Deconstruction and Philosophy

The Texts of Jacques Derrida

Edited by John Sallis
I must begin with some precautions. They all come down to asking your pardon and indulgence for what in particular touches on the form and the status of this "lecture," this reading, on all the presuppositions I ask you to take account of. In effect, I presuppose the reading of a brief and modest essay published under the title "Geschlecht: sexual difference, ontological difference." This essay, published and translated more than a year ago, began some work 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." For lack of time I can reconstitute neither the introductory article entitled "Geschlecht" (it treats of the motif of sexual difference in a course almost contemporary with Sein und Zeit), nor all the developments that form, in my seminar on "Philosophical Nationality and Nationalism," the contextual landscape of the reflections I shall present to you today. Nevertheless I shall strive to make the presentation of these few reflections, still preliminary, as intelligible and independent of all these invisible contexts as possible. Another precaution, another call for your pardon and indulgence: for lack of time, I shall present only a part, or rather several fragments, at times a bit discontinuous, of the work I am following this year in the slow rhythm of a seminar engaged in a difficult reading, one that I would like to be as meticulous and careful as possible, of certain Heidegger texts, notably Was heisst Denken? and above all the lecture on Trakl in Unterwegs zur Sprache.

I want to thank John Leavey very warmly for the invaluable and decisive aid he gave me, once more, in the translation and the presentation of this unfinished work.

We are going to speak then of Heidegger.
We are also going to speak of monstrosity.
We are going to speak of the word “Geschlecht.” I am not going to translate it for the moment. Doubtless I shall translate it at no moment. You know that, according to the contexts that come to determine this word, it can be translated by sex, race, species, genus, gender, stock, family, generation or genealogy, community. In the seminar on “Philosophical Nationality and Nationalism,” before studying texts of Marx, Quintil, Michelet, Toqueville, Wittgenstein, Adorno, Hannah Arendt, we had encountered the word Geschlecht in a very sketchy reading of Fichte: “... das die Geistigkeit und Freiheit dieser Geistigkeit glaubt, die eigene Fortbildung dieser Geistigkeit durch Freiheit will, das, wo es auch geboren sei und welcher Sprache es rede, ist uns Geschlechts, es gehört uns an und es wird sich zu uns tun” (seventh of the Discourses to the German Nation [Reden an die Deutsche Nation]).

The French translation neglects to translate the word Geschlecht, no doubt because the translation was done during or just after the war, I think, by S. Jankelevitch, and under conditions that made the word “race” particularly dangerous and moreover not pertinent for translating Fichte. But what does Fichte mean when he develops in this way what he calls then his fundamental principle (Grundsatz), to wit, that of a circle (Kreis) or an alliance (Bund), of an engagement (we had spoken much of this engagement in the seminar’s preceding sessions) that constitutes precisely belonging to “our Geschlecht”? All those who believe in spirituality and the freedom of that spirit, all those who want the eternal and progressive formation of this spirituality through freedom (die ewige Fortbildung: and if Fichte is “nationalistic,” in a sense rather enigmatic so that we can speak of it here very quickly, he is so as progressive, a republican, and a cosmopolitan; one of the themes of the seminar I am currently working on concerns just the paradoxical but regular association of nationalism with a cosmopolitanism and with a humanism), they all are part of our Geschlecht, they all belong to us and have to do business with us, wherever they are born or whatever tongue [language] they speak. So this Geschlecht is not determined by birth, native soil, or race, has nothing to do with the natural or even the linguistic, at least in the usual sense of this term, for we were able to recognize in Fichte a kind of claim of the idiom, of the idiom of the German idiom. Certain citizens, German by birth, remain strangers to this idiom of the idiom; certain non-Germans can attain it since, engaging themselves in this circle or this alliance of spiritual freedom and its infinite progress, they would belong to “our Geschlecht.” The sole analytic and unimpeachable determination of “Geschlecht” in this context is the “we,” the belonging to the “we” who are speaking at this moment, at the moment when Fichte addresses himself to this supposed but still...
from its first phonemes, arises from the common and uninterrupted life of a people whose intuitions that language continues to espouse, the invasion of a foreign people changes nothing; the intruders can rise only up to this primordial language, unless one day they can assimilate the intuitions of the Stammvolk, of the people-stock for whom these intuitions are inseparable from the language: "... und so bilden nicht sie die Sprache, sondern die Sprache bildet sie,"44 they do not form the language, the language forms them. Conversely, when a people adopts another language [langue] developed in the designation of suprasensible things, without however totally handing itself over to the influence of this foreign language, the sensible language [langage] is not altered by this event. In all peoples, Fichte notes, children learn that part of the language turned toward sensible things as if the signs for those things were arbitrary (willkürlich). The children must reconstitute the past development of the national language. But in this sensible sphere (in diesem sinnlichen Umkreise), each sign (Zeichen) can become altogether clear thanks to vision or the immediate contact with the designated or signified thing (Bezeichneten). Here I stress the sign (Zeichen), for in a moment we shall come to the sign as monstrosity. In this passage Fichte uses the word Geschlecht in the narrow sense of generation: "At most, the result of this would be that the first generation (das erste Geschlecht) of a people which thus changed its language would be compelled when adults/men (Männer) to go back to the years of childhood."55

Here Fichte is bent on distinguishing Humanität and Menschlichkeit. For a German these words of Latin origin (Humanität, Popularität, Liberalität) resound as if they were void of sense, even if they appear sublime and make etymology something of interest [rendent curieux d'étymologie]. Besides, it's the same in the Latin or neo-Latin people who know nothing of the etymology and believe these words belong to their maternal tongue (Muttersprache). But say Menschlichkeit to a German, you would be understood without any other historical explanation (ohne weitere historische Erklärung). Besides, it is useless to state that a man is a man and to speak of the Menschlichkeit of a man about whom one knows very well that he is not an ape or a savage beast. A Roman would not have responded in that way, Fichte believes, because if, for the German, Menschheit or Menschlichkeit always remains a sensible concept (ein sinnlicher Begriff), for the Roman humanitas had become the symbol (Sinnbild) of a suprasensible (übersinnlichen) idea. From their origins, the Germans, they too, have joined together concrete intuitions in an intellectual concept of humanity, always opposed to animality; and one would surely be wrong to see in the intuitive relation they preserve with Menschheit a sign of inferiority with respect to the Romans. Nevertheless, the artificial introduction of words of foreign origin, singularly Roman, into the German tongue risks debasing the moral level of their own way of thinking (ihre sittliche Denkart... berauntenstimmen). But there is concerning language [langage], image, and symbol (Sinnbild) an "inradible nature" of the "national imagination (Nationalbildungskraft)."

This schematic recall seemed necessary to me for two reasons. On the one hand, in order to underline the difficulty of translating this sensible, critical, and sensitive [névralgique] word Geschlecht; on the other hand, in order to indicate its irreducible bond to the question of humanity versus animality, and of a humanity whose name, as the bond of the name to the "thing," if one can say that, remains as problematic as that of the language in which the name is written. What does one say when one says Menschheit, Humanitas, Humanität, mankind, etc., or when one says Geschlecht or Menschengesellschaft? Is one saying the same thing? I also recall in passing the criticism Marx addressed in The German Ideology to the socialist Grun whose nationalism appealed, according to Marx's ironic expression, to a "human nationality" better represented by the Germans (socialists) than by the other socialists (French, American, or Belgian).

In the letter addressed in November 1945 to the Academic Rectorate of Albert-Ludwig University, Heidegger explains his own attitude during the Nazi period. He had thought, he said, that he would be able to distinguish between the national and nationalism, that is, between the national and a biologist and racist ideology: "I thought that Hitler, after taking responsibility in 1933 for the whole people, would venture to extricate himself from the Party and its doctrine, and that the whole would meet on the terrain of a renovation and a gathering together with a view to a responsibility for the West. This conviction was an error that I recognized from the events of 30 June 1934. I, of course, had intervened in 1933 to say yes to the national and the social (and not to nationalism) and not to the intellectual and metaphysical grounds on which the biologist of the Party doctrine rested, because the social and the national, as I saw them, were not essentially tied to a biologist and racist ideology."77 The condemnation of biologist and racism, as of the whole ideological discourse of Rosenberg, inspires numerous Heidegger texts, whether it be the Discourse of the Rectorate or the courses on Hölderlin and Nietzsche, whether it be also the question of technology, always put in perspective against the utilization of knowledge for technical and utilitarian ends, against the Nazis' professionalization and their making university knowledge profitable. I shall not reopen today the dossier of Heidegger's "politics." I have done that in other semi-
nars, and we have today a rather large number of texts available for deciphering the classic and henceforth a bit academic dimensions of this problem. But all that I shall now attempt will keep an indirect relation to another, perhaps less visible, dimension of the same drama. Today, I shall begin then by speaking of that monstrosity I announced a few moments ago. This will be another detour through the question of man (Mensch or homo) and of the “we” that gives its enigmatic content to a Geschlecht.

