

The Erotic as Limit-Experience: A Sexual Fantasy

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1. *Introduction*

It is difficult to write about eroticism; it is at once too personal and too common. Phenomenology is supposed to start out from experience, making the task even more difficult. We can try to hide under the cover of eidos or under what is general, without giving away our own relation to this burning question, but this risks only to show the blindness of our own specificity, our own personal desires, as one of (at least) two sexes. In the phenomenological attempts to address this issue – such as in the work of Levinas, Marion and Sartre – one could argue that this endeavor has been carried out by a certain kind of (French) man.¹ Their specificity might be more pronounced here than when they broach other subjects. They are, so to say, caught with their pants down, where we often gain an insight into how their own sexual life is structured. All their intellectualism tends to be seen as a façade, behind which lay a male-centric, heterosexist, patriarchal variant of sexuality, the kind of which we are all too familiar. They are, after all, “only men.” So writing on the erotic risks degrading the intellectual to mere drives. To write on the erotic is to go to a place

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), part 3, chapter 3, Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007); *Le phénomène érotique: six méditations* (Paris: B. Grasset, 2003), Emanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, section IV, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969). See also Cederberg’s and Dahlberg’s articles in this volume.

where the intellectual task unavoidably becomes personal, and where the personal goes beyond every person. But even if I complain about the chauvinism exhibited by those above mentioned philosophers, praise must nonetheless be given to those who dare to take the subject on.

One reason for this tension within the erotic phenomena might be its problematic relation to what is interior and what is exterior and how these are interrelated. The erotic is in my opinion not only an ontic region that should be described but a phenomena through which some central tenets of phenomenology come into play. In the following I shall attempt to show how this subject can provide us with philosophical material for thinking the relation between interiority and the exterior, between immanence and transcendence. In order to do so I would like to start by presenting a problem in phenomenology that has its starting-point in Edmund Husserl, namely the problem regarding objectifying intentionality and its limits. This problem receives a special kind of solution in the philosophy of Michel Henry who resolves it by distinguishing between two very different kinds of intentionality. Also Jean-Luc Marion undertakes a similar separation where it plays a specific role in his analysis of the erotic phenomenon. I shall argue that both Henry and Marion resolve this problem in a similar way, but that the solutions they offer are problematic. Nonetheless, I will find in their theories certain themes that are worth developing further. By trying to give an alternative interpretation of the erotic experience I would like to give another kind of solution to the problem discussed. And I will finally try to use this analysis of the erotic to understand why eros is such a problematic theme within philosophy.

2. A Phenomenological Problem

Husserl describes intentionality as directed and as such involving an object that it is directed towards. The aim of Husserlian phenomenology is to analyze intentionality itself and to uncover its structure. The intentionality of the phenomenologist is thus directed towards the structure of intentionality and turns in this way back to itself, making itself into an object. It is in this movement that a problem arises: once

intentionality is turned into an object, is it still intentionality? Intentionality is per se what experiences and when the experiencing capacity itself is changed into something experienced, it could be argued that its central features or eidos is lost. It is no longer the movement of lived subjectivity but rather it is turned into an object within the stream of intentionality. What is supposed to be studied is thus slipping away, it is what *performs* the study, instead of staying in place as the *object* for the study.

Husserl stumbles upon this problem in his analyses of inner time consciousness. Such analyses are supposed to give the base for his phenomenological investigation.² He formulates it as an infinite regress where each analysis of intentionality opens up for a new one. In Husserl (as well as after Husserl) there have been two major interpretations of how to understand this infinite regress. One way is to understand it as a chimera and to claim that there is no difference between intentionality as thematized and intentionality as thematizing. To become an object for thematization does not change anything, nothing is lost in the transformation.³ But in his later texts Husserl gives an opposing interpretation, according to which this problem is understood as instituting an irreducible gap between subjectivity and objectivity – a gap that can never be overcome. Something central to intentionality is thus lost once it becomes an object.⁴

2. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Buch 2*, Hua IV, ed. Marly Biemel (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969) §22, 102f

3. Husserl himself wants to make such an interpretation in for example *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein (1917/18)*, Hua XXXIII, eds. Rudolf Bernet och Dieter Lohmar (Dordrecht : Kluwer, 2001), text 10, 201f and in *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, Hua X, ed. Rudolf Boehm (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), text 54, 382.

