2. Sexual Difference

INTRODUCTION

Dispersing, I become a sexed body. The ‘sexed’ in question here only concerns the body ‘prior’ to its forced classification into a bio-anthropological or ontic determination (male, man, for example). Once again, this ‘prior’ is neither chronological nor logical. A sexed body simply refers to a body that has at least ‘a’ sex. Whether I recognize it (and therefore use it) or not is here as yet to be determined.

Similarly, the ‘I’ referred to here is not yet an entity recognizable as such; it is only a random number of indefinite disseminations surprisingly arriving at multiple points at the same time to say ‘you.’28 No specific unity, whether empirical, subjectal, or nominal, can be identified here. The saying in question is simply a puzzling happenstance that language only manages to recognize with an inadequate and reductive ‘I.’29

29 As Rosi Braidotti rightly says, “The power of synthesis of the ‘I’ is a grammatical necessity, a theoretical fiction that holds together the collection of differing layers, the integrated fragments of the
As this dispersing sexed body, ‘I’ experience something unprecedented: a caress. This caress is not masturbatory yet. The hand hasn’t reached the erection; the mind is still elsewhere. This caress is that taking place between parts of the body: a bicep by the ribcage or an open hand peacefully resting on a breathing stomach, for example.

How am I to understand this event that necessarily involves a sexed body but occurs ‘before’ language determines its gendered performance and sexuality takes hold of its phantasmagorical grip? This will be the topic of this next step in the exploration of this particular masculinity.

Please note: the following text makes a distinction between sexual difference and the difference of sexes. While the latter emphasizes a bio-anthropological opposition (man/woman, for example), the former highlights an indefinite number of sexes all taking place in one body and, specifically here, in this dispersing sexed body. In this way, there will be in this chapter no reference to the classical difference that biological sex and socio-cultural gender always entails, but to an arrangement.


30 Because we are here ‘prior’ to the forced classification of man into a distinctive bio-anthropological or ontic determination, the non-bio-logical noun ‘sex’ or adjective ‘sexed’ can therefore only be understood with split or open words like, for example: im-proper (never quite mine), im-pure (never quite clean), or in-decent (never quite honourable). These words are more or less detached from a biological referent and yet remain at the cusp of intelligibility, that is, necessarily and as this body never tires to remind me, a-logical.

31 I use the term arrangement and not assemblage in order to avoid the kinds of (Deleuzian) assemblages put forward, for example, by Jasbi K. Puar. The reason I prefer arrangement to assemblage is because it allow for ‘what cannot be known, seen or heard’ (to use Puar’s words) to come and disrupt it: i.e. make a mess of the arrangement. The worry I have with Puar’s assemblage is that ‘what cannot be known, seen or heard’ must be incorporated within the assemblage as yet another ‘network’ thus running the risk of creating a new totalizing narrative ultimately called a (Deleuzian) assemblage. With arrangement, my
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known as sexual difference, an arrangement that, as will become clear, only a caress can make sense of. As will be explored, this arrangement is conceived following the work of at least one author: Emmanuel Levinas and one of his most careful readers: Catherine Chalier. The reason for this choice is as follows: When it comes to sexual difference

aim is to think how ‘what cannot be known, seen or heard’ actually de-structures the issue without necessarily appropriating it as part of the structure. Furthermore, to think this should avoid easily going from ‘being’ to ‘becoming(s)’ and thus remaining stuck within a Deleuzian paradigm that, ultimately, only displaces the problem without taking the law of absolute heteronomy seriously enough. This law—and here I can only go against Puar’s argument—does not bring forth waves of the future breaking into the present. To say that it does can only effectively reassert and reinvigorate the singularity and dominance of the ‘I’ that Puar so forcefully rejects because, as always, this very ‘I’ remains secretly conceived as being stronger than time and thus able ‘to see’—with Puar in tow—how the “future break into the present.” For Puar’s thought-provoking essay, see: Jasbir K. Puar, “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” Social Text 23, nos. 3–4 (Autumn-Winter 2005): 121–39.

