

Geschlecht
sexual difference, ontological difference*

JACQUES DERRIDA
Ecole normale supérieure

to Ruben Berezdivin

1928

Of sex, one can readily 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, of the “sexual-relation,” “sexual-difference,” or indeed of “man-and-woman.” That silence, therefore, is easily remarked. Which means that the remark is somewhat facile. A few indications, concluding with “everything happens as if . . . ,” and it would be satisfied. The dossier could then be shut, avoiding trouble if not risk: it is as if, in reading Heidegger, there

*First and wholly preliminary part of an interpretation by which I wish to situate *Geschlecht* within Heidegger’s path of thought. Within the path of his writings too, and the marked impression or inscription of the word *Geschlecht* will not be irrelevant. That word, I leave it here in its language for reasons that should become binding in the course of this very reading. And it is indeed a matter of “*Geschlecht*” (sex, race, family, generation, lineage, species, genre/genus) and not of *the Geschlecht*: one will not pass so easily toward the thing itself (the *Geschlecht*), beyond the mark of the word (*Geschlecht*) in which, much later, Heidegger will remark the “imprint” of a blow or a stamp (*Schlag*). This he will do in a text we shall not discuss here but toward which this reading will continue, by which in truth I know it is already magnetised: “Die Sprache im Gedicht, Eine Erörterung von Georg Trakls Gedicht” (1953) in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1959, pp. 36 ff.).

were no sexual difference, nothing of that in man, or put otherwise in woman, to interrogate or suspect, nothing worthy of questioning, *fragwürdig*. It is as if, one might continue, sexual difference did not rise to the height of ontological difference, on the whole as negligible, in regard to the question of the sense of being, as any other difference, a determinate distinction or an ontic predicate. Negligible for thought, of course, even if not at all for science or philosophy. But insofar as it is opened up to the question of being, insofar as it has a relation to being, in that very reference, *Dasein* would not be sexed. Discourse on sexuality could then be abandoned to the sciences or philosophies of life, to anthropology, sociology, biology, or perhaps even to religion or morality.

Sexual difference, it was said, could not rise to the height of ontological difference. If one wished to find out what height is in question, the thought of difference not rising to any, the silence would not be lacking. That could then be found arrogant or, precisely, provoking, in a century when sexuality, common place of all babbling, has also become the currency of philosophic and scientific "knowledge," the inevitable *Kampfplatz* of ethics and politics. Not a word from Heidegger! It could even be found a matter of grand style, this scene of stubborn mutism at the very center of the conversation, in the uninterrupted and distracted buzzing of the colloquium; for in itself it has a waking and sobering value (but what exactly is one speaking about around this silence?): Who, indeed, around or even long before him has not chatted about sexuality as such, as it were, and by that name? All the philosophers in the tradition have done so, from Plato to Nietzsche, who for their part were irrepressible on the subject. Kant, Hegel, Husserl have all reserved it a place; they have tried at least a word on it in their anthropology or in their philosophy of nature, and really everywhere.

Is it imprudent to trust Heidegger's manifest silence? Will what is thus ascertained later be deranged from its pretty philological assurance by some known or unedited passage when, while searching out the whole of Heidegger, some reading machine will hunt out the thing and snare it? Still, one must think of programming the machine, one must think, think of it and know how to do it. Relying on which words? Only on names? And on which syntax, visible or invisible? Briefly, in which signs will you recognize his speaking or remaining silent about what you nonchalantly call sexual difference? What do you think by those words or through them?

In order that such an impressive silence be today remarked on, to let it appear as such, marked and marking, what, on the whole, would be satisfactory? Undoubtedly this: Heidegger would have said nothing about sexuality by name in the places where the best educated and

endowed “modernity” expected it with a firm foot, under its panoply of “everything-is-sexual-and-everything-is-political-and-reciprocally” (note in passing that the word “political” is of rare usage, perhaps null, in Heidegger, another not quite irrelevant matter). Even before a statistic were taken, the matter would seem already settled. But there are good grounds to believe that the statistic here would only confirm the verdict: about what we glibly call sexuality Heidegger has remained silent. Transitive and significant silence (he has silenced sex) which belongs, as he says, to a certain *Schweigen* (“*hier in der transitiven Bedeutung gesagt*”), to the path of a word [*parole*] he seems to interrupt. But what are the places of this interruption? Where is the silence working on that discourse? And what are the forms and determinable contours of that non-said?

You can bet on it, there’s nothing immobile in the places where the arrows of the aforesaid panoply would assign the point named: omission, repression, denial, foreclosure, even the unthought.

But then, if the bet were lost, the trace of that silence would not merit detouring? He doesn’t silence anything, no matter what, the trace does not come from no matter where. But why the bet? Because before predicting anything whatever about “sexuality,” it may be verified, one must invoke chance, the aleatory, destiny.