4. The problematic is discussed not least through the concept *Nachträglichkeit*, i.e. through what can only be understood afterwards, and as something that always transcends consciousness. See for example *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929–1934). Die C-manuskripte*. Hua, Materialien band VII, utg. Dieter Lohmar (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), text 32, 130f and *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein (1917/18)* text 15, 287. See also Smith's contribution in this volume. Klaus Held is one of the first to use this character of the infinite regress in a positive way. He claims that the living stream (*Lebendige Gegenwart* or *Nunc stans*) cannot be

The first of these interpretations has resulted in a phenomenology proximal to Husserl's own explicit project whereas the second has been central in a reformulation of phenomenology, not least among French phenomenologists. This latter interpretation has been formative in the development of a phenomenology interested in questions regarding passivity, transcendence/immanence, along with other kinds of intentionality besides an objectifying one. Michel Henry belongs to those afflicted with this second tendency.

3. *Michel Henry's Solution*

Michel Henry takes this problem as the starting-point of his philosophy. The main features are given in *Essence of Manifestation* from 1963.⁵ For Henry the problem with phenomenology is its too narrow understanding of intentionality. He claims that understanding oneself, as an intentionality directed towards itself, is not an act of an object-creating consciousness but a radically different kind of intentionality, the intentionality of self-affection or self-knowledge. And he understands this kind of intentionality as foundational to object-intentionality. We can thus differ between two kinds of intentionality:

Object-directed intentionality through which we relate to transcendent beings. i.e. beings that are other than the one who experiences them and which are known through a mediated and outer knowledge. Since there is a gap between intentionality and its object such knowledge is always uncertain.

Self-affection on the other side is a kind of knowledge through which our own being is given to us directly. This means that such knowledge is given immediately, it is a reflection that does not involve any distance. It is an action, an effort, and a movement. It is therefore

reformulated as an object without losing its central tenets, but that it nevertheless is given in a positive way. Klaus Held, *Lebendige Gegenwart – Die Frage nach der Seinsweise des transzendentalen Ich bei Edmund Husserl, entwickelt am Leitfaden der Zeitproblematik*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966).

5. *Essence of Manifestation*, trans. by Girard Etzkorn, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973). *L'essence de la manifestation*, (Paris: PUF, 1960). He poses the question for example at page 28. The following references are made to the English translation.

not mediating or objectifying knowledge, which demands distance. Henry identifies this knowledge with the active and knowing productive force, that is, the ego which does not see itself as an object but receives itself in self-affection (233). For Henry this means an inner, and absolute, knowledge upon which all outer knowledge is dependent. In contrast to all transcendent experiencing, this knowledge is understood as immanent. Here there is a perfect coincidence between the act of experiencing and the content that is experienced. Both are related to the same essence. Henry understands this as the unity of presence (72).

The first kind of intentionality – the objectifying intentionality – is dependent upon the second self-affective intentionality, since this is the living, experiencing force of every intentionality. What Husserl was seeking – namely, a basis for all knowledge that we have direct access to – is what Henry claims to have found. But it is at the cost of the possibility to formulate a content of this intentionality. Language needs the distance between intentionality and its object and in an intentionality without such distance, there can be no room for words. Henry disagrees with both Husserl and Heidegger when he challenges an understanding of consciousness as giving representations (51, 81). Instead he emphasizes that this distanceless immanence is the essence of manifestation and functions as a foundation for every experience. Before the split, where consciousness becomes transcendent to itself and turns itself into an object, it is immanent (228).

This self-consciousness is, though, not a consciousness of *a* self, but a consciousness of the self in the experience of the object. A self-consciousness that makes it possible for objects to come forth. Henry's point is that this self-consciousness, which makes all consciousness possible, is characterized neither by a split nor an internal division. Henry therefore accuses most phenomenology for being an ontological monism, having too narrow an understanding of intentionality. He rejects the idea that there is only one kind of phenomenality and that the given can only be given as an object. By this, he means that this mistake has led phenomenology to the paradigm of intentionality, which also understands self-consciousness as objectified. Henry wants instead to understand self-manifestation as an immediate, non-objectified, passive phenomenon of self-affection. As such there is no dis-

tance between the feeling of pain and the consciousness of it. This immanent being is very different from the transcendent being: it is a non-horizontal, non-ecstatic, atemporal and acosmic immanence. Its unique form of immediate, non-ecstatic manifestation cannot be grasped by any categories that are adjusted for objectified phenomenality; rather, he claims that this immanence is what always escapes reflexive thematization. This immanence has therefore been called invisible and obscure. Its appearance is invisible, but it is not non-appearance; on the contrary, it is the most foundational kind of manifestation. It is not unknown, but known in a radically different way. It is not non-being, rather a radically different being.

