-provoking” as opposed to being a man-made phenomenon.¹⁸⁶ Insofar as Heidegger is attempting to think what is most thought-provoking as the fact that we do not yet think, only this thought can clear the air and lay bare the horizon from out of which science and philosophy shine forth as the “essence of technology,” what Heidegger later calls a “power” appropriately named by the Greek words *ποίησις* and *τέχνη*.

Derrida pays attention to how Heidegger’s “hand” is inserted in a “national-socialist context” where Heidegger’s “strategy” to resist the “professionalization” or “technologization” of the university or of philosophy brought about by the “Nazis and their official ideologues” remains “equivocal” precisely with respect to the very political movement it so vehemently condemns.¹⁸⁷ As Derrida explains:

This strategy has, one might suspect, equivocal effects: it leads to an archaistic turn to the rustic artisan class and denounces business or capital, notions whose associations were then well known. In addition, with the division of labor, what is called “intellectual work” is what implicitly finds itself thus discredited.¹⁸⁸

In *What is Called Thinking*, just after having denounced the tendency to misunderstand what thinking means that characterizes the university in its techno-scientific era, Heidegger mobilizes what Derrida calls, with Plato’s demiurge in mind, the “traditional

¹⁸⁵ Heidegger 1968, 13.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Derrida 2008b, 39.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

example of philosophical didactics,” the apprentice cabinetmaker whose artisanal handiwork (*Hand-Werk*) comes to “illustrate” how one ought to learn how to think in a *manner* that is anything but the techno-scientific know-how of the profit-driven university or the mass-production assembly line of the capitalistic industry. Just as learning (how to think) consists in “bringing everything one does to a correspondence (*Entsprechung*) to what each time essentially awards (*zuspricht*) itself to us,” the cabinetmaker apprentice, “if he is a true cabinetmaker,” specifies Heidegger, will also “bring himself to a correspondence”:

A cabinetmaker apprentice, someone who is learning to build cabinets and the like, will serve *as an example*. His learning is not mere practice on how to gain facility in the use of tools. Nor does he merely familiarize himself with the customary forms of the things he is to build. If he is to become a true cabinetmaker, he brings himself to a correspondence above all to the different kinds of wood and to the dormant shapes within wood, to wood as it enters into man’s dwelling with all the hidden fullness of its nature. In fact, this relatedness to wood is what maintains the whole handiwork. Without that relatedness, the handiwork will never be anything but empty busywork. Any occupation with it will be determined exclusively by business concerns. Evert handiwork, all human dealings (*Handeln*) are constantly in that danger. The writing of poetry is no more exempt from it than is thinking.¹⁸⁹

Derrida points out a double analogy at work here: between thinking and poetizing on the one hand and, on the other, “between the two, poetry and thinking, and the authentic

¹⁸⁹ Heidegger 1968, 14. Translation modified.

work of the hand.”¹⁹⁰ And just a little after this passage Heidegger will go on to make this second analogy between thinking and handiwork even more explicit to the point that thinking is not just “perhaps something like building a cabinet” but also, without a “perhaps” or a “something like,” “thinking is a hand-work” pure and simple, as Heidegger tells us:

We are attempting here to learn thinking. Perhaps thinking is simply something like building a cabinet. It is at any rate a hand-work.¹⁹¹

Thinking too, then, would have to accord with what essentially gives itself over to be thought. Thinking would thus remain an ongoing learning exercise that responds to the call of thought by receiving the gift of what is thought-provoking and letting it “enter into man’s dwelling,” just as the “dormant shapes within the wood” grant and address themselves to Heidegger’s “true cabinetmaker.” One would have to follow the many instances where Heidegger sees an intimate relation between building, dwelling and thinking – most notably in the 1951 (same year as *What is Called Thinking*) essay with these last three words as its title – and relate the hand to it.

Derrida intimates such a relation by starting “*Geschlecht II*” with the following epigraph from Heidegger’s 1949 essay “The Turn”:

Thinking is authentic action if acting (*handeln*) means to lend a hand (*Hand*) to the essencing of being. This means: to prepare (build) for the essencing of being among beings that site into which being brings itself and its essencing to

¹⁹⁰ Derrida 2008b, 38.

¹⁹¹ Heidegger 1968, 14.

language. *Language* alone is what gives to every purposeful deliberation its ways and its byways.¹⁹²

As we know from the “Letter on Humanism,” “language is the house of being,” a house that Heidegger sometimes calls a “shrine” in the Hölderlin lectures from the 1930s and 1940s, a shrine (*Schrein*) that might in fact go *hand-in-hand* with the cabinet (*Schrein*) Heidegger wants to build in order to give being a helping hand (*Hand*) as “authentic action (*Handlung*).” Be it thinking, acting, dwelling, building or poetizing, the hand “is not there for nothing,” as Derrida says.

Throughout “*Geschlecht II*,” displaying a scholarly virtuosity second to none, Derrida provides numerous examples in Heidegger’s oeuvre where the hand “plays an immense role in the whole of Heideggerian conceptuality since *Sein und Zeit*.”¹⁹³ Concerning the latter, Derrida notices that one of the main distinctions of *Being and Time* is not accidentally named by an “experience of the hand” as either *Vor-handenheit* or *Zu-handenheit*, the respective English translations of which as “presence-at-hand” and “readiness-to-hand” do well to “keep the hand,” as Derrida says.¹⁹⁴ One is tempted to think that Heidegger would have agreed given what he says in the 1942-43 Parmenides lecture-course concerning the German translation of the Greek word *pragma* as *Handlung* which, as Heidegger says, captures well the “originally essential essence of *pragma*” for the sole reason that, as Derrida paraphrases Heidegger, “these *pragmata* present themselves, as *Vorhandenes* and *Zuhandenes*, within the domain of the hand (*im*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Derrida 2008b, 43.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Bereich der Hand).¹⁹⁵ It is as though the German language had the virtue of preserving the relation to action (*praxis*) the “appropriate” Greek word *pragmata* has – referring to the things that lie closest to us, “which we have to do (*tun*) with in our concerned dealings” with the world as we move about and around in it during average everydayness, *handling* (*hantieren*) equipment – while endowing the Greek language with the German *Hand* whose domain is where “thinking as authentic action (*Handlung*)” unfolds.

It will be remembered that what is at stake here is “decisive” for Heidegger’s “strategy” and “original procedure” in *Being and Time* to bracket the “dogmatic” and unfounded presuppositions philosophy imposes onto Dasein (ego cogito, consciousness, etc.) so as to let this being show itself of its own accord as it is in itself.¹⁹⁶ This is why Heidegger begins by turning to the way in which we are as we move about and around in the world. His point is simply to make explicit this everyday way of existing which has, as the beings that are closest to it, what we ordinarily call things, the *pragmata* we encounter in *praxis*, the equipment which we *handle* as we engage with the world initially surrounding us. The being of what Heidegger thus calls “average everydayness” is illuminated by means of an analysis of the equipmentality that initially delineates the horizon in which Dasein moves as an acting being prior to an objectification as a theoretical observer. Dasein thus relates primarily to beings it can handle and that are ready and available to be used, what Heidegger calls ready-to-hand beings as opposed to present-at-hand beings that only become theoretically observable once all handling has ceased. All this to say that, even though Dasein itself is neither ready-to-hand nor present-at-hand, its hand – and this is Derrida’s point – is *instrumental* for it to “relate to

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 45.

¹⁹⁶ Heidegger 2010, 5-6.

other modes of presence,” to action or to thinking in general. Every time Heidegger discusses any of these or the aforementioned leitmotifs of his post-war thinking, we are justified in calling this thought the “thought of the hand” or, as Derrida flips things over, the “hand of thought.”¹⁹⁷

None of this would be necessarily problematic were it not for Heidegger’s privileging of the *human* hand over any other non-human organ. Derrida seems to be impressed, in fact, with Heidegger’s attempt to “link thinking to a thought or situation of the body (*Leib*).”¹⁹⁸ The essential role the hand plays in Heidegger’s thinking of thinking, precisely, allows Derrida to say this: “Thinking is not cerebral or disincarnate; the relation to the essence of being is a certain *manner* of Dasein as *Leib*.”¹⁹⁹ This relation to the body in turn “allows us to glimpse a dimension of *Geschlecht* as sex or sexual difference in relation to what is said or silenced about the hand” of the human *Geschlecht*, the “hand of man.”²⁰⁰ This “glimpse” seems to be resonant with Derrida’s desire to “sexualize philosophy” that can be said to be the driving force of his reading of Heidegger and *Geschlecht*. However, though Heidegger’s gesture opens the door to lending thought a sexualized body, it can only do so by relying on a “dogmatic” distinction between the human and the non-human by means of the hand that only humans have. On Derrida’s reading of Heidegger, the hand would thus be the “proper of man,” the site where humanity gathers itself in a fierce opposition against the non-human.

¹⁹⁷ Derrida 2008b, 35.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

It is just this oppositional system that Derrida finds so problematic in Heidegger. Commenting on Heidegger's "symptomatic and dogmatic" statement in *What is Called Thinking* that "apes, for example, have organs of prehension but no hand," Derrida writes:

In its very content, this statement marks the essential scene of the text. It marks it with a humanism that certainly wants to be nonmetaphysical (Heidegger underscores this in the following paragraph), but a humanism that inscribes, between a human *Geschlecht* that one wants to withdraw from biologicistic determinations [...] and an animality that one encloses in its organico-biological programs, not *some* differences but an absolute, oppositional limit. Elsewhere I have tried to show that, like every opposition, this absolute oppositional limit erases differences and leads back to the homogeneous, according to the most resistant metaphysico-dialectical tradition.²⁰¹

Derrida does not want to deny that there may in fact be "*some* differences" between the hand of man and the hand of the ape.²⁰² We may even be justified to see Derrida fighting for these differences which Heidegger's "absolute oppositional limit" tends to "erase." Let us now turn back to "What is Called Thinking" in order to see how exactly Heidegger gives in to a "humanism" that would go hand-in-hand with the "problematic name of man, his *Geschlecht*."²⁰³

Just after comparing thinking to building a cabinet and affirming that "thinking is a hand-work," Heidegger writes:

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

The hand is a peculiar case. According to habitual representation, the hand belongs to the organism of our body. But the essence of the hand can never be determined, or explained, by its being a bodily organ of prehension. Apes, for example, have organs of prehension but no hand. The hand is infinitely different from all organs of prehension (paws, claws, or fangs), different by an abyss of essence. Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have the hand and accomplish works of the hand in and through manipulation.²⁰⁴

As always, Heidegger's initial gesture is to reject the metaphysical presuppositions of what he calls "habitual representation" that relies, in this instance, on the same organico-biologism that we saw Heidegger criticize in the more political context of the techno-scientific university. Contrary to popular belief, writes Heidegger, the "essence of the hand" is not to be found in the "bodily organ" that, much like paws, clutches, claws, fangs or talons, "grasps and catches." The essence of the hand is "infinitely different" from an instrumental grasp and catch because an "abyss" separates the two: "only a being that can speak, that is, think, can have the hand," meaning that the hand is to be thought solely on the basis of thought which in turn needs to be thought on the basis of language and "not conversely," as Heidegger writes a little later.²⁰⁵ Far from being one instrumental organ among many, the essence of the hand is thus located in thought and, *ipso facto*, language, insofar as neither of these can be thought without the hand whose "gestures traverse through language everywhere," writes Heidegger:

But the work of the hand is richer than we habitually imagine. The hand does not only grasp and catch, press and push. The hand offers and receives and indeed not

²⁰⁴ Heidegger 1968, 14.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

only things but it offers and receives itself in the other. The hand holds. The hand carries. The hand traces signs, presumably because man is a sign. The hands fold when this gesture is meant to carry man into great simplicity. The hand is all this, and this is the true hand-work. Everything is rooted here that is habitually known as handiwork, and commonly we go no further. But the hand's gestures traverse through language everywhere and indeed in their most perfect purity when man speaks by being silent. Yet only when man speaks, does he think and not conversely, as metaphysics still believes.²⁰⁶

As Derrida remarks, the hand thus has a “double vocation” in Heidegger.²⁰⁷ On the one hand, the “vocation to show or make a sign” and, on the other hand, the vocation to “give or give itself.”²⁰⁸ Both these vocations are “gathered and crossed in the same hand,” writes Derrida, noticing how this monstrous sign that Heidegger calls man seems to have only one hand that may well touch another in “great simplicity (*Einfalt*),” in a fold that makes one (*Ein-falt*).²⁰⁹ What Derrida seems to find “decisive” is “the passage from the transitive gift to the gift of what gives *itself*,” or, following the same logic, not just the hand of man as what makes signs but man *himself* as a sign.²¹⁰ This double vocation of *the* hand of man is the “monstrosity of the gift” for Derrida because the hand will thus be tied to the monstration (*Zeigen*) of a sign (*Zeichen*) that gives itself as such, signifying not this or that sign but signification as such. The hand will thus be that “monstrous sign”

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²⁰⁷ Derrida 2008b, 42.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

that Heidegger will read in Hölderlin's "Mnemosyne" as pointing to what is "not yet translated into the language of our speaking," as Heidegger says:

When man is on track towards what withdraws, he points into what withdraws. On track towards this, we are a sign. *Yet we thereby point to what is not – not yet – translated into the language of our speaking.* It remains without a meaning. We are a meaningless sign.²¹¹

It is a bit curious that Derrida chooses not to comment on a passage that begged to be read. For it seems to complicate the argument Derrida makes that Heidegger's thinking of the hand leads to "phonocentrism" and "logocentrism."²¹² In the passage above, the monstrous sign of the hand points to what is "not yet" the "language of our speaking" where no φωνή or λόγος yet intervenes. More radically still, Heidegger seems to position the hand at the site towards which thinking points as the event of translation: what needs to be thought is precisely the passage into translation of the monstrous hand that is "not yet translated" and whose untranslatable "gestures" traverse the whole of our language and thought as impossible translations. "What is not – not yet – translated into the language of our speaking" endures and survives translation, leaving its untranslatable *signature* in the language we only call ours without realizing that this too is already a translation. "We are a sign" amounts to, in Heidegger's reading, an impossible translation that calls for thinking, i.e., translation nevertheless.