Let it be, then, a so-called “modern” reading, an investigation armed with psychoanalysis, an enquiry authorized by complete anthropological culture. What does it seek? Where does it seek? Where may it deem to have the right to expect at least a sign, an allusion, elliptical as it may be, a reference, to sexuality, the sexual relation, to sexual difference? To begin with, in *Sein und Zeit*. Was not the existential analytic of *Dasein* near enough to a fundamental anthropology to have given rise to so many misunderstandings and mistakes regarding its pretended “*réalité-humaine*” or human reality as it was translated in France? Yet even in the analyses of being-in-the-world as being-with-others, or of care either in its self or as *Fürsorge*, it would be vain, it seems, to search even for the outline of a discourse on desire and sexuality. Hence the consequence could be drawn that sexual difference is not an essential trait, that it does not belong to the existential structure of *Dasein*. Being-there, being *there*, the *there* of being as such, bears no sexual mark. The same then goes for the reading of the sense of being, since, as *Sein und Zeit* clearly states (§ 2), *Dasein* remains in such a reading the exemplary being. Even were it admitted that all reference to sexuality isn’t effaced or remains implied, this would only be to the degree that such a reference presupposes quite general structures (*In-der-Welt-sein als Mit- und Selbst-sein, Räumlichkeit, Rede, Sprache, Geworfenheit, Sorge, Zeitlichkeit, Sein*

zum Tode) among many others. Yet sexuality would never be the guiding thread for a privileged access to these structures.

There the matter seems settled, it might be said. And yet! *Und dennoch!* (Heidegger uses more often than one would fain believe this rhetorical turn: and yet, exclamation mark, next paragraph).

And yet the matter was so little or ill understood that Heidegger had to explicate himself right away. He was to do it in the margins of *Sein und Zeit*, if we may call marginal a course given at the University of Marburg/Lahn in the Summer Semester 1928.¹ There he recalls certain “directive principles” on “*the problem of transcendence and the problem of SEIN UND ZEIT*” (§ 10). The existential analytic of *Dasein* can only occur within the perspective of a fundamental ontology. That’s why it is not a matter of an “anthropology” or an “ethic.” Such an analytic is only “preparatory,” while the “metaphysics of *Dasein*” is not yet “at the center” of the enterprise, clearly suggesting that it is nevertheless being programmed.

It is by the name of “*Dasein*” that I would here introduce the question of sexual difference.

Why name *Dasein* the being which constitutes the theme of this analytic? Why does *Dasein* give its “title” to this thematic? In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger had justified the choice of that “exemplary being” for the reading of the sense of being: “Upon which being should one read off the sense of being . . . ?” In the last instance, the response leads to the “modes of being of a determinate being, *that* being which we the questioners ourselves are.” If the choice of that exemplary being, in its “privilege,” becomes the object of a justification (whatever one think of it and whatever be its axiomatics), Heidegger on the other hand seems to proceed by decree, at least in that passage, when it becomes a matter of naming that exemplary being, of giving it once and for all its terminological title: “That being which we ourselves are and which includes questioning as one of its possibilities of Being [*die Seinsmöglichkeit des Fragens*], we name being-there [we grasp it, arrest it, apprehend it ‘terminologically,’ *fassen wir terminologisch als Dasein*].” That “terminological” choice undoubtedly finds its profound justification in the whole enterprise and in the whole book by unfolding a *there* and a *being-there* which (nearly) no other pre-determination should be able to command. But that does not remove the decisive, brutal, and elliptical appearance from that preliminary proposition, that declaration of name. On the contrary, in the Marburg Course, the title of *Dasein*—its sense as well as its name—

can be found to be more patiently qualified, explained, evaluated. Now, the first trait that Heidegger underlines is its *neutrality*. First directive principle: “For the being which constitutes the theme of this analytic, the title ‘man’ (*Mensch*) has not been chosen, but the neutral title ‘*das Dasein*.’ ”

At first the concept of neutrality seems quite general. It is a matter of reducing or subtracting every anthropological, ethical or metaphysical predetermination by means of that neutralisation, so as to keep nothing but a relation to itself, bare relation, to the Being of its being; that is, a minimal relation to itself as relation to Being, that the being which we are, as questioning, holds with itself and its own proper essence. This relation to self is not a relation to an ego nor to an individual. Thus *Dasein* designates the being that “in a determined sense” is not “indifferent” to its own essence, or to whom its own Being is not indifferent. Neutrality, therefore, is first of all the neutralisation of everything not bearing the naked trait of this relation to itself, of this interest for its own Being (in the widest sense of the word “interest”). This implies an interest or a pre-comprehensive opening up for the sense of Being and for the questions thus ordained. And yet!

And yet the unfolding of this neutrality will be carried out with a leap, without transition and from the following item on (second directive principle) towards a sexual neutrality, and even towards a certain asexuality (*Geschlechtslosigkeit*) of being-there. The leap is surprising. If Heidegger wanted to offer examples of determinations to be left out of the analytic of *Dasein*, especially of anthropological traits to be neutralised, his only quandary would be which to choose. Yet he begins with and keeps himself limited to sexuality, more precisely to sexual difference. It therefore holds a privilege and seems to belong in the first place—to follow the statements in the logic of their enchainning [together]—to that “factual concretion” which the analytic of *Dasein* should begin by neutralising. If the neutrality of the title “*Dasein*” is essential, it is precisely because the interpretation of that being—which *we* are—is to be engaged *before* and *outside* of a concretion of that type. The first example of “concretion” would then be belonging to one or another of the two sexes. Heidegger doesn’t doubt that they are two: “That neutrality means *also* [I underline — J.D.] that *Dasein* is neither of the two sexes [*keines von beiden Geschlechtern ist*].”

Much later, and at any rate thirty years later, the word “*Geschlecht*” will be charged with all its polysemic richness: sex, genre, family, stock, race, lineage, generation. Heidegger will retrace in language, by means of irreplaceable path-openings (that is, inaccessible to a current translation),

through labyrinthine, seductive and disquieting ways, the imprint of roads usually shut. Still shut, here, by the two. Two: that can not count anything but sexes, it seems, what are called sexes.