Why “monster”? Not in order to make the thing pathetic, nor because we are always near some monstrous Unheimlichkeit when we are prowling around the nationalist thing and the thing named Geschlecht. What is un monstre? You know the polysemic gamut of this word, the uses one can make of it, for example concerning norms and forms, species and genus/gender: thus concerning Geschlecht. I shall begin by privileging here another course [direction]. It goes in the direction, the sens, of a less known sense, since in French la monstre (a changing of gender, sex, or Geschlecht) has the poetic-musical sense of a diagram that shows monstre in a piece of music the number of verses and the number of syllables assigned to the poet. Monstre is montrer (to show or demonstrate), and une monstre is une monstre (a watch). I am already settled in the untranslatable idiom of my language, for I certainly intend to speak to you about translation. La monstre, then, prescribes the divisions of a line of verse for a melody. Le monstre or la monstre is what shows in order to warn or put on guard. In the past la monstre, in French, was written la monstre.

I chose this melo-poetic example because the monster I am going to speak to you about comes from a well-known poem of Hölderlin, “Mnemosyne,” that Heidegger often contemplates, interrogates, and interprets. In the second of its three versions, the one that Heidegger cites in Was heisst Denken? one reads the famous stanza:

Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutunglos,
Schmerzlos sind wir, und haben fast
Die Sprache in der Fremde verloren. 8

Among the three French translations of this poem, there is the one by the translators of Was heisst Denken?, Aloys Becker and Gérard Granel. Translating Hölderlin in Heidegger, this translation uses the word monstre (for Zeichen), in a style that had first seemed to me a bit mannered and gallicizing, but which on reflection seemed to me in any case to give occasion for thought.

Nous sommes un monstre privé de sens
Nous sommes hors douleur
Et nous avons perdu
Presque la langue à l’étranger. 9

We are a “monster” void of sense
We are outside sorrow
And have nearly lost
Our tongue in foreign lands.

Leaving aside the allusion to the tongue lost in foreign lands, which would lead me back too quickly to the seminar on nationality, I want to stress first the “we, ‘monster.’” We are a monster, and singular, a sign that shows and warns, but all the more singular since, showing, signifying, designating, this sign is void of sense (deutunglos). It says itself void of sense, simply and doubly monster, this “we”: we are sign—showing, informing, warning, pointing as sign toward, but in truth toward nothing, a sign out of the way [à l’écart], in a gapped relation to the sign [en écart par rapport au signe], display [monstre] that deviates from the display or monstrosity, a monster that shows [monstre] nothing. This gap of the sign to itself and to its so-called normal function, isn’t it already a monstrosity of monstrosity [monstrosité], a monstrosity of monstrosity? And that is we, we inasmuch as we have nearly lost our tongue in foreign lands, perhaps in a translation. But this we, the monster, is it man?

The translation of Zeichen by monstre has a triple virtue. It recalls a motif at work ever since Sein und Zeit: the bond between Zeichen and zeigen or Aufzeigung, between the sign and monstrosity. Paragraph 17 (Verweisung und Zeichen) analyzed the Zeigen eines Zeichens, showing of the sign, and lightly touches in passing the question of the fetish. In Unterwegs zur Sprache, Zeichen and Zeugen are linked with Sagen, more precisely with the High German idiom Sagen: “Sagen heisst: zeigen, erscheinen-, sehen- und hören-lassen.” 10 Farther on: “To name the said (die Sage) we employ an old word, well warranted but no longer in use: die Zeige (la monstre)” 11 (word underlined by Heidegger who has moreover just cited Trakl, to whom we shall return in a few minutes). The second virtue of this French translation by “monstre” has value only in the Latin idiom, since the translation stresses this gap concerning the normality of the sign, of 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. I omit here a long development that seems necessary to me on what deeply binds a certain humanism, a certain nationalism, and a certain Europocentric universalism, and I hastily move toward the interpretation of “Mnemosyne” by Heidegger. The “we” of “Ein Zeichen sind wir,” is it indeed a “we men”? Numerous indications would give one the thought that the response of the poem remains rather ambiguous. If “we” were “we men,” this humanity would be determined in a way justly rather monstrous, apart from the norm, and notably from the humanist norm. But Heidegger’s interpretation that prepares and gives access to this Hölderlin citation says something about man, and then too about Geschlecht, about the Geschlecht and the word “Geschlecht” that still awaits us in the text on Trakl, in Unterwegs zur Sprache.

The hand will be the (monstrous) sign [le monstre], the proper of man as (monstrous) sign, in the sense of Zeichen. “The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes—and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hand of the other. The hand keeps. The hand carries. The hand designs and signs, presumably because man is a (monstrous) sign (Die Hand zeichnet, vermutlich weil der Mensch ein Zeichen ist).”

This seminar of 1951–52 is later than the “Letter on Humanism” that withdraws the question of being from the metaphysical or ontotheological horizon of classic humanism: Daein is not the homo of this humanism. So we are not going to suspect Heidegger of simply falling back into that humanism there. On the other hand, the date and the thematic of this passage accord it to that thought of the gift, of giving, and of the es gibt that overflows without reversing the anterior formation of the question of the sense of Being.

(1n order to situate more precisely what one could call here the thought of the hand, but just as well the hand of thought, of a thought of the human Geschlecht, of a thought claiming to be nonmetaphysical, let us remark that this develops itself in one moment of the seminar [Recapitulations and Transitions from the First to the Second Hour] that repeats the question of the teaching of thought, in particular in the university, as the place of sciences and technics. It is in this passage that I cut out, so to speak, the form and the passage of the hand: the hand of Heidegger. The issue of L’Herne in which I published “Geschlecht I” bore on its cover a photograph of Heidegger showing him, a studied and significant choice, holding his pen with both hands above a manuscript. Even if he never used it, Nietzsche was the first thinker of the West to have a typewriter, whose photograph we know. Heidegger himself could write only with the pen, with the hand of a craftsman and not a mechanic, as the text in which we are going to become interested prescribes. Since then I have studied all the published photographs of Heidegger, especially in an album bought at Freiburg when I had given a lecture there on Heidegger in 1979. The play and the theater of hands in that album would merit a whole seminar. If I did not forget that, I would stress the deliberately craftsman-like staging of the hand play, of the monstrous and demonstration that is exhibited there, whether it be a matter of the handling [maitenance] of the pen, of the maneuver of the cane that shows rather than supports, or of the water bucket near the fountain. The demonstration of hands is as gripping in the accomplishment of the discourse. On the cover of the catalog, the only thing that overflows the frame, that of the window but also of the photo, is Heidegger’s hand.)

The hand is monstrosity [monstrosité], the proper of man as the being of monstrousness. This distinguishes him from every other Geschlecht, and above all from the ape.

The hand cannot be spoken about without speaking of technics. Heidegger just recalled that the problem of university teaching resulted from the fact that the sciences belong to the essence of technics: not to technics, but to the essence of technics. Technics remains plunged in a fog for which no one is responsible, neither science, nor the scientists, nor man in general. Simply what gives rise the most to thinking (das Bedenkliche) is that we do not yet think. Who, we? All of us, Heidegger specifies, including him who speaks here and even him the very first (der Sprecher mit einbehalten, es sogar zuerst). To be the first among those who do not yet think—is that to think more or less the “not yet” of what gives rise the most to thinking, to wit, that we do not yet think? The first, here, the one who speaks and shows himself in speaking thus, designating himself in the third person, der Sprecher, is he the first because he already thinks that we do not yet think and already says so? Or indeed is he the first not yet to think, then the last to think already that we do not yet think, which would not nonetheless prevent him from speaking in order to be the first to say this? I leave these questions that would merit long developments on the auto-situation of this speaking that claims to teach while speaking of teaching and claims to think what is learning and first of all learning to think. “That is why,” Heidegger continues, “we are here attempting to learn thinking (Darum versuchen wir hier, das Denken zu lernen).” But what is learning, in French apprendre? The response, untranslatable in its literalness, passes through a very subtle craft work, a work of the hand and of the pen among the words entsprechen, Entsprechung, zusprechen, Zuspruch. Let me, instead of translating, roughly summarize: to learn,
of the dwelling or habitat can become the international corporation named, I think, "Habitat." The hand is in danger. Always: "All handwork (Handwerk), all human dealings (Handeln) are constantly in that danger. The writing of poetry (Das Dichten) is no more exempt from it than is thinking (das Denken)."\(^{16}\) The analogy is double: between Dichten and Denken on the one hand, but also, on the other, between the two, poetry and thought, and the authentic handiwork (Handwerk). To think is a handiwork, says Heidegger explicitly. He says it without any dodge and without even that "perhaps (vielleicht)" that had moderated the analogy of thought with the manufacture of the cabinet that is "perhaps like thought. Here, without analogy and without "perhaps," Heidegger declares: "At any rate, it [thinking, das Denken] is a handiwork (Es ist jedenfalls ein Hand-Werk, a word of the hand, in two words)."\(^{17}\)

This does not mean that one is thinking with one's hands, as is said in English and French that one speaks with one's hands when one's discourse is accompanied with voluminous gestures, or that one thinks with one's feet, avec ses pieds, when one is, as French has it, bête comme ses pieds, too stupid for words. What does Heidegger mean then, and why does he choose here the hand, whereas elsewhere he more readily accords thought to light or to Lichtung, one would say to the eye, or else to hearing and the voice?

Three remarks to prepare a response here.