Derrida's choice not even to quote this passage – given how meticulous his reading of *What is Called Thinking* is up to the second Hölderlin quotation (which he extensively reads) immediately before which this passage occurs, it is extremely unlikely

²¹¹ Heidegger 1968, 15.

²¹² Derrida 2008b, 48.

he simply “missed it” – should at least lead us to ask if his accusations concerning Heidegger’s phonocentrism and logocentrism are in fact the most generous reading possible. One might also suspect that this passage should have a profound impact on a Heideggerian understanding of “our language” already as a translation and thus foreign, making it more resilient to a nationalistic appropriation of the Fichtean sort, not to mention National-Socialism. Finally, the “gestures” of the hand that run through the whole of language would seem to contradict what Derrida says in “*Geschlecht I*” concerning the derivative status of the body vis-à-vis the existential structures of Dasein. Though Heidegger may have operated in accordance with the “order of derivations” of *Being and Time* in 1927, in 1951 with *What is Called Thinking* he seems to be well beyond this schema and ready to think a hand of thought and of language that gesticulates all the more so when man “remains silent.” It is this non-phonocentric and non-logocentric irreducible hand that seems to allow Derrida to “glimpse” how the hand of thought might bring the body and sexual difference along with it. Where is the problem? then, one is tempted to ask Derrida. It is here that things become even more complicated.

We must now take stock of where we are in Derrida’s reading of Heidegger in “*Geschlecht II*.” We began by noticing the “invisible contexts” of this reading: Derrida’s hypothesis of a “sequence of German national-philosophism” that appeals to a secret idiom of the idiom as the exemplary representative of humanity in its teleological essence. Starting with Fichte’s *Addresses to the German Nation*, Derrida develops the argument that philosophical discourse necessarily relies on an idiomaticity that, as the

“scandal” of philosophy, resists a translation into the universal essence of man. Philosophy deals with this scandal by essentializing this idiomaticity in turn as the language that best incarnates the essence of man, access to which can be gained in *this* language alone.

It would seem as though Heidegger would be a limit-case in this national-humanist sequence that runs through Marx, Adorno, Arendt, Wittgenstein and others. As Derrida himself notes, the passage from *What is Called Thinking* he is so interested in dates from four years after Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism” which, as Derrida paraphrases Heidegger, “withdraws the question of being from the metaphysical or onto-theological horizon of classic humanism,” making it impossible for Derrida to suspect Heidegger of “simply falling back on that humanism.”²¹³ However, as “far from being classical, dogmatic and metaphysical” Heidegger’s context may be, it still allows itself of a “very classically posed opposition” between human and animal *Geschlecht* by means of the hand that only humans have.²¹⁴ As far as Derrida is concerned, this is not a simple slip on Heidegger’s part:

This sentence comes down to distinguishing the human *Geschlecht*, our *Geschlecht*, and the animal *Geschlecht*, the *Geschlecht* that is called “animal.” I believe, and I have often believed I must underscore this, that the manner, lateral or central, in which a thinker or scientist speaks of so-called animality constitutes a decisive symptom regarding the essential axiomatic of the given discourse. No more than anyone else, classic or modern, does Heidegger seem to me here to escape this rule when he writes: “Apes, *for example*, have organs of prehension

²¹³ Derrida 2008b, 35.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

but no hand.” Dogmatic in its form, this traditional statement presupposes an empirical or positive knowledge whose titles, proofs, and signs are never shown. [...] This non-knowledge raised to the status of settled knowledge, then exhibited as an essential proposition about the essence of the ape’s prehensile organs, an ape that supposedly has no hand, this is not only, in its form, a kind of empirico-dogmatic hapax, misled or misleading in the middle of a discourse that holds itself to the highest level of the most demanding thought, beyond philosophy and science. In its very content, this statement marks the essential scene of the text. It marks it with a humanism [...].²¹⁵

Derrida is then suspicious of the “absolute, oppositional limit” or the “system of limits” Heidegger’s example of animality establishes and that “marks the essential scene” of his text. Derrida is not so much criticizing Heidegger for “not wanting to know nothing about” apes supposedly deprived of hands but rather insisting on how Heidegger’s example reinforces a metaphysical binarism between human and non-human within which “everything Heidegger says about the hand of man takes on meaning and value.” From this moment on, writes Derrida, it is the “name of man, his *Geschlecht*” that becomes just as “problematic” as the oppositional limit of the non-human on the basis of which the human *Geschlecht* is thus named.²¹⁶

We can see the signs of Heidegger’s humanist axiomatics in the distinction between giving and taking that seems to be itself grounded by a further distinction between “giving/taking-the-thing *as such* and giving/taking-the-thing without this *as*

²¹⁵ Ibid., 41.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

such.”²¹⁷ As Derrida points out, though Heidegger seems to be relying, “*in the first instance and at first glance,*” on an “assured opposition” between giving and taking, between a human hand that “gives and gives itself” and an animal prehensile organ that “can only take (*prendre*)” and comprehend (*comprendre*) without the hand, “in the last instance” this opposition comes down to having or not having access to beings in their being as such.²¹⁸ Derrida refers initially to his own “Giving Time” – where he had problematized the distinction between giving and taking, gift and poison – and then promises to study one day “as closely as possible” Heidegger’s 1929-30 lecture-course *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* where three things seems to be “without an essential discontinuity” with what Heidegger says of animals without the hand (and thus without the gift of thought) some two decades later in *What is Called Thinking*:

[...] (i) the classic gesture that consists in seeing zoology as a regional science that has to presuppose the essence of animality in general—which Heidegger then proposes to describe without the aid of this scientific knowledge (see § 45); (ii) the thesis according to which “*das Tier ist weltarm,*” a middle thesis between the two others (“*der Stein ist weltlos*” and “*der Mensch ist weltbildend*”) [...] (iii) the phenomeno-ontological modality of the *als*, the animal not having access to being *as (als)* being (290sq.). This last distinction would lead one to specify that the difference between man and animal corresponds less to the opposition between being-able-to-give and being-able-to-take than to the opposition between *two ways* of taking or giving: the one, that of man, is one of

²¹⁷ Ibid., 43.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

giving and taking *as such*, of being or the present *as such*; the other, that of the animal, would be neither giving nor taking *as such*.²¹⁹

Without going deeper into this issue – we shall come back to Derrida’s reading of Heidegger’s 1929-30 course later on – let us simply flag that, for Derrida, an essential continuity marks Heidegger’s thinking of animality as a simple opposition to the human, no matter how much fancy footwork Heidegger engages in throughout his career in order to secure this distinction which is thus symptomatic of his “axiomatics,” as Derrida tells us.

The hand is thus essential to Heidegger’s thought. As the “sign” that points to what is “not yet translated into the language of our speaking,” the hand is the site where thought emerges as what is not yet thought, as what announces itself to thought as what still needs to be thought. The hand is thus exposed to the un-thought. It receives the un-thought not by conceptually grasping it into something thought. It rather bears witness to what remains essentially unthought in thought. Even if the hand is essentially tied to thought, language and speaking, this link is itself testamentary to what precedes and continues to exceed thought, language and speaking that are themselves relegated into the status of a translation. Insofar as the language and speaking of this translation *cannot* say what they only *gesture* towards, we can call this an impossible translation hollowed out from within. This translation would nevertheless point, by its very failure, to what remains untranslatable, unthought, unspoken and unwritten. The entire movement of thought as translation of the untranslatable would echo the essential “denial” (*Verleugnung*) Heidegger attributes to Hölderlin’s poetry in general insofar as it speaks

²¹⁹ Ibid.

and names (translates) the unnamable and unspeakable, that is, the withdrawal of being, what in *What is Called Thinking* “we are not yet thinking.”²²⁰

This would seem to put pressure on the indictment Derrida issues in “*Geschlecht II*” concerning Heidegger’s logocentrism and phonocentrism:

Thus one sees all the traits—whose incessant recurrence I have elsewhere recalled under the names logocentrism and phonocentrism—being organized around the hand and speech, with great coherence. Logocentrism and phonocentrism dominate a certain very continuous discourse of Heidegger’s—whatever the lateral or marginal motifs that are simultaneously at work in it—and they dominate from the moment of the repetition of the question of the meaning of Being, the destruction of classic ontology, the existential analytic that redistributes the (existential and categorial) relations among *Dasein*, *Vorhandensein*, and *Zuhandensein*.²²¹

At this point, we might do well to reconstruct the argument Derrida makes in “*Geschlecht II*” that leads him into what seems to be an unfair and overhasty caricaturization of Heidegger’s thinking.

Derrida expresses the aforementioned reservation at the end of a sequence where he relates Heidegger’s remarks on Socrates in *What is Called Thinking* as the “purest thinker of the West” to Heidegger’s “implacable indictment” of the typographical mechanization of writing in the 1942-43 Parmenides lecture course. There Heidegger writes:

²²⁰ Heidegger 1968, 13.

²²¹ Derrida 2008b, 42.

In handwriting the relation of being to man, namely the word, is inscribed in beings themselves. The origin and the way of dealing with writing is already in itself a decision about the relation of being and of the word to man and consequently a decision about the comportment of man to beings and about the way both, man and thing, stand in unconcealedness or are withdrawn from it. Therefore when writing was withdrawn from the origin of its essence, i.e. from the hand, and was transferred to the machine, a transformation occurred in the relation of being to man. [...] It is no accident that the invention of the printing press coincides with the inception of the modern period. The word-signs become type, and the writing stroke disappears. The type is ‘set,’ the set becomes ‘pressed.’ This mechanism of setting and pressing and ‘printing’ is the preliminary form of the typewriter. [...] The typewriter veils the essence of writing and of the script. It withdraws from man the essential rank of the hand, without man’s experiencing this withdrawal appropriately and recognizing it has transformed the relation of being to his essence.²²²

As Derrida points out, Heidegger’s “apparently positive evaluation of manuscripture” as the “relation of being and of the word to man” – over and against the “oblivion” brought about by typographical mechanical writing that “tears writing from the essential realm of the hand, i.e., the realm of the word” – in no way “excludes the devalorization of writing in general.” Here, Derrida tempers Heidegger’s enthusiasm for handwriting by relating this defense of manuscripture to Heidegger’s remarks on Socrates, writing and literature in a paragraph shortly preceding the Hölderlin citation in *What is Called Thinking*.

²²² Heidegger 2009, 80.

Derrida singles out what he calls “two trenchant affirmations” that will give him enough confidence to issue his verdict on Heidegger’s logocentrism and phonocentrism.

The first “trenchant affirmation” concerns Heidegger’s praise of Socrates as “the purest thinker of the West,” this being the reason why “Socrates did not write anything.”

As Heidegger puts it:

Once we are so related and drawn to what withdraws, we are on track (*auf dem Zug*) towards what withdraws, into the enigmatic and therefore mutable nearness of its appeal. Whenever man is explicitly on this track, he is thinking even though he may still be far away from what withdraws, even though the withdrawal may remain as veiled as ever. All through his life and right into his death, Socrates did nothing else than place himself into the wind (*Zugwind*) of this track, and maintain himself in it. This is why he is the purest thinker of the West. This is why he wrote nothing.²²³

It will be remembered that, in the context of *What is Called Thinking*, “what withdraws” is nothing less than “what is to be thought” as “the most thought-provoking” which “turns away” and “withdraws itself from man.” As Heidegger argues, this withdrawal (*Entzug*) is “not nothing,” it nevertheless “draws us in” (*zieht uns mit, uns anzieht*) as “the event of withdrawal.”²²⁴ The virtue of Socrates, writes Heidegger, consists in being “explicitly on this track (*Zug*)” towards what withdraws, even if this should in no way draw the withdrawal near. To “place” oneself in the “wind,” trace or track (Derrida would say *piste* or *sillage*) of this withdrawal, to “maintain” oneself in it means not to write, as Heidegger implies:

²²³ Heidegger 1968, 17-18.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

For anyone who begins to write at the exit of thought must inevitably be like those people who run to seek refuge from any wind too strong for them. An as yet hidden history still keeps the secret why all great Western thinkers after Socrates, with all their greatness, had to be such fugitives.²²⁵

We see then that, however valuable manuscripture is for Heidegger, preferable to typographical mechanical writing at any rate, the latter is “only a modern aggravation of the evil” of writing in general which, as Derrida says, is interpreted by Heidegger as already the “growing destruction of the word or of speech.”²²⁶ Derrida seems to think that this “devalorization” of writing in Heidegger is of a piece with the “essential co-belonging” Heidegger sees between hand and speech, what he calls the “essential distinction of man.” This leads Derrida to suspect that Heidegger is privileging a “system of phonetic writing” over other forms of writing or, as Derrida also puts it, a “manuscripture *immediately* tied to speech.”²²⁷

This phonocentric prejudice on Heidegger’s part finds an even more pronounce form in what Derrida calls Heidegger’s “second trenchant affirmation”: when faced with the uncanny “event of withdrawal” and its overwhelming wind, thinking – at least the thinking of “all the great thinkers after Socrates” – found shelter in literature so as to hide itself from what it ought to have remained exposed to: “*das Denken ging in die Literatur ein.*”²²⁸ In other words, thinking stops being thinking the moment one writes, mattering little, in the end, if it is with a pen or typewriter. This would then be of a piece with what we saw Derrida state to be “a *certain*, very continuous Heideggerian discourse” (my

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Derrida 2008b, 48.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Heidegger 1968, 15.

italics) dominated by a logocentrism and phonocentrism that, “despite the lateral or marginal motifs that are simultaneously working through this discourse, organizes itself, in a very strongly coherent fashion, around the hand and speech.”²²⁹

It is a bit surprising to see Derrida here rather minimize the so called “lateral or marginal motifs” that nevertheless are working through a certain Heideggerian discourse. All the more so when, just about ten pages later, still in *Geschlecht II*, the same Derrida goes on to cast doubt on the putative homogeneity of this then not so very “continuous” discourse:

For I never “criticize” Heidegger without recalling that this can be done from other places in his own text. His text is not homogeneous, and it is written with two hands, at least.²³⁰

Even if it is true that logocentrism and phonocentrism do in fact have the upper hand in Heidegger’s discourse – a discourse whose heterogeneity in no way implies a democratic equilibrium of textual forces where no repression would happen – this marginalized, lateral and repressed *under-hand* would nevertheless stealthily compromise, in a back-handed kind of way, the steadiness and continuity of Heidegger’s upper hand. Heidegger’s two hands would never simply fold into one.