As it must be self-evident by now (and as it will become clear later on in this chapter with terms such as arrangement, impropriety, perpendicular dislocation, and irretrievable remainder), the event sought here under the heading ‘Sexual Difference’ cannot be understood as an a-priori transcendental abstraction detached from concrete bio-ontical sexual realities. Although it occurs ‘prior to’ the difference of sexes, the event of sexual difference cannot be seen to found the difference of sexes. Conversely, although the difference of sexes happens ‘after’ sexual difference, it cannot be seen to result from it. In a situation where there is no formal logic, there can be no hierarchy or order of priority (temporal or otherwise). Sexual difference is not an empty floating signifier and the difference of sexes is not its concrete content. The two necessarily contaminate each other without altogether forming a couple as such. No understanding of the body can take place outside of all abstraction and vice versa: no abstraction can take place detached from its concrete (or bodily) origin. For a fruitful discussion on this topic see the conversation that took place between Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Zizek, in Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left (London: Verso, 2000), especially Butler, 144–8, Laclau, 190–2, and Zizek, 256–8.
(and not the difference of sexes), Derrida leaves us with an unruly but unsatisfactory “choreography of sexual voices.” It is unsatisfactory, because it never deals with the dynamics of the choreography. Who hears what and how in this dance? Re-reading Levinas helps us to see that this choreography is in fact structured as—and this is precisely what will remain to be shown in this chapter—a perpendicular dislocation that knows no rest.

Please also note that the following chapter does not pretend to put forward yet another general theory of sexual difference for the human race. As should be clear by now, the sexual difference in question here is only that of this sexed body lying here on the ground. Any generalisation taken out of the following descriptions can only betray its specificity and, as is well known, can only be disloyal to its own fabulation.

33 “I have felt the necessity for a chorus, for a choreographic text with polysexual signatures…. The relationship would not be a-sexual, far from it, but would be sexual otherwise: beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition feminine/masculine, beyond bi-sexuality as well, beyond ‘homosexuality’ and ‘heterosexuality’ which come to the same thing. As I dream of saving the chance that this question offers I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices”: Derrida “Choreographies,” 76.

34 And for this reason, I will therefore shamelessly refrain from thinking this bio-graphy in relation to the animal realm. The reason for such shamelessness (cette pudeur to recall Derrida’s cat) is to prevent any attempt to think ‘beyond’ oppositional binaries (man-woman, human-animal) because, as is well known, such attempt can only lead us either back to the same (man, for example) or into an unwieldy infinite plurality. Oppositional binaries need to be thought otherwise and this is what is attempted here. For how sexual difference relates to animal difference see: Jacques Derrida, The Animal That Therefore I Am [More to Follow], trans. D. Wills, Critical Inquiry 28, no. 2 (2002): 369–418. For a commentary on such a relation, see Kelly Oliver, “Sexual Difference, Animal Difference: Derrida and Difference Worthy of its Name,” Hypatia 24, no. 2 (Spring, 2009): 290–312.

35 As Jacques Derrida says: “If I were to say ‘sexual difference is a fable,’ the copula ‘is’ would permit the proposition to be turned around: a fable, thus every fable, is sexual difference, which can be understood in many ways. We can say that every fabulous narrative recounts
As is well known, sexual difference, like the neuter, must be thought outside of any form of opposition. When sexual difference is determined by opposition in the dialectical sense, there is no choice, but to misinterpret sexual difference, confuse it with the difference of sexes, and set off once again the famous war between the sexes thus inevitably precipitating the end with a victory going to the male sex and men in general.  

In this way, the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are not used here in a way that is reducible to a member of the male or female sex. In other words, the feminine does not equate to woman and the masculine does not equate to man. However much this will infuriate those who cannot open the word bio-logy, the terms masculine and feminine will be used here as logical improprieties within the positive neuter of this body. An impropriety is simply what never accords with itself: being masculine is never my own and yet I recognize my masculinity. 

When I was a child, I had long hippy hair and people often thought that I was a girl. Even when I was an adolescent, when I more consciously opted for long hair, I was also deemed to be more feminine than masculine. I lacked virile qualities. This didn’t annoy me; it simply puzzled me. Even then, I thought that whoever or whatever I was, I could only be an odd juxtaposition of masculine and feminine.

