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Unpresentable Members: The Theology and Radical Phenomenology of the Sexual Flesh

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UNPRESENTABLE MEMBERS:
THE THEOLOGY AND RADICAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE SEXUAL FLESH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

J. Leavitt Pearl

May 2019

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By

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Approved April 5th, 2019

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ABSTRACT

UNPRESENTABLE MEMBERS: THE THEOLOGY AND RADICAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE SEXUAL FLESH

By

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May 2019

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Marie Baird

Unpresentable Members begins with a wager: that a proper account of the flesh and its sexual character may not only prove philosophically fertile within its own limited domain, but may also provide insight into the theological question of the proper role and place of gender and sexual difference within communities, particularly Christian religious communities. In this regard, this dissertation has two distinct goals: one phenomenological and one theological. Phenomenologically, it offers an account of the manifestation of concrete sexual determinations not only as they objectively appear across the “body-object” (*Körper, le corps*) but with equal importance as they manifest within the subjective affectivity of the flesh (*Leib, la chair*). Here, the text is particularly centered on the radical phenomenologies of Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion, two theologically-inflected phenomenologies that offer a powerful reconception of bodily-ownness, and yet

nevertheless replicate the worst patriarchal and heteronormative prejudices of their predecessors. Theologically, *Unpresentable Members* employs this account of the flesh in order to construct an account of community that resists oppressive forms of social and religious marginalization—particularly the oppression of sexual minorities and other representatives of gender and sexual difference. In this regard, the present dissertation brings together, for the first time, three discourses: radical phenomenology, queer theory, and theology.

DEDICATION

For Teddy and Amelia

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I would first like to extend my deepest gratitude to my dissertation committee—Dr. Marie Baird, Dr. Lanei Rodemeyer, and Dr. George Worgul. Your careful reading and consideration made this dissertation possible. I would like to thank my family who offered me encouragement when continuing was difficult, and the periodic and necessary breaks without which I never would have finished. I should offer a particular thank you to the organizers of the Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences who allowed me to present many of the central ideas of this dissertation in early form, and offered invaluable feedback on each. Perhaps, more than anything else, the present form of this dissertation is owed to the countless friends and colleagues who encouraged (or at least tolerated) my constant testing out of ideas on them, including Jeremy Northup, Erica Freeman, Jennifer Carter, Steven Perry, Joseph Smith, Gwendolyn Jackson, Matthew Scruggs and all the participants of the Pittsburgh Continental Philosophy Reading Group, past and present.

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Am I to become profligate as if I were a blonde? Or religious as if I were French?

Frank O'Hara

Dismemberment: By way of an Introduction

The life of Spirit ... wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself.

G. W. F. Hegel

Sexual difference is probably the issue of our time, which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through.

Luce Irigaray

§1. The Question of Sexuality

The decades since Luce Irigaray suggested that sexual difference is probably “the issue” of our time seem to have only confirmed her thesis. In the last forty years, feminist demands for equal rights and equal pay have only intensified; the gay and lesbian liberation movements carried sexual orientation into the streets; prominent transgender activists and celebrities have thrust gender identity into the center of the public discourse; and the questions of sexual violence and consent have become seemingly permanent fixtures of the nightly news cycle.

Theology and religion have in no way been immune to this tumult; “institutional Christianity,” as Sarah Coakley suggests, “is in crisis about ‘sexuality’.”¹ Mainline protestant denominations—including Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Methodists—face schism over the questions of gay marriage and gay ordination.² The Catholic church lives under the shadow of near constant revelations of clergy sexual abuse and coordinated coverups.

¹ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

² In the words of Tonstad, “that we live under the regime of sexuality is show perhaps most emphatically by the many church schisms taking place over just such issues.” Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 224.

All while feminist and queer theologies continue to push the boundaries of theological discourse in unexpected directions.

Indeed, much of this dissertation was written while I worked with youth at a congregation in suburban Pittsburgh that was in a discernment process to leave the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) in response to the denomination's 2015 vote to amend their regulations on marriage to read: marriage is a "unique commitment between two people, *traditionally* a man and a woman."³ While the congregation ultimately voted to remain within the denomination, the fractures only widened. In early 2018 the congregation split, as those unhappy with the vote left, together with the pastor, to form a new church in the conservative ECO Presbyterian denomination. This crisis, which may bring an end to a one-hundred and thirty year old congregation, highlights the imperative nature of constructing a sexual theology worthy of the challenges of the contemporary world.

The present investigation begins with a wager: that a proper account of the body, or more specifically, the flesh, and its sexual character may not only prove philosophically fertile within its own limited domain, but may also provide insight into the theological question of the proper role and place of gender and sexual difference within communities, particularly Christian religious communities.

In this regard, this dissertation has two distinct goals: one phenomenological and one theological. Phenomenologically, it seeks to offer an account of the manifestation of concrete

³ The new language reads, in full: "Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the wellbeing of the entire human family. Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives. The sacrificial love that unites the couple sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community."

In civil law, marriage is a contract that recognizes the rights and obligations of the married couple in society. In the Reformed tradition, marriage is also a covenant in which God has an active part, and which the community of faith publicly witnesses and acknowledges."

sexual determinations not only as they objectively appear across the “body-object” (*Körper, le corps*) but with equal importance as they manifest within the subjective affectivity of the flesh (*Leib, la chair*). Here, the dissertation is particularly centered on the so-called “radical phenomenology” of Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion, two theologically-inflected phenomenologies that offer a powerful reconception of bodily-ownness, and yet nevertheless appear to replicate the worst patriarchal and heteronormative prejudices of their predecessors. Theologically, this dissertation will seek to employ this account of the flesh in order to construct an account of community that resists oppressive forms of social and religious marginalization—particularly the oppression of sexual minorities and other representatives of gender and sexual difference.

I will therefore here follow, as best as I am able, the footsteps of queer theology, insofar as it is this theology that has more clearly and directly than any other, exposed the sexual and embodied character of *all* theological thinking. “Theology is a sexual act, a sexual doing,”⁴ as Althaus-Reid remarks, and it was “the queer theologians ... [who] introduced the body into theology, bodies in love, bodies entangled in ethics of passion—transgressive bodies at that.”⁵

In this regard, the present dissertation can be understood as an attempt to bring together, for the first time, three discourses: radical phenomenology, queer theory, and theology. For radical

⁴ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 36.

⁵ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 48.

theology has, since its inception, explored theological themes and motifs;⁶ while queer theology⁷ and queer phenomenology⁸ have applied the insights of queer theory to theology and phenomenology respectively. Yet, a consideration of radical phenomenology from the perspective of queer theory—particularly with a sensitivity to the theological consequences of this work—has until now not been attempted. It is the aim of the present dissertation to fill this conspicuous gap in the literature.

⁶ For a summary of these reflections, see, e.g.: Dominique Janicaud (ed.), *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000); Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba (eds.), *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Christina Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?: Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Tarek R. Dika and W. Chris Hackett (eds.), *Quiet Powers of the Possible: Interviews in Contemporary French Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); and Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

⁷ The literature of queer theology is much too large to summarize, but the following texts have been particularly influential on the present work: John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* (2000); Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (2003); Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury, 2011); Tonstad, *God and Difference* (2016); Linn Marie Tonstad, *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018).

⁸ The literature in queer phenomenology, or at least in the intersection of queer theory/trans studies and phenomenology is considerably smaller. Key texts include: Judith Butler, "Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory," *Theatre Journal* 40 (1988): 519–531; Henry S. Rubin "Phenomenology as method in trans studies," *GLQ* 4 (1998): 263–281; Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press 2006). Julia Horncastle, "Queer orientation: Selfhood and poetics," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (Dec. 2009): 903–920; Gayle Salamon, "Justification and Queer Method, or Leaving Philosophy," *Hypatia* Vol. 24, No. 1, Oppression and Moral Agency: Essays in Honor of Claudia Card (Winter, 2009): 225–230; Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Lanei M. Rodemeyer, "Husserl and queer theory," *Continental Philosophy Review* (2017), doi:10.1007/s11007-017-9412-x; Lanei M. Rodemeyer, *Lou Sullivan Diaries (1970-1980) and Theories of Sexual Embodiment: Making Sense of Sensing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2018).

§2. Ἀσχήμων: the Dysmember and Dismemberment

The two methodological streams of this dissertation—phenomenological and theological—will be united through Paul’s language of the ἀσχήμων (1 Cor. 12.23)—variously translated as “uncomely parts” (KJV), “unpresentable parts” (NIV), or “less respectable members” (NRSV). Drawing upon Paul’s usage, ἀσχήμων will be taken in a dual sense, bridging the phenomenological and theological considerations, as a term that denotes both the sexual determinations of the individual body (e.g. genitalia), and homologously, those members of social or political communities who are “unpresentable”—that is to say, who are cast out or granted only restricted access to the religious community (e.g. women and sexual minorities).

This introduction will serve to frame the discourse, by setting out this key term in something like a word study. In context, the passage in which this term appears reads as follows:

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ... Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ... All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many . If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members [ἀσχήμονα] are treated with greater respect [εὐσχήμονα]; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so constituted the body, giving

the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no division within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all the members suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (Corinthians 12.12-27)⁹

As noted above, the NRSV renders ἀσχήμονα: “less respectable members.” While Paul here undoubtedly has in mind genitalia, this cover translation “is not bad since discretion on the part of Paul calls for discretion in our own language.”¹⁰ Yet, while this is a passable translation, it is perhaps overly reliant upon its synonymous parallel, wherein special honor [τιμῆν] is granted these dishonored members [ἀτιμότερα]. Whereas this second paradoxical contrast, where the dishonorable is honored, is dependent upon socio-cultural perspectives or opinions—what might be called, for lack of a better word, “subjective” assessments—a more precise rendering of ἀσχήμων might draw forward its aesthetic or even ontological significance. For, while it is certainly the case that its ἀσχήμων and its opposite, εὐσχήμονα, carry a social weight—as attested by Mark 15, where Joseph of Arimathea is marked as a “prominent [εὐσχήμων] member of the council”; or Acts 13 and 17’s marking of “prominent [εὐσχημόνων] women” within the early church—a deeper translation of ἀσχήμων should recognize its root in σχῆμα: form, figure, or as its transliteration would suggest: *schema*.

Whereas honor [τιμῆν] marks a social assessment of value, the σχῆμα of a member—whether positive [εὐ] or negative [ἀ]—denotes its formal characteristic. In Philippians 2.8, Jesus the Christ takes on the very “form [σχήματι]” of a human; in 1st Corinthians 7, Paul anticipates the passing away of the “form [σχῆμα] of the present world order.” In like manner, εὐσχήμων and

⁹ Unless otherwise marked, all translations in this dissertation are taken from: The Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, *New Revised Standard Version Bible* (1989). Minor changes or variations from the NRSV are my own.

¹⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians in The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT)*, eds. Ned B. Stonehouse et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 609.

ἀσχήμων reflect the formal characteristic of their respective members—rightly-formed in the first case, malformed or disfigured in the second.

One can trace this usage of ἀσχήμων as that which is *formally* malformed or disfigured throughout ancient Greek literature. Thus Herodotus describes Gelon, who faced with the arrogance of the Spartans, refuses to be provoked to an “unseemly answer” [ἀσχήμονα ἐν τῇ ἀμοιβῇ].¹¹ For Plato, ἀσχήμων marks that which is “repugnant” [τῶν ἀσχημόνων] because it is monstrous; that is to say, it marks that which breaks proper form by bringing together what should by nature and right be opposed.¹² Likewise, Hippocrates, will employ the term in a medical context to refer straightforwardly to physical “deformity” [ἀσχήμονα].¹³

For Aristotle, this formal or aesthetic disorder is explicitly granted a *moral* character. Thus, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the term refers to the morally bankrupt “uglier character” [ἀσχημονέστερος] of the exaggerator.¹⁴ Likewise, Euripides employs the term to mark that which is “unseemly” [ἀσχήμονες], such as an undignified death by hanging: “unseemly [ἀσχήμονες] is the noose ‘twixt earth and heaven: even of thralls ‘tis held a death of shame. Noble dagger is and honourable, and one short instant rids the flesh of life.”¹⁵

¹¹ As a translation note, most contemporary translations render the double negative here as a positive: “nevertheless I will answer you *with courtesy*.” Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (New York: Penguin Books, 1954/2003), 471 (7.160).

¹² “Soc: Now, look at the pleasures that go with these types of maladies, what kinds of conditions they are. Pro: What types do you mean? Soc: Those pleasures of a rather repugnant type [τῶν ἀσχημόνων], which our harsh friends hate above all. Pro: What kinds? Soc. For example, the relief from itching by rubbing, and all of that sort that needs no other remedy. But if this condition should befall us, what in heaven’s name should we call it, pleasure or pain? Pro: That really would seem to be a mixed experience, with a bad component, Socrates.” Plato, “Philebus,” trans. Dorothea Frede in *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 435 (46a).

¹³ Hippocrates, “On Joints” in *Hippocrates Vol. III*, trans. E. T. Withington (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 251 (27).

¹⁴ Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. 2*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1779 (1127 b13).

¹⁵ Euripides, “Helen,” *Euripides: In Four Volumes, Vol. 1*, trans. Arthur S. Way (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912/1978), 491 (299-302).

This moral condemnation takes on clear *sexual* connotations in the *Politics*, where Aristotle argues that the children of the polis should be banned from the stage, where “indecent” [ἀσχήμοναζ] performances will be produced: “clearly we should also banish pictures or speeches from the stage which are indecent [ἀσχήμοναζ]. Let the rulers take care that there be no image or picture representing unseemly actions, except in the temples of those gods at whose festivals the law permits even ribaldry.”¹⁶ This sexual connotation is repeated in Josephus, who employs the term to describe a soldier exposing himself to a group of Jews, thereby triggering civil unrest: “and a Roman cohort stood over the cloisters of the temple ... one of the soldiers pulled back his garment, and cowering down [bending over] after an indecent manner [ἀσχημόνως], turned his breech to the Jews, and spake such words as you might expect upon such a posture [τῷ σχήματι].”¹⁷

It is precisely the intention of the present dissertation to hold these three components of the ἀσχήμων—formal, moral, and sexual—together. The ἀσχήμων represents that which is “unpresentable” because it breaks with right form, because it corrupts good morals, and because it engages in what is sexually illicit. The ἀσχήμων is the sexual member in every sense. Or rather, insofar as it is ἀ-σχήμων, that is, the loss of form, or, morally speaking, the corrupt or disordered member; I will suggest the translation “*dys-member*.”¹⁸ The dysmember is, as Althaus-Reid describes the nomadic queer, “the image of the unstable or irredeemable body of a theological subject who lives amidst insecurity and risk.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Aristotle, “Politics” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. 2*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2120 (1336 b14-17).

¹⁷ Josephus, “The Jewish War” in *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 744 (II.12).

¹⁸ From the Greek prefix δυσ- “hard, bad, unlucky, etc., ...; destroying the good sense of a word, or increasing its bad sense.” Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Seventh Edition (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1889), 453.

¹⁹ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 50.

Moreover, the dysmember is that which is structurally excluded from the community. It is the irreducible reminder that renders every body—whether the sexual body of the individual or the body politic of the community—not-whole. In this regard, the dysmember is that which every logic of wholeness and sameness must excise from the body; the dysmember must be cut out, for the good of the community. The dysmember is “unpresentable,” precisely because its uncomfortable presence provokes the dissolution of the fantasy of the One-body. Thus, discomfort with the dysmember motivates the dismemberment of the body—whether rhetorical, social, or literal. Phenomenologies and theologies of the body that seek to render the body as the wholeness of self-presence must dismember themselves, symbolically casting off that which disrupts this unity of theory. Religious and political communities which seek the homogeneity of sexual and social unanimity must dismember themselves, literally casting out those who disrupt their communal uniformity.²⁰

Like a queer theology, a radical phenomenology and theology of the sexual flesh must “come to terms first of all with the forgotten body parts and dismembering ceremonies to which persons or communities have been subject in the past,”²¹ and in the present. It is the aim of the present dissertation to employ the methodologies of phenomenology and theology in order to bring the dysmember to the foreground, to make it the explicit subject of an investigation, in order to expose it as a site of liberation and redemption.

²⁰ In this way, communities attempt to convert what John Boswell calls “inferior insiders”—denigrated members of the community—into “inferior outsiders,” denigrated individuals expelled from the community. Such inferior outsiders are “not tolerated at all (they are killed, or banished, or incarcerated) or are relegated to nonexistence conceptually.” John Boswell, “Homosexuality and Religious Life: A Historical Approach,” in James Nelson and Sandra Longfellow (eds.), *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 362-363.

²¹ Ibid.

§3. The Path to be Followed

The first chapter, “Phenomenology: Having a body, Being a Body,” briefly lays out the history of the phenomenology of the body, first as it appears in Husserl, before turning to the French tradition that anticipates radical phenomenology. In particular, the chapter will expose the ways in which questions of gender and sexuality have been bound up with investigations into embodiment almost from the beginning of the phenomenological movement.

The second chapter, “Michel Henry: Transcendental Asexuality,” takes up precisely where the previous chapter left off, exploring the way in which Michel Henry’s phenomenology sought to radicalize the account of embodiment and the flesh introduced by his predecessors. Once this account of fleshly incarnation is laid out, the chapter exposes key patriarchal and heteronormative prejudices that subtend Henry’s thinking, submitting them to a critique drawn primarily from the French feminist tradition that was working concurrently with his own developments.

The third chapter, “Jean-Luc Marion: The Saturated Flesh,” lays out the specific ways in which Jean-Luc Marion’s more recent phenomenological work follows and diverges from Henry, particularly in regards to his account of the flesh. Following the model of Chapter 2, once this account has been laid out, key patriarchal and heteronormative prejudices—most conspicuously in his account of the child—are drawn forward, and a critique is leveled from the perspective of queer theory, particularly the work of Lee Edelman.

The fourth chapter, “Nuptial Theology in the *Communio* School and Radical Phenomenology,” traces the clear influence of *ressourcement* theology—particularly that of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II), and Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)—upon

radical phenomenology. Specifically, the chapter seeks to expose the way in which rather specific claims regarding the nature of women, sexual difference, and procreation are directly drawn from this theological tradition.

The fifth chapter, “A Radical Phenomenology of the Sexual Flesh,” suggests that the problems identified in Henry and Marion are not simply reducible to the importing of theological categories. Rather, it is here argued that the ground for these misrepresentations of women and queer folk are motivated by phenomenological failures in Henry and Marion’s account of the flesh. That is, a monadic tendency within radical phenomenology is identified, which views the flesh as a total self-presence, given to itself without gap or remainder. Against this view an alternative account of the constitution of the flesh, drawing both from the radical phenomenology of Jacob Rogozinski and Lacanian psychoanalysis is offered as an alternative, which recognizes the structural incompleteness and precarity of incarnation.

The sixth chapter, “Studies on the Sexual Member,” works out the logic of the previous chapter by examining three phenomenological studies of sexual embodiment: acute male impotence, anal pleasure, and polymorphous perversity. Through this trajectory, the chapter aims both to lay out the key characteristics of each of these various phenomena, and to challenge the model of sexual development proffered by Freud—thereby opening up the possibility of a wider understanding of sexual embodiment.

The seventh chapter, “Membership and the Body of Christ,” moves away from the phenomenological methodology that had dominated the early chapters and instead employs a theological methodology—influenced by both *ressourcement* and queer theologies. Under this method, the chapter works from the general notion of the communal body or *corpore politico* to the uniquely Christian notion of the body of Christ. Here, specifically, the notion of the body of

Christ is worked out in three registers: the physical body of Christ (Jesus of Nazareth), the resurrected body of Christ, and the eucharistic body of Christ. In each instance, the analysis attempts to highlight key embodied characteristics of the body of Christ, as well highlighting the particular role of sexuality in each manifestation.

The eighth chapter, “The Cut and the Body of Christ,” functions as the pair of the seventh, picking up a fourth and final conception of the body of Christ: the communal or social body of Christ, that is, the church. In this chapter, careful analysis is given to the various accounts of the body of Christ in the Pauline corpus, as well as its treatment among early interpreters—particularly Cyprian and Augustine. These analyses seek to highlight the deeply ambivalent nature of this symbol for liberative work in sexual politics, suggesting both that the notion of the body of Christ should not be appropriated in a naive manner, while also suggesting that it may provide useful tools in an emancipatory project.

CHAPTER 1 - Phenomenology: Having a Body, Being a Body

We stand amazed before consciousness, but 'the truly surprising thing is rather the body.'

Gilles Deleuze

Since its inception in 1900, phenomenology—particularly the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl—has been haunted by a consistent accusation: it is marked by an ethereal character, it has forgotten materiality. Through phenomenology's concern for the region of consciousness, the formal structure of logic, and the transcendental Ego—this criticism generally argues—the fleshy, dirty corporeality of everyday life has been lost. Through its repetition of a Cartesian dualism, it is further suggested, transcendental phenomenology has forgotten that we are not merely subjects, souls, or Egos, but also human bodies—with all of the innumerable associated complexities of race, gender, ability, sexuality, and so forth.

It is first and foremost the aim of this introductory chapter to disabuse the reader of this wholly selective reading of phenomenology. Rather, what will subsequently be shown is, first, that phenomenology has, since its very inception, been marked by a deep preoccupation with the question of embodiment; and second, that this engagement has taken the form of an undeniable trajectory within phenomenology—one that has increasingly situated these concerns together with the related questions of sexuality and eroticism. Simply put, far from ignoring either the body or sexuality, the former emerges as a central theme of phenomenological research at the latest in 1907, and the latter as early as 1943.

Mapping this trajectory is essential for the foregoing research, as it will situate and contextualize the distinct character of Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological reflections on sexuality and the flesh in the following two chapters. Moreover, it will likewise lay the groundwork for much of the work in later chapters, work which will not only critique certain formulations in Henry and Marion from the perspective of contemporary scholarship, but will also seek to return to key notions in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological accounts of the constitution of the body.

While countless thinkers could be brought forward to construct this phenomenological genealogy, space has necessitated its limitation to five central figures. The first section will exclusively engage with the work of Edmund Husserl, most notably his posthumously published manuscript *Ideas II*. The second and third sections will center the work of the first generation of French phenomenologists: viz. Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This limitation undeniably carries its own weaknesses: ignoring, for example the key phenomenological investigations into race and post-colonialism—epitomized by the work of Trần Đức Thảo and Frantz Fanon—and the inestimable role of Didier Franck's *Flesh and Body* for the French reception of Husserl in the second half of the 20th century. Nevertheless, these figures will provide a basic framework for understanding the phenomenological milieu in which Henry and Marion developed their phenomenologies of the body. In Husserl we will find that phenomenology has, since its inception, reserved primacy of place for the body, which functions as a quasi-transcendental condition for the constitution of the objective world. In the first generation of French thinkers we will find the gradual replacement of the transcendental Ego with the body, as well as the emergence of sexuality as a key component of embodiment.

§I. Edmund Husserl: The Quasi-Transcendental Body

A. Does Edmund Husserl Have a Body?:

Already from the 1913 publication of *Ideas I*, Husserl's "transcendental turn" drew swift criticism for its rationalism, its formalism, and its abstract quality. Such criticisms first arose among his early contemporaries—such as Roman Ingarden²² and the "Munich Circle" (e.g. Adolf Reinach²³ and Johannes Daubert)—and later among existential-phenomenological thinkers including Jean-Paul Sartre,²⁴ Emmanuel Levinas,²⁵ and, most prominently, Martin Heidegger.²⁶ In each instance, these thinkers rebelled against Husserl's turn to the pseudo-Kantian language of the Ego and

²² For an account of the principal critiques leveled by Ingarden against Husserl, see: J. N. Mohanty, "Roman Ingarden's Critique of Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology" in *Phenomenology: Between Essentialism and Transcendental Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 32-45.

²³ See, e.g.: Adolf Reinach, *Phénoménologie Réaliste*, trans. Dominique Pradelle et al (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2012). For an English translation of the first chapter, see: Adolf Reinach, *The A priori Foundations of the Civil Law: along with the lecture, "Concerning Phenomenology,"* ed. John F. Crosby (Frankfurt, Paris, Lancaster, New Brunswick: ontos verlag, 2012), "Concerning Phenomenology" (trans. Dallas Willard), 143-166.

²⁴ Sartre, for example, marks *Ideas I*'s conception of the transcendental-I as a needless reversion ("il est revenu")—after the substantive steps forward in the *Logical Investigations* and the lectures *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*—into an outdated paradigm: "The transcendental I thus has no *raison d'être*." Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. Sarah Richmond (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 7. For more on Sartre's relation to Husserl, see: "§II. From the Transcendental Ego to *Le Corps Propre*" below.

²⁵ Levinas' reading of Husserl is complex, due in part to a discovery of a "difficulty or fluctuation" in Husserl's desire to ground phenomenology in "concrete life" and his competing desire to ground it in abstract theorization. As he writes, "while asserting the primacy of theory for Husserl, we have also emphasized that his essential thesis consists in locating being in concrete life." Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. André Orianne (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 158. In a later work, Levinas will critically describe Husserl's account of intentionality as "neutralized and disincarnate." Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 27-28.

²⁶ For a detailed examination of the relationship between this "first schism" (1905-1913) and this "second schism" (1927-1933), wherein it is argued that "the first schism anticipated the second and the second recapitulated the first, so that, although the first could have occurred without the second, the second would not have happened as it did without the first," see: George Heffernan, "A Tale of Two Schisms: Heidegger's Critique of Husserl's Move into Transcendental Idealism," *The European Legacy* 21:5-6 (2016), 556-575.

Transcendental Idealism²⁷ in favor of the realist paradigm of the *Logical Investigations* and the early lectures *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*. As Heidegger wrote in 1963, “even after the *Ideas* was published, I was still captivated by the never-ceasing spell of the *Logical Investigations*.”²⁸

While each of these thinkers would ultimately depart from Husserl in a unique direction, it is nevertheless clear that, for a number of these thinkers, a central threat of transcendental idealism was potential repercussions in the phenomenology of the body. By emphasizing the Ego or the transcendental Ego, it was suggested, Husserl had relegated the body to a secondary status, recapitulating the traditional Cartesian problematic of the soul and the body. Ingarden’s critique of Husserl’s *Ideas I* is emblematic of this concern: “the problem of the relations between soul and body—which is as old as European philosophy—has not been solved by Husserl and was not, in my opinion, taken by him even one step beyond the traditional state of the problem in spite of

²⁷ See, e.g., Husserl’s engagement with the language of Transcendental Idealism in §40–41 of the *Cartesian Meditations*. “Phenomenology,” he there writes, “seems to be rightly characterized also as transcendental theory of knowledge.” He will clarify this assertion writing that “carried out with this systematic concreteness, phenomenology is *eo ipso* ‘transcendental idealism,’ though in a fundamentally and essentially new sense. It is not a psychological idealism . . . nor is it a Kantian Idealism. . . . On the contrary, we have here a transcendental idealism that is nothing more than a consequentially executed self-explication in the form of a systematic egological science, an explication of my ego as subject of every possible cognition, and indeed with respect to every sense of what exists.” Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: an Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 81, 86.

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, “My Way to Phenomenology” in *On Time and Being* trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 78. Heidegger likewise writes that “from the beginning and always stood outside the philosophical position of Husserl in the sense of a transcendental philosophy of consciousness” (Martin Heidegger, “Was ist das Sein selbst?” [12 September 1946], GA, 16.423, as translated by and cited in Heffernan, 568). In the words of Heffernan, “There can be no doubt that Heidegger viewed the transformation of descriptive phenomenology into transcendental phenomenology accompanied by transcendental idealism as performed in Husserl’s *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* as a ‘wrong path’ and that he did this at the time at which it happened.” Heffernan, 564.

undoubted progress in the research on the so-called ‘givenness of the body’ (Husserl’s *Leibgegebenheit*).”²⁹ Similar concerns can be found in Daubert³⁰ and Reinach.³¹

The strong version of this critique—that Husserl simply failed to acknowledge the body or grant it a key role—is belied by the prominent role of the body in his analyses of perception and spatiality as early as the 1907 lectures *Thing and Space*.³² It is there that Husserl first articulated his distinction between the *Leib*—the lived body, animate body, or flesh—and the *Körper*—objective bodies (both living and not) in the spatiality of the world. Three characteristics remain central to Husserl’s conception of the *Leib* throughout these early lectures.³³ First, the body functions as a spatial zero-point, a locus away from which one cannot move. “These things, that are co-perceived,” he writes, “always also include the Ego-Body, which, as a body [*Körper*], is likewise in space, in the space of the total perception. It stands there as the ever-abiding point of

²⁹ Roman Ingarden, *On the Motives which led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Arnór Hannibalsson (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 69-70.

³⁰ “The experience of what is physical and of what is spatial cannot simply be gathered from any intuition whatsoever; it originates from a primordial [*quellhaft*] experience of my own body which moves in space and which does so while already in action and interaction with other bodies in space.” Johannes Daubert, “Daubertiana A I 3” (Unpublished notes, 1930-1931), 35v. As cited in: Karl Schuhmann and Barry Smith, “Against Idealism: Johannes Daubert vs. Husserl’s *Ideas I*,” *Review of Metaphysics* 39 (1985): 763-93.

³¹ As MacIntyre writes, “for Husserl there is no essential relationship between my having or being a body and my being the subject of conscious experience. Yet on Reinach’s account of social acts, a condition of the possibility of such acts is that inner mental awareness and outward bodily expression are parts of a single unified act. Subtract what is bodily and what we would be left with is not with a purely mental act, but no act at all.” Alasdair MacIntyre, *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue, 1913-1922* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 61.

³² Edmund Husserl, *Thing and Space: Lectures of 1907*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997).

³³ This categorization partially overlaps with that discussed by Sara Heinämaa who describes three fundamental characteristics of the *Leib* in the following manner: “First, living bodies are given to us as fields of sensation. ... Second ... the living body is its motility. ... Third, the living body functions as the fixed point in perceptions of direction, distance, and movement.” Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 29.

reference, to which all spatial relations seem to be attached.”³⁴ Second and third, Husserl describes the *Leib* as the “bearer” of the Ego and as the locus of kinesthetic sensation.³⁵

Nevertheless, as central as the *Leib* remains throughout these early analyses, Husserl perhaps remains susceptible to a weaker version of this critique—that while he acknowledges the body, he relegates it to a merely accidental position. This critique is ostensibly justified by two of Husserl’s claims regarding the *Leib*. First, the *Leib* is not essentially or eidetically bound to the Ego or the transcendental Ego. Rather, the body merely “bears” or is “bound” to the transcendental Ego. Second, Husserl positions the *Leib* within the region of constituted spatio-temporal objects of consciousness. It is, he writes in *Thing and Space*, “primarily a thing like any other, insofar as it (although only to a limited extent) can also be constituted like any other thing.”³⁶ As a constituted thing, the body (unlike the transcendental Ego) is susceptible to the bracket of the transcendental reduction—as Husserl subsequently demonstrates in his 1913 *Ideas I*.

As in his earlier texts, Husserl’s investigation of the body in *Ideas I* begins with the body as a continual presence in the normal life. “The world of things *and our body* within it,” he writes, “are continuously present to our perception.”³⁷ But, unlike his earlier writings, the ultimate goal

³⁴ Husserl, *Thing and Space: Lectures of 1907*, 66.

³⁵ “This thing is precisely a Body [*Leib*], the bearer of the Ego; the Ego has sensations, and these sensations are ‘localized’ in the Body.” Ibid., 137. This model of the body is likewise repeated in *The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*. These lectures, hosted in Göttingen in the winter of 1910/11, remain some of the most consistently cited texts by the later Husserl (Ingo Farin and James G. Hart, “Translators’ Preface” in Edmund Husserl, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Ingo Farin and James G. Hart [Dordrecht: Springer, 2006], XIII), and offer one of the clearest accounts of Husserl’s *transcendental* methodology. Yet, Husserl here grants the body a central position, noting that, in the natural attitude, “every I finds itself as having an organic lived body [*Leib*]” (Ibid., 3.). Recapitulating *Thing and Space*, the *Leib* is here granted three roles: Serving as a spatial zero-point around which, and in relation to which, other physical bodies manifest—“everything, which is not lived body, appears to be related to this lived body” (Ibid., 4.)—; serving as a site for the localization of “I-experiences,” as, for example, perceptual sensations; and functioning as that to which the transcendental-I is “tied” (Ibid., 92) or “bound” (Ibid., 96.).

³⁶ Husserl, *Thing and Space*, 242. And again, in 1910/11, “the body [*Leib*], for its part, is not an I, but rather a spatial-temporal ‘thing’.” Husserl, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 3.

³⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 74 (§39) [emphasis added].

of *Ideas I* is the immediate access to the “things themselves” [*die Sachen selbst*],³⁸ that is, conscious phenomena *as they give themselves to pure consciousness*.³⁹ Thus, for the Husserl of *Ideas I*, the omni-presence of the body, insofar as it stands between the phenomenologist and pure consciousness, is a problem to be solved.

In order to solve this problem of access to pure consciousness, Husserl deploys an infamous thought experiment in §49 of *Ideas I*: the imaginative destruction of the world. In this experiment, Husserl introduces the notion of a non-empirical ego by imagining a total “nullifying of the world”—that is, imagining that the “possibility of non-Being which belongs essentially to every Thing-like transcendence”⁴⁰ might become an actuality. Even in such an extreme experience, Husserl argues, “it is then evident that the Being of consciousness, of every stream of experience generally, though it would indeed be inevitably modified by the nullifying of the thing-world, would not be affected thereby in its own proper existence.”⁴¹ Thus, Husserl argues, “no real thing ... is necessary for the Being of consciousness itself.”⁴²

In §54, Husserl redeploys this experiment in order to likewise annul the animate body. “Let us imagine,” he writes, “in the spirit of the foregoing exposition that the whole of nature—and the physical in the first instance—has been ‘annulled,’ there would then be no more bodies [*Leiber*] and therefore no men. ... But my consciousness, however its states of experience might vary,

³⁸ It is important, given the similarity in English translation, to mark this as conceptually distinct from Kant’s “thing in itself” [*Ding an sich*].

³⁹ “How then,” he asks, “does and can Consciousness itself separate out as a concrete thing in itself, from that within it, of which we are conscious, namely the perceived being. ‘Standing over against’ consciousness ‘in and for itself?’” Husserl, *Ideas*, 74 (§39).

⁴⁰ Husserl, *Ideas*, 94.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴² *Ibid.*

would remain an absolute stream of experience.”⁴³ Through this imaginative experiment, Husserl understands himself to have established the phenomenological possibility of “an incorporeal [*leibloses*] and, paradoxical as it may sound, an inanimate and non-personal consciousness.”⁴⁴ Through this second experiment, Husserl establishes the phenomenological possibility of distinguishing between transcendental consciousness and the body. Thus, he argues, the body can itself be submitted to the phenomenological reduction.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ The notions of the *epoché* and the phenomenological reductions form the core of Husserl’s “transcendental turn.” Merleau-Ponty suggests that “there is probably no other question over which Husserl spent more time” (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith [New York: Routledge, 1962], xii); and Didier Franck will later mark the reduction as the “pivotal and the permanent theme of Husserl’s entire enterprise” (Didier Franck, *Flesh and Body: On the Phenomenology of Husserl*, trans. Joseph Rivera and Scott Davidson [New York: Bloomsbury, 2014], 29). Husserl first used the term “phenomenological reduction” in the 1905 *Seefelder Manuscript*, as well as his 1906/07 *Lectures on Logic and Epistemology* (See: Dermot Moran, *Husserl’s Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: an Introduction* [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 22-23; and Dermot Moran and Joseph D. Cohen, *The Husserl Dictionary* [London: Continuum, 2012], 107), but it will not find a full articulation until 1907’s *The Idea of Phenomenology*. There, Husserl insists that his epistemological project, seeking a certain foundation for science, must begin with a phenomenological reduction: “I must exclude all that is transcendently posited. ... This means: everything transcendent (that which is not given to me immanently) is to be assigned the index zero, i.e., its existence, its validity is not to be assumed as such, except at most as a *phenomenon of a claim to validity*” (Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964], 4.).

In 1911, Husserl clarifies the transcendental reorientation inaugurated in 1905 with *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*. While he does not there use the language of the reduction, he nevertheless proposes a “science of consciousness that explores the psychic in respect of what is immanent in it,” and with careful consideration of its specific mode of “direct givenness” (Edmund Husserl, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. Quentin Lauer [New York: Harper & Row, 1965], 93). In this methodology, one abstracts oneself from what Husserl calls a “phenomenological naiveté” (Ibid., 94), in which any number of “prejudices and preconditions” (Ibid., 102.), particularly those regarding the “empirical being in the ensemble of nature” (Ibid., 91.), are simply presupposed. As in the prior case, the basic moves of the phenomenological reduction, albeit without the later technical jargon, are present. This technical language will first appear two years later in *Ideas I*.

In *Ideas I*, the “naiveté” of the previous work is fleshed out into the “natural attitude,” the mode of positing within which phenomena are immediately incorporated into the metaphysically and axiologically dense schema of a spatial, temporal, and valuable “world.” Against this natural attitude, Husserl posits a scientific alternative, *the phenomenological attitude*. Here, “every thesis related to ... objectivity must be disconnected and changed into its bracketed counterpart” (Husserl, *Ideas*, 58), that is to say, every posited characteristic of the phenomenon, everything that is not immediately given to consciousness, must be methodologically set aside.

By reducing all phenomena to what is absolutely given to consciousness prior to all metaphysical, theoretical, or naive positings, Husserl understands himself to have granted access to a new domain of philosophical inquiry; the only domain, to be sure, within which philosophy might attain scientific rigor: the domain of immanent consciousness.

This submission of the body to the transcendental reduction was taken by many of Husserl's contemporaries and later critics as evidence of a fundamental disregard for the body. Thus, even if the strong version of the critique failed to hold—as Husserl undoubtedly centers the body in his writings—the weaker version ostensibly stands. For Husserl, the body is merely accidental. Were this the summation of Husserl's account of the body, then one might conclude with his early critics that Husserl's account of the body is impoverished; to recall Ingarden's critique, one might suggest that the problem of the body was not “taken by [Husserl] even one step beyond the traditional state of the problem.”⁴⁶

Yet, as the defenders of Husserl are quick to note, this is by no means the end of Husserl's consideration of the unique role of the body. On the one hand, Husserl will not diverge from his fundamental conception of the body as distinct from the transcendental Ego. The body, for Husserl, remains couched in the language of *property*. The body is something which is possessed; it is “mine” (*mein*),⁴⁷ it is not “me.”⁴⁸ Even in his most radical moments, he is unlikely to affirm, as does the later French phenomenological tradition, “the problem of the body is that it is an I: not

⁴⁶ Ingarden, *On the Motives which led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism*, 70.

⁴⁷ See, e.g.: Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book, Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 223, 224, 259. For ease and concision of space, subsequent citations will simply refer to “Husserl, *Ideas II*.”

⁴⁸ It is worth noting, even if only in passing, that much of the subsequent tradition of phenomenological reflection on the body is precisely oriented toward the rejection of this “property” thesis. As Luijpen paradigmatically writes, “it is not possible to apply to my body what, according to Marcel, can be said of the object of ‘having.’ I ‘have’ a car, a pen, a book. In this ‘having’ the object of the ‘having’ reveals itself as an exteriority. There is a distance between me and what I ‘have.’ What I ‘have’ is to a certain extent independent of me. I can dispose of it or give it away without ceasing to be what I am—a man [sic]. The same cannot be asserted of my body, at least not without so many restrictions that ‘having’ is deprived of its strict sense. My body is not so far removed from my conscious self as is the ashtray on my desk. Likewise, my body is not something external to me like my car. I cannot dispose of my body or give it away as I dispose of money or give away my golf clubs. All this stems from the fact that my body is not ‘a’ body but *my* body, not in the same way as my golf clubs are mine, but in such a way that my body *embodies me*.” William A. Luijpen, *Existential Phenomenology* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1960), 188.

some ‘thing’ that we may or may not possess, but something we are.”⁴⁹ It is nevertheless the case that the account of the body found in his subsequent writings—particularly his most sustained treatment of the body in *Ideas II*—presents an account of the body which highlights that it is not merely one constituted “thing” within the world of spatial-thingly objects. Rather, the body plays an equally important *constituting* role. Far from merely accidental, the body stands as a condition of possibility for any objective world whatsoever.

B. The Constituted Body:

In *Ideas II*, Husserl seeks to bridge the seemingly insurmountable gap between the immanent region of pure consciousness opened up by *Ideas I* and the everyday, material-sensible world as understood by the natural sciences. Central to this project is a deep understanding of the *Leib*, understood as medium between these two spheres; the *Leib* is situated “between the rest of the material world and the ‘subjective’ sphere.”⁵⁰ But, this mediating role requires that the *Leib* stand in a precarious position, both a constituted phenomenon and a necessary component in the constitution of “higher objectivities.”⁵¹

The unique constituting-constituted character of the *Leib* becomes increasingly apparent throughout *Ideas II*. By the third chapter of Section One, Husserl already suggests that the *Leib* may be a necessary (rather than contingent) component in the constitution of spatial-thingly objects. This suspicion emerges from the need for a receptive figure capable of receiving the

⁴⁹ Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skeban (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 7.

⁵⁰ Husserl, *Ideas II*, 169.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

sensible givenness of aesthetic sensations. This suspicion can be understood as a specific application of Husserl's broader polar, intentional framework.⁵² As Husserl writes:

It pertains in general to the essence of every cogito that a new cogito of the kind called by us 'Ego-reflection' is in principle possible, one that grasps, on the basis of the earlier cogito (which itself is thereby phenomenologically altered), the pure subject of that earlier cogito.⁵³

That is to say, to every form of givenness encountered in phenomenological reflection, there must also correspond something like a subject-pole capable of receiving this particular mode of givenness. Ultimately, Husserl insists, every cogito is intentionally referred to the transcendental Ego: "everything objective, in the broadest sense of the word, is thinkable only as correlate of a possible consciousness or, more precisely, a correlate of a possible 'I think' and consequently as referable to a pure Ego."⁵⁴ Nevertheless, a central claim of *Ideas II* is that the transcendental Ego on its own cannot account for the constitution of the spatial world or spatial things. What is needed instead is an intermediary "Ego-like" structure that would permit this constitution of a spatial-thingly world. It is the *Leib* which is granted this mediating role, due to its unique relationship to sensible intuitions. In order to understand this particular relationship, it is necessary to situate the discussion of the *Leib* in relation to the larger, overarching argument of the text.

Central among the aims of *Ideas II* is the recognition that the natural-scientific world is not immediately given, but rather emerges through a complex series of constitutions, ultimately reducible to the sensible impressions of the hyletic flux. "We are always," Husserl insists:

⁵² "It belongs as a general feature to the essence of every actual *cogito* to be a consciousness of something. ... All experiences which have these essential properties in common are also called '*intentional experiences*' (acts in the very *wide sense* of the *Logical Investigations*); in so far as they are a consciousness of something they are said to be '*intentionally related*' to this something." Husserl, *Ideas*, 67.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Led back further analytically and arrive finally at sense-objects in a different sense, ones which lie at the ground (constitutively understood) of all spatial objects and, consequently, of all thing-objects of material reality, too, and which lead us back again to certain ultimate syntheses, but to syntheses which precede every thesis. ... Here, with the pure datum of sensation, we encounter a pregivness which yet precedes the constitution of the object as object.⁵⁵

Yet, this return to “sense intuitions” or “sense things”⁵⁶ is, on its own, unable to complete Husserl’s project of tracing the “idea of the essence of nature”⁵⁷—and ultimately all theoretical acts—back to “pre-given objectivities which do not spring from theoretical acts but are constituted in intentional lived experiences.”⁵⁸

What Husserl recognizes is that the originary givenness of the sense-thing—the thing insofar as it is not yet intersubjectively constituted as an Object [*Objekt*] in the technical sense—always refers itself back to a *subject capable of relating to this aesthetic intuition*. “The qualities of material things, such as they present themselves to me intuitively,” he suggests, “prove to be dependent on my qualities, the makeup of the experiencing subject, and to be related to my Body [*Leib*].”⁵⁹ For Husserl, the primordial sensorial givenness, while ultimately reducible to a hyletic flow, nevertheless cannot be intuitively given without the mediating influence of an aesthetic body. It is necessary to bridge the gap between the constituting transcendental Ego and the “full givenness of the thing,” insofar as it gives itself sensibly.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Husserl, *Ideas II*, 24-25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 61. In Husserl scholarship, it has become conventional to translate *Leib* as “Body” and *Körper* as “body.” These translations can be assumed for all citations of Husserl’s texts.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

The transcendental Ego cannot play this role for two reasons. First, it lacks the self-referential kinesthetic sensations necessary for the localization of sensible impressions. Second, it is not itself spatially situated. These two characteristics therefore become central to Husserl's account of the *Leib*. In this regard the constitutive role of the *Leib* must begin with an account of the *Leib*'s own constitution. For Husserl, the lived body or *Leib* cannot be assumed as a natural given; "when we approach the constitution of the natural Object ... *we may not presuppose* [the] Body as a fully constituted material thing."⁶¹ Instead, the *Leib* itself undergoes a constitution that can be re-traced through phenomenological reflection.

In order to undertake this task, Husserl seeks to identify a phenomenon through which the constitution of the body would be made manifest. He settles upon the analysis, later recapitulated in a simplified form by Merleau-Ponty,⁶² of the experience of one hand touching the other. He begins:

Touching my left hand, I have touch-appearances, that is to say, I do not just sense, but I perceive and have appearances of a soft, smooth hand, with such a form. The indicational sensations of movement and the representational sensations of touch, which are Objectified as features of the thing, 'left hand,' belong in fact to my right

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁶² "It is no different, in spite of what may appear to be the case, with my tactile body, for if I can, with my left hand, feel my right hand as it touches an object, the right hand as an object is not the right hand as it touches: the first is a system of bones, muscles and flesh brought down at a point of space, the second shoots through space like a rocket to reveal the external object in its place. Insofar as it sees or touches the world, my body can therefore be neither seen nor touched. What prevents its ever being an object, ever being 'completely constituted' is that it is that by which there are objects. It is neither tangible nor visible in so far as it is that which sees and touches. The body therefore is not one more among external objects, with the peculiarity of always being there." Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 105. Commenting on this simplification, Al-Saji writes: "Merleau-Ponty reads the touching-touched experience as a relation of subject and object—of for-itself and in-itself which are mutually exclusive to one another. In this context, my hand can be either absolute subject, 'alive and mobile,' touching and exploring the world; or it can be touched by my other hand, and descend into a passivity that does not even feel itself as such. It seems that the touched hand loses its affectivity; it cannot feel its being touched while my other hand consciously palpates it. At that moment, the touched hand becomes an object, a 'bundle of bones and muscles.' Its power to touch, and its awareness of itself, is there only in memory and anticipation, waiting for the next instant when it can regain this power and, touching the other hand, reduce it to the status of an object." Alia Al-Saji, "Bodies and sensings: On the uses of Husserlian phenomenology for feminist theory," *Continental Philosophy Review* 43 (2010):13–37, 21.

hand. But when I touch the left hand I also find in it, too, series of touch-sensations, which are ‘localized’ in it.⁶³

This analysis begins with the recognition that each of these hands can rightly be understood as an object among every other spatial-thingly object. This *Leibkörper*, insofar as it is conceived apart from its relationship to sensation, is *Körper*, a mere object: “if I speak of the physical thing, ‘left hand,’ then I am abstracting from these sensations.”⁶⁴ Nevertheless, such a move is an *abstraction*. What differentiates the *Leibkörper* from other bodies in the material world is that it is constituted “in a double way.”⁶⁵ As well as being “a physical thing, matter,” it is also constituted with equal primordially in relation to these sensations that “I find on it, and I sense ‘on’ it and ‘in’ it.”⁶⁶ If one does not abstract away from these sensations, Husserl suggests, “then it is not that the physical thing is now richer, but instead it becomes a Body [*Leib*].”⁶⁷ What Husserl discovers through his analysis of the touching hands, is that the constitution of the *Leib* must be understood through its relation to sensation⁶⁸—or more precisely, through the relationship of two distinct modalities of sensation.

The specific mechanism by which the *Leib* is constituted is a process through which sensations—paradigmatically, but not solely, tactile sensations—are incorporated into a spatial framework. Husserl names this process *localization*: the *Leib* “becomes a Body *only* by

⁶³ Husserl, *Ideas II*, 152.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁶⁸ As Al-Saji writes, “the lived Body is thus distinguished by its possession of sensations.” Alia Al-Saji, “The site of affect in Husserl's phenomenology: Sensations and the constitution of the lived body,” *Philosophy Today* 41 (2000): 51-59, 54.

incorporating tactile sensations, pain sensations, etc.—in short, by the localization of the sensations as sensations.”⁶⁹ This process of localization describes the incorporation of external sensations into what might be called—to borrow Merleau-Ponty’s later terminology—the *Leib*’s body image or corporeal schema (*Körperschema*).⁷⁰

This incorporation requires that the various hyletic “sensation-fields”⁷¹ (touch, sight, hot/cold, aural, etc.) be drawn together with fields of kinesthetic sensations, such that when I move my hand, these external sensations vary in a predictable manner. The same applies for other sense-fields as well: “the eye, too, is a field of localization. ... The same applies to hearing. The ear is ‘involved’.”⁷² Certainly, localization in these cases does not function in the same manner as tactile localization—“the sensed tone is not localized in the ear”⁷³—but it is nevertheless the case that movements of the eye or ear, for example, produce predictably variable changes in sensation. This fact constitutes the motivational character of kinesthetic sensation: the kinesthetic sensations “motivate those apprehensions” of hyletic sensations. I move my eye to the right and objects move across my visual-field to the left. As I move my ear closer to a sound, it gets predictably louder.⁷⁴

Husserl names this richer, passive synthesis of hyletic and kinesthetic sensation: *sensings* [*Empfindnisse*]. This neologism, *Empfindnisse*, as Al-Saji notes, “brings together the notions of

⁶⁹ Husserl, *Ideas II*, 159. [emphasis added]

⁷⁰ “My whole body for me is not an assemblage of organs juxtaposed in space. I am in undivided possession of it and I know where each of my limbs is through a body schema in which all are included.” Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 112-113.

⁷¹ Husserl, *Ideas II*, 162.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 156.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ “In seeing, the eyes are directed upon the seen and run over its edges, surfaces, etc. When it touches objects, the hand slides over them. Moving myself, I bring my ear closer in order to hear.” *Ibid.*, 61.

both *Erlebnis* (lived experience) and *Empfindung* (sensation).⁷⁵ By turning to this language of sensings, she continues, “sensation is productively redefined, away from Husserl’s earlier understanding of sensation in terms of senseless and undifferentiated *hyle* calling for apprehension.”⁷⁶ That is to say, the turn to *Empfindnisse* represents Husserl’s attempt to think sensation outside of an empirical or representational model. Rather, sensings are always manifest in a double manner, both kinesthetic/lived and affective/impressional (*hyle* or *Empfindung*).

This dual character of sensings is central to Husserl’s account of the constitution of the *Leib*. For Husserl, the *Leib* is precisely the constituted unity that emerges from the passive synthesis and localization of these various sensings. As Al-Saji writes, these “sensations form an overlapping and interpenetrating multiplicity, and it is this interwoven multiplicity that allows the formation and animation of the Body as *Leib*.”⁷⁷ Moreover, this constitution of the *Leib* permits the body to stand “between the rest of the material world and the ‘subjective’ sphere”⁷⁸ precisely because the body is doubled at this primordial level. Having been constituted by *Empfindnisse* which are the synthesis of hetero-affective impressions and auto-affective kinestheses, the *Leibkörper* itself manifests in a double way, as both a subjective and an objective phenomenon—a lived experience of bodily being (*Leib*) and at the same time a thing among things (*Körper*).

This constituted character is sometimes read as a rejection of the body’s constitutive capacity: a phenomenon must be either constituted or constituting, ontical or ontological, it cannot be both. This reductive approach is not the case for Husserl. Rather, as was already seen above, he

⁷⁵ Al-Saji, “Bodies and sensings,” 18.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁷⁷ Al-Saji, “The site of affectivity in the phenomenology of Husserl,” 53.

⁷⁸ Husserl, *Ideas II*, 169.

remains clear: although it is itself passively constituted through the localization of sensations and the synthesis of sensings, the *Leib* is also a necessary constituent in “the constitution of Objects as spatial things.”⁷⁹

C. The Constituting Body:

Having been constituted through the localization of sensations, the *Leib* becomes the zero-point (the “here”) around which and in relation to which the sensed world is constituted. “Provisionally, we must say: I have all things over and against me; they are all ‘there’—with the exception of one and only one, namely the Body, which is always ‘here’.”⁸⁰ This unique role of the *Leib*—as the “zero-point”⁸¹ of orientation within the spatial world—allows one to make sense of Husserl’s insistence upon the necessity of the body for the constitution of the spatial thing. Simply put, the Ego cannot function, on its own, as the site for the localization of sensations because the transcendental Ego does not have a site, it is not spatially located, it has no “here.” This “here” is absolutely necessary for the constitution of spatial objects because, as eidetic reflection reveals, perspective and constitution-by-adumbration are necessary features of the constitution of perceptual objects.⁸²

⁷⁹ Ibid., 160.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 166.

⁸¹ “The Body [*Leib*] then has, for its particular Ego, the unique distinction of bearing in itself the zero point of all these orientations.” Ibid., 166.

⁸² “Besides its distinction as a center of orientation, the Body [*Leib*], in virtue of the constitutive role of the sensations, is of significance for the construction of the spatial world. In all constitution of spatial thinghood, two kinds of sensations, with totally different constituting functions, are involved, and necessarily so, if representations of the spatial are to be possible. The first kind are the sensations which constitute, by means of the apprehensions allotted to them, corresponding features of the thing as such by way of adumbration.” Ibid., 62.

Because the transcendental Ego lacks any sort of spatial character, the constitution of a spatio-thingly world points back to the eidetic necessity of a body, the universal perceptual organ of the Ego. As Husserl writes, the *Leib* is “the medium of all perception; it is the organ of perception and is necessarily involved in all perception,”⁸³ or again, “in all perception and perceptual exhibition (experience) the Body is involved as freely moved sense organ, as freely moved totality of sense organs.”⁸⁴ In the constituting of a spatial world, the transcendental Ego finds itself spatially manifest through an “organ of the spirit.”⁸⁵

In his phenomenological analysis of the *Leib*, Husserl discovers an intimate relation between the *Leib* and the Ego, for whom the *Leib* functions as a “system of organs.”⁸⁶ Husserl names the synthesis by which these two are brought into relation, *animation*. This animation has two principal effects. From the perspective of the object-pole, the perceptual experiences of the *Leib* are now granted full “psychic significance”—the perceptual experiences of the *Leib* are intentionally constituted as meaningful. From the perspective of the Ego-pole, the *Leib* manifests as “an organ of the will,” as an “I can” that is capable of undertaking free acts.⁸⁷

Having been animated in this manner, the constitution of the objective world emerges as the reciprocal side of the constitution of the *Leib* itself. Just as the *Leib* is constituted through the localization of sensations motivated by kinestheses, so too is the objective world—the “Object

⁸³ Ibid., 61.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 102.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 168. Or, as he writes in his *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, “an entire system of compatibly harmonizing organs of perception” Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. Anthony J. Steinbock (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 50.

⁸⁷ “Only Bodies are immediately spontaneously (‘freely’) moveable, and they are so, specifically, by means of the free Ego and its will which belong to them.” Husserl, *Ideas II*, 159.

counter-pole”—itself simultaneously constituted through this self-same process of localization.⁸⁸ In this reciprocal constitution, the auto- and hetero-affective sensings draw these two constituted poles together; they are revealed as “the way my Body lives in, and experiences, the ‘redness’ of the thing, the roughness of the surface—as vibrations of its own being.”⁸⁹

D. The Ego-Like Body:

Because the animation of the *Leib* grants it a key role in the constitution of objectivities, this animation draws the *Leib* into an ambiguous relationship with the transcendental Ego. In the constitution of an Objective world, the Ego must deputize the *Leib* as what Husserl calls an “Ego-like” structure. “Everything properly ‘subjective’ and Ego-like, lies on the side of the spirit,” Husserl writes, “whereas the Body is called ‘Ego-like’ only in virtue of this animation, and its states and qualities are only thereby called ‘my’ qualities, subjective, of the Ego.”⁹⁰ This term—“Ego-like”—perfectly captures the extent to which Husserl appears torn between two ways of conceptualizing the nature of this relationship between the Ego and the *Leib*. On the one hand, Husserl recognizes that the *Leib* holds a key constitutive role in phenomenological life. Yet, on the other, he appears deeply reticent to grant the *Leib* the full subjective significance of the transcendental Ego.

⁸⁸ Writing of this double character of sensation, Husserl writes: “my hand is lying on the table. I experience the table as something solid, cold, and smooth. Moving my hand over the table, I get an experience of it and its thingly determinations. At the same time, I can at any moment pay attention to my hand and find on it touch-sensations, sensations running parallel to the experienced movement, I find motion-sensations, etc. Lifting a thing, I experience its weight, but at the same time I have weight-sensations localized in my Body. And thus, my Body’s entering into physical relations (by striking, pressing, pushing, etc.) with other material things provides in general not only the experience of physical occurrences, related to the Body and to things, but also the experience of specifically Bodily occurrences of the type we call *sensings*.” *Ibid.*, 154.

⁸⁹ Al-Saji, “The site of affectivity in the phenomenology of Husserl,” 53.

⁹⁰ Husserl, *Ideas II*, 102.

The weight of the relationship between the *Leib* and the Ego can be identified in a particularly revealing appendix to *Ideas II*. There, Husserl develops the distinction between the Ego and constituted objects, or as he there calls them: the “over-and-against” or the “non-ego.” As he opens the appendix: “everything originally proper to the subject is unified in the Ego and belongs consequently on the side of the Ego. Everything else is over and against it. We have here with respect to all constituted ‘things’ and ‘matters,’ an asymmetrical, non-reversible relation.”⁹¹

Throughout this appendix, it is clear that Husserl is unsure how to deal with the *Leib*. On the one hand, he is certain that objectivities constituted through the *Leib* are non-ego.⁹² But does the same conclusion apply to the *Leib* itself, insofar as it too is constituted? Or, does the unique role of animation put the *Leib*, insofar as it is Ego-like, “on the side of the ego”? Whichever route Husserl chooses to follow will not only be determinative of the relationship between the *Leib* and the Ego, but will likewise remain key for understanding the relationship between the analyses that dominate *Ideas I* and *Ideas II*.

Husserl’s solution to this problem is threefold. First, he emphasizes the constituted character of the *Leib* and highlights its continuity with the world of constituted, material beings. Second, he marks the *Leib* as something that the transcendental Ego “has” as its property or possession. Third, he renders the relationship between the *Leib* and the Ego—the “Ego-like” character of the *Leib*—through the language of the “gift.”

Husserl most clearly marks this first point in §57 of *Ideas II* where he is tasked with determining the distinction between the “personal Ego” and the “pure Ego.” There, Husserl insists

⁹¹ Ibid., 330.

⁹² “It is now evident and beyond discussion that what is most proper to the Ego is something experienced in or at the Body, that it is something unified with the Body in the manner of a constituted stratum within a constituted Objectivity. Each such Objectivity and stratum indeed belongs on the side of the not-Ego, the over-and-against, which has sense only as the over-and-against of an Ego.” Ibid., 331.

that the personal Ego must be distinguished from the pure Ego, because whereas the former is itself closely bound to the *Leib*, the pure Ego is essentially distinct or independent of the *Leib*.

The Body is in that case something I have, hence in the broadest sense something over against me just like everything pregiven, foreign to the Ego, in analogy with the things of my environment. To be sure, the Body has here (as we already saw earlier) a particular subjectivity; it is proper to me in a special sense: it is the *organ* and system of organs of the Ego, the organ of perception, the organ of my effects on the “outside,” on the extra Bodily environment, etc. I myself, however, am the subject of the actual “I live”: I undergo and I do, I am affected, I have my own “over and against.”⁹³

Yet, even in this case, there remain clear moments of wavering. The *Leib* is “just like” other constituted objectivities; yet it is likewise “proper to me in a special way.” Even when Husserl self-consciously seeks to demarcate the *Leib* from the pure Ego, the precise manner of their distinction is not obvious. Because of this ambiguity, the essential difference appears to stand not on the correlation between the *Leib* and the environment—a correlation always already undermined by the unique constitutive role of the *Leib*. Rather, the essential difference between the two—taken in the rigorous sense of an eidetic difference—is marked by the use of the language of “having” versus the language of “being.”

Whereas the Ego is something that I am, something that, properly speaking, “lives” its experiences, the *Leib* is merely something that the I (or my transcendental Ego) has. It is merely the “organ and system of organs of the Ego.” This possessive language runs throughout *Ideas II*. “The subject also ‘has’ his Body, and as it is said, his psychic lived experiences are ‘bound to the Body,’”⁹⁴ and again, more succinctly: “I am not my Body, but I have my Body.”⁹⁵ While *Ideas II* lacks a rigorous analysis which would establish this distinction, Husserl is here likely presupposing

⁹³ Ibid., 259.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 129.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 99.

the analyses of §54 of *Ideas I*, discussed above: wherein an imaginative variation of the annihilation of the entire transcendent world established the formal distinction between the transcendental Ego and the *Leib*.

The subjectivity of the *Leib* must therefore be understood as originally proper to the transcendental Ego. The act of animation wherein the *Leib* is endowed with its Ego-like character is a contingent act wherein the Ego “gifts” the *Leib* with subjectivity. The *Leib*, Husserl writes, is “an intuitively constituted Objectivity ... consequently the special status of the Body is by grace of the Ego (or of Ego-like originary intuition).”⁹⁶

* * *

While this account of the “Ego-like” body is unlikely to appease those who would demand a total identification of the Ego and body, it does give the lie to those who would suggest that the body was insufficiently theorized by Husserl. Rather, as is clear throughout *Ideas II*, if not already in *Thing and Space*, from the very foundation of phenomenological thinking in Edmund Husserl, the body has played a prominent role. Never merely one object among others, the body stands as a key bridge between the pure region of immanent consciousness opened up by *Ideas I* and the transcendent region of nature, as studied by the empirical sciences.⁹⁷ By situating this *Leib* in this precarious position of both a constituted and constituting phenomenon, the *Leib* is able to keep one foot in both regions. On the one hand, being passively constituted by the *localization* of sensations, the *Leib* can account for the passive or receptive character of the Ego. Through the *Leib*, the Ego can have access to the sensations necessary for the manifestation of a spatio-material

⁹⁶ Husserl, *Ideas II*, 224.

⁹⁷ As Husserl writes, inaugurating Section Two’s turn to the pure Ego, “let us now proceed to investigate the essence of the soul, the human or animal soul, as it is, in its connection with the material Body, an Object of natural-scientific research.” Husserl, *Ideas II*, 96.

world. Only through the *Leib* can the Ego find itself affected by the world of transcendent objects. On the other hand, as an “Ego-like” entity, the *Leib* is also *animated* by the pure Ego. It is free, can will, act, and think (see: *Ideas II* §38). In this regard, it is only through the body that the active characteristics of the Ego are granted the ability to affect the world. The body is precisely the system of organs through which the Ego can reach out into and affect the transcendent world.

§II. The Living Body in French Phenomenology

In the genealogy of radical phenomenology’s account of the sexual flesh, the first generation of French phenomenologists—particularly Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty—play an indisputable role. The following two sections will mark two significant transformations within the phenomenological thinking of the body inaugurated by these thinkers. In the present section, it will be shown how Husserl’s transcendental Ego is gradually erased from phenomenological discourse and eventually replaced by the immanent manifestation of the body itself; any problem solved by the transcendental Ego, these thinkers will gradually suggest, can be more directly solved by the body itself. In the following section, it will be shown that the body cannot be properly understood unless its nearly inescapable saturation by sexuality is recognized. For, as Merleau-Ponty famously remarked, “sexuality is co-extensive with life.”⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 196.

A. The French Husserl

In order to understand the account of the body generated by this first generation, it is necessary to recognize their work as a product of a distinctively French reception of Husserl—a reception uniquely centered on one text: the *Cartesian Meditations*.

In 1929, Husserl delivered two lectures at the Sorbonne, entitled “Introduction to Transcendental Phenomenology.” These lectures constituted the first formal introduction of phenomenology to the French context. In the lectures—later expanded as the *Cartesian Meditations*, and translated into French by Gabriella Peiffer and Emmanuel Levinas in 1931—Husserl recontextualizes his phenomenology “if not ingratiatingly, at least with a degree of dexterity”⁹⁹ into a Cartesian idiom. As he writes in the opening moments, “one might almost call transcendental phenomenology a neo-Cartesianism,” even if, Husserl will immediately insist, phenomenology “is obliged—and precisely by its radical development of Cartesian motifs—to reject nearly all the well-known doctrinal content of the Cartesian philosophy.”¹⁰⁰ In this short text, one finds an at-times novel account of phenomenology. Nevertheless, Husserl will shortly thereafter characterize it as his *magnum opus*, writing in a letter to Roman Ingarden in 1930:

This is to be the main work of my life, an abridgment of my philosophy I have developed, a fundamental work of method and of a philosophical problematic. It is for me, at least, in light of the conclusion and ultimate clarity that I have developed, something with which I can die in peace.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, et al. “Considerations on Marxism, Phenomenology and Power. Interview with Michel Foucault; Recorded on April 3rd, 1978” *Foucault Studies* 14 (2012): 98-114, 101.