²²⁹ Derrida 2008b, 48-49.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

Chapter IV: “*Geschlecht III*”

Let us now turn to the newly discovered *Geschlecht III*. As Derrida himself took the time and pains to summarize the “hundred or so pages” of *Geschlecht III* in “a few minutes” at the end of his talk at Loyola University in the spring of 1985 – a summary which was then subsequently published as the last ten pages of *Geschlecht II* – we might do well to treat these pages as a favorable point of entry to *Geschlecht III*.²³¹ We are dealing here with Derrida’s “series of suspended or suspensive interrogations” organized

²³¹ Derrida 2008b, 56.

around five foci attempting to sketch *Geschlecht III*'s "principal concern."²³² Let us take the time to go over each one of these foci while taking them as our guiding thread into *Geschlecht III*. As we shall see, *Geschlecht III* ends up saying a lot more than its concise outline, the broad strokes of which we may nevertheless take as our point of departure into this complicated and slightly scattered text.

Derrida broaches his reading of Heidegger's second essay on Trakl precisely by problematizing the notion of reading itself. He writes:

What is one to think of this text ? How is one to read it ? But is it still a matter of a "lecture" in the French or English sense of the word? No, and for at least two reasons. *On the one hand*, it is too late, and rather than continue to read the hundred or so pages I have devoted to this text on Trakl—and whose first French version, incomplete and provisional, has been communicated to some of you—I will simply take a few minutes and outline their principal concern, inasmuch as it can be translated into a series of suspended or suspensive questions. I have grouped them, more or less artificially, around *five foci*. But, *on the other hand*, one of these foci concerns the concept of *reading*, which does not seem adequate to me, without being completely reworked, either for naming what Heidegger is doing in his *Gespräch* with Trakl or in what he calls the authentic *Gespräch* or the *Zwiesprache* of one poet with another poet or of a thinker with a poet, or for naming what I am trying to do or what interests me in this *explication with (Auseinandersetzung mit)* this particular text of Heidegger's.²³³

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

Besides the obvious reason for avoiding the word “reading” to describe what Derrida is “trying to do” with the aforementioned Heidegger text – deconstruction usually avoids “quick” readings and it was after all “too late” for a “full” reading or lecture – a more complicated factor seems to offer more problems.²³⁴ It would seem as though the very concept of reading would itself be implicated in the *Geschlecht III* problematic so that it would not be prudent to impose an arbitrary understanding of reading on it from the outside, without taking into account how reading is *itself* situated in and by the *Geschlecht* problematic and how the two need to be thought together. This is why one of Derrida’s five foci in fact deals explicitly with this concept reading to which we now turn.

The third of the five foci deals with what Derrida calls “*questions of method*,” the main concern of which seems to revolve around the following questions:

What is Heidegger doing? How does he “operate” and along what paths, *odoi*, which are not yet or already no longer *methods*? What is Heidegger’s step on this path? What is his rhythm in this text that explicitly pronounces itself on the essence of *rhuthmos*, and also what is his *manner*, his *Hand-Werk* of writing?²³⁵

Though it is clear that reading and the “what is Heidegger doing?” question should in principle communicate with these “questions of method,” it is not at all evident just how exactly the concept of reading is implicated in the *Geschlecht* problematic, in particular as opposed to just any other Heidegger text. It is here that we may finally turn to the very beginning of *Geschlecht III* for help.

Derrida indeed asks a similar set of questions right at the start of *Geschlecht III*, adding “how does Heidegger read?” to the list:

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid., 58.

Comment Heidegger lit-il ? Comment écrit-il ? Quels sont les mouvements auxquels on reconnaît sa marque ? En particulier dans le traitement ou le maniement (*Handlung*), la manière non pas de traiter (dirait-il) mais d'écouter un texte "poétique" et de donner à y remarquer ceci plutôt que cela ? Interprétation ? Herméneutique ? Poétique ? Philologie ? Critique ou théorie littéraire ? Manifestement non, le geste typique de Heidegger ne se présente sous aucun de ces titres, et il faut au moins commencer par tenir compte de cette présentation de soi, quelque conclusion qu'on en tire au bout du compte.²³⁶

It would seem as though the first order of business for Derrida is to identify or "take into account" the manner in which Heidegger speaks of his own manner, that is to say the way in which Heidegger presents himself, his "self-presentation" or his signature.²³⁷ This signature is "of a type," says Derrida immediately before opening the aforementioned set of questions:

Une typologie est impliquée dans le dispositif des questions classiques : quelle loi assigne-t-elle sa régularité aux gestes typiques de Heidegger ? Car une signature est d'un type.²³⁸

In other words, when we ask "how does Heidegger read or write about Trakl ?," we are trying to locate the "typical gestures" that allow us to "recognize his mark," his signature, what Derrida calls a "'type' of Heideggerian reading" just a little earlier in *Geschlecht III* where he develops more extensively the thought that the concept or word "reading" implies a typology, a thought of the type and how *Geschlecht* is tied to it:

²³⁶ Derrida 2018, 4; as an English translation of Derrida's *Geschlecht III* does not yet exist, I will be providing the text in French.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

Mais le mot de « lecture » se laisse *aussi* affecter par cette re-situation de *Geschlecht*. Nous ne pouvons donc compter à son sujet sur aucune assurance tranquille. Sans doute tenterai-je à mon tour de « lire » la « lecture » de tels poèmes de Trakl par Heidegger. [...] Sans doute essaierai-je, depuis cette « lecture » -ci, de transposer, généraliser, problématiser ce que pourrait être un « type » de lecture heideggerienne. Un type, c'est-à-dire aussi un « coup » de lecture : non pas un modèle, une procédure, une méthode mais un cheminement *typé*. Le *typtein* du *typos* ne fait pas d'abord référence à quelque tympan que j'ai pu jadis décrire ou aux admirables *Typographies* de Lacoue-Labarthe, mais ici même à ce qui lie le *typos* au *Schlag*, et donc au *Geschlecht* dans le texte de Heidegger.²³⁹

As Derrida points out, what “ties” the type to *Geschlecht* is the German word *Schlag* meaning strike, hit, blow or imprint – which are themselves the meanings of the Greek words “*tuptein*” and “*tupos*” – and that is inscribed (or typed) into *Geschlecht* whose etymological ancestors “*gesleht*” and “*gislahti*” are the collective forms (still preserved in the *Ge-* prefix of *Ge-schlecht*) of the old high German “*slahti*” from which *Schlag* and *schlagen* are derived.²⁴⁰ This then authorizes Derrida to treat Heidegger’s words on *Geschlecht* as words on the type, a “type of thought that presents itself as a thought of the type” which explains why reading – which, as we saw, presupposes the type – is then implicated and “affected” by the *Geschlecht III* problematic.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Ibid., 3-4.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

In the seminar version of the Loyola typescript portion of *Geschlecht III*, Derrida rather surprisingly seems to skip over this question of reading. Besides not yet writing that “a typology is implicated by the set of classical questions” of method revolving around Heidegger’s manner or *type* of reading, Derrida seems to forget to give the second example of what these classical questions “presuppose, neglect or dissimulate,” an example he comes back to explicitly in an intermediate version (in between seminar and Loyola typescript) of the opening of *Geschlecht III* where we learn that Derrida’s second example was about the “concept of reading,” precisely, and how it can never do without writing and the *Schlag* of *Geschlecht*:

Deuxième exemple, deuxième indication préliminaire : le concept de lecture. Rappelons cette trivialité. Quelle qu’en soit la surélaboration, le concept de lecture ne se construit jamais sans celui d’une écriture, celle qui (se) donne à lire ou qui (s’)engage au coeur de la lecture même. Pas d’écriture sans marque, trace, impression, inscription, incision, coup. Or nous y viendrons, ce cheminement vers une localité passe nécessairement par une pensée du *Geschlecht* comme pensée du coup (*Schlag*) et de la répétition, du coup redoublé, du « bon » et du « mauvais » coup. N’allons pas au-delà de ce signal pour l’instant.²⁴²

The “way towards (*cheminement*) a locality” that Derrida alludes to here is related to Heidegger’s attempt to “situate” (*erörtern*) Trakl’s poem, the unspoken source and site (*Ort*) from which Trakl’s individual poems spring and to which they ultimately point back towards. One can say, then, that Heidegger is trying to think the essence of place or site from out Trakl’s poetry without first either presuming to know what a place is or

²⁴² Ibid., 5.

relying on the “simple existence of a place” as literary critics and hermeneuticians tends to do notably in the case of a textual place, as Derrida points out in his first example of a metaphysical presupposition lurking behind the aforementioned questions of method:

Toutes les questions classiques, voire les objections adressées à Heidegger du point de vue de la philologie, de la poétique, de l’herméneutique, de la science littéraire, voire de la philosophie, présupposent, plus gravement encore que la possibilité d’une essence du lieu, la simple existence d’un lieu ; et notamment pour une oeuvre ou un corpus, ce lieu singulier qu’est une localité textuelle. Heidegger propose d’entrée de jeu de repenser le lieu, la localité, le site, la situation : autant de traductions déjà défailtantes dès lors qu’elles perdent l’unité de co-appartenance entre *Ort*, *Ortschaft*, *Erörterung*. [...] Tout cela ne relève donc plus des disciplines et des problématiques classiques que nous venons de nommer : philologie, poétique, critique littéraire, théorie philosophico-littéraire, herméneutique ou philosophie, etc. Cela n’appartient même pas à une théorie fondamentale ou à une axiomatique de la lecture.²⁴³

We can see Derrida trying to be as prudent and rigorous as possible here: his point seems to be that, if we are to “have access to the presuppositions which such a situation of Trakl’s *Gedicht* by Heidegger may maintain” in a problematic way, we had better first make sure not to give in to the very presuppositions Heidegger warns us against. Just as, ironically, those accusing Heidegger of repressing sexuality were themselves erasing sexual difference in the form of a binary oppositionality which Heidegger is precisely trying to get away from, it actually being Heidegger who “liberates” sexuality from

²⁴³ Ibid., 4.

binary (in)difference, here too an “imperturbable irony, the most discrete and certain,” would tend to be on “Heidegger’s side” as long as one keeps banking naively on the very underlying assumptions Heidegger’s discourse is asking us to rethink and deconstruct. One such assumption – Derrida’s first example – is the taking for granted of what a place is, a blindness that will affect literary critics and Lacanians alike: in order to be able to ask “how does Heidegger read?” or poke fun at Heidegger for talking about a sword’s tip or spearpoint (*Spitze des Speers*) immediately after dismissing psychoanalysis without apparently realizing he (Heidegger) is talking about Lacan’s transcendental phallus as the *Ur-place* of every signifying chain, one must have already presumed to know what a place in general is before addressing a textual or phallic place respectively.

A topology or thought of the *topos* is thus implicated or naively presupposed by “philology, poetics, literary criticism, philosophic-literary theory, hermeneutics or philosophy” and, we may add, psychoanalysis and “a fundamental or axiomatic theory of reading.”²⁴⁴ The latter communicates with Derrida’s second example of what these disciplines or methods of reading presuppose in addition to a topology: a *typology* this time, a thought of the *tupos* on which, as trivial as it may seem, a thought of reading depends. A *topotypology* would thus be the “condition” for gaining access to Heidegger’s problematic presuppositions that remain out of the scope of a “hypothetical general theory of reading or writing” as Derrida says in the discussion of his second example in the intermediate version:

Si la question « d’après » le lieu et d’après (le) *Geschlecht* (qui ne veut pas seulement, pas encore dire « sexualité »), en tant que question d’après le coup, la

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 5.

marque, la frappe, l'empreinte, ne peut plus se limiter à un exemple parmi d'autres, parmi tous ceux qui relèvent d'une hypothétique théorie générale de la lecture et de l'écriture, elle ne saurait se soumettre à tous les protocoles transcendants, épistémologiques ou méthodologiques d'une telle « théorie ».²⁴⁵

In other words, since Heidegger's thinking of *Geschlecht* is tantamount to a thinking of the *topos* and the *tupos* – a topotypology of sorts – and since the latter does not “fall under the domain of a hypothetical general theory of reading” (so that it would be just “one example among other examples” of a theory of reading remaining somehow outside the mark and the place), one can only “read” Heidegger – in the “profoundly re-elaborated” Derridean sense of this word – by bracketing or suspending “all the methodological, epistemological or transcendental protocols” of what we generally accept “reading” to be, the very protocols that Heidegger's thought calls into question while remaining itself inaccessible to these classical procedures and traditional methods of reading.²⁴⁶

When *reading* Heidegger, in a manner that would not simply make him smirk in his imperturbable irony, one is then, as Derrida says in a sentence that did not find its way into the Loyola typescript, “extremely disarmed and without recourse,” that is, without being able to strike Heidegger with accusations laden with metaphysical assumptions and which he will have always already preemptively retaliated toward, remaining immune and impregnable to the ammunition of a traditional theory of reading that does not ask the topotopological questions Heidegger is opening up.²⁴⁷ For Derrida,

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.; cf. Derrida 2008b, 57.

²⁴⁷ Derrida 1984, Session 7, p. 11.

to read Heidegger is thus to “accompany” and “follow” him as vulnerably as possible, “with the least possible reservation” which does not condemn the reading to a “docile or passive commentary” as he puts it still in his second example in the intermediate version:

Tenter d’accompagner Heidegger dans ce chemin de pensée avec la plus grande patience et la plus grande prudence possible – et la prudence, la sienne, n’exclut pas le risque, bien au contraire, ni l’engagement: nous risquons ou nous gageons (*wagen*) assez, déjà, dit-il dès les premières lignes, si nous nous contentons de ces pas sur le seuil – mais le suivre aussi avec le moins de réserve possible, cela ne voue pas une démarche au genre du commentaire docile ou passif. Cela exige plutôt que, sans toutefois trop se presser vers l’objection, on presse le texte à lire de questions et autant que possible, de préférence, de questions qui apparemment ne s’y présentent pas comme telles. Presser de questions, même si cela se fait sans précipitation polémique, c’est déjà imprimer un autre texte, croiser les marques de plusieurs écritures et de plusieurs langues, faire de la répétition une surimpression.²⁴⁸

Derrida is then trying to “press” Heidegger’s text – without being “hasty” (*pressé*) and “with the greatest possible patience and prudence” – to say or “read” the questions that preferably go unasked by Heidegger himself and that expose what is potentially problematic about Heidegger’s text as to the implicit metaphysics it surreptitiously relies on. This would be Derrida’s manner of reading and writing “on” and “after” Heidegger, imprinting his signature into and over Heidegger’s and thus counter-signing Heidegger’s text. Derridean deconstruction at its finest, one is tempted to say.