(1) I have chosen this text in order to introduce a reading of Geschlecht. In this text Heidegger in effect binds thinking, and not only philosophy, to a thought or to a situation of the body (Leib), the body of man and of human being (Menschheit). That will permit us to glimpse a dimension of Geschlecht as sex or sexual difference apropos what is said or not said [tu] about the hand. Thinking is not cerebral or disincarnate; the relation to the essence of being is a certain manner of Dasein as Leib. (I take the liberty to refer to what I said on this subject in the first article on Geschlecht.)

(2) Heidegger privileges the hand when, speaking of the relations between thought and the craft of teaching, he distinguishes between the current profession (an activity, Beschäftigung, oriented by useful service [service utile] and the pursuit of profit, Geschäft), and on the other hand, the authentic Hand-Werk. Now to define the Hand-Werk, which is not a profession, one must think Werk, work, but also Hand and Handeln that cannot be translated by "dealings" or "agir." The hand must be thought. But the hand cannot be thought as a thing, a being, even less an object. The hand thinks before being thought; it is thought, a thought, thinking [la pensée].
(3) My third remark will be more narrowly tied to a classic treatment of Heidegger’s “politics” in the national-socialist context. In all his self-justifications after the war, Heidegger presents his discourse on the essence of technics as a protest, an act of resistance barely disguised against: (a) the professionalization of university studies to which the Nazis and their official ideologues have surrendered themselves. Heidegger recalls this concerning his Rectorted Discourse that in effect is raised against the professionalization that is also a technologization of studies. (b) the submission of the national-socialist philosophy to the dominion and imperatives of technical productivity. The meditation on the authentic Hand-Werk also has the sense of an artisanalist protest against the hand’s effacement or debasement in the industrial automation of modern mechanization. This strategy has, one suspects, equivocal effects: it opens up an archaistic reaction toward the rustic artisan class and denounces business or capital, notions whose associations then are well known. In addition, with the division of labor, what is called “intellectual work” is what implicitly finds itself thus discredited.

Having said this, I want to underscore again the idiomaticity in what Heidegger says to us about the hand: “Mit der Hand hat es eine eigene Bewandtigung.”18 With the hand one is dealing with a thing entirely particular, one’s own, proper, singular. Une chose a part (a thing apart), as the French translation says while running the risk of letting one think of a separate thing, of a separate substance, as Descartes said of the hand that it was a part of the body, to be sure, but was endowed with such independence that it could also be considered as a complete substance apart and almost separable. Heidegger does not say in this sense that the hand is a thing apart. In that the hand has any proper or particular of its own (eigen), it is not a part of the organic body, as the common representation (gewöhnliche Vorstellung) claims and against which Heidegger invites us to think.

The hand’s being (das Wesen der Hand) does not let itself be determined as a bodily organ of gripping (als ein leibliches Greiforgan). It is not an organic part of the body intended [destiné] for grasping, taking hold [prendre], indeed for scratching, let us add even for catching on [prendre], comprehending, conceiving, if one passes from Greif to begriffen and to Begriff. Heidegger could not let the thing say itself, and one can follow here, I have tried to do it elsewhere, the whole problematic of the philosophical “metaphor,” in particular in Hegel, who presents the Begriff as the intellectual or intelligible structure “relying” (aufhebend) the sensible act of grasping, begriffen, of comprehending by taking hold of, by laying one’s hands on, mastering and manipulating. If

there is a thought of the hand or a hand of thought, as Heidegger gives us to think, it is not of the order of conceptual grasping. Rather this thought of the hand belongs to the essence of the gift, of a giving that would give, if this is possible, without taking hold of anything. If the hand is also, no one can deny this, an organ for gripping (Greiforgan), that is not its essence, is not the hand’s essence in the human being. This critique of organicism and biologism also has the political destination I spoke of a moment ago. But does that suffice to justify this critique?

Here in effect occurs a sentence that at bottom seems to me Heidegger’s most significant, symptomatic, and seriously dogmatic. Dogmatic also means metaphysical, coming under one of those “common representations” that risk compromising the whole force and necessity of the discourse right here. This sentence in sum comes down to distinguishing the human Geschlecht, our Geschlecht, and the animal Geschlecht, called “animal.” I think, and I have often thought I must underscore this, that the manner, lateral or central, in which a thinker or scientist spoke of the said “animalness” constituted a decisive symptom concerning the essential axiomatic of the given discourse. No more than anybody else, classic or modern, does Heidegger seem to me here to escape this rule when he writes: “Apes, for example [my emphasis, J.D.], have organs that can grasp, but they have no hand (Greiforgane bestezt s. B. der Affe, aber er hat keine Hand).”19

Dogmatic in its form, this traditional statement presupposes an empiric or positive knowledge whose titles, proofs, and signs are never shown [montres]. Like most of those who, as philosophers or persons of good sense, speak of animality, Heidegger takes no account of a certain “zoological knowledge” that accumulates, is differentiated, and becomes more refined concerning what is brought together under this so general and confused word animality. He does not criticize it and does not even examine the sorts of presuppositions, metaphysical or otherwise, it can harbor. This nonknowing raised to a tranquil knowing, then exhibited as essential proposition about the essence of an ape’s prehensile organs, an ape that would have no hand, this is not only, in its form, a kind of empirico-dogmatic ἐστιν λεγόμενον misled or misleading in the middle of a discourse keeping itself to the height of the most demanding thought, beyond philosophy and science. In its very content, this proposition marks the text’s essential scene, marks it with a humanism that wanted certainly to be nonmetaphysical—Heidegger underscores this in the following paragraph—but with a humanism that, between a human Geschlecht one wants to withdraw from the biologicist determination (for the reasons I just stated) and an animality one encloses in its organico-
biologic programs, inscribes not some differences but an absolute oppositional limit. Elsewhere I have tried to show that, as every opposition does, this absolute oppositional limit effaces the differences and leads back, following the most resistant metaphysico-dialectic tradition, to the homogeneous. What Heidegger says of the ape without hand—and then, as we are going to see, without thinking, language, gift—is not only dogmatic in its form because Heidegger knows nothing about this and wants to know nothing, has no doubt studied neither the zoologists (even were it to criticize them) nor the apes in the Black Forest. It is serious because what he says traces a system of limits within which everything he says of man’s hand takes on sense and value. Since such a delimitation is problematic, the name of man, his Geschlecht, becomes problematic itself. For it names what has the hand, and so thinking, speech or language, and openness to the gift.

Man’s hand then will be a thing apart not as separable organ but because it is different, dissimilar (verschieden) from all prehensile organs (paws, claws, talons); man’s hand is far from these in an infinite way (unendlich) through the abyss of its being (durch einen Abgrund des Wesens). This abyss is speech and thought. “Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have the hand and can be handy (in der Handhabung) in achieving works of handicraft (Nur ein Wesen, das spricht, d. h. denkt, kann die Hand haben und in der Handhabung Werke der Hand vollbringen).” Man’s hand is thought ever since thought, but thought is thought ever since speaking or language. That is the order Heidegger opposes to metaphysics: “Only when man speaks, does he think—not the other way around, as metaphysics still believes (Doch nur insofern der Mensch spricht, denkt er; nicht umgekehrt, wie die Metaphysik es noch meint).”

The essential moment of this meditation opens onto what I shall call the hand’s double vocation. I use the word vocation to recall that, in its destination (Bestimmung), the hand holds on to speaking. This vocation is double, but gathered together or crossed in the same hand: to show (monstr) or point out (zeigen, Zeichen) and to give or give itself, in a word the monstruity (monstruosité) of the gift or of what gives itself.

But the work of the hand (das Werk der Hand) is richer than we commonly imagine [meinen: we believe, have the opinion]. The hand does not only grasp and catch (greift und fängt nicht nur), or push and pull. The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes [reicht und empfängt: the German consonances must be heard: greift, fängt/reicht, empfangt]—and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hand of the other. The hand holds (hält). The hand carries (trägt).

This passage from the transitive gift, if such can be said, to the gift of what gives itself, which gives itself as being-able-to-give, which gives the gift, this passage from the hand that gives something to the hand that gives itself is evidently decisive. We find again a passage of the same type or the same structure in the following sentence: not only does man’s hand point out and show, but man is himself a sign, a monstrous sign [ein monstre], what begins the citation and the interpretation of “Mnemosyne,” on the following page.

The hand designs and signs (zeichnet), presumably because man is a (monstrous) sign (ein Zeichen ist). Two hands fold into one (falten sich: also, join together), a gesture meant to carry man into the great simplicity (Einfalt; I am not sure of comprehending this sentence that plays on sich falten and Einfalt; whether it be a matter of prayer or of more common gestures, what matters above all is that the hands can touch each other as such, in auto-affection, even at the touch of the other’s hand in the gift of the hand; this implies that the hands can also show themselves). The hand is all this, and this is the true hand work (das eigentliche Hand-Werk). Everything is rooted here that is commonly known as handicraft (Handwerk), and commonly we go no further. But the hand’s gestures (Gehärtungen: a word worked over very much by Heidegger in other texts too) run everywhere through language [or through the tongue], in their most perfect purity precisely when man speaks by being silent. And only when man speaks, does he think—not the other way around, as metaphysics still believes. Every motion of the hand in every one of its works carries itself (sich trägt) through the element of thinking, every bearing of the hand bears itself (gehärtet sich) in that element. All the work of the hand is rooted in thinking. Therefore, thinking (das Denken) itself is man’s simplest, and for that reason hardest, Hand-Werk, if it would be properly accomplished (eigens).