¹⁰⁰ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 1.

¹⁰¹ Edmund Husserl, *Briefe an Roman Ingarden: Mit Erläuterungen und Erinnerungen an Husserl*, ed. Roman Ingarden (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 59. As cited in Franck, *The Flesh and Body*, 14.

The heart of the *Meditations* is the Fifth Meditation, which Franck rightly notes, “is almost as important as the first four together.”¹⁰² Titled “Uncovering of the Sphere of Transcendental Being as Monadological Intersubjectivity,” this fifth section undertakes “*a peculiar kind of epoché*,”¹⁰³ one which “disregard[s] all constitutional effects of intentionality relating immediately or mediately to other subjectivity”¹⁰⁴ in order to return to a sphere of radical ownness.

This focus upon the monadological sphere of ownness together with a Cartesian tenor—the “radicalness of [Descartes’] spirit”¹⁰⁵—, results in a uniquely “egological” appropriation of Husserl within France. As Michel Foucault later reflects:

It is absolutely true that at the time that I was studying the only form, the only two forms of philosophy that seemed possible to us, I don’t even say that they were dominant, the only two domains of possibility were Hegel—and Marx—and then there was phenomenology, which had always functioned in France, always developed as a philosophy of the subject. ... once Husserl arrives in France, once he is finally recognized in France, and gives lectures under the auspices of the Société Française de Philosophie, what does he talk about? What does he do? The *Cartesian Meditations*! Which means that France only knew Husserl via an angle which I am not sure was, or represented, the main line of phenomenology. Because in particular, the whole fundamental problem of phenomenology was ultimately a problem of logic: how to found logic. We were not so familiar with all that in France.¹⁰⁶

For the French readers of Husserl, phenomenology first and foremost represented a new philosophy of the subject, an egology which, while meaningfully distinct from its Cartesian and

¹⁰² Franck, *Flesh and Body*, 15. “The Fifth Meditation aims to give meaning to the project of elevating philosophy to the rank and dignity of a rigorous, absolutely founded science.” *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 93. What Alfred Schutz and Dorion Cairnes name the “second epoché.” Alfred Schutz, “The Problem of Transcendental Intersubjectivity in Husserl,” *Schutz Collected Papers III*, *Phaenomenologica* (Collection Publiée sous le Patronage des Centres d’Archives-Husserl), vol. 22. (Dordrecht: Springer, 1970).

¹⁰⁴ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 93.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Foucault, et al. “Considerations on Marxism, Phenomenology and Power. Interview with Michel Foucault; Recorded on April 3rd, 1978,” 101.

Kantian forebears, was directly situated within their shadow. Nevertheless, even given this focus upon the philosophy of the subject, the French tradition was far from neglecting the body in favor of the Ego. Rather, quite to the contrary, almost from the beginning the French tradition sought to radicalize the relationship between the Ego and the body through two complementary reorientations: a diminishment—eventuating in an erasure—of the transcendental Ego, and the substitution of this Ego with the body itself. The first of these steps is exemplified in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre.

B. The (R)ejected Ego

In his 1936 *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre sought to rescue the phenomenological project by casting the Husserlian Ego out of the sphere of ownness. Like his countryman Robespierre, who proclaimed that “Louis must die so that the country may live,”¹⁰⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre likewise sought to save the most profound insights of phenomenology by decapitating phenomenology’s own illegitimate regent, the transcendental Ego. According to Sartre, this revolution was undertaken with ease; one can “quite simply eject” the deposed Ego from the immanent sphere of ownness “like some noisy visitor.” Indeed, for Sartre, the Ego is “perfectly all right outside.”¹⁰⁸

In this early essay, Sartre echoes his predecessors—both the early “Munich circle” and Martin Heidegger—pitting Husserl’s early *Lectures on the Consciousness of Internal Time* and the *Logical Investigations* against the post-transcendental-turn writings (particularly *Ideas I*).¹⁰⁹ In

¹⁰⁷ “Mais Louis doit mourir parce qu’il faut que patrie vive.” Maximilien Robespierre, *Oeuvre de Maximilien Robespierre: Discours Tome IX, Septembre 1792 - 27 Julliet 1793* (Paris: PUF, 1910), 130.

¹⁰⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *War Diaries: Notes from a Phoney War*, November 1939-March 1940, trans. Quintin Hoare (New York: Verso, 1984), 324.

¹⁰⁹ See: Lior Levy, “Intentionality, Consciousness, and the Ego: The Influence of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* on Sartre’s Early Work,” *The European Legacy* 21 (2016): 511–524.

these early texts Husserl remains convinced that the *empirical* ego can be ultimately reduced to the unified flow of conscious experience: “the phenomenologically reduced [empirical] ego is therefore nothing peculiar, floating above many experiences: it is simply identical with their own interconnected unity.”¹¹⁰ The *transcendental* Ego, on the other hand, is quite simply and unceremoniously set aside: “I am quite unable to find this ego, this primitive, necessary centre of relations.”¹¹¹ Nevertheless, in his subsequent edition of *The Logical Investigations* Husserl will, perhaps playfully, remark “I have since managed to find it.”¹¹² Indeed, the missing Ego of *The Logical Investigations* takes pride of place in *Ideas I* where it will be identified as the “pure subject of the act,”¹¹³ which “no reduction can get any grip on.”¹¹⁴

In *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre sets himself the task of recovering this earlier Husserlian position, inverting *Ideas I* and once again submitting the ego to the reign of consciousness: “the Ego is not the proprietor of consciousness,” he writes, “it is its object.”¹¹⁵ That is to say, rather than functioning as a primordial, immanent pole of every act of consciousness, Sartre suggests that the Ego itself is simply one more product of consciousness’ own constituting capacity: “it is a transcendent pole of synthetic unity, like the object-pole of the unreflected attitude. But this pole appears only in the world of reflection.”¹¹⁶ Having characterized the Ego as

¹¹⁰ Edmund Husserl, *The Shorter Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay (New York: Routledge, 2001), 205.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 412 n. 8.

¹¹³ Husserl, *Ideas*, 163.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 163. On this point, see also §57.

¹¹⁵ Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 45.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21. As Barnes writes, “When consciousness tries to turn back upon itself and contemplate itself, it can reflect on this interiority but only by making it an object. The Ego is the interiority of consciousness when reflected on by itself.” Hazel E. Barnes, “Translator’s Introduction” in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Pocket Books, 1956), xiii.

a constituted product of reflection, the Ego is therefore cast out of the immanence of primordial consciousness and into the constituted world of transcendent objects—“neither formally nor materially in consciousness: it is outside, in the world; it is a being in the world, like the Ego of another.”¹¹⁷

In his magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre recapitulates and clarifies this thesis: often derisively condemning the notion of the transcendental Ego as a “useless and disastrous” hypothesis.¹¹⁸ Situating his previous claims within his present phenomenological ontology, he insists that “the Ego does not belong to the domain of the for-itself.”¹¹⁹ Rather, “the Ego appears to consciousness as a transcendent in-itself, as an existent in the human world, not as of the nature of consciousness.”¹²⁰ That is to say, the transcendental Ego is not found within the “absolute immanence”¹²¹ or “presence to itself”¹²² of consciousness. On the contrary, insofar as the Ego is a product of reflection, it is an object like every object of the world. For Sartre’s *existential* phenomenology, this fact serves to propel the subject into the world, highlighting the Being-in-the-world that is factually central to every subject. “If the Ego and the world are both objects of consciousness, if neither has created the other,” Barnes comments, “then consciousness by

¹¹⁷ Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 1.

¹¹⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 318.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 124. A presence, which Sartre emphasizes “implies a duality” (*ibid.*), thus, “the being of consciousness qua consciousness is to exist *at a distance from itself* as presence to itself” (*ibid.*, 125).

establishing their relations to each other insures the active participation of the person in the world.”¹²³

This ejection of the deposed transcendental Ego inaugurates, but fails to culminate the French radicalization of phenomenology. For, the ultimate aim of their phenomenological project is not only the erasure of the Ego, but ultimately the substitution of the body for the Ego.

C. From Transcendental Ego to Living Body

This turn to the body does not emerge as a rejection of Husserl, but as a radicalization of the account of the *Leib* found in *Ideas II* and the *Cartesian Meditations*. In the fifth meditation, for example, the *Leib* plays a prominent role in the sphere of ownness. As Husserl writes, “among the bodies belonging to this ‘nature’ and included in my peculiar ownness, I then find my flesh [*Leib*] as uniquely singled out—namely as the only one of them that is not just a body but precisely a flesh [*Leib*].”¹²⁴ As Didier Franck will later attest—but in a move consistent with the earlier French tradition—“the sphere of ownness [is] anchored in my flesh. ... Flesh is the condition of the possibility of the thing, or better, the constitution of flesh is presupposed by all constitution of things. ... This means that flesh is the universal medium for the givenness of bodies within the sphere of ownness.”¹²⁵ By reading this priority of the flesh in a radical manner, the French reception of Husserl consistently amplifies the constitutive role granted the flesh in Husserl’s *Ideas II*, until it finally supplants the constitutive role of the transcendental Ego itself.

¹²³ Barnes, “Translator’s Introduction,” xiv.

¹²⁴ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 97. Translation modified to follow Joseph Rivera and Scott Davidson’s translation in Franck, *Flesh and Body*, 79.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

As in the previous case, this French tradition again begins with Jean-Paul Sartre. Emerging from the pseudo-Hegelian ontology of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre identifies a tripartite manifestation of the body: the body for-itself, the body for-others, and the body “for myself as known by the other.”¹²⁶ For the purpose of the present investigation, it is the first manifestation of the body that is particularly relevant. Here, the for-itself—that is, consciousness—is manifest in its facticity *as body*. “Being-for-itself must be fully body,” Sartre suggests, “there is nothing behind the body.”¹²⁷

This body is understood as facticity insofar as its precise configuration remains contingent. But while the specific characteristics of the body are contingent, embodiment itself is not. Rather, the body is the for-itself made form: “we could define the body as *the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency*.”¹²⁸ Thus incarnation is not incidental to human existence, but a necessary transcendental feature: “for human reality, to be is to-be-there ... it is an ontological necessity.”¹²⁹ This necessity hinges on the ontologically foundational role of the body; it is only on the grounds of embodiment that the world and its “things”¹³⁰ manifest to conscious being (for-itself).

Nevertheless, because Sartre’s broader ontology associates the for-itself with negation and nothingness—the for-itself is the “being by which nothingness comes to things”¹³¹—Sartre

¹²⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 460.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 404.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 408.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 407.

¹³⁰ “Consequently things are precisely ‘things-which-exist-at-a-distance-from-me’.” *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 57. It is necessary that nothingness be identified with the for-itself, because, “Nothingness can be conceived neither outside of being, nor as a complementary, abstract notion, nor as an infinite milieu where being is suspended. Nothingness must be given at the heart of Being, in order for us to be able to apprehend that particular type of realities which we have call *négalités*. But this *intra-mundane Nothingness cannot be produced by Being-in-itself*;

unsurprisingly refrains from a positive account of the body-for-itself: “the body-for-itself is never a given which I can know ... it exists only in so far as I escape it by nihilating myself.”¹³² The body is not a positive given precisely insofar as it is *only* manifest through the resistance of objects in the world: we do not perceive the body-for-itself, “we perceive the resistance of things.”¹³³ Moreover, in the same way, a bodily sense is never directly given, “any sense in so far as it is-for-me is an inapprehensible.”¹³⁴ Instead, the senses are reflectively constituted from the apprehension of various objects.¹³⁵ Thus, Sartre turns against Maine de Biran’s famous thesis of the “sensation of effort.” Such a sensation, he insists, “does not really exist. For my hand reveals to me the resistance of objects, their hardness or softness, *but not itself*.”¹³⁶ Ultimately, within *Being and Nothingness* the body-for-itself is therefore phantasmatic, reduced to the status of a mere sign of one’s being-in-the-world.¹³⁷ A *positive* account of the body will necessitate a turn to Sartre’s contemporary, Merleau-Ponty, and his phenomenological analyses of perception.

Unlike Sartre’s Hegelian inflected phenomenological ontology, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body directly draws upon Husserl’s account of the *Leib* in *Ideas II*. In fact,

the notion of Being as full positivity does not contain Nothingness as one of its structures.” Ibid., 56 [emphasis added].

¹³² Ibid., 409.

¹³³ Ibid., 427.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 417.

¹³⁵ Thus, “the senses are contemporaneous with objects.” Ibid., 420.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 402 [emphasis added]. And again, “the famous ‘sensation of effort’ by which Maine de Biran attempted to reply to Hume’s challenge is a psychological myth. We never have any sensation of our effort.” Ibid., 427. This is particularly relevant note for the present undertaking. For, it is in large part through an explicit return to Maine de Biran that Henry will construct his own account of the body. See, in particular, *The Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body* Chapter I: “The Philosophical Presuppositions of the Biranian Analysis of the Body” and Chapter VI: “A Critique of the Thought of Maine de Biran. The Problem of Passivity”; and Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, trans. Karl Hefty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), §24.

¹³⁷ “Consciousness of the body is comparable to the consciousness of a sign.” Ibid., 434.

Merleau-Ponty would be the first international scholar to visit the newly established Husserl Archive at Leuven in April 1939, with the express intention of consulting Husserl's *Ideas II*.¹³⁸ Although Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* only explicitly cites the then unpublished manuscript one time,¹³⁹ its influence on the production of Merleau-Ponty's early thinking is undeniable. Throughout this early period, Merleau-Ponty's aim will be to "re-establish the roots of the mind in its body,"¹⁴⁰ thereby revealing the primacy of the living body—*le corps vivant*, as Merleau-Ponty will often render *Leib*—as the principal site and condition for the constitution of phenomena.

The first manuscript to emerge following Merleau-Ponty's discovery of Husserl's *Ideas II* is the oft neglected *The Structure of Behavior*. With this thesis, Merleau-Ponty sought to challenge behaviorist psychology through a synthesis of gestalt psychology¹⁴¹ and phenomenological

¹³⁸ As he wrote in a letter to Van Breda, "I am currently pursuing a study of the *Phenomenology of Perception* for which it would be extremely useful for me to acquaint myself with volume II of the *Ideen*." H.L. Van Breda, "Merleau-Ponty and the Husserl Archives at Louvain" in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Texts and Dialogues*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and James Barry Jr., trans. Michael B. Smith et al. (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992), 151.

¹³⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 105.

¹⁴⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of His Work," trans. Arleen B. Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James E. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 3.

¹⁴¹ The synthesis of phenomenology and Gestalt psychology is a project that Merleau-Ponty seems first to have encountered while assisting Aron Gurwitsch in 1934. "While his 1933 subvention request on the "Nature of Perception" makes no mention of phenomenology, his 1934 follow-up application emphasizes the convergence of phenomenology and Gestalt psychology as promising horizons for his future studies. In support of this convergence, he cites Aron Gurwitsch's dissertation, the first phenomenological interpretation of Gestalt theory. ... Merleau-Ponty ... soon began attending Gurwitsch's Sorbonne lectures on Gestalt theory, the work of Gelb and Goldstein, and constitutive phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty subsequently proofread two of Gurwitsch's essays for publication, one of which provided nearly all the bibliographical resources for Merleau-Ponty's discussions of Gestalt theory in *The Structure of Behavior*" (Ted Toadvine, "Phenomenological method in Merleau-Ponty's critique of Gurwitsch," *Husserl Studies* 17[3] [2001]:196). Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty's use of Gestalt psychology is certainly not uncritical. Indeed, throughout the text Merleau-Ponty seeks to employ "Gestalt theory's own principles ... against it." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden L. Fisher (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963), 150.

insights.¹⁴² While much of the text serves to elucidate technical disputes within the study of reflex, conditioning, and related behaviors, the text does establish a number of central theses regarding Merleau-Ponty's account of the body. Already in his analysis of animal behavior and critique of Pavlov, for example, Merleau-Ponty insists that nothing would "be served by saying that behavior 'is conscious' and that it reveals to us, as its other side, a being for-itself (*pour soi*) hidden behind the visible body."¹⁴³ While the terminology suggests a critique of Sartre,¹⁴⁴ what is already apparent in *The Structure of Behavior* is a more general rejection of anything like a consciousness, mind, or Ego, insofar as it is understood as temporally, logically, or ontologically prior to embodiment. Simply put, Merleau-Ponty flatly "rejected Husserl's notion of the transcendental ego."¹⁴⁵ In place of this transcendental Ego, as Sallis suggests, "Merleau-Ponty is substituting a bodily or sensible for-itself."¹⁴⁶ Thus, finally, the body is not something that one "has," as we have seen Husserl continued to insist throughout his career, but something one "is."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Critically, although the influence of phenomenology is evident in the text, Merleau-Ponty largely avoids recourse to a technical language of phenomenology that will become considerably more explicit in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Nevertheless, even lacking much of this jargon, Wild notes that "Merleau-Ponty has taken over from Husserl the general conception of the phenomenological method and the well-known analysis of perception through profiles (*Abschattungen*); from Sartre, with important qualifications, the notion of consciousness as involving negation and distance; from Heidegger many aspects of his analysis of man as being-in-the-world; and from Scheler the notion of structural levels." John Wild, "Foreword" in *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden L. Fischer (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963), xiv.

¹⁴³ Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, 125.

¹⁴⁴ A critique highlighted by his subsequent insistence that one must "surpass the alternative of the for-itself (*pour soi*) and the in-itself (*en soi*)" Ibid., 126.

¹⁴⁵ Wild, "Foreword," xiv.

¹⁴⁶ John Sallis, *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1973), 88. Or again, for Merleau-Ponty, "the body is of the mind, its outside, and the mind is of the body, its inside." (Ibid., 83).

¹⁴⁷ The perceiving mind is an incarnated mind. ... For contemporary psychology and psychotherapy the body is no longer merely *an object in the world*, under the purview of a separated spirit. It is on the side of the subject; it is *our point of view on the world*, the place where the spirit takes on a certain physical and historical situation. As Descartes once said profoundly, the soul is not merely in the body like a pilot in his ship; it is wholly intermingled with the body." Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 3-5.

Merleau-Ponty gives his fullest account of this lived body that one “is” in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The heart of Merleau-Ponty’s account of the body is the recognition—following Husserl, albeit in a simplified form—of the multivalent manifestation of the body; the body is simultaneously both object and subject; it is “for us an *in-itself*.”¹⁴⁸ As this language suggests, this account of the body is once again intended as a critique of the Sartrean ontology. Simply put, in order to disrupt the dualism of the *in-itself* and the *for-itself*, Merleau-Ponty draws forward the body as a limit phenomenon—both an object (*in-itself*) and a subject (*for-itself*)—which reveals the limit of this distinction.

Merleau-Ponty begins his analysis with the “body as object,” as it is manifest within the mechanistic sciences. In analyses that follow and expand upon the studies of behavior in *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty shows that the body consistently “evades”¹⁴⁹ any simple reduction to objective materiality. This evasion is a result of the intentional structure of the body; the body—like the transcendental Ego it is understood to efface—“rises toward the world.”¹⁵⁰ Roughly following Husserl’s distinction between *Körper* and the *Leib*, Merleau-Ponty understands this intentionally directed body to be meaningfully distinct from the objective body. Whereas the objective body manifests within objective space, one’s lived body (*le corps vivant*)—also periodically designated as “one’s own body” (*le corps propre*), “phenomenal body” (*corps phénoménal*) or “body schema/image” (*schéma corporel*)¹⁵¹—is constituted through an entirely

¹⁴⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 83.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁵¹ Frustratingly, the Smith translation also periodically translates *schéma corporel* as “body image,” for no discernible reason. Further complication is introduced by certain printings of the text which corrected some—but not all—instances of “body image” as a translation of *schéma corporel*. See, e.g. the 2008 printing which replaces “if the body image...” with “if the body schema...” (*Ibid.*, 114), but inexplicably retains “body image” on the following page, 115 n. 7.

distinct synthesis whereby it is not merely “*in space*,”¹⁵² but instead finds its own “bodily being” in a “primitive spatiality” defined not by the objective distance of a *res extensa*, but by the perceptual and practical spatiality of lived experience.

Phenomenological evidence for this distinction is drawn from the examination of phantom limb syndrome (and its converse, anosognosia). In phantom limb syndrome one finds a disjunction between the objective body—missing a limb—and one’s body schema. What is at issue in the case of phantom limb syndrome, Merleau-Ponty argues, is therefore not a misplaced *representation*, which would itself still be an objective manifestation: “the phantom arm is not a representation of the arm, but the ambivalent *presence* of an arm.”¹⁵³ Indeed, the phantom member reveals a disjunction not between mental representation and material reality, but between the objective body and the subjective experience of the body—*le corps vivant*.

Like Husserl before him, Merleau-Ponty seeks to ground the constitution of *le corps vivant* in sensation and movement. Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty refuses to reduce the constitution of the body to “tactile sensations.” Instead, drawing upon the existential influence of Heidegger and Sartre, he suggests that “what unites ‘tactile sensations’, in the hand and links them to visual perceptions of the same hand, and to perceptions of the other bodily areas, is a *certain style* informing my manual gestures ... and contributing, in the last resort, to a certain bodily bearing.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, in a surprising turn, it is not the individual sensations or kinesthesia which constitute *le corps vivant*, but conversely, *le corps vivant* functions as a “law of [their] constitution.”¹⁵⁵ It is a certain

¹⁵² Ibid., 171.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 94.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 174 [emphasis added].

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 114.

bodily comportment or “style,” a pre-reflexive motility discovered and manifest in the concrete movements and gestures by which it engages the world, which is granted a constitutive primacy. Thus, while *le corps vivant* exists within “one and the same world”¹⁵⁶ as the objective body, it is granted a quasi-transcendental privilege: “there would,” for example, “be no space at all for me if I had no body.”¹⁵⁷ In its dialogical and dialectical relationship to the world, *le corps vivant* permits phenomena to manifest.

This understanding of the body as something one “is,” rather than something one “has” will be likewise echoed by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty’s contemporary, Emmanuel Levinas. In the early *Existence and Existents*, he will explicitly critique the Husserlian language of ownership, writing that “the body of possession is finally resolved into a set of experiences and cognitions. ... I am my pain, my breathing, my organs. ... I do not have a body, but am a body.”¹⁵⁸ Or, more strongly in *Totality and Infinity*, “the body as naked body is not the first possession; it is still outside of having and not having.”¹⁵⁹

Yet, in a manner even more radical than his existential contemporaries, Levinas aims to fully extricate the body from any notion of self-constitution, whether the constitution of a

¹⁵⁶ “It is not a question of how the soul acts on the objective body, since it is not on the latter that it acts, but on the phenomenal body. So the question has to be reframed, and we must ask why there are two views of me and of my body: my body for me and my body for others, and how these two systems can exist together. It is indeed not enough to say that the objective body belongs to the realm of ‘for others’, and my phenomenal body to that of ‘for me’, and we cannot refuse to pose the problem of their relations, since the ‘for me’ and the ‘for others’ co-exist in one and the same world, as is proved by my perception of an other who immediately brings me back to the condition of an object for him.” *Ibid.*, 121-122 n.17.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁵⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne university Press, 1969), 162. The first clause should not be read to say that the body is a *later* possession, but rather, as the second clause clarifies, that the body is *no possession whatsoever*.

transcendental Ego or the “gestural” constitution of Merleau-Ponty’s bodily comportment. The body, he suggests:

Is not a thing among things which I ‘constitute’ or see in God to be in a relation with a thought, nor is it the instrument of a gestural thought. ... The body naked and indigent is ... irreducible to a thought, of representation into life, of the subjectivity that represents into life which is sustained by these representations and lives of them; its indigence—its needs—affirm ‘exteriority’ as non-constituted, prior to all affirmation.¹⁶⁰

For Levinas, the body is always already marked by its encounter with the material world that nourishes it.¹⁶¹ The body is certainly passively constituted, but this is not the constitution of an Ego. Rather, the body emerges from a material relation that always already precedes the Ego: “to be a body is on the one hand to stand, to be master of oneself, and, on the other hand, to stand on earth, to be in the other, and thus to be encumbered by one’s body.”¹⁶² This material conception of bodily constitution permits Levinas not only to collapse the Sartrean dualism between the body in-itself and the body for-itself (as had Merleau-Ponty), but likewise to collapse even Merleau-Ponty’s own distinction between *le corps vivant* and the objective body. For Levinas, any possible dualism within the manifestation of the body is overcome by the body’s own material origin: “there therefore exists no duality—lived body and physical body—which would have to be reconciled.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 127. While “exteriority” here is laying the framework for the ethical shift in subsequent passages, and the introduction of the “face of the Other” as the figure of transcendence and exteriority *par excellence*, Levinas here understands “exteriority” as the encounter with a world or reality that anticipates the constituting subject and functions as the condition of possibility for such a subject. Thus, for example, he undertakes a phenomenology of the *jouissance* of eating, wherein food or nutrition is discovered as a condition that preexists the constitution of the subject. Therefore, in a manner that is intended to anticipate the constitution of the subject by the Other, Levinas here finds the subject constituted by a material world.

¹⁶¹ See: Ibid., 127-130.

¹⁶² Ibid., 164.

The dwelling which lodges and prolongs life, the world life acquires and utilizes by labor, is also the physical world where labor is interpreted as a play of anonymous forces.”¹⁶³

The ultimate result of this French tradition’s complementary movements—the diminution of the Ego and the amplification of the body—is an increasing commitment among French phenomenologists that the role reserved for the Ego in Husserl’s phenomenology may be realized by the flesh itself. Insofar as the Ego is demoted to a mere “material me”¹⁶⁴ within the world, and the living body is simultaneously recognized as a necessary (and perhaps even sufficient) component in the constitution of objective phenomena and unification of conscious life, then a tendency to either erase the transcendental Ego or absorb it into the flesh becomes almost unavoidable. As Merleau-Ponty summarizes the position:

The body is no longer merely an object in the world ... It is on the side of the subject. ... As Descartes once said profoundly, the soul is not merely in the body like a pilot in his ship; it is wholly intermingled with the body. The body in turn, is wholly animated, and all its functions contribute to the perception of objects—an activity long considered by philosophy to be pure knowledge.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Ibid., 165. This reconciliation will remain largely unique within the French phenomenological tradition—which has almost unanimously accepted the dualism between the subjective and objective manifestations of the body—until the contemporary writings of Emmanuel Falque. See: Emmanuel Falque, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude: An Essay on Birth and Resurrection*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); Emmanuel Falque, *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Emmanuel Falque, “y a-t-il une chair sans corps?,” *Transversalités* 81 (2002): 43-74.

¹⁶⁴ Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 17.

¹⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty, “An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of His Work,” 5.

§III. Phenomenology and the Sexual Body

A: Husserl On Sexuality

In §55 of *The Crisis of European Sciences*, Husserl lists a number of problems that emerge from the phenomenological analysis of “communal life,” setting an agenda for future phenomenological research. Among the listed problems are birth, death, and “the problem of the sexes.”¹⁶⁶ Yet, as Sara Heinämaa has noted, “Husserl’s work does not include a phenomenological analysis of sexuality or sexual difference.”¹⁶⁷

Certainly, this claim should not be taken in an absolute sense, for as Heinämaa herself notes in a subsequent footnote, Husserl’s “Universal Teleology,”¹⁶⁸ offers an analysis of sexual drive [*Geschlechtrieb*].¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Heinämaa’s basic point stands. Husserl barely considered sexuality, and when he did, his analyses left much to be desired.

¹⁶⁶ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 188.

¹⁶⁷ Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, 53.

¹⁶⁸ Edmund Husserl, “Universal Teleology” trans. Marly Biemel, in *Husserl: Shorter Works*, eds. Peter McCormick and Frederick Elliston (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame, 1981), 335-337.

¹⁶⁹ The language of *Geschlechtrieb*—“sexual drive” or “genital drive”—suggests that Husserl is here likely influenced by 19th century functionalist theories of sexual development, such as that proposed in Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) or in Albert Moll’s *Untersuchungen über die libido sexualis* (1898), the latter of which explicitly refers to reproduction as “the principle of teleology.” For these theories, as for Husserl, the sexual drive is ultimately reducible to the biological need for reproduction.

In “Universal Teleology,” Husserl attempts to offer an account of the sex drive “viewed transcendently.”¹⁷⁰ The primary theses of the text, as explicated by Elliston, are threefold: “T₁ Sex is a social act; T₂ Sex seeks copulation; and T₃ Sex is heterosexual.”¹⁷¹ Yet, as subsequent commentaries—including Elliston and Al-Saji—have shown, each of these three theses appear marred by naturalistic commitments that, methodologically speaking, should have been bracketed by the phenomenological reduction.

The first thesis—“Sex is a social act”—emerges from Husserl’s goal-driven account of drive. In the case of hunger, for example, the drive is directed toward the object of food—even if this object is indeterminate; that is, my hunger is not necessarily directed toward any particular food. In the same manner, Husserl suggests, the sexual drive is directed. The object of this drive, “its enticing, exciting goal ... is the other.”¹⁷² Thus, sexuality is an eidetically intersubjective phenomenon. Yet, this ostensible characteristic may not be as certain as Husserl assumes. Further reflection seems to suggest non-intersubjective manifestations of sexuality. “Whatever one’s moral scruples or reservations,” Elliston notes, “masturbation (along with fetishism and bestiality) are clearly forms of sexual activity.”¹⁷³ It seems therefore, that Husserl’s first thesis is too narrowly constructed; restricting alternative sexual manifestations without phenomenological evidence.

Husserl’s second and third theses fare no better. Husserl’s argument in the second case—“Sex seeks copulation”—foregrounds a key development of “Universal Teleology.” Just as individual conscious acts are intentional, Husserl here argues, so too is there something like a

¹⁷⁰ Husserl, “Universal Teleology,” 335.

¹⁷¹ F. A. Elliston, “Introduction to ‘Universal Teleology’” in *Husserl: Shorter Works*, eds. Peter McCormick and Frederick Elliston (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame, 1981), 333.

¹⁷² Husserl, “Universal Teleology,” 335.

¹⁷³ Elliston, “Introduction to ‘Universal Teleology’,” 333.

global directedness that links together the distinct manifestations of human drive: “shouldn’t we or mustn’t we posit a universal intentionality of the drive?”¹⁷⁴ There is, Husserl posits, a directedness of the drive writ large which remains analogous to the intentional structure of the individual act. Husserl names this intentionality “teleology.” In the case of the sexual drive, he argues, the universal object of the drive, its teleological aim, is *reproduction*. Thus, the properly sexual act must be that which aims toward such reproduction. While this teleology is particularly manifest in the pregnant mother, it is nevertheless universally present within the drive; “teleology encompasses all of the monads.” Thus, “what occurs in the motherly domain is not limited to it, but ‘is reflected throughout’.”¹⁷⁵

Husserl’s third thesis—“Sex is heterosexual”—follows directly from the second. If the teleological aim of the sex drive is reproduction, then it must find its natural fulfillment in *heterosexual* copulation. “I can [attain fulfillment] only as a man in the actual reciprocal feeling or empathy with the woman,”¹⁷⁶ Husserl presumes. Simply put, the sexual drive is “the drive toward the other sex.”¹⁷⁷

The critical response to these theses is unambiguous. “Even if it is not taken to identify the goal of all social encounters,” Elliston argues, Husserl’s account “overstates the goal of even those that are sexual.”¹⁷⁸ The result is an account of sexuality that unjustifiably restricts sexuality to its determinately heterosexual manifestations:¹⁷⁹ “what is thereby ruled out by fiat is that homosexual

¹⁷⁴ Husserl, “Universal Teleology,” 336.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 336.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 335.

¹⁷⁸ Elliston, “Introduction to ‘Universal Teleology,’” 333.

¹⁷⁹ Moreover, this account likewise strikes all non-procreative sexual acts—e.g. oral or anal sex—from the domain of the properly sexual.

encounters can qualify as sexual, or that group sex ... can even be counted as sex.”¹⁸⁰ Al-Saji offers an even sharper critique, tracing Husserl’s account of reproduction to a “patriarchal and masculinist ‘natural’ attitude on sex”; a heterosexist “framework of reproduction that ... imaginatively excludes other forms of sexuality.”¹⁸¹

In a manner that will be tragically reiterated in subsequent phenomenologies—particularly Levinas, Henry, and Marion—Husserl has here failed to employ the very reduction that should grant access to the sex drive in its transcendental essentiality. Husserl, as Elliston notes, “has built into his definition of what sex *is* undefended assumptions of what it *ought* to be.”¹⁸² Echoing Merleau-Ponty’s assertion that “the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction,”¹⁸³ Elliston insightfully concludes his critique with the recognition of the difficulty of the phenomenological method: “to disengage oneself from such preconceptions in order to examine them critically is indeed an infinite task.”¹⁸⁴

The subsequent phenomenological tradition will take Husserl’s task to engage “the problem of the sexes”¹⁸⁵ seriously, producing significantly more material than Husserl’s short essay. More importantly still, these accounts of sexuality will explicitly link the problematics of sexuality to those of the lived body in its concrete affectivity—a link which, excluding his passing reference to “the physiology of pregnancy,”¹⁸⁶ is ignored by Husserl’s “Universal Teleology.”

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Al-Saji, “Bodies and sensings,” 16.

¹⁸² Elliston, “Introduction to ‘Universal Teleology,’” 333 [emphasis added].

¹⁸³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xv.

¹⁸⁴ Elliston, “Introduction to ‘Universal Teleology,’” 333.

¹⁸⁵ Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 188.

¹⁸⁶ Husserl, “Universal Teleology,” 337.

Nevertheless, as will be shown, these subsequent phenomenologists will likewise find it difficult to avoid the temptation to illegitimately import their own naturalistic preconceptions into their ostensibly phenomenological investigations.

B: Sexuality in the Constitution of the Body

The first substantial, phenomenological treatment of sexuality in the French tradition can be found in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Following directly from his analysis of the body, Sartre turns to the phenomena of love, desire, and sexuality as a necessary supplement to his analysis of the body-for-others. Simply put, Sartre will attempt to show that the body cannot be understood in its multiplicitous manifestation unless the body is recognized as ontologically bound to sexuality. Thus, against the "existential philosophers"—among whom Sartre has Heidegger particularly in mind¹⁸⁷—who "have not believed it necessary to concern themselves with sexuality," Sartre suggests that "desire and its opposite, sexual repulsion, are *fundamental structures of being-for-others*."¹⁸⁸

Certainly, Sartre recognizes, the particular biological and desirous character of one's sexuality is "in the domain of absolute contingency."¹⁸⁹ The particular sexual structures of one's body—genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, etc.—as well as one's sexual orientation (and the modern reader might presume gender identity) are contingent rather than transcendental or ontological; they belong to the domain of facticity. Yet, as in the case of the body—where the

¹⁸⁷ "Heidegger, in particular, does not make the slightest allusion to it in his existential analytic with the result that his *Dasein* appears to us asexual." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 498.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 498-499 [emphasis added].

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 498.

specific bodily configuration is factual, but embodiment itself is transcendental—Sartre, refuses to draw the conclusion from this facticity that “the same must be true for sexual desire.”¹⁹⁰ Rather, while the specific sexual configuration is factual, sexuality as such is not. For as we have seen, for Sartre, to be in-the-world is to be in the world as a body. Likewise, to be in the world is to be in the world with others, who are themselves manifest as body. But, this inter-corporeal relation is not a purely neutral relation, inter-corporeal engagement manifests primordially as a desirous relation (attraction or repulsion).¹⁹¹ Thus, he concludes, “we shall be able to say that the For-itself is sexual in its very upsurge in the face of the Other and that through it sexuality comes into the world,”¹⁹² or more succinctly, “sexuality appears with birth and disappears only with death.”¹⁹³

This insistence upon sexuality within the constitution of the body will be reiterated in 1945 by Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*. Like Sartre, Merleau-Ponty posits sexuality as a necessary constitutive feature of human embodiment. But, whereas Sartre emphasized the intersubjective character of sexuality, Merleau-Ponty uses sexuality in order to explicate the “affective life.” It is through affectivity, he argues, that “a thing or a being begins to exist for us”;¹⁹⁴ phenomena do not emerge in a flat neutrality, but as pleasures and pains, attractions and repulsions.¹⁹⁵ As Husserl already noted of the natural attitude, “without further effort on my part,

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ “The sexual attitude is a primary behavior toward the Other. ... We cannot admit that this behavior is subject from the start to a physiological and empirical constitution. As soon as ‘there is’ the body and as soon as ‘there is’ an *Other*, we react by *desire*, by *Love*, and by the derived attitudes which we have mentioned.” Ibid., 527.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 499.

¹⁹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 178.

¹⁹⁵ “There must be an Eros or a Libido which breathes life into an original world, gives sexual value or meaning to external stimuli and outlines for each subject the use he shall make of his objective body. ... A body is not perceived merely as any object; this objective perception has within it a more intimate perception: the visible body is subtended by a sexual schema, which is strictly individual, emphasizing the erogenous areas, outlining a sexual

I find the things before me furnished not only with the qualities that befit their positive nature, but with value-characters such as beautiful or ugly, agreeable or disagreeable, pleasant or unpleasant, and so forth.”¹⁹⁶ It is therefore through the specifically sexual affects that the sexual-body and the “sexual world”¹⁹⁷ co-constitute one another.

It is certainly possible to live a life largely devoid of a sexual world, as Merleau-Ponty shows in an exaggerated form through the Schneider case, wherein “perception has lost its erotic structure, both spatially and temporally.”¹⁹⁸ But, as Merleau-Ponty seeks to illustrate, the loss of a sexual world, even in a limited sense, can have serious, rippling repercussions for one’s being-in-the-world as such: “a girl whose mother has forbidden her to see again the young man with whom she is in love, cannot sleep, loses her appetite and finally the use of speech.”¹⁹⁹ This is because “sexuality has an existential significance,”²⁰⁰ it is “co-extensive with life.”²⁰¹ Thus, Merleau-Ponty marks the loss of a sexual world as pathological,²⁰² because, in his analysis, sexuality functions as a necessary constitutive of human embodiment:

physiognomy, and eliciting the gestures of the masculine body which is itself integrated into this emotional totality.” Ibid., 180.

¹⁹⁶ Husserl, *Ideas*, 53.

¹⁹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 181.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 181.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 185.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 193.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 196.

²⁰² While Merleau-Ponty has been employed by many scholars of disability studies, he has also been duly criticized for his failure to critically reflect on his use of the language of “normal” and “pathological.” As Oksala writes, “while emphasizing that the subject is always historically situated, Merleau-Ponty does not problematize how the ‘normal subject’ itself is fundamentally constituted in history.” Johanna Oksala, “Female Freedom: Can the Lived Body Be Emancipated?,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, eds. Dorothea Olkowski and Gail Weiss (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 218. In the particular case of sexuality one might note the experience of perfectly well adjusted *asexual* people as an example that challenges Merleau-Ponty’s denigration of the loss of a sexual world. In response, Merleau-Ponty might suggest that the asexual does not lack a sexual world, but rather finds themselves oriented within a sexual world in a different manner than people with other

All human ‘functions,’ from sexuality to motility and intelligence, are rigorously unified in one synthesis, it is impossible to distinguish in the total being of man a bodily organization to be treated as a contingent fact, and other attributes necessarily entering into his make-up. Everything in man is a necessity.²⁰³

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty neither the constitution of the body nor the world can be understood apart from the diffuse saturation of sexuality: “existence permeates sexuality and vice-versa, so that it is impossible to determine, in any given decision or action, the proportion of sexual to other motivations, impossible to label a decision ‘sexual’ or ‘non-sexual’.”²⁰⁴ Sexuality is marked a “principle of indeterminacy” that is itself *necessary and transcendental*.

C. The Problem of Sexual Difference

Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty’s accounts of sexual embodiment remain surprisingly silent on the issue of sexual difference. Differences in the phenomenological experience of sexual embodiment between men and women, for example, are largely overlooked. The result, for much feminist scholarship,²⁰⁵ is the implicit substitution of a determinately male body for the ostensibly “universal” subject of sexuality. Yet, this is not the case for Levinas, who, as early as his 1948 *Time and the Other*, centralizes sexual difference in his phenomenology of Eros.

sexual orientations. See: Anthony F. Bogaert, “Toward a conceptual understanding of asexuality,” *Review of General Psychology*, Vol 10(3), (2006): 241-250; and Anthony F. Bogaert, *Understanding Asexuality* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

²⁰³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 197.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁰⁵ The status of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* in feminist scholarship is heavily disputed. For more generous readings of Merleau-Ponty, see e.g.: Silvia Stoller, “Reflections on Feminist Merleau-Ponty Skepticism,” *Hypatia* Vol. 15, No. 1 (Winter, 2000): 175-182; Sonia Kruks, “Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Difference in Feminism,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, eds. Dorothea Olkowski and Gail Weiss (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 25-48.

For Levinas, Western philosophy, particularly within the Hegelian tradition—as epitomized by Sartre—is marked by an oppositional and conflictual conception of intersubjectivity. For these philosophies, individuals are pitted against one another in a struggle for recognition. As Sartre writes, “I am—at the very root of my being—the project of assimilating and making an object of the Other.”²⁰⁶ In ethical analyses that will culminate with the phenomenology of radical responsibility in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas seeks to discover an alternate mode of intersubjective relation that does not reduce the experience of the other to struggle, violence, and totalization.²⁰⁷ While this ethical analysis will ultimately conclude in the analytic of the Face (*visage*), already in *Time and the Other* Levinas begins to think a non-oppositional mode of intersubjective relation through a detailed analysis of the erotic encounter and the relationship of paternity—an analysis that will be largely affirmed and repeated in both *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Ethics and Infinity* (1982).²⁰⁸

To encounter another in a non-oppositional mode is not merely to encounter the other as alter-ego—another me, reducible to a logic of the same—but as truly other (*autrui*), as *the Other* (*le Autre*). For Levinas, this otherness is uniquely manifest in nudity: “nudity is the true experience

²⁰⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 474. Sartre names this contest of freedom—between my freedom and the freedom of the Other—the “look.” From me, the look seeks to render the Other as an object; from the other, the look seeks to render me as an object—a “transcendence transcended.” This is for Sartre, contra Levinas, equally and unavoidably true within the context of sexuality. Thus one is ineluctably thrown into “masochism”—the assimilation of the Other’s freedom, and the making of self into object—or “sadism”—the rejection of the freedom of the Other, and the making of the Other into an object. See: *Ibid.*, 474-534.

²⁰⁷ As Derrida notes, “This concept of desire is as anti-Hegelian as it can possibly be.” Yet, as he also recognizes, “Levinas is very close to Hegel, much closer than he admits, and at the very moment when he is apparently opposed to Hegel in the most radical fashion. This is a situation he must share with all anti-Hegelian thinkers.” Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 92, 99.

²⁰⁸ The repetition of this analysis in 1982 challenges a common reading of Levinas, which proposes that the erotic analytic of *Totality and Infinity* was “abandoned by the time he wrote *Otherwise than Being*” in 1974. Michael Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics: Rationality in Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998)

of the otherness of the other.”²⁰⁹ This recourse to nudity has a dual meaning for Levinas. In the context of ethical responsibility, for example, nudity will often be paired with poverty to suggest vulnerability: “the body naked and indigent...”²¹⁰ Yet, nudity also points toward another mode of non-oppositional encounter: the erotic caress. In Eros one aims at the Other as an object of need and desire, but one which is not reduced to objectivity: “the possibility of the Other appearing as an object of a need while retaining his alterity, or again, the possibility of enjoying the Other ... constitutes the originality of the erotic.”²¹¹

What the phenomenology of the erotic encounter reveals is an essential necessity of alterity. “The pathos of the erotic relationship,” Levinas argues, “is the fact of being two, and that the other is absolutely other.”²¹² Yet, this *absolute* alterity cannot take on just any form. Rather, this absolute character points toward a specific mode of alterity: “the notion of the sociality of two, which is probably necessary for the exceptional epiphany of the face—abstract and chaste nudity—emerges from sexual differences, and is essential to eroticism and to all instances of alterity.”²¹³ Moreover, for Levinas the sexual difference that underlies the erotic relation is asymmetrical. The unique mode of the beloved (*Aimée*) object of erotic desire is granted a concrete name: *the feminine*. “The plane of *eros* allows us to see that the other *par excellence* is the feminine.”²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 31.

²¹⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 127.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 255.

²¹² Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 66.

²¹³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 36.

²¹⁴ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 86.

In Levinas' analysis, the feminine is granted this unique role not only because of a biological or ontic alterity between man and woman; indeed, "alterity is in some way [femininity's] nature."²¹⁵ That is to say, the ontological structure proper to femininity is represented by the fact that the feminine is described "as of itself other, as the origin of the very concept of alterity."²¹⁶ Thus, in *Time and the Other* Levinas will name the feminine the "absolutely contrary contrary... absolutely other."²¹⁷

Before turning to enactment of erotic desire in the caress, it will be helpful to briefly note persistent charges of androcentrism that have been levelled at Levinas, almost since the inception of *Time and the Other*. The most significant responses to Levinas have been levelled by Simone de Beauvoir (who will be covered below) and Luce Irigaray. Both thinker's fundamental objection can be summarized by Irigaray's "The Fecundity of the Caress," which takes Levinas to task for

²¹⁵ Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 65.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 66. Again, "femininity ... appeared to me as a difference contrasting strongly with other differences, not merely as a quality different from all others, but as the very quality of difference." Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 36.

²¹⁷ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 85. This account of the feminine is not limited to Levinas' philosophical writings, but can be found in a slightly altered form in his Talmudic studies. There Levinas is particularly interested in resisting the account of women's liberation proffered by feminism—"the revolution which thinks it has achieved the ultimate by destroying the family so as to liberate imprisoned sexuality" (Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990], 170). For the Levinas of this Talmudic context, true liberation requires the risk of a "daring question: how can the equality of sexes stem from the priority of the masculine?" (Ibid., 173). Toward this end, Levinas affirms that "from the beginning he [God] wanted two equal beings. [But] to create a world, he had to subordinate them one to the other. There had to be a difference which did not affect equity: a sexual difference. ... Real humanity does not allow for an abstract equality, without some subordination of terms. Subordination was needed, and a wound was needed; suffering was and is needed to unite equals and unequals" (Ibid., 173). The result of this analysis is a reduction of femininity—and sexual difference *tout court*—from the ontological status granted it in Levinas' philosophical texts, to an accidental or ontic status. "The feminine as such is only secondary," he insists, "the sexual is only an accessory of the human." (Ibid., 170). It is therefore in the context of these Talmudic commentaries—together with Levinas' writings on Judaism in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*—that Derrida will comment: "the work of EL seems to me to have always made alterity as sexual difference secondary or derivative, to have subordinated the trait of sexual difference to the alterity of a wholly other that is sexually unmarked. It is not woman or the feminine that he has made secondary, derivative, or subordinate, but sexual difference." Jacques Derrida, "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am" in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume 1*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 180. For a sustained analysis of Sexuality in Levinas' Talmudic commentary, see: Deborah Achtenberg, "Bearing the Other and Bearing Sexuality: Women and Gender in Levinas's 'And God Created Woman'," *Levinas Studies* Vol. 10 (2016): 137-154.

forgetting the subjectivity and consciousness of the woman, rendering woman as Other and therefore as “object.” As she parodies Levinas’ approach, “beloved woman. Not female lover. Necessarily an object, not a subject with a relation, like his, to time.”²¹⁸ Simply put, insofar as the *object* of the erotic encounter is explicitly marked as necessarily the feminine, Levinas presupposes that the philosophical subject is itself masculine.²¹⁹

Certainly Richard Cohen has suggested a more generous reading, emphasizing “that the issue is important but certainly not as simple as de Beauvoir, in this instance, makes it out to be, because for Levinas the other has a priority over the subject.”²²⁰ Yet, this response is largely belied by Levinas’ account of femininity and its persistent recourse to stereotyped tropes of femininity—associating femininity with mystery,²²¹ frailty/weakness,²²² the home (as opposed to labor),²²³ etc.

Returning to Levinas’ analytic, the concrete phenomenon that Levinas draws forward in order to draw out the phenomenality of the erotic encounter is the “caress.” Levinas is not unique in undertaking this analysis, as Sartre had already undertaken a similar analysis of the caress in

²¹⁸ Luce Irigaray, “The Fecundity of the Caress” in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Tina Chanter (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 126.

²¹⁹ “Poser l’altérité absolue comme féminin signifie déjà que le sujet philosophique est masculin.” Paulette Kayser, *Emmanuel Levinas: la trace du féminin* (Paris: PUF, 2001), 31; or again, “on this subject, let us note in passing that *Totality and Infinity* pushes the respect for dissymmetry to the point where it seems to us impossible, essentially impossible, that it could have been written by a woman. Its philosophical subject is man (vir).” Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 320-321 n. 92.

²²⁰ Richard A. Cohen, translator’s footnote in *Time and the Other*, 85 n.69. See, also: Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, 88-92.

²²¹ “Its mystery constitutes its alterity.” Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 87.

²²² “The movement of the lover before this frailty of femininity...” and “the frailty of femininity...” Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 257, 262.

²²³ “The other whose presence is discreetly an absence, with which is accomplished the primary hospitable welcome which describes the field of intimacy, is the Woman.” *Ibid.*, 155.

Being and Nothingness,²²⁴ and both Henry and Marion—as we will see below—will likewise situate a phenomenology of the caress at the heart of their phenomenologies of Eros. For Levinas, the caress is uniquely distinguished from similar phenomena (e.g. touch)²²⁵ insofar as it “transcends the sensible.”²²⁶ In this regard, the caress is distinguished from mere perception; it is in no way identifiable with the bodily sensings (*Empfindnisse*) analyzed by Husserl in *Ideas II*. Rather, the caress seeks to appease the “metaphysical desire”²²⁷ for absolute alterity. Thus, the caress “aims at neither a person nor a thing”²²⁸ —beings which can be “reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessor.”²²⁹ Instead, the caress seeks a pure experience of the Other beyond conceptualization or language, “irreducible to intentionality.”²³⁰ In this experience, one encounters the Other “beyond the face,” which is the mere existent *par excellence*. Instead the caress aims at an erotic unification of love. But the Same cannot in principle be united to the absolute Other. Therefore it is necessary that love overflow in a positive fecundity: the child. “The same and the other are not united but precisely ... engender the child.”²³¹

²²⁴ For Sartre, the caress is the means by which desire seeks to appropriate the body of the Other, to reveal the body of the other not as action, but as a “pure being-there” that Sartre names flesh. “The caress by *realizing* the Other’s incarnation reveals to me my own incarnation; that is, I make myself flesh in order to impel the Other to realize *for-herself* and *for me* her own flesh, and my caresses cause my flesh to be born for me in so far as it is for the Other *flesh causing her to be born as flesh ... a double reciprocal incarnation.*” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 508. See, also: Helena Dahlberg, “On Flesh and Eros in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*,” *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 40 (2012): 197–206.

²²⁵ “What is caressed is not touched, properly speaking.” Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 89.

²²⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 257.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 259.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33. “In the random agitation of caresses there is the admission that access is impossible, violence fails, possession is refused.” Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 35.

²³⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 260.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 266.

What Levinas discovers through the introduction of the child is a final figure of the Other, a figure that manifests as the paradox of paternity: the child is me, and is not me. As he writes in *Time and the Other*, “the son ... occurs as a possibility beyond the possible!”²³² Through this experience of fecundity, the totalization of the self-same not only encounters alterity as an external blow, as in the case of the feminine, but as a fracture *internal to the self*. In fecundity transcendence pierces the heart of immanence. The result of this paradoxical fracture is the advent of a futurity beyond conceptuality; “the absolute future, or infinite time”²³³ is anticipated in the caress,²³⁴ but only manifest in *the Other that is also I*, the other who will outlive me.²³⁵

Critiques of Levinas’ account of fecundity/paternity/filiation tend to follow directly from those aimed at his account of sexual difference. Insofar as he already presumed a determinately male subject, he likewise posits fecundity’s liberatory potential as the liberation of the male subject, the father.²³⁶ This androcentrism is redoubled by Levinas’ insistence upon the masculine child. Paternity is not merely the case of the relationship between the father and the child, but between the father and the son: filiation is a matter of “the father-son relationship, ... the son’s relation with the father...”²³⁷ The masculine particularity of this relationship is highlighted by Derrida, who asks a series of insightful questions: “Is ‘son’ another word for ‘child,’ a child who could be of one sex or the other? If so, whence comes that equivalence, and what does it mean?”

²³² Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 36.

²³³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 268.

²³⁴ “The caress is the anticipation of this pure future, without content.” Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 89.

²³⁵ “The I breaks free from itself in paternity without thereby ceasing to be an I, for the I is its son.” Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 278.

²³⁶ This is only further highlighted by the passing reference to “maternity” (e.g. *Ibid.*, 278), which serves only to emphasize the impossibility of an exchange or substitution of the neuter “parent” for “father.”

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

And why couldn't 'daughter' play an analogous role? Why would the son be the work beyond 'my work,' more or better than the daughter, than me? If there was as yet no difference from this point of view, why should 'son' better represent, in advance, this indifference? This unmarked indifference?"²³⁸ It remains unclear what possible justification Levinas might muster in defense of this un-thematized choice.

Finally, it is necessary to note a certain heteronormativity implicit in Levinas' account of fecundity. First, insofar as it explicitly marks Eros as the male caress of the feminine, Levinas' account of the erotic encounter presupposes a heterosexual union. While Levinas remains silent on the question of queer eroticism, his insistence that the feminine stands as the paradigmatic figure of absolute Other strongly suggests that Eros, insofar as it is a move into absolute alterity, beyond the face, could not manifest within a male homosexual relationship, for example. In that instance, it seems, the "sameness" of the erotic partners would necessitate a fall into the totalization of the same. Second, while Levinas will not mark the fecundity of the child as a necessary requirement of Eros,²³⁹ it does seem that the child (or more specifically, the son) is a necessary requirement for the full liberation (or "trans-figuration") of the self.²⁴⁰ Insofar as biological reproduction is not a consequence or possibility within many queer relationships—e.g. many homosexual relationships, as well as heterosexual relationships which include transgender

²³⁸ Derrida, "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am," 179.

²³⁹ As, for example, Marion will argue in *The Erotic Phenomenon*. See Chapter 3 below.

²⁴⁰ Luce Irigaray challenges this presumption, writing of Levinas: "he knows nothing of communion in pleasure. Levinas does not ever seem to have experienced the transcendence of the other which becomes an immanent ecstasy ... The other is [merely] 'close to him in 'duality'. This autistic, egological, solitary love does not correspond to the shared outpouring, to the loss of boundary of the skin into the mucous membranes of the body, leaving the circle which encloses my solitude to meet in a shared space, a shared breath ... In this relation we are at least three, each of which is irreducible to any of the others: you, me and our creation, the ecstasy of ourselves in us ... *prior to any child*." Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love," in Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (eds.), *Re-Reading Levinas* (London: Athlone, 1991), 109-118 [emphasis added].

partners—it seems that the final act of transcendence is posited as the sole domain of straight, cisgender men.

While this heteronormative logic is merely implicit in Levinas, its consequences can be found in an explicit form in subsequent proponents of his philosophy. As will be extensively examined below (Chapter 3), Jean-Luc Marion will directly recapitulate this argument in analyses that remain explicitly heteronormative. For Marion, queer sexuality is built upon the expulsion of the Other: “homosexuality [is] the ultimate refusal of dissimilarity.”²⁴¹ In a similar vein, the philosopher and theologian Enrique Dussel reveals the heteronormative potential of Levinas in his “Philosophy of Liberation,” in which he seeks to synthesize a Marxist theory of liberation with a Levinasian account of otherness. Toward this end he not only highlights economic oppression, but also gendered oppression—advocating for the liberation of women. Nevertheless, this liberation is constructed upon biologically essentialist grounds. “Liberation is real sexual distinction: the male affirms his phallic openness (with what risk that may entail) and the woman equally affirms her clitoral-vaginal and mammary-oral openness (in her dimension as wife and mother; 4.2.6.2).”²⁴² The homophobic character of this essentialism is explicitly marked in a passage (excised from the English translation) which reads “liberation is not the pure negation of domination by the denial of sexual diversity (as when feminism promotes homosexuality, test-tube babies, etc.),”²⁴³ or again, a few years later, “feminist homosexuality ends up summing up all

²⁴¹ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Future of Catholicism” in *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017) 78.

²⁴² Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 84.

²⁴³ “La liberación no es negación pura de la dominación por la negación de la diversidad sexual (como cuando el feminismo propone la homosexualidad, los hijos en probetas, etc.)” Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la liberación*, (Mexico: EDICOL, 1977), 106 [translation my own].

perversions ... [it is] a radical loss of [the] sense of the reality of the Other.”²⁴⁴ Thus, while Levinas himself remains silent on the issue of queer sexuality, the logic of his analysis of Eros is clearly manifest in these subsequent thinkers. As long as women are defined as *the* “absolutely contrary contrary”²⁴⁵ and reproduction is valorized as the only means of liberation, then the erotic analytic can only reproduce patriarchal and heteronormative oppression.

While this work has been targeted for critique by contemporary thinkers, Levinas also faced a serious challenge from his own contemporary, Simone de Beauvoir. In 1949 de Beauvoir undertook *The Second Sex* as a project at once personal,²⁴⁶ political, and philosophical. The aim of *The Second Sex* was to engage directly with sexual difference by asking the question: “what is a woman?” The answer that de Beauvoir discovers is incredibly complex, drawing as it does from feminist literature, psychoanalysis, Marxism, Hegelian philosophy, and—most important for the discussion at hand—existential phenomenology.

²⁴⁴ Enrique Dussel, as cited in Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation: Feminist Theology and the Ethics of Poverty and Reproduction* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 192-193. On this point, see: Marcella Althaus-Reid, “‘Let Them Talk ...!’ Doing Liberation Theology from Latin American Closets,” in *Liberation Theology and Sexuality: Second Edition*, ed. Marcella Althaus-Reid, (London: SCM Press, 2009), 10-13; Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 195-200; Martha Zapata, “Filosofía de la Liberación y Liberación de la Mujer. La Relación de Varones y Mujeres en la Filosofía Ética de Enrique Dussel,” *Debate Feminista* 16 (1997): 69–97; and Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics*, 66-67. The latter of which notes, “Homosexuality ... is the love of the same for the same, with all the exclusionary connotations that the world ‘same’ carries for Dussel and Levinas” (Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics*, 67). It is worth noting that Dussel seems to have more recently softened his tone, writing in 1996, “in the second place, the grave problem of homosexuality. Again, a conservative mentality prevents seeing the question with clarity. The human person whose sexuality is directed toward the same sex (leaving aside here the cause, whether it is natural, psycho-pedagogical, or psycho-pathological) ought to be respected in the dignity of the person. The ethics of erotics ought to overcome sexuality in order to arrive at the person itself of the Other. A sexual relationship is just if it respects, in justice, the person of the Other. *In a homosexual relationship such respect is not impossible.*” Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. and ed. Eduardo Mendieta (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), 10.

²⁴⁵ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 85.

²⁴⁶ “One day I wanted to explain myself to myself ... and it struck me with a sort of surprise that the first thing I had to say was ‘I am a woman’.” Madelein Chapsal, “Une interview de Simone de Beauvoir,” *Les Ecrivains en personne* (Paris: Julliard, 1960) as translated in Deirdre Bair, “Introduction to the Vintage Edition,” in Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), viii.

The central thesis of de Beauvoir's text, one which falls directly from Levinas, is that woman has been made *Other*. Certainly, this is not to suggest as many all-too-quick readers have argued, that de Beauvoir believes in a naive fashion that woman is Other, or even less that she defends this positioning. Rather, the heart of *The Second Sex* is a critique of such a myth of the "eternal feminine."²⁴⁷ Woman is not Other *in-* or *for-herself*. Rather, woman is Other only from the masculine perspective: "man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him."²⁴⁸ It is in fact Levinas himself who is drawn forward as a paradigmatic case of androcentric thinking. In a key footnote, she writes of *Time and the Other*:

I suppose that Levinas does not forget that woman, too, is aware of her own consciousness, or ego. But it is striking that he deliberately takes a man's point of view, disregarding the reciprocity of subject and object. When he writes that woman is a mystery, he implies that she is a mystery for man. Thus his description which is intended to be objective, is in fact an assertion of masculine privilege.²⁴⁹

For de Beauvoir, the presumed otherness of women is a product of men's false sense of universality. Failing to take into account women's lived experience [*l'expérience vécue*], men misunderstand women. Further failing to account for their own gendered situation, men assume this misunderstanding is the reality of women—women simply *are* mysterious, *are* Other. Thus, as Heinämaa suggests, "the Feminine is not just an end result of idealizing thinking but results from the reiteration of unnoticed androcentric valuations."²⁵⁰

For de Beauvoir, this rendering of woman as absolute Other is not merely wrong; it is self-refuting. In their radical pursuit of alterity, thinkers like Levinas and Sartre have failed to recognize

²⁴⁷ See, in particular: de Beauvoir, "Part III: Myths" in *The Second Sex*, 139-265.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xxii.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, 90.

the necessary reciprocity of human relations. In such a phenomenology, “woman thus seems to be the inessential who never goes back to being the essential, to be the absolute Other, *without reciprocity*.”²⁵¹ This masculine understanding of the Other seeks two diametrically opposed aims: “[the man] hopes to fulfill himself as a being by carnally possessing a being, but at the same time confirming his sense of freedom through the docility of a free person.”²⁵² Man wants to capture—whether literally or figuratively—the woman, and thereby objectify her. Yet, at the same time, man wants to be freely chosen (loved). Sartre explicitly thematizes this paradox, ultimately concluding that there is only one resolution: the lover must set the terms of the beloved’s freedom—“in love the Lover wants to be ‘the whole World’ for the beloved.”²⁵³ De Beauvoir identifies an internal inconsistency, the necessary failure of this project. As Heinämaa summarizes her argument, “the idea of an absolute other is self-refuting. This is because the self-other relation is essentially—necessarily—reciprocal: I see an other only if I see a living body which is able to see me as a body.”²⁵⁴ Undertaking an eidetic analysis, de Beauvoir suggests a structural relationship between subject and other. Every experience of the other is necessarily bound to a recognition that, simultaneously, the Other is for-itself a subject for whom I am an object. There can be no *absolute* Other, because every other is relative to a certain subject position, a certain situation. “There can be no intersubjective relation if there is only one subject.”²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 141 [emphasis added].

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 479.

²⁵⁴ Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, 12.

²⁵⁵ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 210.

While de Beauvoir articulates this sharp critique of her contemporaries, *The Second Sex* is by no means limited to this negative project. Quite to the contrary, de Beauvoir seeks to offer a positive account of feminine existence. Moreover, as Heinämaa's *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference* has definitively shown, this account is both explicitly embodied and phenomenological. This confluence of embodiment and phenomenological investigation is key to de Beauvoir's argument, for it gives lie to critiques which have often misunderstood her recourse to bodily difference as a bioscientific reductionism. To the contrary, de Beauvoir concludes her discussion of the "data of biology" by explicitly rejecting such an approach.²⁵⁶ As she writes:

We must view the facts of biology in the light of an ontological, economic, social, and psychological context. ... The body of woman is one of the essential elements in her situation in the world. But that body is not enough to define her as woman; there is no true living reality except as manifested by the conscious individual through activities and in the bosom of society.²⁵⁷

De Beauvoir considers a few alternative approaches that might situate female embodiment within its social context, including psychoanalysis and historical materialism, but ultimately finds these alternatives wanting. Instead, de Beauvoir relies upon an existential phenomenological approach.

The starting point for *The Second Sex* is therefore a phenomenological investigation into the meaning of woman's lived body [*corps vivant, corps vécu*].²⁵⁸ The account of the body implied

²⁵⁶ De Beauvoir cites as evidence of this thesis, the fact that existential concerns often diverge significantly from biological importance: "woman is female, to the extent that she experiences herself as such. There are biologically essential facts that do not belong to her situation as she lives it: thus the structures of the egg is not reflected in it, but on the contrary an organ of no great biological importance, the clitoris, plays in it a part of the first rank. It is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by taking on nature in her affectivity." *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁵⁷ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 37.