This self-affection is formulated as self-sufficient and it gives rise to the following question (which has been pointed out by many phenomenologists, for example Rudolf Bernet and Dan Zahavi): how could reflection, spatiality, difference and alterity ever come into being?⁶ In one of his last works *I am the Truth* this gap becomes even more problematic. Here, Henry even understands the transcendent world of exteriority as untrue in relation to the true world of immanence. In a similar way he distinguishes between the living and Life itself, prioritizing Life at the cost of the living – a dangerous strategy, not least politically.⁷

Henry develops a slightly different, and to my mind more fruitful, position in *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*.⁸ Here he connects the theme of self-affection to an investigation of the body. The body is here not understood as Cartesian extension, nor is it regarded as the biological body. (5ff) Rather, what Henry is interested in is described

6. See for example Rudolf Bernet, “Christianity and Philosophy” (in *Continental Review*, nr 32, 1999), 25–42, Dan Zahavi, “Michel Henry and the Phenomenology of the Invisible” (in *ibid*), 223–40.

7. *C'est moi la vérité: pour une philosophie du christianisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1996); English translation S. Emanuel, *I am the Truth* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), xx.

8. *Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps: essais sur l'ontologie biranienn* (Paris: PUF, 1965); *Philosophy and phenomenology of the body*, trans. by Girard Etzkorn (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975). Henry is here offering a reading of Maine de Biran – but I will, in this short discussion of the text, neglect Biran and only describe Henry's position. The following references are made to the English translation.

as a transcendental body. This body is as fundamental as the ego and fuses with the self. To define the human being as body therefore results not in a materialism but, instead, in an undermining of materialism (11).

Henry focuses on the ability of the body, or rather the body as ability. The body is the hand that strokes and thus the ability to strike. The movement is not something that is mediated by a body as something between an ego and a world, rather this action is understood as the direct knowledge of self-affection. The action, the movement, *is* the ego and it *produces* a world. The body is therefore not an instrument that someone is using, rather, the movement of the body produces both a transcendent world and a transcendent self as an object for itself. Before the body becomes objectified it is a force. To understand the body as an immanent, transcendental, direct and distance-less being and, moreover, to understand this body as foundational for subjectivity, means to accept another way of understanding both being and knowledge. As discussed above it is a distanceless knowledge which entails no division in being. In this way, Henry can claim that the ego *is* the categories that *have* transcendent knowledge (73ff).

In *Phenomenology and Philosophy of the Body*, Henry thus emphasizes the relation between self-affection and an objectifying intentionality. The body, as the place of self-affection, is thus called *transcendental* – and not *immanent* as self-affection, as it will come to be named in *Essence of Manifestation*. The point of calling it transcendental is to focus on its relation to what is transcendent. He understands this relation in the following way: when my hand meets resistance, transcendent extension is created. Transcendent extension is thereby a formulation of the limits of my effort. We find the transcendent world as a necessary consequence of the body as transcendental movement. Transcendent and transcendental share a conceptual root because they belong together; the transcendental is the necessity of the movement and the transcendent is what resists this movement. The necessity and certainty of the movement, the transcendental, therefore also includes the certainty of the transcendent, that which resists. The existence of the outer world is as necessary as the existence of the inner. In the development of Henry's argument we could even say that "inside" and "outside" are given shape and contours in the meeting, that is, from

out of the transcendental movement. The unity of the world – between two kinds of being (transcendental and transcendent) – is given by the unity of this movement. In this way Henry means that the transcendent as resistance escapes the phenomenological reduction and thereby makes transcendent being both possible and necessary as the immanence of self-affection (89ff).

Body is here primarily immediate knowledge of the self, and secondarily knowledge of the self as an object to this immediate experiencing. It is at the same time transcendental and transcendent knowledge, and therefore primarily not a knowledge *about* the self but *about* the transcendent. Bodily knowledge is therefore not exactly a knowledge but rather a power to knowledge. (125f)

The phenomenological paradox of the impossibility of seeing the seeing – that is to say, the paradox of the empirical self that at the same time is a transcendental body – is understood by Henry by a twofold usage of sign: the words “to see,” i.e. the sign for seeing, is used as a reflection of this experience of seeing. Seeing moves from being a transcendental, internal, experience and becomes an object for a new experience in reflection. “To see” becomes thereby a transcendent correlate to the immanent body. It is no longer the seeing that is seen, but a representation of the seeing. Thus a split arises which is necessary for the naturalized attitude, and through this split we understand the eye as an object which sees. The body splits thereby into an original, transcendental body and a physiological body (111ff). This is all very close to Husserl’s distinction between “Leib” and “Körper,” which, at the same time, are one.