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Now that I have grown up, I realise that the masculine ‘in me’ is not due to the possession of a penis, but that it is a way of ap-pro priating my ‘self’ and ultimately has nothing to do with sexuality or gender. The feminine ‘in me’ de-propriates such foolish attempt at property with as much force or strength as that expressed by my masculinity. The play between the two occurs not as a fight between opposite forces, but as the necessity of being both, that is, improperly complex.

In this way, and as will become clear, a) the masculine and the feminine are not single and autonomous regions or aspects of the body, b) they do not come in sequence, c) they do not obey an order of priority, and d) they are not equal or comparable entities. As previously stated, the masculine and the feminine are here understood as an arrangement of improprieties that this specific body could never ap-propriate/de-propriate fully or with any clarity.38

Sexual difference is therefore not to be thought of as a straightforward opposition or hierarchy between masculine and feminine or between the active mastery of a subject and its passive submission, but rather as the necessity of having to be a ‘sexed’ body with all the various improprieties (masculine, feminine, etc.) that structure it and dispute for attention. In other words, sexual difference is the necessity of being a ‘sexed’ body in a situation where the word ‘sex’ always already remains to be invented.

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37 I transform here Heidegger’s noun ‘de-propriation’ and make it into a verb: ‘to de-propriate.’ The verb does not exactly designate the self-withdrawal of being (Enteignung), but the precipitous action of destabilizing being. For Heidegger’s noun, see: Martin Heidegger, On Being and Time, trans. J. Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 23.

38 I thereby adhere here to Derrida’s understanding of sexual difference: “If sexual difference is to be interpreted, to be deciphered, to be decoded, to be read, it cannot be seen. Readable, thus invisible, the object of testimony and not of proof—and in the same stroke problematic, mobile, not assured”: Derrida, “Fourmis,” 121.
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The necessity of having to be a ‘sexed’ body (participating as the masculine and the feminine before these are transformed into opposed bio-anthropological entities) implies emphasizing an enigmatic bodily advent: the ecstasy (of) spacing (and) temporizing that structures this sexed body.39

At the heart or on the surface of this sexed body, there is a sexual difference that never ceases to be different and this whatever ‘I’ think and whatever ‘I’ do. This sexual difference is always already to-come and therefore necessarily on the edge of representation. As such, and however much two terms are used (masculine, feminine) sexual difference is, as previously stated, without recourse to formal logic or order, for it is always futural—hence the fact that it is an impropriety.

However, this sexual difference does not imply that there is ‘something’ autonomous that is recognizable as such: ‘my (always renewed) sexual difference,’ for example. The lack of referent means that sexual difference cannot be understood within the prism of a synchronic ‘moment.’ If this were possible, then I would automatically reduce ‘it’ to an instant (a longish second that would allow me to gather my thoughts and write a phrase, for example) through which I would recognize myself as either this or that; a recognition that would take place within a teleological order where the masculine would inevitably come first and the feminine last.

In order for it to escape logic properly, the sexual difference of this body cannot be ‘a moment’ in space and time. The absolute heteronomy (or diachrony40) that dislocates space

39 Although the following draws its inspiration from the remarkable work of Catherine Chalier, it also attempts to gently depart from it. The aim of doing so is to simply rethink the relation with the radically other, a relation that remains in Chalier’s reading of Levinas still untainted by language. For Chalier’s main argument on this topic, see: Catherine Chalier, “L’Exsate du Temps,” in Figures du Feminin (Paris: Des Femmes: Antoinette Fouque, 2006), 137–70.

40 I use here the word diachrony as a substitute for this law of absolute heteronomy and as a contrast to synchrony. Synchrony reduces time
and time also dislocates sexual difference. Inversely, sexual difference is what breaks space and time apart, a breaking that can never be understood as a breakage. In other words, sexual difference is the body falling out of phase with its sex, ‘just as’ spacing (and) temporizing disjoins space and time.\footnote{This can be extended—an extension that I deliberately avoid doing here in order to limit the scope—to the entry of the subject as a breaker of space (and) time. Joan Copjec explores this quite remarkably in her essay “The Sexual Compact.” She writes, for example: “The crucial point is this: Freud gives sexuality the same structure that he gives to the temporality of psychic functioning. This relation is not founded on mere analogy; neither term—time or sex—has priority over the other. The two are co-originary. The subject is sexuated inasmuch as she is finite, subject to time. Or: sex belongs not to the essence of the subject but to her historicity; it defines her life of pleasure/unpleasure inasmuch as she is finite, subject to time’s vicissitudes”: Joan Copjec, “The Sexual Compact,” \textit{Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities} 17, no. 2 (2012): 37.}