²⁵⁸ As Heinämaa notes, "Beauvoir's discussion of femininity and sexual difference is phenomenological in its aims and its methods"; "*La deuxième sexe* is not a thesis about women's socialization, but a phenomenological inquiry into the constitution of the meaning of sexual difference"; "Beauvoir emphasizes several times that her analysis of sexuality and sexual difference takes its starting point from the existential-phenomenological understanding of the living body [*corps vivant, corps vécu*]," Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, xii, xiii, 25. See also: Sara Heinämaa, "What Is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference," *Hypatia* Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter, 1997): 20-39.

by this analysis is precisely that traced above—from Husserl’s *Leib*, to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas’ lived body. As de Beauvoir herself notes: “the body is not a *thing*, it is a situation, as viewed in the perspective I am adopting—that of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty; it is the instrument of our grasp upon the world, a limiting factor for our projects.”²⁵⁹ Generally, scholarship has emphasized the unique role of Sartre’s analyses of the body in *Being and Nothingness*. Thus Judith Butler, for example, paradigmatically writes that “we can see in *The Second Sex* an effort to radicalize the Sartrian program to establish an embodied notion of freedom.”²⁶⁰ Yet, while one should certainly not underestimate the influence of Sartre, Heinämaa has shown that it is not primarily Sartre’s, but Merleau-Ponty’s account of the body that most directly influenced de Beauvoir: “Merleau-Ponty presented a viable alternative to Sartre’s ‘phenomenological ontology’ troubled by the problems of solipsism and dualism.”²⁶¹

From Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir develops the notion of the lived body as a situation. Yet, as an analysis of sexual difference, *The Second Sex* is unfulfilled by Merleau-Ponty’s neuter conception of embodiment. Rather, de Beauvoir seeks to show the unique mode of embodiment characteristic of women’s experience. While the full description of women’s embodiment is beyond the scope of the present discussion, one key feature should be highlighted. For Merleau-Ponty, the central feature of the living body is its *activity* within the world: “consciousness is in

²⁵⁹ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 34.

²⁶⁰ Judith Butler, “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*?” *Yale French Studies*, No. 72, Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century (1986): 38.

²⁶¹ Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, xii. This interest in Merleau-Ponty’s account of the body can be traced back to a quite positive review of *Phenomenology of Perception* in 1945 (Simone de Beauvoir, “A Review of The Phenomenology of Perception,” in *Philosophical Writings*, eds. Margaret A. Simons, Marybeth Timmermann, Mary Beth Mader [Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004]). Nevertheless, de Beauvoir’s relationship to Merleau-Ponty should not be misunderstood as uncritical. Indeed, de Beauvoir famously critiqued Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Sartre in “Merleau-Ponty and Pseudo-Sartreanism” in *Philosophical Writings*, eds. Margaret A. Simons, Marybeth Timmermann (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

the first place not a matter of ‘I think that’ but of ‘I can’.”²⁶² Yet, through phenomenological analyses of traditionally feminine experiences—such as menstruation and pregnancy—de Beauvoir seeks to show that feminine embodiment is not merely marked by activity, but equally by passivity. As she writes of pregnancy, for example, “in any case giving birth and suckling are not activities, they are natural functions; no project is involved, and that is why woman found in them no reason for a lofty affirmation of her existence—she submitted passively to her biologic fate.”²⁶³ And again, of menstruation, “it is during her periods that she feels her body most painfully as an obscure, alien thing.”²⁶⁴ Certainly, as de Beauvoir repeatedly insists, this discussion should not be misunderstood as a reduction of feminine experience to biology; “human society is never abandoned wholly to nature.”²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, this discussion is intended to unveil the unique *meaning* of the woman’s body. As she summarizes this finding, “woman, like man, *is* her body; but her body is something other than herself.”²⁶⁶ What de Beauvoir seeks to show is not that men are active, and women are passive. Indeed, it is one of the chief roles of the myth of the “eternal feminine” to mask the passivity of masculine embodiment.²⁶⁷ Rather, de Beauvoir argues that the experience of bodily alienation characteristic of both men and women in illness, dysphoria, and other *acute* scenarios, takes on a more persistent or *periodic* form in women’s embodiment. Thus,

²⁶² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 159.

²⁶³ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 63. De Beauvoir’s analysis has often been critiqued for its largely negative and passive account of pregnancy. For a discussion of this debate see: Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, 109-114. See, also: Kristin Zeiler et al, *Feminist Phenomenology and Medicine*, eds. Kristin Zeiler and Lisa Folkmarson Käll (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).

²⁶⁴ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 29.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 484.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁶⁷ “As a matter of fact, man, like woman, is flesh, therefore passive.” *Ibid.*, 728.

feminine being-in-the-world takes on a distinct character from the masculine experience that not only tends to lack this *more persistent* form of passivity, but also tends to cover over its own passivity, casting it mythologically onto the feminine Other: understood as “matter, passivity, immanence, ... flesh.”²⁶⁸

This attempt to phenomenologically uncover the meaning of feminine embodiment is often accused of a gender essentialism. Yet, it is worth reminding oneself that de Beauvoir is not seeking a metaphysically static account of sexual difference. Indeed, sexual difference itself is not even understood by de Beauvoir as an ontological necessity.²⁶⁹ To the contrary, de Beauvoir seeks to uncover the meaning of feminine embodiment *within the contemporary situation*. Thus, she consistently emphasizes that woman is not a being, but a becoming.²⁷⁰ As she famously stated, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”²⁷¹ Yet, against many readings of de Beauvoir which correlate this famous dictum with contemporary theories of social construction,²⁷² de Beauvoir offers less a genealogy or archeology of sexual difference, than a genetic phenomenology

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 144.

²⁶⁹ As she argues, through an implicit eidetic analysis, reproduction is a necessary feature of human being, but the same is not the case for sexual difference: “thus we can regard the phenomenon of reproduction as founded in the very nature of being. But we must stop there. The perpetuation of the species does not necessitate sexual differentiation.” This is because, employing an imaginative variation on human reproduction, she concludes that “it nevertheless remains true that both a mind without a body and an immortal man are strictly inconceivable, whereas we can imagine a parthenogenetic or hermaphroditic society.” Ibid., 7.

²⁷⁰ Here, de Beauvoir seems to have in mind something akin to the Hegelian conception of becoming. As she notes in regard to the present being verb—*être*—“the significance of the verb to be must be rightly understood here; it is in bad faith to give it a static value when it really has the dynamic Hegelian sense of ‘to have become’.” Ibid., xxx.

²⁷¹ Continuing... “no biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as *Other*.” Ibid., 267.

²⁷² “Gender is the cultural meaning and form that that body acquires” Butler, “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*,” 35. For a critique of this reading, see: Heinämaa “What Is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference.”

of sexual difference. Thus, what is revealed by her analysis is not an eternal essence of femininity, but the specific *possibilities of being* granted to women insofar as they find themselves within a patriarchal world: “woman is not a completed reality, but rather a becoming, and it is in her becoming that she should be compared with man; that is to say, her *possibilities* should be defined.”²⁷³

* * *

Having traced a genealogy of the phenomenology of the body, particularly in the work of Husserl and the early French tradition, it should now be clear that, despite the internal disagreements over precise details, this development has followed a clear trajectory. First, the phenomenological tradition has increasingly recognized the primacy of lived embodiment within the constitution of the world, and second, it has increasingly recognized the priority of sexuality and sexual difference in this constitution of the body’s relation to the world and others.

In the following two chapters it will be shown that the radical phenomenologies of Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion tend to reflect this broader tradition both at its strongest and its weakest moments. Like the preceding tradition, they emphasize the unique constitutive role of the body. Moreover, each of these subsequent thinkers have developed a complex analysis of sexuality and eroticism. Yet, at the same time, they will tend to draw forward some of the most troubling patriarchal and heteronormative aspects of this earlier tradition as well. For example, Levinas’ account of the caress will be found almost explicitly recapitulated in both Henry’s *Incarnation* and Marion’s *The Erotic Phenomenon*. The result of this repetition is that Henry—having failed to recognize de Beauvoir’s critique—tends to echo Levinas’ own androcentric mode of thinking: ignoring possible varieties of sexual embodiment, proffering an account of the universal male, and

²⁷³ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 34.

rendering the feminine as structurally other. Marion, likewise repeats the most troubling aspects of Levinas' account and, like Dussel, renders Levinas' implicit heteronormativity as an explicit homophobia.

Nevertheless, as *radical* phenomenologies, these two thinkers will also offer new ways understanding the flesh; opening the door to a more complex account of affectivity and givenness which has proven philosophically and theologically fecund. Thus, the aim of the following chapters will not merely be the dismissal of Henry and Marion as irredeemably heteronormative. Rather, identifying the distinct advantages of their accounts of the flesh and the body, it will seek to identify the precise points at which their analyses have gone wrong. This precision will open the possibility of a fusion of radical phenomenology and queer theory in the second half of the dissertation, a fusion that will seek to retain the benefits of radical phenomenology, while casting aside its history of androcentric and heteronormative thinking around sexuality and eroticism.

CHAPTER 2 - Michel Henry: Transcendental Asexuality

Sexes must vanish & cease To be when Albion arises from his dread repose.

William Blake

§I: Radical Phenomenology

A. From Onto-Phenomenological Monism to Radical Phenomenology

In order to approach Michel Henry's "radical phenomenology"—or as he will sometimes prefer "material phenomenology"¹—it may be best to begin with a biographical note. In 1943, during the Second World War, Henry found himself involved with the resistance movement known as the "Free French Forces." Operating as an undercover agent in Lyon, Henry found that his very survival necessitated that he obscure his true motivations, beliefs, and feelings. This powerful experience of subterfuge produced the guiding conviction of his subsequent philosophical career: the truth of reality does not reside in the visible world where appearances deceive and words can lie, but rather, as Scott Davidson remarks, "one's true identity withdraws from the visibility of the public realm and resides in the secrecy of a clandestine, underground life."²

Henry's lifelong philosophical project may be understood as an attempt to unpack this guiding intuition, articulating it through the language of phenomenological philosophy. From the very beginning, in *Le Bonheur de Spinoza (The Happiness of Spinoza)*, until his final *The Words*

¹ Henry uses these two terms interchangeably, often shifting from one to the other in a single article or chapter.

² Scott Davidson, "Translator's Introduction" in Michel Henry, *Barbarism*, trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Continuum International Publishers), vi.

of Christ, Henry's firm conviction remains—as will be seen below—that immanence, what he calls by various names—“internal = interiority = life = invisible = pathos”³—is the true nature of Being and the true essence of manifestation.

Nevertheless, this introduction may be served not by turning directly to Henry's positive contribution, but rather to his reconstruction of the dominant strain of Western philosophy, what in 1963 he has already named “ontological monism” (or as he will later prefer, “phenomenological monism”).⁴ Most directly, onto-phenomenological monism refers to any philosophical system that seeks to reduce the diversity of manifestation to a single modality: what Henry will call the “horizon of visibility that is the world, that is Time, and ... history.”⁵ What draws together visibility, time, history—and one should add spatiality, representation, and objectivity—is the privileged role of ek-static distance or separation, that is *transcendence* or *alienation*.⁶ For the onto-phenomenological monist—both idealist and realist—“alienation is the essence of manifestation.”⁷ Whether a philosophical system is centered on “Being,” “consciousness,” or

³ Michel Henry, *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky*, trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2009), 7.

⁴ “At the time, I called it ontological monism, but it should instead be called phenomenological monism.” Michel Henry, “Material Phenomenology,” in *Quiet Powers of the Possible: Interviews in Contemporary French Phenomenology*, eds. Tarek R. Dika and W. Chris Hackett (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 121. See, e.g. “the horizon of phenomenological monism” in Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, trans. Karl Hefty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 136. I will here follow commentators who have coined “onto-phenomenological monism” as a means of addressing both his early work and later preference.

⁵ Michel Henry, *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 11.

⁶ §4 of *Incarnation* offers an example of a way in which Henry links together many of these terms: “the world's appearing consists of the ‘outside itself,’ in the coming outside of an Outside, ... everything that shows itself in this shows itself on the outside—as exterior, as other, and as different. Exterior, because the structure of the Ek-stasis in which it shows itself is exteriority; other, because this ek-static structure is the structure of a primordial alterity (everything outside me is other than me, everything outside itself is other than itself); different, because this Ek-stasis is equally a Difference; it is the operation that, hollowing out the gap of a distance, makes different everything to which appearance is given with the help of this distancing—in the horizon of the world.” Henry, *Incarnation*, 39.

⁷ Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. G.J. Etzkorn (New York: Springer, 1973), 70.

“God,” manifestation necessitates an internal splitting, the creation of distance as the necessary condition of phenomenality. Thus, in the words of the 17th century theosophist Jacob Boehme—a particularly common target of Henry’s criticism⁸—“that cannot enter into particular existence ... which cannot be comprehended, which dwells in itself and possesses itself; but [in order to attain existence] it proceeds out of itself, and manifests itself out of itself.”⁹

Within Henry’s philosophical milieu, this phenomenological prejudice was most readily apparent in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, where self-alienation is granted primacy of place. As Sartre there writes, “the being of consciousness qua consciousness is to exist *at a distance from itself*.”¹⁰ Yet, Henry discovers the tendency toward onto-phenomenological monism throughout the Western philosophical canon: in ancient Greek thought, Kant, Schelling, Husserl, Heidegger,¹¹ Merleau-Ponty and to a lesser extent Descartes, Fichte, and Schopenhauer. Indeed,

⁸ This is primarily due to the influential role that Boehme would play in the development of German ontology, via his influence on Fichte and Hegel. See: Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 85-86, 132, 138-140; Michel Henry, *Marx: A Philosophy of Human Reality*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 44-45, 56-58; Michel Henry, *From Communism to Capitalism: Theory of a Catastrophe*, trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 99; and Henry, *Incarnation*, 44-45.

⁹ Jacob Boehme, *Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings*, trans. John Rolleston Earle (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1958), 62.

¹⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Pocket Books, 1956), 125 [emphasis Sartre’s]. Likewise, of Being, he writes, “the presence of being to itself implies a detachment on the part of being in relation to itself.” *Ibid.*, 77. In the case of Sartre, this recourse to alienation and opposition is a clear product of a Kojevian-influenced reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. For Henry’s critique of Hegel’s account of manifestation, see the appendix to *The Essence of Manifestation*: §§71-77.

¹¹ Heidegger perhaps serves as Henry’s deepest philosophical opponent. As Jean-Yves Lacoste writes, Henry is “probably the most anti-Heideggerian of all the phenomenologists.” Jean-Yves Lacoste, “Foreword” in Michel Henry, *Words of Christ*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), ix. Like Sartre after him, Heidegger affirmed that the self was unveiled through a “reflection” whereby the self could “radiate back from [beings].” Dasein, he argues, “never finds itself otherwise than in the things themselves, and in fact in those things that daily surround it. It finds *itself* primarily and constantly in *things* because, tending them, distressed by them, it always in some way or other rests in things. ... The Dasein does not need a special kind of observation, nor does it need to conduct a sort of espionage on the ego in order to have the self; rather, as the Dasein gives itself over immediately and passionately to the world itself, its own self is reflected to it from things.” Thus, Heidegger continues, “Transcendence is a fundamental determination of the ontological structure of the Dasein.” Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 159, 162.

Henry will ultimately conclude that this prejudice is nearly unanimous within Western thinking.¹² Ontological monism simply is “Western metaphysics, with its origin in Greek truth, [where] the only recognized mode of manifestation is ek-static, which after its Kantian elaboration becomes the essence of representation.”¹³

Nevertheless, Henry’s argument is not that onto-phenomenological monism fails in its task of elucidating transcendence—it quite rightly recognizes this mode of givenness as distancing or alienation—but rather, he critiques the way in which its assumption of the sole reign of transcendence serves to efface the possibility of a more primordial region, what he will call radical immanence, or simply, “life.”¹⁴ For Henry, immanence is the true “essence of transcendence.”¹⁵

Nevertheless, Henry is unsatisfied to merely deduce the necessity of a primordial region of Being through a sort of transcendental deduction; he does not only seek to defend the thesis that there exists a region prior to the phenomenality of the representative world. Indeed, as he argues, such a conception is by no means foreign to ontological monism. Kant, for example, argues that the phenomenal world is rightly surrounded by the noumenal world of the thing-in-itself. But, while thinkable, the noumenal world is nevertheless empty. “In the end,” Kant writes:

¹² Among Henry’s few exceptions are the Christian Patristics, Meister Eckhart, Spinoza, Maine de Biran, Marx, Levinas, and Kandinsky. In light of this almost overwhelmingly negative appraisal of the history of occidental thought, Henry will write that “c’est contre [la totalité du champ philosophique], en pratiquant une immense antithèse, que j’ai en quelque sorte travaillé.” Michel Henry, “Narrer le pathos,” entretien avec M. Calle-Gruber, *La Revue des Science Humaines*, vol. 95 n. 221 (1991): 310-311.

¹³ Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 165.

¹⁴ Thus, for example, Henry states, “my phenomenology of life is not intended to be a substitute for the phenomenologies of the world. The phenomenology of the world has its own proper role. There are extraordinary descriptions of this world in Husserl and Heidegger, but their phenomenology is unilateral.” Henry, “Material Phenomenology,” 120-121.

¹⁵ Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 249.

We have no insight into the possibility of such noumena, and the domain outside of the sphere of appearances is empty (for us), i.e., we have an understanding that extends farther than sensibility problematically, but no intuition, indeed not even the concept of a possible intuition, through which objects outside of the field of sensibility could be given, and about which the understanding could be employed assertorically. The concept of a noumenon is therefore merely a boundary concept, in order to limit the pretension of sensibility, and therefore only of negative use.¹⁶

In like manner, Fichte's 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* announces the "Absolute," what he names life. But nevertheless, this Absolute is denied its own phenomenality: "for us the oneness beyond is nothing in itself, although it is posited as in itself; rather it exists *only* through the light and in the light, and (is) its projection ... [and] when we observe the light, the light is objectified, alienated from us and killed as something primordial."¹⁷ Thus, Henry aims not only to affirm an immanent region heterogenous to the ek-static transcendence of the world. Rather, the task of a radical phenomenology is to further uncover the unique mode of givenness [*mode de donation*] of this immanence.¹⁸

Henry's critique of Husserl provides an instructive case study in onto-phenomenological monism. Henry's deepest reflections on Husserl can be found in his 1990 *Material Phenomenology*, where Henry compares his radical phenomenology to Husserl's "hyletic

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 350.

¹⁷ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Science of Knowing: J. G. Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, trans. Walter E. Wright (New York: State University of New York, 2005), 62 [emphasis added]. Thus, in the words of Tilliette, according to Henry, Fichte was "si proche par sa découverte de l'absolu immanent, mais retombé dans l'erreur moniste de la connaissance aveuglée." Xavier Tilliette, "Phénoménologies autonomes: Michel Henry & Jean-Luc Marion," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 60 (2004): 473-484, 475.

¹⁸ "A radical phenomenological thought must interrogate the manner in which the transcendental power, which gives every thing, *is itself given*." Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 22 [emphasis added].

phenomenology”¹⁹ and offers his most sustained critique of Husserl, and treatment of his own relationship to the founder of phenomenology.

This engagement begins with a distinction first explicitly articulated by Husserl in §§85-86 of *Ideas I*. There Husserl juxtaposes two forms of phenomenology, each corresponding to a distinct field of givenness: intentional phenomenology and hyletic phenomenology. Hyletic phenomenology, Husserl writes, is oriented toward “all the experiences which in the *Logical Investigations* were designated ‘primary contents,’ ... [that is], sensory contents such as the data of colour, touch, sounds, and the like.”²⁰ Or, as Husserl will now call them, the *sensile hyle* (ὄλη). Distinct from these “concrete data” or “formless material,” are the “immaterial forms” which constitute the objects of intentional phenomenology, what Husserl will now call the *intentional morphe* (μορφή). Whereas the former function as the mere material of experience, the intentional *morphe* include all phenomena which bear a meaning or a sense [*Sinn*],²¹ and can therefore be phenomenologically examined for their noetic and noematic content.

While Husserl will hold that both forms of analyses are possible, he will nevertheless strictly bias intentional phenomenology. Thus, while hyletic phenomenology “has a value in itself,” Husserl insists that “it stands clearly below noetic ... phenomenology.”²² Indeed, the vast

¹⁹ This is in response to a question issued by Didier Franck three years earlier, while preparing a special issue of *Philosophie* devoted to Henry’s work, wherein Franck asked Henry “to clarify the relation between [Henry’s] ‘material phenomenology’ and Husserl’s ‘hyletic phenomenology’.” Scott Davidson, “Introduction” in Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, xii.

²⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2012), 174.

²¹ The intentional *morphe* are the meaningful experiences constituted by a “‘bestowal of sense’ which takes place in the noetic phases.” *Ibid.*, 177.

²² *Ibid.*, 180. Or again, “phenomenological reflexions and analyses which specifically concern the material may be called hyletically phenomenological, as, on the other side, those that relate to noetic phases may be referred to as noetically phenomenological. *The incomparably more important and fruitful analyses belong to the noetical side.*” *Ibid.*, 178 [emphasis added].

majority of Husserl's subsequent phenomenological investigations will be devoted to intentional content. Insofar as Henry's radical or material phenomenology bears a noticeable similarity to Husserl's hyletic phenomenology, it is precisely this bias that Henry will target in *Material Phenomenology*, aiming not only to resist the denigration of hyletic phenomenology, but to completely invert the priority: "material phenomenology, as I conceive it," Henry there writes, "results from a radical reduction of every transcendence that yields the hyletic or impressional component as *the underlying essence of subjectivity*,"²³ or again, "*hyle* is more essential than *morphe* for the determination of the object."²⁴

In his defense of hyletic phenomenology, Henry first notes a tendency in Husserl to efface the unique givenness of the impressional *hyle*. Simply put, rather than recognizing the unique phenomenality of the impression, Husserl reduces it to a mere component of intentionality, thereby subsuming the *hyle* within the *morphe*. As Henry notes, under Husserl's analyses, "the *hyle* becomes originally and in itself lacking ... of the capacity to carry out the work of manifestation in and by itself."²⁵ The result of this "dejection" of the impression is its "ejection" into the sphere of transcendence, the horizon of visibility; the *hyle* become mere "sense data." Thus, by the time that Husserl writes *Ideas II*, affectivity will be stripped of its unique givenness and bound together with objects, as an "act of feeling." Affects are there found "in the object itself"; they are "predicates of objects,"²⁶ lacking any capacity to manifest themselves from themselves.²⁷ Thus

²³ Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book, Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 16.

²⁷ This reduction of the impression to the horizon of visibility—that is, transcendence—is most clearly recognizable in Husserl's account of the "empty feeling." As he writes, "Just as there is, however, a sort of representing from afar,

ultimately, for Husserl, all phenomenology (rightly bearing the name) is intentional phenomenology, that is, phenomenology of the transcendent.²⁸

According to Henry, this is a problem precisely because it betrays the phenomenological project itself. For Henry, the phenomenological enterprise seeks “to describe phenomena themselves, ... as they are given and consequently in their givenness itself.”²⁹ “The object of phenomenology,” he writes, drawing upon the Husserl’s 1907 *The Idea of Phenomenology*, is “the object in its How [*Wie*],” that is “in the how of its givenness.”³⁰ Yet, he suggests, Husserl has here rejected the givenness of the *hyle* not due to a phenomenological insight or eidetic necessity, but due to a pre-phenomenological prejudice: onto-phenomenological monism.

As Henry will seek to illustrate, Husserl’s analyses themselves often reveal precisely the opposite of what his ideological perspective demands. Indeed, as Husserl will note:

The reference to the phenomenological reduction, and similarly to the pure sphere of experience as ‘transcendental,’ depends precisely on our finding in this reduction an absolute sphere of *materials and* noetic forms, to *whose interlacings*, nicely articulated in accord with as immanent essential necessity belongs this wonderful conscious possession of something definitively or definably given in such and such a way.³¹

As Henry glosses the consequences of this passage, intentionality—this wonderful conscious possession of something—“always requires what is wholly other than itself: the sensation, the

an empty representational intending which is not a being in the presence of the object, so there is a feeling which related to the object emptily; and as the former is fulfilled in intuitive representing, so is the empty feeling fulfilled by way of the delighting.” *Ibid.*, 11. Here feeling—the impression or *hyle*—is submitted to the reign of objectivating distance, the horizon of transcendence or alienation.

²⁸ Insofar as intentionality represents a directedness toward “something over against consciousness itself as in principle other, unreal, transcendent.” Husserl, *Ideas*, 207.

²⁹ Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 16.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Husserl, *Ideas*, 207 [emphasis added].

impression. The latter must first be given in order for any experience whatsoever to take place.”³² Thus, the task of a hyletic—or a material/radical—phenomenology must not be the erasure of the unique mode of givenness of the affective material or the impressional *hyle*. It is rather the task of a radical phenomenology to discover this unique givenness that not only manifests itself, but likewise functions as the foundation of all transcendent phenomenality: “everything that is given is given to us, so to speak, two times. The first givenness, the *Empfindung*, ... and then, ... [it is] given a second time in and through intentionality, as a transcendent and unreal thing, as its ‘vis-a-vis’.”³³ Whereas, “‘transcendental’ phenomenology, is limited to the description of this second givenness,” it is the first mode of givenness that Henry’s radical phenomenology seeks to uncover in its unique manifestation. In order to uncover this more primordial phenomenon, Henry will develop a methodology that aims to radicalize Husserl’s phenomenological reduction: this he names “the radical reduction.”

B. The Radical Reduction

The radical reduction, as Henry suggests in *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, is not completely unique to his own radical phenomenology. For, apart from its obvious precedence in Husserl, Henry also discovers a “radical reduction” at the heart of Cartesian philosophy.³⁴ The Cartesian methodology constitutes a reduction, Henry argues, precisely because it seeks to bracket appearing beings (*l’étants*)—what Martin Heidegger will call the ontic—from the act of appearing itself (*l’être*)—the ontological or transcendental. As Henry writes, “the cogito’s phenomenological

³² Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁴ “Cartesianism is a phenomenology.” Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 25. Further, “the radical problematic introduced by ... Cartesianism moves entirely in an attitude of reduction, which is precisely what makes it radical.” *Ibid.*, 22.

reduction begins this differentiation, the separation of appearance's appearing from what appears," or in Descartes' language, the *videor/cogitatio* from the *videre/cogitatum*.

It is precisely the task of returning from appearance to its very act of appearing, from what is given to its givenness, that Henry takes to be the task of his radical reduction. Husserl quite rigorously sets out this task in *The Idea of Phenomenology*, where he describes the phenomenological reduction as a method for attaining the "absolute data" of the immanent; "everything transcendent (that which is not given to me immanently) is to be assigned the index zero, i.e., its existence, its validity is not to be assumed as such."³⁵ Yet, it remains ambiguous what is to be understood by immanence. As Husserl notes: "the phenomenon of sound perception, even as evident and reduced, demands within the immanent a distinction between appearance and that which appears. We thus have two absolute data, the givenness of the appearing and the givenness of the object."³⁶ We here have, in Henry's language, a first and a second givenness. But Husserl remains clear on this point, continuing "the object within this immanence is not immanent in the sense of genuine immanence."³⁷ The object—what Husserl will later designate as the *morphe*, or the object of intentional phenomenology—is not genuinely immanent [*reell Immanente*]; for genuine immanence refers to that which "presents nothing else, 'points' to nothing 'outside' itself, ... [it is] self-givenness [*Selbstgegebenheit*]."³⁸ But, Husserl will almost immediately substitute for this radical project, a reduction that instead privileges this "second givenness"—the givenness of the object, rather than the givenness of its appearing. By making this substitution, Henry argues,

³⁵ Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

Husserl introduces a “perversion of the concept of immanence,”³⁹ whereby “the mode of givenness of the transcendence of the pure gaze,” is granted “the false title of ‘immanence’.”⁴⁰ Henry therefore understands the radical reduction as a retrieval of this earlier conception of the reduction—a radical reduction discovered by Descartes and Husserl, but ultimately abandoned by both in favor of the object/*videre/cogitatum*.

Henry’s radical reduction therefore aims—to use Husserl’s language—at the *genuinely* immanent. In this reduction everything that appears within the horizon of visibility is bracketed; “if we bracket every empirical or worldly image ... there remains a pure ... affective tonality.”⁴¹ This not only includes the general thesis of existence and the positings of the natural attitude, as in Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, but also the second givenness—“which is the ek-static givenness in the perception of the now.”⁴² That is, everything that is given in intentionality, both the noetic and the noematic content is entirely bracketed. Simply put, in Henry’s radical reduction, everything that is marked by distance or transcendence—even the “immanent transcendence” described by Husserl in the *Cartesian Meditations*⁴³—is placed out of play in order that the

³⁹ Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 55.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 57. For a Husserlian response to this argument, see: Jeffrey Hanson and Michael R. Kelly, “Michel Henry and *The Idea of Phenomenology*: Immanence, Givenness and Reflection” in *The Affects of Thought*, eds. Jeffrey Hanson and Michael R. Kelly (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 62-84. As they there write, “Husserl does indeed develop different senses of immanence in these lectures, but the claim could be made that he does so rather more purposefully and defensibly than Henry recognizes. Henry does detect a recognizable ‘shift’ in *The Idea of Phenomenology*, but the precise nature of this shift can be interrogated further, revealing not so much an illicit substitution of one notion of immanence for another but a deepening recognition of what immanence necessarily entails,” 73.

⁴¹ Henry, *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 243.

⁴² Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 25.

⁴³ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, §47.

givenness or appearing of the phenomenon, what Henry calls the essence of phenomenality, might be manifest in its phenomenological purity.⁴⁴ As Henry describes the reduction:

The radical reduction reduces appearing itself. Within appearing, it sets aside this range of light that we call the world in order to reveal that without which this visible horizon would never become visible, namely, the auto-affectation of its transcendental exteriority which actualizes itself in the pathos of Life that is never outside.⁴⁵

Insofar as this reduction brackets everything that manifests within the distance of the horizon of the world, its phenomena manifest without distance or gap. That which is given is nothing other than the act of givenness itself, and this act likewise in no way differs from that which receives the givenness. It is an “original givenness [*la donation originelle*] in self-givenness [*l'autodotation*].”⁴⁶ It is in this self-givenness that the self gives itself from itself to itself, in its own self-affectivity.⁴⁷ Henry names this self-givenness in affectivity: Life.⁴⁸

C. Self-Affectivity, the Essence of Life

“Immanence and affectivity are the two essential characteristics of life.”⁴⁹ Insofar as Henry identifies immanence, self-givenness, and self-affectivity with Life, his radical phenomenology

⁴⁴ Insofar as Henry radicalizes the critique beyond Husserlian recognition, Rivera suggests—in an assertion representative of critiques of Henry—that “Henry has moved beyond the concept of ‘suspension’ or ‘bracketing,’ rather than having realized more fully the reduction itself.” Joseph Rivera, *The Contemplative Self After Michel Henry: A Phenomenological Theology* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 135.

⁴⁵ Michel Henry, “The four principles of phenomenology,” trans. Joseph Rivera and George E. Faithful, *Continental Philosophy Review* 48 (2015): 1-21, 11.

⁴⁶ Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 519.

⁴⁷ “To be the feeling of self means to have a content, not any content whatever, it means to have as content what one is himself [sic], his own reality.” Ibid., 517.

⁴⁸ Given Henry’s subsequent conflation of Life and God—“the first fundamental equation of Christianity: God is Life—he is the essence of Life, or if one prefers, the essence of Life is God” (Henry, *I am the Truth*, 27)—Rivera argues that “the radical reduction so premised by Henry is necessarily a theological reduction.” Rivera, *The Contemplative Self After Michel Henry*, 142.

⁴⁹ Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 204.

might be rightly identified as a philosophy of life. But, for Henry, the meaning of the living being shares little in common with the *bios* of the biological sciences: it “differs totally from what biology studies.”⁵⁰ Whereas “life” in the biological sciences refers itself to “neurons, electrical currents, chains of amino acids, cells, or chemical properties,”⁵¹ these constituents remain phenomena, ontic beings “wholly foreign to phenomenality.”⁵² For Henry, on the other hand, Life refers to the transcendental condition of phenomenality, the first givenness—the genuine immanence of the *hyle*, impression, or *Empfindung*—which is most readily manifest in the self-affectivity of the living individual (*le vivant*). Thus, to be living here designates the self-feeling by which the living individual feels itself to be living, its self-affectivity.⁵³

In these affections or impressions—such as joy, suffering, anxiety, boredom, etc.—there is no difference between that which feels, that which is felt, and the feeling itself. Rather, “feeling ... ‘reveals itself’ in such a way that that which it reveals in this revelation which constitutes it is itself and nothing else.”⁵⁴ In self-affectivity one feels oneself without gap; here, “life refers to life, spirit to spirit, wherein the absolute is related to itself, there is no place whatever for objective

⁵⁰ Henry, *I am the Truth*, 34.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ “To be affected by itself, to affect itself, is to constitute itself as self-affection. Self-affection is the constitutive structure of the original essence of receptivity.” Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 233. One might find a precedence for this account in Heidegger’s reading of Kant’s 2nd *Critique*: “We must elucidate this state of affairs phenomenologically. It pertains in general to the essential nature of feeling not only that it is feeling for something but also that this feeling for something at the same time makes feelable the feeler himself and his state, his being in the broadest sense. Conceived in formally universal terms, feeling expresses for Kant a peculiar mode of revelation of the ego. In having a feeling for something there is always present at the same time a self-feeling, and in this self-feeling a mode of becoming revealed to oneself. The manner in which I become manifest to myself in feeling is determined in part by that for which I have a feeling in this feeling.” Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 132.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 553. This “affectivity is not a phenomenon or some thing which manifests itself, rather it is manifestation itself and its essence.” *Ibid.*, 533.

knowledge which would occur there only as a ‘cleft’ [*faille*], which would only destroy the spiritual world.”⁵⁵

This is the essence of the unique phenomenality of immanence. Whereas transcendence depends upon the gaps or fissures of representivity—the “cleft” between subject and object, noesis and noema, intention and intuition—genuine immanence marks a direct givenness of the self to itself, without the distancing of the horizon of the world. In Henry’s theo-poetic language, “the content of Life—what it experiences—is Life itself, [it] refers back to a more fundamental condition, to the very essence of ‘Living,’ to a mode of revelation whose specific phenomenality is the flesh of pathos, pure affective material, in which any cleavage, any separation, finds itself radically excluded.”⁵⁶ In this manner, the phenomenality of affectivity serves as an “arch-revelation” of Being, the manifestation of “a reality-in-itself, totally foreign to the world of representation, excluded from its phenomenological mode of presentation and content.”⁵⁷

Self-affectivity is therefore marked by a primordial ipseity; each affection is mine, or more precisely, *it is me*. As Heidegger of all thinkers argues, “what is phenomenologically decisive in the phenomenon of feeling is that it directly uncovers and makes accessible that which is felt, and it does this not, to be sure, in the manner of intuition but in the sense of a direct having-of-oneself.”⁵⁸ Thus, Henry argues, “the difference which is instituted among our various feelings is a difference *in the unity of life* such as takes place concretely with the ceaseless passage from one modality to another as modalities of a single life.”⁵⁹ That is not to suggest that the experience of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 402.

⁵⁶ Henry, *I am the Truth*, 30.

⁵⁷ Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 133.

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 133.

⁵⁹ Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 618.

the self in its radical immanence-to-itself is univocal. On the contrary, Henry seeks to describe a *differentiation*, but one without gap or cleft. In a manner that explicitly draws from Husserl's account of the *Ur-impression*, which finds itself "engaged in continuous alteration,"⁶⁰ the affective tonalities of the self manifest in a continuous flux, inescapably present to the self, but nevertheless always new and renewed.⁶¹ In this radical receptivity or passivity of the self to itself, one experiences not only the intoxication of joy, but also the terror of suffering.⁶²

Indeed, Henry will consistently emphasize the quasi-dialectical "oscillation" between suffering and joy, the two "fundamental tonalities"⁶³ of affectivity. Thus, he writes in *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, for example:

Suffering and joy are not two modes of affectivity. Together they constitute the unique essence of being, as life, as the original self-experience in self-growth of self-delight. Nor are suffering and joy two separate, self-sufficient tonalities. Rather, *they are the eternal transition from one to the other* since self-suffering in its actualization is always a growing from and delighting in self, since delight has no site or phenomenological actuality except the suffering of that suffering.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* (1905), trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 50. For Henry's account of the *Ur-impression*, see: Henry, *Incarnation*, 55-59.

⁶¹ "All our impressions pass, ... and are ... constantly modified, not into the non-being of the immediately past where they vanish, but into another and always 'new' impression—sickness into well-being, desire into satisfaction, worry into rest, suffering into joy, and despair into beatitude." Henry, *Incarnation*, 57.

⁶² Thus, Henry suggests, for example, that it is this inescapability of self-feeling, particularly in the mode of suffering, that constitutes the transcendental condition for suicide—whether literal or figurative—the only possible escape from the self-givenness of life. "The horror of life always results from [suffering] ... It is rather within itself, in one of the tonalities by which it necessarily happens ... that the crazy idea of no longer experiencing what it experiences, of dismissing its own condition of being alive is rooted ... suffering is trapped in itself." Henry, *Barbarism*, 67.

⁶³ "Life is the eternal movement of the passage from Suffering to Joy." Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, 122. Henry will elsewhere designate other affective tonalities as "fundamental," such as anxiety, as will be seen below.

⁶⁴ Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 232 [emphasis added].

Nevertheless, the unique status of suffering and joy should not be overemphasized, as Henry insists upon a complex pantheon of affective tonalities in the self-givenness of life. Not only suffering and joy, but also hunger and thirst, boredom, anxiety, pain, pleasure, despair, fatigue, and drive—in fact, insofar as affectivity functions not only as “content,” but also as the “form” of manifestation,⁶⁵ *every experience is founded in the impressionality of affectivity*: “this is precisely what affectivity is: the universal form of all possible experience in general, the ontological and transcendental dimension which constitutes the foundation of the reality of everything which is.”⁶⁶ Thus it is not only the obvious experiences of pathos which depend upon affectivity, but every experience whatsoever.⁶⁷ For the perceptual experience there is a self-affectivity of the sense: for every sight a seeing, for every sound a hearing, for every touch a feeling. For the intellectual experience there is an “affectivity of thought.”⁶⁸ For every intentional act of whatever kind—whether of perception, intellection, imagination, memory, etc.⁶⁹—every act is bound together with a more primordial manifestation in the immanence of affectivity.

⁶⁵ Affectivity is “that which constitutes the condition of every affection and experience, of everything which is capable of being given us, the Being-given itself considered as such in its intrinsic possibility and its own reality, this is what we call a Form, the transcendental element of the real and what is ontological in it.” Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 510-511.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 511.

⁶⁷ “There is no need for distinguishing certain affective *Erlebnisse* from others which would not be affective; rather, all our experiences, insofar as they are different ways of living, bear within them that which is precisely the first characteristic of every life and every experience and which we call, for lack of better terms, an affective tonality.” Michel Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 144.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁶⁹ “The affective tonalities which are bound to these acts of perception, imagination, and memory, and invariably determine them, are in no way contingent with respect to such acts, they are their reality and the modes of their realization.” Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 485.

Henry often draws clear connections between this notion of the self-affective Life and the *cogito* (whether Cartesian or Nietzschean⁷⁰); he will even go so far as to identify it with the “soul” as affirmed in Descartes and critiqued by Kant.⁷¹ Certainly, as Ezio Gamba rightfully notes, “he does not have any space for the soul as a transcendent substance, as an object.”⁷² Nevertheless, this recourse to the language of the ego, the *cogito*, and the soul can lend itself to an ethereal quality in Henry’s philosophy. Therefore, it might be suspected, given his emphasis upon radical interiority, that Henry affirms the Cartesian priority of the “knowledge of soul” over the “knowledge of body.” But the truth is quite the opposite. While Henry seeks a recovery of radical immanence, he nevertheless continuously insists that “the mode in which it presents itself to us is our body.”⁷³ Simply put, the “original body is soul, in the Cartesian sense of the word; it is immanence and life.”⁷⁴ Thus, already by 1948, while composing the *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, the central figure of immanence will be the subjective experience of the originary body. As he would later write:

It may seem paradoxical, in order to make legitimate this concept of a radical interiority and thereby the concept of the soul, to make an appeal to the body. This paradox diminishes once the idea of a subjective body comes to light. Actually when the body is interpreted, no longer in a naive and unilateral way as an object, but also as a subject and perhaps as the true subject, ... then the analysis of the body

⁷⁰ Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, chapters I-III and VII-VIII respectively. See also, Michel Henry, “Does the Concept ‘Soul’ Mean Anything,” trans. Gerard Etzkorn, *Philosophy Today*, vol. 13 n. 2 (1969): 94-114.

⁷¹ For Henry’s challenge to Kant’s critique of rational psychology in the “Paralogisms of Pure Reason,” see: Michel Henry, “Destruction ontologique de la critique Kantienne du paralogisme de la psychologie rationnelle,” *Studia Phaenomenologica IX* (2009): 17-53.

⁷² “Il ne peut y avoir aucun espace que le concept de l’âme comme substance transcendante, comme objet.” Ezio Gamba, “L’âme dans la pensée de Michel Henry,” in *La vie et les vivants: (re)lire Michel Henry*, eds. Grégori Jean et al (Louvain: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2013), 78 [translation my own].

⁷³ Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 133.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

thus understood in its original subjectivity may have some semblance of leading us to this interiority which we seek.⁷⁵

It is to this notion of the embodied flesh that we will now turn.

§II: The Erotic Flesh

A. The Objective Body and the Subjective Flesh

The questions of incarnation have functioned as a central problematic for Henry since the beginning. “We know,” he writes, “that man is an incarnate subject”;⁷⁶ but what does it mean to be an incarnate being? What is the essence of our body? How does are body differ from the mere objects of the world? Already in 1948 he devoted his work to an articulation of the body understood not as a contingent, ontic being within the world, but as a transcendental condition of manifestation. This work, originally envisioned as a chapter of *The Essence of Manifestation*,⁷⁷ would instead by developed as a self-standing manuscript and published almost twenty years later as *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*. While these initial investigations would be supplemented and nuanced by subsequent works, most importantly *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh* (2000), his dualistic account of the body is there already worked out in surprising detail.

In many ways Henry’s account of the body bears a striking resemblance to his contemporaries, particularly Merleau-Ponty.⁷⁸ Like these other thinkers, Henry avoids the

⁷⁵ Henry, “Does the Concept ‘Soul’ Mean Anything,” 104.

⁷⁶ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 7.

⁷⁷ Just as “Destruction ontologique de la critique Kantienne du paralogisme de la psychologie rationnelle,” *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body* was excised from *The Essence of Manifestation* due to the latter’s already unwieldy scope (Rivera, *The Contemplative Self After Michel Henry*, 353 n. 10).

⁷⁸ Though, as he notes in the preface to the second edition, “le contenu de ce premier travail ne doit rien aux recherches contemporaines de Merleau-Ponty, que j’ignorais à cette époque.” Michel Henry, “Avertissement à la seconde édition” in *Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps: Essai sur l’ontologie biranienne* 2nd edition (Paris:

temptation to reduce the body to a single modality; instead the body—as he will later write—“splits strangely in two.”⁷⁹ For Henry, the body is the paradigmatic figure of the duplicity of appearing—“our body offers us the crucial experience in which the duality of appearing is decisively confirmed”;⁸⁰ The body is both objective and subjective, both ontic and ontological.⁸¹

As he will later write in *Seeing the Invisible*:

On the one hand, I live this body internally, coinciding with the exercise of each one of its powers—I see, I hear, I feel, I move my hands and eyes, I am hungry, I am cold—in such a way that I am this seeing, this hearing, this feeling, this movement or this hunger. ... On the other hand, I also live this same body externally, because I am able to see it, touch it, and represent it as one represents an object.⁸²

Undoubtedly, Henry is here influenced by Husserl’s analyses of the body in *Ideas II* (see: Chapter 1), particularly his distinction between the *Leib* and the *Körper*, as well as a variety of bodily specifications within these broader categories: such as the sensing body, organic body, “biological body, living body, and human body.”⁸³ Nevertheless, in *Philosophy and*

Presses Universitaires de France, 1965/1987), i. Nonetheless, despite Henry’s assertion in this preface that his conception of the subjective body is “radically opposed” [*s’opposaient radicalement*] to his contemporaries, something of an affinity will be noted by Henry in “Does the Concept ‘Soul’ Mean Anything?,” 105-108. But, even in this later work, Henry will continuously privilege Maine de Biran over Merleau-Ponty, being particularly critical of Merleau-Ponty’s late work on the flesh of the world. For the complex relationship between these two thinkers’ competing notions of embodiment, see: Henry, “Does the Concept ‘Soul’ Mean Anything?,” 105-114; Henry, *Incarnation*, §21; and Renaud Barbaras, “The Essence of Life: Drive or Desire?” trans. Darian Meacham, in *Michel Henry: Affects of Thought*, eds. Jeffrey Hanson and Michael R. Kelly (New York: Continuum, 2012).

⁷⁹ Henry, *Incarnation*, 116.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁸¹ For a detailed analysis of this distinction, see: Jean-Michel Maldamé, “Michel Henry et la philosophie de la chair,” *BLE CV* (2004): 73-82. There Maldamé will mark the distinction as follows: “Michel Henry distingue nettement entre la chair et le corps. Un corps inerte ne sent ni n’éprouve rien. Il ne se sent pas ni ne s’éprouve pas lui-même, il ne s’aime ni ne se désire. Par contre, le propre du corps humain est de percevoir les qualités, voir les couleurs, entendre les sons, respirer une odeur, mesurer du pied la dureté du sol, de la main la douceur d’une étoffe.”

⁸² Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, 5.

⁸³ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 8. For the complex relation between Husserl’s and Henry’s respective notions of the body and flesh, see: Michael Beat, “L’âme entre corps et esprit: le concept Husserlien de soubassement à la lumière de la phénoménologie matérielle de Michel Henry,” *Revue de théologie et philosophie*, 142 (2010): 37-51; and Rémy Gagnon, “La philosophie de la chair de Michel Henry. Vers une onto-phénoménologie de l’individualité,” *Symposium* 14:2 (2010): 66-77; and Rolf Kühn, “Corporéité et vie charnelle: Résultats et

Phenomenology of the Body, Henry adopts Maine de Biran—who he will later call “one of the most profound philosophers of all time”⁸⁴—as his primary interlocutor.⁸⁵ For, according to Henry, the traditional approach that depends upon the distinction between the *Leib* and the *Körper*—the constituting body and the constituted body—is too “limited ... [for], they are both worldly bodies.”⁸⁶ Instead, following de Biran, Henry seeks to institute a deeper ontological distinction between an originary flesh and any manifestation of the body within the visibility of the world.

The central focus of this work is de Biran’s deep challenge to both rationalism (Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant) and empiricism (Locke, Hume, and Condillac). Most centrally, Henry recognizes de Biran as the first philosopher to have rejected the universal conviction of occidental philosophy, “that the being of our body belongs to the world.”⁸⁷ Instead, de Biran inaugurates a genuinely new mode of conceptualizing the body as a “subjective body.”

For de Biran, there are two modes of knowledge:

In the first form of knowledge, being is given us through the mediation of a phenomenological distance, it is transcendent being. Maine de Biran calls this knowledge “exterior knowledge.” In the second form of knowledge, being is given to us immediately, in the absence of all distance; and this being is no longer any being whatever, it is the ego, whose being is uniquely determined according to the manner in which it is given to us. *Maine de Biran calls this second form of knowledge “reflection.”*⁸⁸

perspectives de la phénoménologie matérielle,” in *Michel Henry*, eds. Jean-Marie Brohm and Jean Leclercq (Lausanne, Suisse: L’Age d’Homme, 2009), 186-195.

⁸⁴ “Plus profonds philosophe de tous les temps.” Michel Henry, “Œuvres, t. II : Influence de l’habitude sur la faculté de penser by Maine de Biran,” *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger*, 178, no. 3 (1988): 338-339, 338 [translation my own].

⁸⁵ As indicated by the subtitle of the French edition, inexplicably excised from the English: “Essai sur l’ontologie biranienne.”

⁸⁶ Henry, *Incarnation*, 156.

⁸⁷ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

While it is quite tempting, particularly following Hegelian philosophy, to read “reflection” as a mediated knowledge, lending itself to a phenomenological distance, Henry goes to great length to establish the immediacy of reflection in de Biran’s usage. For de Biran, reflection refers to an “unrepresentable idea”⁸⁹ that “in no way *sees* itself as *object*.”⁹⁰ Indeed, this notion of reflection will be most readily apparent in de Biran’s famous “feeling [or sensation] of effort,”⁹¹ wherein during an act of movement one not only feels the resistance of external bodies, but likewise has an immediate sensation of the body’s own inner force of action. Thus, for example, to lift one’s hand is distinct from having one’s hand lifted by another; not only because of the presence of sensation (the pressure of the other’s hand lifting from below), but also due to the lack of an inner sensation of effort (I do not feel myself lifting).

In these two modes of knowledge, Henry finds precisely the alternative to onto-phenomenological monism that he seeks. For de Biran, the body is not first and foremost known by its external manifestations—biological, behavioral, etc.—but by the unique immanent givenness of the body to itself. Indeed, one-hundred and fifty years before the French reception of Husserl, de Biran would seem to suggest a collapse of the ego into the subjective experience of the lived body. As Henry writes: “the teaching of Maine de Biran may be summarized in these words: *A body is subjective and is the ego itself*.”⁹² But this ostensible similarity may be misleading, for quite against his predecessors and contemporaries, who begin by casting the ego out of its transcendental sphere and into the transcendence of the world—as epitomized by Sartre’s *The*

⁸⁹ Maine de Biran, *Mémoire sur la décomposition de la pensée*, in *Oeuvre de Maine de Biran*, Vol. 3, ed. Tisserand (Paris: Alcan, 1932), 156.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁹² Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 11.

Transcendence of the Ego—Henry takes the opposite approach and attempts to identify an originary manifestation of the body within the transcendental sphere:

The Biranian determination of subjective movement is ... a radical critique of the Cartesian conception of the body, because by tearing away, not the idea, but the very being and reality of movement from the sphere of transcendent being, it defines the real body, and not the idea of the body, as a subjective and transcendental being.⁹³

By drawing upon this distinction, between the “real body” which is transcendental subjectivity, and the mere idea of the body, thrown into the irreality of the ek-static horizon of the world, Henry develops the dualistic conception of the body that he will maintain with only limited alteration throughout his subsequent career.

Henry names this latter conception of the body—as manifest within the world and its transcendence—the objective body, or eventually, simply “the body” (*le corps*). This term stands in for any objective manifestation of the body as an object in the world—including the biological body of the medical sciences, the body as living organism, or the body as brute matter. Since each of these manifestations of the body appear within the horizon of visibility, they are united insofar as they are necessarily constituted by intentional acts and their associated sensible intuitions; that is to say, they presuppose the structures of the transcendental ego.⁹⁴ Simply, if the body is understood as a being *within* the horizon of the world, then it cannot at the same time be identical with the *transcendental condition of* that horizon.

Within the ontological monism of Western society, it is presumed that this objective manifestation of the body is the sole manifestation of the body. This conviction, Henry suggests,

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁹⁴ Understood in this way, Henry insists that “the body is no longer the radically subjective and immanent ‘I can’ that I am and that is identical to my ego.” Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 110.

emerges from an abstraction that, following Husserl's *Krisis*, he will call the Galilean reduction.⁹⁵ Under this reduction, "Galilean science has separated from itself everything that is subjective and even subjectivity itself."⁹⁶ Rather than addressing itself to the sensible life-world, Galilean science insists that "the real universe is made up of extended material bodies,"⁹⁷ and therefore all true knowledge of the universe must take the form of geometrical relations between extended substances. On the level of the human body, this reduction "substitutes for the sensible body a body unknown until then—the scientific body."⁹⁸ For Henry, this reduction constitutes an abandonment of the truth of life, that we are living beings who experience ourselves in our ownmost intimacy and that we experience the world through innumerable sensible givens. Moreover, Henry insists that this scientific body always depends on the prior givenness of the horizon of Being, whose essence is nothing transcendent. That is to say, insofar as all science presupposes the sensible experience of living beings—the scientist or investigator—the objective body depends upon a more primordial manifestation of the body within life.⁹⁹ "My body is always

⁹⁵ "Galileo's categorical assertion is that the sensible body that we take to be the real body—that we can see, touch, feel, hear, which has colors, odors, tactile and sonorous qualities, etc.—is only an illusion, and that the real universe ... is made up of extended material bodies, and this extended matter constitutes precisely the reality of these bodies, and, at the same time, of the universe" (Henry, *Incarnation*, 97). As Galileo writes, "when I think of a physical material substance, I immediately have to conceive of it as bounded, and as having this or that shape, as being large or small in relation to other things, and in some specific place and at any given time, as moving or at rest ... I cannot separate it from these conditions by any stretch of the imagination. But whether it is white or red, bitter or sweet, noisy or silent, and of a pleasing or unpleasant colour, my mind does not feel compelled to bring this in order to apprehend it." Galileo, *Selected Writings*, trans. William R. Shea and Mark Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 119.

⁹⁶ Henry, *Barbarism*, 102.

⁹⁷ Henry, *Incarnation*, 97.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Far from being able to furnish us with any clarification of such knowledge, a science like biology rather finds its bases in such knowledge; biology cannot be counted on to explain what it presupposes as the condition for its possibility and as the ontological horizon within which it can find its objects, furnish its explanations, and before all else, pose its problems." Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 5.

there and sensuously prominent,” Henry writes, “while the original body is this sensibility itself to which both the constituted body and the reduced world of the sphere of ownness are present.”¹⁰⁰

In this quest to determine the original body in its primordial givenness and radical immanence to itself, Henry not only aims at the transcendental condition of the objective body, but the *ultimate* transcendental condition. Thus, he enacts a “splitting of the transcendental body”¹⁰¹ (*dédoublement du corps transcendental*): “the transcendental body, which opens us to the sensed body (whether it is a question of our own or of things), rests upon a corporeity far more originary, which is transcendental in a final, non-intentional, non-sensible sense, the essence of which is life.”¹⁰²

Following de Biran, Henry will first name this most primordial manifestation of the body the “subjective body” (*le corps subjectif*) or the Archi-body (*Archi-corps*). But, by 1983, he will adopt the language of “the flesh” (*la chair*).¹⁰³ The flesh is the subjective and affective manifestation of the body to itself; it is the mode in which the body feels itself and its own capacities. It is not the eye, but seeing itself, not the hand, but grasping as such. Thus, as suggested above, Henry understands the flesh to be identical to the ego; it is “*a body which is an ‘I’*.”¹⁰⁴ More specifically, insofar as the flesh is shown to be the very manifestation of the ego to itself, the auto-

¹⁰⁰ Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 110.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁰³ This linguistic shift is perhaps due to the influence of Nietzsche (“As far as I can glean, the use of the term ‘flesh’ first begins with Henry’s confrontation with Nietzsche in *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*. Henry deploys the term with greater regularity after his critical reading of Husserl in *Material Phenomenology* and his appropriation of the topos of incarnation in the Gospel of John in the late 1990s.” Rivera, *The Contemplative Self After Michel Henry*, 353 n. 21.), or possibly following Didier Franck’s interpretation of the Husserlian *Leib* as *la chair* in *Flesh and Body* (Didier Franck, *Flesh and Body: on the Phenomenology of Husserl*, trans. Joseph Rivera and Scott Davidson [New York: Bloomsbury], 2014).

¹⁰⁴ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 8.

affection of the self is likewise the auto-affection of the flesh. Therefore, it likewise constitutes the transcendental condition of the ek-static givenness of the world, serving as the transcendental condition of everything that manifests within the sensible horizon of that world, including the objective body.¹⁰⁵ This, for Henry, is the essence of life; to live is not simply to feel oneself as living, but more specifically to experience one's affective flesh—simply put, “this living auto-impersonality is flesh.”¹⁰⁶

B. The Failure of Sexuality and the Erotic

Despite his consistent recourse to *self*-affection, Henry does not understand the flesh in purely solipsistic terms: “auto-affection,” Jean-Luc Marion notes, “was never an autism.”¹⁰⁷ Rather, for Henry as for his contemporaries, the questions of intersubjectivity are central. Yet, following his distinction between the flesh and the body, Henry likewise aims to substitute a notion of “pathos-with” for the Husserlian “association” of the fifth *Meditation* or the Heideggerian “*mit-sein*”—

¹⁰⁵ In this regard, Henry follows Husserl's analyses in *Ideas II*.

Insofar as this conception of the flesh is understood in sharp distinction—even opposition—to the body, it has drawn forth considerable criticism from defenders of the body. Perhaps most importantly, Emmanuel Falque has repeatedly targeted Henry for his forgetfulness of the real fleshliness of the flesh, the blood and bones of incarnation. For Falque, Henry remains principal among those French philosophers who have advocated a “stampede toward the flesh” (and away from the objective and organic body)—particularly within the French phenomenological tradition. Emmanuel Falque, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude: An Essay on Birth and Resurrection*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 77; see also, Emmanuel Falque, “y a-t-il une chair sans corps?,” *Transversalités* 81 (2002): 43-74; and Emmanuel Falque, *Les Noces de l'Agneau: Essai philosophique sur le corps et l'eucharistie* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 2011), 23-27. For a broader overview of Falque's critique of the preceding tradition, see: Christina Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?: Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 199-206. For Henry's response to Falque's critique, see: Michel Henry, “À Emmanuel Falque,” *Transversalités* 81 (2002): 105-117.

¹⁰⁶ Henry, *Incarnation*, 62.

¹⁰⁷ “L'auto-affection n'avait rien d'un autisme.” Jean-Luc Marion, “Avant-propos” in Michel Henry, *Phénoménologie de la vie I: De la phénoménologie* (Paris: PUF, 2003), 8 [translation my own]. As Marion continues, “L'affection par soi se laissait affecter elle-même par toutes les autres consciences auto-affectées que l'amitié lui attirait.” Ibid.

both of which on his account presuppose that the intersubjective relation must manifest within the ek-static horizon of the world.¹⁰⁸ Thus, he writes, “before intentionally grasping the other as other and before the perception of the other’s body, every experience of the other in the sense of a real being with the other occurs in us as an affect.”¹⁰⁹

The preeminent form of pathos-with, for Henry, is the erotic encounter, wherein one aims at an intermingling with the flesh of the other.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, Henry also consistently denigrates “sexuality.” While a clear distinction between the sexual and the erotic is not employed in a consistent enough manner to constitute a law, *it nevertheless constitutes a general principle* and useful heuristic. For Henry, the erotic *generally* refers to an affective encounter with the other in the flesh, while sexuality refers to an objective relation to the body of the other. Nevertheless, as will become increasingly clear, this distinction does little to rescue even the erotic from its essential and ultimate disappointment.

¹⁰⁸ “For Husserl, it is intentionality that gives us access both to others and to everything that for us can be asserted as being. ... [Likewise] Heidegger himself knows no other kind of phenomenality than [the essence of intentionality], specifically this original self-externalization of pure exteriority that he calls by different names, for example the ek-static horizon of temporality.” Ibid., 238-239. For Henry’s account of intersubjectivity, see: Henry, “Pathos-with” in *Material Phenomenology*, 101-134; Henry, *Incarnation*, 237-252; and the volume edited by Jean Leclercq, “Michel Henry: Texts inédits sur l’expérience d’autrui” *Revue Internationale Michel Henry 2* (2011). E.g. “quand bien même on dirait que l’expérience d’autrui est une expérience de son corps—ce qui n’est pas vrai—le problème reste posé car: ce n’est pas dans le monde que je puis avoir l’expérience du corps d’autrui (pour lui),” Ibid., 77. Henry will likewise commend Levinas for a similar conception. As he writes in a letter to Bernard Forthomme, “je suis, d’autre part, tout à fait d’accord avec ce que vous dites de la philosophie d’Emmanuel Levinas le seul à avoir pensé la relation à autrui dehors du monde.” Michel Henry, “Lettre à Bernard Forthomme,” *Studia Phænomenologica IX* (2009), 55.

¹⁰⁹ Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 115.

¹¹⁰ “L’eros henryen n’est en dernière instance ni auto-référentiel ni autiste main éminemment dialogique.” Natalie Depraz et Frédéric Mauriac, “La fécondité de la phénoménologie de la vie de Michel Henry pour les approches en deuxième personne,” in Jean Leclercq (ed), “Michel Henry: Texts inédits sur l’expérience d’autrui” *Revue Internationale Michel Henry 2* (2011): 180-196, 186. Moreover, “le phénomène érotique n’est pas seulement un exemple—au sens d’un cas ou d’une illustration—de l’expérience métaphysique d’autrui, mais que c’en est aussi la version ‘exemplaire,’ le modèle par conséquent, dont tout autre expérience d’autrui participe en quelque sorte pour autant qu’elle en est une, pour autant qu’elle est, par conséquent, une telle ‘expérience métaphysique.’” Grégori Jean, “Les ambiguïtés de l’érôs,” in Jean Leclercq, (ed), “Michel Henry: Notes sur le phénomène érotique” *Revue Internationale Michel Henry 4* (2013): 22.

The overarching unity of Henry's discussion of sexuality is the inevitability of failure (*l'échec*).¹¹¹ Already in *The Essence of Manifestation*, sexuality is a "vain repetition";¹¹² sexuality is always already "the failure of sexuality" (*l'échec de la sexualité*).¹¹³ In essence, sexuality becomes paradigmatic of the limits of representation and objectivity. Whereas love (*l'amour*), desire, or libido are affective sentiments, auto-affectations rightfully given from themselves to themselves, the "reduction of love to sexuality"¹¹⁴ represents a bastardization of this affect, whereby it is cast out of its proper intimacy in affective pathos-with, and into the cold irreality of the world.

This denigration of sexuality is already perfectly clear in *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*. There, thinking in Husserlian and Schelerian terms, sexuality is constituted within the transcendence of the horizon of visibility as a "sexual intentionality." Yet, Henry identifies an immediate failure implicit in all sexual intentionality. "Insofar as it directs itself toward sex,

¹¹¹ He offers, "the interpretation of desire and sexual activity as always and necessarily ending up in failure." Henry, *Incarnation*, 212.

¹¹² Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 455.

¹¹³ Ibid. This notion of an inevitable "failure" at the heart of sexuality is similarly affirmed by psychoanalytic readings of sexuality. Thus for example, when Jacques Lacan insists that "there is no sexual relationship," he can at the same time reinterpret this as "the essence of the object is failure." Although, two notes are here worth specifying, first Lacan uses *rater*, "to fail," and *raté*, "failure," rather than Henry's *l'échec*. Second, whereas Henry reads this failure non-dialectically, Lacan suggests that this is an at least potentially productive failure. (Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX*, trans. Bruce Fink [New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998], 57-58). Thus, not only sexual difference, but subjectivity itself emerges from an attempt to deal with the failure of sexual relation. As Žižek parses this notion, "there is nothing outside of this failure; subject and language are themselves the outcome of this primordial failure." Slavoj Žižek, *Incontenance of the Void: Economico-Philosophical Spandrels* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 58.

Additionally, Henry's non-dialectical notion of failure presents a particularly keen risk to queer folk. For, as Heather Love notes, for example, "same-sex desire is marked by a long history of association with failure, impossibility and loss. ... Homosexuality and homosexuals serve as scapegoats for the failures and impossibilities of desire itself" (Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009], 21). For a more positive appraisal of "failure" from a queer perspective, see: Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹¹⁴ Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 197.

understood as a being-there and as an object,” Henry writes, “sexual intentionality encounters an obstacle prescribed by ontology.”¹¹⁵ Unlike, for example, perceptual intentionality, sexual intentionality is marked by an ontological aporia; *it is in-principle unfulfillable*. The formal unfulfillability of sexual intentionality emerges from its self-contradictory character. On the one hand, the proper object of sexuality is the absolute subjectivity of the other.¹¹⁶ Yet, this subjectivity is approached through the realm of objective being, a realm essentially foreign to absolute subjectivity.¹¹⁷ Therefore, sexuality is defined in terms of a fundamental frustration. Because sexual intentionality lacks access to the interiority of subjectivity, it retains no reality; it is a mere representation. As Henry insists, “when the anxiety of sex is dissipated there is nothing left, except an objective determination. The Subjectivity which had been aimed at has vanished.”¹¹⁸

This relegation of sexuality to objectivity—and its correlate inability to access absolute subjectivity—follows from its relegation to the body rather than the flesh. Henry is explicit on this point: “the ontological status of our objective transcendent body is the foundation which makes the existence of a sexual *world* possible.”¹¹⁹ As Henry will later write, in *Material Phenomenology*,

¹¹⁵ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 214. As he noted in his preparatory notes: “voilà l’échec de l’amour physique, lorsqu’il obéit à cette intentionnalité-là.” Michel Henry, “Notes sur le phénomène érotique” in Jean Leclercq, (ed), “Michel Henry: Notes sur le phénomène érotique” *Revue Internationale Michel Henry* 4 (2013): 32.

¹¹⁶ “The intentionality presiding over the determined form assumed by us in our sexual life is oriented toward its transcendent terminus as toward something absolute.” Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 213.

¹¹⁷ “Nevertheless, that which it finds in this experience is not the absolute but only a presence without life, that which is realized by the pure and simple being-there of a transcendent element.” *Ibid.*, 214.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 214. Or again: “It will be objected that the human body presents itself to man [sic] with characteristics which have varied throughout the course of *history*, characteristics which lead to such *varying habits* concerning nourishment, for example, clothing, *sexuality*, as well as the numerous ‘modes’ related thereto. However, this is not the original body, but various ways in which man *represents* this body to himself and behaves toward it.” *Ibid.*, 4 n. Sexuality is here cast off from the flesh and placed together with culturally determined characteristics such as clothing; it is thereby relegated to mere representation.

in sexuality “the caress follows the trail of the other’s pleasure. It calls upon the other’s pleasure but what it touches is the other’s body-object. It does not touch the other’s original body, which is radically subjective and radically immanent.”¹²⁰ In general, discussions of sexuality throughout Henry’s middle-period will largely presuppose this intentional framework and the reduction of sexuality to objectivity.¹²¹

This critique of sexuality culminates in *Incarnation*. There Henry recognizes that the body is necessarily embedded in a sexual world and as such “our body is always marked by sexual difference”¹²²—a mark which manifests, for Henry, most conspicuously in concrete “sexual

This relegation of sexuality to the representational realm of history or habit interestingly anticipates poststructuralist accounts of sexuality that will emerge in the 90s, particularly those surrounding the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. One might, for example, consider the surprising similarity between Henry’s claim that “the body of biology is in a certain sense a cultural object, and as such it is essentially historical, both regarding its appearance and its modifications which are none other than those brought about by the very development of science” (Ibid., 4) and Butler’s assertion that “the universal conception of the person, however, is displaced as a point of departure for a social theory of gender by those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts. This relational or contextual point of view suggests that what the person ‘is,’ and, indeed, what gender ‘is,’ is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined. As a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations.” Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 14.