In *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body* Henry thus focuses on how immanence – here symptomatically called transcendental – is connected to transcendent being. But in texts such as *Essence of Manifestation* and *I am the Truth*, the difference and incompatibility of immanence and transcendence is emphasized. Generally speaking, Henry’s philosophy is always at the border of becoming a dualism where an objectifying intentionality is secondary and is on the morally bad side (especially in *I am the Truth*). This sharp division between immanence and transcendence is, however, balanced in the best way in his analysis of the transcendental body.

4. *Jean-Luc Marion and the Erotic:
the Problem Reappears*

A theory of intersubjectivity and of the other person does not play any important role in Henry's philosophy. From this perspective Marion's phenomenological analysis of the erotic can be understood as a development of Henry's philosophy of the body. As we will see, the immanence of self-affection is here reached in the erotic phenomena, but only through a total dependence upon the other person. Even so, in the end Marion's philosophy of the erotic inherits a set of problems from Henry's philosophy of immanence.

In *The Erotic Phenomenon* Marion argues for what he calls an erotic reduction, this means that the self is given not mainly through doubt (as in Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum*) but through the fact that one is loved by someone else: only through this love from the outside can the existence of the self be justified.⁹ The I finds itself whenever the question "Am I loved?" arises. Like others in the phenomenological tradition Marion also claims that I can think myself only since I can feel myself, but through the question of whether I am loved he claims that I experience how I am given from an outside. Me loving myself is not enough, I need to borrow the loving gaze of the other person to understand myself as one among many in a world. However, the starting-point for Marion is not only the love of the other person, but equally the love that the self feels toward the other person. This love is without why – or rather it is the place where every "Why?" is born. Love starts out without knowing what love is, who the loved one is or who me that is loving is, all this can only come after love (90).

It is in loving that Marion finds a self-affection, where I affirm myself, since I have to go along with my own feeling. I find myself as loving and as already affirming my own desires (94, 97). And this is a self that always stands in relation to another, open to alterity. The self-affection is here, in contrast to Henry, only possible within a network of otherness. Marion also gives the flesh and the impossibility to feel the feeling a central role in his argument. In contrast to Henry's

9. *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 22 ff. Following references are made to the English translation.

understanding of immanence, Marion claims that the self can not fully know itself since it can only know itself as felt and not as feeling. It is not firstly an ego that knows the other, but the ego is rather loving and structured around the other, and where the other is only secondarily an object. Primarily we are loved and loving. It is also through desire we are individualized: I am the loved one of the other and thus am different from all other. To summarize it is in love that I receive myself through a threefold passivity: the first passivity is the dependence upon the other who loves me; the second is the receiving of oneself as loving, even before the love has a specific content and this second passivity also shows the third one, namely that in loving I put myself at risk and in risking myself I realize that there is a self to risk (109f). The individual is thus given passively through both the love of the other and the love of the self. Love as a structure before knowledge is an old phenomenological theme, developed not least by Max Scheler (even though Scheler emphasizes loving as giving the person its direction, whereas Marion emphasizes the love of the other as the possibility for my existence).¹⁰ This analysis of love gives us a different understanding of intentionality, which is important to phenomenology since intentionality is no longer only a knowledge-structure. In Marion's writings it is developed further into an understanding of the erotic encounter but, as we will see, I think a certain problematic returns at this point.

Having a self that can be put at risk also includes being flesh – a body among many in the world. This body is exposed to a world that affects me and includes within me a certain passivity. The world affects me but the things of the world are characterized as something that can be experienced but they are themselves not experiencing. The world is in this way only given as body and as full of “things,” i.e. of transcendent beings (in Henry's vocabulary), rather than of flesh (or transcendental body in Henry's terminology) as that which produces both an immanence of self-affection and a world of transcendent beings. But the erotic experience changes exactly this state of affairs. In the

10. I discuss this in my *Kunskapens gräns, gränsens vetande: en fenomenologisk undersökning av transcendens och kroppslighet* (Huddinge: Södertörn Philosophical Studies, 2009), 131ff.

erotic encounter the other person is suddenly given as giving, i.e. as experiencing flesh. It is thus not only a thing but another flesh. I can feel the other person as *feeling* at the same time as he or she is also a body that remains inaccessible to me (114ff).