The nerve of the argument seems to me reducible to the assured opposition of giving and taking: man’s hand gives and gives itself, gives and is given, like thought or like what gives itself to be thought and what we do not yet think, whereas the organ of the ape or of man as a simple animal, indeed as an animal rationale, can only take hold of, grasp, lay hands on the thing. The organ can only take hold of and manipulate the thing insofar as, in any case, it does not have to deal with the thing as such, does not let the thing be what it is in its essence. The organ has no access to the essence of the being (etant) as such (see Gesamtausgabe 29/30, p. 290). For lack of time I must refer to a seminar already of long standing in which we had been able to problematize this opposition between
giving and taking, or two ways of *taking*, human and animal; only the human would be granted the possibility of giving. Nothing is less assured than the distinction between *giving* and *taking*, at once in the Indo-European languages we speak (here I am referring to a famous text of Benveniste, "Gift and Exchange in the Indo-European Vocabulary," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. M. E. Meek [Coral Gables: Univ. of Miami Press, 1971]) and in the experience of an economy—symbolic or imaginary, conscious or unconscious, all these values remaining precisely to be reelaborated from the precariousness of that opposition of the gift and of the grip, of the gift that presents and the gift that grips or holds or takes back, of the gift that does good and of the gift that does bad, of the present [*zadeau*] and of the poison (*gift*/*Gif* or *φαμασθων*, etc.).

For lack of time I shall not analyze any more the immense role the hand or the word *Hand* more or less directly plays in the whole Heideggerian conceptuality since *Sein und Zeit*, notably in the determination of presence according to the mode of *Vorhandenheit* or *Zuhandenheit*. The first is translated more or less well in French by "étant subsistant" and better in English by "presence-at-hand"; the second by "être disponible," as "being available" like a tool or implement, and better, since the English can keep the hand, by "ready-to-hand," "readiness-to-hand." *Dasein* is neither *vorhanden* nor *zuhanden*. Its mode of presence is otherwise, but it must indeed have the hand in order to relate itself to the other modes of presence.

The question posed by *Sein und Zeit* (§ 15) gathers together the greatest force of its economy in the German idiom and in that idiom in the Heideggerian idiom: is or is not *Vorhandenheit* founded (fundiert) on *Zuhandenheit*? Literally: what is the relation to the hand that founds the other in the relation of *Dasein* to the Being of beings that it is not (*Vorhandensein* and *Zuhandensein*)? What hand founds the other? The hand that is related to the thing as moveable tool or the hand as relation to the thing as subsisting and independent object? Here I cannot reconstitute either the stake of this question decisive for the whole strategy of *Sein und Zeit*, or Heidegger's original course for deconstructing the classical order of foundation (the end of § 15). But as this whole passage is also an analysis of *Handeln*, of the action or the practice as a gesture of the hand in its relation to sight, and thus a placement in a new perspective of what is called the *πράξεως*/*θεώσια* opposition, let us recall that for Heidegger "practical behavior" is not "atheoretical." I am only going to cite some lines in order to draw out two guiding threads:

The Greeks had an appropriate term for "Things": *πράξεως*—that is to say, that which one has to do with (zu tun) in one's concernful dealings (im bezeugenden Umgang) (*πράξεως*). But ontologically, the specifically "pragmatic" character of the *πράξεως* is just what the Greeks left in obscenity (im Dunkeln) [in sum the Greeks were beginning to leave *Zuhandenheit* of the tool in obscenity to the benefit of *Vorhandenheit* of the subsisting object: one could say that they were inaugurating the whole classical ontology while leaving a hand in the dark, while leaving a hand to bring umbrage to the other, while substituting, in a violent hierarchizing, one hand experience for another]; they thought of these "proximally" as "mere Things (blosse Dinge)." We call those entities which we encounter in concern (im Besorgen) "equipment (Zeug)." In our dealings [in common life, im Umgang, in daily and social surroundings] we come across equipment for writing, sewing, working, transportation, measurement [I cite a very inadequate translation for Schreibzeug, Nähzeug, Werk-, Fahr-, Messzeug]. The kind of Being which equipment (Zeug) possesses must be exhibited. The clue for doing this lies in our first defining [Umgrenzung: delimiting] what makes an item of equipment—namely, its equipmentality (Zeughaftigkeit).

This mode of being will be precisely *Zuhandenheit* (readiness-to-hand). And Heidegger begins, in order to speak about it in the following paragraph, by taking up the examples that he has in a way near at hand: the writing desk (Schreibzeug), pen (Feder), ink (Tinte), paper (Papier), what is happily called le sous-main in French, the blotting pad (Unterlage), the table, lamp, furniture, and, his eyes looking up a bit above his hands writing, the windows, doors, the room.

Here now are the two threads I would like to draw, by hand, from this text, in order to make them guiding threads, clues, or in order to sew and write also a bit in my manner.

(1) The first concerns *πράξεως* and *πράξεως*. I had already written all this when John Sallis, whom I want to thank for this, drew my attention to a much later passage of Heidegger. It punctuates in a gripping way this long maneuver that makes of the *path of thinking* and of the question of the sense of Being a long and continuous meditation *on* the hand. Heidegger always says of thought that it is a path, on the way (Unterwegs); but on the way, on the march, the thinker is unceasingly occupied with a thought of the hand. Long after *Sein und Zeit*, which does not speak *thematically* of the hand while analyzing *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*, but ten years before *Was heisst Denken?* which thematizes these, there is that seminar on Parmenides that, in 1942–43, takes up
again the meditation on πρόγαμα and πράξεως. Although the German word Handlung is not the literal translation of πρόγαμα, it just touches, if one comprehends well, it meets “the primordially essential being of πρόγαμα (das ursprünglich wesentliche Wesen von πρόγαμα),” since these πρόγαμα present themselves, as “Verhandenen” and “Zubehörden,” in the domain of the hand (im Bereich der “Hand”).26 All the motifs of Was beist Denken? are already in place. Only the being that, like man, “has” speech (Wort, μύθος, λόγος) can and must have the hand thanks to which prayer can occur, but also murder, the salute or wave of the hand, and thanks, the oath and the sign (Wink), Handwerk in general. I underscore for reasons that will appear later the allusion to Handschlag (the handshake or what is called “shaking on it” with the hand [dans la main]) that “grounds,” Heidegger says, the alliance, the accord, the engagement (Bund). The hand comes to its essence (was) only in the movement of truth, in the double movement of what hides and causes to go out of its reserve (Verbergung/Entberfung). Moreover, the whole seminar is devoted to the history of truth (αλήθεια, λήθη, λοθέν, λοθείς). When he says already, in this same passage, that the animal has no hand, that a hand can never upsurge out of a paw or claws, but only from speech, Heidegger specifies that man “has” no hands, but that the “hand occupies, in order to have in hand, man’s essence (Der Mensch ‘hat’ nicht Hände, sondern die Hand hat das Wesen des Menschen inne).”27

(2) The second thread leads back to writing. If man’s hand is what it is since speech or the word (das Wort), the most immediate, the most primordial manifestation of this origin will be the hand’s gesture for making the word manifest, to wit, handwriting, manuscript (Handschrift), that shows [montre] and inscribes the word for the gazer. “The word as drawn [or inscribed: eingezeichnet] and such that it shows itself thus to the gaze (und so dem Blick sich zeigende) is the written word, that is, writing (d. h. die Schrift).” But the word as writing is handwriting (Das Wort als die Schrift aber ist die Handschrift).” Instead of handwriting, let us say rather manuscripture, for, don’t forget, the writing of the typewriter against which Heidegger is going to raise an implacable indictment is also a handwriting. In the brief “history” of the art of writing (‘Geschichte der Art des Schreibens”) he sketches in a paragraph, Heidegger sees the fundamental motif of a “destruction of the word” or of speech (Zerstörung des Wortes). Typographic mechanization destroys this unity of the word, this integral identity, this proper integrity of the spoken word that writing manuscripts, at once because it appears closer to the voice or body proper and because it ties together the letters, conserves and gathers together. I stress this motif of gathering together for reasons that will also appear in a moment. The typewriter tends to destroy the word: the typewriter “tears (entrißt) writing from the essential domain of the hand, that is, of the word,” of speech. The “typed” word is only a copy (Abschrift), and Heidegger recalls that first moment of the typewriter when a typed letter offended the rules of etiquette. Today, the manuscripts letter is what seems culpable: it slows down reading and seems outdated. The manuscript letter obstructs what Heidegger considers a veritable degradation of the word by the machine. The machine “degrades (degradiert)” the word or the speech it reduces to a simple means of transport (Verkehrsmittel), to the instrument of commerce and communication. Furthermore, the machine offers the advantage, for those who wish for this degradation, of dissimulating manuscript writing and “character.” “In typewriting, all men resemble one another,” concludes Heidegger.28