¹²⁰ Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 131.

¹²¹ In *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, for example, Henry ties sexuality to Schopenhauer’s will-to-live, writing that “the generative organs are will’s headquarters; the sexual needs and all the others express the will-to-live’s ceaseless claim on us” (Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 166). But this binding of sexuality to life is immediately abrogated by the subsumption of the will to representation: “however, will’s immanence in body, or their identity, . . . is incompatible with the thesis that forces will, abandoned to the unconscious, to seek its phenomenal reality outside itself, precisely in the body, *but a body that now belongs to representation’s sphere*, to life’s ‘world’” (Ibid. [emphasis added]). Moreover, the scarcity of reference to sexuality in a text devoted to the genealogy of psychoanalysis is striking: “son [l’érôs] absence de *Généalogie de la psychanalyse* est à cet égard significative.” Jean, “Les ambiguïtés de l’érôs,” 20.

Likewise, in *From Communism to Capitalism* Henry will critique the wage system’s reduction of the worker to their labor time, that is, the necessity that one sell their body, and thus themselves. Yet, even while reaffirming the indissolubility of the human person from their body (to sell the body = to sell oneself), he nonetheless reaffirms the relegation of sexuality solely to the objective manifestation of the body. “Needs for food, sex, and other things point back to a nature—in this case to a body—that is interpreted as an empirical and natural given” (Henry, *From Communism to Capitalism*, 24).

¹²² Henry, *Incarnation*, 204. Even if only implicitly: “this mark remains long implicit: In innocence, for example, the difference is lived in ignorance.” Ibid.

determinations.” Yet, these determinations of sexual difference remain nothing more than objective facts, essentially divorced from the living affectivity of the flesh and its *eros*. Focusing upon the experiences of anxiety¹²³ and shame that often accompany the exposure of these determinations—e.g. nudity or sexual activity¹²⁴—Henry here reiterates his earlier assertion of the centrality of failure in sexuality. But, importantly, he here moves to intensify this failure.

Whereas in *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, the failure of sexuality is centered on the inability of sexual intentionality to grasp the subjectivity of the other, its inability to reconcile the body of the other with his or her absolute subjectivity, in *Incarnation*, this anxiety and failure is redoubled. It not only emerges from an inability to reconcile the other’s body and flesh, but likewise, the inability to reconcile this difference within oneself. Thus “the failure of desire”¹²⁵ and the related anxieties of sexuality are reduplicated in the gap between *one’s own* flesh and body. Turning to Kierkegaard’s language of “the soul”—which here should be understood as the affectivity of one’s original corporeity—Henry presents the anxiety of sexuality in terms of a failure to properly reconcile the relation between one’s soul (flesh) and body. “Anxiety *as such*,” he writes, “is the result of the paradoxical synthesis, in the spirit, of the soul with a sexually differentiated objective body.”¹²⁶

¹²³ The emphasis upon the language of “anxiety,” now paired with failure, comes from Henry’s reading of Søren Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Anxiety* (trans. Reidar Thomte [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980]) which plays a key role in the third part of *Incarnation*. It is important to note that anxiety is not univocally negative for Henry: “in itself, anxiety is not culpable” (Ibid., 203). But anxiety, insofar as it creates desire (Ibid., 202 [although Henry perhaps later rejects this thesis Ibid., 217]), also creates the possibility for the “leap into sin” (Ibid., 203), which is, for *Incarnation*, nothing other than the leap into sexuality—“in this respect, one can say that the sexual, which is understood here as sin...” (Ibid., 204).

¹²⁴ See, e.g.: Ibid., 215.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 208.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 215. “Spirit” here, drawing from both Kierkegaard and Merleau-Ponty, appears to be a stand-in for the holistic human person, the unity of the subjective flesh and the objective body. “To the extent that anxiety arises from the synthesis of the soul and body, such a synthesis, however unimaginable and paradoxical it may be, must be possible. Kierkegaard entrusts this possibility to a third in which the two elements are united, and ‘this third is the

Nevertheless, despite its recourse to the language of failure common throughout his earlier corpus, *Incarnation* does offer a partial answer to the problematic of sexuality from the perspective of immanence and the flesh. For, as Henry writes in *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, “the entire philosophy of sexual love has to be re-done beginning with the data of the philosophy of the subjective body.”¹²⁷ There should be, together with the sexual intentionality of sexuality, another “form of our sexual life,”¹²⁸ one which “finds its most fundamental ontological presupposition in the theory of the subjective body.”¹²⁹ In *Incarnation*, Henry attempts to offer precisely such a rethinking, which will here be designated as *the erotic*.¹³⁰

For Henry, the erotic gives itself as the peak manifestation of intersubjectivity. In dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's notion of the “chiasm,”¹³¹ the unity of the touching and the touched, Henry situates the erotic caress within the immanence of the flesh; “being-touched,” he writes, “is a modality of our original flesh.”¹³² This emphasis upon the erotic touch marks Henry's indebtedness to Levinas' phenomenology of the “caress,” which both “is sensibility,” but nonetheless,

spirit’.” Ibid., 195.

¹²⁷ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 218n. An analogous call to a radical phenomenology of sexuality is likewise implied at the closing of *I am the Truth*. There, Henry laments those “who have been liberated by making them think their sexuality is a natural process, the site and place of their infinite Desire,” Henry, *I am the Truth*, 275. This lament echoes similar concerns in *Barbarism*. Henry, *Barbarism*, 82-83.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 218n

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ This notion of the erotic is deeply entangled with Henry's related notions of libido, which is immanently experienced as “an affective tonality before it is the grasping of determined axiological qualities of the opposite or of one's own sexuality.” Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 644.

¹³¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130-155.

¹³² Henry, *Incarnation*, 207.

“transcends the sensible.”¹³³ For Levinas, the essence of the caress is that it “grasps nothing.”¹³⁴ This incapacity of the erotic caress to “grasp” an object easily translates into Henry's onto-phenomenological dualism. As a modality of the flesh, the erotic manifests on the plane of radical immanence, never appearing to the ek-static sight of objectivity. The erotic caress “grasps nothing” precisely because, in the immanence of radical interiority, there is no-“thing” to grasp.¹³⁵ “The young woman's hand,” Henry writes, “belongs to an original flesh; only in belonging to this flesh, *and never as an object or thingly body*, is it capable of being touched and entering into the erotic relation.”¹³⁶

This distinction holds not only for the hand of the caress, but for embodiment as such: in “eroticism, corporeity as an objective element disappears completely. This is purity.”¹³⁷ Thus, what Henry identifies under the language of the erotic is a direct encounter with the other within the radical immanence of subjectivity, within the affectivity of life. In this pathos-with, completely foreign to the givenness of the world, one has a non-intentional encounter with the other.¹³⁸

The erotic therefore radically differs from *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body's*

¹³³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1961), 255.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹³⁵ “But it is also clear that such ‘seeing’ is out of the question here. Seeing is only possible in a ‘world.’ Seeing presupposes the distancing of what must be seen and thus its coming-outside—more precisely, the prior coming outside of ‘Outside’ itself, the formation of the world's horizon. It is the coming-outside of ‘outside,’ the ‘outside-itself’ as such, that constitutes the visibility of everything that, situated in the ‘Outside’ before our gaze, will be susceptible of being seen by us, as a being-seen as such. And this concerns not only sensory seeing but equally so intelligible seeing, any form of experience in which one accedes to what is experienced as an en-face or as an ‘object’.” Henry, *I am the Truth*, 25.

¹³⁶ Henry, *Incarnation*, 206 [emphasis added].

¹³⁷ “l'érotisme, la corporéité comme élément objectif disparaît complètement. C'est cela la pureté.” Henry, “Michel Henry: Texts inédits sur l'expérience d'autrui,” 80 [translation my own].

¹³⁸ Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 124.

sexual intentionality. Indeed, just as every intentionality presupposes a first givenness in affectivity, the truly erotic encounter represents the ontological condition of any possible sexual intentionality. In this manner, the erotic encounter bypasses the aporia of sexual intentionality. Rather than seeking the absolute subjectivity of the other in the objectivity of the world—a Sisyphean task—genuine eroticism is the direct encounter with the flesh of the other in immanence.

This immanence makes it all the more surprising that, on Henry's account, even when it remains at the level of the flesh, even when it is a properly erotic relation in the immanence of life, even when it is not yet reduced to the "nihilism" of sexuality, the erotic relation nevertheless inevitably fails: "in considering the erotic relation, either in its immanent achievement, or in its worldly appearing, we have recognized how in each case it is wrapped in anxiety and in each case leads to failure."¹³⁹ This failure, Henry remains clear, does not result from an external impetus (a "distraction"); Henry is not here describing the "fall" of the erotic into the sexual—though he will elsewhere. Rather, "maintaining our attitude of reduction," he nevertheless discovers an impasse: "the failure of sexual desire, far from being able to be overcome in the affective relation to the other, on the contrary condemns this affective relation to reproduce that failure in itself, thus leading it to advance its own failure."¹⁴⁰ While the flesh that is my own and the flesh of the other can truly touch, can come into contact, they nevertheless constitute a barrier or limit. I cannot experience the other as they experience themselves; nor can they experience my self-givenness as I experience myself. The flesh of the other constitutes a limit or boundary line that cannot be

¹³⁹ Henry, *Incarnation*, 222. This is even more noteworthy, given that in *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, he had explicitly suggested that such an account would provide "the possibility of a love without anxiety." Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 218n.

¹⁴⁰ Henry, *Incarnation*, 213.

crossed.

C. Concrete Sexual Determinations

This failure of sexuality not only strikes the erotic encounter, but is likewise determinative of the status of the flesh itself. For Henry proffers a distinctly monadic account of the flesh. Simply put, in its true interiority, the flesh *manifests without sexual members*—without, to use Henry’s language, sexual determinations. These sexual organs or members are instead cast out of the originary immanence of affectivity and into the objectivity of the world.

This is not to suggest that sexuality finds no proper basis in immanence. For love, desire, and libido are all properly speaking affective tonalities of our originary flesh. Yet, in the erotic encounter, these original impressions are objectified. As Henry writes of the hand, for example, insofar as it is “considered as an objective organ, as part of the worldly body, the hand is incapable of touching and sensing anything at all, ... the subjective power of touching alone can do this.”¹⁴¹ That is to say, the hand considered in its true immanence, simply is “the radically subjective power of prehension.”¹⁴² In order to appear within the objectivity of the organic body or the world, this original impression must be objected, cast into exteriority. It is precisely this process that Henry understands to be determinative of sexuality, insofar as sexuality appears in anything like a sexual organ, an erogenous zone, or any other member. Thus, for example, while Henry reads the Schopenhauerian will as roughly analogous to the immanence of life, he nevertheless affirmatively cites Schopenhauer’s assertion that “the body objectifies in the genitals the will to propagate.”¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 141.

¹⁴² Henry, *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 326. “Described in its pure subjectivity and reduced to this, the ‘hand’ is nothing but the subjective power of touching and grasping.” Henry, *Incarnation*, 143.

¹⁴³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation Vol. 1*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), 334. Cited in Henry, *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 176.

Here “objectifies” or “*réalise-t-il extérieurement*”¹⁴⁴ should be understood in the strong sense as an externalization, a representation, a casting into the horizon of visibility of the world: it is the “will's illusory doubling in the objective body.”¹⁴⁵

It is this which unites Henry's account of sexual determinations. Sexual determinations stand as an objectification—even a “fall” in all of its Christian connotations—of the original affectivity of *eros*. In them, “the erotic relation is reduced to an objective sexual relation; and that is how it now comes about, as a performance and a set of *objective phenomena*.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, for example, “sensible tactile zones, or erogenous ... zones”¹⁴⁷ are found on the “thingly body.” Or again, in the sexual caress, one touches “the other at the most ‘sensible’ point of their body, the extreme point of its sexuality—‘there,’ which means on their own thingly body as it is shown in the world.”¹⁴⁸ Simply put, the sexual member always manifests in the phenomenological mode of objectification.

Henry refers to this objectification as the naked body; naked, not necessarily in a literal sense, but insofar as it is exposed to the visibility of exteriority: “thus unveiled in the objectivity of the world, naked, sex no longer offers anything more than this contingent and absurd appearance.”¹⁴⁹ Exposed in this manner, the body cannot be experienced as anything but absurd. This is true for any member which, exposed to the light of visibility, is exposed as irreducibly

¹⁴⁴ Michel Henry, *Généalogie de la psychanalyse: le commencement perdu* (Paris: PUF, 1985), 216.

¹⁴⁵ Henry, *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 176.

¹⁴⁶ Henry, *Incarnation*, 218 [emphasis added].

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 214. “There,” in this instance, is a clear allusion to the “*Da-*” of Heidegger's *Dasein*, that is, being-in-the-world. Hence, Henry's association of the “there” with the horizon of the world. This connection is emphasized elsewhere, where Henry will refer to the “sexed body, which is its being-there.” *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

contingent or arbitrary. There is no “why” for the particular configuration of the body. As Henry notes, “doubtless, the nose, the eye, the members, etc., manifest themselves to us as determinations concerning which no justification, for example, a functional one, suffices to hide their strange configuration or absurd characteristic from the view of a lucid mind.”¹⁵⁰ And while this absurdity strikes every member exposed to the light, it is given a particular resonance in the case of the sexual member. Henry therefore finds it necessary to highlight “the contingency and therefore absurdity of sexual difference, and above all of sexual determination as such.”¹⁵¹

Simply put, it is the experience of the absurdity of the synthesis of the originary flesh with an objective body which provokes the distinctive anxiety of sexuality.¹⁵² Or more precisely, it is not simply the correspondence of the originary flesh and the objective body that produces this anxiety, but the flesh’s correspondence with “this body there in the world, *with its determinations and its objective sexual configurations.*”¹⁵³ For Henry, anxiety “emerges in the presence of an objective sexual determination, it is in the spirit that it feels anxiety at not recognizing itself in a sex.”¹⁵⁴

Thus in a very real sense it is sexual determinations, insofar as they are always conceived as objective sexual determinations, that are responsible for the failure of desire—that is, the failure of both sexuality and the erotic. “It is the duality of appearing, and *more precisely the objectivity of sexual determinations* and thus of the erotic relation itself which is responsible for the absurdity

¹⁵⁰ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 190.

¹⁵¹ Henry, *Incarnation*, 223.

¹⁵² As Courtel notes, “L'esprit ne s'angoisse donne pas devant le corps, devant ses fonctions et son destin, il s'angoisse devant la synthèse qu'il est, il s'angoisse d'être ‘ça’.” Yannick Courtel, “Chair et différence sexuelle chez Michel Henry,” *Revue des sciences religieuses* 83:1 (2009), 83.

¹⁵³ Henry, *Incarnation*, 214 [emphasis added].

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

of these determinations as well as for the failure of desire.”¹⁵⁵ Therefore, all that remains after this failure of desire, is an “unimaginable synthesis”¹⁵⁶ in the spirit of the originary flesh wherein life experiences itself in itself and the objective sexed body; a synthesis which is unimaginable, because it can never overcome the “monstrous, ‘enormous’ difference that is established in it, between itself and its sexed body.”¹⁵⁷ The sexual member is therefore the dysmember.

Thus, despite the fact that Henry critiques Kierkegaard for “surreptitiously [treating the] body, and particularly sexual difference, as objective determinations, referring inevitably to the world’s ek-static appearing,”¹⁵⁸ Henry ends up reproducing precisely this tendency. Having asked in *Barbarism* if a solution to scientific (e.g. behaviorist) readings of sexuality might be cured by recognizing “the relation of the absolutely immanent, absolutely subjective, transcendental life to its incomprehensible objective double, to this body, with its sexual characteristics and its strange configuration?”¹⁵⁹ Henry offers an undeniable “no.” According to Henry, such a response is “incomprehensible for this transcendental life.”¹⁶⁰ Transcendental life always brackets sexuality.

D: Transcendental Asexuality

If all sexual determinations have been thrown into the objectivity of the world, then so too has sexual difference as such. One is not just a body, but always already a “sexually differentiated objective body.”¹⁶¹ Thus “between these [objective sexual] properties, and in spite of their

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 223 [emphasis added].

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 202.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 198.

¹⁵⁸ Henry, *Incarnation*, 210.

¹⁵⁹ Henry, *Barbarism*, 83.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Henry, *Incarnation*, 215.

common phenomenological status, a difference is revealed: ... It is ... a man's or woman's body."¹⁶² The question, Henry suggests, is therefore "one of knowing what this presence of the spirit in our own body means exactly, when this is defined by a set of objective properties, and in a singular way by sexual difference."¹⁶³ That is to say, what does it mean to be living flesh bound to a sexually differentiated body—a man's or a woman's body? The answer, perhaps unsurprising at this point, is that the synthesis of the flesh with sexual difference is an absurdity that provokes anxiety. For, insofar as sexual difference depends upon sexual determinations, it likewise depends upon their mode of phenomenality, which is the mode of exteriority and objectivity.¹⁶⁴ As Henry summarizes this moment of recognition: "the discovery of one's own body as an objective body—and even more as an objective body marked by sexual difference—is identical to an affective disposition, the fact that such a body belongs to the mind is experienced as anxiety at the outset."¹⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the affective tonality of this anxiety is not univocal. Rather, Henry here comes close to affirming something like sexual difference within the flesh, insofar as sexual difference is revealed to the flesh in affectively unique ways. "It is in the immanence of our flesh," he writes, "that sexual difference reveals itself originally in the form of distinct, pure impressions, some proper to female sensibility, unknown to male sensibility, and vice-versa."¹⁶⁶ This echoes a similar assertion in *I am the Truth*, where Henry suggests that being a woman is defined by an

¹⁶² Ibid., 196.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 199.

¹⁶⁴ "What is inexplicably and ultimately absurd is the objective body as such, and its foreign organs, or even the functions for which these organs are means. ... the body with its surprising configurations and sexual difference is absurd." Ibid., 198.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 197.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 249.

“internal and lived unfolding of feminine ‘sexuality.’”¹⁶⁷ But, in both cases this potential is immediately undermined by Henry in favor of a transcendental purity devoid of sexual difference. Thus, despite this initial promise, it is ultimately revealed that “this givenness to itself takes place in the same way, in the same, for man as for woman ... [it] is identical in each.”¹⁶⁸ There is, Henry notes, paraphrasing Paul, “neither male nor female.” Rather, “what we are dealing with in the relation to the other is never primarily, or solely, despite worldly appearance, a man or a woman.”¹⁶⁹ Instead, as he will later argue, one is ultimately given to oneself—and given to the other—within the self-givenness of life “before every subsequent determination—before being man or woman.”¹⁷⁰

As Yannick Courtel, writes in “Chair et différence sexuelle chez Michel Henry”: “it is therefore necessary for us to conclude that the flesh is not sexuated ... in its relation with absolute life, the flesh ignores sexual difference.”¹⁷¹ But, whereas Courtel rightfully marks this absence, tying it to the paradoxical synthesis of the flesh and the objective body, it is here possible to be

¹⁶⁷ Henry, *I am the Truth*, 251.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 251. In the words of Hatem, “si j’ai même centre, par le contact, que l’Archi-Soi, alors j’accède à autrui non plus à partir de mon seul Soi, moyennant l’Archi-Soi, mais immédiatement, à partir du Centre common” Jad Hatem, *Théologie de l’œuvre d’art mystique et messianique: Thérèse d’Avila, Andreï Roublev et Michel Henry*, Bruxelles Lessius Coll., “Donner raison,” 2006, 317

¹⁷⁰ Henry, *Incarnation*, 250. As Rivera glosses these passages, “prior to the moment any ethnic, economic, social, or even sexual difference may mark out my world as separate from yours, I experience you and you experience me in the eternal arrival of the Word.” Rivera, *The Contemplative Self After Michel Henry*, 284 [emphasis added]. Here there is a noteworthy correlation between Henry and Levinas, insofar as Levinas likewise posits the most originary encounter with the other prior to all other determinations. “The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes! When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other. The relation with the face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 85-86.

¹⁷¹ “Il nous faut donc conclure que la chair n’est pas sexifère. ... Dans sa relation à la Vie absolue, la chair, elle, ignore la différence sexuelle.” Courtel, “Chair et différence sexuelle chez Michel Henry,” 80 [translation my own].

even more precise. The flesh ignores sexual difference, in its relation to absolute life, because in this life there are no sexual determinations, no organs or members. In “the lover’s night”¹⁷² there is no skin, gender, secondary sexual characteristics, or genitalia. In Henry, the transcendental flesh has been, to use my own language, dis-membered. Thus, we might say of Henry, as Sartre once said of Heidegger, “his Dasein appears to us as asexual.”¹⁷³

§III: Consequences of the Erasure of Sexual Difference

A. The Universal Man

Henry’s insistence upon a transcendental asexuality motivates a few unfortunate tendencies in his account of gender and sexuality. Specifically, despite the ostensible sexually-neutral character of his account of the flesh, he nevertheless ends up presupposing a determinately male subject, reiterating problematic tropes of femininity, and variously erasing or denigrating non-traditional sexual relationships. In the final division of this chapter, these three tendencies will each be examined in turn.

At first blush, Henry appears to unambiguously affirm the fundamental gender non-specificity—and thus logical interchangeability—of the human person within the sexual or erotic

¹⁷² Henry, *Incarnation*, 210.

¹⁷³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 495. Asexual should be taken here, in subsequent passages, and in the prior headings, as an ontological or transcendental claim—viz. that this account of the flesh lacks sexual characteristics and sexual difference—and not in the ontic sense of “asexuality” as it is more commonly used in contemporary discourse, where it is placed beside other sexual orientations—e.g. heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, etc.—and understood as an “enduring lack of sexual attraction.” For certainly, it is indisputable that ontically asexual individuals nevertheless manifest sexual difference. In fact, precisely insofar as asexuality is placed in distinction to other sexual orientations, *it is itself a sexual difference*. Thus, as will hopefully be clear in the foregoing analysis, the critique of Henry’s ontological asexuality is *in no sense* intended as a critique of ontic asexuality. For a discussion of asexuality in the ontic sense, see, e.g.: Anthony F. Bogaert, *Understanding Asexuality* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

relation. Just as a phenomenology of the *chiasm* reveals an eidetic “reversibility”¹⁷⁴ of the touching and the touched, so too does a phenomenology of the erotic caress. In the erotic relation the touching and touched are “absolutely symmetrical.”¹⁷⁵ This symmetry of the caress likewise determines the symmetrical character of the erotic relation as such; thus, “the only difference between the two cases of transcendental flesh . . . , is that the one is ‘active’ and the other ‘passive’; they are two modalities of one and the same capacity for power, so they are interchangeable, and *the man and woman can exchange their roles.*”¹⁷⁶ This interchangeability seems to perfectly cohere with Henry’s broader framework, following from his marked preference for an asexual transcendental ego and his insistence upon the priority of the existentially unique, living person over every sociological category—including gender and sexual categories. Thus, in *From Communism to Capitalism*, for example, Henry will criticize Marxist class analysis for its effacement of the living individual; “what characterizes Marxism from a theoretical point of view,” he will there suggest, “is the replacement of the living individual with a number of abstract entities.”¹⁷⁷

Nonetheless, a rhetorical analysis of Henry’s discussion of sexuality, particularly in *I am the Truth* and *Incarnation*, suggests that, even granting his official statement regarding the symmetrical and interchangeable relation of the genders, Henry’s philosophical model of the human person bears the distinctive marks of the traditional “active male subject.” For these texts,

¹⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 263.

¹⁷⁵ Henry, *Incarnation*, 206.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 207 [emphasis added].

¹⁷⁷ Henry, *From Communism to Capitalism*, 26. The direct applicability of this critique to the sociological categories of gender and sexuality can already be discerned here in Henry’s rather dismissive reference to “the days when sexual liberation was an issue, [when] one heard women say . . .” This sexual liberation, for him, is merely “la religion remplacée par l’erotisme.” Henry, “Notes sur le phénomène érotique,” 43.

the male is subject; the female is object. The transcendental purity of the originary flesh is always, even if often only implicitly, “a pure *man*.”¹⁷⁸

Feminist scholarship has long marked this tendency of Western philosophy to introject the characteristics of socio-cultural masculinity into any notion of the “universal” human, so it will little serve this project to survey the entire tradition. Instead, given Henry’s French context, it will be helpful to limit discussion to three of his direct contemporaries: Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous. This limitation will highlight the fact that the present critique is not anachronistic, but rather reflects debates internal to Francophone philosophy, to which Henry would have had perfect access.

According to de Beauvoir, within the Western philosophical canon “there is an absolute human type, the masculine.”¹⁷⁹ To be masculine is to be universal, to be universal is to be masculine. This tendency, according to de Beauvoir, emerges from the “subject”-centered character of Western thought: “he is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.”¹⁸⁰ But, this is not to suggest that this correlation between the universal/absolute and the masculine is in any sense natural. Rather, as Irigaray notes, “any theory of the subject has always been *appropriated* by the ‘masculine’.”¹⁸¹ Given Irigaray’s interest in political economy, this notion of appropriation should be taken in a quite literal sense. The masculine has made the “subject” *propre* (one’s own); it has been *expropriated* and has therefore become his *property*.¹⁸² The means of this expropriation

¹⁷⁸ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 7 [emphasis added].

¹⁷⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), xxi.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, xxii. It is at precisely this point that de Beauvoir offers an intervention into Levinas’ account of the feminine as the Other *par excellence* [see: Chapter 1 above].

¹⁸¹ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 133 [emphasis added].

¹⁸² See, e.g.: Karl Marx’s discussion of “primitive accumulation” in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 873-895. Therein Marx notes the necessity of an

is the maintenance of a certain posture or perspective: men “describe [the world] from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.”¹⁸³ In so describing the world, “man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being.”¹⁸⁴ As Irigaray describes this asymmetrical relation: “the feminine has been construed only as the negative, inferior version or opposite of the masculine: always defined *in relation to, against, and beneath* the masculine, paradigmatically as object in contrast to the masculine subject.”¹⁸⁵

Having been defined against the supposed universality of the masculine, woman simply becomes “the sex,” always posed against masculine neutrality. This designation of woman as “the sex” has, for de Beauvoir, a clear genesis, one that is particularly relevant to a critique of Henry: *the forgetting or erasure of sexual determinations.*

Woman has ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands. Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as the testicles, and that they secrete hormones.¹⁸⁶

Precisely as in Henry, this erasure of sexual determinations produces a subsequent erasure of sexual difference. As Irigaray notes, Western philosophy depends upon a “power to eradicate the difference between the sexes in systems that are self-representative of a ‘masculine subject’.”¹⁸⁷

expropriation of “communal property” (Ibid., 885) which “precedes capitalist accumulation” (Ibid., 873). This expropriation takes the form of “conquest, enslavement, robbery, [and] murder” (Ibid., 874). The connection between this expropriation, property, and gender relations is explored by Engels (using notes composed by Marx before his death) in Friedrich Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010). For an explicitly feminist interpretation of primitive accumulation, see: Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

¹⁸³ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 143.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., xxii.

¹⁸⁵ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 69. Or again, “Woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man’s fantasies.” Ibid., 25.

¹⁸⁶ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, xxi.

¹⁸⁷ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 74.

Thus, Henry's tendency to implicitly center a masculine subject in his ostensibly universal analyses of the transcendental flesh is neither unique, nor unexpected. But rather, this tendency is deeply embedded in the Western philosophical tradition and falls from precisely the attempt to subordinate sexual difference to a transcendental subject that Henry explicitly marks as his project.

Nowhere is this prejudice clearer than in a particularly odd thought experiment that marks the conclusion to *I am the Truth*. Anticipating analyses that will be undertaken with considerably more depth in *Incarnation*, Henry closes *I am the Truth*'s theological speculations with a turn to "the erotic relations between men and women."¹⁸⁸ There, amidst a critique of scientism and technology, Henry suggests that the reader consider the possibility—even inevitability—of "the simulation in the technical and scientific world of a procedure applied not only in the military domain but to social relations, for example the erotic relation."¹⁸⁹ Drawing from the idea of flight simulators, Henry there posits an "erotic simulation," in which an artificially simulated woman's body could be used as an outlet for sexual desire. For Henry, such an "erotic simulation" would enact a total erasure of the "living transcendental Self"; the fulfillment of the technologization that Henry traces to Galileo, but sees with particular intensity in modern capitalism: "science has reduced the living transcendental Self to a dead object of the Galilean field."¹⁹⁰

A rhetorical analysis of this thought experiment suggests an implicit gender asymmetry at the heart of Henry's paradigm. "Let us hypothesize that *men* can use a simulator," he says, introducing the thought experiment. "The *man* (like the student pilot) is placed in a certain position and *the appearance of a woman's body* is gradually unfolded..." he continues; "beneath *his*

¹⁸⁸ Henry, *I am the Truth*, 273.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 274.

touching, the appearance of the *female body quivers...*” Ultimately, this simulation is that wherein “*a man* who wants to embrace *a woman...*”¹⁹¹—as one embraces an object—finds fulfillment. Here, the man “uses,” “touches,” “embraces”—in sum, is the subject of an erotic encounter. The woman, or rather “the appearance of a woman’s body,” is entirely passive; she merely corresponds to the masculine subject’s activity as a passive recipient.¹⁹²

What is clear throughout this passage—as well as his broader corpus—is that Henry’s tendency to prioritize the masculine manifests most conspicuously at a strictly grammatical level. Thus, for an especially stark example, in the pages immediately following his thought experiment Henry embraces the apocalyptic and eschatological fervor of 1st Thessalonians and Revelation. In the increasing technologization of the world: “*men* [are] debased, humiliated, despised...” “*Men* [are] reduced to simulacra”; “*men* [are] chased out of their work and their homes”; “*men* [are] replaced by abstractions...”; “*men* [are] treated mathematically, digitally, statistically.” “*Men* [are] turned away from Life’s truth”; “*men* whose emotion and loves are just glandular secretions”; “*men* who have been liberated by making them think their sexuality is a natural process”; “*men* whose responsibility and dignity have no definite site anymore. *Men* who in general degradation will envy the animals. *Men* will want to die.”¹⁹³

Like the authors of his period, Henry’s texts rely almost exclusively on masculine nouns and pronouns throughout: “*men* [are] turned away from Life’s truth”;¹⁹⁴ the philosophical subject

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 273-274 [emphasis added throughout].

¹⁹² See, also, Henry’s remark in his unpublished notes: “De même la femme [qui] veut être « prise », qui demande à l’homme d’être fort, de la prendre.” This strength of the man, Henry clarifies, “n’est pas celle des *bras*,” but rather, an “acte transcendantal.” Henry, “Notes sur le phénomène érotique,” 31.

¹⁹³ Henry, *I am the Truth*, 275 [emphasis added].

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 275.

is “il”: “he is related to life,”¹⁹⁵ he is the “Son with the Son” [*fil dans le fils*],¹⁹⁶ the other is neither “a man or a woman: it is a *Son*.”¹⁹⁷ This grammatical convention seems to reveal little beyond Henry’s social location: he is French, so he uses “il” as a general pronoun; he is Catholic so he uses “son [of God]” to speak of one’s relation to God.

Nevertheless even if they are traditional, such conventions are not beyond repute. De Beauvoir, for example, will highlight the connection between this linguistic convention and the tendency to conflate the universal and the masculine. As she writes:

A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. The terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, *as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general*; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity.¹⁹⁸

For Irigaray, this connection necessitates “a revolution in thought and ethics”¹⁹⁹ as well as language. “We need to reinterpret ... everything, beginning with the way in which the subject has always been written in the masculine form, as man, even when it claimed to be universal and neutral. Despite the fact that man—at least in French—rather than being neutral, is sexed.”²⁰⁰ Thus,

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., chapter 7.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 251 [emphasis added].

¹⁹⁸ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, xxi [emphasis added].

¹⁹⁹ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 6.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. One might here point to Hélène Cixous’ notion of *écriture féminine* as a model of such an explicitly feminine mode of language. For Cixous, *écriture féminine* is a means of “letting go and allowing the body to ‘make itself heard,’ ... tap[ping] into what Cixous refers to as ‘the huge resources of the unconscious.’ [Thus] the practice of *écriture féminine* results in a variety of disruptive meanings being brought to bear on seemingly ‘stable’ texts.” Ian Blyth and Susan Sellers, *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 34. See: Hélène Cixous, “Sorties: Out and Out Attacks/Ways Out/Forays” in *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

even if Henry is here employing the standard—albeit questionable—convention of his epoch, one might still note clear connections between this linguistic convention and a determinately masculine conception of the subject.

Yet, more strongly, if one turns from *I am the Truth* to *Incarnation*'s phenomenological analysis of the caress, it will be clear there is good reason to believe this linguistic usage is *not* simply convention. Rather, throughout this analysis, Henry conspicuously inverts from exclusively masculine to exclusively feminine language in his account of the “other” of the erotic caress. Thus the recipient of the caress is “she” [*elle*] or even, with a remarkable regularity, the “young woman” [*jeune femme*].²⁰¹ One finds “the young woman’s hand,” “the original flesh of the young woman,” “our dancer ... the young woman.”²⁰² This inconsistency suggests that Henry’s use of masculine language for the philosophical subject may not be strictly reducible to traditional convention. Rather, the subject of the caress—which, according to basic moves of Henry’s analysis, should remain in principle sexually generic—is in a non-trivial sense configured as determinately male. The “object” or recipient of the caress, the passive partner of the erotic encounter, is figured as female.

This privileging of the male subject in an analysis of the caress is not without precedence. As was already discussed in Chapter 1, Emmanuel Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity* offered a phenomenological account of the caress that has been roundly criticized for its explicitly gendered character. Instilling the traditional patriarchal family structure into his phenomenology of *eros*, Levinas there contrasts the “feminine”—the welcoming character of the home, epitomized in the

²⁰¹ The figure of the “young woman” seems to be drawn from Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Anxiety*.

²⁰² Henry, *Incarnation*, 206, 206-207, 210, respectively.

wife—with the masculine subject of the erotic relation.²⁰³ While Henry does not explicitly reference Levinas’ gendered analysis, it is without question that he has his contemporary in mind.

Taken together with *I am the Truth*’s “erotic simulation,” these passages suggest that the philosophical and existential subject of Henry’s philosophy is figured as determinately male, whereas the passive object is figured as female. In this regard, the caress and the erotic simulation stand together. Thus, while for Henry the horror of the technologized modern world is that “a man or a woman is only an object,”²⁰⁴ his analysis appears to offer liberation for the man alone; woman remains an object, passive to the caress and the domination of the masculine subject. In the words of Hélène Cixous, “Active—is reserved for man”;²⁰⁵ “woman is always associated with passivity in philosophy. ... Either woman is passive or she does not exist.”²⁰⁶ This specification of an active male subject and a passive female object is not unique within Henry’s project. Rather, it emerges together with some rather insidious, stereotyped notions of femininity.

B. Tropes of Femininity

Henry’s decision to employ traditional gender stereotypes is particularly unfortunate, as his philosophy is uniquely situated to think beyond these traditional tropes of femininity. For, these tropes have always emerged from a structured binary. “Thought,” as Cixous argues, “has always worked through opposition.”²⁰⁷ And yet, it is this oppositional—or perhaps dialectical—model of

²⁰³ “The other,” he writes, “whose presence is discreetly an absence, with which is accomplished the primary hospitable welcome which describes the field of intimacy, is the Woman.” Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 155. See: Luce Irigaray’s “The Fecundity of the Caress” in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* as well as her “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas.”

²⁰⁴ Henry, *I am the Truth*, 274.

²⁰⁵ Cixous, “Sorties,” 110.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

philosophical thinking that Henry directly challenges in his critique of onto-phenomenological monism. Moreover, Henry's line of flight from this oppositional model of thought is through an affirmation of affectivity. And this is precisely the route likewise suggested by Cixous, for whom women must write from a "direct contact with her appetites, her affects."²⁰⁸

Indeed, if one turns to a table of the gendered binary, such as that provided by Irigaray, the confluence between this table and Henry's distinction between the two principal modes of givenness is rather illuminating. As Irigaray sets out the traditional paradigm: "be/become, have/not have sex (organ), phallic/non-phallic, penis/clitoris or else penis/vagina, plus/minus, clearly represented/dark continent, logos/silence or idle chatter, desire for the mother/desire to be the mother."²⁰⁹ While certainly not an exact match, important points of intersection appear. For Henry, the first givenness in affectivity is marked by a certain conspicuous negativity, but only from the perspective of the world. Thus, where the world offers the "plus" of beings [*les étants*]—"exteriority constitutes visibility"²¹⁰—affectivity offers the "minus" of an absence, insofar as affectivity does not, nor eidetically speaking ever could, appear within the world's visibility. Where the world therefore offers "clearly represented" phenomena, the invisible affective life offers nothing to be seen: "the invisible concerns the human being itself and his or her true reality."²¹¹ Life is, Henry writes, "clandestine";²¹² or, in the words of Irigaray, it is a "dark continent." Likewise, "the invisible life," Henry writes, "does not cease to be invisible and remains

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 66.

²⁰⁹ Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 22.

²¹⁰ Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, 6.

²¹¹ Henry, *Words of Christ*, 17.

²¹² Henry, *Barbarism*, 139.

forever in the dark.”²¹³ Whereas the world offers the rationality of the spoken word [Greek *Logos*], life speaks with an altogether different Word [Johannine *Logos*²¹⁴], a Word that can only appear to the world as a silence: “it is a silence where there cannot be any, because, where it is established, no sense is a work, no ear.”²¹⁵ Moreover, insofar as “logos” stands for the theoretical attitude, Henry again seeks to cast such theory out of the immanence of life and into the world of representation. Borrowing his language from Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*, Henry writes, “I call ‘praxis’ the knowledge of life. ... By contrast, I call ‘theory’ the knowledge that defines this relation to the world.”²¹⁶

Taken together, these confluences suggest a remarkable overlap. The invisible, affective, practical, silent life that Henry champions seems a far cry from the theoretical, representational visibility of traditional phallogentric philosophy. And yet, Henry falls into precisely the same traps as his forbearers—or perhaps, forefathers—recapitulating gendered stereotypes of women as anxious, passive, and exaggerated in their “sexuality.” But for Henry, these three principles are not unconnected. Rather, Henry develops a clear causal chain that brings one from the particularly “sexual” or “sensual” character of the female form, through an intensified anxiety, into a quietist passivity.

²¹³ Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, 10.

²¹⁴ “Totally different from the Greek *Logos* that denotes at once Reason and the possibility of language that men speak, which consists in the formation of ideal and as such unreal significations, the Word of Life is the radical and final, transcendental, phenomenological condition of every possible flesh.” Henry, *Incarnation*, 256.

²¹⁵ Henry, *Words of Christ*, 107. Again, this silence is always a silence *from the perspective of the world*. Thus, “Kafka’s ‘Heaven is silent, it is only the echo of silence,’ [has] forgotten only one thing: the nature of the Word which they accuse of silence and which yet speaks but in a completely different manner from what they think.” *Ibid.*, 106.

²¹⁶ Henry, *Barbarism*, 18.

In *Incarnation*, Henry will note that “the woman’s body is much more marked by sexual determination. ... She is more sensual than the man.”²¹⁷ This statement is noteworthy in two distinct regards. First, and most conspicuously, it is completely unclear what evidence, phenomenological or otherwise, is brought in support of the assertion that the feminine body is more sexual than the masculine. One wonders, as did de Beauvoir, by what possible standard the feminine is perceived to be particularly marked by sexuality. “She is called ‘the sex’,” de Beauvoir notes, “by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex—absolute sex.”²¹⁸ Why is this so? The answer, as we have seen, is that “man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as the testicles, and that they secrete hormones.”²¹⁹ The masculine lacks neither genitalia, erogenous zones, hormones, nor secondary sexual characteristics, but these are not included in what is “essential” to masculine being. Rather, as we have seen above, *Incarnation*’s erotic analytic is built upon the presumption of male universality; and insofar as the male is the generic, the female is necessarily constituted as the aberrant. To be male is to lack the mark of sexuality; the male precedes sexual differentiation, the male precisely is the “before man and woman.” In this sense, Henry broadly recapitulates the Aristotelian figure of women as a *πεπηρωμενον* male, that is, “defective” or “mutilated.”²²⁰

At first glance, the correlation of Henry’s particularly marked feminine sexuality with Aristotle’s notion of feminine deficiency may appear exaggerated. But, turning to the second concern regarding this passage, it is worth noting that within the Henrian paradigm, the designation

²¹⁷ Henry, *Incarnation*, 207.

²¹⁸ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, xxii.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, xxi.

²²⁰ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 737a. 28. For de Beauvoir’s brief discussion of this passage, see: *Ibid.*, xxii.

of the female body as particularly sexual or sensual is by no means a merely descriptive claim. For, it is certainly true that Henry's radical phenomenology may be read as a simple defense of the phenomenological and ontological priority of immanence over transcendence. As Henry writes in *Material Phenomenology*, "the second givenness, which is the ek-static givenness in the perception of the now, presupposes the first non-ek-static givenness in affectivity."²²¹ But, aside from this phenomenological and ontological claim, Henry also insists upon a normative priority: what he calls an "essential hierarchy."²²²

For Henry, the visibility of the world is not only phenomenologically secondary, but rather—in a move likely intended to ground the cultural criticism of *Barbarism* and the political intervention of *From Communism to Capitalism*—this visibility manifests as a terrifying violence and indifference. As he writes:

An appearing of this sort turns away from itself *with such violence*, it casts itself outside with such force, ... that everything to which it gives appearing can indeed never be anything but exterior *in the terrible sense* of that which, put outside, *chased in some way* from its true Dwelling, from its Homeland, and *deprived of the goods* most proper to it, is henceforth *abandoned*, without support, and lost. ... Like the light Scripture speaks of and that shines on both the just and the unjust, the world's appearing illuminates everything it illuminates without making a distinction between things or persons, in *terrifying neutrality*.²²³

This normative hierarchy is nowhere more conspicuous than in Henry's account of sexuality. For Henry, sexuality is constituted as a falling away or corruption of the original, pure erotic affects;

²²¹ Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 25.

²²² "This ethical-political hierarchy elevates the political and lowers the individual; it subordinates the singular to the aim for the universal. This does not result merely from one value judgment that could be contrasted with another one, instead it refers to a prior and essential hierarchy on the phenomenological level. This hierarchy is introduced between two modes of appearing: the mode of appearing of life which experiences itself in the silent embrace of its pathos and as a pathos, in contrast with the appearing of the world, which is the horizon of visibility where the political aim is fulfilled." Henry, *From Communism to Capitalism*, 101.

²²³ Henry, *Incarnation*, 40 [emphasis added].

“this is the case for the erotic relation, when torn from life’s pathos, handed over to the world, reduced to what of it is shown in the world, across all the objective determinations of a thingly body; it is at the same time reduced to what in it can still become an object of desire—its sexuality.”²²⁴

This hierarchy falls directly from the binary character of Henry’s phenomenological dualism—immanence/transcendence, flesh/body, erotic/sexual. To borrow a passage from Derrida’s *Positions*, in each of these binaries, “we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand.”²²⁵ For Henry, that which is sexual is lesser; one “falls” into sexuality when the authentic erotic relation is reduced to its visibility. Therefore, to directly associate the feminine body with marked sexuality is to implicitly situate the feminine more fully within the world, therefore transitively positioning the feminine below the masculine in the same normative hierarchy.

Transitioning from this marked “sexuality” of the female body to an ontological increase in anxiety, Henry suggests that “because [the woman] is more sensual, she is more anxious. Her anxiety is more ‘feminine’ even than his.”²²⁶ Strangely, Henry seems to understand this movement from sexuality/sensuality to anxiety as a means of attenuating the negative bias of his prior assertion. Here he will argue that the increased sexuality of the feminine body “does not mean that she is more culpable than the man. . . . Nor does this mean that she is inferior, but, on the contrary,

²²⁴ Ibid. 219. Or again, “the erotic relation is reduced to an objective sexual relation; it accomplishes itself and that is how it comes about, as a performance and a set of objective phenomena.” Ibid., 218.

²²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41.

²²⁶ Henry, *Incarnation*, 207. This notion of a particularly “feminine” account of anxiety can be found throughout Henry’s oeuvre.

here, spiritually superior—if anxiety is the sign of the spirit—the sign of our heterogeneity.”²²⁷ But, this assertion appears to contradict the spirit, if not the letter, of *Incarnation*’s broader erotic analytic for two reasons. First, while anxiety is certainly an immanent affective tonality, sexuality is generally understood, as shown above, as a category of the objectified body—either organic or thingly. Since this hierarchy is not only descriptive, but also normative, sexuality is therefore a fall from the flesh’s transcendental purity. Within this paradigm, it is unthinkable that a centering of femininity in the sexuality of the body could be understood as a positive characteristic, nor a spiritual superiority, even if—as productive of anxiety—its repercussions are extended into immanence. Simply put, within Henry’s account, greater sexuality corresponds to greater nihilism and an increased forgetting of life. Henry makes this point explicitly clear in an earlier section, again identifying femininity and anxiety, and designating their ultimate form as nothing other than weakness: “Anxiety then takes on its feminine form as weakness: even though it comes from the Self, it crushes it and leaves it powerless, left to drift in the anxiety that drowns it.”²²⁸

At a more methodological level, Henry’s critique of scientism in *Barbarism* aims to establish the impossibility of quantification and calculation within the immanence of life. Indeed, the modern tendency to reduce human life to statistics produces only “its gradual impoverishment, which reaches its highest point in mathematical treatment.”²²⁹ To speak of a quantitative increase in anxiety (immanent life) that is somehow directly proportional to an increase in sexuality (transcendent being) is, in Henry’s paradigm, to make a fatal category error—to fail to appreciate the ontological difference between immanence and transcendence. And insofar as there is a

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., 203.

²²⁹ Henry, *Barbarism*, 82-83.

movement between immanence and transcendence, it is always a movement from the former to the latter: from the reality of affective life to the irreality of the transcendent world. It is precisely this failure to respect this uni-directionality that, in Henry's eyes, marks the utter failure of the modern scientific study of sexuality. "Doesn't the reader of Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety* know," Henry asks, "a bit more about sexuality than someone who would have covered all of the past and future scientific treatises on the subject, with their cumbersome statistics?"²³⁰ For Henry, such statistics can teach us that "seven percent of French people have made love in a stairwell,"²³¹ but can teach us nothing of the erotic life, because quantification necessarily misses the auto-affective character of *eros*.

In the final move of Henry's treatment of feminine sexuality, Henry suggests that this increase in anxiety spawns a quietist passivity. "The feminine character of anxiety," he argues, "denotes not the fact that it is a woman's, but the moment proper to all anxiety, where overwhelmed by it the Self loses all initiative."²³² Here Henry makes two important shifts. First, his claim that women are more anxious is inverted. It is not simply that women are more anxious than men, but rather that anxiety itself—and its correlate passivity—is feminine. This is an assertion that can be traced back to Henry's earliest work, where he speaks of a distinctly "feminine attitude"²³³—in relation to passivity. Second, it is here that this analysis of feminine tropes reverts to the conclusions of the first and establishes a circularity—a vicious Ouroboros of gendered stereotypes. For, by positioning erotic anxiety as a stultifying anxiety, particularly one that

²³⁰ Ibid., 83.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Henry, *Incarnation*, 207.

²³³ Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 681.

uniquely strikes the feminine individual, Henry marks femininity itself as passive. Given this particularly feminine passivity, it is not surprising that Henry's analysis of the "erotic simulation" and the caress would ultimately find an objectified woman, who, as passive, functions as object to the active male subject of the phenomenological gaze. Trapped in her overt sexuality, burdened by uncontrollable anxiety, the Henrian woman cannot act, but can only be acted upon. One could not fault the woman, who presented with such a paralysis, responds as Cixous, "I resist: detest a certain passivity, it promises death for me."²³⁴

C. Profanation: on Non-traditional Sexuality

Despite his numerous writings on the erotic experience, Henry offers little reflection on non-traditional sexualities. This silence is most conspicuous in the case of sexual orientation. Simply put, at no point in his written work does Henry ever explicitly consider the possibility of a non-heterosexual erotic encounter. Insofar as Henry has bracketed sexual difference from the immanence of the flesh, from the true seat of subjectivity and reality, this is not particularly surprising. For, just as the "universal man" emerged from an inadequate consideration of sexual difference, so too does an inadequate consideration of difference in sexual orientation tend to produce a "universal heterosexual." Therefore, given Henry's transcendental asexuality, it is unsurprising that his phenomenology of the caress or erotic simulation thought experiment both presuppose not only a masculine subject, but likewise a cisgendered heterosexual subject.²³⁵

²³⁴ Cixous, "Sorties," 77.

²³⁵ As Jean Leclercq notes: "le projet henryen est certes celui d'une phénoménologie à première personne et, dans ce cas, une phénoménologie hétérosexuelle." Jean Leclercq, "Éditorial," in Jean Leclercq, (ed), "Michel Henry: Notes sur le phénomène érotique" *Revue Internationale Michel Henry* 4 (2013): 10.

Nevertheless, there are a few oblique references that may refer to non-heterosexual erotic relations, but these are invariably derogatory and dismissive. Thus, for example, Henry writes of “depraved” sexualities that are “against nature”²³⁶—references that, given their distinct echoes of the anti-queer rhetoric of his context, may very well refer to queer sexualities.²³⁷ These references follow a uniform structure: non-traditional sexualities are a product of the objectification of sexuality, the casting of the erotic onto the objective body and its horizon of visibility. Using a style of argumentation that is methodologically problematic,²³⁸ Henry describes this process as a “denaturing”²³⁹ [*dénaturation*] of life.

The reduction of eroticism to objective sexuality ... goes against *the nature of life*, and stipulates that it be consummated where its very existence is simply impossible, we would claim it follows from a decision. But every *decision against nature* assumes the form of violence because it implies an active negation that opposes the consistency and coherence of reality. *This must be eliminated and destroyed*. This active and deliberate destruction of reality, in this case life’s own reality, is nihilism.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ This recourse to “nature” is unexpected, given his consistent critique of any attempt to think sexuality as “quelque chose de naturel,” and his rigorous condemnation of naturalistic strains in Sartre, Freud, and others. But, it is perhaps anticipated by his condemnation of sadomasochistic sexual practices because they violate the “internal prescriptions” of life. “c’est parce que la sexualité n’est pas naturelle qu’elle peut déchoir ou se métamorphoser en toutes les formes de la vie, sadisme, masochisme, et devenir un mal, un profanation; [...] le rapport du monde moderne à sexualité est essentiellement un rapport de profanation; traiter la sexualité hors [de la] vie et ses prescription internes, ce n’est pas seulement [une] ruine morale, mais [c’est aussi un] non-sens intellectuel.” Henry, “Notes sur le phénomène érotique,” 39.

²³⁷ Henry’s general silence on queer sexuality, redoubled by his periodic denigration of “perversions,” makes his rather casual dismissal of “the progress of scientific research on AIDS” (Henry, *Incarnation*, 222), for him an example of the poverty of objective methodologies of science, all the more disconcerting; it is perhaps akin, albeit in an attenuated form, to Heidegger’s casual use of the Nazi death camps as an example, despite his own unwillingness to disavow his pronounced anti-Semitism and early support for the Nazi party. This text, which reads—“agriculture is now a motorized food industry, the same thing in its essence as the production of corpses in the gas chambers and the extermination camps, the same thing as blockades and the reduction of countries to famine, the same thing as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs.”—was excised from both the German and English versions of “The Question Concerning Technology,” but can be found among the “unpublished texts” in volume 79 of the *Gesamtausgabe*.

²³⁸ A detailed critique of the use of “nature” language within radical phenomenology is undertaken below, in chapter 3.

²³⁹ Henry, *Incarnation*, 221.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

Insofar as this denaturing exacerbates the conflict between the living individual and their objective body, marked as it is by sexual difference, this denaturing ushers in the reign of anxiety. As Henry writes, “in the most depraved societies, when all moral rules and all ‘taboos’ are abolished, and when various forms of perversion are welcomed with immense favor ... anxiety has not so much disappeared as put itself in charge.”²⁴¹

This reign of objectivity and anxiety—wherein “life exposes itself, and thus affirms that it is nothing other, and nothing more, than [sexuality]”²⁴²—is given a variety of titles by Henry. It is the rule of an “indecent sex”²⁴³ [*ce sexe indécent*]. It is a “profanation”²⁴⁴ *of life*, that is always also a profanation *by life*: a “self-profanaion.”²⁴⁵ It is “voyeurism”²⁴⁶ and “pornography.”²⁴⁷ These last two are particularly enlightening, as they mark the essence of Henry’s account of profanation: “in pornography an attempt to bring the objectivity of the erotic relation to its limit emerges, *where everything is given to be seen*—which then requires the vantage points on the behaviors and sexual attributes to be multiplied.”²⁴⁸

Here, and despite the consistent use of French feminism as a foil for Henry, there emerges an interesting parallel. For, since the middle of the last century, feminists have consistently

²⁴¹ Ibid., 194.

²⁴² Ibid., 219.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Here non-traditional sexuality is modeled upon the flight from life examined by Henry in *Barbarism*, the flight that ultimately culminates in suicide, whether literal or metaphorical —i.e. the killing off of the Life within oneself through objectification and technologization. See: Henry, *Barbarism*, Chapter 4: “The Sickness of Life.”

²⁴⁶ Henry, *Incarnation*, 220.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid [emphasis added].

critiqued the ocular-centric character of masculinity, the recourse to sight as the sense *par excellence*.²⁴⁹ In Irigaray this tendency is named “specularity.” It is that “which confuses all individuality in the extrapolated operation of the specular.”²⁵⁰ But not all speculation and spectation is equal under the reign of specularity, rather, “it is in [the father’s] gaze that everything comes into being.”²⁵¹ The father’s gaze, that is, the masculine gaze, here delimits the bounds of reality.²⁵² This theory finds a practical outlet in the feminist anti-pornography movement. Here in thinkers such as Andrea Dworkin,²⁵³ one finds close parallels to Henry’s theory of pornography as specularity and objectification. Thus, as Catharine MacKinnon argues, “pornography creates an accessible sexual object. . . . This is not because pornography depicts objectified sex but because it creates the experience of a sexuality which is itself objectified.”²⁵⁴

Yet, this parallel with Henry should not be taken too far. For, while feminist critiques of specularity—at least at their best²⁵⁵—open up a space of liberation for oppressed sexual and gender

²⁴⁹ Here one should recall the discussion of parallels to Irigaray’s table of the sexual binary above.

²⁵⁰ Irigaray, *The Speculum of the Other Woman*, 320.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 323.

²⁵² Cixous will similarly note: “sexual difference is not determined simply by the fantasized relation to anatomy, which depends to a great extent on catching sight of something, thus on the strange importance that is accorded to exteriority and to that which is specular in sexuality’s development. A voyeur’s theory, of course.” Cixous, “Sorties,” 82.

²⁵³ See, e.g., Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Perigee, 1981), where she writes of women: “the object is allowed to desire, if she desires to be an object.” *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁵⁴ Catharine A. MacKinnon, “Sexuality, Pornography, and Method” in Nancy Tuana and Rosemarie Tong (eds.) *Feminism & Philosophy: Essential Reading in Theory, Reinterpretation, and Application* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 114. Or again, “What do men want? Pornography provides an answer. Pornography permits men to have whatever they want sexually. It is their ‘truth about sex.’ It connects the centrality of visual objectification to both male sexual arousal and male models of knowledge and verification, connecting objectivity and objectification.” *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁵⁵ Here one should recognize the reality that anti-pornography feminism has often shamed, and even pressed for legislation that actively endangers sex workers. This tendency to target sex workers, as discussed immediately below, likewise appears in Henry.

classes, Henry's critique of objectivity primarily serves to discipline and shame non-normative sexual practices. Thus, Henry rhetorically targets fetishists,²⁵⁶ practitioners of sadism and masochism (S&M),²⁵⁷ and those engaged in polyamorous or open relationships.²⁵⁸ This fervor takes on its sharpest form in Henry's critique of sex workers: for whom objectification is seen to take on its strongest form, economization.²⁵⁹ Thus, Henry writes, "the same radical project of objectification occurs in prostitution, which is not first and foremost a social fact, but is also a metaphysical act, whose 'publicity,' however limited it may be, remains the hidden *telos* (the prostitute is one who, just like money, concentrates this potential advertising in his being)."²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ "The object toward which sexual intentionality is directed and which exercises upon the latter a power of fascination can be, notably in certain cases of perversion, an inert object of nature and not even a living human body." Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 216n.

²⁵⁷ "Two correlative traits belong to the erotic relation that takes place in the world's appearing, and they are taken to their extreme degree from the beginning: sadism and masochism. It is masochism for the spirit to declare that it is nothing other than a contingent objective determination (foreign precisely to the spirit) and for it to lower itself to the rank of a thing, of a masculine or feminine sex. The other's sadism corresponds to this masochism, as its correlate, and enjoys the suffering of the one that is diminished like this, affirming in and by its display that its truth is in this poor thing, which is indeed foreign to spirit, indecent, and absurd. But the other in the relation is put in the same situation. Sadism and masochism are now indefinitely interchangeable, and become the elements that constituted the erotic relation as long as it seeks, and expects, to be realized outwardly." Henry, *Incarnation*, 219-220. Similarly, in his preparatory notes, he remarks: "c'est parce que la sexualité n'est pas naturelle qu'elle peut déchoir ou se métamorphoser en toutes les formes de la vie, sadisme, masochisme, et devenir un mal, un profanation; [...] le rapport du monde moderne à sexualité est essentiellement un rapport de profanation; traiter la sexualité hors [de la] vie et ses prescription internes, ce n'est pas seulement [une] ruine morale, mais [c'est aussi un] non-sens intellectuel." Henry, "Notes sur le phénomène érotique," 39.

²⁵⁸ "Let us add that, in objectivity, anything can take the place of anything: individuals are interchangeable just like things are. That is why the logical consequence of voyeurism is 'partner swapping,' which often accompanies it. At this point the very particular pleasure that degradation provides, already seen in prostitution, is brought to its extreme." Henry, *Incarnation*, 220.

²⁵⁹ "Prostitution inhérente au voyeurisme; [elle n'est] pas réservée à l'argent mais [au] fait même de se prostituer en public [...] (Exhibitionisme)." Henry, "Notes sur le phénomène érotique," 39.

Conversely, Henry will also tend to borrow Marx's unfortunate habit of using sex-work as a loaded metaphor for wage-labor writ large. "In an analogous way, on the economic plane where 'alienation' reigns, where the worker hires out and sells his work like the prostitute her body, turning it into 'merchandise' that goes from hand to hand, it is himself he hires out and sells—not his objective body but its activity, its 'real, subjective, individual, and living work.' As Marx says, 'the worker goes to the factory' just like the prostitute goes to bed." *Ibid.*, 176. See, e.g.: "prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the labourer." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), 115.

²⁶⁰ Henry, *Incarnation*, 220.

Moreover, just as Henry laments that all profanation is ultimately the self-profanation of life, he likewise holds his strongest ire for those who would willingly enter sex-work: "... right up to the kind of prostitution that one might call artificial to the extent that it is no longer a question of prostituting oneself for money, but for the pleasure of prostituting oneself—for the anxiety that every form of self-abasement purveys."²⁶¹

This targeting of non-traditional sexual minorities—like Henry’s prior stigmatization of the feminine—does not merely reflect the personal biases or idiosyncrasies of Henry’s personal sexual ethic. Rather, they are directly motivated by his account of the flesh, which illegitimately expels all sexual determinations, and therefore all sexual difference, from the ultimate site of human subjectivity. Certainly, one can suggest external influences upon Henry’s account of sexuality—I will do precisely this in chapter 4’s discussion of the so-called “*communio*” school of Catholic theology. But, this adoption of theological and moralistic conceptions of sexuality is not self-grounding; it depends upon a prior phenomenological opening, that is, upon a phenomenology of the body.

D. Life is not Anonymous

For Henry, as we have seen, the heart of modern technocratic society is the “Galilean reduction,” wherein all that is living and sensible is stripped from reality. Science, he writes, “believes that it continues to operate in its own proper domain when it reduces ... properties to their material physical substrate.”²⁶² Parodying this scientific reduction, Henry quips:

Likewise, if it is a question of human sexuality, one will first define a certain number of behaviors, and they will be listed in terms of age, sex, class, and type in order to enumerate the circumstances in which they occurred. One will be able to

²⁶¹ Ibid., 194.

²⁶² Henry, *I am the Truth*, 37.

refine the definition of the types, categories, and conditions, to cross check them, to demonstrate their forms and structure, in short, to arrive at ever more sophisticated, scientific and objective results.²⁶³

Having been reduced to its transcendent character, its objectivity and visibility—its specularity—sexuality is here stripped of its true living reality. All that remains is the motion of objective materials, statistics, patterns, and behaviors. Yet, rather than opposing the relegation of sexuality to its transcendent manifestation, this is precisely the route that Henry's radical phenomenology has taken in its stripping of sexual determinations and sexual difference from the originary flesh. Thus, *rather than constituting a decisive break with the onto-phenomenological monism of the Galilean reduction, Henry has admitted its central thesis, that sexuality is essentially reducible to its visible manifestation.* Of course, this failure is partially moderated by the introduction of certain erotic, affective tonalities such as libido and desire. But even these affections remain secondary, insofar as within the original givenness of life to itself, there is not sexuality; life is “before being man and woman.”

This failure seems to contradict the spirit, if not the letter, of Henry's radical phenomenology insofar as Henry insists that “life is nothing anonymous or universal”;²⁶⁴ “there is no ordinary life.”²⁶⁵ By casting the sexual determinations and sexual difference of the individual

²⁶³ Henry, *Barbarism*, 82-83.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 231. For example, in 19th century Romanticism, “Life thus appears as an impersonal and anonymous power and, because it excludes the singularity of the individual, as ‘universal’” (Henry, *I am the Truth*, 120). Because it is stripped of its individuality and subjectivity, this anonymous life “is not only superior to the individual but foreign and therefore indifferent to it as well” (*Ibid.*). This takes on its clearest political form in fascism. Thus, Henry writes, “I call ‘fascism’ any doctrine that, whether admittedly or not, pursues the devaluation of the individual, in such a way that the individual becomes nothing, or else something insignificant or bad and henceforth its suppression seems legitimate” (Henry, *From Communism to Capitalism*, 45).

Against this tendency, Henry advocates a notion of Life that is always “mine.” Life is ipseity; that is, “the possibility of saying ‘me,’ ‘I’—more radically, the possibility that there exists something like a ‘me’ and an ‘I,’ a living ‘me’ and ‘I’ who are always a particular one, mine and yours” (Henry, *I am the Truth*, 134). As Gagnon writes: “la chair, et l’affectivité qu’elle distille (dont la souffrance et la joie sont les pôles de leur co-appartenance), est pour Henry la

out of the flesh, and therefore out of lived immanence, Henry has constructed an account of sexuality that is detached from its affective source. As Courtel puts it: “however, an idea is time and again repeated by Michel Henry: the flesh is never an anonymous flesh, the flesh is never the flesh of someone, it is always that of a living being. [Is the denial of sexual difference therefore a contradiction?]”²⁶⁶ While Courtel will follow Henry, answering “no, because the living being in question is a transcendental self,”²⁶⁷ I will take a harder line.

For Henry, lived individuality is only accessible if one brackets: “every consideration pertaining to a professional, economic, social, intellectual, ethnic, or other condition”; only then can one disclose “what is unique in each one.”²⁶⁸ But, without an account that recognizes sexual determinations and sexual difference as essential and irreducible components of lived experience, Henry’s speculations regarding sexuality themselves become anonymous and universal. As Merleau-Ponty rightly recognized, “all human 'functions', from sexuality to motility and intelligence, are rigorously unified in one synthesis, it is impossible to distinguish in the total being of man a bodily organization to be treated as a contingent fact, and other attributes necessarily entering into his make-up.”²⁶⁹ Simply put, what Merleau-Ponty here recognizes is the inability to bracket sexuality from the human individual without fundamentally disrupting one's view of

possibilité principielle de l’ipséité, puisqu’elle est l’essence originelle de la subjectivité.” Rémy Gagnon, “La philosophie de la chair de Michel Henry. Vers une onto-phénoménologie de l’individualité,” *Symposium* 14, 2 (2010): 67.

²⁶⁶ “Et cependant, une idée est mainte fois répétée par Michel Henry: la chair n'est jamais une chair anonyme, la chair n'est jamais la chair de personne, elle est toujours celle d'un vivant. Contradiction?” Courtel, “Chair et différence sexuelle chez Michel Henry,” 80 [translation my own].