I've underlined the word "also" ("that neutrality means also . . ."). By its place in the logical and rhetorical chain, this "also" recalls that among the numerous meanings of that neutrality, Heidegger judges it necessary to begin not so much with sexual neutrality—which is why he also says "also"—yet, nevertheless, *immediately* with it *after the only* general meaning that has marked neutrality up to this point in the passage, to wit the *human* character, the title "*Mensch*" for the theme of the analytic. That is the only meaning which up till then he has excluded or neutralised. Hence a kind of precipitation or acceleration which can not be neutral or indifferent: among all the traits of man's humanity found thus neutralised 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. The incitement cannot be due merely to grammar, that's obvious. To pass from *Mensch*, indeed from *Mann*, to *Dasein*, is certainly to pass from the masculine to the neutral, while to think or to say *Dasein* and the *Da* of *Sein* from that transcendent which is *das Sein* ("*Sein ist das transcendens schlechthin*," *Sein und Zeit*, p. 28), is to pass into a certain neutrality. Furthermore, such neutrality has to do with the nongeneric and nonspecific character of Being: "Being as fundamental theme of philosophy is not a genre of a being (*keine Gattung*) . . ." (ibid.). But once again, if sexual difference can't exist without relation to saying, words, or language, still it can't be reduced to a grammar. Heidegger rather than describing it designates it as an existential structure of *Dasein*. But why does he all of a sudden insist with such haste? While in *Sein und Zeit* he had said nothing of it, asexuality (*Geschlechtslosigkeit*) figures here at the forefront of the traits mentioned when recalling *Dasein's* neutrality, or rather the neutrality of the title "*Dasein*." Why?

The first reason may be suspected. The very word *Neutralität* (*neutraler*) induces a reference to binarity. If *Dasein* is neutral, and if it is not man (*Mensch*), the *first* consequence to draw is that it may not be submitted to the binary partition that one most spontaneously thinks of in such a case, to wit "sexual difference." If "being-there" does not mean "man" (*Mensch*), *a fortiori* it designates neither "man" nor "woman." But if the consequence is so near common-sense, why recall it? Above all, why should one go to so much trouble to get rid of a thing so clear and secure in the continuation of the Course? Should one indeed conclude that sexual difference doesn't depend so simply on whatever the analytic

can and should neutralise, metaphysics, ethics, and especially anthropology, or indeed any other domain of ontic knowing, for example biology or zoology? Should one suspect that sexual difference cannot be reduced to an ethical or anthropological theme?

Heidegger's precautionary insistence leaves one thinking, in any case, that here things are not a matter of course. Once anthropology (fundamental or not) has been neutralised and once it has been shown that it can't engage the question of being where it is engaged as such, once it has been observed that *Dasein* is reducible neither to human-being nor to the ego nor to consciousness and the unconscious nor to the subject or the individual, nor even to an *animal rationale*, one might conclude that the question of sexual difference doesn't have a chance of measuring up to the question of the sense of being or of the ontological difference, that even its very riddance wouldn't deserve privileged treatment. Yet incontestably it is the contrary that happens. Heidegger has just recalled *Dasein's* neutrality, and there he is right away trying to clarify: neutrality also as to sexual difference. Perhaps he was then responding to more or less explicit, naive or sophisticated, questions on the part of his hearers, readers, students, or colleagues, still held, aware or not, within anthropological space: What about the sexual life of your *Dasein*? they might have still asked. And after having answered the question on that terrain by disqualifying it, in sum after having recalled the asexuality of a being-there which is not an *anthropos*, Heidegger wishes to encounter another question, even perhaps a new objection. That's where the difficulties will grow.

Whether a matter of neutrality or asexuality (*Neutralität, Geschlechtslosigkeit*) the words accentuate strongly a negativity which manifestly runs counter to what Heidegger thereby wishes to mark out. It is not a matter of linguistic or grammatical signs at the surface of a meaning that remains for its part untouched here. By means of such manifestly negative predicates there should become legible what Heidegger doesn't hesitate to call a "positivity" (*Positivität*), a richness, and, in a heavily charged code, even a power (*Mächtigkeit*). Such precision suggests that the a-sexual neutrality does not desexualize, on the contrary; its *ontological* negativity is not unfolded with respect to *sexuality itself* (which it would instead liberate), but on its differential marks, or more strictly on *sexual duality*. There would be no *Geschlechtslosigkeit* except with respect to "two"; asexuality could be determined as such only to the degree that sexuality would mean immediately binarity or sexual division. "But such asexuality is not the indifference of an empty nothing (*die Indifferenz des leeren Nichtigen*), the feeble negativity of an

indifferent ontic nothing. In its neutrality, *Dasein* is not just anyone no matter who, but the originary positivity (*ursprüngliche Positivität*) and power of essence [*être*] (*Mächtigkeit des Wesens*)."

If *Dasein* as such belongs to neither of the two sexes, that doesn't mean that its being is deprived of sex. On the contrary, here one must think of a pre-differential, rather a pre-dual, sexuality—which doesn't necessarily mean unitary, homogeneous, or undifferentiated, as we shall later verify. Then, from that sexuality, more originary than the dyad, one may try to think to the bottom a "positivity" and a "power" that Heidegger is careful not to call sexual, fearing undoubtedly to reintroduce the binary logic that anthropology and metaphysics always assign to the concept of sexuality. Here indeed it is a matter of the positive and powerful source of every possible "sexuality." The *Geschlechtlosigkeit* would not be more negative than *aletheia*. One might recall what Heidegger said regarding the *Würdigung des "Positiven" im privaten Wesen der Aletheia* (in *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*).