So Marion claims that the erotic encounter is an experience of pure experiencing flesh – beyond every experience of the body as an object. How is the experiencing flesh of the other person experienced? In the world it is only the I that is given as flesh, and not the other person. My flesh alone has the doubleness of feeling and being felt, and I can only feel the world since I can feel myself. The world is given only through my flesh. I can only take the experience of the other person seriously through turning it into an experience of mine. The experiencing flesh of the other is only supposed, and never experienced. Neither is the object of desire something that can be reached as a worldly object to be possessed and consumed. The erotic object is simply not an object among many in the world. Rather, flesh and the denuding of flesh would not entail an uncovering of an object. That no flesh can appear as object suggest that, in Marion's philosophy, there is an irreversible gap between the flesh and the body.

In the erotic, Marion continues, I feel the other, I feel the other feel and I feel the other feel me. An intertwining between me and the other take place. Nevertheless, there are still two different subjects who feel. What changes this, Marion argues, is that the flesh of the other does not resist me as other bodies do. Bodies of the world expel me from their space – which makes me find myself as this body that is expelled. But in the erotic encounter an inaccessible body suddenly invites me and makes room for me. Precisely, it is this phenomena that characterizes the erotic experience in Marion's philosophy. He claims that in the erotic encounter the flesh of the other makes room for him; the other lets herself be penetrated so that he can stretch out for the first time. Her flesh is “allowing me to come in, by letting itself be penetrated.” (118) The other does not want to resist him, and lets him invade her without defending herself. His flesh, thus, no longer touches *some-thing*, since the flesh of the other person no longer is a thing, but the place where he can become flesh in her flesh (119f). Here the straight male perspective is evident, particularly in the resignatory role accorded to his female counterpart. When Marion states that the

woman gives place and does not resist, it almost sounds like a rape-victim who has admitted defeat. This inactivity of Marion's woman is further reinforced when he adds that it is her passivity, which increases an arousal "more powerful than every activity" (119).

There is consequently in Marion's analyses never anything erotic to see – what is seen immediately becomes ridiculous as it is thrown out of the immanent experience of the flesh. Thus there is no place for fantasy or any play of the body as an object. Neither are there any erotic organs in the erotic flesh. The role of the other is also so central that Marion claims that auto-erotization has no meaning. He argues that since one's own flesh is only given through this opening in the flesh of the other person, only sex with the other person provides pure flesh and therefore any auto-erotic experience is meaningless. I cannot give flesh to myself (122). An orgasm on one's own and an orgasmic experience with another person are thus two completely different things. Here it is easy to suspect it is the Catholic in Marion that is speaking. I would rather claim that the experience of orgasm on one's own and with another person does not show such essential difference (even if it differs on a social level). Marion means that the auto-erotic experience only involves the body, whereas only the sexual encounter with another person provides us with pure experiencing flesh.

In Marion's description the erotic is the transformation of the body as pure flesh, i.e. pure experiencing, where it is only through this experience that one can become pure flesh. He formulates this as that which she gives him what she does not have and what he does not have on his own. As flesh, no longer any difference exists between different parts of the body. The whole body is eroticized – becoming flesh. As we have seen Marion fixates on the erotic experience as a relation with one other person. The other person is more inner to me than myself, so that he does not have her flesh and his own flesh is given to him when he gives her, her flesh. It is a journey beyond intentionality when he enjoys her enjoyment. Marion even writes that the body becomes "almost immaterial" (135).

The gap between body and flesh also culminates in the climax of this journey, but not in terms of an ascent to the apogee of a mountain-face but in terms of a descent into the emptiness of a ravine within which one hastily falls. Suddenly nothing remains and the lovers are back in

a world of things as if nothing had happened. The flesh disappears and the lover is once again part of the world where he finds himself as a naked body. The experience of pure flesh is now understood as a meeting with nothingness. In the return to the world the lover can only formulate his experience in terms of there nothing to see. The orgasm leaves nothing to see and nothing to say. It even takes the memory of the flesh with it. He thus calls the orgasm an erased phenomenon and not a saturated phenomena that would intend more than what is signified¹¹ (135ff).