²⁶⁷ “Non, parce que le vivant en question est un Soi transcendantal.” Ibid [translation my own].

²⁶⁸ Henry, *Incarnation*, 248.

²⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 196. Or again, “in so far as a man's sexual history provides a key to his life, it is because in his sexuality is projected his manner of being towards the world, that is, towards time and other men.” Ibid., 183.

person-hood itself, without losing the true ipseity of the individual. In the words of Frédéric Seyler, “by exclusively focusing on life, radical phenomenology seems to have forgotten existence and its everyday challenges for phenomenology, philosophy, and ethics.”²⁷⁰ Indeed, having bracketed sexual determinations and difference, one now finds, in place of the living individual who should ground a radical phenomenology, a *universal* heterosexual male. Other lived experiences of sexuality, and the individuals for whom these experiences are essential, find themselves denigrated and cast out of the true reality of lived immanence.

Thus I find myself in a similar position to Rivera, who writes of Henry, “I see him as a kind of rival that is also a model, one whom I both appreciate and despise.”²⁷¹ That is to say, despite the present critique, radical phenomenology should not be summarily dismissed as irreducibly patriarchal; there is much here to be appreciated. Instead, the aim of the following chapters—particularly chapter 5—will be to work out a solution to the problem of sexual determinations and sexual difference from *within radical phenomenology*. But, before turning to this constructive project, Henry’s project will first be juxtaposed with Jean-Luc Marion’s novel take on radical phenomenology, which, although it borrows greatly from Henry’s phenomenology of the flesh, nevertheless develops an importantly distinct—though itself not unproblematic—account of sexuality and sexual difference.

²⁷⁰ Frédéric Seyler, “Is Radical Phenomenology too Radical?: Paradoxes of Michel Henry’s Phenomenology of Life” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* Vol. 27 No. 3 (2013), 285.

²⁷¹ Rivera, *The Contemplative Self After Michel Henry*, 9.

CHAPTER 3 - Jean-Luc Marion: The Saturated Flesh

Perhaps in the Parisian context, there can be no ultimate difference between radical and reactionary thinking.

Thomas J. J. Altizer

§I: A Phenomenology of Pure Givenness

A. Reduction, Givenness, and Receptivity

The term “radical phenomenology” is not spoken univocally. Rather, radical phenomenology marks a diverse range of approaches to phenomenology—certainly bound together by methodological overlap, common objects of interest, and similar general orientations—but nevertheless each offering unique nuances. As Simmons and Benson write, “there is value in viewing recent French phenomenology as a coherent and distinctive philosophical *family*. And, like all families, there are sure to be robust disagreement as well as underlying shared values and commitments.”¹ It will therefore be helpful to begin this chapter by articulating the unique character of Marion’s phenomenology, as well as the precise ways in which his approach to radical phenomenology differs from that embodied by Henry.²

¹ J. Aaron Simmons and Bruce Ellis Benson, *The New Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 4.

² For Marion’s most concise account of his reading of Henry, see: Jean-Luc Marion, *Figures de Phénoménologie: Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, Henry, Derrida* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2012), 95-115.

Henry employed a material phenomenology of radical interiority and pure self-affection in order to challenge the “ontological monism” of Husserl, Heidegger, and the preceding philosophical tradition. Marion’s radical phenomenology, on the other hand, is invested in a notion of *radical heterogeneity*. This account of heterogeneity is centered upon an account of phenomenological givenness; “Givenness,” Kevin Hart writes, “such is Marion’s *maître mot*.”³ Drawing upon the Husserlian notion of *gegebenheit* (translated into the French as *donation*), Marion seeks to offer an explicitly anti-constructivist reading of phenomenology. “The phenomenological method,” he argues in *Being Given*: “even when it constitutes phenomena, is limited to letting them manifest themselves. Constituting does not equal constructing or synthesizing, but rather giving-a-meaning, or more exactly, recognizing the meaning that the phenomenon itself gives from itself to itself.”⁴ For Marion, Husserl’s famous call to return to the “things themselves” [*Sache selbst*]⁵ must be understood as a comportment that permits the givenness of the phenomenon to manifest itself without condition or mediation. The role of the phenomenologist is to resist the perennial temptation of consciousness: the desire to circumscribe or control the phenomenon, to grasp or take it.

This comportment of radical receptivity manifests methodologically in Marion’s idiosyncratic reading of Husserl’s *Principle of Principles*:

Every primordial dator Intuition [“originally given intuition”] is a source of authority for knowledge, that whatever presents itself in ‘intuition’ in primordial

³ Kevin Hart, “Introduction” in Jean-Luc Marion, *The Essential Writings*, ed. Kevin Hart (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 38.

⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 9.

⁵ Edmund Husserl, *The Shorter Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay, ed. and abridged Dermot Moran (New York: Routledge, 2001), 88.

form (as it were in its bodily reality), is simply to be accepted as it gives itself out to be, though only within the limits in which it then presents itself.⁶

Counter to the most common interpretation of this principle, Marion does not see the Principle of Principles to have granted ultimate evidential priority to intuition as such. Rather, Marion identifies Husserl's persistent recourse to the language of givenness [*donation/gegebenheit*] throughout the rendering of the principle. It is not any intuition whatsoever that functions as an "authority for knowledge," but every "originally given intuition" [*originär gegebende Anschauung*]⁷—an originally given intuition that should be accepted *only* in regards to the way in which it "gives itself out to be" [*als was es sich gibt*]. Simply put, for Marion, "the phenomenological breakthrough consists neither in the broadening of intuition, nor in the autonomy of signification, but solely in the unconditional primacy of the givenness of the phenomenon."⁷

Marion first attempted to formulate this radical priority of givenness in his 1989 *Reduction and Givenness*. The difficulty staged by this text is one of phenomenological access. Every phenomenon manifests within a horizon of visibility that mediates the phenomenon, delimiting the precise conditions by which it might manifest itself. What is needed to bring the principle of principles into fruition—to draw forward the givenness of the phenomenon in its purity—Marion argues, is a methodology that would permit one to bypass these mediating conditions. This methodology, he insists, is the phenomenological reduction: "this is confirmed by a final twist. The 'principle of all principles' comes up before and without the reduction being operative. And yet, without the reduction, no procedure of knowledge deserves the title of 'phenomenology'."⁸

⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 43.

⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 32.

⁸ Marion, *Being Given*, 13. On the prior emergence of the "Principle of Principles" Marion here cites the fact that the principle is defined in §24 of *Ideas I*, whereas the reduction is not introduced until §30. Although, it is possible that

This reduction increasingly takes on the status of an unconditional demand, “without it, everything collapses.”⁹ As the reduction provides the means by which the phenomenologist can methodologically set aside or bracket any condition that would seek to mediate or delimit the givenness of the phenomenon, phenomenological givenness and the reduction therefore become entangled in a principle of proportionality: “as much reduction, as much givenness.”¹⁰

Yet, Marion is content neither with the Husserlian transcendental-phenomenological reduction nor with the Heideggerian existential reduction. Through neither articulation of the reduction, Marion argues, can the givenness of the phenomenon be directly accessed: “objectness (Husserl) and beingness (Heidegger) only offer specific and possible cases, but surely not the most legitimate ones, of the naming of givenness.”¹¹ Whereas the aim of the reduction is the removal of every mediator between the phenomenological investigator and the phenomenon, both the Husserlian and Heideggerian reductions reinstate mediating conditions of phenomenality. These delimiting horizons, Marion argues, do not truly permit the manifestation of the pure givenness of the phenomenon as it gives itself to be. Tackling each of these reductions in turn, Marion ultimately suggests that a new conception of the reduction will be necessary: a “third reduction” to givenness itself.

For the Husserl of *Ideas I*, the transcendental-phenomenological reduction provides the route out of the natural attitude and into the properly phenomenological attitude—unveiling the

Marion is also commenting upon Husserl’s lack of use of the reduction in the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*.

⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Rigor of Things: Conversations with Dan Arbib*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 73.

¹⁰ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 203.

¹¹ Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 78.

proper objects of phenomenological inquiry. In the mundane horizon of the natural attitude phenomena manifest within a “world spread out in space endlessly, and in time becoming and become without end”¹²—a world that “gives itself to me as something that exists out there.”¹³ Under the phenomenological reduction, this natural experience “undergoes a modification”¹⁴ wherein this “general thesis” (of the spatio-temporal existence of the world) is methodologically bracketed or set aside in order that the things themselves (“reduced phenomena”) might be brought to the fore. Yet, for Marion, the reduced phenomenon that is produced by the phenomenological reduction fails to exhibit its givenness without condition.

The horizon of this Husserlian reduced phenomenon is consciousness or transcendental subjectivity; which, as Heidegger notes, “is already presupposed [by Husserl] as the matter of philosophy.”¹⁵ The reduced phenomenon is “the phenomenon whose mode of Being is reduced by the reduction to what the primacy of consciousness imposes upon it.”¹⁶ What this consciousness imposes on the phenomenon is a particular mode of Being or phenomenality; “consciousness ... predetermines, in advance and in conformity with the prevalence of pure presence in it, the mode of Being of the phenomena: these give themselves as they appear only on condition of appearing in the mode that consciousness silently imposes on them.”¹⁷ This silent condition of phenomenality

¹² Husserl, *Ideas*, 51.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy,” in *On Time and Being* trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 63.

¹⁶ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 54. Or, in the words of Heidegger: “the transcendental reduction to absolute subjectivity gives and secures the possibility of grounding the objectivity of all objects (the Being of this being) in its valid structure and consistency, that is, in its constitution, in and through subjectivity.” Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy,” 63.

¹⁷ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 52.

is the requirement of objectivity, “every phenomenon that is not reduced to that [objective] presence is of itself excluded from phenomenality.”¹⁸ The reduced phenomenon, therefore, *is the object of consciousness*.

This limitation of givenness to the mode of Being particular to consciousness can be identified in a typical introduction to a phenomenological analysis in §15 of *Ideas II*:

*If we should touch on the thing itself, then it is required of us, assuming we wanted to grasp the essence of the thing and determine it conceptually, that we not be content with vague locutions and traditional philosophical preconceptions but instead draw from the very source of clear givenness. Thus we have to go back, as exemplary, to the consciousness in which things are given to us originally and so perfectly that we can be lacking nothing for grasping the universal essential form which prescribes the a priori rule for such objects.*¹⁹

For Marion, this reduction and its correlate reduced phenomena, fail to live into the radicality of the phenomenological impulse. Givenness has not been accessed in its purity, the “thing itself” has not been truly reached, because the horizon of the phenomenological reduction (the phenomenological attitude) still excludes those phenomena whose mode of givenness does not lend itself to objectification: “it thus excludes from givenness everything that does not let itself be led back to objectivity, namely the principal differences of ways of Being (of consciousness, of equipmentality, of the world).”²⁰

For Heidegger, the Husserlian reduction’s inability to approach the “originary givenness” of the phenomenon requires a radical reconceptualization of the phenomenological reduction and its correlate conception of the phenomenological self. This reorientation finds its clearest

¹⁸ Ibid., 56.

¹⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book, Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 37 [emphasis added].

²⁰ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 204.

formulation in a 1927 lecture course collected as *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, where Heidegger explicitly marks out the divergence between his own reduction—what Marion calls the “redoubled reduction”²¹—and the reduction as understood by Husserl.

For Husserl, phenomenological reduction, which he worked out for the first time expressly in the *Ideas Toward a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913), is the method of leading phenomenological vision from the natural attitude of the human being whose life is involved in the world of things and persons back to the transcendental life of consciousness and its noetic-noematic experiences, in which objects are constituted as correlates of consciousness. *For us*, phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological vision back from the apprehending of a being, whatever may be the character of that apprehension, to the understanding of the being of the being (projecting upon the way it is unconcealed).²²

For Heidegger, the role of the reduction was not to grant access to the consciousness of the phenomenon. More primordially, Heidegger aimed to grant access to the Being [*Sein*] of beings [*Seiendes*], and ultimately to grant access to Being [*Sein*] itself as a phenomenon. In this way, Heidegger seeks to radicalize an opening granted by the sixth *Logical Investigation*'s introduction of the categorial intuition of “Being.”²³ Phenomenology, for Heidegger, is that science which grants a unique access to Being. Phenomenology is the proper route to a fundamental ontology, that is, an attempt to grasp the meaning of Being itself.²⁴

²¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²² Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 21.

²³ See *Logical Investigations* §§44-45, where Husserl writes, for example, “it is in fact obvious from the start that, just as any other concept (or Idea, Specific Unity) can only ‘arise,’ i.e. become self-given to us, if based on an act which at least sets some individual instance of it imaginatively before our eyes, so the concept of Being can arise only when some being, actual or imaginary, is set before our eyes.” Husserl, *The Shorter Logical Investigations*, 347.

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 34.

Yet, as is already clear within the opening pages of *Being and Time*, a fundamental ontology will only be possible if approached from the perspective of *Dasein*—that peculiar entity who “in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it.”²⁵ *Dasein* is that being which essentially exists within a “world,” that being to whom the Being of beings primordially discloses itself.²⁶ Whereas traditional renderings of the Heideggerian substitution of *Dasein* for Husserlian transcendental subjectivity tend to highlight its “worldly”—its “being-in-the-world”—as opposed to the worldlessness of the pure Husserlian consciousness,²⁷ Marion instead privileges the theme of radical receptivity. *Dasein*, unlike transcendental consciousness, does not primarily constitute, but rather is that being who stands “in the truth of Being.”²⁸ This receptivity—in its distinction from the traditional Western “subject”—is highlighted with increasing clarity throughout Heidegger’s oeuvre: being particularly evident following his transition from the language of *Dasein* to the language of “the clearing” in the early 1930s. Heidegger’s comments in “The Origin of the Work of Art” are exemplary of this development:

In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing. Thought of in reference to beings, this clearing is more in being than are beings. This open center is therefore not surrounded by beings; rather, the clearing center itself encircles all that is. ... Beings can be as beings only if they stand within and stand out within what is cleared in this clearing. Only this clearing grants and guarantees

²⁵ Ibid., 32.

²⁶ “To *Dasein*, Being in a world is something that belongs essentially. Thus *Dasein*’s understanding of Being pertains with equal primordially both to an understanding of something like a ‘world,’ and to the understanding of the Being of those entities which become accessible within the world.” Ibid., 33.

²⁷ See, e.g.: “the most obvious sense of the rejection is the rejection of Husserl’s absolute, transcendental consciousness. For Heidegger, *Dasein* is always within-a-world, whereas for Husserl the transcendental must be outside the world.” Marion Tapper, “The Priority of Being or Consciousness for Phenomenology: Heidegger and Husserl” *Metaphilosophy* Vol. 17, No. 2/3 (April/July 1986), 154.

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism” in *Basic Writings*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 218.

to us humans a passage to those beings that we ourselves are not, and access to the being that we ourselves are.²⁹

For Heidegger, this receptive approach is more capable of manifesting phenomena in their originary givenness, because phenomena are not grasped or delimited by transcendental subjectivity: the truth of beings (phenomena) “is not a feature of correct propositions that are asserted of an ‘object’ by a human ‘subject’.”³⁰ Heidegger instead turns to a mystico-poetic³¹ language of radical receptivity. The true philosopher is that one who maintains a comportment of “letting-be” [*Gelassenheit*] towards beings: “to let beings be as the beings which they are—means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand.”³²

For Marion, this Heideggerian development of the reduction and the phenomenological self marks a decisive step forward in phenomenology’s aim to open itself to the manifestation of the phenomenon as it gives itself to be. But the receptivity of *Dasein* and the Heideggerian clearing nevertheless still fail to finish the return to pure givenness.³³ Like the Husserlian reduction, the Heideggerian reduction fails to manifest the givenness of the phenomenon without condition. While it recognizes the diversity of modes of Being among beings as well as the ontological

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” in *Basic Writings*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 178.

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth” in *Basic Writings*, trans. John Sallis, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 127.

³¹ This mystical character is highlighted by Heidegger’s use of the language of *gelassenheit* (releasement)—borrowed from the Medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhart—in his description of the comportment of letting-be. See: Martin Heidegger, “Memorial Address” in *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966). For a comprehensive treatment of Heidegger’s relation to Christian mysticism, see: John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1977).

³² Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth,” 125.

³³ For Marion’s account of the late Heidegger, as an advance toward, but nevertheless inability to reach the radical receptivity sought by Marion—a subject beyond the scope of the present investigation— see, e.g.: Marion, *Being Given*, 34-39.

difference between Being and beings, it nevertheless limits itself to that which “is.” The Heideggerian redoubled reduction “excludes therefore that which does not have to be, in particular the preliminary conditions of the ‘phenomenon of Being’ (boredom, claim, etc.).”³⁴ It is the aim of Marion to develop a still more radical conception of the reduction, a “third reduction” which might finally grant access to the givenness of the phenomenon without restriction.

Marion first sketches out the basic moves of the third reduction—what he will later designate the “erotic reduction”³⁵—in the concluding section of *Reduction and Givenness*. Under this third reduction, the phenomenon is not only reduced from the general thesis, but reduced from *every horizon of visibility*, every condition, every determination. Through this radical reduction, Marion attempts to grant access to the pure givenness of the phenomenon before it is constituted as an object (Husserl) or a being (Heidegger). Such a phenomenon is not bound by the strictures of the constituting subject: that which sculpts, grasps, or controls the phenomenon. As he will later write, “I reduce each thing to the given in it. And I know that I am performing this reduction correctly when I reach in each thing what I *cannot myself give to myself*.”³⁶ Instead, givenness is permitted to manifest as it gives itself to be: “phenomenality is not grasped: it is received.”³⁷

What Marion discovers through this third reduction is that the basic structure of givenness, insofar as it can be called a structure, is that of the gift or the call. The third reduction, he writes,

³⁴ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 204.

³⁵ Marion will shift from the “third reduction” to the language of the “erotic reduction” in 2003’s *The Erotic Phenomenon* (trans. Stephen E. Lewis [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007]), in order to mark a deep connection between givenness and the affectivity of desire and love. This language will be maintained in subsequent publications including, notably, *In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine* (trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012]).

³⁶ Marion, *In the Self’s Place*, 285.

³⁷ Marion, *Being Given*, 264.

is the reduction of “every claim to the pure form of the call.”³⁸ Within the purity of the call the phenomenon manifests itself, from itself, in its radical heterogeneity. “Givenness,” he writes, “goes farther than objectness and Being because it comes from farther away.”³⁹ In light of this radical heterogeneous account of phenomenological givenness, Marion is forced to reconceptualize the very nature of the phenomenological self: “the reduction of each and every thing to the given implies obviously that the ego, so reduced, is reduced first to the rank of given—first gift, absolute and without remainder, unconditioned and thoroughly so.”⁴⁰ Already in *Being Given*, Marion names this respondent “the gifted” (*l’adonné*).

While much of Marion’s early career was devoted to a recovery of Cartesian thought for the contemporary world,⁴¹ he nevertheless suggests that the *ego cogito* and its philosophical heirs remain trapped in the logic of subjectivity that would foreclose any access to the phenomenon as it gives itself. Against the Cartesian cogito and its philosophical descendants—which Marion will trace through Heideggerian *Dasein*⁴²—Marion develops the figure of “the gifted” as a figure of radical receptivity: a “successor to the ‘subject,’ ... [that] receives itself entirely from what it receives.”⁴³ In a series of passages that belie the influence of the Levinasian priority of the

³⁸ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 196.

³⁹ Marion, *Being Given*, 39.

⁴⁰ Marion, *In the Self’s Place*, 286.

⁴¹ See: Jean-Luc Marion, *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jean-Luc Marion, *Descartes’ Grey Ontology: Cartesian Science and Aristotelian Thought in the Regulae* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, Forthcoming); Jean-Luc Marion, *Descartes’ White Theology* (South Bend: Saint Augustine’s Press, Forthcoming).

⁴² Marion, *Being Given*, 261.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 268.

encounter with the Other,⁴⁴ as well as Jean-Louis Chrétien's account of the call and the response,⁴⁵ Marion contends that the phenomenological subject does not function as the ultimate condition of possibility for the manifestation of phenomena. In a reversal of this traditional constructivist account, Marion insists to the contrary that the gifted is born in its response to a counter-intentionality: that which "sees me first, because it takes the initiative."⁴⁶ In this ultimate act of receptivity, "the call gives me to myself ... the I is only insofar as the call has always already claimed and therefore given to itself something like a *myself/me*."⁴⁷ To use Marion's grammatical language, the self discovered by this radical phenomenology is a self in the dative.⁴⁸

Against the impulse to control or grasp, the gifted manifests as a "filter or prism,"⁴⁹ a mere screen upon which givenness projects itself. "The receiver therefore does not only receive what gives itself," Marion suggests, "it allows the given to show itself insofar as it gives itself."⁵⁰ This passivity or receptivity grants activity, construction, and constitution merely penultimate roles in

⁴⁴ See, in particular, Levinas' two central volumes: Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969); Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981). This influence granted, Marion will nevertheless insist upon a distinction between his conception of the self and Levinas': "The ego does not even accede to itself *for* an other (Levinas) or *as* an other (Ricoeur); rather, it becomes itself only *by* an other—in other words by a gift: for everything happens, without exception, as and by a gift." Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 285.

⁴⁵ See, e.g.: Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 116.

⁴⁷ Marion, *Being Given*, 270.

⁴⁸ On this point, see: Ian Leask, "The Dative Subject (and the 'Principle of Principles')" in *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, eds. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 182-189.

⁴⁹ Marion, *Being Given*, 264.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

the self. The gifted is preceded by a heterogenous givenness that it does not ground; it is always already a respondent, is always anticipated by an Other that precedes it and calls it into itself.⁵¹

B. Radical Phenomenologies

Throughout this reconsideration of phenomenology, Marion consistently marks Henry as a profound philosophical inspiration. As he writes in the preface to *Reduction and Givenness*, “I would like to say to Michel Henry how much his faithful friendship and his example of philosophical probity have sustained me.”⁵² Nevertheless, as should be increasingly apparent, the two phenomenologists are marked by deep differences. Whereas Henry’s emphasis upon auto-affective self-givenness results from an attempt to access the manifestation of life before all transcendence and exteriority, Marion’s more Levinasian-inflected phenomenology remains committed to a strong notion of otherness, a hetero-givenness that precedes any self. This obvious discrepancy appears to suggest an almost oppositional relation between the philosophers. But the reality requires a more nuanced analysis that can best be engaged through the debate surrounding *Reduction and Givenness* and the “fourth principle.”

In “The Four Principles of Phenomenology,” Henry places Marion’s principle—“as much reduction, as much givenness”—into conversation with three phenomenological principles outlined by Husserl and Heidegger: “so much appearance, so much being,” “the principle of principles,” and “to the things themselves!” Although Marion’s principle significantly postdates these earlier principles, not emerging until 1989, Henry suggests that “its importance hits upon the entirety of phenomenological development,” where it functions, “as a hidden presupposition that

⁵¹ Marion, *Being Given*, 273.

⁵² Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, xi.

is always already at work.”⁵³ Each of the first three principles, Henry suggests, contain indeterminate or ambiguous premises. These ambiguous premises—regarding the relation between appearance and Being, realism and idealism, and so forth—call into question the very status and possibility of phenomenology. Marion’s fourth principle on the other hand, through its clear grounding of phenomenality in givenness, provides a much needed clarification of the phenomenological project. For Henry, the recognition of this principle—and its correlate “third reduction” to the absolute givenness of the phenomenon—provides an essential tool in the return to the radical promise of phenomenology: the access to “objects in their How [*Wie*].”⁵⁴

In a key footnote to *Being Given*, Marion returns the favor, suggesting that his own turn to phenomenological givenness finds a key predecessor in Henry’s *Material Phenomenology*. To cite the passage in full:

I introduced this formulation [as much reduction, as much givenness] in the conclusion of *Réduction et donation*. It goes without saying that I would not dare elevate it to the rank of principle of phenomenology if Michel Henry had not validated it in his commentary (“Les quatre principes de la phénoménologie,” pp. 3 and 26). In fact, one could also refer to Michel Henry himself if one wanted to acknowledge the principal role of givenness: “Because [ipseity] belongs, inasmuch as its self-givenness, to all givenness whatsoever ... , any being can have in this givenness, and through it alone, as phenomenon, a ‘self’” (*Phénoménologie matérielle* [Paris, 1990], p. 74).⁵⁵

What Marion identifies in Henry is an account of phenomenology that privileges givenness over intuition. “Without going so far as to speak of ‘murder’,” Marion writes, in reference to Henry’s critique of intuition, “one can certainly speak of a *betrayal* of phenomenality by intuition. By

⁵³ Michel Henry, “The four principles of phenomenology,” trans. Joseph Rivera and George E. Faithful, *Continental Philosophy Review* 48 (2015): 1-21, 2.

⁵⁴ Edmund Husserl, *On the phenomenology of the consciousness of internal time* (1893–1917), trans. John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht and London: Kluwer Academic, 1991), 121.

⁵⁵ Marion, *Being Given*, 330.

serving it and displaying its dignity, intuition lowers phenomenality to the status of mere fulfillment of the intentional aim at an object.”⁵⁶ Simply put, for both Henry and Marion, intuition finds its justification in givenness and not vice versa. As Henry writes in *Material Phenomenology*, “the second givenness, which is the ek-static givenness in the perception of the now [intuition], presupposes the first non-ek-static givenness in affectivity, ... the second givenness presupposes its realization elsewhere in the affectivity and impressionality.”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, this ostensible commonality is undermined by marked differences in Henry and Marion’s respective accounts of givenness itself. These differences are already apparent in Henry’s analysis of *Reduction and Givenness*.

While Henry commends Marion’s fourth principle as a step beyond Husserl and Heidegger, it is nevertheless the case, as Marion notes, that ultimately, “none of these four formulations receive Henry’s endorsement.”⁵⁸ For Henry, while Marion’s principle makes a decisive step forward, by relativizing both *Dasein* and the transcendental Ego, it nevertheless fails to enact the total return to genuine immanence promised by the phenomenological project. Marion thinks givenness through the structure of the call and response. By maintaining this structure of the call and response, Henry argues, Marion’s phenomenology of givenness remains trapped within the very transcendent horizon of visibility that it seeks to escape. Even if Marion succeeds in overcoming the specific transcendent conditions of phenomenality in Husserl (consciousness) and

⁵⁶ Ibid. See, also: “For Henry, however, this amounts to ‘murder.’ The murder of what? Of everything that such a definition of phenomenality through intuition excludes. For intuition is meaningful only insofar as it functions to fill intentionality, because, since Kant, its task has been to give, as contrasted with the concept, which would remain empty without it. Therefore, it has value only insofar as it relates to the concept. The giving intuition is in play only in and for the concept, which implies, in Husserlian language, that its fulfilment concerns and makes use only of intentionality.” Jean-Luc Marion, “The Reduction and ‘The Fourth Principle’,” trans. Daniel Gillis, *Analecta Hermeneutica* 8 (2016): 41-63, 45.

⁵⁷ Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 25.

⁵⁸ Marion, “The Reduction and ‘The Fourth Principle’,” 43.

Heidegger (Being), he nevertheless continues to think phenomenality through the most basic conditioning structure of the transcendent horizon of visibility: the distance or gap that Henry names the world. “The structure of the call borrows this disposition from an established mode of appearing, a mode in which opposition is constitutive of phenomenality,” Henry argues, “and this established mode is precisely that of the world.”⁵⁹ Rather than escaping the oppositional manifestation of the horizon of visibility, the call and the response reproduces this dualistic structure.

For Henry, this third reduction to the givenness of the call is insufficiently reductive—it, like its predecessors, fails to permit givenness to give itself in its most primordial manifestation.⁶⁰ What is necessitated, Henry argues, is a radical reduction to the self-affectivity of life. In order to escape every horizon of visibility that would condition the givenness of the given, Marion must collapse the call and the response into a single dimension. That which is given must give nothing but itself, and it must give it to nothing other than itself. Such a givenness can only be found in the immanence of life’s self-affectivity.

Only a reduction that goes all the way to the end of its capacity of reducing, that suspends the ek-static dimension of visibility in which every conceivable giving intuition and evidence itself flow, and that suspends all possible showing, can discover the original givenness, the givenness that by giving life to itself, gives to it to be life.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Henry, “The four principles of phenomenology,” 18. And again: “the pair Call/ Response is substituted for the classic dichotomy of Subject/Object...it only reverses a relation conceived in both cases as constitutive of phenomenality, as preserving it. Far from escaping from the call of Being and from its implicit phenomenology, the structure of the call refers to Being and receives its own ‘structure’ from it: the opposition of Ek-stasis.” Ibid., 18-19.

⁶⁰ For an analysis of Henry and Marion’s distinct conceptions of the “radical reduction” throughout this debate, see: Blandinne Lagrut, “Deux réductions radicales? Le principe ‘autant de réduction, autant de donation’ chez Jean-Luc Marion et Michel Henry,” in *La vie et les vivants: (re)lire Michel Henry*, eds. Grégori Jean et al (Louvain: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2013).

⁶¹ Ibid., 11.

Marion's full response to this critique would not appear for over two decades, with the 2015 publication of "The Reduction and 'The Fourth Principle'." Here, Marion identifies the core of Henry's argument as a key presupposition: "that ecstasy, or a distance and gap, separates the call and the response essentially."⁶² For Henry, the call and response necessarily reproduces the gap or distance of ekstasis because it is part of the eidetic structure of the call that it might *not* be answered. Insofar as there remains a possibility of rejecting the call, there is no total unity of that which is given and that which receives. This critique can be clarified through a comparison with Henry's account of the inescapable manifestation of life. Life cannot be rejected (without the self-destruction of suicide) because there is no gap between that which is given and that which receives.

As Henry writes in *Barbarism*:

Getting rid of oneself or denying oneself, however, is what neither suffering nor life can do. ... As the phenomenological actualization of auto-affection in the primal Suffering and as a radical and insurmountable passivity of life with respect to itself, they are absolutely linked to pathos. This link cannot be disconnected. To try to break this link is in some way to increase its infrangibility: to experience it more strongly. ... Life runs up against an insurmountable failure in its desire to get rid of oneself.⁶³

For Henry, it is not possible to have a total immanence, if there remains a gap or fissure that would permit the rejection or affirmation of the given. It is this fundamental presupposition that Marion challenges.

Marion's response takes the form of a paradox. On the one hand, the call is "always already given, but not yet phenomenized."⁶⁴ Within the register of givenness, the call precedes the response. But, at the same time, the response is "first phenomenized but always after the fact."⁶⁵

⁶² Marion, "The Reduction and the 'Fourth Principle'," 50.

⁶³ Michel Henry, *Barbarism*, trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2012), 71.

⁶⁴ Marion, "The Reduction and the 'Fourth Principle'," 51.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Within the phenomenal register, the response precedes the call. This ostensible paradox can be dissolved, because givenness is not beholden to the ekstastic temporality of the world: “the relation between the call and response cannot be conceived according to a simple chronological succession (physical, worldly), since their relation does not make use of the ecstatic gap of intentionality.”⁶⁶ Manifesting outside of the ekstastic horizon of visibility, the result is a simultaneity of call and response.

Phenomenologically there is no I (above all no transcendental I) who precedes the call, who anticipates it like an intentional consciousness anticipates its object. The addressee of the call is born at the same time as the call, is awakened by this call and bursts forth out of the depths of their own absence. He who is awoken therefore undeniably hears the call at the very moment of the response (the awakening), to the point that he reconstitutes the call by the response that he brings to it, even after it.⁶⁷

The gifted receives itself from the call of givenness and *simultaneously* brings this call into the light of phenomenal visibility. Unbound by the temporality of any intentional horizon, the call and the response are not reducible to an oppositional duality of ekstastic phenomenality.

The result, for Marion, is not only that he is able to step around Henry’s critique, but more strongly, that he is able to ground the very possibility of Henry’s material phenomenology. “Not only,” he writes, “does the fourth principle (and its corollary in the structure of the call and response) not fall under the weight of Henry’s critique since it does not assume ecstatic phenomenality, but it might alone allow for the non-ecstatic phenomenality of ‘life’ to be conceived.”⁶⁸ Henry’s dualistic phenomenological ontology presupposes a seemingly

⁶⁶ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 52.

unbridgeable heterogeneity between “the truth according to the world” and the “truth of life.” Nevertheless, this relation is also conceived as a relationship of grounding, wherein the non-ekstatic phenomenality of affectivity is presumed to ground ekstatic phenomenality. But, the precise means or mechanism by which the division between these heterogenous regions can be breached remains problematically unclarified.⁶⁹ With the fourth principle and the conception of givenness as a call, Marion believes himself to have discovered a means of articulating the self-givenness of affectivity that does not detach it from the mundane phenomenality of the world.

[The fourth principle] allows us, or at least does not prohibit us from also clarifying self-affection as an extreme case, but one that coheres with others, with phenomenality in general, without having to divide phenomenality into two regions and into two incompatible phenomenologies: understood through the call, the response, and the gifted, the “embrace” of life could also extend to worldly figures of phenomenality and take account of them as a number of variations, more and more distant and doubtless ecstatic, of that which it first establishes, but not exclusively, as immanent unfurlings of originary givenness.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ As Marion cites in a footnote (Ibid., 52), for example: “With what right does this second phenomenality, second in presentation but in reality the only true and originary phenomenality—the first being a catastrophic aberration and turning-away from the second—call itself phenomenal, since it has no outside, no phainesthai, no shining, no spark, no face or appearance, neither Schein nor Erscheinung?” Michel Haar, “Michel Henry: entre phénoménologie et métaphysique,” in *Lectures de Michel Henry. Enjeux et perspectives*, eds. Grégori Jean and Jean Leclercq [Louvain: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2014], 49 [translation by Daniel Gillis]. One might also point to Jean-François Lavigne’s argument: “There is a double paradox in Henry’s concept of transcendence. The first paradox is that, although he needs to save and employ the basic distinction between ‘transcendence’ and ‘immanence’, relying on the classical opposition between an ‘inner’ life and an ‘outward’ reality, or between consciousness and the ‘outside’ world, he aims at the same time, through his radical phenomenological procedure, at overcoming these oppositions, and cannot but reduce and blend the two dimensions into a homogeneous and continuous originary element of subjective (affective) events. But behind this very obvious paradox lies another one: in order to prevent his thinking from falling into this ontological confusion—a confusion which threatens both to cancel out the very phenomenological and fundamental difference between life and world, and to maintain a radical opposition between the two realms—he would need to free himself from his double Heideggerian heritage (the traditional horizontal-ekstatic determination of *Transzendenz*), as well as from the identification of being with the appearance of being. Such an emancipation would imply the recognition of two dimensions of absolute transcendence, both at the ontological level of what appears as a ‘resisting continuum’ in worldly reality, and as the ultimate principle of immanent life itself. The striking fact is that, whereas Henry seems to acknowledge the independent existence of real material bodies in the world, he always refuses to go as far as to admit the idea of a transcendent reality as such.” Jean-François Lavigne, “The Paradox and Limits of Michel Henry’s Concept of Transcendence,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, n. 3 (2009): 377–388, 386.

⁷⁰ Marion, “The Reduction and the ‘Fourth Principle’,” 54.

Under Marion's analysis, self-affectivity constitutes the limit case of phenomenality. But this phenomenon, like all phenomena whatsoever, remains subordinated to the conditions of givenness more broadly construed.

This analysis of the relationship between Henry and Marion is key to the foregoing discussion, because, as we will see, Marion's account of the flesh is drawn almost directly out of Henry's thought. As Christina Gschwandtner notes:

Although Marion does interact with Romano on the saturated phenomenon of the event, with various painters and their writings in regard to the phenomenon of the idol, and with Levinas in regard to the phenomenon of the icon, his reliance on Michel Henry's phenomenology for the phenomenon of the flesh is much more extensive. Marion basically adopts Henry's account of the self-affectation of the flesh and merely illustrates how it can be understood as a saturated phenomenon of relation.⁷¹

Nevertheless, as we will see, whereas for Henry the flesh stands at the very ground of phenomenality itself, for Marion, the self-givenness of the flesh is simply one example of a limit phenomenon among others. Marion designates these limit cases: "saturated phenomena."

§II: Flesh: The Saturation of Relation

A. The Saturated Phenomenon

Although Marion proffers a sharp critique of the primacy of intuition, privileging instead the pure givenness of the phenomenon, intuition is by no means excised from Marion's account of phenomenology. Intuition is, in fact, recognized as a privileged form of givenness: "intuition

⁷¹ Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 95.

always gives,” Marion insists, “in it and in it alone, it is a matter of giving what shows itself.”⁷² Due to this privileged status, intuition is granted a central role in what might be regarded as Jean-Luc Marion’s most significant contribution to phenomenology: the “saturated phenomenon.”

Under the name saturated phenomenon, Marion does not seek to inaugurate a radical break within phenomenology, but rather to develop “one of the possibilities that is by right already inscribed within the commonly accepted definition of the phenomenon.”⁷³ This commonly accepted definition is that proposed by Edmund Husserl and Immanuel Kant, wherein the phenomenon is constituted by two autonomous factors: the concept (Kant) or intentionality (Husserl) on the one hand, and intuition (Kant and Husserl) on the other.⁷⁴

In the common or mundane phenomenon, the concept/signifier/intention (Marion will often use these three interchangeably) exceeds the intuitive givenness. “The realm of meaning,” Husserl writes, is “much wider than that of intuition.”⁷⁵ My concept of Boston, for example, always exceeds my various intuitions of Boston in such a manner that even while I continually enrich and clarify this concept through new intuitions—I discover this new pub, that new alleyway, this new overlook, etc.—these new intuitions remain subsumed under a single concept or intention

⁷² Marion, *Being Given*, 198.

⁷³ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Banality of Saturation” in *The Essential Writings*, ed. Kevin Hart (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 135.

⁷⁴ The conflation of Kantian and Husserlian accounts of phenomenality—that Marion describes as “convergent in the essentials” (Jean-Luc Marion, *Negative Certainties*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015], 52) risks obvious equivocations, as has been noted by critical readings. MacKinlay, for example, suggests that “Marion’s argument depends on taking key Husserlian terms (‘intention,’ ‘intuition,’ ‘signification,’ ‘adequation’) and interpreting them in the context of Kant’s understanding of the relation between intuition and concepts. The problematic nature of this interpretation prevents Marion from successfully establishing the concept of saturated phenomena in terms of an excess of Husserlian intuition over intention.” Shane MacKinley, *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 74.

⁷⁵ Husserl, *The Shorter Logical Investigations*, 369.

(“Boston”). The exact proportion of this intuition/intention relationship is not static; rather, it remains essentially—that is, eidetically—variable; “givenness,” Marion writes, “admits of degrees.”⁷⁶ The phenomenon might manifest with the clarity of substantial givenness (fulfillment), with the unclearness of empty (unfulfilled) intentionality, or it might pass from one extreme to the other over time. I may find myself moving to a new city (Pittsburgh, for example), where my intuition remains relatively empty or unfulfilled. But over a number of years, as I explore the city to a continually greater extent, my concept attains ever increasing levels of intuitive fulfillment—passing from near-emptiness to substantial intuitive givenness.

For Husserl, mundane phenomena are generally perched between the two extremes of complete emptiness and total fulfillment (adequate givenness): the “zero-limit is obscurity, [and] the unity-limit is full clearness.”⁷⁷ In the case of empty intentionality, the intentional ray finds no intuitive givenness. Such a case does not even result in the constitution of an object, properly understood: “the phase of givenness is not reached at all. Consciousness ... intuits no longer, in the strict sense it no longer ‘gives objects’ at all.”⁷⁸ At the other extreme is the idea of the adequately given phenomenon. In such an instance, a phenomenon would be given with a full clarity, “which ‘excludes otherness’.”⁷⁹ Such an adequate givenness is a relatively infrequent experience—one which is limited to eidetic phenomena. Such “adequation,” Marion writes, “can never be realized, or at least only rarely.”⁸⁰ The majority of phenomena, including all transcendent

⁷⁶ Marion, *Being Given*, 25.

⁷⁷ Husserl, *Ideas*, 131.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁸⁰ Marion, *Being Given*, 191.

phenomena, are not even *in principle* open to adequate fulfillment.⁸¹ Rather, for such phenomena adequate givenness is an “idea (in the Kantian sense),”⁸² an ideal possibility that can only be approached asymptotically, but never fully achieved. The most direct case of this restriction is the perceptual act, wherein it is impossible to view an object from every possible perspective simultaneously, thereby necessarily producing gaps of intuitive lack.⁸³

For Marion, this account of phenomena suggests a possibility that is never explored in Husserl’s analyses. Whereas, in the empty intention no intuitive fulfillment is granted, and in the mundane phenomenon partial or adequate intuitive fulfillment is granted, what, Marion asks, would happen if intuition were to exceed intentionality? Or, in his own words:

To the phenomenon characterized most often by lack or poverty of intuition (a deception of the intentional aim), indeed, exceptionally, by the mere equality of intuition and intention, why wouldn’t there correspond the possibility of a phenomenon where intuition would give more, indeed immeasurably more, than the intention would ever have aimed at or foreseen.⁸⁴

It is the aim of his analyses of the saturated phenomenon to perform an eidetic analysis of precisely this phenomenological possibility.

Although it is absent from Husserl’s analyses, Marion does find a partial antecedent to the saturated phenomenon in Kant’s notion of the *aesthetic idea*. “It is Kant himself—the thinker of the intuitive shortage of the common phenomenon—who had a foretaste of what I call a saturated

⁸¹ “There are objects—and all transcendent objects, all ‘realities’ (*Realitäten*) which are included under the rubric of Nature of World are here included—which cannot be given with complete determinacy and with similarly complete intuitability in any limited finite consciousness.” Husserl, *Ideas*, 299.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Nevertheless, the same also holds true for certain eidetic phenomena: “it belongs to the type of development peculiar to certain categories of essential being that essences belonging to them can be given only ‘one-sidedly,’ whilst in succession more ‘sides,’ though never ‘all sides’.” *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸⁴ Marion, *Being Given*, 197.

phenomenon.”⁸⁵ Unlike the idea of pure reason—wherein knowledge is not granted and an object cannot be truly constituted, because of a total lack of intuitive givenness—the aesthetic idea marks a representation of intuition itself, a case wherein an object cannot be constituted not because intuition lacks, but because no concept measures up to the excess of intuition. In Kant’s words:

By an aesthetic idea, however, I mean that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible.⁸⁶

The aesthetic idea is presented by Kant as the inverse of the idea of reason: the aesthetic idea “is the counterpart (pendant) of an idea of reason, which is, conversely, a concept to which no intuition (representation of the imagination) can be adequate.”⁸⁷ In this regard, Kant has outlined three categories of phenomena:⁸⁸

1.) *Object*: a phenomenon in which intuition and concept coincide either partially or fully. This corresponds to phenomenology’s *mundane phenomenon* and

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 192.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Although inverted, these two are not strictly speaking “opposites.” Rather, as suggested by the language of “counterpart,” Kant understands the aesthetic idea as an imaginative supplement for the intuitive lack generated in the idea of reason. “[Aesthetic ideas] strive toward something lying beyond the bounds of experience, and thus seek to approximate a presentation of concepts of reason (of intellectual ideas)” (Ibid.). As Gilles Deleuze describes this relationship, “The Idea of reason goes beyond experience, either because there is no object which corresponds to it in nature (for example, invisible beings) or because it makes a simple phenomenon of nature into a spiritual event (death, love...). The Idea of reason thus contains something inexpressible. But the aesthetic Idea goes beyond all concepts because it create the intuition of a nature other than that which is given to us: another nature whose phenomena would be true spiritual events, and whose events of the spirit, immediate natural determinations. It ‘gives food for thought,’ it forces one to think. The aesthetic Idea is really the same thing as the rational Idea: it expresses what is inexpressible in the latter.” Gilles Deleuze, *Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Continuum Books, 2008), 47-48.

⁸⁸ The following table, with minor variations, summarizes that found in Marion, *Being Given*, 221-233 and later expanded in Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 194-200. This table is particularly important as it highlights the rigor that Marion seeks to bring to the notion of saturation. As he writes, “the saturated phenomenon must not be understood as a limit case, an exceptional, vaguely irrational, in short, a ‘mystical,’ case of phenomenality. On the contrary, it indicates the coherent and conceptual completion of the most operative definition of the phenomenon: it alone truly appears as itself, of itself, and starting from itself.” Jean-Luc Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon” trans. Thomas A. Carlson, in Dominique Janicaud (ed), *Phenomenology and the ‘Theological Turn’: The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 212.

adequate phenomenon, respectively.

2.) *The idea of reason*: a phenomenon in which intuition is completely lacking. This corresponds to phenomenology's *empty intention*.

3.) *The aesthetic idea*: a phenomenon in which intuition exceeds every possible concept. This possibility is found nowhere in traditional phenomenology, and it is this possibility that Marion seeks to develop as the *saturated phenomenon*.

What Marion draws from the aesthetic idea is the possibility of a saturation not only of intuition, but ultimately of givenness, “since according to Kant (and, for the most part, Husserl) intuition always gives.”⁸⁹ In the aesthetic idea an object cannot be truly rendered, but not due to an absence of givenness. On the contrary, within the aesthetic idea conceptuality finds itself overwhelmed by an excess of givenness: “intuition is no longer exposed in the concept; it saturates it and renders it overexposed—invisible, unreadable not by lack, but indeed by an excess of light.”⁹⁰

This Kantian precedent is essential for understanding the saturated phenomenon, as it decisively determines Marion's subsequent eidetic analysis of saturation. For Marion, saturation's excessive givenness not only exceeds or bypasses conceptuality, but overwhelms the very horizon of conceptuality itself, epitomized by the Kantian categories of the understanding.⁹¹ Thus, it is not only the case that the saturated phenomenon eludes conceptuality, but, more directly, that it

⁸⁹ Marion, *Being Given*, 198.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Marion's assertion—that the categories of understanding constitute a horizon of phenomenality—is supported by the particular role granted to the categories in both the first and second editions of the *First Critique*. There, according to Guyer, a category is understood as “a concept of an object, or more precisely a general feature of any determinate concept of an object, which allows the application of a judgment to that object” (Paul Guyer, “The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 129). This judgment permits the manifold of intuition to be brought to representation. “The manifold in a given intuition,” Kant rights, “also necessarily stands under the categories” which perform “the logical function for bringing the manifold under a concept.” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 252 [B153], 344 [A245]). Having subsumed the intuition under a concept, the intuition is able to attain proper representation and thus manifest as a cognition, rather than as a mere “blind” intuition (*Ibid.*, 193, [A51/B75]).

actively inverts these Kantian categories.⁹² Marion therefore writes:

I will sketch a description of the saturated phenomenon by following the lead of the categories of the understanding defined by Kant. The saturated phenomenon exceeds these categories (as well as principles), since in it intuition passes beyond the concept. *I will therefore follow them by inverting them.* The saturated phenomenon will be described as invisible according to quantity, unbearable according to quality, absolute according to relation, irregardable according to modality.⁹³

It is here that the necessity of the third reduction is brought to fruition. Having overwhelmed the categories of the understanding, the saturated phenomenon manifests outside of any possible horizon which would delimit or predetermine its phenomenality; saturation is givenness given in its purity. Such a phenomenon, Marion writes, “is freed because it does not depend on any horizon. In every case, it does not depend on this condition of possibility par excellence—a horizon, whatever it may be. I therefore call it an unconditioned phenomenon.”⁹⁴

Taking each of the four Kantian categories in turn—quantity, quality, relation, and modality—Marion develops four “types” of saturated phenomena. For the saturation of quantity, Marion marks *the event*; for quality, *the idol*; for relation, *the flesh*; for modality, *the icon*.⁹⁵ To these four Marion also appends a fifth form wherein all four categories are simultaneously

⁹² The motivation and justification for Marion’s choice to determine the phenomenality of saturation through an inversion of the Kantian categories remains obscure. As MacKinley writes, “Marion simply announces this choice without introduction or explanation.” McKinley, *Interpreting Excess*, 236 n.25.

⁹³ Marion, *Being Given*, 199 [emphasis added].

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁹⁵ Just as Marion’s justification for the use of the categories of the understanding is unclear, it is likewise unexplained why saturated phenomenality should result in the saturation of a single category, rather than the saturation of every category. If the saturated phenomenon overwhelms the horizon of conceptuality, then it is unclear why every case of saturated phenomenality isn’t “revelation.” Moreover, it has been suggested that Marion’s attempts to “invert” these categories often appears forced or contrived. As MacKinley argues, “this lack of correspondence is particularly evident in the case of saturation according to modality. . . . Saturation according to modality corresponds so poorly to Kant’s table of categories that it might be better understood as a different aspect of saturation in general, rather than as a distinct type of saturation.” MacKinley, *Interpreting Excess*, 236 n. 26.

saturated, a redoubled saturation or “saturation of saturation”: *revelation*. An examination of all five of these types of saturation is certainly beyond the scope or aim of the present investigation.⁹⁶ Rather, focus will be reserved for the third mode of saturation, the flesh, the saturation of relation. For, it is through the flesh that Marion will introduce his deepest examinations of the body and its relation to the erotic and the sexual.

B. The Saturation of Relation

Jean-Luc Marion’s account of body stands directly within the phenomenological tradition that we have traced from Husserl to Henry. Like his French antecedents, Marion institutes a primary distinction between the body understood as an objective phenomenon within the visibility of the world and the lived experience of the body. Drawing upon the language popularized by Didier Franck and Michel Henry,⁹⁷ Marion designates the objective manifestation of the body as “body” (*le corps*) and the lived or subjective manifestation of the body as the “flesh” (*la chair*). For Marion, as for his predecessors, the “objective body” (*le corps*) is an object of knowledge; it can be touched, dissected, and most importantly, gazed upon. The flesh (*la chair*), on the other hand, is never seen; it is rather the capacity of sensibility as such. Whereas the body is seen and touched, the flesh sees and touches.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ For close examinations of these five types of saturation see: Marion, *Being Given*, 228-241; Marion, *In Excess*; MacKinley, *Interpreting Excess*; Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*; Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (eds.), *Givenness and God*, chs. 4, 8.

⁹⁷ See: Didier Franck, *Flesh and Body: On the Phenomenology of Husserl*, trans. Joseph Rivera and Scott Davidson (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, trans. Karl Hefty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015).

⁹⁸ Husserl will mark this as the “double sensation” of touch. To borrow one of his favorite examples, when one uses their left hand to touch their right (or vice versa), their touched hand is not only felt (the body, *le corps*) but at the same moment feels itself being touched (the flesh, *la chair*). As Franck writes, explicating this example, “what is important here is the self-relation of touch, the endless exchange between the organ and the object in which they can no longer be distinguished from one another. If touch is privileged, it is due to this double ‘sensation’. What touches is also touched.” Didier Franck, *Flesh and Body*, 82.

Marion writes very little about the objective manifestation of the body. Nevertheless, given the Henrian pedigree of his analyses, it can be construed that the body is constituted as an object within the horizon of visibility. It is therefore bound by the conditions of objectivity: the body in its objectivity remains like “the bodies of the world[, which] are objects of sense (sentient as feel-able) but themselves feel nothing (insentient as non-feeling).”⁹⁹ As a poor or mundane phenomenon, the body’s intentionality essentially exceeds its intuitive fulfillment. Marion’s analyses instead primarily focus on the flesh. The flesh, unlike the body, exceeds the horizon of objectivity; it is a saturated phenomenon.¹⁰⁰

Because Marion thinks the flesh through a saturation of the category of relation, it will be helpful to begin with relation in its standard function. In “The Analytic of Concepts,” Kant “systematically generate[s]”¹⁰¹ the categories of the understanding through an examination of the

⁹⁹ Marion, *In Excess*, 84.

¹⁰⁰ It is worth marking a divergence between Henry and Marion’s respective accounts of the flesh at this point. Whereas Henry grants the flesh a foundational position within phenomenality, the condition of possibility for any phenomenality whatsoever, Marion seems to mark the flesh as merely one type of saturated phenomenality. In *The Ego and the Flesh*, Jacob Rogozinski follows Henry and challenges this subsumption of the flesh into the broader category of saturation: “at first glance, self-givenness of the ego could come from a phenomenology of givenness, such as the one elaborated by Jean-Luc Marion in *Being Given*, ... But immanent self-givenness is not just one ‘case’ among others of givenness in general; it radically differentiates itself from other modes of givenness that open to or could be subordinate to a transcendence. I am not sure that the phenomenology of givenness and of the ‘saturated phenomenon’ takes account of this difference.” Jacob Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh: an Introduction to Egoanalysis*, trans. Robert Vallier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 325 n. 3. Nevertheless, in the later “Faith and Reason,” Marion appears to waver on the relationship between the flesh and other phenomena, ostensibly shifting towards Henry’s position and granting the flesh a transcendental relationship to other forms of saturation, writing: “only the flesh reaches nonobjective phenomena, those where an excess of intuition saturates the limits of the concept already known and always foreseen. ... The flesh exposes me to what the ‘I’ cannot constitute as an object. It surpasses my objectifying rationality.” Jean-Luc Marion, “Faith and Reason” in *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 8.

¹⁰¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 212 (A80/B106). “There arise exactly as many pure concepts of the understanding, which apply to objects of intuition in general *a priori*, as there were logical functions of all possible judgments in the previous table: for the understanding is completely exhausted and its capacity entirely measured by these functions.” *Ibid.*, 212 (A79/B105). According to Guyer, “His idea appears to be that since a judgment expresses a certain relation among its component representations ... the object of the judgment must be represented as having parts or aspects represented by those syntactically distinct components of the judgment.” Guyer, “The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories,” 129.

table of all possible forms of judgment. The twelve judgments determined to be comprehensive are organized into four titles, each of which includes three moments. The third of these titles, Relation, includes three varieties of judgment: categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive. What unites these three categories under the title of “Relation” is their association of two or more members: “in the first kind of judgment ... two concepts are considered to be in relation to each other, in the second, two judgments, and in the third, several judgments.”¹⁰² From these judgments, Kant derives three categories of relation: Inherence or Subsistence, Causality or Dependence, and Community. In the first instance one object is subordinated to another, in the second, one object temporally succeeds another, and in the third—whose connection to its related judgment (disjunction) Kant himself admits “is not as obvious as in the other cases”¹⁰³—a number of objects are related “reciprocally, as in an aggregate.”¹⁰⁴ What remains essential for our investigation is that in each of these instances the phenomenon in question bears a categorical, spatial, or temporal *connection* to other phenomena. Experience, Kant insists, is *only* possible “through a representation of the necessary connection of the perceptions.”¹⁰⁵ Or as Marion paraphrases Kant, “we can never perceive an object of experience ... without setting it in relation to a different object.”¹⁰⁶ Conversely, as we have already seen in Henry, any such relation simultaneously assumes a conceptual, spatial, or temporal *distance* between these related phenomena. This is the dual role played by the category of relation: *connection without identification*.

¹⁰² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 208 (A73/B98).

¹⁰³ Ibid., 215 (B112).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 216 (B112).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 296 (B219).

¹⁰⁶ Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 90.

Marion first determines the saturation of relation in a general sense, naming this component of saturation the “absolute.” The saturated phenomenon, he writes, “appears absolute according to relation, which means it evades any analogy of experience.”¹⁰⁷ The saturation of relation produces a phenomenon that is no longer found within any categorical, causal, spatial, or temporal relation to other phenomena. Thus, the absolute phenomenon is a phenomenon that cannot be synthesized within the horizon of visibility.

Marion marks out the precise contours of this saturation through a contestation of three Kantian presuppositions. First, against Kant’s assertion that every phenomenon must obey the temporal unity of experience, Marion suggests that the saturation of relation requires precisely the opposite, that the phenomenon manifest as an “unforeseeable phenomenon (in terms of the past), not exhaustively comprehensible (in terms of the present), not reproducible (in terms of the future), in short, absolute, unique, coming forward.”¹⁰⁸ Second, against Kant’s assertion that this unity be grounded in an analogy of experience, Marion suggests that the saturated phenomenon “will not maintain any measure in common with these terms [inherence, causality, commonality]; it would be free of them as from all other a priori determinations of experience that might claim to impose itself on the phenomenon.”¹⁰⁹ Third, and finally, against Kant’s assertion that “all phenomena are in time,”¹¹⁰ Marion argues that the saturated phenomenon exceeds the temporal horizon of manifestation: “it does not depend on this condition of possibility par excellence—a horizon, whatever it might be.”¹¹¹ In sum, Marion suggests that the saturation of relation would produce a

¹⁰⁷ Marion, *Being Given*, 206.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹¹⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 300 (A182, B224).

¹¹¹ Marion, *Being Given*, 212.

phenomenon which is absolutely unique, set apart from any relation or analogy with other phenomena, and outside of the conditioning capacity of any horizon (particularly the temporal horizon) of manifestation.

Having established the characteristic features of the saturation of relation, in what might be roughly described as an eidetic analysis, Marion turns to the flesh as a paradigmatic case of an “absolute” phenomenon. This first analysis in *Being Given* covers a mere page and a half, nevertheless, this basic sketch already establishes the central themes of the flesh.¹¹² First, the flesh, as in Henry, is set apart by its radical auto-affection: “the flesh is defined as the identity of what touches with the medium where this touching takes place (Aristotle), therefore of the felt with what feels (Husserl), but also of the seen and the seeing or the heard and the hearing—in short of the affected with the affecting (Henry).”¹¹³ This identity of the flesh’s affective capacity with its receptive capacity (its auto-affection), sets the flesh apart from all other phenomena. In the flesh, it is a matter of a self-relation that “saturates the horizon to the point that there is no longer any relation that refers it to another object.”¹¹⁴ Because there is no relationality, there is also no gap or distance; the flesh produces an absolute immanence devoid of opacity. In the words of Henry, it is “an internal, immanent relation, namely, the absence of all relation.”¹¹⁵ This immanence is a self-

¹¹² This analysis, it should be stipulated, is not Marion’s first analysis of the flesh, but rather his first analysis of the flesh *as a saturated phenomenon*. A brief examination of the distinction between the body—which remains “unaffected” by any other—and the flesh—which “can affect itself with (feel) another”—can be found in Marion’s earlier *Prolegomena to Charity*, in the context of an examination of the relationship between love and charity. Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 155-164.

¹¹³ Marion, *Being Given*, 231.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 646 [translation altered].

presence that radically individualizes the flesh; it is always first and foremost *my* flesh. The flesh, Marion writes, “provokes and demands solipsism; for it remains by definition mine, unsubstitutable—nobody can enjoy or suffer for me (even if they can do so in my place).”¹¹⁶

This account of the flesh is worked through with more detail in the fourth chapter of *In Excess*. There Marion more carefully situates his analysis in relation to the Cartesian Ego and the Husserlian *Leib*, and marks the unique character of the flesh as its sentience: unlike “the bodies of the world,” my body is a “body gifted with sense.”¹¹⁷ Insofar as it is gifted with sense, it is no longer merely one body among other bodies, but precisely a flesh, or rather, *my flesh*. This radicality produces a qualitative gap: “the flesh of the other remains absolutely inaccessible to me, like mine to him or her.”¹¹⁸ The flesh, to borrow the language of Leibniz, is an inaccessible, invisible, and unbreachable monad. “Absolved” of all relation, it appears destined to manifest in an absolute solipsism.

Yet, and it is here that Marion constitutes his most significant break with Henry’s account, the flesh cannot remain purely confined to this solipsism. At the same time that the flesh gives the self to itself in its auto-affection, the given also gives itself to the flesh as its hetero-affection:

It fixes it in it as an *adonné*—that which receives itself from this very thing that it receives, according to the simultaneity characteristic of flesh since Aristotle. If a subjectivity must surmount the destruction of the metaphysical subject, it can only come from flesh, *where hetero- and auto-affection are mixed*.¹¹⁹

Whereas for Henry the flesh was defined by its radical exclusion of all hetero-affection, for Marion the flesh—as the body gifted with sense—is the site of affectivity as such, whether that affectivity

¹¹⁶ Marion, *Being Given*, 232.

¹¹⁷ Marion, *In Excess*, 84.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

finds its origin in the flesh itself or in the givenness of any phenomenon whatsoever. This capacity for hetero-affection finds its culmination in the only phenomenon which might permit the manifestation of the flesh of the other: the erotic phenomenon.

C. The Flesh and the Erotic

The relation between the flesh and the erotic relation is an early and permanent theme in Marion's corpus. In his early theological treatise, *Prolegomena to Charity*, Marion attempts to draw a distinction between the theological account of charity and the "contemporary explosion of eroticism."¹²⁰ While Marion will ultimately insist upon the structural univocity of love,¹²¹ he nevertheless distinguishes these two as divergent manifestations or modalities of love.

On the one side Marion marks the love or eroticism of the contemporary world. This love depends upon the reduction of the object of love to that which is objectifiable, to its visibility: "in the contemporary explosion of eroticism," he writes, "we love by sight. ... we have no trouble seeing objectifiable bodies, consumed and caught in the sex trade."¹²² The object of contemporary eroticism is the objective body, the body constituted by an intentional gaze that originates from the lover. As Marion more recently stated in partisan terms, "if you are not a Christian there is no eroticism, there is pornography instead—it is very clear today."¹²³

Authentic eroticism, on the other hand, is invisible, is centered upon the heterogeneity of

¹²⁰ Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 158.

¹²¹ See: Chapter 4 below.

¹²² Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 158. "Our hypersexualization," Marion elsewhere writes of contemporary Western culture, "bears witness to a collapse of the erotic phenomenon that is continually marginalized or minimized (to the advantage, if one can put it like that, of pornography and of prostitution, under a thousand names)." Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 122.

¹²³ Jean-Luc Marion, *Why Remain Catholic: Ep 2*, Video, Dir. Sam Sorich, Glass Darkly Films Inc., 2017.

the beloved, and emerges from—even as it supersedes—the domain of the flesh. “Without flesh,” he suggests, “no body can accede to love, for it remains unaffected by another person, or even any sort of other.”¹²⁴ That is to say, only by means of the flesh—because the flesh, and not the body, is sentient—can one be affected by the beloved, and therefore granted access to a “third state of the body: neither physical body nor the flesh,”¹²⁵ *the eroticized flesh*.

Marion’s early phenomenological analyses of the flesh likewise point toward this erotic component of the flesh. In *Being Given*, Marion situates the erotic affectivity of the flesh together with other varieties of auto-affection: “the flesh auto-affects itself in agony, suffering, and grief, as well as *in desire, feeling, or orgasm*.”¹²⁶ In *In Excess*, Marion supplements this notion of erotic auto-affection with a brief reflection on the child—the ostensible culmination of the erotic encounter. “Two *ipse*,” he suggests, “are never the same flesh, neither do they have the same flesh. The injunction that ‘they will become one flesh’ would remain a pious vow, unceasingly contradicted, if it could not be understood from the flesh of the child at birth, effectively common.”¹²⁷ Nevertheless, these analyses remain relatively understated. It is only with the 2003 publication of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, that Marion treats these erotic phenomena with the requisite care and depth.

In this later work, Marion largely continues the trajectory set by his earlier phenomenological analyses of the flesh, but with one central caveat. Whereas the phenomenological descriptions of the flesh in both *Being Given* and *In Excess* strongly emphasize

¹²⁴ Ibid., 159.

¹²⁵ Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 121.

¹²⁶ Marion, *Being Given*, 231 [emphasis added].

¹²⁷ Marion, *In Excess*, 98.

the impenetrable singularity and subjectivity of the flesh—its “mineness”¹²⁸—*The Erotic Phenomenon* will seek to unveil the structure of a limit phenomenon, authentic *eros*, within which the flesh of the beloved might be manifest, where the flesh of the lover and the beloved might meet.

Marion’s initial intuition that the flesh of the other is essentially inaccessible emerges from a reading of the fifth of Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*. There Husserl argues that the encounter with the alter-ego begins with the body (*Körper*) of the other. The recognition that this other is animated—is a living being like myself, with a full interiority—is the secondary product of an associative appresentation. “The body over there, which is nevertheless apprehended as an animate organism” Husserl writes, “must have derived this sense by an *apperceptive transfer from my animate organism*.”¹²⁹ When I encounter another, the flesh (*Leib*) of this other is not originally given within my sphere of ownness; this flesh remains inaccessible, invisible to my intentional gaze. Instead, I infer the interiority of the other through an analogy with myself.¹³⁰ In the words of Marion, “the other’s flesh in effect remains merely inferred from his [sic] visible behaviors, by analogy with my flesh and my behaviors.”¹³¹

While this Husserlian account of intersubjective experience seems to foreclose access to

¹²⁸ “More radically than the idol, the flesh provokes and demands solipsism; for it remains by definition mine, unsubstitutable—nobody can enjoy or suffer for me ... Mineness (*Jemeinigkeit*) does not concern first or only my possibility as the possibility of impossibility (dying), but my flesh itself. More, it belongs only to my flesh to individualize me by letting the immanent succession of my affections, or rather of the affections that make me irreducibly identical to myself alone, be inscribed in it. ... The flesh therefore show itself only in giving itself—and, in this first ‘self,’ it gives me to myself.” Marion, *Being Given*, 232.

¹²⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 110.

¹³⁰ “It is clear from the very beginning that only a similarity connecting, within my primordial sphere, that body over there with my body can serve as the motivational basis for the ‘*analogizing*’ *apperception* of that body as another animate organism.” *Ibid.*, 111.