From hence, the Course sketches a quite singular movement. It is very difficult to isolate in it the theme of sexual difference. I am tempted to interpret this as follows: by a kind of strange and quite necessary displacement, it is sexual division itself which leads to negativity, so neutralisation is *at once* the effect of this negativity and the effacement to which thought must subject it to allow an original positivity to become manifest. 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 negatation. To radicalize or formalize too quickly the sense of this movement before retracing it more patiently, we could propose the following schema: it is sexual difference itself as binarity, it is the discriminative belonging to one or another sex, that destines or determines to a negativity that must then be explained. Going a bit further, sexual difference thus determined (one over two), negativity, and a certain "impotence" might be linked together. When returning to the originality of *Dasein*, of this *Dasein* said to be sexually neutral, "originary positivity" and "power" can be reconsidered. In other words, despite appearances, the asexuality and neutrality that should first of all be subtracted from the sexual binary mark, in the analytic of *Dasein*, are in truth on the same side, on the side of that sexual difference—the binary—to which one might have thought them simply opposed. Does this interpretation sound too violent?

The three following sub-paragraphs or items (§ 3, § 4, § 5), develop the motifs of neutrality, positivity and originary power, the originary itself, without explicit reference to sexual difference. "Power" becomes

that of an origin (*Ursprung, Urquell*), while elsewhere Heidegger will never directly associate the predicate “sexual” to the word “power,” the first remaining all too easily associated with the whole system of sexual difference that may, without much risk of error, be said to be inseparable from every anthropology and every metaphysics. Moreover, the adjective “sexual” (*sexual, sexuell, geschlechtlich*) is never, at least to my knowledge, used, only the nouns *Geschlecht* or *Geschlechtlichkeit*, which is not without importance, these nouns being all the more capable of irradiating sense to other semantic zones. Later we will follow there some other paths of thought.

But without speaking of it directly, these three sub-paragraphs prepare the return to the thematic of *Geschlechtlichkeit*. They first of all efface all the negative signs attached to the word “neutrality.” This word does not have the emptiness of an abstraction, neutrality rather leads back to the “power of the origin” which bears within itself the internal possibility of humanity in its concrete factuality. *Dasein*, in its neutrality, must not be confused with the existent. *Dasein* only exists in its factual concretion, to be sure, but this very existence has its originary source (*Urquell*) and internal possibility in *Dasein* as neutral. The analytic of this origin does not deal with the existent itself. Precisely because it precedes them, such an analytic cannot be confused with a philosophy of existence, with a wisdom (which could be established only within the “structure of metaphysics”), or with a prophesy that would teach such or such a “world view.” It is therefore not at all a “philosophy of life.” Which is to say that a discourse on sexuality which would be of this order (wisdom, knowledge, metaphysics, philosophy of life or of existence) falls short of every requirement of an analytic of *Dasein* in its very neutrality. Has a discourse on sexuality ever been presented not belonging to any of these registers? It must be noticed that sexuality is not named in that last paragraph nor in the one that will treat (we will return to it) a certain “isolation” of *Dasein*. It is named in a paragraph in *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (the same year, 1928) which develops the same argument. The word is found in quotation marks, as if incidentally. The logic of *a fortiori* raises its tone somewhat there. For in the end, if it is true that sexuality must be neutralised “with all the more reason” (“*a plus forte raison*”), as Henri Corbin’s translation says, or *a fortiori, erst recht*, why insist? Where is the risk of misunderstanding? Unless the matter be decidedly not obvious, and there is still a risk of mixing up once more the question of sexual difference with that of Being and the ontological difference? In that context, it is a matter of determining the ipseity of *Dasein*, its *Selbstheit* or being-a-self. *Dasein* exists only for its own sake [*a dessein de soi*] (*umwillen seiner*), if one can put it thus, but that does not mean

either the for-itself of consciousness nor egoism nor solipsism. It is starting from *Selbstheit* that an alternative between “egoism” and “altruism” has a chance of arising and becoming manifest, as well as a difference between “being-I” and “being-you” (*Ichsein/Dusein*). Always presupposed, ipseity is therefore “neutral” with respect to being-me and being-you, “and with all the more reason with regard to ‘sexuality’ ” (*und erst recht etwa gegen die “Geschlechtlichkeit” neutral*). The movement of this *a fortiori* is logically irreproachable on only one condition: It would be necessary that such “sexuality” (in quotation marks) be the assured predicate of whatever is made possible by or from ipseity, here for instance the structures of “me” and “you,” yet as “sexuality” not belong to the structure of ipseity, and ipseity that would not as yet be determined as human being, me or you, conscious or unconscious subject, man or woman. Yet if Heidegger insists and underlines (“with all the more reason”), it is because a suspicion continues to weigh on him: What if “sexuality” already marked the most originary *Selbstheit*? If it were an ontological structure of ipseity? If the *Da* of *Dasein* were already “sexual”? What if sexual difference were already marked in the opening up of the question of the sense of Being and of the ontological difference? And what if, though not self-evident, neutralisation were already a violent operation? “With all the more reason” may hide a more feeble reason. In any case, the quotation marks always signal some kind of citing. The current usage of the word “sexuality” is “mentioned” rather than “used,” one could say in the language of *speech act theory*; it is cited to be compared, warned about if not accused. Above all one must protect the analytic of *Dasein* from the risks of anthropology, psychoanalysis, even of biology. Still there perhaps remains some open door for other words, or another usage and another reading of the word “*Geschlecht*,” if not of the word “sexuality.” Perhaps another “sex,” or rather another “*Geschlecht*,” will come to be inscribed within ipseity, or will come to derange the order of all its derivations, for example that of a more originary *Selbstheit* making possible the emergence of the *ego* and of you. Let us leave this question suspended.