²⁴⁸ Derrida 2018, 5.

We are not yet quite finished with our discussion of reading in Derrida's *Geschlecht III*. After beginning by uncovering the hidden foundations of the classical questions of method of the “how does Heidegger read?” *type* – the toptypology which these methodological questions *qua* methodological tend to overlook and nevertheless tacitly rely on – Derrida then tries, still in a “disarmed” fashion, to describe Heidegger's *manner* without falling prey to all the metaphysical vices of a methodologism which Heidegger often “situates” and “warns us against” as Derrida puts it:

Nous sommes toujours dans l'introduction, avant même le commencement de la première partie. Sur le seuil, les précautions se multiplient. D'autres les appelleraient méthodologiques. En vérité elles mettent en garde contre la méthode et le méthodologisme. Non pas au nom de l'empirisme, bien au contraire, mais au nom d'un rigoureux chemin vers le lieu. Ce chemin, qui n'est pas encore une procédure méthodique, paraîtra sans doute arbitraire, capricieux, voué à l'improvisation tant qu'on n'aura pas situé, comme Heidegger le fait si souvent ailleurs, le projet métaphysique de la méthode elle-même. Les précautions pré- ou a-méthodologiques qui se multiplient ici sans être des « questions de méthode » n'en dessinent pas moins des limitations (*Beschränkungen*). Elles délimitent d'autant plus qu'elles s'interdisent tous les discours et tous les savoirs qui prétendent s'autoriser d'une méthode, produire un savoir au sujet d'un objet déterminé et faire progresser une recherche ou des enquêtes.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 16.

This would in fact explain why Heidegger must, right at the start of his situation of Trakl's poem, "dismiss" (*donner congé à*) the human or social sciences" as Derrida puts it, referring to Heidegger's second paragraph in "Language in the Poem" where he writes this:

Die Erörterung spricht von Georg Trakl nur in der Weise, dass sie den Ort seines Gedichtes bedenkt. Solches Vorgehen bleibt für das historisch, biographisch, psychoanalytisch, soziologisch an der nackten Expression interessierte Zeitalter eine offenkundige Einseitigkeit, wenn nicht gar ein Irrweg. Die Erörterung bedenkt den Ort.²⁵⁰

Even though the sentence immediately preceding this paragraph states that "a situation (*Erörterung*) questions *after* the locality of the site (*Ortschaft des Ortes*)," this mode of questioning is not to be confused with the methodological "research or inquiry" of the human or social sciences that Heidegger names in this paragraph described by Derrida as having "under the appearance of a clause of modesty, the authority of a verdict" vis-à-vis *episteme* and *istoria*, a verdict which "puts them in their place" as Derrida playfully insists on Heidegger's own play between *Ort* and *Erörterung*:

Nous ne devons pas déterminer l'acheminement questionnant comme *recherche* ou enquête. *Epistémè* et *istoria* sont des modes particuliers, ils dérivent de l'essence cheminante de la question mais ne se confondent pas avec elle. Le paragraphe suivant les remet à leur place, si on peut dire. Sous l'apparence d'une clause de modestie, mais avec l'autorité du verdict, Heidegger donne congé aux

²⁵⁰ Heidegger 1985, 33; as Derrida is reading Heidegger's German text almost word-for-word, I shall cite it in German and offer my own translations (and Derrida's) of the relevant passages throughout.

sciences humaines ou sociales au seuil de cette « situation ». Il nomme, ce qui est assez rare, la psychanalyse, à côté de l'histoire, de la sociologie, etc.²⁵¹

What Derrida here calls the “questioning pathway towards” (*acheminement*) or the “on-the-way (*cheminante*) essence of the question” comes from Heidegger’s characterization of his *Erörterung* as steps (*Schritte*) along a “path of thought” (*Denkweg*) that “ends in a question” which, as Derrida *reads* the first lines of Heidegger’s essay, “is given on the way (*en chemin*)” rather than being there from the start.²⁵² Somewhat correcting an earlier formulation he had advanced concerning the end that Heidegger gives himself at the start of his situation, Derrida proleptically puts pressure on some of the claims he would go on to make in *Of Spirit* just two years later regarding an “ultimate privilege of the question” in Heidegger which here finds itself limited in a “dependency with regard to the path” according to Derrida:

Mais l’ultime privilège de la forme questionnante qu’on pourrait vouloir questionner et déplacer à son tour (pourquoi tout devrait-il commencer ou finir par des questions, sous la forme de la question ?), nous en éprouvons la singularité dans sa dépendance au regard du chemin, dans la mouvance du chemin (*Bewegung*), du caractère-chemin, de l’être-chemin de la pensée, de ce que Heidegger nomme ailleurs le *Wegcharakter des Denkens*. Chemin de part en part, la pensée doit chercher après (*nach*, vers), elle doit questionner *après* le lieu, ce qui peut revenir à demander son chemin. Mais il faut être déjà en chemin pour demander son chemin. [...] Corrigeons donc une formulation antérieure. Heidegger ne *se* donne pas la fin comme question. Celle-ci est donnée en chemin

²⁵¹ Derrida 2018, 8.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

(*unterwegs*), dans l'être-chemin de la pensée comme acheminement *vers* mais aussi d'*après* (*nach*) le lieu donné. Parce qu'elle est (en) chemin, la pensée questionne – et non l'inverse.²⁵³

It is then this movedness (*mouvance*) or *Be-weg-ung* – what Derrida's Freud would have called *Bahnung* or *frayage* – that opens or moves thought into a question that Heidegger stresses time and again with words such as *Wegmarken*, *Holzwege*, *unterwegs*, *Wegcharakter des Denkens* or *Denkweg*, a being-underway or on the way that a classical or modern problematic reading will again presuppose as Derrida argues:

La *Bewegung* de la question est sans doute présupposée par toute problématique, classique ou moderne, de la lecture, par l'herméneutique, la philologie, la poétique, etc. Mais cette présupposition fait de telles problématiques des moments dérivés ou conditionnés.²⁵⁴

A little later in *Geschlecht III*, Derrida comes back to what makes a classic or modern problematic of reading (“hermeneutics, philology, poetics, etc.”) into a “derivative or conditioned” factor for Heidegger whose apparent modesty vis-à-vis the intentions of his *Erörterung* “produces a double effect” according to Derrida:

Cette stratégie des limitations est aussi, bien entendu, une manoeuvre [...]. Elle produit un double effet. Disant modestement : « n'attendez pas trop, pas autre chose de cette situation, etc. », elle sous-entend : « je récuse d'avance les questions ou les objections méthodologiques (scientifiques, épistémologiques, herméneutiques, poéticiennes, historiennes, philosophiques mêmes) qu'on

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

pourrait me faire en me prêtant un projet qui n'est pas le mien. Depuis le lieu de ces critiques on n'a aucune chance d'accéder à l'essentiel.²⁵⁵

This “strategy of limitations” on Heidegger’s part is here to do with what may very well appear too limited or even one-sided (*einseitig*) in the way Heidegger deals with Trakl – so much so that the *Weg* here looks like an *Irrweg* when compared to the method (*odos*) of Heidegger’s *Zeitalter* – a strategy or *manoeuvre* that feigns a modesty while at the same time impeaching preemptively the validity of the accusations Heidegger’s “method” (or lack thereof) was bound to be charged with by traditional methodology. What Derrida calls a “modest, discrete yet incredibly decisive preamble” – he is referring to the “verdict” of the three-page introduction of Heidegger’s essay – shields Heidegger from a certain methodologism and in turn *situates* any “methodological question or objection” as a derivative element from which “access to what is essential” is denied.²⁵⁶

This access to what is essential seems to depend on a rethinking of rhythm that implicitly entails a relation to the source and the wave (*Woge*) that springs from and flows back towards it by means of a *Weg* or *Bewegung* that metaphysical aesthetics (“the whole of literary criticism, poetics, etc.”) thinks it recognizes under the name rhythm without however “having understood anything” about it, as Derrida comments on the following paragraph from Heidegger’s essay where his distinction between silent poem (*Gedicht*) and spoken poems (*Dichtungen*) is first made:

Das Gedicht eines Dichters bleibt ungesprochen. Keine der einzelnen Dichtungen, auch nicht ihr Gesamt, sagt alles. Dennoch spricht jede Dichtung aus dem Ganzen des einen Gedichtes und sagt jedesmal dieses. Dem Ort des Gedichtes entquillt die

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Woge, die jeweils das Sagen als ein dichtendes bewegt. Die Woge verläßt jedoch den Ort des Gedichtes so wenig, daß ihr Entquellen vielmehr alles Bewegen der Sage in den stets verhüllteren Ursprung zurückfließen läßt. Der Ort des Gedichtes birgt als die Quelle der bewegenden Woge das verhüllte Wesen dessen, was dem metaphysisch-ästhetischen Vorstellen zunächst als Rhythmus erscheinen kann.²⁵⁷

In other words, Heidegger is interested in the “place of the poem” as a “source” (*Ursprung* or *Quelle*) whence every individual spoken poem springs and flows back towards so as to “say this each time.”²⁵⁸ This in turn allows Heidegger to make a second distinction, this time between the elucidation (*Erläuterung*) of particular poems that will “bring what is translucent (*das Lautere*) into a first appearance” versus the situation (*Erörterung*) that will point to the site on the basis of which a “right elucidation” or first shining appearance is possible to begin with. Derrida identifies here an “order of implications” that seems suspiciously close to the “hermeneutical circle we thought we could escape in one go (*d’un coup*)” and at a glance (*coup d’œil*), a glance that Heidegger calls eye-leap (*Blicksprung*) to describe a saccadic movement or leap (*Sprung*) to the source (*Ursprung*) of Trakl’s poem, the site his situation is committed to pointing to:

Der jetzt versuchte Hinweis auf seinen Ort muß sich indessen mit einer Auswahl weniger Strophen, Verse und Sätze behelfen. Der Anschein ist unvermeidlich, daß wir dabei willkürlich verfahren. Die Auswahl ist jedoch von der Absicht geleitet, unsere Achtsamkeit fast wie durch einen Blicksprung an den Ort des Gedichtes zu bringen.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Heidegger 1985, 34.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 35.

The necessity of having recourse to a “few stanzas, verses and sentences” is itself rigorously thematized by Heidegger just a bit before:

Weil das einzige Gedicht im Ungesprochenen verbleibt, können wir seinen Ort nur auf die Weise erörtern, daß wir versuchen, vom Gesprochenen einzelner Dichtungen her in den Ort zu weisen. Doch hierfür bedarf jede einzelne Dichtung bereits einer Erläuterung. Sie bringt das Lautere, das alles dichterisch Gesagte durchglänzt, zu einem ersten Scheinen.²⁶⁰

It is immediately after recognizing this necessity of starting from “what is spoken by individual poems” – which brings along with it a further necessity of explicating (the cursory sense of *Erläuterung*) “each single poem” – that Heidegger will establish the aforementioned “order of implications” that seems to trouble Derrida:

Man sieht leicht, daß eine rechte Erläuterung schon die Erörterung voraussetzt. Nur aus dem Ort des Gedichtes leuchten und klingen die einzelnen Dichtungen. Umgekehrt braucht eine Erörterung des Gedichtes schon einen vorläufigen Durchgang durch eine erste Erläuterung einzelner Dichtungen.²⁶¹

This relation of reciprocity or convertibility (*Wechselbezug*) between *Erörterung* and *Erläuterung* will be the rhythm of Heidegger’s own discourse which ends up endorsing the very enunciative position it describes: as Derrida puts it, “it is more tempting than legitimate to fold back on his writing what he interprets as the essence of poetic rhythm” or, a little later:

Il doit y avoir convertibilité ou réversibilité entre *Erörterung* et *Erläuterung*. C’est là un rythme et on pourrait dire que le rythme poétique, entendu en son essence

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 34.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

propre, dicte le rythme d'une juste « lecture » : elle doit être fidèle à cette alliance, à cette conversion incessante entre les deux, *Erörterung* et *Erläuterung*. Au fond, ceux qui n'y verraient qu'un cercle logique ou une aporie méthodologique n'auraient simplement rien compris à l'essence du rythme. Mais cette incompréhension, ce non-accès ne sont rien d'autre que l'esthétique de la métaphysique : toute la critique littéraire, toute la poétique, etc.²⁶²

In other words, what Heidegger describes as the “moving wave” that animates Trakl's poetry as a whole, so that each individual poem would be caught between the wave's undulation of springing forth (*entquellen*) and flowing back towards (*zurückfließen*), this essence of poetic rhythm in turn justifies Heidegger's own rhythm, his own going back and forth between the welling up of the poetic wave in its first translucence, the *Erläuterung*, and the reflux of that wave into “its ever more veiled origin (*Ursprung*)” that draws us back to its site or source whence it sprang, the *Er-örterung* of the *Ort*.²⁶³ By extension, just as an “order of implications” was operative in the relation between source and offspring, silent poem and spoken poems, *Ort* and everything to which it *donne lieu*, a “right elucidation” will also presuppose an *Er-örterung* and the *Ort* to which it points. This *Ort* will have always already gathered both the poems and their elucidation, gathering being what Derrida calls, in quotation marks, the “axiomatics” of Heidegger's “reading”:

[...] ce qui importe et dominera désormais toute cette « situation », c'est le motif du rassemblement (*Versammlung*), de recueil, de convergence. *Ort*, la pointe de la lance : lieu vers lequel viennent concourir (*zusammenlaufen*), pour s'y rassembler

²⁶² Derrida 2018, 1.