The paths according to which the denunciation of the typewriter increased and specified itself would have to be followed closely (I cannot do that here).29 Finally, the typewriter would dissimulate the very essence of the writing gesture and of writing (“Die Schreib-maschine verhüllt das Wesen des Schreibens und der Schrift”). This dissimulation or this veiling is also a movement of withdrawal or subtraction (the words entziehen, Entzug often recur in this passage). And if in this withdrawal [retirat] the typewriter becomes “zeichnen,” without sign, unsignifying, a-signifying,30 that is because it loses the hand; in any case it threatens what in the hand holds speech safe [garde la parole] or holds safe for speech the relation of Being to man and of man to beings. “The hand handles”: Die Hand handelt. The essential co-belonging (Wesenzusammengehörigkeit) of the hand and speech, man’s essential distinction, manifests itself in this, that the hand manifests, precisely, what is hidden (die Hand Verborgenes enthüllt). And the hand does this precisely, in its relation to speaking, by showing [montre] and by writing, by pointing to, signs that show, or rather by giving to these signs or these “monstration forms called writing (“siezeigt und zeigend zeichnet und zeichnend die zeigenden Zeichen zu Gebilden bildet. Diese Gebilde heissen nach dem Vokum “γράφειν die γράμματα”). This implies that, as Heidegger expressly says, writing in its essential source is manuscripture (“Die Schrift ist in ihrer Wesenswirkung die Handschrift”). And I shall add—that Heidegger does not say but which seems to me even more decisive—manuscripture immediately bound to speech, that is, more probably the system of phonetic writing, unless what gathers together Wort, zeigen, and Zeichen does not always necessarily pass through the voice and unless the speech Heidegger speaks of here is essentially distinct from all θντι. The distinction would be strange enough to warrant emphasizing; now Heidegger does not breathe a word of this. He insists, on the
contrary, on the essential and primordial co-belonging of Sein, Wort, lêgein, ëgòs, Lese, Schrift as Hand-schrift. Moreover, this co-belonging that gathers them together stems from the movement of the very gathering together Heidegger always reads, here as elsewhere, in lêgein and lesen (“das ‘Lesen’, d. h. Sammeln . . .”).31 This motif of gathering together (Versammlung) governs the meditation of Geschlecht in the text on Trakl that I shall evoke very briefly in a few minutes. Here, the protest against the typewriter also belongs—this is a matter of course—to an interpretation of technology [technique], to an interpretation of politics starting from technology. Just as Was heisst Denken? will name Marx a few pages after treating of the hand, so this seminar of 1942–43 situates Lenin and “Leninism” (the name Stalin gave to this metaphysics). Heidegger recalls the word of Lenin: “Bolshevism is the power of the Soviet + electrification.”32 When he was writing that, Germany was just entering into war with Russia and with the United States (it is not spared either in this seminar), but there was not yet the electric typewriter.

This apparently positive evaluation of handwriting does not exclude, on the contrary, a devaluation of writing in general. This devaluation takes on sense within this general interpretation of the art of writing as the increasing destruction of the word or of speech. The typewriter is only a modern aggravation of the evil. This evil comes not only through writing but also through literature. Just before the citation of “Mnemosyne,” Was heisst Denken? advances two trenchant affirmations: (1) Socrates is “the purest thinker of the West. This is why he wrote nothing (der reinste Denker des Abendlandes. Deshalb hat er nichts geschrieben).”33 He knew how to hold himself in the wind and in the withdrawing movement of what gives itself to be thought (in den Zugwind dieses Zuges). In another passage, which also treats of this withdrawal (Zug des Entzweihens), Heidegger again distinguishes man from animal, this time from the migratory birds. In the very first pages of Was heisst Denken? before citing “Mnemosyne” for the first time, he writes: “Once we are drawn into the withdrawal (Zug des Entzweihens), we are—but completely otherwise than the migratory birds—drawing toward what draws, attracts us by its withdrawal.”34 The choice of example here (an example omitted in the English translation) stems from the German idiom: “migratory birds” is said Zugvögel in German. We, men, we are in the drawing (trait, Zug) of this withdrawal [retrait], nur ganz anders als die Zugvögel. (2) Second trenchant affirmation: thought declines the moment one begins to write, on coming out of [au sortir de] thought, in escaping [en sortant de] thought in order to take shelter from it, as from the wind. This is the moment when thought entered literature (Das Denken ging in die Literatur ein).35 Sheltered from thought, this entry into writing and literature (in the broad sense of this word) would have decided the destiny of Western science as much qua doctrina of the Middle Ages (teaching, discipline, Lehre) as qua the science of Modern Times. This is naturally a matter of what constructs the dominant concept of discipline, teaching, and the university. So one sees being organized around the hand and speech, with a very strong coherence, all the traits whose incessant recurrence I have elsewhere recalled under the name logocentrism. Whatever the lateral or marginal motifs that simultaneously work (over) logocentrism, I would like to suggest that it dominates a certain and very continuous discourse of Heidegger, and does so from the repetition of the question of Being’s sense, the destruction of classic ontology, the existential analytic redistributing the (existential and categorical) relations among Dasein, Vorhandensein, and Zuhandensein.

The economy imposed on me for this discourse prohibits me from going beyond this first reference marking [repérage] in the Heideggerian interpretation of the hand. In order to bind better, in a more differentiated coherence, what I am saying here to what I said elsewhere about Heidegger, notably in “Onsia and Gramné,” one would have to reread a certain page of “The Anaximander Fragment,” that is, of a text that also names “Mnemosyne” and in the context of which “Onsia and Gramné” can be unfolded. This page recalls that in χρεος, which is generally translated by “necessity,” there speaks ἥ χρεος, the hand: “χρεος means: I handle, I bring my hand to something (ich be-handle etwas).”36 The rest of the paragraph, too difficult to translate since it handles so closely the German idiom (in die Hand geben, einhändig, aushändigen: to hand back to its rightful owner, then to hand over, to give up, überlassen), withdraws the participle χρεος from the values of constraint and obligation (Zwang, Müssen) and at the same time withdraws from these values the word Brauch by which Heidegger proposes to translate το χρεος and which means, in everyday German, “need.” So it is not necessary to think the hand starting from “need.” In French der Brauch is translated by le maintien, which, besides indeed some drawbacks or false senses, exploits the chance of a double allusion: to the hand and to the now, the maintien, that preoccupy the specific concern of this text. If Brauchen translates well, as Heidegger says, the χρεος that permits thinking the present in its presence (das Anwesende in seinem Anwesen), if it names a trace (Spur) that disappears in the history of Being as that history unfolds itself as Western metaphysics, if
der Brauch is indeed “the gathering (Versammlung): ὁ λόγος,”37 then, before all hand technics, all surgery [chirurgie], the hand does not have no hand in this, it is already implicated [la main n’y est pas pour rien].

The hand of the man, of man as such: no doubt you have remarked that Heidegger does not only think the hand as a very singular thing that would rightfully belong only to man, he always thinks the hand in the singular, as if man did not have two hands but, this monster, one single hand. Not one single organ in the middle of the body, just as the Cyclops has one single eye in the middle of the forehead, even though this representation, which leaves something to be desired, also gives rise to thought. No, the hand of man, this signifies that we are no longer dealing with prehensile organs or instrumentalizable members that some hands are. Apes have prehensile organs that resemble hands, the man of the typewriter and of technics in general uses two hands. But the man that speaks and the man that writes with the hand, as one says; isn’t he the monster with a single hand? Thus, when Heidegger writes: “Der Mensch hat keine Hände, sondern die Hand hat das Wesen des Menschen inne”: “Man ‘has’ no hands, but the hand occupies, in order to have in hand, man’s essence,” this supplementary precision does not just concern, as we saw in the first instance, the structure of “having,” a word Heidegger places in quotation marks and whose relation he proposes to invert; it concerns the difference between the plural and the singular: nicht Hände, sondern die Hand. What comes to man through λόγος or speech (das Wort) can be only one single hand. Hands, that is already or still the organic or technical dissipation [dispersion]. So one will not be surprised faced with the absence of all allusion, for example in the Kantian style, to the play of difference between right and left, to the mirror, or to the pair of gloves. This difference cannot be sensible. For my part, having already treated in my manner of the pair of shoes, of the left foot and the right foot in Heidegger, I shall not go any further today on this path. I shall content myself with two remarks. On the one hand, the sole sentence in which Heidegger, to my knowledge, names man’s hands in the plural seems to concern precisely the moment of prayer, or in any case the gesture in which the two hands join together [sich falten] to make themselves only one in simplicity (Einfalt). Gathering together (Versammlung) is always what Heidegger privileges. On the other hand, nothing is ever said of the caress or of desire. Does one make love, does man make love, with the hand or with the hands? And what about sexual differences in this regard? Heidegger’s protest can be imagined: this question is derivative; what you call desire or love presupposes the coming [événement] of the hand since speech, and as soon as I alluded to the hand that gives, gives itself, promises, lets go, gives up, hands over, and engages in the alliance or oath, you have at your disposal everything you need to think what you commonly call making love, caressing, or even desiring. Perhaps, but why not say it?

(This last remark should serve for me as a transition, if I had the time, toward this word, this mark “Geschlecht” that we should now [maintenant] follow in another text. I shall not give this part of my lecture [conférence], which should have been titled “Geschlecht III” and whose (typed) manuscript has been photocopied and distributed to some of you so that discussion of it might be possible. I shall confine myself then, if you would kindly grant me a few minutes more, to a very cursory sketch.)