If this neutralisation is implied in every ontological analysis of *Dasein*, that does not mean that “the *Dasein* in man,” as Heidegger often says, need be an “egoistic” singularity or an “individual ontically isolated.” The point of departure within neutrality does not lead back to the isolation or insularity (*Isolierung*) of man, to his factual and existential solitude. And yet the point of departure within neutrality does indeed mean, Heidegger carefully observes, a certain original isolation of man: not, precisely, in the sense of factual existence, “as if the philosophising

being were the center of the world,” but as the “*metaphysical isolation* of man.” It is the analysis of this isolation which then raises again the theme of sexual difference and of the dual partition within *Geschlechtlichkeit*. At the center of this new analysis, the very subtle differentiation of a certain lexicon already signals translation problems which will only become aggravated for us. It will remain ever impossible to consider them as either accidental or secondary. At a certain moment we ourselves will be able to notice that the thought of *Geschlecht* and that of translation are essentially the same. Even here the lexical hive brings together (or swarms scattering) the series “dissociation,” “distraction,” “dissemination,” “division,” “dispersion.” The *dis-* is supposed to translate, though only by means of transfers and displacements, the *zer-* of *Zerstreuung*, *Zerstreuungheit*, *Zerstörung*, *Zersplitterung*, *Zerspaltung*. But an interior and supplementary frontier still partitions the lexicon: *dis-* and *zer-* often have a negative sense, yet sometimes also a neutral or non-negative sense (I would hesitate here to say positive or affirmative).

Let us attempt to read, translate and interpret more literally. *Dasein* in general hides, shelters in itself the internal possibility of a factual dispersion or dissemination (*faktische Zerstreuung*) in its own body (*Leiblichkeit*) and “thereby in sexuality” (*und damit in die Geschlechtlichkeit*). Every proper body of one’s own [*corps propre*] is sexed, and there is no *Dasein* without its own body. But the chaining together proposed by Heidegger seems quite clear: the dispersing multiplicity is not primarily due to the sexuality of one’s own body; it is its own body itself, the flesh, the *Leiblichkeit*, that draws *Dasein* originally into the dispersion and *in due course* [*par suite*] into sexual difference. This “in due course” (*damit*) insists through a few lines’ interval, as if *Dasein* were supposed to have or be a priori (as its “interior possibility”) a body found to be sexual, and affected by sexual division.

Here again, an insistence on Heidegger’s part to observe that dispersion like neutrality (and all the meanings in *dis-* or *zer-*) should not be understood in a negative manner. The “metaphysical” neutrality of isolated man as *Dasein* is not an empty abstraction operating from or in the sense of the ontic, it is not a *neither-nor*, but rather what is properly concrete in the origin, the “not yet” of factual dissemination, of dissociation, of being dis-sociated or of factual dis-society: *faktische Zerstreuungheit* here and not *Zerstreuung*. This being dissociated, unbound, or desocialized (for it goes together with the isolation of man as *Dasein*) is not a fall nor an accident nor a decline [*déchéance*] that has supervened. It is an originary structure affecting *Dasein* with the body, and hence with sexual difference, of multiplicity and lack-of-binding [*déliation*], these two significations remaining distinct though gathered

together in the analyses of dissemination (*Zerstreuung* or *Zerstreuungheit*). Assigned to a body, *Dasein* is separated in its facticity, subjected to dispersion and parcelling out (*zersplittert*), and thereby (*ineins damit*) always disjunct, in disaccord, split up, divided (*zwiespältig*) by sexuality toward a determinate sex (*in eine bestimmte Geschlechtlichkeit*). These words, undoubtedly, have at first a negative resonance: dispersion, parcelling out, division, dissociation, *Zersplitterung*, *Zerspaltung*, quite like *Zerstörung* (demolition, destruction), as Heidegger explains; this resonance is linked with negative concepts from an ontic point of view, immediately drawing forth a meaning of lesser value. "But something else is at issue here." What? Another meaning, marking the fold of a mani-fold multiplication. The characteristic sign (*Kennzeichnung*) by which such a multiplication can be recognized is legible to us in the isolation and factual singularity of *Dasein*. Heidegger distinguishes this multiplication (*Mannigfaltigung*) from a simple multiplicity (*Mannigfaltigkeit*), from diversity. The representation of a grand original being whose simplicity was suddenly dispersed (*zerspaltet*) into various singularities must also be avoided. It is rather a matter of elucidating the internal possibility of that multiplication for which *Dasein's* own body represents an "organising factor." The multiplicity in this case is not a simple formal plurality of determinations or of determinities (*Bestimmtheiten*), it belongs to Being itself. An "originary dissemination" (*ursprüngliche Streuung*) belongs already to the Being of *Dasein* in general, "according to its metaphysically neutral concept." This originary dissemination (*Streuung*) is from a fully determined point of view dispersion (*Zerstreuung*): difficulty of translation which forces me here to distinguish somewhat arbitrarily between dissemination and dispersion, in order to mark out by a convention the subtle trait which distinguishes *Streuung* from *Zerstreuung*. The latter is the determination of the former. It determines a structure of originary possibility, dissemination (*Streuung*), according to all the meanings of *Zerstreuung* (dissemination, dispersion, scattering, diffusion, dissipation, distraction). The word *Streuung* appears but once, it seems, to designate that originary possibility, that disseminality (if this be allowed). Afterwards, it is always *Zerstreuung*, which would add—but it isn't that simple—a mark of determination and negation, had not Heidegger warned us the previous instant of that value of negativity. Yet, even if not totally legitimate, it is hard to avoid a certain contamination by negativity, indeed with ethico-religious associations, that would seek to bind that dispersion to a fall and a corruption of the pure originary possibility (*Streuung*), which appears then to be affected by a supplementary turn. It will indeed be necessary to elucidate also the possibility or fatality of that contamination. We will return to this later.