²⁶³ Heidegger 1985, 34.

comme en un point indivisible toute les forces orientables de l'arme. [...] j'y insiste parce que nous touchons ici à ce que d'autres appelleraient l'« axiomatique » de cette « lecture », mots que je laisse ici entre guillemets pour des raisons évoquées plus haut : il y a ou il doit y avoir du rassemblement (*Versammlung*). C'est un des mots le plus fréquents et les plus déterminants du texte.²⁶⁴

Derrida is here picking up on Heidegger's displacement of the meaning of *Ort* (site) into what that word means "originally," that is, the "tip of the spear" towards which "everything converges" as Heidegger says:

Ursprünglich bedeutet der Name "Ort" die Spitze des Speers. In ihr läuft alles zusammen. Der Ort versammelt zu sich ins Höchste und Äußerste. Das Versammelnde durchdringt und durchwest alles. Der Ort, das Versammelnde, holt zu sich ein, verwahrt das Eingeholte, aber nicht wie eine abschließende Kapsel, sondern so, daß er das Versammelte durchscheint und durchleuchtet und dadurch erst in sein Wesen entläßt.²⁶⁵

Derrida takes these lines from Heidegger – along with what is said of the *Ort* as what gathers in *Zur Seinsfrage* – as indicative of a problematic "privileging of gathering" which Derrida will want to call into question along with "everything it induces." Derrida's "approach to the Heideggerian gesture" thus pays attention to the value of an indivisible gathering that will mark both Trakl's poetry (according to Heidegger of course) and Heidegger's own analysis of that poetry – this time according to Derrida who is more keen to reflect on the implication of Heidegger's analysis in the very object it

²⁶⁴ Derrida 2018, 10.

²⁶⁵ Heidegger 1985, 34.

ends up both describing and enacting in a certain way. Just as the *Ort* of Trakl's poem gathers in advance every single poem, so that each poem should run towards it and together with other poems – *zusammen-laufen* – Heidegger's own elucidation of each poem will always have been made possible also by an anticipatory running ahead – *vorläufig* – that leaps provisionally (again *vorläufig*) into the very site it wants to situate. This of course reminds Derrida of *Being and Time*'s hermeneutic circle and the emphasis on the proleptic jump is in fact part and parcel of such a circle. What Heidegger in *Being and Time* calls a “precursory look at being” (*vorgängigen Hinblicknahme auf das Sein*) – a “guiding look” that somehow “sees” being in advance and without which no question of being would even be as such possible – is here translated into the *Blick-sprung* that will guide Heidegger in his choice of “stanzas, verses and sentences.”²⁶⁶

We are now finally approaching what perhaps “most interests” Derrida in the “what is Heidegger doing?” or “how does Heidegger read?” question. As this question will communicate with another focal point of Derrida's five foci, so as “not to let itself be separated” from it, we might do well to multiply the foci, looks or *Blicke* and remember Freud's advice that sometimes the easiest way to crack a nut is to bring in a second.

Derrida begins his fourth focal point in *Geschlecht II* by tying Heidegger's manners to a certain “writing manoeuvre” which still insists on the doubling narratological structure we were beginning to tease out in the last section and that seems

²⁶⁶ Heidegger 2010, 45.

to have interested Derrida “the most” in his “reading” of Heidegger’s Trakl essay. He writes:

Cette dernière formulation, qui vise toujours la manière de Heidegger ou, comme on peut dire aussi en français, avec une autre connotation, ses manières, ne se laisse plus séparer, pas plus que la main selon Heidegger, de la mise en oeuvre de la langue. Donc ici d'une certaine manoeuvre de l'écriture. Elle recourt toujours en des moments décisifs à une ressource idiomatique, c'est-à-dire intraduisible si l'on se confie au concept courant de la traduction. Cette ressource, surdéterminée par l'idiome de Trakl et par celui de Heidegger, n'est pas seulement celle de l'allemand mais le plus souvent d'un idiome de l'idiome haut- ou vieil-allemand.²⁶⁷

Derrida then goes on to give a “list” of words that will illustrate what he calls “the very reason of this seminar, the decisive role played by the untranslatable idiom,” an idiom surely not reducible to native idiomaticity but nevertheless irreducibly linked to a Germanity, access to which is to be gained by a leap that will suddenly bring our glance – the *Blick-Sprung* – into a *Sprung* where words can find a rejuvenated meaning forgotten perhaps most especially by native speakers. Derrida thus calls attention to key instances in Heidegger’s essay where Heidegger’s recourse to the *Sprung* – a gesture that enacts the spring-like essence of poetic rhythm that Heidegger describes, as we saw – takes place primarily by means of a leap (*Sprung*) into a source (*Ur-sprung*) of original (*ursprünglich*) meaning, what Heidegger’s “our language” (*unsere Sprache*) “originally means” (*ursprünglich bedeutet*) or names. At each step of the way, Heidegger’s way is thus never thrown off course, always being able to let itself be guided by the very place

²⁶⁷ Derrida 2008b, 59.

or source of Trakl's poems towards which both poems *and* Heidegger's elucidation of them are gathered in advance.

First in Derrida's list of five words is "naturally the word "*Geschlecht*" "and its entire *Geschlecht*, its entire family, roots, off-spring, legitimate or not."²⁶⁸ By being attentive to the "lexico-semantic family" of "*Geschlecht*" – the blow, strike or imprint (*Schlag*) that *either* sets the *Ge-schlecht* on its way so as to strike a direction (*eine Richtung oder einen Weg ein-schlagen*) or a right blow (*rechter Schlag*) that specifies (*ver-schlagen*) the *Menschen-geschlecht* or *Mensch-schlag* into what it was destined to be or befalls *Geschlecht* like a curse, striking (*schlagen*) it so as to break it into pieces (*zer-schlagen*) and make it fall apart (*auseinander-schlagen*) – Derrida begins to understand how Heidegger's idiomatic play around and on *Geschlecht* seems to favor one *Geschlecht* among many, and the only language in which "*Geschlecht*" is said.²⁶⁹ As he puts it at the end of his fourth focal point:

Si la "situation" (*Erörterung*) du *Gedicht* se trouve ainsi dépendre dans ses moments décisifs du recours à l'idiome du *Geschlecht* et au *Geschlecht* de l'idiome, comment penser le rapport entre l'imprononcé du *Gedicht* et son appartenance, l'appropriation de son silence même à une langue et à un *Geschlecht* ? Cette question ne concerne pas seulement le *Geschlecht* allemand et la langue allemande, mais aussi ceux qui semblent reconnus à l'Occident, à l'homme occidental, puisque toute cette « situation » est pré-occupée par le souci du lieu, du chemin et de la destination de l'Occident.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Ibid.,

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 61.

In the text of *Geschlecht III*, Derrida is a little more emphatic as to the link between the untranslatable idiom and the destiny of the West in Heidegger's text. Apparently addressing a question from one his seminar's auditors, Hachem Foda – who seems to have wondered if Heidegger's characterization of Trakl's poem as what is left unspoken (*ungesprochen*) would not temper some of the Derridean argument with a non-German silent origin which would not fall prey to the philosophical nationality and nationalism Derrida is diagnosing – Derrida goes on to specify that even this silence is *related* (*apparenté*) to German, to the “idiom of *Geschlecht* and the *Geschlecht* of the idiom,” to the German family as it were:

Si en tous cas, le *Grundton* est [...] autour du mot « *Ein* » de « *Ein Geschlecht* », assigné au *Gedicht* et non aux *Dichtungen*, il est imprononcé [...]. Mais son imprononciation n'étant pas *autre chose* (ailleurs) que ce qui se prononce dans les poèmes (*Dichtungen*), la question se pose (et je l'avais fait en réponse à Hachem Foda la semaine dernière) du rapport entre cet imprononcé singulier et un idiome déterminé. Il faut bien que le lieu du *Gedicht* imprononcé, s'il n'est pas autre chose que ce à quoi il donne source, soit essentiellement apparenté, dans son silence même, à l'idiome allemand, voire haut et vieil allemand. Son silence est allemand, il parle allemand.²⁷¹

The *Grundton* in question is to do with Heidegger's insistence on a certain “singular unison“ (*einzigartigen Einklang*) that resonates between Trakl's poems due to the fact that each one of them points steadfastly to the site of the spring from which it sprang and towards which it flows back in accordance with the rhythm of the poetic wave as

²⁷¹ Derrida 2018, 52.

Heidegger both describes and performs it.²⁷² Crucial to Heidegger's argument is a certain unicity or oneness – captured by the “Ein” in formulations such as “*einem einzigen Gedicht*,” “*in den einen Ort des Gedichtes*,” “*einzigartigen Einklang seiner Dichtungen*,” “*aus dem einen Grundton seines Gedichtes*,” “*die Einheit des einen Geschlechtes*” and most especially Trakl's “*Ein Geschlecht*” – a singularity ultimately grounded in the gathering that the site of the poem brings about by means of another idiomatic manoeuvre : the *Ort* (site) is really meant in its original High-German sense of a spearpoint that draws toward itself, permeates and penetrates everything that is gathered therein so as to “release it into its essence” as Heidegger says.²⁷³ Every single Trakl poem is pulled towards this “highest” and “outermost” gathering pole that assures *one* orientation or direction to *both* Trakl's poems *and* Heidegger's “reading” of them.²⁷⁴ No wonder this *one* place should have *one* single poem with *one* fundamental tonic attuning every single poem to *one* poem, *one* site or source from which it wells forth and then recoils back towards. And no wonder again that the “Ein” of “*Ein Geschlecht*” should, according to Heidegger, “harbor the fundamental tone, from out of which this poet's poem silences the mystery” since, as Derrida points out in the passage above and later in *Geschlecht III*, this *Grundton* of “*Ein Geschlecht*” remains “unpronounced,” sheltered and hidden in a word “without saying itself, without phenomenalizing itself, an intonation inaudible in itself.”²⁷⁵

As Derrida explains, even though this *Gedicht* is never of the order of the *Dichtungen* – the singing of the latter presupposing the irreducible silence of the former –

²⁷² Heidegger 1985, 35.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Derrida 2018, 53.

the unspoken *Gedicht* is not however “something other (elsewhere) than what pronounces itself in the poems (*Dichtungen*).”²⁷⁶ Derrida reminds us that Heidegger goes so far as to assign a fundamental tone to this silent poem, which need not be a contradictory gesture since, as he puts it, there are at least two ways to understand how a silent poem could possibly have a *Grundton*:

On peut donc dire que la note fondamentale n’est pas prononcée, elle est tue, ce qui peut vouloir dire deux choses : qu’elle est silencieuse, au sens où le silence appartient déjà à la parole ou que, autre interprétation, imprononcée, inarticulée comme parole articulée, elle est chantée, en un sens du chant qui ne revient pas, ou ne se réduit pas à l’articulation de la langue, à ce qui dans langue est articulé.²⁷⁷

Derrida seems to be inclined to agree with the second alternative, reminding us that Heidegger expresses a worry that his situation of the site of Trakl’s poem, his “thinking conversation” (*denkende Zwiesprache*) with Trakl, runs the risk of “rather disturbing *the saying of the poem (das Sagen des Gedichtes)* [my emphasis] instead of letting it sing from out of its own tranquility.”²⁷⁸ In other words, however unspoken it may remain, this poem has a saying that would then exceed spoken articulation and rise to the level of a song not reducible to “the articulation of language” and that would be the “proper possibility of the poem” as Derrida puts it a little earlier in *Geschlecht III*.²⁷⁹ It is tempting to think that Heidegger would agree, given his insistence that the poetic wave of the unspoken *Gedicht* – the source-site of all Trakl’s poems – far from “abandoning

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 54.

²⁷⁸ Heidegger 1985, 34-35.

²⁷⁹ Derrida 2018, 52.

(*verläßt*) the site of the poem” and becoming something else in the poems, in fact moves the poems towards their source, gathering them not in “a closed-off capsule” but by permeating and penetrating them (*durchdringt, durchwest*) so as to release (*entläßt*) each poem into its true being in and through which the site of the poem, the spearpoint or the moving wave continues to sing, resonate, pierce and shine (*durchscheinen, durchleuchten*).²⁸⁰ Each poem would thus be the poem it is only insofar as it stands outside of itself, always running or jumping back towards the *Ur-sprung* that never leaves its offspring behind. The umbilical cord between *Gedicht* and *Dichtungen* is thus never cut.