I just said “the word ‘Geschlecht’”: that is because I am not so sure it has a determinable and unifiable referent. I am not so sure one can speak of Geschlecht beyond the word “Geschlecht”—which then is found necessarily cited, between quotation marks, mentioned rather than used. Next, I leave the word in German. As I have already said, no word, no word for word will suffice to translate this word that gathers in its idiomatic value stock, race, family, species, genus/gender, generation, sex. Then, after saying the word “Geschlecht,” I amended or corrected myself: the “mark ‘Geschlecht,’” I clarified. For the theme of my analysis would come down to a sort of composition or decomposition that affects, precisely, the unity of this word. Perhaps it is no longer a word. Perhaps one must begin by gaining access to it from its disarticulation or its decomposition, in other words, its formations, its information, its deformations or transformations, its translations, the genealogy of its body unified starting from or according to the dividing and the sharing of the words’ morsels. We are going then to concern ourselves with the Geschlecht of Geschlecht, with its genealogy or its generation. But this genealogical composition of “Geschlecht” will be inseparable, in the text of Heidegger I should interrogate now [maintenant], from the decomposition of human Geschlecht, from the decomposition of man.

One year after Was heist Denken? in 1953, Heidegger published “Die Sprache im Gedicht” in Merkur under the title “Georg Trakl,” with a subtitle that so to speak will not change when the text will be taken up again in 1959 in Unterwegs zur Sprache: “Eine Erörterung seines Gedichtes.” All these titles are already practically untranslatable. I will nevertheless have recourse, rather frequently, to the invaluable translation published by Jean Beaufret and Wolfgang Brokmeier in the
Nouvelle Revue Française, today collected in Acheminement vers la parole. At each step the risk of thought remains intimately engaged in the tongue, the idiom, and translation. I salute the daring venture that constituted, in its very discretion, such a translation. Our debt here goes toward a gift that gives much more than what is called a French version. Each time I will have to diverge from it, that will be without the least intention of evaluating, even less of amending, that version. Rather, we shall have to multiply the drafts, harass the German word, and analyze it according to several waves of touches, caresses, or strokes. A translation, in the usual sense of what is published under this name, cannot indulge itself in this. But we, on the contrary, have the duty to do this each time the calculus of word for word, one word for another, that is, the conventional ideal of translation, will be defied. It would be more over legitimate, apparently trivial, but in truth essential to take this text on Trakl for a situation (Erörterung) of what we are calling translation. At the heart of this situation, of this place or site (Ort), Geschlecht, the word or the mark. For the composition and the decomposition of this mark, the labor of Heidegger in his tongue, his hand and artisan writing, his Hand-Werk, these are what the existing translations (the French and, I suppose, the English) tend fatally to efface.

Before any other preliminary, I jump suddenly to the middle of the text, in order to throw light as from a first flash on the site that interests me. On two occasions, in the first and the third parts, Heidegger declares that the word “Geschlecht” has in German, “in our tongue” (it is always a question of “we”), a multitude of significations. But this singular multitude must gather itself together in some manner. In Was heißt Denken? a bit after the passage on the hand, Heidegger protests more than once against one-track thinking or the one-track path. While recalling here that Geschlecht is open to a kind of polysemic, he heads, before and after all, toward a certain unity that gathers this multiplicity. This unity is not an identity, but guards the simplicity of the same, even in the form of the fold. Heidegger wants this primordial simplicity to give rise to thought beyond all etymological derivation, at least according to the strictly philosophical sense of etymology.

(1) The first passage cites the next to last stanza of the poem “Autumn Soul (Herbstseele).” I read it in its French translation that will pose some problems for us later on:

Bientôt fuent poisson et gibier.
Ame bleue, obscur voyage
Départ de l’Autre, de l’Aïmé
Le soir change sens et image [Sinn und Bild].

Heidegger connects: “The travelers who follow the stranger find themselves immediately separated from ‘Loved Ones’ (von Lieben) who are for them ‘Others’ (die für sie ‘Andere’ sind). The ‘Others,’ let us understand the ruined stock of man.”

What is translated in that way is “der Schlag der verwesten Gestalt des Menschen.” “Schlag” means several things in German. In the literal sense, as the dictionary would say, it is blow [coup] with all the associable significations; but in the figurative sense, says the dictionary, it is also race or species, the stock [la souche] (the word chosen by the French translators). Heidegger’s meditation will let itself be guided by this relation between Schlag (at once as blow and as stock) and Geschlecht. Der Schlag der verwesten Gestalt des Menschen implies a Verwesen in the sense of what is “decomposed,” if it is literally understood according to the usual code of bodily decay, but also in another sense of the corruption of being or essence (Wesen) that Heidegger is not going to stop retracing and recalling. Here he opens a paragraph that begins with “Unsere Sprache”: “Our language calls (nennen: names) humanity (Menschenwesen) having received the imprint of a striking (das aus einem Schlag geprägt) and in this striking struck with/as species determination [und in diesen Schlag verschlagene: and in effect verschlagen] means commonly to specify, separate, cast adrift, partition, board-up, distinguish, differentiate, our language calls humanity . . . ‘Geschlecht.’” The word is between quotation marks. I am going up to the end of this paragraph whose context would have to be reconstituted later: “The word [Geschlecht, then] signifies the human species (Menschengeschlecht) in the sense of humanity (Menschheit) as well as the species in the sense of tribes, stocks, and families, all that struck again [dies alles wiederrum geprägt: struck in the sense of what receives the imprint, the rörg, the typical mark] with the generic duality of the sexes (in das Zwiefache der Geschlechter).” Dualité générique des sexes is in French a risky translation. Heidegger, it is true, does speak this time of the sexual difference that comes again, in a second blow (wiederrum geprägt), to strike (also in the sense that one says in French and English to strike coins) the Geschlecht in all the senses just enumerated. My questions will later be concentrated on this second blow. But Heidegger does not say “generic duality.” And as to the word das Zwiefache, the double, the dual, the dual alliance, it carries the whole enigma of the text that plays itself out...
between, on the one hand, *das Zwiebliche*, a certain duplicity, a certain fold of sexual difference or *Geschlecht*, and, on the other hand, *die Zweiachter der Geschlechter*, the duality of sexes as dissonance, war, disagreement, opposition, the duel of violence, and of declared hostilities.

(2) The second passage will be taken from the third part\(^{40}\) in the course of a passage that will have indeed displaced things: "*One* [in quotation marks and italics in the German text: *das Ein*] in the words *One race* [in Wort *Ein Geschlecht*: citation of a verse by Trakl; this time the French translators chose, without apparent or satisfactory justification, to translate *Geschlecht* by "race"] does not mean 'one' in place of 'two' (meint nicht 'eins' statt 'zwei'). One does not signify either the indifference of an insipid uniformity [das Einerlei einer faden Gleichheit: on this point I take the liberty of referring to the first part of my essay entitled "*Geschlecht*"]. The words *One race* (das Wort *Ein Geschlecht*) name here no biologically determinable state of things (nennt hier keinen biologischen Tatbestand), neither 'unisexuality' (weder die 'Eingeschlechtlichkeit') nor the 'undifferentiation of the sexes' (noch die 'Gleichgeschlechtlichkeit'). In the *One* underlined [by Trakl] (In dem betonten *Ein Geschlecht*) does the unity take shelter, the unity that, starting from the matching azure of the spiritual night, reunites (einigt). [The "matching azure" is incomprehensible as long as one has not recognized, as I try to do in the rest of the talk I shall not give, the symphonie or synchronatic reading of the blues or of the blue of the azure sky in Trakl's poems, and as long as one has not recognized that the French translators are translating by "apparailant (matching)") the word *verrasen*ld: gathering, collecting in the same or the "similar (pareil)" of what is not identical.] The word [by implication, the word *Ein* in *Ein Geschlecht*] speaks from out of the song (Das Wort spricht aus dem Lied) in which is sung the land of the decline [or of the setting or of the Occident: *wir das Land des Abends gezogen wird*]. Consequently, the word *Geschlecht* keeps here the multiple fullness of signification (mehrfältige Bedeutung) we have already mentioned. *Geschlecht* first names the historical race, man, humanity (das geschichtliche Geschlecht des Menschen, die Menschheit) in the difference that separates it from the rest of the living [plant and animal] (im Unterschied zum übrigen Lebendigen [Plante und Tier]). The word *Geschlecht* next names as well the generations [*Geschlechter*, in the plural: the word *Geschlecht* names the *Geschlechter!*], tribes, stocks, families of this human species (Stämme, Sippen, Familien dieses Menschen-Geschlechts). The word *Geschlecht* names at the same time, across all these distinctions [überall: throughout; Heidegger does not specify "all these distinctions" that the French translation introduces by analogy with the first definition, but no matter], the gener-

ic splitting in two [die Zwiefalte der Geschlechter: the French translation here does not name the sexuality nonetheless evident, whereas above it translated *Zwiefalte der Geschlechter* by "dualité générique des sexes (generic duality of the sexes)"]."