Some indications of that dispersion (*Zerstreuung*). First of all, *Dasein* never relates to an object, to a sole object. If it does, it is always in the mode of abstraction or abstention from other beings which always co-appear at the same time. And this multiplication does not supervene because there is a plurality of objects; actually it is the converse that takes place. It is the originary disseminal structure, the dispersion of *Dasein*, that makes possible this multiplicity. And the same holds for *Dasein's* relation to itself: it is dispersed, conformably to the "structure of historicity in the widest sense," to the extent that *Dasein* occurs as *Erstreckung*, a word whose translation remains dangerous. The word "extension" could all too easily be associated with *extensio*, which *Sein und Zeit* interprets as the "fundamental ontological determination of the world" according to Descartes (§ 18). Here something else is at issue. *Erstreckung* names a spacing which, "before" the determination of space as *extensio*, comes to extend or stretch out being-there, the *there* of Being, *between* birth and death. Essential dimension of *Dasein*, the *Erstreckung* opens up the *between* that links it at once to its birth and to its death, the movement of suspense by which it *is tended* out and extended of itself *between* birth and death, these two receiving meaning only from that intervallic movement. *Dasein* affects itself, and that auto-affectation belongs to the ontological structure of its historicity: "DIE SPEZIFISCHE BEWEGTHEIT DES erstreckten Sicherstreckens NENNEN WIR DAS Geschehen DES DASEINS" (§ 72). *Sein und Zeit* links together precisely this intervallic tension and dispersion (*Zerstreuung*) (notably in § 75, p. 390). *Between* birth and death, the spacing of the *between* marks at once the distance and the link, but the link according to a kind of distension. This "between-two" as rapport (*Bezug*) drawn into relationship (*trait*) with both birth and death belongs to the very Being of *Dasein*, "before" any biological determination, for instance ("Im Sein des Daseins liegt schon das 'Zwischen' mit Bezug auf Geburt und Tod," p. 374). The link thus entertained, held or drawn between [*entre-tenu, entre-tendu*], over or through the distance between [*entre*] birth and death, is itself entertained *with* dispersion, dissociation, unbinding (*Zerstreuung, Unzusammenhang*, etc. Cf. p. 390 for example). That link, that *between*, *could not take place* without them. Yet to take them as negative forces would be to precipitate the interpretation, for instance render it dialectical.

The *Erstreckung* is thus one of the determinate possibilities of essential dispersion (*Zerstreuung*). That "between" would be impossible without dispersion yet constitutes only one of its structural dependents, to wit temporality and historicity. Another dependent, another possibility—connected and essential—of originary dispersion: the originary spatiality of *Dasein*, its *Räumlichkeit*. The spatial or spacing dispersion is

manifested in language for instance. Every language is first of all determined by spatial significations (*Raumbedeutungen*).⁽²⁾ The phenomenon of so-called spatialising metaphors is not at all accidental, nor within the reach of the rhetorical concept of “metaphor.” It is not some exterior fatality. Its essential irreducibility can’t be elucidated outside of this existential analytic of *Dasein*, of dispersion, historicity or spatiality. The consequences therefore must be drawn, in particular for the very language of the existential analytic: all the words Heidegger uses necessarily refer back to these *Raumbedeutungen*, beginning with the word *Zerstreuung* (dissemination, dispersion, distraction) which names the very origin of spacing at the moment when as language it submits to its law.

The “transcendental dispersion” (as Heidegger still names it) thus belongs to the essence of *Dasein* in its neutrality. “Metaphysical” essence, we are more precisely told in a Course presented above all at that time as a metaphysical ontology of *Dasein*, whose analytic constitutes only a phase, undoubtedly preliminary. This must be taken into account in order to situate what is here said about sexual difference in particular. Transcendental dispersion is the possibility of every dissociation and parcelling out (*Zersplitterung*, *Zerspaltung*) into factual existence. It is itself “founded” on that originary character of *Dasein* that Heidegger then called *Geworfenheit*. One should be patient with that word, subtracting it from so many usages, current interpretations or translations (for instance dereliction, being-thrown). This should be done foreseeing what the interpretation of sexual difference—which right away follows—retains in itself of that *Geworfenheit* and, “founded” on it, of transcendental dispersion. [There is] no dissemination that fails to assume such a “throw” [*jetée*], the *Da* of *Dasein* as thrown [*jetée*]. Thrown “before” all the modes of throwing [*jetée*] that will later determine it, project, subject, object, abject, trajectory, dejection; throw that *Dasein* can not make its own in a project, in the sense of *throwing itself* as a subject master of the throw. *Dasein* is *geworfen*: that means that before any project on its part it is thrown, but this being-thrown is not yet *submitted* to the alternative of activity or passivity, these [concepts] still too much in solidarity with the couple subject-object and hence with their opposition, one could even say with their objection. To interpret being-thrown as passivity could reinscribe it within the derivative problematic of subjecti(vi)ty (active or passive). What does “throw” mean before these syntaxes? And being-thrown even before the image of the fall, be it Platonic or Christian? There is a being-thrown of *Dasein* “before” there even appears—in other words, “before” there occurs for it there—any thought of throwing amounting to an operation, activity, or

an initiative. And that being-thrown of *Dasein* is not a throw *in* space, in what is already a spatial element. The originary spatiality of *Dasein* is drawn toward [or has to do with, *tient à*] the throw.