The flesh is thus essentially erotic and as such moves towards the flesh of the other. But the erotic must itself also have a limit since, it would otherwise extinguish the world with its bodies in time and space. It is in light of this that Marion claims that we have no common world, only a common flesh: the engagement with the other person brings me beyond the world, and we have nothing to say to one another since language belongs to the world. The erotic encounter only gives a negative language since language only can be about things. This negativity even makes the lover in Marion's philosophy uncertain whether there ever was the flesh of the other person or only her body. It even gives him a suspicion about his own flesh. The erotic thus never fully leads to either the alterity of the other or of the self (143 ff).

Marion's concept "flesh" bears a closer resemblance to Henry's concept of immanence in *Essence of Manifestation*, rather than to his concept of transcendental body in *Phenomenology and Philosophy of the Body*. Both flesh and immanence are pure experiencing beyond anything experienced. The greatest point of difference between them is that in Henry this flesh / immanence is self-donated, whereas Marion claims that this giving takes place in relation only to another person. Despite this, both have the tendency to separate the immanence of the flesh from the exteriority of the body. Marion states that there is no bridge between these two areas: after the orgasm there is nothing to say since the experience of being pure flesh is not possible to take with us to the

11. Marion defines the saturated phenomena as a phenomena where the given is experienced as more than what is given directly and more than what is contained in any ideas about the given. See *Etant donné: essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 280ff.

world of objects. In this way Marion comes closer to Henry's concept of immanence and the problem of two orders of fact that can never come into contact with one another.

Instead of this strict separation between body and flesh (in Marion's terminology) and transcendence and immanence (in Henry's terminology) I want to investigate the erotic as an in between. In the following I will both criticize Marion's and Henry's theories and discuss certain themes that I find fruitful. With Marion, I will uphold the claim that the erotic provides us with a phenomena of central importance to phenomenology. With Henry, I will develop his theory of the transcendental body, understanding it as a springwell for thinking both the interiority of immanence and the objectivity of transcendence. What I want to try to understand is how the gap between the feeling and the felt is constructed in the erotic experience of the transcendental body. I am interested in how images and erotic objects are related to the experience of the flesh. With this aim in mind, there are two phenomena I would like to give specific consideration to, namely the role of fantasy and the erotic body as a limit-experience.

5. Another Phenomenological Analysis of the Erotic

Marion has nothing to say about the role of fantasy in the erotic experience, and I would like to claim that to bring fantasy into the analysis results in a different understanding of the relation between interiority and objectivity. This changed relation between interiority and objectivity can also be developed from the erotic experience understood as the bodily experience of destruction and creation of borders between the inside and the outside. It is, just as Marion writes, an experience where one's own body as well as the body of the other are no longer characterized in terms of a border between an exterior and an interiority. But Marion still understands eroticized flesh in strict separation from the world. Contrariwise, I would like to focus on the connection between the eroticized flesh and objects of the world and try to focus on this experience as entering into the very drawing of a limit that takes place "before" an inside and outside –and that creates thereby an inside and outside.

But let us begin with an analysis of the role of fantasy in the erotic. Fantasy has often been understood as a freedom from the here and now, as the very possibility for the movement of thought.¹² This is true to a certain extent, i.e. insofar as you understand “here and now” as the sense-impressions of a here and now. But if “here and now” instead is understood as a living presence, we can think fantasy as an intensification of the here and now, rather than taking us away from it. This intensification is engendered through the creation of objects or images. Fantasy is the capacity to *make* images present. The erotic fantasy is maybe the most intense kind of fantasy, and its images can really function as an intensification of the living present. The erotic feeling is thus a certain intensification of the feeling of being alive. The fantasy makes the presence fully directed towards one thing: increasing the erotic feeling. Objects – for example the body of the other person – takes part in the fantasy and becomes permeated by the erotic fantasy. The erotic is thus not, as Marion says, to leave the world of objects, but rather to deepen the experience of them and make them permeated with significance. In this intensification we can experience a relation between object and subject – or between the transcendent and the transcendental in Henry’s vocabulary – where each is not yet fully separated and where their origin in the living stream is experienced. In this way the erotic fantasy, in permeating the object with significance, draws it into a close connection with the living stream.

It is also through fantasy that we can come close to the erotic experience and that affords thereby the possibility of taking a closer look. So in order to approach this connection between objectivity and interiority and the erotic as a point where they meet and where, for a second, they even fuse, let us enter an erotic fantasy. As is the case with any erotic fantasy, or real encounter, we must lay stress on its singularity, so that we are not describing some universal phenomena. It can thus never be described in the third person; it always takes place between you and me.