¹³¹ Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 162.

the flesh (*la chair* or *Leib*) of the beloved, Marion already hints in *Prolegomena to Charity* that “a thinking of charity can advance further”¹³² than this Husserlian analysis. But to do so, this thinking must think outside of the horizon of visibility from which the flesh of the other is always hidden.

Marion orients the analyses of *The Erotic Phenomenon* with an existential question: “Does anyone out there love me?” For Marion, the attempt to access the other’s flesh in an erotic encounter is first and foremost an attempt to guarantee love. But what the lover engaged in this erotic consummation discovers is instead a series of failures. Even if the flesh of the other can be shared in the erotic embrace, this love is always marked by an impermanence: “the erotic conversation, which consists of never concluding, is going to have to conclude ineluctably (which signifies not success, but running aground). One can name this contradiction the orgasm.”¹³³ This structural failure repeats in every modality of love. Love of self, love of the other, and love of the child—in each instance Marion finds an insufficiency and instability in love. Love of self becomes self-hatred, love of the other becomes jealousy, and love of the child faces the inevitable departure or independence of the child. What is instead required to guarantee love is the inversion of the love: the lover must take the form of a respondent to the beloved:

The other loves me more as lover than I love myself, or rather (for I in fact never love myself), that the other loves me more than I hate myself. In the end, I love even myself, because the other lover, through her own advance, has made me a lover, and thus lovable in her eyes and, because I believed her, lovable in my own eyes. ... This final swing of the center of gravity can be expressed thus: “You loved me first.”¹³⁴

In an echo of Augustine’s *Confessions*, this inverted love or counter-intentionality of the beloved finds its ultimate manifestation in the love of God: the true first lover who “loves infinitely better

¹³² Ibid., 164.

¹³³ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 132.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 214-215.

than do we,” and who always already loved us “from the very beginning.”¹³⁵

Overall, this account of the erotic encounter deserves praise in a number of regards, including first and foremost, its sensitivity to the close relation between love and hate, its nuanced treatment of jealousy, and its choice to treat sexual consummation directly and unambiguously. Nonetheless, it is also within *The Erotic Phenomenon* and subsequent texts (e.g. *Negative Certainties*) that the contours of Marion’s reactionary and “exaggeratedly rigorous”¹³⁶ sexual ethic and recourse to an explicit heteronormativity manifest most conspicuously. For the present investigation, we will treat three paradigmatic cases: beginning with the sexual act (perversion), passing through birth (the advent of the third), and into fatherhood (filiation).

§III: The Limits of Heteronormativity¹³⁷

A: “Unnatural” Perversions

The very possibility of the erotic encounter begins with an essential gap or distance between oneself and another.¹³⁸ This gap results in an incapacity, at least at this point in Marion’s analysis, of the lover to access the person of the beloved through eroticization. Fearing the suspension of

¹³⁵ Ibid., 222.

¹³⁶ In the words of Milbank: “One curious feature of Marion’s exposition of the flesh is the way he in certain ways abandons the path of a traditional Catholic metaphysic, yet defends in terms of a strictly modern philosophy most of the strictures of current Catholic sexual teaching—indeed sometimes in an exaggeratedly rigorous form.” John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 273.

¹³⁷ An early draft of portions of this section can be found in J. Leavitt Pearl, “Jean-Luc Marion: the reinscription of heteronormativity into postmodern theology,” *Theology & Sexuality*, 1 (2017), pp. 144-163.

¹³⁸ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, chapter 5, “Concerning Lying and Truthfulness.”

the erotic reduction and the return of the body, the lover seeks to gain access to the beloved's flesh by their own power. Ultimately, Marion will offer an account of a healthy surmounting of this gap through a reintroduction of the Levinasian "face of the Other."¹³⁹ But, before doing so, Marion offers two transgressions which attempt to illicitly bridge this gap: abduction and perversion.

The first transgression manifests with levels of increasing, violent intensity: appearing first as coercion, second as rape—though Marion is, to his credit, sensitive enough to note that the first, coercion, is itself thoroughly violent¹⁴⁰—and finally, in murder, wherein one accedes to the twisted logic "I loved her too much, I killed her." Unfortunately, Marion's account of the second transgression lacks the nuance and sensitivity of the first. In this second case, Marion once again posits a sequence of increasing intensity—beginning with roleplaying and Sadomasochism,¹⁴¹ Marion continues to homosexuality, and ultimately bestiality. As he writes:

I will constrain the flesh of the other as well as my own flesh at any price, through every trick and every convention: make-up, disguise, masks, play-acting. ... it is necessary that I push bodies, and thus their naturalness, to their limits, or even beyond these limits. ... Thus I will transgress the borderline of excitations, passing from pain to pleasure; I will transgress the borderline between the sexes; I could

¹³⁹ "Thus the face, taking up again its autonomy and finding once again its privilege, could give me access to the other in person." This is what abduction and perversion, by Marion's account, attempt, but inevitably fail, to do. This return to the priority of the face, is ultimately a return to Levinas, for whom the face of the Other (*le visage de l'Autre*)—most famously analyzed in the two volumes: *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*—is nothing less than the very emergence of the ethical value of the Other, which declares "do not kill me!" This experience of the face is the truly foundational human experience, "presupposed in all human relationships." Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 89.

¹⁴⁰ Often, he will suggest, even perpetuating a "worse violence" against the very will of the other. Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 164.

¹⁴¹ While the point is beyond the scope of the present investigation, John Milbank notes an important tension between Marion's critique of sado-masochism and what Milbank names the "Catholic metaphysic": "the same goes for a certain mode of sado-masochism. Marion has the rigor to acknowledge that this is unavoidable, since at times we are more entirely focused on the other as physical reality and lose sight of their *visage*. Yet to view this negatively is once more ironically to refuse the possibilities of a more Catholic metaphysic. For the latter, things as well as persons are, in their own degree, properly lovable, and indeed humanity has the privilege of mediating between the lowliest material form of existence and the higher intelligible angelic mode of existence and beyond to god-likeness itself." John Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror," 273.

almost end up—why not?—transgressing the borderline between species.¹⁴²

Here, Marion primarily employs a rhetorical strategy of association. Whereas Marion avoids a rigorous or direct attack upon queer sexuality, he nevertheless employs a faulty implicit argument. On the one hand, at a primary level, one finds a classic slippery slope argument against queer sexuality as the inevitable precursor to bestiality. Such arguments are not uncommon, having often linked homosexuality to pedophilia, incest, adultery, or, as in this case, bestiality.¹⁴³ One might recall, for example, US Senator Rick Santorum’s assertion that “if the Supreme Court says that you have the right to consensual [gay] sex within your home, then you have the right to bigamy, you have the right to polygamy, you have the right to incest, you have the right to adultery. *You have the right to anything.*”¹⁴⁴ A similar argument can be found in Justice Scalia’s infamous dissent in *Lawrence v. Texas*’s sodomy ruling, wherein he argued that:

State laws against bigamy, same-sex marriage, adult incest, prostitution, masturbation, adultery, fornication, bestiality, and obscenity are likewise sustainable only in light of Bowers’ validation of laws based on moral choices. Every single one of these laws is called into question by today’s decision; the Court makes no effort to cabin the scope of its decision to exclude them from its holding.¹⁴⁵

Courtney Cahill describes this unique category of anti-queer slippery slope arguments as a “politics of disgust,” designed to provoke a visceral reaction. Yet, as Cahill’s argument goes on to show, such rhetoric also harbors a distinct ethico-legal strategy. In her analysis of the role of incest within

¹⁴² Ibid., 165.

¹⁴³ For academic engagements with this argument, see: Courtney Megan Cahill, “Same-sex Marriage, Slippery Slope Rhetoric, and the Politics of Disgust: A Critical Perspective on Contemporary Family Discourse and the Incest Taboo,” *Northwestern University Law Review* 99, no. 4 (2005); John Corvino, “No Slippery Slope,” *Gay And Lesbian Review Worldwide* 7 no. 3 (2000); and Ruth E. Sternglantz, “Raining on the Parade of Horribles: Of Slippery Slopes, Faux Slopes, and Justice Scalia’s Dissent in *Lawrence V. Texas*,” *University Of Pennsylvania Law Review* 153, no. 3 (January 2005).

¹⁴⁴ As cited in Cahill, 1544 [emphasis added].

¹⁴⁵ *Lawrence V. Texas* (02-102) 539 U.S. 558 (2003). <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/02-102.ZD.html> (accessed 09/25/14).

such slippery slope arguments, she writes:

This analysis of incest as boundary violation has demonstrated the extent to which nature, or the notion of what is 'natural,' continues to shape the ideal conception of kinship in the context of family law. That is, same-sex relations and cloning are often grouped together with incest in slippery slope arguments because all three represent a perversion of what is considered to be a natural form of the family and a natural form of sexual reproduction.¹⁴⁶

It is only by way of a foundation within "nature," or a concept of the "natural," that the slippery slope argument can find its ultimate grounding. Though its affective goal is disgust, this affect can only be rationally justified through a recourse to clear metaphysical presuppositions.

The applicability of Cahill's analysis of the "politics of disgust" to Marion's account of homosexuality is clear. The language of "transgression" saturating the passage suggest an inevitable question: "transgression of what?" The answer that Marion offers is manifold: the transgression of the division between pain and pleasure, between male and female, between human and animal. Yet, each of these distinct "borderlines" is reducible to a single source that Marion will mark with full clarity; these are the borders established by *nature*. It is the "naturalness" of the body, as Marion writes, that is here being transgressed.¹⁴⁷

Yet, even if one were to ignore the historical and cultural specificity regarding what qualifies as natural,¹⁴⁸ then one still encounters a deeper methodological problem: how can the

¹⁴⁶ Cahill, 1605 [emphasis added].

¹⁴⁷ Although the above examples were drawn from the American political-judicial system, it is worth noting, even if only in passing, that Marion here remains consistent with his French context. For, as Guy Hocquenghem noted in 1972: following the Second World War, under the rule of de Gaulle, "the French penal codes has referred to homosexuality, and homosexuality alone, as a 'crime against nature.' This is a case of paranoiac regression: it is a well-known fact that the individualized and rationalized law inherited from the bourgeois revolution and the empire ceased to be based on theological concepts such as 'nature.' If the code retreats into obscurantism here it is because, when faced with homosexuality, it requires the backing of a universal authority on heterosexual normality." Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 62.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Derrida's now classic deconstruction of the binary categories nature/culture (particularly as manifest in Rousseau) in "Nature, Culture, Writing." Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), Part II.

notion of the natural be employed following the phenomenological reduction? It is precisely the center of the phenomenological method to begin analysis with a “reduced phenomenon,” an experience stripped of all metaphysical positings—not only the general thesis of existence, but also any conception of the natural derived from scientific or metaphysical discourse. Without denying their legitimacy within their own domains, Husserl unambiguously insists upon the evacuation of any postulate of the natural world from phenomenological analyses:

I do not then deny this ‘world,’ as though I were a sophist, I do not doubt that it is there as though I were a sceptic; but I use the ‘phenomenological’ *εποχη*, which completely bars me from using any judgment that concerns spatio-temporal existence. Thus all sciences which relate to this natural world, though they stand never so firm to me, though they fill me with wondering admiration, though I am far from any thought of objecting to them in the least degree, I disconnect them all, I make absolutely no use of their standards, I do not appropriate a single one of the propositions that enter into their systems, even though their evidential value is perfect, I take none of them, no one of them serves me for a foundation.¹⁴⁹

Such metaphysical accoutrements are the domain of the “natural attitude,” which, while they may be perfectly justifiable within their own domain, fail to offer phenomenological evidence. While many phenomenologists reject the priority of the reduction, Marion, as we have seen, is a thinker of the reduction *par excellence*. He not only defends the centrality of the phenomenological reduction, but also proposes his “third reduction” to pure givenness (here designated as the “erotic reduction”¹⁵⁰) as a more rigorous variant of the reduction. Quite against any supposition that the erotic reduction could let in a conception of “naturalness” which had been bracketed by the phenomenological reduction, Marion’s third reduction remains markedly *more* stringent. Thus,

¹⁴⁹ Husserl, *Ideas*, 59.

¹⁵⁰ “There remains, then, the attempt at a third reduction: in order for me to appear as a full-fledged phenomenon, it is not enough that I recognize myself as a certified object, nor as a certifying ego, nor even as a properly being being; I must discover myself as a given (and gifted) phenomenon, assured as a given that is free from vanity. ... Now, asking to assure my own certainty of being against the dark assault of vanity comes down to asking nothing less than, “Does anybody love me?” So there we are: the assurance appropriate to the given (and gifted) ego puts into motion an erotic reduction.” Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 22.

from a purely methodological perspective, Marion's ethico-phenomenological judgment against non-heterosexual erotic relation appears deeply problematic.

At a deeper level, the implicit argument from association becomes markedly more disturbing. Holding this section together in its totality, queer sexualities are here directly correlated not only to bestiality, but ultimately, to rape. Both abduction and perversion, it should be recognized, are bound to one another, for Marion, by their mutual dependence upon a reduction of the human person to a depersonalized manifestation. Simply put, for Marion, both abduction and perversion are attempts to directly access the flesh—to “capture” it—by controlling and manipulating the body. While this description may account for coercion and rape, *a justification for its use as a description of queer sexuality is completely absent from Marion's account.*

On the contrary, Marion's analysis lacks anything that could be understood as a proper phenomenological analysis of queer sexuality.¹⁵¹ Without such an account, Marion's correlation of queer eroticism and violence appears to lack the requisite phenomenological evidence. Quite to the contrary, countless first-person accounts of queer eroticism—both phenomenological and non-phenomenological¹⁵²—stand as evidence that not only is authentic eroticism possible in queer relations, but that it might there find a great depth and intensity. Julia Horncastle's “Queer

¹⁵¹ Or even, for that matter, a phenomenological analysis of heterosexual erotic relations that employ contraception.

¹⁵² Explicitly phenomenological accounts of queer sexuality are rare, since phenomenology, as a methodology, remains fairly marginal within queer theory and trans studies—emphasis instead falling upon discourse analysis and Foucauldian paradigms. Nevertheless, a number of key texts in queer phenomenology are worth noting: Judith Butler, “Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40 (1988): 519–531; Henry S. Rubin “Phenomenology as method in trans studies,” *GLQ* 4 (1998): 263–281; Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press 2006). Julia Horncastle, “Queer orientation: Selfhood and poetics,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (Dec. 2009): 903–920; Gayle Salamon, “Justification and Queer Method, or Leaving Philosophy,” *Hypatia* Vol. 24, No. 1, *Oppression and Moral Agency: Essays in Honor of Claudia Card* (Winter, 2009): 225-230; Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Lanei M. Rodemeyer, “Husserl and queer theory,” *Continental Philosophy Review* (2017), doi:10.1007/s11007-017-9412-x; Lanei M. Rodemeyer, *Lou Sullivan Diaries (1970-1980) and Theories of Sexual Embodiment: Making Sense of Sensing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2018).

orientation: Selfhood and poetics,” for example, offers numerous phenomenological analyses of queer erotic encounters. Analyzing the penetrative act, for example, she finds not violence, but an erotic communion of flesh:

In sex, there can occur a corporeal threshold moment when one comes to be ‘inside someone’—with a fist, a tongue, a strap-on, with energetic focus, eye contact, any body part or surface, a prosthesis or object as extension of the self, even through utterances, or the draughts of breath onto skin, or into hearing. In this moment one cannot tell exactly which body parts are one’s own or another’s. Penetration becomes interpenetration, sensed as touching someone, whereupon one ‘feels’ and one is ‘felt’ (touched by the surface one is touching)—one ‘loses sight’ of which sense is which. In this threshold state one penetrates and cannot be anything other than also and simultaneously penetrated; possibly doubly-so if the other person/s also intentionally penetrate/s.¹⁵³

Within this properly phenomenological analysis of queer sexuality, there emerges a moment of erotic penetration within which one can no longer distinguish one’s flesh from that of the beloved—“in this moment one cannot tell exactly which body parts are one’s own or another’s.” Is this not precisely the erotic communion—wherein one is granted access to the flesh of the other—that Marion’s erotic reduction has sought?

Even outside of “phenomenology proper,” narrative, depth-descriptive, and poetic accounts of queer sexuality open up vital venues for thinking queer eroticism. Monique Wittig’s *The Lesbian Body*, for example, stands out as a paradigmatic celebration of queer eros, “an erotic female song of songs.”¹⁵⁴ Its deeply sensual, embodied prose testifies to an authentic eros that cannot be merely set aside on account of a pre-phenomenological prejudice. Wittig speaks from the site of a rapturous love:

I have a deathly chill, I moan, I fall into an abyss, m/y head is awhirl, m/y heart is in m/y mouth, it feels as if m/y blood is all congealed in m/y arteries. You say

¹⁵³ Horncastle, “Queer orientation: Selfhood and poetics,” 910.

¹⁵⁴ Edna O'Brien, on the jacket of: Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, trans. David Le Vay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

nevertheless that you receive an enormous quantity of it in your hands. You speak of the colour of m/y organs. I cannot see them. I hear your voice hissing in m/y ears, I concentrate on listening to you. I see m/yself stretched out, all m/y entrails are unwound. I open m/y mouth to sing a cantata to the goddess m/y mother. M/y heart fails in this effort. I open m/y mouth, I admit your lips your tongue your palate, I prepare to die by your side adored monster while you cry incessantly about m/y ears.¹⁵⁵

While such an account may lack the full methodological rigor of a properly phenomenological analysis, its insights may nevertheless serve the phenomenologist; for, as Gayle Salamon notes, “queer folks are natural (and I use that word advisedly) phenomenologists, since careful reading of our surroundings, of the physical and social circumstances through which we move, is often a matter of survival.”¹⁵⁶

Lacking such phenomenological or descriptive accounts, Marion instead here relies entirely upon a series of plays on language: equivocations upon “force,” “constrain,” “capture,” “transgression,” are the materials out of which an analogy between rape and queer sexuality is implicitly constructed. Marion speaks, for example, as though the act of “capturing” the body of the other in abduction is ethically equivalent to “capturing” the other in the gaze,¹⁵⁷ or as though the transgression of the other’s body (e.g. rape) may be straightforwardly marked as equivalent to “transgressing” gender norms. However, such correlations remain wholly unsubstantiated.

It is within the literature of queer studies and lived queer sexuality that the most direct challenge to Marion’s paradigm can be formulated. For, it is phenomena such as those presented

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹⁵⁶ Salamon, “Justification and Queer Method, or Leaving Philosophy,” 227. The use of “phenomenology” should be accepted cautiously here, for as Rodemeyer rightfully notes, “in such cases (not all, of course), phenomenology begins to appear simply like an unspecific philosophical stance, or merely the description of experience for its own sake. Such analyses, while well-meaning, do not offer careful considerations of how phenomenology—as a serious, rigorous method—and especially Husserl’s work, might speak to other approaches such as queer theory.” Rodemeyer, “Husserl and queer theory.”

¹⁵⁷ As one might say, e.g. “I captured the recital on film.”

above—personal accounts of an undeniable eros—that strike at the very foundation of Marion’s heteronormative presuppositions. The phenomenologist is here faced with a choice, either one must presuppose (prior to an eidetic analysis) the content of love as necessarily heterosexual, and therefore preemptively restrict any queer phenomenological accounts of eros, or the eidetic analysis of the necessary structure of love, as presented by Marion, must be placed into question.

Thus, in summary, while Marion’s arguments might hold weight in a metaphysical debate, they completely lack standing as *phenomenological* evidence. In the first case, there is direct recourse to a posited notion of “natural,” a presumption that appears incapable of surviving within Marion’s own stated methodology. In the second case, his argument appears to stand on little more than baseless rhetorical flourish, ultimately devoid of philosophical or phenomenological substance. What is lacking is a phenomenological account of queer sexualities that would justify their correlation to bestiality and rape. Lacking such a justification, this association becomes more revelatory of Marion’s pre-phenomenological sexual ethic than the diverse phenomena of queer sexuality.

B: The Necessity (of the Possibility) of the Child

The second case of heteronormative discourse follows directly from the first. Having extinguished the possibility of non-heteronormative sexual intercourse from the domain of authentic *eros*, Marion subsequently presumes procreative sexuality as the only legitimate consequence of sexuality. Thus, the denigration of queer sexuality leads inexorably to the “advent of the third party.” In Marion’s description, the great tragedy of the erotic is its suspension; one cannot make love forever, eventually climax comes and one is thrust outside of the relation. The secret desire of every lover, Marion suggests, is to discover a means of loving forever. Here enters the child.

The child manifests as a culmination of the erotic relation, a concretization or reification of the very oath of love itself.¹⁵⁸ “The passage to the child,” Marion suggests, “has the function of producing a more stable visibility of the erotic phenomenon ... and thus of assuring the visibility of the lovers, as it is present and to come.”¹⁵⁹

On its own, these passages on the child have a certain beauty and intimacy, clearly reflective of Marion’s own experience of fatherhood. This is not surprising, as Marion already admits in the opening chapter that he will intentionally undertake his analysis from a deeply subjective perspective. “I will say *I*,” he states, “and I will not be able to hide myself behind the *I* of philosophers, that *I* who is supposed to be universal, ... I will say *I* starting from and in view of the erotic phenomenon within me and for me—*my own*.”¹⁶⁰

From a certain perspective then, Marion remains true to the particularity of his own experience, and his work maintains a pseudo-phenomenological character *in this limited regard*. However, the failure of Marion’s analysis manifests precisely at the point where Marion attempts to determine the “essential” character of love as such, without offering a sufficiently thorough bracketing of his own pre-phenomenological baggage.¹⁶¹ Simply put, the problem arises when

¹⁵⁸ It is here that Marion again reveals his deep indebtedness to the phenomenological work of Emmanuel Levinas. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas’ own “Phenomenology of eros” gives way, immediately to a discussion of “fecundity,” that is, of the child. Just as in Marion’s later analyses, this child is understood primarily in temporal terms. The child extends love forward, into the indeterminate future. “The relation with the child—that is, the relation with the other that is not a power, but fecundity—establishes relationship with the absolute future, or infinite time.” Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 268.

¹⁵⁹ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 197.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶¹ “Essential,” here, should be taken in the Husserlian sense. The “essence of love” that Marion seeks is precisely the phenomenological essence that Husserl suggests can be attained by eidetic analysis. Yet, and it is here where Marion’s analysis loses its phenomenological credentials, Husserl outlines strict methodological requirements for undertaking an eidetic analysis, the most central being the eidetic reduction. For Husserl’s discussion of “Eidetic Variation and the Acquisition of Pure Universals” see: Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), §§ 86-90.

Marion attempts to make the child a *necessary* piece of the erotic structure. The claim that the child is a necessary, rather than a merely possible outcome of love, is explicitly presented by Marion; who writes that it is “in no way optional,” is “unconditional,” is a “phenomenological requirement,” and is an “unavoidable stage.”¹⁶² What precisely is meant in the claim that the child is necessary is here marked without ambiguity. The erotic reduction as such—that is to say, the very possibility of authentic love—is broken when one blocks access to the child: “we understand the child as an unconditional demand of the erotic reduction, which in no case the lover can even claim to avoid, *except by suspending this reduction...*”¹⁶³

For the queer erotic relationship where biological reproduction is not possible—most clearly the homosexual relation, but also certain heterosexual relations which include trans or queer members or any other number of non-normative erotic relations—authentic love is not possible, the reduction must be suspended.¹⁶⁴ Even the mere use of birth control, on this account, disrupts the erotic relation, rendering its love incomplete or partial. Marion does not wish to punish the infertile, the elderly, or similar cases and therefore insists that “it is not first and foremost a matter of the actual child,” but rather that “the passage to the child ... must first, be understood as the *possibility of the child* more than its actuality.”¹⁶⁵ For Marion, the true loving relationship finds

¹⁶² Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 196-198.

¹⁶³ [Emphasis added] *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁶⁴ It is a—perhaps unconscious—recognition of this reality, Marion suggests, that accounts for homosexual advocates’ recent push for adoption rights and fertility assistance. Yet, even if this advocacy emerges from an authentic desire for the child, it nevertheless suspends the erotic reduction. As he writes, “that is why one must take the desire of homosexual couples for a child very seriously, despite the fact that the conceivable replies often miss the gravity of this possibility, which one wants to make effective by taking recourse to all the mechanisms of objectness (biological and legal). In this way, the erotic phenomenon disappears one more time into the (metaphysical) mastery of the object.” Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 123.

¹⁶⁵ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 197-198. “I say the child,” he elsewhere writes, “but one must also hear the possibility of the child, a possibility almost as strong as the real child.” Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 123.

itself determinatively limited to the heterosexual union of cis-gender couples, open to the possibility of childbirth. All else suspends and disrupts this erotic reduction; all else is an inauthentic love.

Marion appears to anticipate critiques of this account, and therefore preemptively insists that his analyses are not ideological, but rather fall from the phenomenon under investigation (eros): “this passage” to the child, he writes, “has nothing arbitrary or ideological about it.”¹⁶⁶ Marion employs two arguments to defend the ideological (and phenomenological) neutrality of these analyses. His first argument in this regard is quite plainly circular. Here he argues that these analyses are not ideological because they emerge from a phenomenological demand: “the passage to the child does not result from a biological or social law, but from a phenomenological requirement.”¹⁶⁷ That is to say, he argues tautologically that *it is properly phenomenological because it is phenomenological*.

His second argument offers little additional support. Here he contends that this assertion is not ideological because it concerns the possibility (of the child) and not the actuality.¹⁶⁸ This distinction between possibility and actuality—and more specifically, the claim that the former is the proper domain of phenomenology, while the latter the proper domain of theology or metaphysics—is already attested in “Metaphysics and Phenomenology.” There, glossing Heidegger’s insistence that “higher than actuality stands possibility,”¹⁶⁹ he argues that, “between

¹⁶⁶ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 197. This claim echoes his earlier defense of his broader project’s phenomenological credentials, in a discussion with Derrida: “I suggest that my proposal remains merely philosophical and without any theological presupposition or bias here. On the contrary, any theological bias and second thought would ruin my project.” Derrida and Marion, “On the Gift” in *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 70.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 197-198.

¹⁶⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 63.

phenomenology and theology, the border passes between revelation as possibility and revelation as historicity.”¹⁷⁰ Simply put, for Marion, phenomenology concerns the *possibility* of phenomena, while theology argues for the *reality* of certain phenomena (God, the resurrection, grace, etc.). According to Marion’s second argument, therefore, since the requirement of “the possibility of the child” does not require the actuality of the child, it passes phenomenological muster.

Here Marion once again relies upon a slippery equivocation. Unlike the authentic conditions of the “possibility of phenomena” revealed by the phenomenological method, “possibility,” in Marion’s account of the child, *masks a deeper actuality or necessity*. That is to say, what renders Marion’s requirement phenomenologically untenable is that it does not concern the mere “possibility of the child,” but the *necessity* of a subjective openness to the possibility of the child; “the passage to the child,” as we saw above, “responds to a *requirement*.”¹⁷¹

Counter to Marion’s claim, this requirement is not a phenomenological requirement, but an ontic ethical requirement, perfectly traceable to Catholic doctrine. In fact, Marion’s conception of a “necessary possibility” remains directly correlated to magisterial teaching. There as well, it is not the child that is dogmatically mandated, but an openness *to the possibility* of childbearing. As *Humanae Vitae* argues, “the Church... teaches that each and every marriage act (*quilibet matrimonii usus*) must remain through itself open to the transmission of life.”¹⁷² Thus, for example,

¹⁷⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, No. 4 (Summer, 1994): 590.

¹⁷¹ *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 197 [emphasis added].

¹⁷² *Humanae Vitae*, 11 [emphasis added], as cited in John Paul II, *Man and Women He Created Them*, 118:2. This English translation is derived from John Paul II’s preferred Italian translation of *Humanae Vitae*. The English translation derived from the Latin is here ostensibly stricter, reading “the church... teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life.” Yet, even in this “stricter” translation, emphasis still remains upon the intrinsic (read: natural) ordering of human sexuality towards creation, an ordering that need not manifest in every instance (see *Humanae Vitae*’s discussion of licit methods of birth control; 15-16). This emphasis on an “openness” to procreation is reaffirmed by John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*, 14, where he emphasizes that “even when procreation is not possible, conjugal life does not for this reason lose its value.” This is repeated in *Gratissimam Sane*, where he writes, “the logic of the total gift of self to the

the supposed moral failure of contraception comes not from the lack of an actual child, but from the technological suspension of the natural human reproductive system's necessary direction toward procreation: "they obstruct the natural development of the generative process."¹⁷³ This is precisely the argument that one finds in Marion's text, where he condemns the "bio-technical manipulations or socio-medical traffickings which would reduce [the child] to the rank of a manufactured object."¹⁷⁴ Thus, rather than pointing beyond an ideological investment at the center of Marion's phenomenology of love, his argument for the "necessity of a possibility," rather than an actuality, remains true to the ideological investments that ground Marion's analyses of sexuality.

Apart from these particularly magisterial-ideological commitments—that will be examined with more depth in the following chapter—Marion here also enacts a more general Western ideology that Lee Edelman names "reproductive futurism." In his 2004 *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Edelman brings to light the confluence of a certain "image of the Child" and anti-queer polemics. "The Child," Edelman insists, is "not to be confused with the lived experience of any historical children."¹⁷⁵ Indeed, "the Child" is an imaginary figure, invested with the very possibility of a future or futurity; a figure who therefore functions as the precondition for any politics or collectivity. The child represents the boundaries of debate, the site wherein all political opinions converge: "Children," as Max Horkheimer suggests, "symbolized the Golden Age as well

other involves a potential openness to procreation: in this way the marriage is called to even greater fulfilment as a family." John Paul II, *Letter to Families From Pope John Paul II: Gratissimam Sane* (Vatican: 1994), 12.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 198.

¹⁷⁵ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 11.

as the promising future.”¹⁷⁶

Resistance to the necessity of reproduction is therefore rendered as a rejection of sociality in favor of hedonistic jouissance: “if, however, there is no baby ... then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself.”¹⁷⁷ Non-procreative eroticism is figured as a dereliction of social duty: “the homosexual can only be a degenerate, for he does not generate.”¹⁷⁸

For this reason, the figure of the Child likewise generates the necessary, imaginary counter-figure of “the queer” as its constitutive exception, the abject figure to be cast out of society and social discourse. In the words of Edelman, “the sacralization of the Child thus necessitates the sacrifice of the queer.”¹⁷⁹ The queer is that figure which stands outside of acceptable politics, because it denies the necessity of reproduction and its logic of futurity.¹⁸⁰ Because queer sexuality resists the call for reproduction as the necessary end or telos of eroticism, the queer is figured as anti-child and anti-future: “queerness names the side of those not ‘fighting for the children.’”¹⁸¹

This connection between the child and futurity could not be more explicit in Marion’s

¹⁷⁶ Max Horkheimer, “The End of Reason,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum Press, 2007), 41.

¹⁷⁷ Edelman, *No Future*, 12.

¹⁷⁸ Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 107.

¹⁷⁹ Edelman, *No Future*, 28.

¹⁸⁰ The depth of this figural thinking is marked by Marion’s rejection of the queer, even if they uphold the logic of reproductive futurism at a literal level—that is to say, they desire a child: “c’est pourquoi il faut prendre très au sérieux le désir d’enfant des couples homosexuels, bien que les réponses envisagées le plus souvent manquent le sérieux de cette possibilité, qu’on voudrait transformer en effectivité par recours à toutes les mécaniques de l’objectivité (biologiques et légales). Ainsi, le phénomène érotique disparaît, encore une fois, dans la maîtrise (métaphysique) de l’objet.” Jean-Luc Marion, *La Rigueur des Choses: Entretien avec Dan Arbib* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 199.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

writing. His very terminology—the advent of the third [*l'avènement du tiers*—marks his indebtedness to the ideology of reproductive futurism. The advent—*l'avènement*—from the Latin *advenire* “to come,” from which the French also get *l'avenir*, “the future.” The third—*le tiers*—Marion makes explicit is the child—“... *Le tiers ou l'enfant*.” Taken together, the advent of the third, of the child, is for Marion nothing other than the guarantee of love’s futurity, the passage to the child “has the function of producing a more stable visibility of the erotic phenomenon ... as it is present *and to come*.”¹⁸²

What Edelman reveals is that this connection between the figure (or advent) of the child and futurity—reproductive futurism—is not merely contingently connected to Marion’s denial and denigration of queer eroticism. Indeed, this figuring of the child as a necessary component of the erotic structure preserves “the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.”¹⁸³ The child becomes necessary not on account of the phenomenological evidence, but because non-procreative eroticism is, for Marion and reproductive futurism, truly unthinkable. This unthinkability reveals a certain falsity within Marion’s ostensible concern for the prioritization of sexual difference: as Stephen E. Lewis writes, for example, “sexual difference is to be taken seriously in [*The Erotic Phenomenon*].”¹⁸⁴ This is not to cast even the slightest aspersions on Lewis’ translation, but rather to note the way in which Marion’s insistence upon sexual difference and heterosexual reproduction serves to mask a deeper logic which expels difference in service of a reproduction of the same. “The Child,” Edelman

¹⁸² Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 197.

¹⁸³ Edelman, *No Future*, 2.

¹⁸⁴ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 24n.

writes, “marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism,”¹⁸⁵ a futurism that “generates generational succession, temporality, and narrative sequence, not toward the end of enabling change, but, instead, of perpetuating sameness, of turning back time to assure repetition ... in the service of representation and, by extension, of desire.”¹⁸⁶ Quite against his ostensible insistence upon difference, Marion here reveals that his conception of the erotic is bound by a commitment to a reproduction of the same, precisely insofar as non-normative sexualities are cast out of the realm of thinkable discourse, and therefore out of the eidetic structure of *eros*.

C. Paternity and the Name of the Father

The third case of heteronormative, and in this instance explicitly patriarchal, discourse follows logically from the second. Having instituted an openness to the possibility of the child as a necessary component of authentic *eros*, Marion turns to the question of filiation, particularly the relationship between the father and the (implicitly male)¹⁸⁷ child. The centrality of this phenomenological description is attested by its repetition and extension over a decade and a half—appearing first in *Being Given* and later in an extended form in the essay “The Reason of the Gift,”¹⁸⁸ itself subsequently revised into the third chapter of *Negative Certainties*.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Edelman, *No Future*, 21.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁸⁷ While Marion’s use of the masculine pronoun in his discussion of filiation could well be understood as a merely grammatical convention (as attested by Lewis’ translation of pronouns associated with *l’enfant* with the feminine), this possibility is belied by Marion’s generational account which positions the father as the child of “a(nother) father” (Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 100), and implicitly the child/son as another, or a future, father.

¹⁸⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Reason of the Gift” trans. Shane MacKinlay and Nicolas de Warren in *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

¹⁸⁹ This argument can also be seen as anticipated by Marion’s conflation, in *God Without Being*, of the figure of the theologian and the bishop—“the theologian par excellence, the bishop” or again, “the theologian who doubles ... for

Throughout these texts, Marion draws forward the phenomenon of fatherhood (*paternité*) as a paradigmatic example of a gift that avoids absorption into the economic logic of exchange. In an analysis that reveals an indebtedness to Jacques Derrida's *Given Time*,¹⁹⁰ Marion argues that there are three standard ways—corresponding to the giver, the givee, and the gift given—in which the gift is “abolished in favor of its contrary: exchange.”¹⁹¹ First, the giver, even if they do not receive material equivalence, nevertheless may find symbolic gratification—esteem, contentment, moral superiority, etc.—from the act of giving; “the giver never loses anything in the gift, but in exchange, she always finds herself there, making a good deal.”¹⁹² Second, the givee “receives not only a good, but especially a debt.”¹⁹³ This debt or poison (German: *Gift*),¹⁹⁴ “whether real or fictive,”¹⁹⁵ erases the gift, and through the assumption of debt, reintegrates the gift into the logic of exchange. Finally, the given gift itself obscures the act of giving and invariably transmutes into a simple commodity: “no longer to appear except as a pure and bare piece of merchandise.”¹⁹⁶ In

the bishop” (Marion, *God Without Being*, 152, 157). Here apostolic succession appears synonymous with a sort of paternity, whereby the (male) bishop designates or ordains the (male) theologian or priest as *his* rightful successor: “only the saintly person knows whereof he speaks in theology, only he that a bishop delegates knows wherefrom he speaks” (Ibid., 155). See, also: Catherine Keller, “The Apophysis of Gender: A Fourfold Unsayings of Feminist Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 76.4 (2008), 917.

¹⁹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992). For the extended debate between Marion and Derrida concerning the possibility of the gift, see: Marion, *Being Given*, 71-118; Derrida and Marion, “On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion, Moderated by Richard Kearney” in *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, 54-78; and John D. Caputo, “Apostles of the Impossible: On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion” in *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, 185-222.

¹⁹¹ Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 84.

¹⁹² Ibid., 85.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ “We know that as good, it can also be bad, poisonous (*Gift, gift*), and this from the moment the gift puts the other in debt, with the result that giving amounts to hurting, to doing harm.” Derrida, *Given Time*, 12.

¹⁹⁵ Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 85.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 86.

each instance, the gift loses its unique phenomenological character, becoming a mere object of exchange. Thus, it initially appears that the gift must either remain a pure possibility or, insofar as it is actualized, lose its status as a gift.

Yet, even given these difficulties, Marion seeks to defend the possibility of the gift, offering a solution to these Derridean critiques. Through the bracketing of one or more of the components of the gift—giver, givee, gift given—he argues, the gift can be maintained in its excessive phenomenality; “there is a gift *only* if one of these terms of exchange is missing.”¹⁹⁷ One can bracket the givee, giving to a recipient incapable of receiving the gift *as gift*—whether because they are an enemy or an ingrate.¹⁹⁸ One can bracket the giver, paradigmatically in the example of inheritance, where the gift is only given in the event that the giver is no more.¹⁹⁹ Or one can bracket the gift itself; one can give that which is properly speaking nothing, no-“thing”—one’s time, attention, etc.²⁰⁰

It is within this context that Marion privileges the phenomenon of fatherhood. Fatherhood is a paradigmatic gift precisely because all three components of the gift find themselves bracketed. First, at the moment in which life is granted, the givee (child/son) does not yet exist. Second, that which is given—life—is precisely nothing, no-thing within the ekstastic horizon of visibility. Third, the giver (father), as we will see below, is fundamentally defined by his absence. Given this triple bracketing, the event by which fatherhood emerges—marked by the giving of the name of the father to the child—is drawn out as an example of the gift given in its purity.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 143 [emphasis added]. “The gift is irreducible to the [terms of exchange, because it can only be described by bracketing one of these three terms.” Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Marion, *Being Given*, 85-94.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 94-102.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 102-113.

The numerous difficulties that plague this analysis have already been investigated by Colby Dickinson in “The Problem of Having Both a Body and a Name in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion: Names, Fathers, and the Hopeful Possibilities of a Queer Phenomenology,”²⁰¹ and the present investigation closely follows his lead. For Dickinson, the very delimitation of the phenomenon already renders the analysis suspect. Certainly, fatherhood is a worthy phenomenon for phenomenological investigation, as are all manifest phenomena. As Raymond Aron famously exclaimed to a young Jean-Paul Sartre, “you see, my dear fellow, if you were a phenomenologist, you could talk about this cocktail glass and make philosophy out of it.”²⁰² Nevertheless, as Dickinson notes, Marion’s choice to treat fatherhood in *opposition* to motherhood, and without reference to other family configurations, predisposes his investigation to the repetition of questionable tropes under the guise of eidetic necessity. In Dickinson’s words, Marion’s is an analysis that forgets “the fact that not all fathers have a ‘wife,’ that not all children take the father’s name or that not every birth has a discernible father figure (as in the case of lesbian households, for example).”²⁰³ Unfortunately, Marion’s analyses ultimately bear out this apprehension.

The description of the phenomenon of fatherhood begun in *Being Given* is centered neither on the biological relation of father and child—as one might expect from a naturalistic account—nor the relationship/interactions between the father and child—as one might expect from a phenomenological account. Rather, Marion “focuses solely on the name given to the child as that which bestows fatherhood.”²⁰⁴ For Marion, “the child (and the context surrounding his birth) exerts

²⁰¹ Colby Dickinson, “The Problem of Having Both a Body and a Name in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion: Names, Fathers, and the Hopeful Possibilities of a Queer Phenomenology,” *Theology & Sexuality*, 20 No. 1 (2014).

²⁰² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, trans. Peter Green (New York: Lancer Books, 1966), 162.

²⁰³ Dickinson, “The Problem of Having Both a Body and a Name in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion,” 24.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

over him a call to recognition in paternity.”²⁰⁵ Yet, this call is not the call for care, nurturing, support, or relationship. On Marion’s account, that which calls the father into his fatherhood, is the call for a name; “the child silently calls the father to call him with his name—with the name of the father, with the name that he does not have.”²⁰⁶ Why does the prospective father experience the child as a call to grant his own name? The father gives his own name (“*son propre nom*”) because “the father knows, through intimate experience, that this child is born from *his own (ses)* deeds, from *his own (sienne)* wife, in *his (sa)* house, in front of him, etc.”²⁰⁷ The child carries his name because it is the proper name, for the child too is “his own” (*propre*), he belongs to him—is properly his child, is his property.

Already, the absence of the mother makes itself felt. For, although Marion admits that “these excellent reasons nevertheless suffer from a well-known weakness,”²⁰⁸ this weakness is not the erasure of the mother, but instead is the fact that, due to “the temporal delay of birth’s initial belatedness to conception, biological paternity remains without immediate and direct proof, always doubtful.”²⁰⁹ As Dickinson notes, “what results from this seems to be nothing short of a certain paternal anxiety about whether or not the father can claim the child before him as his own.”²¹⁰ The mother disappears as a subject—Marion “finds no room for the example of the mother,”²¹¹ indeed,

²⁰⁵ Marion, *Being Given*, 301.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 300. Emphasis added.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 300.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Dickinson, “The Problem of Having Both a Body and a Name in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion,” 25.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28. This tendency is exemplified, for example, in the consistent slippage between “filiation” and “paternity”; throughout these analyses, to be a child is to be the son of a father.

she appears only as “his wife”—in order to create the space for a masculine insecurity that haunts the giving of the name.

Nevertheless, rather than confirming the givenness of fatherhood, Marion’s language belies the fact that it is precisely this masculine anxiety that strips the naming of the child of its gift-character. In the giving of the patronymic, Marion seems to unconsciously recognize that the erotic reduction is suspended, and the relationship is abruptly thrust back into the logic of exchange: for, the child adopts the father’s name “as collateral for his own adoption by the father.”²¹² Collateral—*en gage*, deposit, security, guarantee—this is not the language of the gift, but precisely that of exchange. The pursuit of the givenness of fatherhood does not find its completion in the anxiety of the absent father, but on the contrary this masculine insecurity strikes at the heart of Marion’s argument, rendering his reconstruction of “fatherhood as a gift” in *Being Given* self-contradictory.

The later account set forward in “The Reason of the Gift” and *Negative Certainties*, largely follows the trajectory of *Being Given*, with one key difference: whereas *Being Given* systematically erased the role of the mother, these later texts reintroduce the mother, but only as the “symbolic opposite”²¹³ of the father. As was already suggested above, for Marion the father is defined by absence: “*the father is missing.*”²¹⁴ Or, in phenomenological language, “the father appears as the giver who is perfectly reduced to givenness, the bracketed giver.”²¹⁵ The father is bracketed because the father is transcendent. Against the immanence of the child, the father manifests as a radical alterity.²¹⁶ Yet, this alterity is not simply the alterity implicit in every

²¹² Marion, *Being Given*, 302.

²¹³ Dickinson, “The Problem of Having Both a Body and a Name in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion,” 28.

²¹⁴ Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 100.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

²¹⁶ “Beyond the transcendence that fatherhood imposes within the gifted immanence...” *Ibid.*, 104.

intersubjective experience, for the child is not alone in their immanence. Instead, through a phenomenologically unclarified merger, the father discovers both the child and the mother in the immanence of the child: the father “is lacking because he can never merge with the given child (in contrast to the mother, who can and even must do so, if only for a time).”²¹⁷ From the site of this “happy immanence to the child,” the mother “stigmatizes the father’s miserable transcendence.”²¹⁸ This transcendence results from manifold causes: the masculine anxiety of paternity, the fact that the father “procreates only at the moment and then, having become superfluous, withdraws immediately, in contrast to the mother who remains,”²¹⁹ and lastly from the fact that “he can only remain united with the child by taking leave—precisely so as to bestow his help, as extroverted provider, as hunter, warrior, or traveler; in short, as the one who constantly returns, coming back to the hearth from which he must distance himself if he wants to maintain it.”²²⁰ Apart from its obvious recourse to traditional gender norms—certainly questionable as phenomenological necessities, given the numerous alternate familial configurations not only possible but actual—Marion’s analysis suffers from a number of identifiable limitations. Dickinson summarizes these problems in two passages worth citing in full:

Rather than steer such a discussion toward the many fathers who in reality are unknown to their children, not through their inability to name them (and as many such children do in fact bear the absent father’s name), but through their literal absence, Marion tries to establish a phenomenological sketch of why such absences are inherent to the role of the father in the child’s life something which, practically

²¹⁷ Ibid., 101.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 100. Dickinson here rightly notes that this analysis “appears to blame the mother’s closeness to the child for the father’s absence, and that also has significant theological implications for understanding a ‘distant fatherly God—Marion likewise assumes that mother’s desire to remain (and which is certainly not true of all mothers) as well as the father’s apparent inability to remain with the child (and which is not necessarily true of many father’s experiences).” Dickinson, “The Problem of Having Both a Body and a Name in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion,” 26.

²¹⁹ Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 100.

²²⁰ Ibid., 101.

speaking, can only appear as a most dangerous legitimation of a father's absence, perhaps indirectly justifying their choices and anxieties of many truly absent fathers. ... Marion's presentation of fatherhood ... hence appears in many ways as a justification for the absentee and irresponsible father, an upholding of patriarchal normativity and its generational legitimacy, an unfair 'stigmatizing' of the mother's lived responsibility for her child.²²¹

It does not here seem that the phenomenon has been permitted to manifest as it gives itself to be. Rather, quite to the contrary, what this analysis suggests is that the phenomenon of fatherhood—and therefore, correlatively, its symbolic opposite: motherhood—has been bound by the strictures of a “quasi-theological, patriarchal agenda”²²²—an ideology that not only figures heteronormative presuppositions as eidetic necessities, but one that also codes the phenomena of sexuality in such a way that traditional gender norms are likewise rendered as phenomenological requirements. The rendering of these norms into essential characteristics appears to directly contradict a central principle of Marion's phenomenology. As he writes, “that man would recognize himself as created ‘in the image and likeness of God’ does not imply his submission to some strictly defined essence, ... but instead releases and exempts him from the duty of being conformed to any known norm,”²²³ or again, without the theological intonation, “man distinguishes himself from all the other beings in that he is defined by his very resistance to every *definition*.”²²⁴ Any attempt to delimit humanity, to make of them an object, Marion rightly recognizes, constitutes an act of violence—or at least functions as the precondition for violence: “defining man by a concept does not always or immediately lead to killing him, but it does fill the first condition

²²¹ Dickinson, “The Problem of Having Both a Body and a Name in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion,” 26, 29.

²²² *Ibid.*, 24.

²²³ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Future of Catholicism” in *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 81.

²²⁴ Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 41.

required to have done with all that which (all of he who, *quis, quisqui*) does not *fit* this definition.”²²⁵

Yet, it appears unavoidable that Marion has here imposed a defining concept, a norm, in short, an essence upon each and every father and mother—one *ostensibly* validated phenomenologically, but an essence nonetheless. This essence, drawing as it certainly does from a Western tradition of patriarchal presuppositions, bounds both mother and father, strips them of their dignity, because it submits them to (metaphysical) concepts—absence/transcendence presence/immanence—rather than recognizing that which is “undefinable” within them. Moreover, this essentialization likewise generates its constitutive other, the queer or the homosexual, as its necessary supplement—that which does not “*fit* this definition.” As Marion already insists by 1979, the queer is marked by a rejection of difference—“homosexuality [is] the ultimate refusal of dissimilarity.”²²⁶ Yet, the difference that is here refused is not the alterity that marks the indefinability of the human, the resistance to every essence, but rather the imposed masculine/feminine essences that Marion has himself imposed as conditions for the manifestation of the human person in general, and the erotic manifestation of human sexuality more specifically.

§IV: Smuggling the Ontic into the Ontological

What is revealed by this critical analysis of Marion’s account of the erotic flesh is an inability to think sexuality in terms that would allow the diverse phenomena of queer sexuality to manifest.

²²⁵ Ibid., 27.

²²⁶ Marion, “The Future of Catholicism,” 78.

These analyses are heteronormative insofar as they have, in Marion's language, failed to permit the phenomena of queer sexuality to give themselves as they are given to be. Instead, the givenness of the erotic phenomenon has been filtered through a mediating condition of phenomenality, a delimiting horizon of visibility that we might simply name—to borrow Husserl's convention—a heteronormative attitude.

In Marion, this attitude manifests in two registers: both concealing and disclosing. What is concealed are the erotic components of non-normative sexual acts—whether sadomasochism, queer sexuality, or non-procreative sex. Read through a heteronormative lens, such acts cannot manifest other than as “perversions” or “transgressions.” The very possibility that they might manifest an authentic eros—understood here in Marion's terms as the coming together of my flesh and the flesh of the other—is excluded *a priori* from any eidetic analysis of eros. Because these queer eroticisms are, as Edelman suggests, “unthinkable,” they cannot enter into Marion's imaginative variation by which he seeks to uncover the phenomenological givenness of eros.

This concealing is grounded in a disclosing or pseudo-disclosing that presents certain phenomena—“nature,” a binary notion of sexual difference, the necessity of procreation, the maintenance of traditional gender norms, etc.—as constitutive of eros. These phenomena preemptively mask the phenomena of queer eroticism. That is to say, it is precisely insofar as something like the “naturalness of the body” steps forward, that something like queer eroticism is covered over or erased. Under the reign of the heteronormative attitude, they are, to use Paul's language, rendered “unpresentable”: τὰ ἀσχήμωνα. Indeed, insofar as these non-normative sexualities are permitted to manifest within this heteronormative attitude, they can only find themselves correlated with violence and dysfunction.

This tendency to present “traditional theological claims in the guise of a rigorous

phenomenology”²²⁷ is not unique to Henry and Marion. Indeed, this discussion strikes at the very center of phenomenology as a methodology. As Merleau-Ponty famously wrote, “the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction.”²²⁸ In the present case, this passage might be read in the following manner: no phenomenological reduction, even a redoubled or third reduction, is immune to the creeping influence of ideological investments. There is, to use Heidegger’s language, a perpetual tendency to smuggle the ontical into the ontological, to import non-phenomenological concerns into the very heart of ostensibly pure phenomenological analyses. Husserl himself commented on this risk explicitly in *Experience and Judgment*, writing:

This treatment [pure eidetic seeing] is achieved only when every connection to pre-given actuality is most carefully excluded. If we practice variation freely but cling secretly to the fact that, e.g. these must be arbitrary sounds in the world, heard or able to be heard by men on earth, then we certainly have an essential generality as an *eidos* but one related to our world of fact and bound to that universal fact. It is a secret bond in that, for understandable reasons, it is imperceptible to us. ... Only if we become conscious of this bond, putting it consciously out of play, and so also free this broadest surrounding horizon of variants from all connection to experience and all experiential validity, do we achieve perfect purity.²²⁹

Husserl’s comments on this matter are particularly helpful, as they not only diagnose the illness, but prescribe a cure as well: we must “become conscious of this bond, putting it consciously out of play.” That is to say, the means of eliminating non-phenomenological presuppositions from our analyses must begin with a thorough accounting of these presuppositions, their status, and their origin.

This task therefore necessitates genealogical work. For, if it is to be claimed that the

²²⁷ Dickinson, “The Problem of Having Both a Body and a Name in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion,” 29.

²²⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), xv.

²²⁹ Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, 350-1.

specific structure of Henry and Marion's accounts of sexuality emerges from an ideological investment then it will be necessary to chart the precise contours of this investment. Specifically, what will be shown is that the account of sexuality proffered by Henry and Marion does not merely emerge from a general heteronormativity, nor even from traditional Catholic sexual ethics generally construed, but rather that this account of sexuality finds a specific genesis in the so-called "communio school" of Catholic theology: epitomized by the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karol Józef Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II).

CHAPTER 4 - Nuptial Theology in the *Communio* School and Radical Phenomenology

Heterosexuality has difficulties in understanding sexuality outside the biological discourse, that is, outside the epistemological boundaries of reproductive organs.

Marcella Althaus-Reid

§I: Textual and Theological Connections¹

While on their own, Henry and Marion’s phenomenological analyses of the sexual body may appear confounding; their conclusions become considerably more comprehensible once they are situated within their *theological* context: what will here be referred to as the “*Communio* school.” It is only for simplicity’s sake that I will here refer—and with some reservation—to a *Communio* “school.” For *Communio*, more than most other schools of Catholic theology—from liberation theology to transcendental Thomism—can only be understood in relation to its founder, the swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. As Marion notes, “everything was animated by Balthasar.”²

Neither von Balthasar as an individual nor *Communio* as a loosely connected school can be easily categorized. Horner, for example, suggests that Marion’s association with *Communio* “is not without significance, since it has been argued that *Communio* epitomizes neo-conservative Catholicism, and that Marion represents a conservative push within the church.”³ Yet, any simple designation of *Communio* as “conservative” requires further nuance. For as Kilby reminds readers,

¹ An early draft of portion of this and later sections of this chapter can be found in J. Leavitt Pearl, “Jean-Luc Marion: the reinscription of heteronormativity into postmodern theology,” *Theology & Sexuality*, 1 (2017), pp. 144-163.

² Jean-Luc Marion, *The Rigor of Things: Conversations with Dan Arbib*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 25.

³ Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 4.

“Balthasar, while he might be seen as a conservative, is at many points certainly not traditional.”⁴ Indeed, von Balthasar’s *Johannes Verlag* (St. John’s Press) published many key texts in 20th century liberal Catholicism, including, Küng’s *Justification* and Rahner’s *Free Speech in the Church*. Thus, one might be served to follow Moss and Oakes suggestion that von Balthasar and his followers are “neither liberal nor conservative as these shopworn terms are normally understood.”⁵ Rather, in von Balthasar (and *Communio*), “we encounter a man teeming with paradoxes.”⁶

Von Balthasar found himself largely ostracized throughout the first half of his career, due to a variety of factors, including: his decision to leave the Jesuits in 1950 in order to found a secular institute with the mystic Adrienne von Speyr, his critique of natural theology in *The Theology of Karl Barth*, and his critique of anti-modernism in *Razing the Bastions*. As Kilby notes, for example, “in the 1960s, when the second Vatican Council was called, Balthasar stood alone among his generation of great theological minds in *not* being invited.”⁷ Nevertheless, despite his absence,

⁴ Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: a (very) critical introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: 2012), 11.

⁵ David Moss and Edward T. Oakes, “Introduction” in David Moss and Edward T. Oakes (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

⁶ Ibid., 6. Nevertheless, this notion of von Balthasar as “conservative” is certainly not without merit. As Kevin Mongrain notes, “in addition to his apparently ‘traditionalist’ interest in retrieving premodern theologians, after the Council he began writing books and essays stridently opposing many ‘progressive’ causes in the church. For example, he suggested there were anti-Catholic ideological motives behind such popular causes as liberation theology and ecumenism among world religions. Moreover, he sided with the Vatican in opposition to women’s ordination, artificial contraception, and optional clerical celibacy. In arguing his positions on all these issues he sometimes demonstrated self-righteous contempt for theological opinions different from his own; when his intellectual advice was not heeded, he could be a nasty and bitter polemicist. Suspicion of his ideas only grew as self-styled ‘conservatives’ nostalgic for Tridentine Catholicism appropriated von Balthasar as an intellectual champion of their causes. His image as a reactionary was also fostered by the fact that most of the English translations of his books were published by a company whose catalogue is filled with books written by theologically, politically, and culturally conservative Catholics.” Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: an Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 13.

⁷ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 27.

Vatican II would end up serving as something like a vindication of many of his most important theological positions. Yet, rather than resting on his laurels, von Balthasar instead became increasingly worried about the majority interpretation of the council and immediately “threw all his energies into openly opposing the majority trend in theology, especially as advocated in the pages of the international journal *Concilium*, which he cheekily countered with his own anti-accommodationist periodical, the journal *Communio*.”⁸

A further confirmation of von Balthasar’s theological program would come in the form of two Popes, both of whom largely supported his theological agenda: John Paul II and Benedict XVI.⁹ At the event of von Balthasar’s death, John Paul II’s eulogy would describe him as “a great son of the Church, an outstanding man of theology and the arts,”¹⁰ and Benedict XVI (then Cardinal Ratzinger) would give von Balthasar’s funeral homily wherein he would state that “the Church itself, in its official responsibility, tells us that he is right in what he teaches of the Faith,

⁸ Moss and Oakes, “Introduction,” 6. Or more precisely, close collection of related journals. “Some among them, Balthasar, Daniélou, Lubac, Bouyer, and the (then) young professor of systematic theology, Ratzinger, decided to create a different journal [than *Concilium*], which was called *Communio*. Or rather, it was a federation of independent journals, coming out in different countries. ... *Communio* most often depended on lay people, some university trained but not only those, including women and some really young people.” Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 23. In the words of Cardinal Ratzinger the *Communio* program sought to resist those who “sold goods from the old liberal flea market as if they were new Catholic theology.” Joseph Ratzinger, “Communio: A Program,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 437. While these two journals are often simply read as the liberal and conservative positions respectively, the reality is more nuanced. As Tracey Rowland writes, “whereas *Concilium* approached the Conciliar documents with a hermeneutic of rupture, the *Communio* authors offered a hermeneutic of continuity” (Tracey Rowland, *Guides for the Perplexed: Benedict XVI* (London, GBR: Continuum International Publishing, 2010), 5). That is to say, for the *Concilium* school the reforms of Vatican II represented a radical break in the Catholic tradition, the emergence of something substantially new, while for the *Communio* school the documents of Vatican II necessitated no significant break in Catholic teaching or dogma, only a shift in expression or presentation.

⁹ “He was said to be the favorite theologian of Pope John Paul II, and is held in high esteem also by Benedict XVI.” Kilby, *Balthasar*, 1. A first major recognition would come in 1984, when John Paul II granted von Balthasar the honor of being the first theologian to receive the International Paul VI Prize “for the development of research and religious knowledge.” But, the support of these two popes would never be as clear as in 1988. At the request of John Paul II, von Balthasar was to be made cardinal—though he would unfortunately pass two days before his installation.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

that he points the way to the sources of living water.”¹¹

A: *Communio* and Phenomenology

The relationship between *Communio* and phenomenological philosophy is quite complex. For, despite its distinctly theological aims and, as we will see below, its ambitions to return to patristic sources, it has nevertheless been the case that *Communio* has been continuously indebted to phenomenological thinking. This debt finds its earliest expression in von Balthasar’s complex relationship to Martin Heidegger. Indeed, the metaphysical underpinnings of von Balthasar’s theology might be read as something like a “Heideggerian Thomism.”¹²

According to von Balthasar, the question of Being—most famously posited by Leibniz as “why is there something rather than nothing?,”¹³—perpetually remains *the* fundamental metaphysical issue: “the Greek question about the being of what exists is as new today as it was in the age of Heraclitus and Parmenides, of Plato and Aristotle.”¹⁴ In the 20th century, the figure who embodied this philosophical pursuit most fully was Heidegger.¹⁵

¹¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Homily at the Funeral Liturgy of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in David Schindler (ed), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 295. And likewise called *Communio* “a powerful source for correct renewal as opposed to counterfeit forms.” *Ibid.*, 294.

¹² Fergus Kerr, “Balthasar and metaphysics,” in David Moss and Edward T. Oakes (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 237.

¹³ G. W. Leibniz, “Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason” in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 210.

¹⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Philosophy, Christianity, Monasticism,” in *Explorations in Theology II: Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 342.

¹⁵ “Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?” Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Darrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 110.

For Heidegger, the question of Being is ultimately the question of *the meaning of Being*.¹⁶ In his magnum opus, *Being and Time*, Heidegger pursues this question of the “meaning” of Being through an analysis of the particular manner of being unique to the human person, what he calls *Dasein*. According to Heidegger, *Dasein* is that being which “is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it.”¹⁷ *It is humans who ask, “why do I exist? Why does anything exist?”* Indeed, “the very asking of this question is [*Dasein*’s] mode of Being.”¹⁸ And because we are the being which interrogates Being, it is *Dasein* alone which discloses the meaning of Being.

In admittedly oversimplified terms, Heidegger’s answer to the question of the meaning of Being, is that Being is that which permits any being to be disclosed within the horizon of the world. In every experience of a being, no matter how mundane,¹⁹ *Dasein* likewise experiences the Being of that being.²⁰ Whereas beings are simply the ontical objects within the world, “‘Being’ cannot indeed be conceived as a being.”²¹ Rather, it is the ontological condition of beings; it is what determines beings as beings.²² This, for Heidegger, is precisely the transcendental task of phenomenology, not to “investigate the being itself but the possibility of the precursory

¹⁶ “Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word ‘being’? Not at all. So it is fitting that we should raise anew the question of the meaning of Being.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹ Heidegger will give particular emphasis, for example, to the Being of a tool (e.g. a hammer).

²⁰ “It discovers all beings, both in the fact that they are, and in their Being as they are.” *Ibid.*, 33 [translation modified for consistency].

²¹ *Ibid.*, 23, Or again, “The Being of beings ‘is’ not itself a being.” *Ibid.*, 26 [translations modified for consistency].

²² “We are able to grasp beings as such, as beings, only if we understand something like *being*.” Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 10.

comprehension of the Being of the being.”²³ The result of this transcendental or ontological distinction is a consistent insistence by Heidegger upon a fundamental difference between beings [*Seiendes*] and Being [*Sein*]: or as he will later name it, the “ontological difference.”²⁴

Already by 1940, von Balthasar was deeply engaged with Heideggerian phenomenology, reading him from a distinctly “Catholic standpoint.”²⁵ While von Balthasar’s appropriation of Heidegger would be anything but uncritical, it is nevertheless the case that von Balthasar was deeply taken by Heidegger’s reading of the history of Being and insistence upon ontological difference.²⁶ Thus, von Balthasar’s reading of the history of philosophy in the fourth and fifth volumes of *The Glory of the Lord* bears the distinct marks of a Heideggerian influence.²⁷ Moreover, the fifth volume culminates in an explicit engagement with Heidegger’s notion of the fourfold, entitled: “The Miracle of Being and the Fourfold Difference.”²⁸

²³ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. James S. Churchill (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1972), 20 [translation altered for consistency]. Likewise, this becomes, for Heidegger, the true meaning of the phenomenological reduction, “for us, phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological vision back from the apprehension of a being, whatever may be the character of that apprehension, to the understanding of the Being of this being (projecting upon the way it is unconcealed)” Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 21.

²⁴ “We must be able to bring out clearly the difference between Being and beings in order to make something like Being the theme of inquiry. This distinction is not arbitrary; rather, it is the one by which the theme of ontology and thus of philosophy itself is first of all attained. It is a distinction which is first and foremost constitutive for ontology. We call it the *ontological difference*—the differentiation between Being and beings” (Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 17). Or again, “we speak of the difference between Being and beings” (Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh [New York: Harper & Row, 1969], 50).

²⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Heidegger’s Philosophie vom Standpunkt des Katholizismus” *Stimmen der Zeit* 137 (1940): 1-8.

²⁶ “For Christian theology, and particularly for the theology of God’s glory—so Balthasar contends—Heidegger’s project is by far the most fertile in modern philosophy.” Kerr, “Balthasar and metaphysics,” 235.

²⁷ As Kerr notes: “Unlike Rahner, Balthasar never attended lectures by Heidegger. Ironically, however, as we shall see, his conception of metaphysics, as well as his massive reinterpretation of the history of Western philosophy in the fourth and fifth volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*, are deeply indebted to his reading of Heidegger. Balthasar is far more radically ‘Heideggerian’ than Rahner ever was.” Kerr, “Balthasar and metaphysics,” 225.

²⁸ This account of the “fourfold” serves as a useful heuristic of von Balthasar’s complex relationship to Heidegger, insofar as he here both positively affirms and negatively critiques his predecessor. Heidegger’s fourfold marks his increasingly mytho-poetic speculations on Being (See: John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* [Bloomington:

Indiana University Press, 1993]). Here, the human person finds itself held at the cross-section of four elements—earth and sky, divinities and mortals—which, as Kerr notes, “excludes all reference to the Christian God and equally any reference to human intersubjectivity” (Kerr, “Balthasar and metaphysics,” 235).

Von Balthasar therefore borrows the notion of a fourfold, embracing Heidegger’s assertion that the world is “disclosed” rather than “posited” or “constructed,” but seeks to highlight four key *differences* constitutive of the human being’s place in the world. This fourfold difference is: “(1) The intersubjective difference of the awakening child’s ‘I’ from its mother (and implicitly from every other human and from all else in the world); (2) the difference of the to-be of beings from the beings themselves; (3) the converse difference of being from being; and (4) the difference between all of these and God” (Ibid., 236).