It is at this point that the theme of sexual difference may reappear. The disseminal throw of being-there (understood still in its neutrality) is particularly manifest in the fact that *Dasein* is *Mitsein* with *Dasein*. As always in this context, Heidegger's first gesture is to observe an order of implication: sexual difference, or belonging to a genre, must be elucidated starting from being-with, in other words, from the disseminal throw, and not inversely. Being-with does not arise from some factual connection, "it cannot be explained from some presumably originary generic being," by a being whose own body would be partitioned according to a sexual difference (*geschlechtlich gespaltenen leiblichen Wesen*). On the contrary, a certain generic drive of gathering together (*gattungshafte Zusammenstreben*), the union of genres (their unification, rapprochement, *Einigung*), has as "metaphysical presupposition" the dissemination of *Dasein* as such, and thereby *Mitsein*. The *Mit* of *Mitsein* is an existential, not a categorial, and the same holds for the adverbs of place (*Sein und Zeit*, § 26). What Heidegger calls here the fundamental metaphysical character of *Dasein* is not to be derived from any generic organisation or from a community of living beings as such.

How does this question of *order* matter to this "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. As soon as it is not placed upon a common *doxa* or a bio-anthropological science, the one and other sustained by some metaphysical pre-interpretation, sexual difference remains to be thought. But the price of that prudence? Is it not to remove sexuality from every originary structure? Deduce it? Or in any case derive it, confirming all the most traditional philosophemes, repeating them with the force of a new rigour? And that derivation, does it not begin by a neutralisation whose negativity was laboriously denied? And once the neutralisation is effected, does one still arrive at an ontological or "transcendental" dispersion, at that *Zerstreuung* whose negative value was so difficult to efface?

In this form these questions remain, undoubtedly, summary. But they couldn't be elaborated simply in an exchange with the passage in the Course of Marburg which names sexuality. Whether it be a matter of neutralisation, negativity, dispersion, or distraction (*Zerstreuung*), indispensable motifs here, following Heidegger, for posing the question of sexuality, it is necessary to *return* to *Sein und Zeit*. Although

sexuality is not there named, its motifs are treated in a more complex fashion, more differentiated, which does not mean, on the contrary, in an easier or more facile manner.

We must remain content here with several preliminary indications. Resembling in the Course a methodical procedure, neutralisation is not without link to what in *Sein und Zeit* is called the “privative interpretation” (§ 11). One could even speak of method, since Heidegger appeals to an ontology to be accomplished by or on the “way” of a privative interpretation. That way allows the “a priori’s” to be extracted, while a note on the same page, crediting Husserl, says that it is well known that “a priorism is the method of every scientific philosophy which understands itself.” This precisely in the context of psychology and biology. As sciences they are founded on an ontology of being-there. The mode of being of life is accessible, essentially, only through being-there. It is the ontology of life that requires a “privative interpretation”: “life” being neither a pure *Vorhandensein* nor a *Dasein* (Heidegger says this without considering that the issue requires more than a mere affirmation: it seems to be obvious), it is accessible only by a negative operation of subtraction. It may then be asked what is the being of a life which is *nothing but* life, which is neither this nor that, neither *Vorhandensein* nor *Dasein*. Heidegger has never elaborated that ontology of life, but one can imagine all the difficulties it would have run into, since the “neither . . . nor” conditioning it excludes or overflows the most basic structural (categorical or existential) concepts of the whole existential analytic. It is the whole problematic that is here in question, the one that subjects positive knowings to regional ontologies, and these to a fundamental ontology, which itself at that time was preliminarily opened up by the existential analytic of *Dasein*. No chance (once more, one might say, and show) if it is the mode of being of the *living*, the animated (hence also of the psychical) which raises and situates that enormous problem, or in any case gives it its most recognisable name. This matter cannot be engaged here, but in underlining its all too often unnoticed necessity, it should at least be observed that the theme of sexual difference could not be dissociated from it.

Let us for the moment keep to that “way of privation,” the expression picked up by Heidegger in § 12, and this time again to designate the a priori access to the ontological structure of the living. Once that remark is elaborated, Heidegger enlarges upon the question of those negative statements. Why do negative determinations impose themselves so often within this ontological characteristic? Not at all by “chance.” It is because one must detach the originality of the phenomena from what has dissembled, disfigured, displaced or varnished them, from the *Verstellungen*

and *Verdeckungen*, from all those pre-interpretations whose negative effects should in their turn be annulled by the negative statements whose veritable “sense” is truly “positive.” It is a schema that we have recognised before. The negativity of the “characteristic” is therefore not fortuitous any more than the necessity of alterations or dissemblances which it attempts in some manner *methodically* to correct. *Verstellungen* and *Verdeckungen* are necessary movements in the very history of Being and its interpretation. They can not be avoided like contingent faults; one may not reduce inauthenticity (*Uneigentlichkeit*) to a fault or sin into which one should not have fallen.