So Heidegger has just recalled that *Geschlecht* names, surnames, *at the same time* (zugleich) sexual difference, in addition to all the other senses. And he opens the following paragraph with the word *Schlag*, that the French translation renders by *frappe*, striking, which presents a double drawback. On the one hand, the translation lacks the recall of the Trakl verse whose word *Flügelschlag* is accurately translated by "wingbeat." On the other hand, in using two different words, *coup* (beat) and *frappe* (striking), to translate the same word *Schlag*, the translation effaces what authorizes Heidegger to recall the affinity between *Schlag* and *Geschlecht* in the two verses he is in the process of reading. Such affinity supports the whole demonstration. These verses are extracted from a poem entitled "Occidental Song* (Abendländisches Lied). Another is titled "The Occident* (Abendland), and the decline of the Occident, as Occident, is at the center of this meditation.

O der Seele nachtlicher Flügelschlag:

O de l'âme nocturne coup d'aile:

O the soul's nocturnal wingbeat: \(^{41}\)

After these two verses, colon [deux points] and two words plain and simple: "Ein Geschlecht," "Ein": the sole word that, in his whole oeuvre, Heidegger notes, Trakl will have underlined in this way. To underline is *betonen*. The word thus underlined (Ein) then will give the fundamental tone, the fundamental note (Grundton). But it is the *Grundton* of *Gedicht* and not of *Dichtung*, for Heidegger regularly distinguishes *Gedicht*, which always remains unspoken (ungesprochene), silent, from poems (Dichtungen), which themselves say and speak in proceeding from *Gedicht*. *Gedicht* is the silent source of written and spoken poems (Dichtungen) from which one must start in order to situate (erörtern) the site (Ort), the source, to wit, *Gedicht*. That is why Heidegger says of this *Ein Geschlecht* that it shelters the *Grundton* from which the *Gedicht* of this poet silences (schweigt) the secret (Geheimnis). So the paragraph beginning with *Der Schlag* can be warranted not only by a philological decomposition but by what happens in Trakl's verse, his *Dichtung*: "The striking (Der Schlag) whose imprint gathers together such a splitting in two in a simplicity of the one race
with Trakl or in what he calls the authentic Gespräch or the Zwiesprache (two speaking) of one poet with another poet or of a thinker with a poet, or for naming what I am attempting or what interests me in this explication with (Auseinandersetzung) this text here of Heidegger.

My most constant concern is evidently the "mark" "Geschlecht" and what in that mark remarks the mark, the striking, the impression, a certain writing as Schlag, Prängung, and so on. This re-mark seems to me to maintain an essential relation to what, a bit arbitrarily, I place in the first place among the five foci of questioning:

(1) Of man and animality (the text on Trakl also proposes a thinking of the difference between animality and humanity), of the difference between two sexual differences, of difference, of the relation between the 1 and the 2, and of divisibility in general. At the focus of this focus, the mark Geschlecht in its polysemy (species or sex) and in its dissemination.

(2) Another focus of questioning concerns just what Heidegger says of polysemy and that I want to distinguish from dissemination. On several occasions, Heidegger shows himself receptive to what could be called a "good" polysemy, that of poetic language and of the "great poet." This polysemy has to let itself be gathered into a "higher" univocality and into the oneness of a harmony (Einklang). Heidegger thus comes to valorize for once a "Sicherheit" of the poetic rigor, thus stretched by the force of the gathering together. And he opposes this "security (Sicherheit)" both to the errance of mediocre poets that hand themselves over to bad polysemy—the one that does not let itself be gathered into a Gedicht or into a unique site (Ort)—and to the univocality of exactitude (Exaktheit) in techno-science. This motif appears to me at once traditional (properly Aristotelian), dogmatic in its form, and symptomatically contradictory to other Heideggerian motifs. For I never "criticize" Heidegger without recalling that this can be done from other places in his own text. His text could not be homogeneous and is written with two hands, at least.

(3) That question, which I title then polysemy and dissemination, communicates with another focus in which several questions of method cross. What is Heidegger doing? How does he "operate" and according to what ways, ōψοψ, that are not yet or already no more methods? What is Heidegger's step [le pas] on this path; what is his rhythm in this text that explicitly pronounces itself on the essence of ὑπήρξη; and what is also his manner, his Hand-Werk of writing? These questions beyond-or-across-method [contre-méthode] are also questions of the relation this Heidegger text (and the text I am writing in my turn) maintains with

(der sie in die Einfalt des 'Einen Geschlechts' prägt) and thus restores the stocks of the species (die Sippen des Menschengeschlechts) and the species itself in the sweetness of the more serene infancy, that striking strikes (eingeschlagen lässt) the soul with an opening for the path of the 'blue springtime' [this is a citation of Trakl indicated by the quotation marks omitted in the French translation].

Those then are the two passages, still separated from their context, two passages in which Heidegger thematizes at once the polysemy and the focal simplicity of "Geschlecht" in "our tongue." This tongue, which is ours, German, is also the tongue of "our Geschlecht," as Fichte would say, if Geschlecht also means family, generation, stock. Now what is written and played out with the writing of this word, Geschlecht, in our Geschlecht and in our tongue (unsere Sprache) is idiomatic enough in its possibilities to remain almost untranslatable. The affinity between Schlag and Geschlecht takes place and is thinkable only from this "Sprache." Not only from the German idiom I hesitate here to call a "national" idiom, but from the overdetermined idiom of a singular Gedicht and Dichten, here that or those of Trakl, which are moreover then overdetermined by the idiom of a Denken, the idiom that passes through the writing of Heidegger. Yes, I say Dichten and Denken, poetry and thought. You recall that for Heidegger Dichten and Denken are a work of the hand exposed to the same dangers as the handicraft (Hand-Werk) of the cabinetmaker. You also know that Heidegger never places philosophy and science on a level with thought and poetry. These last two, thought and poetry, although radically different, are relatives and parallels, parallels that cut across and breach each other, that cut each other in a place that is also a kind of signature (Zeichnung), the incision of a trait (Riss). Philosophy, science, and technics are, so to speak, excluded from this parallelism.

What is one to think of this text? How is it to be read?

But will it be a matter again of a "lecture," in the French or English sense of the word? I am afraid and with you I hope that it is nothing of the kind. On the one hand, it is too late, and in place of continuing to read the one hundred or so pages I have devoted to this text on Trakl and whose first French version, incomplete and provisional, has been communicated to certain among you, I shall content myself with indicating in a few minutes their principal concern, inasmuch as that can be translated into a series of suspended or suspensive questions. I have grouped them, more or less artificially, around five foci. Now on the other hand, one of these foci concerns the concept of reading [lecture] that does not seem adequate, without being profoundly re-elaborated, either for naming what Heidegger does in his Gespräch.
what is called hermeneutics, interpretation or exegesis, literary criticism, rhetoric or poetics, but also with all the bodies of knowledge [savoir] of the human or social sciences (history, psychoanalysis, sociology, political science, and so on). Two oppositions or distinctions, two couples of concepts support the Heideggerian argumentation—and I am questioning them in my turn. There is, on the one hand, the distinction between Gedicht and Dichtung. Gedicht (an untranslatable word, once more) is, in its place, what gathers together all the Dichtungen (the poems) of a poet. This gathering together is not that of a complete corpus, of the œuvres complètes, but a unique source that is not presented in any part of any poem. This gathering is the site of origin, the place from which and toward which the poems come and go according to a “rhythm.” Not elsewhere, not some other thing, and yet not to be confused with the poems insofar as they say (sagen) something, Gedicht is “unspoken (ungesprochene).” What Heidegger wants to indicate, to announce rather than show, is the unique Site (Ort) of this Gedicht. That is why Heidegger presents his text as an Erörterung, that is to say, according to the reawakened literalness of this word, a situation that localizes the unique site or the proper place of Gedicht from which the poems of Trakl sing. Whence, on the other hand, a second distinction between the Erörterung of Gedicht and an Erläuterung (clarification, elucidation, explication) of poems (Dichtungen) themselves, from which one must indeed start. I pay particular attention then to all the difficulties that result from this double starting point and from what Heidegger calls “Wchselbezug,” the relation of reciprocity or exchange between situation (Erörterung) and elucidation (Erläuterung). Does this Wchselbezug coincide with what is called the hermeneutic circle? And how does Heidegger practice or play, in his manner, this Wchselbezug?

(4) This last formulation, which always aims at Heidegger’s manner or, as one can also say in French and English, with another connotation, his manners, no more lets itself be separated, no more than the hand according to Heidegger, from bringing the tongue into play, its mise en œuvre. Here then from a certain maneuver of writing. This maneuver of writing always resorts in its decisive moments to a resource that is idiomatic, in other words, untranslatable, if one trusts in the common concept of translation. This resource, overdetermined by the idiom of Trakl and by Heidegger’s, is not only the resource of German, but most often of an idiom of the Old High German idiom. In my manner, that is, following the injunctions and the economy of other idioms, I retrace and remark all these recourses by Heidegger to Old

German, each time he begins by saying: in our tongue (in unsere Sprache); such a word signifies originally (bedeutet ursprünglich). Here, in this quick overview, I can only give the list of words, of morsels of words, or of sentences near which I mark a slightly longer stop.