But, if this is the case, then how can this diachronic sexual difference that appears to structure my sexed body be envisaged, let alone translated into words neatly arranged on this page? In other words, how can sexual difference be understood without glossing over its radical ‘entanglement’ with the law of absolute heteronomy? Let me return and expand on the positive ‘not yet’ of factual dispersion mentioned in the preceding chapter on the neuter. This return and expansion will unreasonably flirt with bodily allusions, but these, as will be shown, should never be taken literally.
'BETWEEN'

Dispersion necessarily implies horizontality, a spreading or a distribution over a period of space and time. As such, it is also a deployment of language. As a deployment, it is essentially masculine, it disseminates, it is seminal, it has something to do with emissions, which are also forms of emptying. This does not equate language with being male or a man. When the masculine is understood as an impropriety ‘within’ the positive neuter of this ‘sexed’ body, the deployment of language knows no gender.

Sliding down perpendicularly, dispersion also implies verticality, a fact that creates intervals and therefore allows for the deployment. As such, it is also a disruption of language. As a disruption, it is essentially feminine; it falls or descends thus marking space and time, which is also a way of creating the world. As such, it has something to do with cycles, which are also forms of timely uncertainties. Once again, this does not equate the disruption of language with being female or a woman. Similarly, this feminine disruption of language knows no gender.

42 I have no competence here to link or relate this perpendicular structure to that envisaged by scientists (for example, that developed by Hermann Minkowski and later by Albert Einstein). The idea of perpendicularity simply comes from reading a passing remark in Eberhard Gruber’s text on Levinas’s understanding of sexuality: “Autrement que sexuellement marqué? Lecture d’Emmanuel Levinas,” Literature 142 (June 2006): 57, my translation: “What does then Levinas understand by ‘relationship’? He perceives it as a temporal crisscrossing: the time that ‘splits the terms of the relation’ is subordinated to diachronic time. One could judge the feminine as being far too close to reality to signify the (human) condition of withdrawal, this symbolic charge that is usually understood as masculine because unable to give birth. But what matters is that this logical thinking of the withdrawal … is that of a diachronic thinking, which allows one to situate the masculine and the feminine not in opposition or in complementarity, but in a perpendicular relation. The vertical line would be what is ‘before,’ while the horizontal line highlights a ‘succession.’”
This intervallic fall and this interrupted deployment create a kind of ‘between’ spacing (and) temporizing that can never be identified, measured, or weighed. This ‘between’ is neither a juncture (an ‘and’ that can be heard), nor, more metaphorically, the place of bisexuality or hermaphroditism, for example. This ‘between’ is a rapport of horizontality and verticality that never manages to report back, let alone make sense as such. If it did, then it would be nothing other than a fold created by divine agency. Instead, it is the ‘between’ birth and death, the union-separation43 involved in any happenstance.

This ‘between’ obviously takes place ‘after’ the neuter, but still before any spatial or temporal and therefore ‘before’ any bio-anthropo-logical and historical determination. Once again, ‘before’ and ‘after’ do not refer here to an order of priority. This ‘between’ occurs ‘before,’ that is, it ‘carries’ (itself with) the factuality of being male or female, a man or woman. As such, it can never be understood as a negative force. Of the same order as the neuter, the ‘between’ created by this vertical slide and this horizontal deployment can never be rendered dialectical, be sublated, or deconstructed because it always evades a fixed point from which this could happen.