And yet. If Heidegger uses so easily the word “negative” when it is a matter of qualifying statements or a characteristic, he never does it, it seems to me (or, more prudently, much less often and much less easily), to qualify what, in pre-interpretations of Being, makes still necessary those methodical corrections of a negative or neutralising form. *Uneigentlichkeit*, the *Verstellungen* and the *Verdeckungen* are not in the order of negativity (the false or evil, error or sin). And one can well understand why Heidegger carefully avoids speaking in this case of negativity. He thus avoids religious, ethical, indeed even dialectical schemas, pretending to rise “higher” than they.

It should then be said that no negative signification is ontologically attached to the “neuter” in general, particularly not that transcendental dispersion (*Zerstreuung*) of *Dasein*. Thus, without speaking of negative value or of value in general (Heidegger’s distrust for the value of value is well known), we should take account of the differential and hierarchical accent which regularly in *Sein und Zeit* comes to mark the neutral and dispersion. In certain contexts, dispersion marks the most general structure of *Dasein*. This we have seen in the Course, but it was already the case in *Sein und Zeit*, for example in § 12 (p. 56): “The *being-in-the-world* of *Dasein* is, with its factivity, always already dispersed (*zerstreut*) or even parcelled out (*zersplittert*) into determinate modes of *being-in*.” Furthermore, Heidegger proposes a list of these modes and of their irreducible multiplicity. Yet elsewhere, dispersion and distraction (*Zerstreuung* in both senses) characterise the inauthentic ipseity of *Dasein*, that of *Man-selbst*, of that *One* which has been distinguished from ipseity (*Selbst*) as authentic and proper (*eigentlich*). As “anyone,” *Dasein* is dispersed or distracted (*zerstreut*). The whole of that analysis is well known, we’re only detaching that which concerns dispersion (cf. § 27), a concept one can again find at the center of the analysis of curiosity (*Neugier*, § 36). That, let us recall, is one of the three modes of falling (*Verfallen*) of *Dasein* in its everyday-being. Later we shall have to return to Heidegger’s warnings: falling, alienation (*Entfremdung*),

and even downfall (*Absturz*) are not meant here as the theme of a “moralising critique,” a “philosophy of culture,” a dogmatic religious account of the fall (*Fall*) from an “original condition” (of which we have neither ontic experience nor ontological interpretation) or of a “corruption of human nature.” Much later, we will have to recall these warnings and their problematic character, when within the “situation” of Trakl, Heidegger will interpret the decomposition and the dessentialisation (*Verwesung*), that is to say also a certain corruption, of the figure of man. It will still be a matter, even more explicitly this time, of a thought of “*Geschlecht*” or of *Geschlecht*. I put it in quotations because the issue touches as much on the name as on what it names; and it is here as imprudent to separate them as to translate them. We shall ascertain it, it is there a matter of the inscription of *Geschlecht* and of *Geschlecht* as inscription, stamp, and imprint.

Dispersion is thus marked *twice*, as general structure of *Dasein* and as mode of inauthenticity. One might say the same for the neutral: in the *Course*, while it is a question of *Dasein*'s neutrality, no negative or pejorative index; yet “neutral,” in *Sein und Zeit* may also be used to characterize the “one,” to wit what becomes the “who” within everyday ipseity: then the “who” is the neutral (*Neutrum*), “*the one*” (§ 27).

This brief recourse to *Sein und Zeit* has perhaps allowed us better to understand the sense and necessity of that *order of implications* that Heidegger tends to preserve. Among other things, that order may also render an account of the predicates made use of by all discourse on sexuality. There is no properly sexual predicate; there is none at least that does not refer, for its sense, to the *general* structures of *Dasein*. So that to know what one speaks of, and how, when one names sexuality, one must indeed rely upon the very thing described in the analytic of *Dasein*. Inversely, if this be allowed, that disimplication allows the general sexuality or sexualisation of discourse to be understood: sexual connotations can only mark discourse, to the point of immersing it in them, to the extent that they are homogeneous to what every discourse implies, for example the topology of those “spatial meanings” (*Raumbedeutungen*) which are irreducible, but also all those other traits we have situated in passing. What would a “sexual” discourse or a discourse “on-sexuality” be without evoking farness [*éloignement*], an inside and an outside, dispersion and proximity, a here and a there, birth and death, a between-birth-and-death, a being-with and discourse?

This order of implications opens up thinking to a sexual difference that would not yet be sexual duality, difference as dual. As we have already observed, what the *Course* neutralized was less sexuality itself than the “generic” mark of sexual difference, belonging to one of *two* sexes.

Hence, in leading back to dispersion and multiplication (*Zerstreuung, Mannigfaltigung*), may one not begin to think a sexual difference (without negativity, let us clarify) not sealed by a two? Not two yet or no longer? But the “not yet” or “no longer” would still mean, already, some dialectical appropriation.

The withdrawal [*retrait*] of the dyad leads toward another sexual difference. It may also prepare other questions. For instance, this one: How is difference deposited among two? Or again, if one kept to consigning difference within dual opposition, how can multiplication be stopped in difference? Or in sexual difference?

In the Course, for the above given reasons, *Geschlecht* always names sexuality such as it is typed by *opposition* or by duality. Later (and sooner) matters will be different, and this opposition is called decomposition.

NOTES

(1) *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz, Gesamtausgabe*, Volume 26.

(2) Cf. also *Sein und Zeit*, p. 166.