In the first difference, von Balthasar seeks to strip away Heidegger’s solipsistic tendencies. Key to human being is the differential relationships between one’s self and others. The second difference is precisely von Balthasar’s appropriation of Heidegger’s “ontological difference” between beings and Being. The third difference seeks to highlight the symmetrical relationship between beings and Being. Not only do beings depend upon Being as their ontological condition. But likewise, “Being does not subsist in itself, on its own, in isolation” (Ibid., 236-237). Rather, it too depends upon beings. This may be read as akin to Heidegger’s assertion in *Being and Time*, “Insofar as Being constitutes what is asked about, and “Being” means the Being of beings, then beings themselves turn out to be what is interrogated. These are, so to speak, questioned as regards their Being. But if the characteristics of their Being can be yielded without falsification, then these beings must, on their part, have become accessible as they are in themselves. When we come to what is to be interrogated, the question of Being requires that the right way of access to beings shall have been obtained and secured in advance.” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 26 [translation modified for consistency].

Von Balthasar’s most striking challenge to Heidegger is his assertion in the fourth difference that everything, including Being itself, is marked by a primordial difference between itself and God, the difference between creature and creator. Thus it is not ultimately Being that discloses the world, but rather the divine. Here von Balthasar is opposing Heidegger with what might be called an Irenaean phenomenology. According to von Balthasar, Irenaeus teaches the theologian that “the primary aim is not to think, to impose Platonic intellectual or even mythical categories on things, but simply to *see what is*” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume II: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984], 45). It is therefore not surprising that the preceding volume is itself importantly sub-titled “*Seeing the Form*” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume I: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982]). This demand to “*see what is*” is remarkably reminiscent of Husserl’s charge: “meanings inspired only by remote, confused, inauthentic intuitions—if by any intuitions at all—are not enough: we must go back to the things themselves” [Edmund Husserl, *The Shorter Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay [New York: Routledge, 2001], 88). But, against Heidegger, von Balthasar suggests that when one genuinely sees what is—when one sees the *Gestalt* (“totality” or “form”)—what one sees is not the ontological difference, but this more originary theological difference, “the phenomenon of Christ” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Volume One: The Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian Walker [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000], 20): “the invisible Father renders himself visible in his Word and Son, who reveals him to us as the loving Father and Creator of all things” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Volume II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990], 141). In Kevin Mongrain’s words: “Irenaeus’s definition of faith is ‘seeing’ this paradoxical unity-in-difference of God and creation in Christ” (Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 31).

This fourth difference can be understood as anticipating Marion’s own attempts to bypass the Heideggerian charge of onto-metaphysics, in *God Without Being*, where God’s goodness will be positioned “above” Heideggerian Being, (*epekeina tes ousias*).

Whereas Heidegger functions as von Balthasar's principal interlocutor, Karol Józef Wojtyła (John Paul II) takes his phenomenological starting point from Max Scheler. Like von Balthasar, Wojtyła lacked any formal training in phenomenology, but rather, "came to phenomenology, contrary to popular assumption, entirely on his own."²⁹ It was at the prompting of his doctoral advisor, Father Ignacy Rozycki, that Wojtyła decided to examine the ethics of Max Scheler in his dissertation: "The Ethical System of Max Scheler as a Means to Elaborate Christian Ethics" (1953). In Scheler's philosophical anthropology, Wojtyła discovered a means of articulating the human experience of moral value: thus a conception of the human as a "moral person." This personalistic phenomenology would find its culmination in Wojtyła's 1969, *The Acting Person: A Contribution to Phenomenological Anthropology*.

Despite the subtitle to *The Acting Person*, it is unclear precisely how phenomenological Wojtyła actually remains. It is indisputable that "the departing point for Wojtyła is the experience of man."³⁰ Nevertheless, it remains methodologically unclear to what extent "experience" in Wojtyła can be correlated to anything like its phenomenological counterpart. For, "Wojtyła seems to separate himself not only from the transcendental reduction and *epoché*, but from the particular eidetic methodology of realistic phenomenology."³¹ In place of this method, Wojtyła seems to demand a turn to "meta-phenomenological or meta-physical premises."³²

²⁹ Anna-Theresa Tymieniecka and Roger Duncan, "Karol Wojtyła, between phenomenology and scholasticism" in Anna-Theresa Tymieniecka (ed), *Phenomenology World-Wide: Foundations—Expanding Dynamics—Life-Engagements. A Guide for Research and Study* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2002), 497.

³⁰ Ibid., 110. He was drawn to "the phenomenological proposal [demanding] fidelity 'to things themselves,' i.e., the reaffirmation of a cognitive process, which operates after having been affected by the actual 'givenness' of things." Carmen Beatriz Gonzalez, "Karol Wojtyła's Ethical Thought," *Analecta Husserliana* 114 (2009): 131-146, 137.

³¹ Juan Manuel Burgos, "The Method of Karol Wojtyła," *Analecta Husserliana* 114 (2009): 107-129, 118.

³² "Scheler's ethical system is not suitable for interpreting an ethics that has an objective character as Christian Ethics does. There is no doubt that Scheler's insufficient objectivism springs from his phenomenological principles. Because of these principles the ethical value always remains in an intentional and—despite everything—subjective position. In order to grasp ethical value in its real and objective position, one would have to proceed from different

Ultimately therefore, it seems that rather than pursuing a rigorous phenomenological line, Wojtyła can best be understood as embracing a hybrid methodology. As he declares, “the Christian thinker, especially the theologian, who makes use of phenomenological experience in his work, cannot be a Phenomenologist.”³³ Rather, maintaining the phenomenological orientation to experience, Wojtyła aims to supplement this with both a consideration of intersubjective experience³⁴ and the metaphysical realism of Thomism. Wojtyła names this hybrid methodology “Thomistic Personalism.”³⁵

B. Phenomenology and *Communio*: Textual Connections

If *Communio* has been marked by its engagements with phenomenological thinking, then the reverse is even clearer—at least in the case of *radical* phenomenology. For, although the “theological turn”³⁶ of French phenomenology includes thinkers from a variety of theological perspectives—such as Emmanuel Levinas’ Judaism or Paul Ricoeur’s Protestantism—the movement has not only been largely Catholic, but disproportionately influenced by von Balthasar

epistemological premises, namely, meta-phenomenological and even meta-physical premises.” Karol Wojtyła, “The Ethical System of Max Scheler as a Means to Elaborate Christian Ethics” as translated in Michael Waldstein, “Introduction” in John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 69. Or again, later, “With the phenomenological method, for example, we can study experiences of morality, religion, or simply what it is to be human, and draw from them a significant enrichment of our knowledge. Yet we must not forget that all these analyses implicitly presuppose the reality of the Absolute Being and also the reality of being human, that is, being a creature. If we do not set out from such ‘realist’ presuppositions, we end up in a vacuum.” John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), 12.

³³ Wojtyła, “The Ethical System of Max Scheler as a Means to Elaborate Christian Ethics,” 196.

³⁴ “It is impossible to state that our experience, as experience of conscience, of one’s conscience itself, exhausts the perceptive horizon of the given; man’s experience as source of knowledge, is composed of self-experience as much as of every other man’s experience.” Gonzalez, “Karol Wojtyła’s Ethical Thought,” 137.

³⁵ Karol Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” trans. Theresa Sandok in Andrew N. Woznicki (ed), *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1993): 165-75.

³⁶ See: Dominique Janicaud (ed), *Phenomenology and the ‘Theological Turn’: The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

and *Communio* theology. Thus, although the present investigation concerns the influence on the radical phenomenologies of Henry and Marion, one could likewise detect the clear influence of *Communio* on a variety of phenomenological thinkers, such as Jean-Yves Lacoste and Emmanuel Falque.³⁷

Although chronologically second, it will here be helpful to begin with Marion, whose personal and textual relationship to *Communio* is much more direct than Henry's. Xavier Tilliette describes the young Marion as "a brilliant Normalien and agrégé; ... who emigrated to *Communio* under the leadership of Father Urs von Balthasar."³⁸ Indeed, it is quite difficult to describe Marion's early career without reference to the key role of von Balthasar and *Communio*. In the early 70s, Marion knew relatively little of von Balthasar. Thus it must have come as quite a surprise when von Balthasar chose Marion (and Jean Duchesne) to found the French edition of the journal *Communio*. As Marion describes the event in his own words:

Hans Urs von Balthasar, whom we knew a little bit due to *Résurrection*, for which he had encouraged us, was deaf in that ear: He summoned us (that's the right word) to discuss it with him in Basel. I still remember it: He invited us to eat lunch in the restaurant of the Basel zoo (an allusion to what awaited us?) in order to tell us that, without a penny, without any acknowledged skill, without any institutional support, we should nonetheless launch the Francophone edition of *Communio*. Our protest changed nothing in his decision. We were caught in the trap. That was the summer of 1974.³⁹

³⁷ It is here worth noting that, Falque likewise fails to offer a liberatory sexual ethic. As Gschwandtner notes, "one should probably point out in this context that Falque's treatment is decidedly heterosexual and seems to make homosexuality impossible, or at least deeply problematic. While he does not explicitly condemn homosexuality, any consideration of it is entirely excluded from his account." Christina Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 316.

³⁸ "Brillant normalien et agrégé, élève d'Alquié et de Beaufret, il provenait du groupe 'tala' de *Résurrection* qui avait émigré à *Communio* sous la houlette du Père Urs von Balthasar." Xavier Tilliette, "Phénoménologies autonomes: Michel Henry & Jean-Luc Marion," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 60 (2004): 473-484, 478 [translation my own].

³⁹ Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 24.

Despite the inauspicious beginning of this “foolhardy undertaking,”⁴⁰ Marion would go on to edit the journal for another decade. Thus, not only would Marion be influenced by *Communio* thought, but he would also function as a principal contributor to its international shape. In that time, Marion would come to regard von Balthasar as “the greatest Catholic theologian of modern times.”⁴¹

The explicit influence of von Balthasar can be found on occasion throughout Marion’s corpus. He turns to Balthasar in his analysis of love in the *Prolegomena to Charity* (70n10, 122, 145n17), in connection to his notion of distance in *On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism* (307n30) and in *The Idol and Distance* (155).⁴² Yet, given Marion’s tendency to forego citation,⁴³ it will not be surprising if these few references represent only a small portion of the actual influence of *Communio* thought on his work. Marion has suggested precisely as much, when he writes, “I always have them in mind. I do not write a single line without asking myself what Hans Urs von Balthasar, Jean Daniélou, Jean Beaufret, Emmanuel Levinas, or Michel Henry would think of it.”⁴⁴ The influence of Jean-Paul II was less direct; for, Marion found himself disappointed by *The Acting Person*. nevertheless, he appreciated *Love and Responsibility*, which “has a simultaneously pastoral, biological, and spiritual dimension, which is completely lacking in [his] *Erotic*

⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁴¹ Ibid., 25.

⁴² Here he remarks, “To H. Urs von Balthasar my approach owes much.” Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University, 2001), xxxviii.

⁴³ A tendency explicit in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, for example, where he will write that “an initial precaution, as insufficient as it is obligatory, will consist in avoiding scrupulously the citation of any author at all.” Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 8.

⁴⁴ Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 19. This, despite the fact that von Balthasar took a passing “dig” (Ibid., 184) at Marion in the second volume of the *Theo-Logic*. There, glossing Plato, von Balthasar writes that despite the fact that the good is marked as “beyond being”: “it must not lead us however, into removing God from being (Jean-Luc Marion, *Dieu sans être* [Paris: Fayard, 1982]). Groundless love is not prior to being but the supreme act of being.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Truth of God*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 20.

Phenomenon.”⁴⁵ Thus, to understand the full significance of *Communio* for Marion, it will be necessary to examine some key themes that Marion shares in common with this tradition. But, before doing so it will be helpful to remark on the connection between Henry and *Communio*.

If Marion’s connection to this tradition could not be clearer—as editor of its primary journal—then the same cannot be said for Henry. For, even more than Marion, Henry tends to obscure his sources, particularly his theological sources. Where Henry does cite theological precedent these sources tend to either be the church Fathers or Meister Eckhart, almost never will Henry cite a contemporary theological voice. Thus, the task of tracing Henry’s theological lineage is rather difficult for the commentator. But evidence suggests that Henry was not only familiar with *Communio*, but may have at least partially subscribed to the theological tradition’s program. First, and most obviously, Henry published in the French edition of the journal on multiple occasions, over more than a decade—and at precisely the time when his own project was explicitly turning to theology—publishing “Représentation et auto-affection”⁴⁶ in 1987, “Archi-christologie”⁴⁷ in 1997, and “Incarnation”⁴⁸ in 2000.

Additionally, as in the case of Marion, there are clear methodological and thematic points of convergence. These will be explored more concretely below, but the reader will benefit from Rivera’s existing comparative study of Henry and von Balthasar’s conceptions of “form,”⁴⁹ and

⁴⁵ Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 183.

⁴⁶ Michel Henry, “Représentation et auto-affection” *Communio* XII, 3, n°71 (1987): 77-96.

⁴⁷ Michel Henry, “Archi-christologie” *Communio* XXII, 2-3 - n°130 (1997): 195-221.

⁴⁸ Michel Henry, “Incarnation” *Communio* XXV, 6 - n°152 (2000): 81-96.

⁴⁹ As Rivera notes, “it is perhaps instructive for us to show just how Henry may come in contact with Hans Urs von Balthasar, for instance, given that the latter has devoted considerable space to the concept of ‘form’” (Joseph Rivera, *The Contemplative Self After Michel Henry: A Phenomenological Theology* [Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2015], 129). According to Rivera, Henry and von Balthasar are united in this concern for the transcendental form of Christ (*Gestalt Christi*), their “deeply aesthetic mode of expression” (Ibid.) and their “Johannine piety and temperament” (Ibid.).

Kungua’s comparative study of their respective critiques of historical-critical method.⁵⁰ But, apart from these concerns, there remains much that binds Henry—and Marion—to the *Communio* school. Before ultimately turning to the convergences surrounding sexuality which are particularly relevant here, I will first draw out important similarities in theological method and content.

C. Theological Method: *Ressourcement*

Since its inception, the *Communio* school has understood itself in opposition to the Neo-Scholasticism dominant in early 20th century Catholic theology. Von Balthasar famously

Nevertheless, despite these similarities, these two retain a key difference. Where Henry adopts a subjective interpretation of form, von Balthasar’s concern for the maintenance of difference necessitates a clear recourse to ontological distance. As Rivera notes, “while it appears there is so little that separates Henry from Balthasar: ... Balthasar holds to the distinction between the Creator and the creature, or the form and content, and Henry simply does not” (Ibid., 132). Thus, Henry will instead turn to Eckhart’s assertion that “the eye with which I see God is exactly the same eye with which God sees me” (Meister Eckhart, “Sermon 16: Qui audi me non confunditur” in *Selected Writings*, trans. Oliver Davies [New York: Penguin Books, 1994], 179). In multiple instances Henry will paraphrase this famous passage, e.g.: “each of my actions is revealed to God at the same time as it is revealed to me, and in the very act by which it does so” (Michel Henry, *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emanuel [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000], 174), or more directly, “to say it in the fashion of the mystics: the Eye by which God sees Cain and the one by which Cain sees himself are but one and the same Eye” (Michel Henry, *Words of Christ*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012], 104). This citation of Eckhart serves to mark an original identity that can only be lost by a “forgetting” (See: Henry, *I am the Truth*, Chapter 8 “Forgetting the Condition of Son: ‘Me, I’ / ‘Me, Ego’”)—and is therefore recovered by remembering. Put more strongly, “all men are in Christ ... they are Christ himself” (Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, trans. Karl Hefty [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015], 237). Von Balthasar on the other hand denies such an originary identity: “this is not a question of the (gnostic) recovery of one’s own form, once possessed and then lost.” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume VII: Theology: The New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989], 293). Rather, for von Balthasar the form of Christ, granted to humans by the grace of God, is a radically “new creation,” a “new man.”

⁵⁰ According to Kungua, Henry and von Balthasar offer markedly similar critiques of the historical-critical method: “comme H. Urs von Balthasar, Michel Henry a des propos absolument incendiaires, caustiques et durs conte l’hybris et le totalitarisme de l’exégèse historico-critique issue de la Révolution galiléenne qui sous-tend la science occidentale et positiviste moderne” (Benoît Awazi Mbambi Kungua, *Déconstruction phénoménologique et théologique de la modernité occidentale: Michel Henry, Hans Urs von Balthasar et Jean-Luc Marion* [Paris: L’Harmattan, 2014], 112). As Kungua shows, both von Balthasar and Henry “assument l’interprétation heideggerienne de l’essence de la technique moderne comme figure extrême du nihilisme en tant qu’oubli de l’oubli de la différence ontologique de l’Être irréductible aux étants manipulables” (Ibid., 109-110). From this assumption, they develop remarkably similar critiques of modern historical-critical methods, understood in each instance as an attempt to submit the “la transcendance du Dieu toujours plus grand” (Ibid., 110) to the delimited strictures of modernity and its scientific rationalism.

described his experience of neo-scholastic training as “a grim struggle with the dreariness of theology, with what men had made out of the glory of revelation.”⁵¹ In response to this theological climate, von Balthasar took up the study of the Patristics with Henri de Lubac in 1933 at Fourvières.⁵² Although not an official student of de Lubac, the two would become important theological collaborators and life-long friends. Under the tutelage of de Lubac, von Balthasar produced a number of manuscripts on important Patristic sources, including: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Clement of Alexandria, Evagrius of Pontus, Dionysius, and Maximus the Confessor. Though, it was his study of Irenaeus which would be most formative for his future theological endeavors.⁵³

Following in the footsteps of de Lubac’s *ressourcement* tradition, von Balthasar saw these patristic figures as an escape from the overly rationalized—even gnostic, he will on occasion polemically claim—neo-scholastic theology. Where Neo-Scholasticism privileged the concept (*Begriff*), the Fathers opened a route to a theology of symbol (*Vorstellung*). Yet, as suggested by the name *ressourcement* (“return to the sources”), this methodology did not only aim to offer commentary or historical analyses of the Fathers, but rather von Balthasar “saw in them models for carrying on the work of theology *in his own world*.”⁵⁴ It is precisely this approach that can

⁵¹ As cited in Peter Henrici, “Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life” in David L. Schindler (ed) *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 13.

⁵² “The imposition of neo-scholastic uniformity seems to have given birth to a tremendous collective impulse ... to go back ... beyond Thomas to the richness and beauty of patristic thought” Kilby, *Balthasar*, 21.

⁵³ “Von Balthasar granted Irenaeus of Lyons privileged status as the quintessential patristic figure whose theology is the standard by which all other patristic theologies should be judged.” Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 9.

⁵⁴ Daley, “Balthasar’s reading of the Church Fathers,” 189 [emphasis added]. Some have suggested that *ressourcement* thinkers are more interested in *using* these figures, than in accurately understanding them; that they are read anachronistically. As Daley notes, “when all is said and done, [von Balthasar] still treated them essentially as sources to support his own theological engagement with modern European culture and thought” (Brian E. Daley, “Balthasar’s reading of the Church Fathers” in David Moss and Edward T. Oakes (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 189). it might instead be suggested that

likewise be found in Henry and Marion, both of whom draw upon Patristic theology at key moments in order to intervene in contemporary debates in phenomenology and theology.

As has been seen above (chapter 2) Henry traces ontological monism—the reduction of all phenomenality to visibility—back to its “origin in Greek truth.”⁵⁵ In his Christian trilogy, this struggle is recast as a conflict between a Greek “truth of the world”⁵⁶ and a Johannine “truth according to Christianity”⁵⁷—between “the Christian God” and “the Greek God.”⁵⁸ Nowhere is this conflict between Greek and Christian truth more evident, Henry will suggest, than in the writings of the Church Fathers, who spoke in the language of Hellenistic philosophy, but only ever of a Christian truth: “the Hellenization of language,” he argues, “goes hand in hand with a de-Hellenization of the faith.”⁵⁹

Drawing upon Acts 17’s account of Paul at the Athenian Areopagus, Henry marks the incarnation—particularly as manifest in the resurrection of the body—as the *locus classicus* of this dispute between Greek and Christian truth: “when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some

this tendency reflects the fact that—despite its seeming backward-facing posture—*ressourcement* does not advocate a simple or insufficiently nuanced adoption of the Patristic assumptions or metaphysics. As von Balthasar insists, “nothing would be more perilous than to demand from our completely different situation a pure return to patristic Platonism” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 24 [1997], 379).

⁵⁵ Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 165.

⁵⁶ It remains unclear if this phrase “truth of the world” refers to the title of the first volume of von Balthasar’s *Theo-logic* (von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Volume One: The Truth of the World*) or if the similarity is coincidental. If an intentional gesture, it is nevertheless worth noting that while both conceptions of the “truth of the world” will mark its dependence upon a more primordial truth, von Balthasar will tend to think this dependence in relational terms, while Henry’s dualistic tendencies will lead to a rather harsh, polemical treatment of the “truth of the world.”

⁵⁷ Henry, *I am the Truth*, 12-32.

⁵⁸ Henry, *Incarnation*, 122.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9. Here paraphrasing Bernard Sesboüé, “Jésus Christ dans la tradition de l’église,” in *Jésus et Jésus Christ*, no. 17 (Paris: Desclée, 1993), 100.

scoffed.”⁶⁰ This therefore becomes the heart of Henrian orthodoxy: “very great thinkers, the Fathers of the Church, will devote themselves to this reflection [on the incarnation],”⁶¹ while, Gnosticism and heresy, because they are corrupted by Greek truth, represent every theology that denies the incarnation.⁶² It is therefore the Fathers of the church that will become the champions *avant la lettre* of Henry’s phenomenology of flesh.

If this conflict reads as an overly simplistic account of the Patristic context, this is because Henry here undertakes two reductions. First, despite the apparent diversity of views and clear disputes among these early figures, Henry will insist upon a fundamental homogeneity, a “genius of the Church Fathers ... that weaves its way little by little through their dazzling intuitions.”⁶³ Thus, for example, he will breathlessly write of that “which we find in all the Fathers as well as in the councils.”⁶⁴ Nevertheless, much like von Balthasar’s use of Irenaeus as the interpretive key for the Patristics, Henry too frames his discussion around a central figure. Thus, while he cites a variety of Fathers: Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, and even devotes an entire section to Irenaeus and Augustine’s accounts of salvation,⁶⁵ it is ultimately Tertullian—and perhaps even more narrowly, Tertullian’s *De Carne Christi*—which serves as the guiding

⁶⁰ Acts 17.32 NRSV.

⁶¹ Henry, *Incarnation*, 8.

⁶² Here, as above, one might detect an uncited reference to von Balthasar and his rather broad (and polemical) conception of “Gnosticism.”

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, §46 “The Way of Salvation according to Irenaeus and Augustine.”

interpretive model. He will therefore unproblematically mark major claims as “according to Tertullian and the other Fathers...”⁶⁶ or “in the eyes of Tertullian and the Fathers...”⁶⁷

Conversely, this reduction of the Fathers to a “singular ideal sequence”⁶⁸ is likewise paired with a reduction of all Greek philosophy, Gnosticism, and Christian heresy to a singular affirmation of the “Greek body” rather than the “Christian flesh” of incarnation. “In his idea,” Perrot writes, “heresy forms a ‘compact block,’ which is basically the homologous negative of the ‘ideal sequence’ unique to the ‘Fathers’.”⁶⁹ As Henry writes:

All this debris of Greek thought (or of more ancient prejudices) is not only refused across the different forms of Gnosticism; it is pieced together immediately as a compact block: heresy. “Heresy” means everything that, under various masks and through spurious and false constructions, denies the truth (in other words the reality) of Incarnation.⁷⁰

As in the case of the Fathers, the ultimate viability of this reduction is suspect. Nevertheless, it serves Henry, who, like von Balthasar before him, is less concerned with properly historical or philological research than with the lessons that might be learned from these figures. Particularly, in this instance, these two simplifications permit Henry to appropriate Gnosticism and heresy into his figure of ontological monism.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Ibid., 130.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 127.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁹ “Dans son idée que l’hérésie forme un ‘bloc compact,’ qui est au fond l’homologue négatif de la ‘séquence idéologique’ unique des ‘Pères’.” Arnaud Perrot, “Michel Henry, Lecteur des Pères de l’Eglise,” *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 100(4) (2016): 647-660, 653 [translation my own].

⁷⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁷¹ As Perrot remarks, “Le philosophe peut ainsi lire, dans un auteur majeur de la littérature chrétienne du II^e siècle, la proposition centrale de sa théologie de la chair.” Perrot, “Michel Henry, Lecteur des Pères de l’Eglise,” 655.

This tendency to read the Fathers in light of his own philosophy is rather clear throughout *Incarnation*. This is seen grammatically in Henry’s unjustified use of the capitalized “Life” in his translations of Irenaeus: “the flesh is capable of receiving Life, this is proved by this very Life from which it already lives right not” (Irenaeus, as translated by Henry in *Incarnation*, 136). As Perrot’s instructive study notes, “l’assimilation de la doctrine d’Irénée

Given his earlier engagement with *Communio*, it is perhaps not surprising that Marion assimilated Patristic thinking earlier than Henry. Indeed, much like von Balthasar, Marion was driven to the Fathers by his disinterest in Neo-Scholasticism.⁷² In the Fathers, Marion found a truly Christian alternative to the onto-theology critiqued by Heidegger, a “pre-metaphysical” theology

se fait, de plus, par une subtile modification d'ordre typographique, que le texte original n'exige d'aucune façon. M. Henry s'écarte ici sciemment—quoique discrètement—de la traduction d'A. Rousseau qu'il suit par ailleurs, en écrivant le mot *vie* avec une majuscule” (Perrot, “Michel Henry, Lecteur des Pères de l'Église,” 655). In this manner, what is in Irenaeus a mundane reference to the individual life of a living body, becomes a reference to the indwelling spirit of the divine source of all life: “From Life means from God,” Henry elsewhere remarks, “since according to Christianity, the essence of Life and that of God are one and the same” (Henry, *I am the Truth*, 51).

Likewise, in his analysis of Tertullian, Henry imports a distinction between flesh and body that is completely foreign to the Father. “Dans le débat qui oppose, au II^e siècle, Tertullien à ses adversaires gnostiques, la doctrine chrétienne se comprend, précisément, comme la volonté de *ne pas substituer* à la ‘chair,’ c'est-à-dire au corps du Christ compris de manière obvie, un ‘chair’ d'un autre ordre” (Perrot, “Michel Henry, Lecteur des Pères de l'Église,” 655). Yet, through his introduction of a transcendental flesh over-and-against the mundane body, such a substitution is precisely what Henry ends up undertaking. Thus, there is “an ironic effect” (ibid.) to Henry's appropriation of *De Carne Christi*. For, like Valentinus, Henry seems to admit “both the flesh and the nativity, [while having] interpreted them in a different sense” (Tertullian, “On the Flesh of Christ,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume 3: Latin Christianity: Its founder, Tertullian I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995], I [521]); insofar as Henry redefines the muscles and bones of Tertullian's analysis into a monadic, organless flesh. Other commenters have noted this irony, and suggested that, against his own intentions, Henry ends up advocating something like a Valentinian Gnosticism. As Hart argues: “Henry's ‘philosophy of Christianity,’ at least in *C'est moi la vérité*, ends up being closer to certain strains of Gnosticism than to the current that became orthodox Christianity” (Kevin Hart, “The Reduction of Scripture” in *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, 13, no. 1 [2014]). This argument is more fully worked out in Jad Hatem, *Le sauveur et les viscères de l'être: Sur le gnosticisme et Michel Henry* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004); Paul Clavier, “Un tournant gnostique de la phénoménologie française? à propos des *Paroles du Christ* de Michel Henry,” *Revue thomiste* 105, no. 2 (2005): 307-315; and Rivera, *The Contemplative Self After Michel Henry*, 160-166, 198-199.

For a phenomenological reading of Tertullian that remains closer to the text and contemporary patristic scholarship, see: Emmanuel Falque, *God, the Flesh, and the Other: From Irenaeus to Duns Scotus*, trans. William Christian Hackett (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 143-166. It is worth noting that, despite his differences with Henry, Falque offers a kinder assessment of Henry than those above: “it should be understood that I agree with the interpretation of Tertullian that Henry gives in *Incarnation*. *If we can hold* that ‘the flesh is life auto-affected in the Son by the Father’ (and here we would depend more on Irenaeus than Tertullian), the density and solidity of the flesh is such in Tertullian that it is related also to the ‘body’ and not only to the lived experience of the flesh. One would be surprised to find Gnostic leanings in an author who relies on the most virulent anti-Gnostic thinkers to develop his theses (see §24)!” Ibid., 324 n. 68 [emphasis added].

⁷² “Rather than doing classical Thomism (which seemed to us anyway too wrapped up in metaphysics, in Heidegger's sense), we were spontaneously inclined to a study of the Fathers and the history of spirituality. I recall having done workshops on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Dionysius, Saint Augustine, [and] Maximus the Confessor.” Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 22.

that could address postmodern concerns with metaphysics.⁷³ Therefore, in works like *The Idol and Distance* and *In Excess*, Marion would turn to Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius⁷⁴—who function for him much like Irenaeus for von Balthasar or Tertullian for Henry—in order to conceptualize an ontological difference deeper and more substantive than Heidegger’s,⁷⁵ and to challenge Derrida’s reading of the (im)possibility of the gift and the possibility of a saturated phenomenon.⁷⁶

This influence would be so apparent that Levinas supposedly once remarked that “Marion has his Talmud, namely the Fathers of the Church!”⁷⁷

⁷³ “The Fathers found themselves in a premetaphysical position, hence not yet in the (metaphysical) situation, in which we probably really are no longer. At the time of the Fathers, metaphysics was not yet constituted as a system; one can reasonably say today that this constitution is accomplished, historically, with Duns Scotus and extends all the way to Nietzsche. The Fathers, for the most part, obviously thought before this system of metaphysics and even without knowing its medieval basis, with Aristotle’s corpus and its various successive introductions.” Ibid., 132. As Graham Ward notes, “it is in grasping the roots of modernity that Marion’s postmodern thinking sees the possibility of returning to the premodern world which de Lubac, Daniélou and Gilson had reintroduced into early twentieth century French Catholicism.” Graham Ward, “Introducing Jean-Luc Marion,” *New Blackfriars*, 76, No. 895 (July/August, 1995), “Special Issue on Jean-Luc Marion’s *God without Being*,” 323.

⁷⁴ “He cites some of the earliest Christian figures and apologists—Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome, and Justin Martyr—as well as the Alexandrians—Clement, Origen, and Athanasius. He is clearly familiar with all three of the Cappadocians, and they appear throughout his writings. He cites Ambrose and Augustine, the formative ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, John of Damascus, Theodore the Studite, and Maximus the Confessor. However, the influence most frequently present to Marion’s thought is found in the writings collected under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite.” Tamsin Jones, *A Genealogy of Marion’s Phenomenology of Religion: Apparent Darkness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 14. See, also: Wayne J. Hankey, “Jean-Luc Marion’s Dionysian Neoplatonism” in *Perspectives sur la néoplatonisme, International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, Actes du colloque de 2006*, ed. Martin Achard, Wayne Hankey, Jean-Marc Narbonne (Québec: Le Presses de l’Université Laval, 2009), 267-280.

⁷⁵ Here undoubtedly drawing upon von Balthasar’s “fourth difference.” As Marion describes the project, “by way of the Nietzschean threshold, I shall enter into commerce with other border territories of onto-theology: Hölderlin and Denys the Areopagite. ... the same question seemed to me to traverse these figures—that which is formulated here, according to the naming that I brought it, by distance: a distance outside of onto-theology for Nietzsche, a filially received distance of the presence of a God who is paternally in withdrawal for Hölderlin, and a distance traversed liturgically toward the Requisite by the discourse of praise of requestants for Denys.” Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 147-148. The importance of the Dionysian move is highlighted by the books dedication “To Denys.” Ibid., v.

⁷⁶ As he writes for example, “the saturated phenomenon par excellence—the principle, [is] declined in perfectly autonomous registers, where it gives itself to be seen, each time, only according to a perspective that is total as well as partial, conceivable and always incomprehensible: being in the act of Being, one before unity, truth of oneself and of the world, invisible splendor, etc. (Plotinus, Proclus, Dionysius, etc.)” Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 210.

⁷⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, as recalled by Marion in *The Rigor of Things*, 133.

D. Theological Content: Gift, Distance, and Love

While there are innumerable theological similarities between Henry and Marion's radical phenomenologies and *Communio* theology, it will be helpful here to limit the discussion to three closely related terms, that will be preparatory for a discussion of sexuality: gift, distance, and love.

As we have already seen in chapter 3, givenness is the central thematic of Marion's phenomenology. Thus in Marion's reading of Husserl, it is not intuition, but givenness (*gegebenheit*) that has primacy. The same can be said of Henry. For, it should be recalled that Henry's radical phenomenology aims at phenomena in their "How" (*Wie*), which Henry immediately glosses as givenness, "in the 'How' of their givenness."⁷⁸ Indeed, Henry marks the self-affectivity of Life not only as a unique mode of givenness, but as the Archi-revelation: the very "givenness of givenness."⁷⁹ Even the flesh itself is understood as "a power of givenness."⁸⁰ In Marion's *Being Given* this phenomenological concern for givenness is drawn into conversation with the ongoing French debate around "the Gift."

According to the French sociologist Marcel Mauss' study of gift exchange in so-called "archaic societies" (particularly those of the American Pacific Northwest and Polynesia), rather than extra-economic, gift exchange is marked by its social and economic character. The notion of a "free gift," is a "polite fiction, formalism, and social deceit, ... when really there is obligation and economic self-interest."⁸¹ Within the French philosophical community, this opened up a debate surrounding the possibility of gift-giving as such. As Jacques Derrida writes:

⁷⁸ Henry, *Incarnation*, 23.

⁷⁹ Michel Henry, "Le corps vivant," in *Auto-donation: entretiens et conférences* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2004), 127.

⁸⁰ Henry, *Incarnation*, 120.

⁸¹ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchanges in Archaic Societies*, trans W. D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 3.

If there is gift, the given of the gift ... must not come back to the giving. ... It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. ... It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is impossible.⁸²

That is to say, a gift, rightly given, should be given freely and without conditions. But, at least according to Derrida's reading of Mauss, every gift is ultimately reinscribed within the economic sphere. Thus it seems that the naive notion of simply "giving a gift" is undermined. Rather, as Derrida suggests, every gift is also a *Gift*—in the German sense; that is, a poison. To give a gift is, at the same time, to give an obligation to reciprocate.⁸³

For both Henry and Marion the problematic of the gift demands a response that is both phenomenological and theological, for gift and self-giveness are, for both, central theological motifs, particularly integral to any understanding of the relationship between God and creation or of the erotic relationship.⁸⁴ But this is not a novel innovation of radical phenomenology, but rather one again finds clear precedence in *Communio* theology.

According to von Balthasar, self-giveness is at the heart of divine reality. The very internal distinctions of the Godhead are themselves products of gift-giving: to be begotten is to have received a gift. Thus, on von Balthasar's kenotic account of the generation of the second person of the trinity, "the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it

⁸² Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 7.

⁸³ It is worth noting that, despite Marion's reading, Derrida does not actually seem to mark the gift as impossible in the colloquial sense. Rather, Derrida marks the inevitability of reinscription within the economic sphere as an *impossible condition of possibility*; a destabilizing condition that renders the simple gift discursively unstable, but does not necessary exclude the gift *tout court*.

⁸⁴ "Givenness; showing; phenomenalization; unveiling; uncovering; appearance; manifestation; and revelation. ... It cannot escape us that these key words for phenomenology are also, in large measure, key terms for religion, or theology." Henry, *Incarnation*, 23.

over to the Son.”⁸⁵ But this self-giveness is not limited to the sphere of divinity, rather it likewise marks the essence of the created order. To be a creature is to have been given the gift of Being.⁸⁶ Likewise, John Paul II expressly interprets creation through the “hermeneutic of the gift.” Accordingly, he writes, “as an action of God, creation thus means not only calling from nothing to existence, ... it also signifies *gift*; a fundamental and ‘radical’ gift, that is, an act of giving in which the gift comes into being precisely from nothing.”⁸⁷

It would be impossible here to miss the direct correlation between these notions of a receptive being and Marion’s refiguring of the subject as “the gifted” (*l’adonné*), that which “receives itself entirely from what it receives.”⁸⁸ Marion undoubtedly understands the gifted—who receives itself from “revelation”—in von Balthasarian terms. To be the gifted is to have received oneself from a phenomenon that gives itself without condition (Marion), or in von Balthasar’s words: “a revelation of [God’s] glory needs no justification but itself.”⁸⁹

Although Henry tends to use the notion of self-giveness in a more autistic sense, as giving oneself to oneself—rather than as the self-giveness of the phenomenon to itself (von Balthasar/Marion⁹⁰)—his theological writings nevertheless ultimately recapitulate precisely these

⁸⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Volume IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 323.

⁸⁶ As Kilby notes, “it is never on Balthasar’s account a question of possessing anything ... [but rather] on passivity and receptivity, on our being seized, transported, transformed.” Kilby, *Balthasar*, 55.

⁸⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Women He Created Them*, 180.

⁸⁸ Marion, *Being Given*, 268.

⁸⁹ Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Volume I*, 140. This connection is by no means forced, Marion himself makes it explicit, privileging “Balthasar’s argument ... that Revelation has no conditions of possibility except itself.” Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, 26.

⁹⁰ “It is the kind of evidence that emerges and sheds light from the phenomenon itself.” Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Volume I*, 464.

theological commitments, here under the figure of Archi-giveness. For Henry, prior to the givenness of the self to itself in its immanent flesh, the self is first given to itself by an Archi-giveness, whereby Life (i.e. God) generates the living.⁹¹ As Henry notes in *Communio*, “that which is ‘given from above’ [John 19.11], [is] the Archi-giveness of life to all life.”⁹² Thus, the passivity or receptivity of the self to itself,⁹³ is ultimately grounded in a deeper receptivity of the living to Life, of the creature to God. In the words of Paul, cited by Henry in *Incarnation*, “what do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?”⁹⁴

For each of these figures, the giving and receiving of a gift is generative of difference and *distance*.⁹⁵ Thus, although colloquially we understand the gift as creating unity,⁹⁶ it is here more

⁹¹ “Because the most ordinary of these powers are given in absolute Life, their gift is of a singular character. ... The present that Life gives to the living—of its life, its Self, its flesh, and each of the powers that compose it—is nothing from which it could separate itself. This impossibility is two-fold. Inscribed in givenness, given to itself in absolute life’s self-giveness, generated in its Self in its Arch-Ipseity, and passible in its Arch-passibility, where each of these powers is exerted in the heart of an Arch-power, the gift of life that is internally built up in the latter only subsists within it.” Henry, *Incarnation*, 175. As Henry will later affirm, “a flesh such as ours ... is incapable of being self-sufficient, of bringing itself into life.” Michel Henry, *Words of Christ*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 50.

⁹² “Que cette ‘donation d’en haut,’ l’Archi-donation de la vie à toute vie.” Michel Henry, “Incarnation” in Michel Henry, *Les Dossier H: Michel Henry* (Paris: L’Âge d’Homme, 2009), 105 [translation my own].

⁹³ See: Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. G.J. Etzkorn (New York: Springer, 1973), §§25-26.

⁹⁴ 1 Cor. 4.7 NRSV. Cited in Henry, *Incarnation*, 177.

⁹⁵ Remarkably, this even seems to be true for the late Henry. For, in his differentiation of immanence first into Life and the living, and then subsequently by the imposition of a distinction between the Father and the Archi-Son within Life, Henry imposes (something at least very like) a distance and this, despite his contestations to the contrary (e.g. his assertion of a “unity of the Father and the Son ... [which is] not an ecstatic and abstract unity.” Michel Henry, *Words of Christ*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012], 89). Thus for example, Life at least logically, even if not temporally, precedes the living: “the gift of Life in us, this gift which always precedes us.” *Ibid.*, 121. This may reflect an instance where theological concerns (maintaining the unity of the persons of the Godhead, avoiding too closely identifying the soul and God) seem to have overridden the Henry’s phenomenological considerations.

⁹⁶ As Kilby writes, “in general, we do not think of giving, and in particular giving of oneself, as creating distance, difference, separation between giver and receiver—at least not unless something goes wrong.” Kilby, *Balthasar*, 110.

properly understood as generative of a unity-in-difference, a community. Due to the kenotic self-gift of the Father to the Son, for example, there remains “an absolute, infinite ‘distance’”⁹⁷ between the members of the Godhead. Here, Marion’s reading of Dionysian “hierarchy” is instructive. Rather than representing degrees of power or control—as in contemporary usage which “our modernity forbids us straight away from understanding correctly”⁹⁸—the Dionysian hierarchy is grounded in the notion of the self-giving gift, wherein each rung of the ladder gives itself to the rung below. Thus it is not power that generates difference, but ultimately, love: “hierarchy has an ecstatic origin in the excessive love that goes out of itself to create.”⁹⁹

In this way, gift and distance are ultimately reducible to love: and one should therefore not be surprised when Marion’s “reduction to givenness” becomes, in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, “the erotic reduction.” According to von Balthasar, for example, the Father’s gift of Himself to the Son, is a gift given in love, is in fact nothing other than the love that the Father *is*; for, “‘being = giving.’ It is in giving that one is and has.”¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Benedict XVI took the occasion of his first encyclical to write of the self-giving love of God in *Deus Caritas Est*: “since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere ‘command’; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.”¹⁰¹ For Henry, in the Archi-givenness of the self, “it is the unlimited intoxication of life, the Arch-pleasure of its eternal love in its Word, its Spirit, that

⁹⁷ Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Volume IV*, 325.

⁹⁸ Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 163.

⁹⁹ Tamsin Jones, “Dionysius in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Jean-Luc Marion” in Coakley and Stang (eds.), *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 24.

¹⁰⁰ Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Volume VII*, 391.

¹⁰¹ Benedict XVI, *God is Love, Deus Caritas Est: Encyclical Letter* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006), 2.

submerges us.”¹⁰² And for Marion, in the search for an answer to the question “does anyone love me?,” one only finds an answer in the one who loved first: “I discover that this first lover, from the very beginning, is named God.”¹⁰³

But here one should not be confused, this self-giveness of love is not simply reducible to the love of *agape*—the *amor benevolentiae*. Rather, *Communio* has universally marked the central thesis of Anders Nygren’s *Agape and Eros*¹⁰⁴ as an overreach. As Benedict XVI remarks, “the more [*agape* and *eros*], in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. . . . Fundamentally, ‘love’ is a single reality.”¹⁰⁵ In like manner, von Balthasar insists upon “an indissoluble union of *agapê* and *erôs*, of the glory of God and the beauty of the soul.”¹⁰⁶

In Marion, this becomes the univocity of love.¹⁰⁷ “It’s not a question of two parallel or opposed loves,” he writes, “but of two modes of the same love: creatures, myself or my brother, can therefore be loved, and even loved with *enjoyment*, provided that they come to be loved in the enjoyment of God.”¹⁰⁸ In this way, *eros*, even sexuality, will be fundamentally understood through

¹⁰² Henry, *Incarnation*, 262.

¹⁰³ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 222.

¹⁰⁴ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

¹⁰⁵ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 11-12.

¹⁰⁶ Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Volume IV*, 322.

¹⁰⁷ “Univocal love is only told in *one way*.” Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 277. This univocity is explicitly attained through a rejection of Nygren, whose infamous thesis is marked by Marion as “untenable” and “inept” (Marion, *In The Self’s Place*, 273). As Marion writes, “all loves are hierarchically arranged solely according to the variations in the relative importance of one part (me) or the other (the beloved), the structure itself unvarying; thereafter, between the loves in which I constitute the greater part of the whole (love of the bottle, of a woman taken by force, or of hoarded money) and those in which I constitute only the lesser part (love of one’s wife, children, prince, or God), the difference in the objects only underscores the invariant structure.” Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 156. See: Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*,

the paradigm of the gift. As Henry writes, in the erotic encounter, one “gives his or her body and thus not only gives their body, but also this gift itself: their freedom.”¹⁰⁹ With this propaedeutic of the gift, distance, and love, it will now be possible to turn to the ultimate concern: *Communio*’s theology of sexuality.

§II: Sexual Difference, The Nuptial Body

A. The Primacy of Sexual Difference

If, as suggested above, *Communio* is not conservative in a traditional sense, where does its popular designation as a “conservative” school of Catholic theology come from? Certainly this is in part due to its oppositional relation to *Concilium*—widely regarded as “progressive”—, its seeming backward-facing posture in regards to the patristics, and its resistance to liberation theology. But most directly, this perspective seems to stem from what is regarded as its reactionary sexual ethic. Having risen to prominence during a period of intense intra-Catholic debate regarding birth control, abortion, homosexuality, and female ordination, the themes of sexuality and gender figure prominently among *Communio* thinkers. As Mongrain notes, von Balthasar “sided with the Vatican in opposition to women’s ordination, artificial contraception, and optional clerical celibacy,” in a manner, Mongrain continues, often “nasty and bitter.”¹¹⁰ John Paul II’s *Man and Woman He Created Them* likewise centers sexuality—Kerr naming it “a Christian anthropology

4-5, 217-221; Marion, *In the Self’s Place*, 270-282. For a commentary on these claims, and their connection to *Communio* theology, see: Beáta Tóth, “Love Between Embodiment And Spirituality: Jean-Luc Marion And John Paul II On Erotic Love” *Modern Theology* 29:1 (2013).

¹⁰⁹ Henry, *Incarnation*, 215.

¹¹⁰ Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 13.

of sexual difference,”¹¹¹ but, in such a manner that it is often read as a mere apology for the traditionalist sexual ethics of Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae*. As Johnson writes, “by the time [John Paul II] reaches his explicit discussion of *Humanae Vitae*, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that every earlier textual choice and phenomenological reflection has been geared to a defense of Paul VI’s encyclical.”¹¹²

This traditionalist stance is central, because, in *Communio* thinking, discussions of sexual difference are not merely restricted to one corner of moral theology or theological anthropology. Rather, sexual difference saturates *Communio* theology.¹¹³ As Beattie puts it, “Balthasar’s theology oozes sex.”¹¹⁴ From communion¹¹⁵ and ecclesiology, to trinitarian theology and Mariology, nearly every aspect of *Communio* theology is read through the hermeneutic of sexual difference.¹¹⁶ Indeed, Moss and Gardner ask: “is Balthasar’s genius to have recognized that it has been decided that sexual difference is the question of our age?”¹¹⁷ This focus upon sexual

¹¹¹ Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 175.

¹¹² Luke Timothy Johnson, “A Disembodied ‘Theology of the Body’: John Paul II on love, sex & pleasure,” *Commonweal* (Jan. 26, 2001), 14.

¹¹³ As Kilby notes of von Balthasar, “his views on what it is to be ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are not just one topic among others in his writings, but flavor a great deal of his thought” Kilby, *Balthasar*, 123.

¹¹⁴ Tina Beattie, *The New Catholic Feminism: Theology, Gender Theory and Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 157.

¹¹⁵ For example, in his discussion of communion, von Balthasar writes, “what else is his eucharist but, at a higher level, and endless act of fruitful outpouring of his whole flesh, such as a man can only achieve for a moment with a limited organ of his own body.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Elucidations*, trans. John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1975), 226.

¹¹⁶ In Tonstad’s words, “Balthasar’s theology stands or falls by the success of his intercalation of trinitarian relations, God-creation relations, and sexual difference.” Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 28.

¹¹⁷ David Moss and Lucy Gardner, “Difference--the Immaculate Concept? The Laws of Sexual Difference in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Modern Theology* 14 no. 3 (Jul 1998): 377-401, 378. Here, explicitly placing von Balthasar in conversation with the Irigaray quote that opened this dissertation: “each age has one issue to think through, and only one. Sexual difference is probably the issue of our time, which could be our ‘salvation’ if we thought it through” (Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn burke and Gillian C. Gill [Ithaca,

difference likewise holds for Henry and Marion. For each, sexual difference is ultimately a central thematic even if, as we have seen, it appears in Marion as a principal ideological figure, and in Henry only in a disavowed manner, as the underside of his supposed transcendental asexuality.

For *Communio* theology, sexual difference is anthropologically ultimate: “there is no ‘sexless’ first man.”¹¹⁸ This is understood both historically—there was no historical androgyne—and ontologically—the human person is male or female *all the way down*. As von Balthasar writes:

The male body is male throughout, right down to each cell of which it consists, and the female body is utterly female; and this is also true of the whole empirical experience and ego-consciousness. At the same time both share an identical human nature, but at no point does it protrude, neutrally, beyond the sexual difference, as if to provide neutral ground for mutual understanding. Here there is no *universale ante rem*, as all theories of a nonsexual or bisexual (androgynous) primitive human being would like to think.¹¹⁹

Here, it seems one finds a theory of sexual difference quite close to that proposed by Marion’s heavily gendered account of sexuality. Conversely, von Balthasar seems to deny precisely the transcendental a-sexuality that Henry affirms. “Balthasar attempts,” as Crammer argues, “to affirm the dignity and worth of women, in contrast to theology that has either ignored women or elided them into a false universal of ‘man,’ meant to include all humans but which on closer examination

NY: Cornell University Press, 1993], 5). But, the ostensible similarity between von Balthasar and Irigaray’s concerns for sexual difference should not obscure the fundamental difference between the two programs. As Beattie writes, “like Irigaray, von Balthasar defends the irreducibility of the two sexes, and both argue that the discovery or rediscovery of the significance of sexual difference is a vital task if we are to avoid the cultural crises confronting us at the end of the twentieth century. However, von Balthasar seems to think that he already knows what sexual difference looks like and what it amounts to, whereas Irigaray suggests we have only the vaguest of ideas. She argues that all present constructs of sexual difference are products of masculinity, so that what poses as the feminine in western culture is in fact the masculine imaginary—a projection onto women of the desires and fantasies that must be repressed in the acquisition of male subjectivity, in a way that denies women access to the symbolics of their own subjectivity.” Tina Beattie, “A Man and Three Women—Hans, Adrienne, Mary and Luce,” *New Blackfriars* 79 no. 924 (1998): 97-105, 98.

¹¹⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Volume III: Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 290.

¹¹⁹ Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Volume II*, 364-365.

appears to be male.”¹²⁰ To borrow an image from von Balthasar, humanity is like a symphony; and just as “a bass trumpet is not the same as a piccolo; a cello is not a bassoon,”¹²¹ so too are men and women fundamentally different, in an irreducible manner. It is only through a recognition of this difference, that men and women can sound together as one symphony.

The logic underlying this symphonic metaphor is central to *Communio* theology, for the affirmation of an irreducible sexual difference between men and women is regarded as a necessary component of human dignity.¹²² Any demand for respect and justice must necessarily be made in deference to the unique symmetry of man and woman—their complementarity. “Man,” von Balthasar argues, “is always in communion with his counter-image, woman, and yet never reaches her. The converse is true of woman.”¹²³ This quasi-symmetrical relationship renders each sex, on its own incomplete. Only in its relationship to its other, its converse, is one sex able to find its fulfillment: “anything that diminishes sexual difference by allowing incursions of one sex into the other’s natural role damages a critical balance, with baleful consequences.”¹²⁴

In this way, von Balthasar is able to simultaneously affirm and deny the equality of the sexes. Theologically speaking, man and woman are essentially equal (*wesensgleich*) before God. But, as Crammer notes, “equality between the sexes is held in tension with a kind of hierarchy.”¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Corinne Crammer, “One sex or two? Balthasar’s theology of the sexes,” in David Moss and Edward T. Oakes (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 94.

¹²¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 7.

¹²² This logic has been the justification for the appropriation of von Balthasar by some Catholic feminists. As Kilby notes, “some see Balthasar as laying the groundwork for an authentic Christian feminism, or as pointing the way to a profound theology of otherness, bodiliness, and sexual difference.” Kilby, *Balthasar*, 124.

¹²³ Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Volume II*, 366.

¹²⁴ Crammer, “One sex or two?,” 95.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

For, following Paul's assertion in 1st Corinthians, "the husband is the head of his wife,"¹²⁶ von Balthasar likewise posits a certain "primacy of the man."¹²⁷ Authority, particularly authority within the church, is restricted to men, whereas women are cast in the role of submissive recipients of the grace of the (masculine) priest.¹²⁸

While "John Paul II has a more egalitarian understanding of the relationship between man and woman than ... Balthasar,"¹²⁹ he nevertheless argues with equal insistence upon the primordially of sexual difference, or as he terms it: the "spousal meaning" of the body. Methodologically centered in his pseudo-phenomenological recourse to experience, John Paul II identifies sexual difference as a phenomenologically intuitable fact, for which one need only turn to the "evidence of their own body in its masculinity and femininity."¹³⁰ Yet, whereas von Balthasar insists upon the absolute nature of this sexual difference, John Paul II's personalism marks this difference as penultimate, always second to the subjectivity of the individual person. Thus he writes, for example, "although in its normal constitution, the human body carries within itself the signs of sex and is by its nature male or female, the fact that man is a 'body' belongs more deeply to the structure of the personal subject than the fact that in his somatic constitution he

¹²⁶ 1 Corinthians 11.3 NRSV.

¹²⁷ Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Volume II*, 375. "Although Balthasar asserts the equality of the sexes before God, he appears to regard equality in the created order as a threat to sexual difference and as contributing to the excesses of an overly masculinized, overly technological, technocratic society." Cramer, "One sex or two?," 96.

¹²⁸ See, e.g.: Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Women Priests? A Marian Church in a fatherless and motherless culture," *Communio* 22 (1995): 164-170.

¹²⁹ Agneta Sutton, "The Complementarity and Symbolism of the Two Sexes: [] Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar and John Paul II," *New Blackfriars* 87 (2006): 418-433, 418.

¹³⁰ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 195.

is also male or female.”¹³¹ The result of this subordination of sexual difference to a primary embodiment is an emphasis upon a more egalitarian complementarianism. “Thus while he strongly objects to the ‘masculinization’ of woman,” Sutton argues, “he insists, more convincingly than ... Balthasar, on her dignity and equality with man.”¹³² Nevertheless, one is here dealing in shades of emphasis rather than structural disagreements; for, like von Balthasar, John Paul II will ultimately institute an asymmetrical (and hierarchical) relationship between the sexes, stating that “the husband is above all the one who loves and the wife, by contrast, is the one who is loved”;¹³³ the husband is active, the wife is passive.

This distinction between the “active man” and “passive woman” is a defining feature of *Communio* theology’s account of sexual difference—as we saw in Marion and Henry. Thus, as Kilby remarks of von Balthasar, for example, “to be male is to be strong, to take initiative, to be active and goal-oriented; to be woman is to be open, receptive, surrendering, passive, to be characterized by weakness and dependence, to be contemplative.”¹³⁴ Certainly, this feminine passivity should not be understood as a total submission of woman to man. As Crammer notes, for von Balthasar this “is an active passivity, arguably the opposite of passivity, since consent (obedience) must be freely given and this consent-giving is active.”¹³⁵ Nevertheless, this caveat has done little to soothe the concerns of von Balthasar’s critics. As Kilby argues, “to speak of these

¹³¹ Ibid., 157. Scripturally, John Paul II grounds this distinction in the primacy of place given to the first creation account—where humanity is created simultaneously—, rather than the second account where man is created before woman.

¹³² Sutton, “The Complementarity and Symbolism of the Two Sexes,” 432.

¹³³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 485.

¹³⁴ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 129.

¹³⁵ Crammer, “One sex or two?,” 98.

characteristics as fundamentally womanly, however, is, in the first instance at least, to see [women] not in relation to God but in relation to men.”¹³⁶

In John Paul II this submission is rendered in more egalitarian terms as a *reciprocal submission*: “love excludes every kind of submission by which the wife would become a servant or slave of the husband, an object of one-sided submission. Love makes the husband simultaneously subject to the wife.”¹³⁷ Moreover, for both von Balthasar and John Paul II, despite its feminine character, submission or obedience is a virtue for both men and women. Nevertheless, precisely as Henry will later make thematic—in his analysis of the “the feminine character of anxiety”¹³⁸—even when passivity is attributed to men, it is nevertheless still understood as a characteristically feminine comportment. Certainly, just as in Henry, von Balthasar “is portraying women as ahead of the game, having the edge over the men, precisely in this weakness, dependence, and surrender.”¹³⁹ But, as we saw in chapter 2, regardless of the positive tenor given to passivity, it is nevertheless the case that this conception tends to lend itself towards the objectification of the passive woman, by the active man; as Beattie argues in strong terms, “to describe a sexual relationship in terms of active man taking possession of passive woman sounds dangerously close to offering a theological justification for rape.”¹⁴⁰ Moreover, insofar as submission is essentially feminine, it becomes an irreducible character of feminine being, whereas it is merely a contingent or accidental feature of masculine being. Thus, while men “are able also

¹³⁶ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 131.

¹³⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 474.

¹³⁸ Henry, *Incarnation*, 207.

¹³⁹ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 131.

¹⁴⁰ Beattie, “A Man and Three Women,” 100.

to be female and receptive,” particularly in their relationship to God, “women cannot in turn also be active.”¹⁴¹

According to Crammer, who analyzes this recourse to sexual difference through Thomas Laqueur’s distinction between one-sex and two-sex paradigms of sexual difference,¹⁴² this privilege of the male ends up, in spite of its intention, recapitulating a one-sex paradigm: “despite his attempt to construct a two-sex theological anthropology, ... ultimately Balthasar reproduces the one-sex model in which the normative human being is implicitly male and Woman’s definition is based around Man, particularly around what Man is seen to need Woman to be.”¹⁴³ Or, in the words of Beattie:

This account of sexual complementarity entails not the affirmation but the eradication of genuine difference. If woman is man’s fullness, coming forth from within him, there cannot also be a “polarity of man and woman.” Woman is variously described by von Balthasar as man’s “answering word,” his “answering gaze,” the “vessel of fulfilment specially designed for him.” But an answer, to be relevant and comprehensible, is defined by and bound to the question. If woman is the answer to man, she can exist only within the parameters of the man’s question.¹⁴⁴

A similar critique is leveled against John Paul II, by Johnson:

John Paul II wants for example, to have the term “man” mean both male and female. But the Genesis 2 account pushes him virtually to equate “man” with “male,” with the unhappy result that males experience both the original solitude the pope wants to make distinctively human as well as the dominion over creation expressed by the naming of animals. Females inevitably appear as “helpers” and as complementary to the already rather complete humanity found in the male. In virtually none of his further reflections on sexuality do women appear as moral agents: Men can have lust in their hearts but not women, men can struggle with concupiscence but

¹⁴¹ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 132.

¹⁴² Crammer, “One sex or two?,” 107 n.3. See: Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

¹⁴³ Crammer, “One sex or two?,” 102.

¹⁴⁴ Beattie, “A Man and Three Women,” 99.

apparently women do not; men can exploit their wives sexually but women can't exploit their husbands sexually.¹⁴⁵

Here one finds a curious, though incredibly important, reversal. Whereas von Balthasar, John Paul II, and Marion all seek to affirm sexual difference in its strongest terms, they nevertheless—through their affirmation of gendered stereotypes and implicit diminishing of feminine subjectivity—end up recapitulating an account that, rather than the opposite of the Henrian “universal male,” is merely its photo-negative; “the same old story of the same old sameness.”¹⁴⁶ Just as Henry's attempt to erase difference eventuated in a stereotyped notion of sexual difference, so too does von Balthasar, John Paul II, and Marion's converse recourse to stereotyped notions of sexual difference eventuate in an erasure of difference. Despite all initial signs to the contrary, *Henry's transcendental asexuality and Marion's heavily gendered account of sexual difference amount to one and the same thing*: the submission of the feminine and the erasure of sexual minorities.

B. Feminism and Queer Sexuality

Insofar as *Communio* theology tends to think sexual difference in traditional imagery, it has largely regarded secular feminism as a direct threat. For, as Alenka Zupančič, argues:

The traditional division between masculine and feminine worlds, ... actually does not see sexual difference as difference, but as a question of belonging to two separate worlds, which are 'different' from a neutral bird's-eye description, but otherwise coexist as integral parts in the hierarchy of a higher cosmic order, the wholeness and unity of which is in no way threatened by this 'difference.' These are parts that 'know their place.' And feminism (as a political movement) puts in question, and breaks, precisely this unity of the world.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, “A Disembodied ‘Theology of the Body’,” 14.

¹⁴⁶ Beattie, “A Man and Three Women,” 98.

¹⁴⁷ Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 36.

Thus, in his critique of calls for female ordination, von Balthasar sources this demand in the “worldwide offensive of ‘feminism’.”¹⁴⁸ According to von Balthasar, feminists—“whom,” Crammer notes, “he appears to group together in an undifferentiated whole”¹⁴⁹—demand an equality with men that can only take the form of an erasure of sexual difference: “an unnatural masculinization of woman or a leveling of the difference between the sexes.”¹⁵⁰ This, according to von Balthasar, is a result of an increasingly technologized and “history-less” society. “Where positivistic, technology-oriented thinking succeeds in reigning supreme,” he writes, “the female element also vanishes from the attitude of the man.”¹⁵¹

Here one might note a critique of technology and its “culture of death,” that runs across most every *Communio* theology. Consider the similarities between the following propositions:

Meaning can be found only in creating a vital force against history-less, technologized existence, in abstaining from the artificial superabundance of life. (Von Balthasar)¹⁵²

This neo-Manichean culture has led, for example, to human sexuality being regarded more as an area for manipulation and exploitation than as the basis of that primordial wonder which led Adam on the morning of creation. (John Paul II)¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Von Balthasar, “Women Priests?,” 164.

¹⁴⁹ Crammer, “One sex or two?,” 94.

¹⁵⁰ Von Balthasar, “Women Priests?,” 165. A secondary theme in *Communio* critiques of feminism targets the adversarial posture of feminism, rather than the masculinization of women. Thus, one reads of feminism’s tendency “to emphasize strongly conditions of subordination in order to give rise to antagonism: women, in order to be themselves, must make themselves the adversaries of men. Faced with the abuse of power, the answer for women is to seek power. This process leads to opposition between men and women, in which the identity and role of one are emphasized to the disadvantage of the other, leading to harmful confusion regarding the human person, which has its most immediate and lethal effects in the structure of the family.” Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Archbishop Angelo Amato, “Letter to the Bishops of The Catholic Church: On The Collaboration Of Men And Women In the Church and in the World,” (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 2.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 166.

¹⁵³ John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane: Letter to Families From Pope John Paul II* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 19.

[The child] cannot be desired or conceived as the product of an intervention of medical or biological techniques; that would be equivalent to reducing him to an object of scientific technology. (Cardinal Ratzinger)¹⁵⁴

Science has reduced the living transcendental Self to a dead object of the Galilean field. ... Everywhere such a metaphysical situation is produced: everywhere a man or a woman is only an object, a dead thing, a network of neurons, a bundle of natural processes, ... one is put in the presence of a man or a woman but finds oneself in the presence of what, stripped of the transcendental Self that constitutes its essence, is no longer anything, is only death. ... Men treated mathematically, digitally, statistically, ... Men turned away from Life's Truth. (Michel Henry)¹⁵⁵

Bio-technological manipulations or socio-medical traffickings ... would reduce [the child] to the rank of a manufactured object, bought and sold; ... moreover, the obsession with possessing the thing, what one then calls "my" child, can easily go hand in hand with its being forgotten out of indifference, its instrumentalization by convenience, or even its destruction by mistreatment. (Jean-Luc Marion)¹⁵⁶

For each of these figures, the modern world—understood to also be a masculine world—is dominated by technologization, standardization, and objectification. Thus, the passive receptivity of the feminine stands as a final bulwark against the total loss of culture to the “barbarism” of modernity—a barbarism most visible in the realms of sexuality and reproduction. From this perspective, feminism not only represents the erasure of sexual difference, but the possibility of a total erasure of humanity’s unique character: “such a change would totally destroy the disturbed balance, level the all-fructifying difference between the sexes in favor of an asexuality (with male indications, however) and consume humanity’s last ideological reserves.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Donum Vitae: Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation, Replies to Certain Questions of the Day* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987), B, 4.

¹⁵⁵ Henry, *I am the Truth*, 274-275. One should here again note Kungua’s brief comparative study of Henry and von Balthasar’s critiques of scientific rationalism in *Déconstruction phénoménologique et théologique de la modernité occidentale*.

¹⁵⁶ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 198.

¹⁵⁷ Von Balthasar, “Women Priests?,” 166.