This then means that the language in which the *Dichtungen* are said remains indissociably linked to the silence of the *Gedicht*, which leads Derrida to make the provocative claims above as to an essential parentage or filiation between the *Gedicht* and the language of the *Dichtungen* to the extent to which the silence of the former belongs to the language of the latter, to a “determinate idiom” or a given “idiom or *Geschlecht*.” An interesting and problematic doubling is again at work here: Heidegger establishes a relation of filiation between spring (silent poem) and offspring (spoken poems) and then chooses filiation itself as an appropriate way to name this whole situation: Trakl’s “*Ein Geschlecht*” is thus an overdetermined way to describe both the content of Trakl’s poetry *and* the rhythm of that poetry *and* Heidegger’s “reading” of it. As Derrida suggests, the “precursory listening” of “*Ein Geschlecht*” and the silent *Grundton* sheltered therein is presupposed both by every single Trakl poem (as far as Heidegger is concerned) and by Heidegger’s own way of “reading” of Trakl, a way that

²⁸⁰ Heidegger 1985, 34.

gives itself the same orientation and destination of the poetry it not only describes but repeats and enacts:

On peut le dire dès maintenant : dans son *Gespräch* avec Trakl, Heidegger se laisse orienter par l'entente ou la précurtive écoute de ce « *Ein* » dans « *Ein Geschlecht* ». Tel aura été le lieu. Il va le guider dans le choix des poèmes et de tels ou tels vers dans divers poèmes, criblant le trajet, installant les chicanes, préparant l'appel ou la prise pour chacun des sauts, donnant le mouvement pour toutes les transitions métonymiques. Heidegger sait que ces choix paraîtront arbitraire ou capricieux (*willkürlich*) à ceux qui ne parlent au nom de la compétence et de la méthode que pour n'avoir aucun souci, voire aucune idée du « lieu ». ²⁸¹

In other words, the methodological concern for the internal organization of each poem is blind to the *Blick-sprung* that will guide Heidegger's aim (*Ab-sicht*) and deaf to the fundamental tone of "Ein *Geschlecht*" that gathers all poems into their one site, source, or *Geschlecht*, precisely. As Derrida points out, methodologism would thus reproach Heidegger for both saying whatever and "not saying whatever," for jumping from poem to poem willy-nilly all the while thinking to follow, in the most rigorous way possible, the very same call which Trakl supposedly devoted himself to as what Heidegger calls a "great poet":

Jede große Dichter dichtet nur aus einem einzigen Gedicht. Die Große bemißt sich daraus, inwieweit er diesem Einzigem so anvertraut wird, daß er es vermag, sein

²⁸¹ Derrida 2018, 17.

dichtendes Sagen rein darin zu halten.²⁸²

Just as Trakl then supposedly follows his calling as a great poet by devoting himself *one-sidedly* to the site that gathers the whole of his poetry in advance, Heidegger too will follow the call of “Ein *Geschlecht*” as one-sidedly as possible, being drawn in advance by the very same site that “magnetizes” each Trakl poem (as Heidegger describes it) *and* Heidegger’s own trajectory as Derrida tells us in an excursus into what “perhaps most interests” him in *Geschlecht III* and that brings us back to the question of destination and its link to the idiom of *one Geschlecht*:

En vérité, je mets dans cet excursus ce qui m’intéresse le plus, peut-être, dans la lecture de ce texte. Que fait Heidegger ? Quel mouvement, quel chemin, quelle folie, quel sens ou autre sens décrit-il, de quoi et de qui parle-t-il dans cette prétendue situation du *Gedicht* de Trakl [?]. Regardez bien. Il parle, je ne dirai pas de lui, Martin Heidegger, mais assurément de sa propre démarche. Heidegger lit et écrit ici, sur la trace du lieu de Trakl, comme quelqu’un que les critiques littéraires, poéticiens ou philologues ou philosophes, hommes de savoir, jugeraient fou, il semble errer, sauter d’un poème à l’autre, il pérégrine, seul, étranger ou sur la trace de l’autre, il est à la fois le mort et l’étranger, il joue dans sa tombe, etc. Donc il parle de lui en parlant de l’autre, il parle de son lieu en parlant de lieu de l’autre, ou plutôt il est à la recherche de son lieu en suivant les pas de l’autre, etc.²⁸³

And here Derrida turns to Heidegger’s destination by means of his recourse to the two other Old High German words (the “*fram*” of “*fremd*” and the “*sinnan*” of “*wahnsinnig*”)

²⁸² Heidegger 1985, 33.

²⁸³ Derrida 2018, 40.

in Derrida's list that we still need to discuss :

Cependant, et on peut poursuivre cette analyse aussi dans ce sens, je veux dire l'analyse d'un texte de Heidegger qui n'est en somme que la signature ou l'empreinte ou le coup de Heidegger, on peut poursuivre en disant, comme il le dit lui-même de l'étranger (*fram, fremd*) qu'il est en marche, en voie, en pérégrination mais que (et là s'annonce un peu ma question à venir sur la détermination), son chemin a une destination (une *Bestimmung*), comme il le disait lui-même de l'étranger en route (*fram*), il ne va pas n'importe où, il ne lit pas et n'écrit pas n'importe comment, il n'erre pas quand il saute d'un poème ou d'un vers à l'autre. Je ne dirai pas qu'il sait où il va, car cette destination, cette détermination dans la destination, cette *Bestimmung*, n'est pas de l'ordre du savoir, mais enfin, il a une orientation et un chemin (*sent, set*), un *Sinn* qui pré-orienté ou magnétise ou aimante sa démarche, comme son entretien avec Trakl. Il ne va pas n'importe où dans le texte de Trakl.²⁸⁴

It is a good idea for us to pause over Heidegger's appropriation of the two Old-High German words "*fram*" and "*sinnan*," for they are a kind of alibi that appeals to an untranslatable idiomaticity in order to justify Heidegger's seemingly "brutal" crimes when "reading" Trakl, a manoeuvre that Derrida with some hesitation calls a "metonymic transition" according to which the presence of the same word in two or more different poems allows Heidegger to slide from poem to poem each time by means of a "password"

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

(*mot de passe*) as Derrida explains it.²⁸⁵ This zig-zag-like course that Heidegger traces for himself is the very movement of Trakl's poetry as well as the content of that poetry which is said, as Heidegger puts it at the end of the first part of his essay on Trakl, "to remain gathered in the wandering stranger" (*wandernden Fremdling*), which here raises the question "what does 'strange' mean?" (*was heißt fremd ?*), a question that Heidegger wants us to *hear* in the sense of what "calls" something strange (*ein Fremdes*) or is called by it :

Doch was heißt « fremd » ? Man versteht unter dem Fremdartigen gewöhnlich das Nichtvertraute, was nicht anspricht, solches, das eher lastet und beunruhigt. Allein, « fremd », althochdeutsch « fram », bedeutet eigentlich : anderswohin vorwärts, unterwegs nach..., dem Voraufbehaltenen entgegen. Das Fremde wandert voraus. Doch es irrt nicht, bar jeder Bestimmung, ratlos umher. Das Fremde geht suchend auf den Ort zu, wo es als ein Wanderndes bleiben kann. « Fremdes » fogt schon, ihm selber kaum enthüllt, dem Ruf auf den Weg in sein Eigenes.²⁸⁶

All sorts of interesting but uncannily problematic doublings are again at work here : first, and perhaps most obviously, just as Trakl has the stranger being *called* into his downfall (*Untergang*) – "*die Drossel ein Fremdes in den Untergang rief*" – a going under that Heidegger is immediately concerned to distance from the senses of "catastrophe" or "mere disappearing", a "tranquil" descent "down the river" which, like every descent (as Heidegger jumps to the verse of another poem to explain how *this* stranger's descent is supposed to happen), "goes under peacefully and quietly", just as Heidegger finds *ein Fremdes* being called into a restful descent in Trakl's poetry, then, he (Heidegger) will go

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁸⁶ Heidegger 1985, 36.

on to define *ein Fremdes* also on the basis of a call that too is meant to put *ein Fremdes* on its proper course that ensures a journey safe and undisturbed (the exact opposite aspects of what we “habitually” take “*fremd*” to mean: “*das Nichtvertraute, was nicht anspricht, solches, das eher lastet und beunruhigt*”) to the stranger who, *qua* stranger, is always already addressed by the safe and untroubled haven that awaits it as a final destination to be reached but that has already begun to call from the very start.²⁸⁷ This is why Heidegger can confidently say that, even though the stranger wanders ahead and in advance (*voraus-wandert*), he does not “roam about willy-nilly, lacking any destination (*Bestimmung*) whatsoever.”²⁸⁸ This stranger is always already less on the road and closer to home, its way being an always definite and determined *Unter-weg* “towards what is its own,” the propriety of its ownmost proper (*sein Eigenes*).²⁸⁹ The stranger is, by the definition Heidegger gives it, always already less strange, always already more familial and thus more and more a part of a determinate and destined *Geschlecht*.

The second doubling at stake here is slightly more complicated and difficult to grasp: for this time the very act of displacing the meaning of “stranger” (*fremd*) into its Old High German source of “*fram*” is *itself* prescribed and doubled up in the very meaning that “stranger” comes to have once its Old High German ancestry (*Geschlecht*) has been awakened and revived. Such is, at any rate, the “doubling” on which Derrida thinks it is necessary to “insist” as he puts it in the seminar version of the Loyola typescript:

A partir de ce déplacement sémantique – qui a consisté, notez-le bien, à faire du

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 37.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

mot « *fremd* » un *fremdes*, un étranger qu'on a fait répondre à sa destination originale ou originaire et finale en le rapatriant vers son propre, à savoir sa signification en vieil allemand – *fremd* était devenu un mot étranger qui ne demandait qu'à répondre à l'appel le rappelant à son propre et Heidegger l'a reconduit vers son propre (redoublement sur lequel il faudrait insister...) – à partir de ce déplacement sémantique qui est un rapatriement de l'étranger, du mot « étranger » vers sa destination, l'interprétation du vers de Trakl va littéralement changer de sens et de direction, elle va devenir en effet anti-platonicienne.²⁹⁰

The “doubling” Derrida has in mind here is then to do with what Geoffrey Bennington, in another text, calls a “fudging of the enunciative position” whereby Heidegger will adopt as his own what he says of the “original” meaning of *fram*: just as Heidegger will give a destination and proper home to the stranger (*ein Fremdes*) that will follow the call into his own place in accordance with what *fram* now comes to mean, the very word for stranger (*fremd*) will *itself* become affected by the very semantic displacement Heidegger both describes *and* at the same time performs.²⁹¹ As Derrida puts it above, the very word “*fremd*” became “a *fremdes*, a stranger [...], a strange word asking but to respond to the call that recalls it to its proper [like everything *fram*] and Heidegger has brought it home (*reconduit*) to its proper,” a proper home or a “proper of language” as Derrida refers to Old High German in another formulation of the same configuration in the Loyola typescript:

À partir du vieil allemand « *fram* », vers lequel on a fait retour comme en direction d'un propre de la langue, la sémantique de « étranger » s'est

²⁹⁰ Derrida 2018, 22.

²⁹¹ Bennington 2016, 33.

profondément déplacée : et dans le sens de ce qui, précisément, répond à l'appel qui le reconduit vers son propre, « chez soi », vers sa propre destination (*Bestimmung*). Ce déplacement qui effectue *dans* la langue ce dont la langue aura parlé, le retour vers le propre auquel destine un appel, nous a donc éloigné du sens courant de « étranger », aussi bien dans nos langues latines que dans l'allemand courant. Le sens courant s'était rendu étranger au sens de « *fremd* », à son sens propre.²⁹²

What happens here “*in language*” by means of Heidegger’s recourse to an original and proper Old High German source is precisely “what language will have spoken about” when the meaning of *fremd* is displaced “into the sense of that which, precisely, answers the call that brings it home to its proper.” Heidegger is then doubling the very sense of the newly awakened meaning of *fremd*: just as *fremd* is now said to refer to a stranger that is always already on its way home, Heidegger too has brought the very word “*fremd*” – which had *itself* become strange meanwhile – back to its “*chez soi*” and final destination in the Old High German “*fram*.”

This brings us to yet another doubled up narratological moment in Heidegger’s text that will begin to make clear how the *fram* of *fremd* – and subsequently the *sinnan* of *Wahnsinnig* – provide Heidegger with an alibi for exculpating his apparently “brutal” and “hasty” manner of “reading” Trakl, seemingly without any regard for the internal configuration and limits of each poem when picking and choosing from poem to poem as he sees fit.²⁹³ As Derrida points out, Heidegger is speaking of his own way of proceeding (*démarche*) when describing the steps of the stranger “in search of his place (*Ort*),” a

²⁹² Derrida 2018, 34.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

place that will in advance “magnetize” both *Heidegger’s* Trakl *and* Heidegger himself, assuring a definite orientation to both paths that may very well seem “one-sided” or “arbitrary” to traditional methodology, as we have seen. Heidegger is implicitly claiming merely to follow Trakl’s stranger along a path that may, to the human or social sciences, seem like the wrong way (*Irrweg*), but that never in fact leads nowhere, its final destination having always already steered both Heidegger’s Trakl and Heidegger into the right course. When Heidegger thus describes a wandering *Fremdes* in Trakl that does not err (*doch es irrt nicht*) or roam about willy-nilly “lacking any destination whatsoever,” he is “taking on” (*assume*) Trakl’s stranger’s “leaping, at times elliptical and discontinuous, *démarche*” as his own, following the call of the stranger in Trakl *and* in turn calling us to follow not just Trakl’s but his own call which announces itself right at the start of Heidegger’s thinking conversation with Trakl’s poetry as the “point” of that conversation, precisely:

Das Gespräch des Denkens mit dem Dichten geht darauf, das *Wesen* der Sprache *hervorzurufen* [my italics], damit die Sterblichen wieder lernen, in der Sprache zu wohnen.²⁹⁴

As Derrida points out, Heidegger is stressing here, by means of the words “*wieder*” and “*lernen*,” the “necessity of a new teaching” that Heidegger seems eager to undertake and that will “call forth” the essence of language as it converses with Trakl’s poetry so that we “mortals” find again (assuming we ever lost it) a home or dwelling place in language. This is why Derrida is able to claim that the “full title” of the volume in which Heidegger’s essay on Trakl appears, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (On the Way to Language),

²⁹⁴ Heidegger 1985, 34.