43 I follow here Nancy’s work, albeit with a slight divergence. Ian James provides the clearest summary of Nancy’s understanding of the body when he writes: “[Nancy’s] thinking of the corporeal as an event at the limit of sense, as an opening or spacing of discrete places, is seen in terms of a rupturing or fracture, or what Nancy will call an ‘effraction,’ within two types of continuity, that of sense and that of matter.” Nancy’s rupturing, fracture, or effractation is close to the ‘between,’ ‘union-separation,’ or ‘logical absurdity’ that I develop in this book (and in After ‘Rwanda’). However, unlike Nancy, I situate this effractation not ‘within’ the historical continuity of sense and matter, but right in the spacing (and) temporizing that provokes the historical event of sense and matter. For James’s quote, see: Ian James, The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 131.
A PERPENDICULAR DISLOCATION

The crucial aspect of this ‘between’ ‘prior’ to measured space and time is that it allows one to situate the masculine and the feminine not in opposition or complementarily, but in a perpendicular dislocation in which the masculine and the feminine dislocate themselves ‘just as’ spacing (and) temporizing disjoin space and time.

This perpendicular dislocation knows no co- (and as such cannot be seen as a correlation) that would form a secret commonality or ‘togetherness’ between the masculine and the feminine or a subject and object, for example. What is perpendicular never forms ‘two.’ The fracture brought on by absolute heteronomy can know no relation. If it did, one would be in a synchronic moment, that is, at a specific moment in space and time, relating this and that together.

This perpendicular dislocation can therefore never be seen as that which is connected, associated, tied-up, or joined together. It is perpendicular because, like diachrony, it is the spacing (and) temporizing of that which occupies space and time, without ever letting itself be recognized as an ‘expression’ of spacing and/or temporizing, for example.

The fortunate or tragic aspect of this perpendicular dislocation is indeed the fact that it can never be recuperated by memory or history (and thus forced into a dialectical relation productive of narratives and myths like that afflicting poor Oedipus and Electra). The dislocation of the masculine and the feminine occurs every second of time anew, strange, unexpected, vexatiously alienating: the evermore-unexpected ruin of memory and history.

Although two improprieties have been singled out here (masculine, feminine), these are not exclusive or representative of sexual difference. Others, subtler, more imaginative, or simply to-come could have been chosen to expose such a perpendicular and always futural dislocation. Sexual difference is not a given; dislocation always lies ahead (if it really were given, one would have a relation of dislocated ‘items’ floating
in space and time, and no one would want that and this, even if, clarity is the least of our concerns).

**AN IRRETRIEVABLE REMAINDER**

However, notwithstanding the empirical indistinguishability between spacing (and) temporizing and sexual difference, there appears to be a transcendental distinction between the two. This distinction is the fact that unlike diachrony ‘as such,’ sexual difference can only be an irretrievable remainder\(^{44}\): what remains of diachrony—qua diachrony.

Once again, this remainder precedes measurable space and linear time and therefore is allergic to memory and history. Before the subject, before the difference of sexes understood as male and female, man and woman, this remainder traverses this positive neuter body without ever being or becoming a remnant, appendage, protuberance, or prosthesis that can then be translated as an identity, an essence, or excrescence to the body.

This remainder makes thought go on endlessly and will never allow itself to be thought out properly. It is that which is always already on the fore front of this mind but never lets itself be grasped or figured, not even before sex (being horny, for example) and certainly not after an orgasm (being alleviated and elated, for example). Like the dislocation of space and time, the remainder or sexual difference can never stop or be stopped and this, even when in a coma or in the grips of senility.

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\(^{44}\) This irretrievable remainder echoes Jean-Luc Nancy’s interpretation of the sexual as the supernumerary or surplus of the body. However, although it echoes this interpretation, it also divests itself from it because the remainder of this chapter stays with sexual difference and not the difference of sexes. For Jean-Luc Nancy’s interpretation see: Jean-Luc Nancy, *58 Indices sur le corps et Extension de l’âme* (Quebec: Nota Bene, 2004), 66 and Ginette Michaud’s commentary on this surplus in “Appendice,” 85–122, especially, 110–16. The translation of Nancy’s text can be found in Nancy, *Corpus*, 160.
The curious thing about this remainder or sexual difference is that it cannot be understood, as Catherine Malabou rightly observes, outside of substitutability.\textsuperscript{45} The masculine, the feminine, or any other impropriety can change from one into the other at any time. This does not mean that within the body they remain the same and swap places occasionally. Substitutability does not mean replacement. Improprieties have no ability to fix themselves in space and time. There would be no ‘between’ without substitution.