So, what attracts me in you is a strong feeling of you being other

12. See for example Edith Stein, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* (Halle: Buchdruckerei des Waisenhauses, 1917), 6ff.

than me, but in this alterity there is also a sense of belonging together, of recognition. Or rather, it is something in that otherness of you that I want to bring closer to me, something that I want to “have.” But since I know that I want to have it, it is already in me. You wanting me creates a field of tension between us, playing on alterity and recognition. I want you, and more specifically, I want your body, I want what I can objectify, and I want to experience my own body as a beautiful “thing” that you want. I desire to objectify as much as I desire to be objectified, but this does not turn us into neutral “things” with mere extension. Not even things are things with mere extension, they are filled with meanings that are also redrawn from my experience, meanings that through fantasy can make them burn with significance. They remind me, promise me and, at the same time, hide from me. The other person as an erotic object has everything to do with vision, a vision of a promise. Erotic objectification does not deny the living force of the body, but it celebrates our exteriority, the manifestation of our difference and specificity, i.e., our specific traits. I want to get close to these “specific traits,” to have them, to make this specific person mine. How do I do it?

A simple touch, skin that meets skin, would make something happen, it would change things. It would draw my attention to this and nothing else. I would have a very clear direction, and I would long for another touch. I would *feel* the distance between us, a distance that would no longer be made of air, but rather materialized. To be outside of you, other than you, would mean to be directed towards you; it would give me another position, no longer being “inside” a body, controlling a body. But *on, in and of* the skin, I would be only the limit between you and me. You would force me towards my own borders. And this limit between you and me would be on fire, such a fire would mean that the limit, the border between us, no longer only separates us, but also connects us. Every limit, or border, has this double function: it separates and it connects. The limit is what we share.¹³

13. The Swedish word for “sharing” is “dela” and, as is the case with the German word “teilen,,” it has a double meaning. The sentence: “Vi delar något” / “Wir teilen etwas,,” means both that we share something or have something in common, “something” would then bind us together, and it could also mean that we take

Right now we could experience how this surface between us connects us and separates us, but there is more than that, since we do not observe this, I do not distance myself from this shared limit, rather I experience it, I am in it. Neither do I experience it as a stable or static phenomenon; on the contrary it is only its own movement, its urge, its attempt to reach and its desire that brings me forth into the “here and now”.

In this experience the exteriority and interiority of the body would be one and the same, since it would be my limit, I would be only my limit. And if you were to touch me again, that touch would mean that your skin, where you are, your limit, would join mine in that fire. But only because you can take your skin away again. I would want to violate your borders. Consume you and incorporate what you thought was yours into me. There has to be friction – not only acceptance. I want at the same time to erase your borders *and* to keep them in order to feel them. I want both body and flesh. Destruction of a limit is no clean operation, it is messy and sticky, intertwining and exchanging. Trying so desperately to erase the difference between my own sensitivity and your sensitivity.

In touching me you would not only touch my skin, my border towards an outer world, you would be even closer, touching those places where I normally only touch myself, where the skin becomes membrane, the inside of my mouth in the kiss, the membrane of the vagina in the encounter of the genitals. You break my borders and you dislocate my own self-encounter when wet perforated parts meet. And if we would start to move we could play with the materialized space between us and within us, we could play within the meetings of these limit-drawings, creating difference through annihilating it. Motility would activate all of the body. In the beginning the body would have parts, but when the “I” comes to the limit of the skin, temporality would start to show itself without spatiality and the movement of the circumscription of these limits would be intensified, no longer producing different parts. Instead the different parts of the body would start to dissolve into one another and into an intensified now. It would all be membrane, between you and I.

something apart, “something” would then be split up.

You would be my only alterity, the only non-me. Your alterity is intensified, but since you as well as me are nothing but this difference in relation to each other we *exist* only in relation to each other. And when exteriority and interiority melt together or become membrane, we are left with nothing but the event of drawing a line. Membrane resolves the clear distinction of the skin. Through the membrane things gets messy and smooth. Liquids are exchanged and bodies are open.