“could gather the essential of what is said in this essay [...] once it is also towards the *Sprache* and the right (*juste*) stroke of language or speech in its very essence that everything proceeds.”²⁹⁵ It is then no accident that the idiom should play such “a determining or, precisely, destining role” in Heidegger’s *cheminement*, more especially as *this* very idiom becomes the privileged medium in and through which the essence of language (and of dwelling) *in general* is to be taught and learned.²⁹⁶

We can see this problematic status of an exemplarity accorded to German by Heidegger perhaps most clearly in what he says of the original and authentic meaning of *fremd* (“strange,” but any translation here is “illegitimate *a priori*”) and, in the same vein, of *sinnan*. Derrida picks up on a troubling irony or “paradox” around Heidegger’s maneuver that seems not to disturb Heidegger in the slightest:

Une fois de plus, la décision revient au vieux haut-allemand qui détiendrait la signification authentique de ce mot, « *fremd* ». Avant même d’en venir à cette décision, soulignons le paradoxe : à la question de savoir ce que veut dire « étranger », ou plutôt « *fremd* » car déjà la traduction paraît *a priori* illégitime, la réponse reste idiomatique, elle n’appartient qu’à une langue, à un certain état de la langue. La nomination de l’étranger, ou plutôt de « *fremd* », est si propre à tel idiome que l’étranger ne saurait y accéder en tant qu’étranger. Et ce qu’on appelle traduction, au sens courant, ne passe jamais cette frontière. Nous ne cesserons de voir à l’oeuvre ce qu’on pourrait appeler en allemand l’*Unheimlichkeit* de cette situation. Parmi tous les sens qu’elle affecte, il y aura en particulier le sens de

²⁹⁵ Derrida 2018, 41.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

« sens » (*Sinn, sinnan*).²⁹⁷

It is curious that Derrida should name this situation “*unheimlich*” given his own insightful point about Heidegger’s insistence on giving a home, precisely, to the stranger who seems to be given access to his own strangeness only if he starts to speak and think in the language of Heidegger’s native *home*. As Derrida notices, Heidegger’s *Fremdes* remains a priori quarantined from any contact with an *actual Fremdes* who will say its own name in a language that cannot possibly translate what *Fremdes* means into “strange,” “*étrange*,” “*straniero*,” “*extraño*,” “*estranho*,” etc., all foreign words that remain ostracized from the very thing they name.²⁹⁸ When it comes to knowing who or what a *Fremdes* is, the Heideggerian warning seems to be: “do not ask an *actual Fremdes*” lest the reply be given in a foreign language or *fremde Sprache* that cannot say or translate *Fremdes*, precisely. The answer to the question “what does “*fremd*” mean?” remains, then, paradoxically “idiomatic” as “it belongs but to one language” as Derrida points out.²⁹⁹ And the exact same logic is at work in a word that in a sense will affect the very sense of all others: “the sense of sense,” the *Sinn* of *Sinn* as Derrida puts it:

Ici les choses s’aggravent puisque c’est le sens même du mot *sens* qui paraît intraduisible, lié à un idiome ; et c’est donc cette valeur de sens qui, commandant pourtant le concept traditionnel de la traduction, se voit tout à coup enraciné dans une seule langue, famille ou *Geschlecht* de langues, hors desquels il perd son sens originaire.³⁰⁰

Derrida perceptively notices how Heidegger is set on again displacing the cursory

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Derrida 2008b, 61.

meaning of a word – in this case *wahnsinnig* (mad) – towards its Old High German original source which, by means of the “Indo-Germanic roots *sent* and *set*” (meaning *Weg* or way), will communicate with the path of the *Fremdes* whose original meaning of “ahead towards elsewhere, on the way to... (*anderswohin vorwärts, unterwegs nach...*)” maps neatly onto the *sinnan* of *wahn-sinnig*: “to travel, to strive towards..., to strike a direction (*reisen, streben nach..., eine Richtung einschlagen*).”³⁰¹ So much so that when calling the departed one the mad one (*der Abgeschiedene ist der Wahnsinnige*), Heidegger will specify why with the very two words he had used to describe the original meaning of *fremd*: “because he is on the way towards elsewhere” (*weil er anderswohin unterwegs ist*).³⁰² Here, however, *sinnan* also corresponds to “striking (*einschlagen*) a direction” which explicitly links the *Schlag* to the *Weg*: “to get going at once (*s’engager d’un coup*) in a direction, in a sense in the sense of path” as Derrida translates.³⁰³ The path of the stranger is thus one where a blow, strike or imprint (*coup* or *Schlag*) is readily associated with a sense (*Sinn*) that will ensure that whoever “travels” down this path is always homebound, all the more so as sense *itself* enters into an “untranslatable” idiomaticity according to which it becomes “rooted in only one language, family or *Geschlecht* of languages,” especially as the link to the *Schlag* of *Ge-schlecht* is established.³⁰⁴

In other words, when it comes to knowing what sense means, the answer is again given by and in one language alone outside of which *Sinn* “loses its originary meaning,” rendering any possible translation again “a priori illegitimate” as the “very concept of

³⁰¹ Heidegger 1985, 49.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Derrida 2018, 37.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

translation becomes problematic” as Derrida explains:

Ici le recours à l’idiome haut allemand n’est pas simplement un recours de plus parmi d’autres, il est d’autant plus décisif qu’il s’agit du sens du mot « sens ». Si le mot « sens » est un idiome, reconnaître que comme tout idiome il comporte l’intraduisibilité, c’est le concept même de traduction – et donc d’idiome – qui devient problématique puisqu’il repose au moins sur quelque consensus implicite quant au sens et quant au sens du mot « sens », quant à la traductibilité du sens et du sens de sens. Or non seulement le mot « *sinnan* », dans la valeur originale que veut lui restituer ou que veut resituer Heidegger est intraduisible mais son « sens » a une affinité essentielle, vous allez le voir, avec ce mot « *fram* », étranger qui ne pouvait dire ce qu’il dit qu’en allemand et dont le sens original oriente toute la « situation » (*Erörterung*). Nous nous étions demandés quelles conséquences tirer de ce fait qu’un mot signifiant pour nous étranger ne signifiait pas vraiment étranger (*extraneus*) et avait un sens qui ne pouvait résonner que dans les frontières d’une langue.³⁰⁵

We are perhaps beginning to understand why Derrida finds Heidegger’s recourse to Old High German so troubling : here, rather than being “simply one more recourse among others,” the idiomatic displacement of *Sinn* to *sinnan* affects not just the *Sinn* of *Sinn* but *Sinn* in general, the *Sinn* of just about every German word whose meaning too becomes “rooted” in one language alone, in one idiomatic *Geschlecht* dependent on the very idiom *Geschlecht*. Each step of the way, this *Sinn* “orients” Heidegger into finding the right path to follow and hear Trakl’s poetry and the original site whence it springs, a site that

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 39.

Heidegger is content to indicate by means of making our listening to Trakl's poetry more attuned, "in the best case," to a *Sinn* that will render us more *be-sinnlich* (reflective), precisely:

Die Erörterung des Gedichtes ist eine denkende Zwiesprache mit dem Dichten. Sie stellt weder die Weltansicht eines Dichters dar, noch mustert sie seine Werkstatt. Eine Erörterung des Gedichtes kann vor allem nie das Hören der Dichtungen ersetzen, nicht einmal leiten. Die denkende Erörterung kann das Hören höchstens fragwürdig und im günstigsten Fall besinnlicher machen.³⁰⁶

Yet another doubling is then haunting Heidegger's text: just as the departed wandering stranger in Trakl is said by Heidegger to "sense like no one else," to have "another sense" and be "without (*ohne*) the sense of others" – as Heidegger is again having recourse to Old High German (*wana*, the ancestor of *ohne*) to explain that Trakl's word "*wahnsinnig*" "literally" means "without the sense" of others (but *ipso facto* sensing all the more so: *sinnender*) and not "mentally ill" as common sense has it – Heidegger too is "without the sense of others," departing each time from what a word "habitually" means in everyday discourse in order to arrive at a forgotten *Sinn* not just of this or that word but of *Sinn* itself, a *Sinn* that calls Trakl's stranger (again, according to Heidegger) and Heidegger (who in turn calls us) to become "*sinnender*" and "*besinnlicher*" or, as he had put it earlier, "to learn again how to dwell in language."³⁰⁷ As this newly activated *Sinn* unfolds into an original source of language as a site of dwelling that exemplarily lets us "learn again" how to dwell in language by means of what is said in one language about language, the status of German is catapulted into the very essence of language outside of which

³⁰⁶ Heidegger 1985, 35.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

Sinn as such would “lose its originary meaning” and no dwelling would be possible.

No wonder, then, that Derrida should use the provocative word “repatriation” to describe both what Heidegger thinks of Trakl’s *Fremdes* and how Heidegger thinks of *himself* as a *Fremdes* who is too “in the search of his place,” also looking for and being called by “what has been held in store in advance” (*Vorausbehaltenen*) for him which, as Derrida points out, proves to be indissociable from a “movement towards the proper,” a “movement of return” or homecoming (*Heimkunft, Heimkehr*) that cannot do without a recourse to German where a home is to be newly found.³⁰⁸

In conclusion to our preliminary discussion of *Geschlecht III* and Derrida’s five foci in *Geschlecht II* that outline its “principal concern,” let us briefly turn to the other three that we have not yet touched on. It will become clear, however, that all these foci are inextricably linked and that pulling the thread of one always brings the other interwoven four along with it.

The first focal point we have yet to deal with more explicitly very briefly broaches the question of animality:

1. De l’homme et de l’animalité. Le texte sur Trakl propose aussi une pensée de la différence entre l’animalité et l’humanité. Il s’agirait ici de la différence entre deux différences sexuelles, de la différence, du rapport entre le 1 et le 2, et de la divisibilité en général. Au foyer de ce foyer, la marque *Geschlecht* dans sa

³⁰⁸ Derrida 2018, 55.

polysémie (espèce ou sexe) et dans sa dissémination.³⁰⁹

We are in a sense all set to see the relation between *Geschlecht* and animality in Heidegger's text: for immediately after displacing *Sinn* and *sinnen* back to their putatively original sense of *sinnan*, Heidegger will go on to specify that this *Sinn* of the *Wahn-sinniger* is "gentler" ("*sanfter*," a Trakl citation) than common sense as it "senses what is stiller" in and through the homecoming we have been discussing and that here is linked to a return to a "stiller childhood" that will "hold in store more still everything that burns and scorches in wilderness (*die alles nur Brennende and Sengende der Wildnis stiller verwahrt*)."³¹⁰ Just sentences before the etymological rendez-vous with *sinnan*, Heidegger had mobilized a verse from Trakl where a "white (*weiße*) sorcerer plays with his snakes in his grave," a sorcerer and grave (*Grab*) that are metonymically associated with the "stranger we have buried (*begräbt*)," a stranger who in turn is called "white stranger" (*weiße Fremdling*) in yet another poem which gives Heidegger enough confidence to link this *Fremden-begräbt-Grab-weiße* chain back to the "the mad one (*Wahnsinnige*) is dead" verse that initiated the metonymic series.³¹¹ The *Wahnsinniger* is then for Heidegger the white sorcerer (the dead one) who "lives in his grave" and has "transfigured the evil of snakes":

Der Gestorbene lebt in seinem Grab. Er lebt in seiner Kammer so still und
 versonnen, daß er mit seinen Schlangen spielt. Sie vermögen nichts gegen ihn. Sie
 sind nicht erwürgt, aber ihr Böses ist verwandelt.³¹²

Over and against this gentle relationship to animality, we find Heidegger opposing a

³⁰⁹ Derrida 2008b, 57.

³¹⁰ Heidegger 1985, 50.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

³¹² *Ibid.*

bestiality (*Wildnerness*) that declares war between the species (*Geschlechtern*) so that here Heidegger will give an example from Trakl's poem "The Accursed" (*Die Verfluchten*) where humans and snakes seem to be going at each other: "A nest of scarlet snakes sluggishly builds itself in their troubled womb."³¹³ This curse of the "accursed" had already been alluded by Heidegger a little earlier in his essay where he seems to intimate that a curse is endemic to *Geschlecht*:

Womit ist dieses Geschlecht geschlagen, d.h. verflucht? Fluch heißt griechisch *πληγή*, unser Wort "Schlag." Der Fluch des verwesenden Geschlechtes besteht darin, daß dieses alte Geschlecht in die Zwietracht der Geschlechter auseinandergeschlagen ist. Aus ihr trachtet jedes der Geschlechter in den losgelassenen Aufruhr der je vereinzelt und bloßen Wildheit des Wildes. Nicht das Zwiefache als solches, sondern die Zwietracht ist der Fluch. Sie trägt aus dem Aufruhr der blinden Wildheit das Geschlecht in die Entzweiung und verschlägt es so in die losgelassene Vereinzelung. Also entzweit und zerschlagen vermag das "verfallene Geschlecht" von sich aus nicht mehr in den rechten Schlag zu finden.³¹⁴

By means of the *Fluch-πληγή-Schlag* chain, Heidegger is thus able to diagnose a malediction that *strikes Geschlecht* a second time with a difference that will not fold back into the simple fold (*einfältig*) of the *Zwiefache* – which he explicitly distinguishes from the curse of discord (*Zwietracht*) – and that unleashes an "unrestrained individuation" according to which "each of the *Geschlechter* strives (*trachtet* but not *sinnt*) towards an unrestrained upheaval" (*Aufruhr* and not *Ruhe*) that Heidegger is prepared to associate

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 46.

with what he calls “blind” or “mere bestiality” (*blinde, bloße Wildheit*).³¹⁵ Leading up to this moment in the essay, Heidegger had singled out a “blue deer” (*ein blaues Wild*) in Trakl which, by virtue of its blueness – which it receives from dusk as twilight, evening (*Abend*) and night in Trakl are said to be of a hyacinth or cyan color and a “gentle bundle of corn flowers” (“O das sanfte *Zyanenbündel* der Nacht” [my italics]) – is able to become, if not a domesticated animal, a not so wild *Wild*, a “shy animal” or “gentle *Wild*” whose *Wildernis* or *Wildheit* has been tamed and “brought back to what is gentle” as Heidegger says:

Das Antlitz des Wilds nimmt sich angesichts der Blaue in das Sanfte zurück.
Denn das Sanfte ist dem Wort nach das friedlich Sammelnde. Es verwandelt die
Zwietracht, indem es das Versehrende und Sengende der Wildnis in den
beruhigten Schmerz verwindet.³¹⁶

We are precisely at the point in Heidegger’s essay where he will ask questions he already knows the answers to: “Who is this blue animal [...]? An animal? Certainly. And only an animal? Not at all.”³¹⁷ At the end of a sequence that will do all it can to assimilate the “*blaue Wild*” into the “thinking animal, the *animal rationale*, man (*der Mensch*),” whose animality “has not yet been established, that is, brought “home” (*nach Haus*), into the domestic (*Einheimisch*) of its veiled essence,” Heidegger will explicitly link the stranger’s homecoming or repatriation to the domestication and humanization of the blue *Wild* whom Heidegger calls – just as he had called us, his “mortal” readers, to “learn

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 42.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 41.

again how to dwell in language” – to follow the call of the wandering (*wandernde*) stranger and to discover (*er-wandert*) “with him” a home at the end of his homecoming:

Das in seinem Wesen noch nicht fest-gestellte Tier ist der jetzige Mensch. Im dichtenden Namen “blaues Wild” ruft Trakl jenes Menschenwesen, dessen Antlitz, d. h. Gegenblick, im Denken an die Schritte des Fremdlings von der Bläue der Nacht er-blickt und so vom Heiligen beschienen wird. Der Name “blaues Wild” nennt Sterbliche, die des Fremdlings gedenken und mit ihm das *Einheimische des Menschenwesens* erwandern möchten.³¹⁸

We are perhaps beginning to see how Heidegger’s text “also proposes a thinking of the difference between animality and humanity” and how the other aforementioned foci relate to it. As the fifth of Derrida’s foci will actually pick up on the “unbridled, bestial opposition” or “savage opposition” into which a gentle and peaceful sexual difference is transformed by means of a second strike, this is then an appropriate moment to turn to the last of Derrida’s foci in order to see how animality and sexuality, “species and sex,” make up the *Geschlecht* problematic in Heidegger’s essay according to Derrida’s *Geschlecht III*.³¹⁹

The “second strike” that Derrida has in mind is related to the curse that befalls a *Geschlecht* and “tears it apart” (*auseinanderschlagen*), specifying (*verschlagen*) each *Geschlecht* into a cloistered isolation which brings about oppositionality and diremption (*Entzweiung*) between *Geschlechter* to the point of making each one individually fall to pieces (*zerschlagen*). This “fallen” and “decomposing” *Geschlecht* seems to be most pronounced when this malediction “irrupts into what is brotherly”:

³¹⁸ Ibid., 41-42.