However, this is not a self-contained or self-enclosed system that would perpetually modify itself as if some ever-malleable self-contained plastic toy or inventive drag queen or king. Absolute heteronomy plays a curious part in this substitutability: it indeed digs out the spacing (and) temporizing in question here, right in the flesh of difference. This crucial role avoids treating the masculine and the feminine as general and generic forces locked in a mutual embrace or at war. Absolute heteronomy disrupts the game, always making an opening for the event or the performance of any one of these improprieties.

Inevitably, in the same way that sexual difference is allergic to synchronic grammar, it also cannot be regulated by any kind of subjective, objective, natural, or civil law. At the mercy of absolute heteronomy and a player in this very heteronomy, this substitutability expresses the positive madness of sexual difference. It is ‘mad’ because resolutely out of control and this whether I live the recluse life of an abstinent monk or spend my time getting drunk, shagging, and/or cross-dressing.

\textsuperscript{45} I follow here Catherine Malabou. However, as the next paragraph shows, I slightly alter her interpretation of substitutability, thus making it less Hegelian. For Malabou’s remarkable observation about substitutability, see: Catherine Malabou, \textit{Changing Difference: The Feminist and the Question of Philosophy}, trans. C. Shread (London: Polity, 2011), 37.
And this is how I happen to caress myself, lying there half-asleep, in a slumber. My bicep touches my side. My hand rests on my downy stomach. Such contacts express a myriad of different modes of othering my sex, the remainder of the ecstasy (of) spacing (and) temporizing. Neither strictly masculine nor feminine, my male body caresses itself; thus breaking space and time: digging out or opening up a new or unfamiliar impropriety.

At no point can I pin down a moment in this caress. It always leads me to another moment, another repose open to the contingent. In the grips of heterogeneous time, this paradoxically controlled and uncontrolled ‘movement’ has no specific sexual attributes (a typically male kind of stroke, for example). It leads me astray without altogether getting me lost.

As such, this caress cannot fall under the sense of touch, contact, or sensation, which will be explored in the last chapter of this book within the context of the difference of sexes. What is caressed here is really not touched. A movement that carries itself out is beyond the realm of the senses because it is necessarily futural: it does not know where it is going and as such marks the dusk of being, the ebb of knowledge, the wane of light.

In this way, the caress in question here can only be a movement of exteriorization that cannot be gathered, a movement that exceeds itself without there being an inside or an outside to this excess: blind experience. The bicep and the hand are still. The two exceed themselves beyond their very

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singularity, right at the moment when the body abandons its mastery, recedes from being-able and shivers or shimmers with unforeseeable possibilities.

In this way, this caress or excess awakes a sexual difference that no new caress or excess can appease. No shift of the body, no move of the hand can bring any sense or relief to this sexual difference. In its stillness, this sexed body thus remains open to a new event, a new mode of being or tendency—the unexpected breaking apart of space and time, a spacing (and) temporizing that never affords a pause or a poised attitude.

This positive madness of sexual difference—which allows for this substitutability between the masculine and the feminine or any (other) improper perpendicular dislocation—rules this caress. It is a ruling without power or authority and yet, however contradictory this sounds, always already in the hands of a conscious decision: remaining horizontal, not moving, in a slumber.

The crucial aspect of this madness is that it is really the only thing that allows me to evade the overwhelming violence of indistinctiveness that being ‘me’ here on this simple straw mat implies. In other words, the caress provokes in me a forgetting of being, that is, a letting-go of the weight and the horror of being reducible to just ‘one,’ ‘male,’ ‘a man’ (even if this ‘one’ is always indefinitely withdrawn further away). The ever-unfulfilled or always renewed caress relieves me from these singular and autocratic confines.

Through this forgetting of being, the caress therefore allows me to open a future that is different from that of (my) death. We will come back to this. For the moment, let us say simply that my open hand peacefully resting on the hair on my stomach or my bicep gently touching my side implies a space and time other than that of my death; it intimates the other of the masculine, the feminine, or of any other impropriety; an other that no prediction or projection can possibly envisage. To caress is indeed to unsettle without ever mastering ‘it’ the perpendicular ecstasy of spacing (and) temporizing.