(a) First, naturally, there is the word “Geschlecht” and all its Geschlecht, all its family, its roots, its offshoots, legitimate or not. Heidegger convokes them all and gives to each its role. There is Schlag, einschlagen, verschlagen (to separate, partition), erschlagen (to break, smash, dismantle), auseinanderschlagen (to separate while striking one another), and so on. In place of displaying here again the whole Heideggerian maneuver and the one to which he binds us, I shall cite, as a sign of thanks, a paragraph that David Krell devotes in English to this word in chapter 11 of his book Intimations of Mortality (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), the manuscript of which he was kind enough, after the publication of my first article on Geschlecht, to send me. The chapter is titled “Strokes of Love and Death,” and I have extracted this:

“Strokes of love and death”: Schlag der Liebe, Schlag des Todes. What do the words Schlag, schlagen mean? Hermann Paul’s Deutsches Wörterbuch lists six principal areas of meaning for der Schlag; for the verb schlagen it cites six “proper” senses and ten “distant” meanings. Deriving from the Old High German and Gothic slahan (from which the English word “slay” also derives) and related to the modern German word schlagen, “to slaughter,” schlagen means to strike a blow, to hit or beat. A Schlag may be the stroke of a hand, of midnight, or of the brain; the beating of wings or of a heart. Schlagen may be done with a hammer or a fist. God does it through his angels and his plagues; a nightingale does it with his song. One of the most prevalent senses of schlagen is to mint or stamp a coin. Der Schlag may therefore mean a particular coinage, imprint, or type; a horse dealer might refer to einem guten Schlag Pferde. It is by virtue of this sense that Schlag forms the root of a word that is very important for Trakl, das Geschlecht. Paul lists three principal meanings for Geschlecht (Old High German gislan). First, it translates the Latin word genus, being equivalent to Gattung; das Geschlecht is a group of people who share a common ancestry, especially if they constitute a part of the hereditary nobility. Of course, if the ancestry is traced back far enough we may speak of des menschliche Geschlecht, “humankind.” Second, das Geschlecht may mean one generation of men and women who die to make way for a succeeding generation. Third, there are male and female Geschlechter, and Geschlecht becomes the root of many words for the
things males and females have and do for the sake of the first two meanings: Geschlechtsglied or -teil, the genitals; -trieb, the sex drive; -verkehr, sexual intercourse; and so on.

(b) There is next the noun Ort. When Heidegger recalls, from the first page, that this word “Original ... signifies (Ursprünglich bedeutet)” the point of the spear (die Spitze des Speers), that is before everything (and there is much to say on this “before everything”) to insist on its value of gathering. Everything concurs and converges toward the point (in ihr läuft alles zusammen). The site is always the site of gathering, the gathering, das Versammelnde. This definition of site, besides implying the recourse to an “original signification” in a determined language, governs the whole course of Erörterung, the privilege granted to oneness and to indivisibility in situating Gedicht and what Heidegger calls a “great poet,” great insofar as he is related to that oneness of gathering and resists the forces of dissemination or dislocation. Naturally, I would multiply the questions around this value of gathering.

c) There is next the idiomatic and untranslatable opposition between geistig and geistlich that plays a determinant role. This opposition authorizes withdrawing the Gedicht or the “site” of Trakl both from what is gathered together by Heidegger under the title of the “western metaphysics” and of its Platonic tradition distinguishing between the “sensible” material and the “intelligible” spiritual (αἰθήριον/νοητόν) and from the Christian opposition between the spiritual and the temporal. Heidegger again refers to the “original signification (ursprüngliche Bedeutung)” of the word “Geist (geist): to be lifted up, transported outside of oneself, like a flame (aufgebracht, entsetz, auser sich sein). It is a matter of the ambivalence of the fire or the flame of the spirit, which is once the Good and the Evil.

(d) There is again the word fremd that does not signify the foreign, in the Latin sense of what is outside of, extra, extraneous, but properly (eigentlich), according to the High German, frem: forward toward elsewhere, in the act of making one’s own path . . . to the encounter of what in advance lies in store (“anderswohin vorwärts, unterwegs nach . . . dem Vorausbehaltenen entgegen”). This allows saying that the Stranger does not wander [erre], but has a destination (“es irrt nicht, bar jeder Bestimmung, ratslos umher”), the Stranger is not without destination.

(e) There is furthermore the word Wahnsinn that does not signify, as one thinks, the dream of the insane. Since Wahn is led back to the High German wahn that signifies ohne, sans, without, the “Wahnsinn,” the demented is the one who remains without the sense of Others.

It is of another sense, and Sinnan “bedeutet ursprünglich,” originally signifies, “reisen, streben nach . . ., eine Richtung einschlagen,” to travel, to strive toward, to carve open with a blow a direction. Heidegger invokes the “Indo-European root sent, set” that signifies Weg, path. Here things get worse, since it is the very sense of the word sense that appears untranslatable, tied to an idiom. And then this value of sense is what, governing nonetheless the traditional concept of translation, suddenly finds itself rooted in one single tongue or family or Geschlecht of tongues, outside of which it loses its original sense.

If the “situation (Erörterung)” of Gedicht is thus found to depend in its decisive moments on recourse to the idiom of Geschlecht or to the Geschlecht of the idiom, how is one to think the relation between the unspoken of Gedicht and its belonging, the appropriation of its very silence, to one tongue and to one Geschlecht? This question concerns not only the German Geschlecht and the German tongue, but also those that seem recognized in the Occident, in Occidental man, since this whole “situation” is preoccupied, I shall say in English/French, with concern for the place, the site, the path, and the destination of the Occident. This brings me to the fifth focus. I multiply the foci in order to “de-countryside [dépaysé]” a bit an atmosphere perhaps a bit too much “in one country [paysante]”; I do not say countrified [paysanne], even were it for Trakl . . .

(5) What comes to Geschlecht as its decomposition (Verweisung), its corruption, is a second blow that comes to strike the sexual difference and to transform it into dissension, war, savage opposition. The primordial sexual difference is tender, gentle, peaceful, when that difference is struck down by a “curse” (Fluch, a word of Trakl taken up and interpreted by Heidegger), the duality of the two becomes unleashed, indeed bestial, opposition. This schema, which I reduce here to its most summary expression, Heidegger claims, despite all the appearances and signs of which he is well aware, is neither Platonic nor Christian. This schema would come under neither metaphysical theology nor ecclesial theology. But the primordiality (pre-Platonic, pre-metaphysical, or pre-Christian) to which Heidegger recalls us and in which he situates the proper site of Trakl has no other content and even no other language than that of Platonism and Christianity. This primordiality is simply that starting from which things like metaphysics and Christianity are possible and thinkable. But what constitutes their arch-morning origin and their ultra-Occidental horizon is nothing other than this hollow of a repetition, in the strongest and most unusual sense of this term. And the form or the “logic” of this repetition is not only readable in this text on Trakl, but in everything
that, since Sein und Zeit, analyzes the structures of Dasein, the Verfall, the Ruf, care (Sorge), and regulates this relation of the "most primordial" according to what is less so, notably Christianity. In this text, the argumentation (especially for demonstrating that Trakl is not a Christian poet) takes some particularly laborious and at times very simplistic forms—which I cannot reconstitute in this schema. Just as Heidegger requires a unique and gathering site for Trakl's Gedicht, he must presuppose that there is one single site, unique and univocal, for the metaphysics and the Christianity. But does this gathering take place? Has it a place, a unity of place? That is the question I shall leave suspended thus, just before the chute. In French one sometimes calls the end of a text chute. One also says, in place of chute, the envoi.

Notes

The following abbreviations are used in the references in the notes:

AN  Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Addresses to the German Nation; see note 2.
AN  Martin Heidegger, Achenmenent vers la parole; see note 38.
RN  Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Reden an die Deutsche Nation; see note 2.
US  Martin Heidegger, Unterwegs zur Sprache; see note 10.
WD  Martin Heidegger, Was heisst Denken?; see note 8.
WT  Martin Heidegger, What is Called Thinking?; see note 12.

2. Reden an die Deutsche Nation (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, n.d.), p. 121—hereafter RN; Addresses to the German Nation, ed. George Armstrong Kelly (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 108—hereafter AN. "whoever believes in spirituality and in the freedom of this spirituality, and who wills the eternal development of this spirituality by freedom, wherever he may have been born and whatever language he speaks, is of our blood; he is one of us, and will come over to our side."
3. RN 65; AN 55.
4. RN 63; AN 53.
5. RN 64; AN 54.
6. RN 65–66; AN 55–56.
11. Ibid., p. 253.
13. WD 48ff; WT 12ff.
14. WD 49; WT 14.
English. I am doing so for two reasons. On the one hand, in order not to efface the constraints or the chances of the idiom in which I myself work, teach, read, or write. What you hear right this moment is the translation of a text I first wrote in French. On the other hand, I thought that Heidegger’s text could be still more accessible, could gain some supplementary readability by reaching us thus through a third ear; the explication (Auseinandersetzung) with one tongue extra can refine our translation (Übersetzung) of the text that is called “original.” I just spoke of the ear of the other as a third ear. That was not only to multiply to excess the examples of pairs (feet, hands, ears, eyes, breasts, and so on) and all the problems they should pose to Heidegger. It is also to underscore that one can write on the typewriter, as I have done, with three hands among three tongues. I knew I would have to speak in English the text I was writing in French on another I was reading in German.

40. US 78; AP 80.
41. US 77; AP 79.
42. US 78–79; AP 80.
43. US 196.
44. US 37–38.
45. US 37.
46. US 60.
47. US 41.
48. US 53.
49. US 50.

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