³¹⁹ Derrida 2008b, 61.

Das Versammelnde der Abgeschiedenheit spart das Ungeborene über das Abgelebte hinweg in ein kommendes Auferstehen des Menschenschlages aus der Frühe. Das Versammelnde stillt als der Geist des Sanften zugleich den Geist des Bösen. Dessen Aufruhr steigt dort in seine äußerste Bösartigkeit, wo er gar aus der Zwietracht der Geschlechter noch ausbricht und in das Geschwisterliche einbricht.³²⁰

Conversely, it would seem as though the brotherly and the sisterly (*das Geschwisterliche*) held a pride of place for Heidegger vis-à-vis the thought of a *Zwiefaches* not yet or no longer affected by a *Zwietracht* that would not only cause dissension between *Geschlechter* but in very mark “*Geschlecht*” as Derrida points out in the last pages of *Geschlecht III*:

Le coup rassemble le *Zwietracht* en *Zwiefalt*. Il est donc le coup, il frappe entre deux fois deux, deux dualités ou différences du *Geschlecht* – deux différences sexuelles, mais non seulement sexuelles et la signification de sexualité est ici enveloppée dans la polysémie du *Geschlecht* ; c’est peut-être quand elle s’en sépare et se détermine comme seulement sexuelle que le *Zwietracht* apparaît, et la guerre des sexes. [...] On doit dire aussi, bien que ce ne soit pas le propos explicite de Heidegger, que cette frappe de l’un dans le *Geschlecht* est aussi la frappe du mot qui rassemble dans l’un et dans l’unité rassemblante du mot « *Geschlecht* » cette multiplicité de significations, dont tous les coups viennent en

³²⁰ Heidegger 1985, 63.

une seule marque, un seul mot, mot qui dit aussi le rassemblement (*Ge-*) sceller leur consonance.³²¹

This brings us finally to the last focal point we have yet to discuss: the focal point that “concerns what Heidegger says of polysemy, precisely, and that I [J.D.] am going to distinguish from dissemination.”³²² As Derrida points out, Heidegger welcomes what Derrida will call a “good” polysemy but remains wary of a “bad polysemy” which characterizes the poetry of mediocre poets who “lack the authentic poem and its place” as Heidegger argues:

Oft können wir dieses in ihm selber durchaus sichere mehrdeutige Sagen, das den Dichtungen Trakls eignet, schwer gegen die Sprache anderer Dichter abgrenzen, deren Vieldeutigkeit aus dem Unbestimmten einer Unsicherheit des poetischen Umhertastens stammt, weil ihr das eigentliche Gedicht und sein Ort fehlen.³²³

In a manner that comes back full circle to the beginning of this dissertation, Derrida will find the motifs of a “good” and “bad” polysemy “at once traditional (properly Aristotelian), dogmatic in its form and symptomatically contradictory with other Heideggerian motifs.”³²⁴ But what perhaps “most interests” him here is again the uncanny doubling according to which Heidegger speaks of himself and his own quest for a home and place when speaking of Trakl and his non-nomadic and non-erratic wandering stranger who, like Heidegger and according to Heidegger, have a determinate destination and not the indeterminacy (*Unbestimmten*) or “uncertainty of a poetic

³²¹ Derrida 2018, 67.

³²² Derrida 2008b, 59.

³²³ Heidegger 1985, 71.

³²⁴ Derrida 2018, 76.

scrabbling about.”³²⁵ This certainty on Heidegger’s part vis-à-vis his own destiny in relation to Germans is then Derrida’s point of attack in *Geschlecht III* and it will be part and parcel of the problematic of his 1984-85 seminar *Philosophical nationality and nationalism* from which *Geschlecht III* is extracted.

At this point, Heideggerians may well interject and want to defend Heidegger who, in their view, does not subscribe to a vulgar nationalism based on the biologic-racial ideology of the Nazi Party, a point with which Derrida of course agrees but only to emphasize that *this is where the problem really starts*:

Bien entendu, il n’est pas question de nation au sens strict et courant dans tout cela, et Heidegger protesterait très vivement contre cette réduction. Il ferait vite apparaître que le concept de nation, comme la revendication nationaliste sont tributaires d’une métaphysique dans laquelle le thème du *Geschlecht* n’est pas pensé de façon assez originaire, tributaires d’une dégradation de l’humanité décomposée, justement, et qui, pour avoir perdu son « *Heimat* » erre entre les deux pôles symétriques, antagonistes mais indissociables du cosmopolitisme et de nationaliste, les deux ayant en commun le même déracinement au regard de la *Sprache*, etc. Et pourtant, sans récuser à son niveau cette objection de Heidegger, nous devons persister à reconnaître, dans cette dénégation et cette hauteur même, une posture typiquement nationaliste, ou du moins celle qui assure à tout nationalisme son ultime fondement.³²⁶

Here, Heidegger’s “typically nationalistic position” that will “assure every nationalism of its ultimate foundation” is linked to the “value of return, of returning gathering” which, as

³²⁵ Heidegger 1985, 70.

³²⁶ Derrida 2018, 88.

we saw, is a homecoming of sorts. *Peu importe*, argues Derrida, that this return home be associated with “the most risky adventure” or with what Heidegger calls “*Beginn*” in his essay on Trakl where the stranger, if he is to remain the stranger he is, is said to depart and remain departing into “the beginning of his wanderings” as Heidegger puts it while commenting on Trakl’s verse “Evening changes sense (*Sinn*) and image”:

Der Abend verwandelt aus anderem Bild und anderem Sinn die Sage des Dichtens und Denkens und ihre Zwiesprache. Dies vermag der Abend jedoch nur deshalb, weil er selbst wechselt. Der Tag geht durch ihn zu einer Neige, die kein Ende ist, sondern einzig geneigt ist, jenen Untergang zu bereiten, durch den der Fremdling in den *Beginn* seiner Wanderschaft eingeht.³²⁷

Derrida is suspicious of this “revolutionary promise” in Heidegger’s thinking that is here somewhat surprisingly associated with the sun’s course, with the “revolution of the day and year” according to which what is closer to the morning, as dusk is to dawn (*Aufgang*), is at once older and “more promising” than what is not, as Derrida understands this “schema of revolution” that he locates in Heidegger’s essay.³²⁸ Heidegger’s emphasis on *Gang* – the *Auf-* and *Unter-gang* of the sun as well as *gehen* (to go, ienai) as the etymological meaning of *Jahr* (year, *ier-*) – is of a piece with another circular course of rejuvenation that will link the *Heimkunft*, “without which it is difficult to imagine a nationalism,” to “another line, that of the voyage,” as Derrida picks up on a “colonial” aspect of Heidegger’s “*via rupta*” or path-breaking:

Le schème de retour est le thème depuis lequel se détermine typiquement je ne dirai pas le nationalisme, tout nationalisme, tout le nationalisme, mais c’est un

³²⁷ Heidegger 1985, 48.

³²⁸ Derrida 2018, 45, 68.

mot – celui du « *Heimkunft* » – sans lequel il est difficile d’imaginer un nationalisme. On pourrait pousser très loin, je n’ai ni le temps ni en vérité le désir de chercher ici des exemples et de les décrire de près de ce point de vue mais je pense que ce serait facile. Ce retour comme ressourcement peut être celui du repli ou celui de la préparation pour un nouveau matin ou un nouveau bond. La ligne de ce cercle nationaliste peut d’ailleurs, et ce n’est pas contradictoire, et nous en avons aussi le modèle dans l’autre forme de chemin que décrit ici Heidegger, peut composer ou alterner avec une autre ligne, celle du voyage, de chemin ouvert vers l’aventure, du frayage, de ce qui frappe d’ouverture une nouvelle *via rupta*, une nouvelle route pour un nouvel habitat, et là, dans la dépendance ou la mouvance de cette autre ligne, nous avons, au lieu du repli nostalgique vers l’habitat originaire, l’expansion coloniale, l’avenir comme aventure de la culture ou de la colonisation, de l’habitat cultivé et colonisé à partir de nouvelles routes.³²⁹

To close, then, let us too attempt to situate where we are, retrace our steps and measure how far we have come in this last chapter. We began by noticing how Derrida “reads” Heidegger without relying on the naïve and unfounded presuppositions of classical methodology that the very same Heidegger helps us dismantle. We then pointed out how, more specifically, the very concept of reading is *itself* implicated in and by the *Geschlecht* problematic so that no external theory of reading could be simply superimposed and artificially applied to it without first taking into consideration how the

³²⁹ Ibid., 89.

concept of reading is determined from within. This led us to the thought of a typotopology always already presupposed by classical theories of reading and that Heidegger's thought of *Geschlecht* in Trakl goes a long way to unravel, all the while banking on problematic presuppositions of its own (such as the privilege accorded to *Versammlung*). We saw Derrida thus attempting "still something else than a situation of Heidegger," lest he (Derrida) thereby merely "mime" or unwittingly "reproduce" the very gesture Heidegger is enacting vis-à-vis his situation (*Erörterung*) of Trakl.³³⁰

This "methodological" prudence on Derrida's part – though "method" is precisely what this prudence provisionally suspects and suspends – is what leads him to ask about Heidegger's "method" or manner of proceeding without naively relying on the very unquestioned assumptions the very same Heidegger problematizes in advance and preemptively strikes back against. As we saw, Derrida's analysis of Heidegger's *démarche* picks up on an uncanny "doubling" of narratological structures according to which Heidegger's description of Trakl's stranger (and of other aspects of Trakl's poetry) ends up being an auto-biographical gesture on Heidegger's part, a signature that Gérard Genette would have perhaps understood as a classic narratological instance of the narrating I (*Je narrant*) becoming the narrated I (*Je narré*).

It is significant for Derrida that Heidegger's autobiography – a term to be "differently understood than according to psychology, subjectivity and the ego" – should revolve around the repatriation of a few decisive German words (such as *Geschlecht*, *Ort*, *fremd*, *wahnsinnig*, *Sinn*, *Abendland*) whose original and authentic meaning Heidegger is

³³⁰ Ibid., 4.

trying to revive by means of a constant recourse to Old High German.³³¹ Perhaps the most blatant example we examined, the word “*fremd*,” nicely illustrates how Heidegger speaks of himself when speaking of Trakl’s stranger (*ein Fremdes*) who, like the very word “*fremd*” itself, is repatriated to a proper home in Old High German where he can “learn again how to dwell in language,” the same exact task Heidegger assigns himself and his readers at the beginning of his Trakl essay. It thus seems as though this narratological doubling served the purpose of an assignation to one language among others – which just so happens to be the language Heidegger speaks – of the task of exemplarily representing language in general, the “essence” of which Heidegger thinks he can “call forth” precisely *in* the language in which he writes, by means of semantic “displacements which effect *in* language what language will have spoken about” as we saw Derrida put it.

Such is Derrida’s new and provocative approach to Heidegger’s essay on Trakl in “*Geschlecht III*,” where this narratological doubling is linked to the privilege Heidegger accords the German idiom which Derrida wants to denounce as a nationalistic undercurrent in Heidegger’s thought. This “philosophical nationality and nationalism” in Heidegger will be then associated with what Derrida calls “national-humanism” – a “human nationality” as Marx sarcastically puts it – that is, the apparently paradoxical but in fact quintessential gesture of nationalism to claim for one nation the mission and privilege of representing “the universal essence of man, the thought of which is supposedly produced in some way in the philosophy of that nation or that people.”³³² “In the philosophy” and, *ipso facto*, the language of that people or, strictly speaking, that

³³¹ Ibid., 34.

³³² Derrida 1992, 6.

Geschlecht whose very name and humanity “become problematic” as we saw Derrida powerfully argue.

This “paradoxical but regular” association between nationalism and humanism – and the word of the only language in which this humanity can supposedly be spoken, *Geschlecht* or *Menschengeschlecht* – opens the *Geschlecht* problematic onto questions concerning the difference between humanity and animality and, as we saw Derrida point out in his first focal point, onto the difference between a “bestial” or “savage” sexuality and a more gentle one. We saw this motif of diremption and dispersion (*Zwietracht*) versus a gentle twofold (*Zwiefach*) come back in a “linguistic” (*langagier*) form in Derrida’s second focal point where he again teases out yet another narratological doubling: just as Trakl’s poetry welcomes a “good” polysemy as opposed to the “bad” kind of mediocre poets who “scrabble about” willy-nilly (*herumtasten*), without a destination or a unique “place” to confer a singular univocity, rigor and certainty (*Sicherheit*) to their poetry, Heidegger thinks he too can steadily and safely bring us home, towards the “right strike” (*rechtes Schlag*) of the univocal meaning of “Ein *Geschlecht*,” the irreducible dissemination of which Heidegger wants to gather into a “good” polysemy that is meant to “save the earth,” as Heidegger proclaims.³³³ Against salvation, against nationalism, against humanism but not entirely against the idiom, “*Geschlecht III*” thus militantly “combats” and “denounces” Heidegger’s “typically nationalistic position” and its “ultimate recourse” or foundation, – the idiom – the

³³³ Derrida 2018, 45. Heidegger 1985, 37.

“thought” of which he Derrida wants to “learn” but also rescue from Heidegger’s nationalism.³³⁴

³³⁴ Derrida 2018, 88.

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