In orgasm finally the distinct person of “you” and of “me” would be erased, but life and the now would not. In orgasm “I” am no one, I am anonymous, but the “am” is very much present, existence is not erased. This “am” or “sum” is not something of the world, not distinct from something else – it is in this sense a “nothing” and not a worldly experience among many. But even so, I would not say that it is an experience *beyond* the world, rather it goes *into* the world. It only erases differences by intensifying them, intensifying the border itself into its limit-drawing origin, the creation of the border, the powerful energy of annihilating difference, creating difference. It explores pure experiencing beyond you and me – but immediately defined as “my” orgasm – immediately creates a limit between the two of us. Henry’s concept of an immediate, non-ecstatic, self-affection and Marion’s concept of pure experiencing flesh are born. But these areas are not a lost paradise, they are only created in relation to the simultaneous birth of transcendence and an objectifiable body.

The orgasm is not the end of the world and it does not separate us from the world of extension. Rather, it is the beginning of the world. Through annihilation we experience the creation of the world in two ways, the annihilation is the process of creation seen in reverse. After the orgasm we also experience how the differentiated world returns, how the borders of my and your body re-emerge. How I am once again a separate body and you are another body next to mine. There is also a special connection between our bodies after this, the world re-appears for “us.” Our borders are re-constituted, and we are through that separated and able to meet each other in a plural world. After the orgasm, there is not “nothing to say” – as Marion would have it – but everything to say. It is from here that we can speak and allow a world to emerge.

That the other welcomes me and does not resist me is not specific to the erotic phenomenon, as Marion claims; so does a hot bath. What

is specific for the erotic encounter is instead its specific kind of meeting in which I am no longer an interiority that tries to communicate with another. I am the limit – not departing from the exteriority of the body to an experience of pure immanence. Pure experiencing is not an interiority separated from the exteriority of the world as both Henry and Marion suggest it to be. Erotic experiencing annihilates and creates the world in one and the same breath and gives birth to the world and the body. The extension of the erotic encounter is to “talk the world,” describing it anew – as it arises between us. Experiencing the limit of myself and meeting you there, meeting you as experiencing me. Experiencing beyond you and me – an experience that is a pure limit. The body is a limit in this experience in three ways: first, it is a limit as the maximum of bodily experience; second it is the border of my body as a field next to yours, and finally it is a limit that both divides us and binds us together. This limit shows the possible annihilation of me as a person – and thus also shows the limit constitutive of me and you.

6. Conclusion: On the Limit

Let us go back to the initial question of the relation between transcendent phenomenality and immanent, self-affective flesh. What does the above analysis of the erotic encounter add to an understanding of the relation between these two phenomenalitys? My analysis shows in what way these two are intimately bound in a mutual interdependence, more in line with Henry’s theory of the transcendental body than with his discussions on immanence. Or, rather immanence turns out to be the *drawing* of the line, the separating movement itself. This drawing of a line (immanence, flesh or transcendental) can thus never have a value on its own, but only in relation to the transcendent world that it constructs and deconstructs. Orgasm might be a true limit-experience in which the limit-drawing is most apparent. Maybe this limit-drawing could even be formulated as a “living wellspring of experience,” to borrow an expression of Jan Patočka.¹⁴

14. Jan Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago and la Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1998), 3.

Through this differentiating and separating movement, gaps are created. This limit-drawing always results in the identification of one side as “mine” and primary, and the other side as “other” and secondary. It thus draws a line between you and me, manifesting “me” as known and primary and you as partly unknown and secondary. But it also draws a line within this “me” separating the operating, primary, limit-drawing operation, from the empirical, objectified, secondary self, and the flesh, identified with the “inner self,” from the body, as a constructed exteriority. The movement and living force in the limit-drawing thus immediately identifies itself as one side of the differentiation.

The erotic coheres around the experience of destruction of the border between body and flesh, immanence and transcendence, between you and me. Through these destructions the mutual dependency of the two sides also shows itself. It is also a unique experience of an intensification of a life-force, of the here and now, of a creative life.

Maybe this also gives us a hint about why the erotic is such a problematic theme within phenomenology. If phenomenology starts out from experience and “first-person-perspective,” the erotic encounter is dangerous since it risks this perspective. It cannot, as other theories, keep the phenomena at a safe distance, discussing it as if it did not affect me. Instead it puts the phenomenologist in an awkward position: we are stripped of all our defenses, showing ourselves as most un-sophisticated bodily impulses, in its bluntness as exactly *this* life. At the same time the erotic in its specific way touches upon something common, and maybe even universal: limit-drawing as both a creative and separating movement. But this creative movement immediately casts me aside as but a contingency, which could have been drawn quite differently, and the theories of which could have been constructed otherwise.