For these thinkers, the feminist attack on sexual difference, and the family, has likewise given rise to philosophies of gender that further threaten the traditional family, through the normalization and propagation of queer sexualities. As Benedict XVI (then Cardinal Ratzinger) writes, in a letter approved by John Paul II:

A second tendency emerges in the wake of the first. In order to avoid the domination of one sex or the other, their differences tend to be denied, viewed as mere effects of historical and cultural conditioning. In this perspective, physical difference, termed *sex*, is minimized, while the purely cultural element, termed *gender*, is emphasized to the maximum and held to be primary. The obscuring of the difference or duality of the sexes has enormous consequences on a variety of levels. This theory of the human person, intended to promote prospects for equality of women through liberation from biological determinism, has in reality inspired ideologies which, for example, call into question the family, in its natural two-parent structure of mother and father, and make homosexuality and heterosexuality virtually equivalent, in a new model of polymorphous sexuality.¹⁵⁸

This critique of queer sexuality can certainly be traced back to Christian moral theology's condemnations of sodomy and other homosexual and autoerotic activities. But within the modern period, it is John Paul II's *Veritas Splendor*, which was the first encyclical to link homosexuality to what John Paul II would later name a "new ideology of evil," in opposition to "the traditional conception of the natural law" whereby "contraception, direct sterilization, autoeroticism, pre-marital sexual relations, homosexual relations and artificial insemination were condemned as morally unacceptable."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Ratzinger and Amato, "On The Collaboration Of Men And Women In the Church and in the World," 2. Or again, in a letter that explicitly links this new "philosophy of sexuality" to Simone de Beauvoir, Benedict XVI writes: "Simone de Beauvoir: 'one is not born a woman, one becomes so' (*on ne naît pas femme, on le devient*). These words lay the foundation for what is put forward today under the term 'gender' as a new philosophy of sexuality. According to this philosophy, sex is no longer a given element of nature, that man has to accept and personally make sense of: it is a social role that we choose for ourselves, while in the past it was chosen for us by society. The profound falsehood of this theory and of the anthropological revolution contained within it is obvious. People dispute the idea that they have a nature, given by their bodily identity, that serves as a defining element of the human being. They deny their nature and decide that it is not something previously given to them, but that they make it for themselves. Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI: On the Occasion of Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia," Friday, 21 December 2012.

¹⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Veritas Splendor* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 47.

For *Communio* thinkers, there are three principle critiques of queer sexuality. In von Balthasar, queer sexuality is directly linked to a narcissistic autoeroticism and self-idolatry. “Homosexuality is so ruinous,” von Balthasar writes, “because here man has caught sight of his own beauty and made it into an object. If the male is involved, he has likewise objectivized his God-willed superiority. No being, as a matter of fact, should enmesh himself in the love that seeks full satisfaction in beauty, which a special grace graciously conceals from him.”¹⁶⁰ For von Balthasar, homosexuality is an erasure of sexual difference that glorifies the “same” of sexual homogeneity.

The second and third critiques can already be found in John Paul II’s early work, particularly *Love & Responsibility*. There one finds both a slippery slope argument and an argument from reproduction, both akin to what will be later reproduced in Marion’s *The Erotic Phenomenon*. Thus, for example, John Paul II directly links fetishistic fascination with sexual attributes, homosexuality, and bestiality as chains in a single logic of “perversion”:

The sexual urge in a human being is always directed towards another human being—this is the normal form which it takes. If it is directed towards the sexual attributes as such this must be recognized as an impoverishment or even a perversion of the urge. If it is directed towards the sexual attributes of a person of the same sex we speak of a homosexual deviation. Still more emphatically do we speak of sexual deviation if the urge is directed not towards the sexual attributes of a human being but towards those of an animal. The natural direction of the sexual urge is towards a human being of the other sex.¹⁶¹

For this text, these various forms of sexuality constitute perversions precisely because they diverge from the exclusive site of sexual intimacy. As John Paul II writes, “the union of man and woman

¹⁶⁰ Von Balthasar, *The Grain of Wheat: Aphorisms*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 89-90.

¹⁶¹ Karol Wojtyła, *Love & Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 49. This logic is again repeated a few chapters later, where John Paul II similarly writes, “we ignore for the moment those perversions in the context of which a sexual value may be connected with a person of the same sex, or not with a person at all but with an animal or an inanimate object” (Ibid., 105).

needs a suitable framework, one which permits the full development of the sexual relationship while ensuring the durability of their union. Such a union is, of course, called marriage.”¹⁶² But this is not just any marriage, for “attempts to solve the problem of marriage other than by monogamy (which implies indissolubility) are incompatible with the personalistic norm and fall short of its strict demand.”¹⁶³ For John Paul II, it is only the monogamous, indissoluble, heterosexual marriage which can be the site of sexual union. This necessity follows from two demands, first the personalistic norm, which demands respect for individual persons, and second, the natural law:¹⁶⁴ “a man and woman who, as husband and wife, unite in a full sexual relationship thereby enter into the realm of what can properly be called the order of nature.”¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the singular object of this nature is reproduction, “sexual intercourse, on all occasions, is in the nature of things affected in one way or another by its primary purpose, procreation.”¹⁶⁶

This argument will subsequently be rearticulated in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, There John Paul II inscribes this procreative objective directly into the body itself, writing of the “spousal nature” of the body revealed most conspicuously in reproduction: “there is inserted, in a future-related perspective, the procreative meaning of the body, that is, fatherhood and motherhood.”¹⁶⁷ Here, in passages whose very language is almost identical to Marion’s, the child

¹⁶² Ibid., 211.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ “In the sexual relationship between man and woman two orders meet: the order of nature, which has as its object reproduction, and the personal order, which finds its expression in the love of persons and aims at the fullest realization of that love.” Ibid., 226. This critique, rather than von Balthasar’s, is more closely connected to traditional natural law and Thomist critiques of queer sexuality.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 226.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 542. Or again, as he writes of women, “the mystery of femininity manifests and reveals itself in its full depth through motherhood.” Ibid., 210.

marks the culmination of *eros*, the call of futurity, the “third” which seals love. “Procreation,” John Paul II writes, “brings it about that ‘the man and the woman (his wife)’ know each other reciprocally in the ‘third,’ originated in both.”¹⁶⁸

Insofar as many queer sexualities cannot procreate, they are written out of this account of sexuality and love. As Johnson notes, John Paul II’s phenomenological descriptions—much like Marion’s phenomenological descriptions in *The Erotic Phenomenon*—quietly slip from the merely descriptive to the normative.

What appears in the guise of description serves prescription: human love and sexuality can appear in only one approved form, with every other way of being either sexual or loving left out altogether. Is it not important at least to acknowledge that a significant portion of humans—even if we take a ludicrously low percentage, at least tens of millions—are homosexual? Are they left outside of God’s plan if they are not part of the biblical story? Would not an adequate phenomenology of human sexuality, so concerned with ‘persons,’ after all, rather than statistics, take with great seriousness this part of the human family, who are also called to be loving, and in many fashions to create and foster the work and joy of creation?¹⁶⁹

Here, queer sexuality finds itself erased from the biblical narrative, as well as the phenomenological story of sexuality and love, precisely because it does not fit into the paradigm of sexual difference and reproductive futurity demanded by the *Communio* sexual ethics.¹⁷⁰

But, the scathing character of the *Communio* critique and erasure of queer sexuality is not reducible to its conflict with natural law morality. Rather, the acerbic, even vitriolic tenor of this

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 211. This demand for procreation will continue throughout John Paul II’s career, appearing, for example, in his 1994 letter to families: “experience teaches that human love ... naturally tends towards fatherhood and motherhood. ... They [husband and wife] are called to become parents, to cooperate with the Creator in giving life. ... The genealogy of the person is thus united with the eternity of God, and only then with human fatherhood and motherhood, which are realized in time. At the moment of conception itself, man is already destined to eternity in God.” John Paul II, *Grassimam Sane*, 7-9.

¹⁶⁹ Johnson, “A Disembodied ‘Theology of the Body’,” 14.

¹⁷⁰ “It appears that concerted efforts are being made to present as ‘normal’ and attractive, and even to glamourize, situations which are in fact ‘irregular’.” John Paul II, *Letter to Families From Pope John Paul II: Grassimam Sane* (Vatican: 1994), 5.

critique—“the new ideology of evil”!—is a consequence of a larger role of sexual difference in *Communio* theology, one that extends well beyond the sphere of moral theology into the very heart and identity of the Church itself.

C. From the Nuptial Body to Nuptial Ecclesiology

The figure of Mary stands at the intersection of two key discourses in *Communio* theology: sexual difference and ecclesiology. For these thinkers, Mary is the epitome of femininity: she “is woman, pure and simple, in whom everything feminine in salvation history is summed up.”¹⁷¹ But, at the same time, she is the image of the church, which is called to “bear-Christ” and live responsively and obediently.

In Mary two things become visible: first, that there is to be found the archetype of a Church that conforms to Christ, and second, that Christian sanctity is ‘Christ-bearing,’ ‘Christophorous’ in essence and actualization. To the extent that the Church is Marian, she is a pure form which is immediately legible and comprehensible; and to the extent that Christians become Marian (or ‘Christophorous,’ which is the same thing), Christ becomes just as simply legible and comprehensible in them as well.¹⁷²

This feminine image of the church—the “bride of Christ” (viz. Eph. 5; II Cor. 11; Rom. 7)—is absolutely central to *Communio* ecclesiology, together with all of its associated stereotyped notions of femininity (e.g. fecundity, humility, virginity, passivity, etc.). As one reads in Ephesians:

Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the

¹⁷¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Our Lady of Monasticism,” *Word and Spirit* 10 (1985): 52-56, 52. Importantly, what is effaced here is the Mary of Luke’s Magnificat, the bold, prophetic Mary who calls out injustice and proclaims a year of jubilee. This active prophetic Mary is replaced with a one-dimensional, passive Mary, whose only words seem to be “let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1.38).

¹⁷² Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Volume I*, 562.

church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.¹⁷³

This tendency appears with considerable clarity and regularity in von Balthasar, who suggests that the “ordered sexual relationship,” that is, the heterosexual nuptial relation, “exists in Christian terms only in the encompassing space of the relationship of Christ-church, for which the original relationship of Adam-Eve remains an eloquent parable. ... *Here the Church is wholly female*; it is conceiving, bearing, and giving birth to what she has received from Christ as his fruitfulness.”¹⁷⁴ As Crammer notes, von Balthasar here “associates masculinity with divinity, and femininity with creation,”¹⁷⁵ in a manner, it might be added, deeply reminiscent of Mary Daly’s aphorism: “if God is male, then the male is God.”¹⁷⁶ This nuptial relationship between Christ and

¹⁷³ Ephesians 5.22-33 NRSV.

¹⁷⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Church—Bride of Christ” in *The von Balthasar Reader*, ed. Medard Kehl and Werner Löser, trans. Robert J. Daly and Fred Lawrence (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 231-232 [emphasis added]. See also: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of God: Volume VII*, 470-484. Here it may be worth noting Kilby’s critique of von Balthasar’s sexual-centric conception of nuptiality. As she writes, “there is ... a kind of sexual reductionism to be felt in Balthasar’s theological use of gender imagery. And it is not only that male/female relationships are all conceived as marital, and that marriage is considered entirely in terms of sex; sexuality itself, here, is reduced to a sort of biologically conceived act of reproduction. We read much, in Balthasar, as we have seen, of seeds and wombs and gestation periods, but we in fact hear very little of erotic love” (Kilby, *Balthasar*, 138). It is therefore, she argues, “sexual reproduction, rather than sexual love, that seems to govern Balthasar’s ‘nuptial’ thought.” (Ibid., 139). “None of these [sharing property, raising children, etc.], however, is ever even in the background when Balthasar refers to brides, bridegrooms, and nuptiality. On the whole this dimension of Balthasar’s thought could more accurately, if perhaps less politely, be described as pointing towards a sexual-intercourse theology than a nuptial one” (Ibid., 138).

¹⁷⁵ Crammer, “One sex or two?,” 104.

¹⁷⁶ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Woman's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 19.

church—and therefore sexual difference—is for von Balthasar “the central mystery of *all theology*,”¹⁷⁷ insofar as it gathers together the disparate disputes within the Church. Thus, for example, von Balthasar’s insistence upon a masculine priesthood is emboldened by its analogical relationship to the nuptial Christ-Church relation:

The institution [of the priesthood] guarantees the perpetual presence of Christ the Bridegroom for the Church, his Bride. So it is entrusted to men who, though they belong to the overall feminine modality of the Church, are selected from her and remain in her to exercise their office; their function is to embody Christ, who comes to the Church to make her fruitful.¹⁷⁸

This turn to nuptiality will be continued and expanded by John Paul II’s *Man and Women He Created Them*. Like von Balthasar before him, John Paul II expands the gendered categories of his anthropology into an image of the greater union of the masculine Christ with the feminine Church, who mutually “interpenetrate”¹⁷⁹ one another. “To the marriage of the first husband and wife [Adam and Eve], as a sign of the supernatural gracing of man in the sacrament of creation, there corresponds the marriage, or rather the analogy of the marriage, of Christ with the Church, as the fundamental great sign of the supernatural gracing of man in the sacrament of redemption.”¹⁸⁰

Yet, even more explicitly than von Balthasar, John Paul II insists upon the reciprocal nature of this analogy. That is to say, the church is not only understood by consideration of nuptiality, but inversely, the heterosexual nuptial relation is understood by consideration of the Christ-Church relation. As he writes, “the comparison of marriage (due to spousal love) with the relationship

¹⁷⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Word and Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 161.

¹⁷⁸ Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Volume III*, 354.

¹⁷⁹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 431.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 508.

between ‘Yahweh and Israel’ in the Old Covenant, and between ‘Christ and the Church’ in the New, is at the same time *decisive for the way of understanding marriage itself.*”¹⁸¹ Therefore heterosexual marriage, as the proper image of the Christ-Church relation, becomes the only licit site for sexual intimacy. In this way, the necessarily heterosexual nature of the *Communio* sexual ethic is *authorized and insured by the very structure of the church itself.*

In this regard, the theological motivation underlying *Communio*’s characteristically traditionalist reaction to the sexual liberation, feminist, and queer liberation movements—their retrenchment of heteronormativity and traditional gender roles—can be easily understood. The connection of these sexual themes to the church’s very self-identity, through its nuptial ecclesiology, almost inevitably fosters a dogmatic reading of sexual determination. Due to the nuptial correlation, any rejection of a strict relegation of sexual intimacy to heterosexual marriage subsequently strikes at the very meaning of the Church itself. According to Guy Hocquenghem, homosexual flirtation is “a formidable power of disjunction, ... [an] extremely efficient ... nuptial deconstructor.”¹⁸² But, for the *Communio* theologian, such a deconstruction of the ultimacy of the heterosexual nuptial relation is a direct attack upon the very identity and ultimacy of the Church itself—the “Bride of Christ.”

Even more strongly, insofar as the Bride of Christ, the Church, is understood as the medium of the Holy Spirit’s activity in the world—for *Communio* affirms “the doctrine of a directly proportional relationship between the institutional church and the Holy Spirit’s work in

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 502 [emphasis added]. Or again, “While the analogy used in Ephesians clarifies the mystery of the relationship between the Christ and the Church, at the same time it reveals the essential truth about marriage, namely, that marriage corresponds to the vocation of Christians only when it mirrors the love that Christ, the Bridegroom, gives to the Church, his Bride, and which the Church (in likeness to the wife who is ‘subject,’ and thus completely given) seeks to give back to Christ in return.” Ibid., 476.

¹⁸² Guy Hocquenghem, *The Screwball Asses*, trans. Noura Wedell (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2010), 76.

history”¹⁸³—then any challenge to the primacy of heterosexual nuptiality is likewise a challenge to the Spirit, and even the internal constitution of the Godhead. For, as Crammer notes, “sexual difference, which permeates all creation, is derived analogously from something resembling sexual difference, ‘suprasexuality,’ within the Trinity.”¹⁸⁴ “In trinitarian terms,” von Balthasar writes, “the Father, who begets him who is without origin appears primarily as (super-)masculine; the Son, in consenting, appears initially as (super-)feminine.”¹⁸⁵ Thus, at least for von Balthasar, the nuptial relation of sexual difference is determinative of the very nature of the persons of the trinity. *To affirm queer sexuality would be, at the same time, to destabilize this very understanding of the trinity itself.*

While neither Henry nor Marion engages at length with ecclesiology, this nuptial theology is nevertheless subtly determinative of their phenomenologies of sexual difference. Thus, for example, the final division of Henry’s *Incarnation* is devoted to “salvation in the Christian sense.”¹⁸⁶ Yet, the internal unity of this section has often eluded commentators. As Karl Hefty notes, “the intrinsic connections between the various parts of his analysis are here perhaps most difficult to decipher: power, freedom, anxiety, sin, desire, passivity, eroticism—how do these themes hold together under the subheading ‘salvation in the Christian sense?’”¹⁸⁷ *Communio* nuptial theology offers at least one possible explanation for this confluence of themes—

¹⁸³ Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 109.

¹⁸⁴ Crammer, “One sex or two?,” 94.

¹⁸⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Volume V: The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 91.

¹⁸⁶ Henry, *Incarnation*, Division 3 “Phenomenology of Incarnation: Salvation in the Christian Sense.” For an analysis of Henry’s soteriology, see: Sylvain Camilleri, “Phenomenology and Soteriology in the ‘Christian Trilogy’ of Michel Henry,” trans. W. Christian Hackett, in Jeffrey Hanson and Michael R. Kelly (eds.) *Michel Henry: The Affects of Thought* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 11-136.

¹⁸⁷ Karl Hefty, “Translator’s Preface” in Henry, *Incarnation*, xiv.

particularly the extensive discussion of the erotic, sexual sin, passivity, and the closing meditations on the body of Christ. Simply put, Henry seems here to be assuming, without explicitly marking the debt, the central features of *Communio* nuptial theology; wherein, the heterosexual erotic encounter between the active man and passive woman, is a model for the passive/receptive relationship of members of the Church (Body of Christ) and God (Life).

Precisely the same model can be found in Marion's *The Erotic Phenomenon*, where an extended discourse on sexuality and the erotic culminates in a quasi-mystical experience of the divine. But here—in a phenomenological recapitulation of medieval commentaries on *The Song of Songs*—the experience of the divine is cast in decidedly erotic terms, here “God names himself with the very name of love.”¹⁸⁸ More importantly still, one should not discount the subtle gendered language of these passages, following, as they do, Marion's rather explicitly gendered account of femininity. Here, God—or more specifically, the Christ; since God “ends up ... identifying himself in the incarnated Son”¹⁸⁹—is the one who “loves first.” Christ, always gendered masculine, is the active lover. Whereas the reader, the recipient of Christ's love, takes on precisely those characteristics of feminine sexuality as explicated by Marion above—passivity, receptivity, etc. What one finds here, albeit in covert language, is nothing other than the erotic union of the masculine Christ and the feminine church: or in Marion's own language, “the nuptial distance that weds, without confusing, the visible and the invisible.”¹⁹⁰

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¹⁸⁸ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 221.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁹⁰ Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 9.

Given the consistent methodological and theological overlaps between *Communio* theology and radical phenomenology, it therefore becomes quite unsurprising to find Henry and Marion's phenomenological analyses of sexuality and the flesh adopting an account of sexuality largely congruent with this traditionalist approach. In fact, the emphasis upon the stereotyped notions of sexual difference, the limitation of authentic love to heterosexual union, and the critique of technological intervention, are not only completely consistent with official magisterial doctrine, but more importantly, their justification borrows directly from *Communio*'s theological hermeneutic. Simply put, it appears increasingly clear that Henry and Marion's ostensibly pure phenomenological analyses are, in this regard, marked by a pre-phenomenological—in this case, theological—source.

CHAPTER 5 - A Radical Phenomenology of the Sexual Flesh

Pleasure does not derive from uniformity, for uniformity brings forth disgust and makes us dull, not happy: this very principle is a law of delight.

G. W. F. Leibniz

According to Martin Heidegger, “higher than actuality stands possibility.”¹ This is the definitive role of phenomenology, to be a philosophy of the possible. For, already in Kant’s critical philosophy, the priority of possibility over actuality is the guiding intuition of his *transcendental* idealism,² wherein the conditions of possibility of any experience are granted primacy over any particular (viz. actual) experience. Even having abandoned Kant’s transcendental I, Heidegger nevertheless recognizes this debt, glossing Kant:

[Kant states,] “I entitle *transcendental* all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects insofar as this mode of knowledge is to be possible a priori.” Thus, transcendental knowledge does not investigate the being itself but the possibility of the precursory comprehension of the Being of the being.³

This is what Heidegger understands as the proper role of the phenomenological reduction, granting access to the Being of beings.⁴

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 63.

² “For [a thing] can never contain more in actuality than what was contained in its complete possibility.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 333 [A234/B287].

³ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. James S. Churchill (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1972), 20 [translation modified for consistency].

⁴ To again cite a key passage in Heidegger’s *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, “For Husserl, phenomenological reduction, which he worked out for the first time expressly in the *Ideas Toward a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913), is the method of leading phenomenological vision from

Even Marion—who as we have seen, attempts to extend Heidegger’s decentering of the constituting subject even further—maintains this priority of possibility, employing it in order to mark the distinction between phenomenology and theology. As he writes:

Of itself, phenomenology can identify the saturated phenomenon of the being-given par excellence only as a possibility—not only a possibility as opposed to actuality but above all a possibility of donation itself. ... Its phenomenological analysis therefore bears only on its re-presentation, its ‘essence,’ and not directly on its being-given. The intuitive realization of that being-given requires, more than phenomenological analysis, the real experience of its donation, which falls to revealed theology. Between phenomenology and theology, the border passes between revelation as possibility and revelation as historicity. There could be no danger of confusion between these domains.⁵

Thus, from Kant to Husserl, and from Heidegger to Marion, one can identify a distinct priority of phenomenological possibility, which must precede, even anticipate any theological claims to actuality. “Phenomenology from below,” Emmanuel Falque rightly recognizes, “precedes and grounds any theology from above.”⁶

Thus, one might likewise postulate that any *theological violence* from above emerges from a more primordial *phenomenological failure* from below. Put another way, the previous chapter’s recourse to *Communio* theology is on its own insufficient to account for the patriarchy and heteronormativity endemic to radical phenomenology. In order for these theological presuppositions to take root, the phenomenological ground must already be fertile. Thus, *the*

the natural attitude of the human being whose life is involved in the world of things and persons back to the transcendental life of consciousness and its noetic-noematic experiences, in which objects are constituted as correlates of consciousness. *For us*, phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological vision back from the apprehending of a being, whatever may be the character of that apprehension, to the understanding of the being of the being (projecting upon the way it is unconcealed).” Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 21.

⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, No. 4 (Summer, 1994): 590.

⁶ Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 124.

solution to this heteronormativity will not be found by simply evacuating these radical phenomenologies of their theological content. On the contrary, it will now be suggested that Henry and Marion’s phenomenologies of the flesh are themselves far from innocent. In Heideggerian language, it is failure to properly articulate the ontological that has permitted Henry and Marion to import an ontical account of sexuality—in place of a properly ontological account of the relation between sexuality and the flesh. The first half of this chapter will therefore seek to diagnose this phenomenological failure; while the second half will seek to undertake an alternative phenomenology of the sexual flesh, avoiding the respective missteps of Henry and Marion—while nonetheless seeking to remain true to the fundamental principles of their radical phenomenology.

§I: The Monadic Flesh

A. The Underlying Unity

The previous chapters have sought both to explicate Henry and Marion’s phenomenologies of the flesh and to offer some basic critiques of their accounts of sexuality from the perspective of feminist and queer theory. Throughout these analyses, it has been necessary to articulate both the similarities and the evident differences between these two phenomenological philosophies. Thus, for example, it was suggested above (chapter 3) that a fundamental division between the two thinkers’ respective conceptions of radical phenomenology can be understood as a dispute regarding the notion of self-givenness: understood as the auto-affection of the self in Henry and as the self-givenness of the phenomenon to the gifted (hetero-affection) in Marion. This concern for the “same” in Henry and the “different” in Marion is likewise recapitulated at the level of their respective phenomenologies of sexuality: where Henry advocates a transcendental a-sexuality, and Marion, an explicit recourse to traditional notions of binary sexual difference. Given these

divergent, if not ostensibly opposed accounts of sexual difference, it will be helpful here to begin by articulating an underlying unity that justifies a univocal critique of these two unique figures.

A basic sketch of this commonality has already been seen above (chapter 4), in the figure of Hans Urs von Balthasar. For as Crammer made clear in her critique of von Balthasar's account of sexual difference, a recourse to a traditional notion of a sexual hierarchy is by no means immune to the critique of "sameness."⁷ The result, Crammer argues in regard to von Balthasar, is a "one-sex" model of sexual difference. To recall the words of Alenka Zupančič, "the traditional division between masculine and feminine worlds, ... actually does not see sexual difference as difference."⁸

Exactly the same tendency can be seen in Marion. For despite a consistent, clear recourse to sexual difference throughout Marion's œuvre—just as his progenitors von Balthasar and John Paul II—the feminine is nonetheless rendered secondary and subservient to the theoretical (and theological) primacy of the masculine. The philosophical subject, as well as the subject of the erotic encounter is always either explicitly or implicitly masculine, whereas the (passive) recipient of the erotic caress is figured as distinctly feminine. Likewise, in the case of Henry, we have already explicitly shown (chapter 2) the way in which the seeming "a-sexuality" of his phenomenology actually masks an identical privilege of the masculine, the "universal male."

Thus, rather than opposed, these two perspectives are simply two sides of the same coin, photo-negatives of one another. Whether one defends a rigidly binary notion of sexual difference

⁷ Corinne Crammer, "One sex or two? Balthasar's theology of the sexes," in David Moss and Edward T. Oakes (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Or, as Tonstad argues: "hierarchy does not and cannot provide real difference. If sexual difference turns out to mean merely hierarchical ordering, then it is not difference at all, because it is a repetition of the self-same in a receptive mode." Linn Marie Tonstad, "Sexual Difference and Trinitarian Death: Cross, Kenosis, and Hierarchy in the *Theo-Drama*," *Modern Theology* 26:4 (October 2010), 619.

⁸ Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 36.

or seeks to erase sexual difference from the ultimate constitution of the subject entirely, the result is the same: the erasure and denigration of the feminine and sexual minorities.

Are we therefore simply stuck with patriarchal and heteronormative accounts of sexuality, regardless of whether one seeks to amplify or diminish sexual difference? The answer, is perhaps yes, *but only insofar as one presumes Henry and Marion's account of the flesh*. Thus, in order to develop a phenomenology of sexuality that is not encumbered by these pre-phenomenological prejudices, it will be necessary to, at the same time, reconsider the phenomenology of the flesh itself. Indeed, in order to construct an account of sexual difference that can thread the Charybdis of Henry's transcendental a-sexuality and Scylla of Marion's rigidly binary account of sexual difference—one must here undertake a phenomenology of *the sexual flesh* that neither erases the fundamental role of sexual difference nor reduces individuals to pre-established roles within a sexual hierarchy.

But, before undertaking this positive phenomenological project, it will be necessary to name precisely that point where Henry and Marion's respective phenomenologies have gone astray. Here I will draw forward a name to which I have periodically referred, but have not yet given a formal or systematic account: *the monadic flesh*. What Henry and Marion's phenomenologies of the flesh have in common, despite the differences in their accounts of sexuality, is a presupposition that, unlike the body, the flesh must manifest in complete unity with itself; it is a flesh without gap or internal difference, and therefore without organs or members. *The flesh has, in their hands, been dis-membered*. Thus, we should not be surprised that, at the same time, the markers of these disavowed members within the social field, feminine and queer folk, have likewise become dysmembers—castigated and denigrated, excluded and excommunicated from the social body, if not (as will be suggested in chapter 7) the body of Christ.

This theoretical dismemberment has replaced the truly incarnated flesh of the living individual, with all of its associated complexities of individual sexual difference, with the sterility of a disembodied soul and its mere life. For, as Kant rightly notes, “life without the feeling of the corporeal organ is merely consciousness of one’s existence.”⁹ Indeed, insofar as life is stripped of its members, so too are the members stripped of their life. Like the Valentinians against whom Henry rails, Henry and Marion have contradicted their own philosophies of life by themselves stripping life from the members of the flesh: “in this very manner do those men, by alleging that they are alive and bear life in their members, contradict themselves afterwards, when they represent these members as not being capable of [receiving] life.”¹⁰

B. The Body and Soul in Leibniz’s Monadology

To refer to Henry and Marion’s phenomenologies of the flesh as “monadic” is to immediately and intentionally invoke the spectre of Leibniz. For those familiar with radical phenomenology, and particularly the radical phenomenology of the flesh, this will undoubtedly seem an odd gesture. For, while the influence of Kant and Fichte, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, or the Fathers of the Church has been widely recognized, Leibniz seldom emerges in conversations of radical phenomenology. Even among the post-Cartesian rationalists, one might instead expect Spinoza, of whom Henry makes consistent recourse.¹¹ Indeed, in his published works, Henry will almost never

⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 159.

¹⁰ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies” in *The Writings of Irenaeus: Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Vol. IX*, trans. Alexander Roberts and W. H. Rambaut (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1869), Book V, Ch. III [63]; cited by Henry in *Incarnation*, 136.

¹¹ See, e.g.: Michel Henry, *Le bonheur de Spinoza: étude sur le Spinozisme de Michel Henry*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires France, 2004). It is worth noting that Emmanuel Falque will take this Spinozist route in order to level a quite similar critique against Henry. What I have here called, in a Leibnizian mode, the monadic flesh, Falque will refer to as “a Spinozistic type of ‘carnal monism’.” Emmanuel Falque, “Is There a Flesh Without Body? A Debate with Michel Henry,” trans. Scott Davidson, *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* XXIV, No 1 (2016): 139-166, 159.

cite Leibniz. And while Marion gives considerably more space to Leibniz, this is almost always in order to critique the primacy of the law of non-contradiction¹² and the principle of sufficient reason.¹³ What one would search almost in vain for, is a recognition that the phenomenology of the flesh is indebted to Leibniz.¹⁴ In point of fact, the closest one will come to a recognition of this debt is Marion's note that, according to Leibniz, the "monad is always carnal."¹⁵

Despite this paucity of citation, Leibniz's influence upon the radical phenomenology of the flesh is surprisingly direct, having been transmitted by a single mediator: Maine de Biran. While the Leibnizian character of de Biran's spiritualism has often been recognized for its influence upon other French thinkers—such as Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze¹⁶—it has not been recognized in the phenomenological context. But, as was seen above (chapter 2), Maine de Biran constitutes the single greatest influence upon Henry's conception of the relationship between the flesh and the body; appearing as the singular focus of Henry's *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body* and

¹² See, e.g.: Jean-Luc Marion, *Negative Certainties*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 104; Jean-Luc Marion, "Nothing is Impossible for God" in *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 94-97

¹³ See, e.g.: Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 179-184; Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 106-114, 169; Jean-Luc Marion, "The Marches of Metaphysics," in *The Essential Writings*, ed. Kevin Hart (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 48-49; Marion, "Nothing is Impossible for God" in *Believing in Order to See*, 94-97.

¹⁴ In an ironic gesture, Henry writes in *Incarnation's* discussion of the organic body that the "great Cartesians could only avoid the aporia [of Descartes' recourse to the pineal gland] by entrusting the possibility of the soul's action on the body to wanton speculative constructions—Malebranche's occasionalism, Spinoza's parallelism, Leibniz's pre-established harmony," thereby effacing the key influence of Leibniz on his own account of the organic body. Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, trans. Karl Hefty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 74.

¹⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 98. But even here, this is only noted in order to be immediately turned against Leibniz, "and it is why, to the contrary of Gottfried Leibniz, we understand that monads can die." Ibid.

¹⁶ This is, of course, due in part to Deleuze's own self-recognition of the influence of Leibniz. See, e.g.: Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992). For Deleuze and de Biran, see, e.g.: Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 28.

in key sections of *Incarnation*. Moreover, insofar as “Marion basically adopts Henry’s account of the self-affection of the flesh,”¹⁷ one can therefore also transitively mark the influence of de Biran on Marion.

In fact, key terms in Henry’s account of the flesh, including the “organic body,” and the “resisting continuum” are original to neither Henry nor de Biran, but rather have clear precedence in Leibniz. For while, as Marion rightly noted, Leibniz always thinks the monad as “carnal,” his term for this carnality is “organic body” [*corps organique* or *corpus organicum*], for which the soul functions as an entelechy.¹⁸ Henry himself briefly recognizes this debt in the *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, writing, “thus it is that to the original being of our body is bound a sort of organic body from which, according to the word of Leibniz which Maine de Biran cites, the soul is never separated.”¹⁹

But, to what extent is de Biran actually Leibnizian? As Naert notes, the influence is so great, that “it is banal to repeat that Leibniz is everywhere present in the œuvre of Maine de Biran.”²⁰ This influence is most clear in his 1819 *Exposition de la doctrine philosophique de*

¹⁷ Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 95.

¹⁸ “It is necessary,” he writes of the soul, for example, “that there be a persisting individual substance over and above the organic body.” G. W. Leibniz, “Notes on Some Comments by Michel Angelo Fardella (1690)” in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 104. He will likewise speak often of “a certain resistance, by which a body opposes motion *per se*” G. W. Leibniz, “From the Letters to de Volder (1699-1706)” in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 172.

¹⁹ Michel Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 122. Although uncited, Henry probably here has in mind: Maine de Biran’s assertion: “sur quoi il est important d’observer que, dans le système de Leibnitz, l’âme n’étant jamais séparée d’une sorte de corps organique, suivant les affections duquel elle représente harmoniquement ce qui est hors d’elle, et ce corps ou cette monade primitive ne faisant que se développer à la naissance et s’envelopper à la mort, sans cesser d’être uni à l’âme, il ne saurait y avoir en aucun sens d’idées innées ou séparées de toute sensation ou affection interne.” Maine de Biran, *Oeuvres inédites de Maine de Biran: Tome I* (Paris: Dezorby, E. Magdeleine, 1839), 164.

²⁰ “Il est banal de répéter que Leibniz est partout présent dans l’œuvre de Maine de Biran” Émilienne Naert, “Maine de Biran lecteur de Leibniz,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 88(4): 499-513, 499 [translation my own]. It is of course necessary to recognize that, like every philosopher, de Biran cites his predecessors in order to support his

Leibniz, but it nonetheless likewise evident in texts more directly influential on radical phenomenology, particularly his *Essai sur les fondements de la Psychologie*, de Biran's text most commonly cited by Henry, which includes an extended analysis of the "*Système de Leibnitz*."²¹

Entering the philosophical scene in the wake of the Galilean reduction, Leibniz's philosophy of the body begins with "matter in itself."²² This raw materiality or "primary matter," is distinguished by its nature as an "aggregate":

A body is not a substance but an aggregate of substances, since it is always further divisible, and any given part always has another part, to infinity. ... It necessarily contains in itself an infinite multitude, or an infinity of bodies, each of which, in turn, contains an infinite number of substances.²³

This aggregate, insofar as it is mere passive material extension, is "something incomplete,"²⁴ and ultimately, possessed of a certain irrealty: "where there are only beings by aggregation, there aren't any real beings."²⁵ This mere aggregation of matter forces Leibniz to identify a source of

own philosophical program. Nevertheless, as Dunham shows, de Biran did offer a genuine Leibnizianism, albeit a "selective Leibnizianism," which drew upon genuinely Leibnizian insights. See: Jeremy Dunham, "A Universal and Absolute Spiritualism Maine de Biran's Leibniz" in Maine de Biran, *The Relationship between the Physical and the Moral in Man*, trans. Darian Meacham and Joseph Spadola (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

²¹ De Biran, *Oeuvres inédites de Maine de Biran: Tome I*, 157-165.

²² G. W. Leibniz, "From the Letters to Johann Bernoulli (1698-99)" in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 167.

²³ Leibniz, "Notes on Some Comments by Michel Angelo Fardella (1690)," 103.

²⁴ Leibniz, "From the Letters to Johann Bernoulli (1698-99)," 167. As he further clarifies, "what is 'incomplete' for me here? I respond: it is the passive without the active, and the active without the passive" (Ibid.). As he notes in *A New System of Nature*, "I perceived that it is impossible to find the principles of a true unity in matter alone, or in what is only passive, since everything in it is only a collection or aggregation of parts to infinity. Now, a multitude can derive its reality only from true unities, which have some other origin" (G. W. Leibniz, "A New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances, and of the Union of the Soul and Body [1695]" in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 139). Elsewhere, he will mark extension as *such*, as "incomplete" in this manner: "I don't think that substance consists of extension alone, since the concept of extension is incomplete" (Leibniz, "From the Letters to de Volder [1699-1706]," 171).

²⁵ G. W. Leibniz, "From the Letters to Arnauld (1686-87)" in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 85. Such purely aggregate bodies of mere extension are irreal, precisely insofar as they are the mere products of mental representation, "whose unity derives from thought" (Leibniz, "From the Letters to de Volder [1699-1706]," 175). The similarities between this account of material

unity outside of the body, in the soul, in order to account for the experienced unity and subjectivity of the individual.²⁶ As he writes to Fardella:

Now since I am truly a single individual substance, unresolvable into many others, the permanent and constant subject of my actions and passions, it is necessary that there be a persisting individual substance over and above the organic body. This persisting individual substance is completely different from the nature of body, which, assuming that it is in a state of continual flux of parts, never remains permanent, but is perpetually changed. And so, there must be some incorporeal, immortal substance in man, over and above the body, something, indeed, incapable of being resolved into parts.²⁷

Here Leibniz not only identifies the necessity of a soul, but likewise marks its key essential feature. The soul is defined by its incapacity for division into parts;²⁸ it is, as he will soon name it, a “monad.” As he subsequently opens his *Monadology*: “the Monad, which we shall discuss here, is nothing but a simple substance that enters into composites—simple, that is, without parts.”²⁹ Insofar as the monad has no parts, “neither extension, nor shape, nor divisibility is possible.”³⁰

extension and Henry’s own critique of the irreality of representation bears a striking similarity that seems to betray direct influence.

²⁶ “I confess that the body by itself, without the soul, has only a unity of aggregation, but that the reality inhering in it derives from the parts composing it.” Leibniz, “From the Letters to Arnauld (1686-87),” 88. Or again, “By means of the soul or form there is a true unity corresponding to what is call the self in us.” Leibniz, “A New System of the Nature,” 142.

²⁷ Leibniz, “Notes on Some Comments by Michel Angelo Fardella (1690),” 104.

²⁸ “For if a man is the I [*Ego*] itself, then he cannot be divided, nor can he perish, nor is he a homogeneous part of matter.” *Ibid.*, 105. Or again, “I saw that these forms and souls must be indivisible, as our mind is.” Leibniz, “A New System of the Nature,” 139.

²⁹ G. W. Leibniz, “The Principles of Philosophy, or, the *Monadology* (1714)” in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 213. A substance or monad is, he earlier wrote, “a being capable of action. It is simple or composite. A simple substance is that which has no parts.” (G. W. Leibniz, “Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason [1714],” in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989], 207).

³⁰ Leibniz, “The Principles of Philosophy, or, the *Monadology* (1714),” 213.

This radical division between the aggregate of the organic body and the absolute unity of the monadic soul only serves to exacerbate the problem of the unity of the soul and the body.³¹ The solution proposed by Leibniz is his (in)famous thesis of the pre-established harmony: “God originally created the soul ... in such a way that everything must arise from it from its own depths, through a perfect *spontaneity* relative to itself, and yet with a perfect *conformity* relative to external things.”³² Yet, as his critics were quick to point out, this speculative thesis does little to metaphysically unite the body and the soul. Indeed, Leibniz admits as much himself: “I must admit,” he writes, “that it would have been very wrong of me to object to the Cartesians that the agreement God immediately maintains, between soul and body, according to them, does not bring about a true union, since, to be sure, my pre-established harmony would do no better than it does.”³³ Thus, rather than offer such a metaphysical unification, he writes, “I tried to account only for the phenomena,”³⁴ that is, the phenomena of unification.

But these phenomena of relation between soul and body—that is, the subjective experience of will, e.g. movement—remain subordinate to a more primordial phenomenological distinction between “two kingdoms.”³⁵ True metaphysical unity is not possible between the soul and the

³¹ “Locating a notion of body in extension alone, are thus, forced to appeal to God for explaining the union between soul and body, and indeed for explaining the interaction of bodies with one another. For we must admit that it is impossible that bare extension, containing geometrical notions alone, is capable of action and passion.” G. W. Leibniz, “A Specimen of Dynamics, Toward Uncovering and Reducing to Their Causes Astonishing Laws of Nature Concerning the Forces of Bodies and Their Actions on One Another” in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 130.

³² Leibniz, “A New System of the Nature,” 145.

³³ G. W. Leibniz, “Remark of the Author of the System of Pre-established Harmony on a Passage from the *Mémoires de Trévoux* of March 1704 (1708)” in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 197.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Leibniz, “The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology (1714),” 223.

body—but only conformity—because the soul and the body follow distinct “laws” or regimes of phenomenality: “these principles have given me a way of naturally explaining the union, or rather the conformity of the soul and the organic body. *The soul follows its own laws and the body also follows its own.*”³⁶

The phenomenality of the body—as an aggregate—conforms to its material extension: “bodies act according to the laws of efficient causes or of motions.”³⁷ The monadic soul, on the other hand, acts “from its own depths”:³⁸ “the monad’s natural changes come from an internal principle.”³⁹ In fact, the central conviction of Leibnizian dynamics is the necessity, above and before extension, of a principle of action: “in corporeal things there is something over and above extension, in fact, something prior to extension, namely, that force of nature implanted everywhere by the Creator.”⁴⁰ Thus, on this account, it is only because substances act from their own internal impetus (*conatus* or *nisus*) that there is any activity or movement whatsoever. Moreover, insofar as the soul generates its own activity from its interiority, it is likewise immune to all hetero-affection: “monads have no windows”⁴¹ as Leibniz famously argued.

The result of this analysis is a conception of the soul which is defined in its very essence by its radical exclusion of every “part” or member. This exclusion necessitates an internal—one

³⁶ Ibid. [emphasis added].

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Leibniz, “From the Letters to Arnauld (1686-87),” 78.

³⁹ Leibniz, “The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology (1714),” 214.

⁴⁰ G. W. Leibniz, “A Specimen of Dynamics,” 118. This “primitive force” is nothing other than the soul itself: “Primitive force (which is nothing but the first entelechy) corresponds to the soul or substantial form” (Ibid., 119).

⁴¹ Leibniz, “The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology (1714),” 214. Or, more formally, “There is no way of explaining how a monad can be altered or changed internally by some other creature, since one cannot transpose anything in it” Ibid., 213.

might say, following Henry, auto-affective—conception of activity. Whereas, on the other hand, the body is defined precisely as an aggregate relation of extensive members: *partes extra partes*. In his “selective Leibnizianism” de Biran will adopt precisely this scheme, but with one central caveat. Where Leibniz found the soul, de Biran finds a subjective experience of the body. Thus, what Henry names de Biran’s discovery of the subjective body, might instead be recognized as de Biran’s incarnation of the Leibnizian soul. Yet, even incarnated, this subjective flesh will carry forward much of its Leibnizian baggage. Including, most importantly, its monadic character; *the Biranian subjective body—and its experience of effort—does not have parts*. Thus, via this Biranian influence, radical phenomenology will likewise cast the organic body into the exteriority of the world, while the flesh will be marked by its radical exclusion of every part or member from its living immanence.

C. The Monadic Flesh: Against the Organic Body

According to Henry, the flesh manifests without gap, the givenness of its auto-affectivity is an absolute givenness of the self *in its totality*: “feeling could not attain the ego to a more or less strict relationship; the feeling could not attain the ego as something exterior, capable of touching it to a greater or less degree.”⁴² In the manifestation of affectivity the self is saturated by a givenness without remainder, one feels oneself in one's entirety: it is a “total exposure.”⁴³ It is a monadic

⁴² Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 466.

⁴³ Michel Henry, “Material Phenomenology and Language (or, Pathos and Language),” *Continental Philosophy Review* 32 (1999): 355.

account of the flesh.⁴⁴ This monadic character is nowhere more clearly apparent than in Henry's reflections upon the "organic body."⁴⁵

Henry first turns to the language of the organic body in an attempt to understand the phenomenological experience of the "I can." This language is introduced by Husserl's phenomenology of the living body in *Ideas II*, the subjective experience of the body is there particularly marked by its capacity for action. As Husserl writes, "the Ego has the 'faculty' (the 'I can') to freely move this Body [*Leib*]."⁴⁶ For this tradition—from Husserl, to Merleau-Ponty, and Henry—the flesh is distinguished from the objective body by its unique capacity *to act*.

Yet, phenomenologically investigated, this "I can"—even within the immanence of the radical reduction—seems to run up against concrete limits. I can only move my flesh so far, so fast, in specific manners, etc. Henry describes these moments of resistance through the Leibnizian language of the "resisting continuum," the boundary condition of the "I can." When this resistance reaches a level which not only merely resists, but fully stops the "I can"—when "this resistance, lived internally through this effort, no longer gives way"⁴⁷—one experiences the limit of one's

⁴⁴ Thus, for example, in the erotic experience, "le amants n'ont pas conscience de leurs organes comme organes." Michel Henry, "Notes sur le phénomène érotique" in Jean Leclercq, (ed), "Michel Henry: Notes sur le phénomène érotique" *Revue Internationale Michel Henry* 4 (2013): 39.

⁴⁵ Itself a reflection on Leibniz's "organic body."

⁴⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book, Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 159. As Merleau-Ponty paradigmatically echoes the master, "consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can'." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 1962), 159. Henry almost simultaneously makes the same claim, writing in 1948-49 that "the ego is a power, the *cogito* does not mean an 'I think' but an 'I can'." Although he will later nuance this claim, affirming Maine de Biran's *identification* of the 'I think' and the 'I can'; "the Biranian *cogito* is in no way opposed to the Cartesian *cogito*, there is no question of opposing an 'I can' to an 'I think' because the whole Biranian analysis of effort has as its sole and essential result the determining of this effort as a mode of subjectivity itself." Michel Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 53, 55

⁴⁷ Henry, "Material Phenomenology," 127.

own flesh as a novel manifestation of the body. This manifestation is distinct from the objective body insofar as it is internally lived. But this manifestation is likewise distinct from the flesh, which, insofar as it is immediately given to itself *without gap or remainder*, is marked by an “original interior unity.”⁴⁸ “Consequently,” Henry writes, “it is not two bodies which we must distinguish, but rather three.”⁴⁹ Following Leibniz and de Biran, Henry names this third manifestation: the organic body.⁵⁰

The organic body functions as something like a middle-ground between the flesh and the objective body. It is, in a sense, within immanence, but is not the original corporeity of the flesh. It is neither inside nor outside, but, like the skin, is the boundary-line between the immanence of the flesh and the exteriority of the body; it is “the limit against which [the “I can’s”] effort is broken.”⁵¹ Given this position, it is marked by unique phenomenological features. Thus, for example, whereas the various affective tonalities are fully united in the flesh, in the organic body these various faculties discover their own unique limits, differentiating themselves from one and

⁴⁸ Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 609.

⁴⁹ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 129.

⁵⁰ Indeed, Henry’s preparatory notes for *Incarnation*, reveal even this tripartite conception to be limited. Henry there marks a seven-part “table of an exhaustive phenomenology of the body”:

“L’Archi-chair;
La chair: le je peux, le corps se mouvant et le touchant/touché;
La chair auto-constitué;
Le corps organique;
Le corps résistant;
Le corps objectif de l’expérience courante de la science;
L’image du corps”

Grégori Jean, “Désir, négativité, spectralité: Michel Henry et le problème de l’erôs,” *Alter*, “L’erôs,” No. 20 (2012), 77-78.

⁵¹ Henry, *Incarnation*, 206.

other in the form of organs or members;⁵² the organic body “allows to appear in its structures to which we will attribute the names of the different parts of our body, which will be for us our members, our torso, our neck, our muscles, etc.”⁵³ In this way, “the original being of our body is bound a sort of organic body.”⁵⁴ But this provokes further questions, what is the force of this “bound”? Does Henry affirm an originary or a derivative givenness of the organic body and its organs or members? Is Henry’s account of the original body truly monadic as has been suggested above?

For Henry, “the process of their constitution allows us to establish ... a rigorous order”⁵⁵ between the various manifestations of the body. The flesh, insofar as its affectivity constitutes the

⁵² “This division of our senses—insofar as it is a division of our organs of sensing—rests, in reality, on a transcendental division of our powers of sensing, on the division which exists between seeing, and hearing, touching, etc., and which is originally given to us in the internal transcendental experience which we have of the subjective being of our body” (Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 112). Thus, “our body is given to us in a way such that each of its original powers, concerning which we have an immediate knowledge in the subjective experience of movement which constitutes its essence, also manifests itself to us in the form of an organ or some physiological or spatial determination. The difference between the original being of this power and the organ which seems to be its instrument is in no way situated on an ontic level, it is not a difference between something and something else, it is an ontological difference, not a difference in individuality, but in the manner of being” (Ibid., 116).

⁵³ Ibid., 122. Importantly, despite this internal differentiation, Henry remains firm that the extension of the organic body is phenomenologically distinct from the extension of the objective world. This is because the organic body represents the *subjective experience* of the organ. Thus, these are not the organs as understood natural-scientifically: “their original phenomenological being has nothing to do with anatomic or physiological determinations which science takes as its object” (Ibid., 123). As he will later reaffirm, “our organic body is the whole of our organs thus extended. And such organs are different from the anatomical structures that science takes for its object. They are neither dis-posed nor ex-posed *partes extra partes*, but are held together and are as though held up out of nothing by the ‘I can’ of our original corporeity” (Henry, *Incarnation*, 150). Nor are these organs experienced in the irreality of mere thought, but in the practical and existential subjectivity of reality: “it is not represented, because subjective movement and it alone constitutes its proof and experience, this organic or interior space has nothing in common with exterior space” (Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 122); or again, “if one still wants to speak here of exteriority, it is an exteriority fundamentally foreign to that of the world in so far as the experience in which it occurs excludes from itself every representative element” (Henry, *Incarnation*, 148). Therefore, rather than speaking of the exteriority of the world, Henry here speaks of an “internal extension” (Ibid., 149 and Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 122) or “quasi-extension” (Henry, *Incarnation*, 165) of the organic body.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 122 [emphasis added].

⁵⁵ Ibid., 164.

transcendental condition of all experience whatsoever, is in no way constituted by external factors. In fact, for Henry, its transcendental character is so radical as to exclude it from the region of constitution entirely.⁵⁶ The same cannot be said for the organic body. Unlike the flesh, the organic body undergoes a process of constitution whereby the original givenness of the sensation in the auto-affectivity of the flesh is localized onto a determinate member of the organic body. As Henry writes:

The phenomenology of flesh has taught us to distinguish carefully original impressions and constituted impressions: only the former are real. Thus, only the original impressions of movement are real, as well as the impressions of pressure considered in their auto-impressionality. But situated on the organic body and on its limit, they are nothing more than constituted sensations.⁵⁷

This argument is given its most focused explication in Henry's critique of Scheler's account of sensible feelings [*Empfindungsgefühle*] in §66 of *The Essence of Manifestation*.⁵⁸

For Scheler, whereas vital feelings—such as health or fatigue—“participate in the total extension of the lived body,”⁵⁹ the sensible feelings—such as an itch or a headache—are centered upon a particular part or organ of the body; the sensible feeling's “exclusive form of existence is to be at some time and at some place on the lived body”⁶⁰—it “is given as extended and localized

⁵⁶ “Considered in its originality, actually, our flesh is neither constituting nor constituted.” *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵⁷ Henry, *Incarnation*, 209.

⁵⁸ Despite his critique of Scheler's account of *Empfindungsgefühle*, Henry nevertheless finds in Scheler a considerable step forward from the traditional occidental conception of feelings. According to Talon-Hugon, Henry identifies three principal ways in which Scheler advances beyond his predecessors: “avoir compris l'autonomie des sentiments par rapport à la sensibilité; avoir aperçu leur positivité; [et] avoir saisi l'indépendance de l'affect par rapport aux circonstances.” Carole Talon-Hugon, “Affectivité et révélation: Michel Henry, lecteur de Max Scheler” in *Michel Henry*, eds. Jean-Marie Brohm and Jean Leclercq (Lausanne, Suisse: L'Age d'Homme, 2009), 303.

⁵⁹ Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 338.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 334.

in *specific parts* of the lived body.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, as Scheler subsequently notes, while they are “structured according to the more or less clearly experienced units of organs of the lived body,” they are not structured “*on the basis of those units as perceived from the outside.*”⁶² That is to say, like Henry’s organic body, Scheler denies that sensible feelings manifest within the horizon of objectivity, instead marking a specific subjective mode of extension unique to the organic body.

Nevertheless, despite this nuance, Henry insists that feelings (i.e. affections or impressions) must be understood outside of *any extension*, both that of objectivity or that of the organic body. As he writes elsewhere, “where this self-sensing that determines affectivity as pure affective tonality, as pure impression, and as life, occurs, there is no space—neither that of things nor that of the organic body wherein impression is objected.”⁶³ For Henry, the situation of feeling within any extensive field necessitates the subservience of feeling to the mode of manifestation of that field, a mode of manifestation that is in this case transcendent and therefore representational.⁶⁴ Thus, Henry suggests that Scheler’s account of the sensible feelings “confuses two things: on the one hand, the original revelation of feeling to itself ... which consists in this very affectivity; on the other hand, the representation of this feeling ... in the ontological milieu of representation.”⁶⁵ This confusion fails to recognize the “ontological heterogeneity of [these two] essences, of the

⁶¹ Ibid., 333 [emphasis added]. They are “fundamentally different ... in that [they are] local and extended, on or in a body.” Manfred S. Frings, *Max Scheler: A Concise Introduction into the World of a Great Thinker* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1965), 30.

⁶² Ibid. [emphasis added].

⁶³ Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 77.

⁶⁴ For every transcendent horizon of visibility is likewise the horizon of *representation*—as Heidegger notes “to represent [*vorstellen*] means to bring what is present at hand before oneself as something standing *over against*.” Martin Heidegger, “The Age of World Picture,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 131.

⁶⁵ Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 606.

essence of affectivity [on the one hand] and of the transcendent spatial Being of the organic body,”⁶⁶ on the other. In his own words:

Because sensible feeling is a phenomenon in the organs whose feeling it is and because the extension of the organic body and of the time peculiar to it, viz. extension as such, ultimately constitutes the mode of manifestation and the reality of this feeling, the status of the latter, its ontological and phenomenological status, is clearly defined and this status determines its reality as beginning with extension wherein it is extended and beginning with what constitutes the foundation of this extension as an extended and transcendent reality.⁶⁷

That is to say, for Henry, Scheler’s account of sensible feelings is confused precisely because, while it recognizes that the purely psychic feeling or spiritual feeling “in no way participates in extension,”⁶⁸ it fails to recognize that this applies with equal rigor to all feelings, including the sensible.⁶⁹ Our feelings—even our sensible feelings—are not grounded in the organs or members of our extended organic body, Henry argues, but within the non-extended, non-temporal lived immanence of the flesh.

In order to illustrate this argument, Henry draws forward the phenomenon of phantom limb syndrome as a particularly illuminating case study. As he writes:

How could sensorial feeling, if it is really found in a part of the body, if its Being is identified with the Being of this part and with the portion of extension which delimits it, subsist when this part is destroyed, how could the feeling exist when the part does not exist? ... The Being of the mnemonic image of the amputated member is, by definition and essence, an imaginary Being, the Being of the sensorial feeling, far from being able to be identified with the extended-Being of the image wherein the feeling is represented, rather differs in an essential manner from it, as the real differs from the imaginary.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid., 610.

⁶⁷ Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 606 [translation altered].

⁶⁸ Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, 342.

⁶⁹ “Pour Michel Henry, au contraire, tous les sentiments sont absolus.” Talon-Hugon, “Affectivité et révélation,” 304.

⁷⁰ Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 611. Henry repeats this argument in *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, writing: “where this self-sensing that determines affectivity as pure affective tonality, as pure impression, and as life, occurs, there is no space—neither that of things nor that of the organic body wherein impression is objected. Proof

Thus, since the sensible feeling can be removed from its connection to the bodily organ, this connection is not essential (eidetic). Indeed, insofar as sensible feelings are non-intentional,⁷¹ insofar as their manifestation presupposes no gap between feeling and feeler,⁷² it seems that they *must* manifest outside of *any* transcendent horizon.

In sum, for Henry the organic body and its members are derivative of the first givenness of affectivity in the flesh.⁷³ While sensible feelings may be projected or localized on the organs of this derivative body, they do not find their genesis there. Thus, despite his initial intuitions to the contrary, Henry ultimately affirms that “the constituted organic body is already a represented body,”⁷⁴ and depends upon the non-constituted, non-represented flesh as its transcendental condition.⁷⁵ Therefore, from the perspective of the flesh, the organic body can only appear as an “objective body whose configurations, parts, members, organs, and numerous particularities ... have nothing in common with what it experiences originally, [these members can] appear to it only as incomprehensible and, to put it briefly, absurd determinations.”⁷⁶ And this remains the case,

may be found in dreams, where space is an illusion but where the dreamer seems to see that the wall is yellow, or in the illusion of amputees who no longer have feet and yet feel pain in them: this pain's being is solely impressive, is pure self-impression.” Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 77.

⁷¹ “Purely sensible feelings, therefore lack even the most primitive form of intentionality.” Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, 333.

⁷² The Sensible feeling “does not ‘face’ contents in any way and is without any ‘intention’ toward them” (Ibid. 342), thus it “cannot be separated from the contents of sensation” (Ibid. 333).

⁷³ “The theory of subjective movement permits us to understand the profound unity which traverses all these elements and which is found in the first as original unity [the flesh/original corporeity], in the second as a founded unity [the organic body].” Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 91.

⁷⁴ Henry, *Incarnation*, 165.

⁷⁵ “The relationship of our organs among themselves, which seems to constitute the foundation for the internal coherence of the organic body, really rests on the relationship of each of these organs to the power which moves them. ... [it] implies the existence of a more original subjective unity.” Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 124.

⁷⁶ Henry, *Incarnation*, 195.

despite the fact that this organic body is lived internally, even despite the fact that it remains within the radical reduction.⁷⁷ It is, Henry writes, “somewhat erroneous to identify [the organic body’s] being with that of the original body”;⁷⁸ “the being of the organic body is an abstract being, that of itself it has neither autonomy nor ontological sufficiency.”⁷⁹ The organic body is “in the world, in its appearing.”⁸⁰

Behind this technical critique of Scheler, the simple fact is that, for Henry, the organic body’s worldly character is simply evidenced by its internal differentiation into organs or members. For Henry’s monadic account of subjectivity, the ipseity of subjective experience—its mineness—necessitates a primordial transcendental unity at the origin of all affectivity, which would serve as “the principle of unity of a power to which is given the infinite diversity of sensible impressions.”⁸¹ Such a unifying power cannot emerge from an organic body which is constituted from a manifold of diverse parts; but only from a primordial unity which precedes all differentiation: the monadic flesh. As Henry writes,

The transcendent unity of the sensible world ... is that of the resisting continuum which traverses the various sensorial worlds and in each of them gives a foundation to its reality, ... this unity rests on the unity of the power which constitutes this single and real continuum, it rests on the unity of our subjective body. The latter, in turn, rests on the internal structure of subjectivity itself wherein resides the ultimate origin and the essence of all possible unity in general.⁸²

⁷⁷ Henry importantly notes: “the fact that the organic body does not fall beneath the blow of the reduction in no way signifies that it has the same ontological dignity as the original being of the subjective body.” Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 126-127. “Its phenomenological status is radically different from that of our original body.” *Ibid.*, 194.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁸⁰ Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, 214.

⁸¹ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 81.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 84.

Here Henry traces a hierarchical ladder of unification from the absolute diversity of the transcendent, sensible world to the absolute monadic subjectivity of the I—a ladder wherein the unity of each rung is granted by its preceding rung. For such an account, unity always *precedes* difference, and any difference or distancing can at most be regarded as penultimate to its ultimate founding unity.

D. The Monadic Flesh: The Invisibility of Saturation

While Marion does not undertake an analysis of the organ or member with the directness of his predecessor, it is nevertheless possible to establish a clear privilege of the whole over the part in Marion's notion of saturation. For Marion, the saturated phenomenon—including the flesh—is always given in “one fell swoop.”⁸³

This privilege of the whole over its parts, like Marion's account of sexuality, finds clear precedence in Hans Urs von Balthasar. For, according to von Balthasar, the revelatory experience of Christ is given by God, and grasped by the believer, as a “*Gestalt*”: a totality, whole, or figure.

In this ‘figure’ there resides an inner harmony which resists every division into parts as well as every combination of parts. Should one want to designate the individual figures of the Old Testament as such ‘parts’ which, by combination, would result in the figure of Christ, prophet, king, priest, sacrificial lamb, servant of Yahweh, Son of man, etc., then we would have to say that the simple whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that Christ lived his simple, indivisible life without anxious worry about integrating all possible partial aspects.⁸⁴

To subordinate the *Gestalt* of revelation to its “parts” or “partial aspects,” would be to destroy its “indivisible life,” the living potency of this revelatory experience: “anatomy can be practiced only

⁸³ Marion, *Being Given*, 236.

⁸⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Faith and ‘Objective Evidence’ of the Gestalt of Jesus” in *The von Balthasar Reader*, ed. Medard Kehl and Werner Löser, trans. Robert J. Daly and Fred Lawrence (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 127.

on a dead body, since it is opposed to the movement of life and seeks to pass from the whole to its parts and elements.”⁸⁵

This same privilege of the whole is likewise evident in Marion’s account of revelation. For Marion, who aims to explicate its phenomenological possibility, revelation is the redoubled paradox [*paradoxoton*],⁸⁶ the “saturation of saturation.”⁸⁷ As he writes, “the phenomenon of revelation is therefore defined as a phenomenon that concentrates in itself the four senses of the saturated phenomenon”⁸⁸—that is, event, idol, flesh, and icon. As such, revelation is likewise understood to saturate all categories of the understanding: quantity, quality, relation, and modality. In this regard, like the event, the phenomenon of revelation is understood as “perfectly unforeseeable.”⁸⁹ It is, as Marion elsewhere describes it, invisible, unable to be envisaged.⁹⁰ This invisibility is likewise the defining characteristic of the event: wherein “nobody can claim for himself a ‘here and now’ that would permit him to describe it exhaustively and constitute it as an object.”⁹¹ Thus, revelation “is a case par excellence of the event.”⁹²

⁸⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume I: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 31.

⁸⁶ Marion, *Being Given*, 236.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* Here Marion’s logic perfectly recapitulates von Balthasar’s analysis of the relationship between the *Gestalt* of Christ and Old Testament prophecy. As Marion writes, “the phenomenon of Christ gives itself intuitively as an event that is perfectly unforeseeable because radically heterogeneous to what it nevertheless completes (the prophecies).” *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Marion coined the French “invisible” from the verb *viser* “to aim at,”—e.g. “the saturated phenomenon cannot be aimed at [*ne peut se viser*]” (*Ibid.*, 199)—and it should be understood as that which cannot be anticipated or intended (in the phenomenological sense).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 237.

This invisibility of the saturated phenomenon is a result of intuition's overwhelming of the Kantian category of quantity. According to Kant, quantity (that is, extensive magnitude) is a determining condition of phenomenality. Every phenomenon that manifests within time or space—i.e. every phenomenon *tout court*—is thus “declined by composition of the whole in terms of its parts.”⁹³ For, as Kant writes, “I call an extensive magnitude that in which the representation of the parts makes possible the representation of the whole (and therefore necessarily precedes the latter).”⁹⁴ Kant names the process by which the manifold of intuition is rendered quantitative the “successive synthesis,” a synthesis that no phenomenon as such can be constituted without.⁹⁵

The result of this successive synthesis is twofold: as illustrated by Kant's assertion “all appearances are accordingly intuited as aggregates (multitudes of antecedently given parts).”⁹⁶ In the first case, insofar as the synthesis assumes a *manifold* of intuition, the constituted whole is understood as composed of diverse parts: it is an aggregate.⁹⁷ Second, as marked by the use of “antecedently,” this synthesis therefore necessitates a pre-comprehension, it is necessarily *foreseen*. As Marion notes, “this sort of phenomenon would always be foreseeable, literally seen before being seen in person or seen by procuration, on the basis of another besides itself—more precisely, on the basis of the supposedly finite number of its parts.”⁹⁸ It is through this successive synthesis,

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁹⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 287 [A162/B203].

⁹⁵ “Since the mere intuition in all appearances is either in space or time,” Kant writes, “every appearance as intuition is an extensive magnitude, as it can only be cognized through successive synthesis.” *Ibid.*, 288 [A163/B204].

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Given Kant's training in the Leibniz-Wolffian school—at least until, on his own account, he was awakened from his “dogmatic slumber” by Hume's skepticism—“aggregate” should be taken in the full Leibnizian significance discussed above.

⁹⁸ Marion, *Being Given*, 200.

which is to say, the subordination of the thing to quantity and extension as its condition of possibility, that the phenomenon becomes an *object* of experience. Or, conversely, “things become objects through ... the elimination of that in those things which does not allow itself to be abstracted according to order and measure.”⁹⁹

According to Marion, insofar as saturated phenomena resist any reduction to objectivity and any horizon understood as a condition of phenomenality, they must likewise manifest outside of any quantity or magnitude: they are formally unforeseeable, invisible. The logic underlying this claim is laid bare. For Marion, the saturated phenomenon is invisible, precisely because it is not composed of parts, it is not an aggregate:

Since the intuition that gives it is not limited by its possible concept, its excess can neither be divided nor adequately put together again by virtue of a finite magnitude homogeneous with finite parts. It could not be measured in terms of its parts, since the saturating intuition surpasses limitlessly the sum of the parts by continually adding to them.¹⁰⁰

The saturated phenomenon is therefore marked by its immeasurability: “incommensurable, not measurable (immense), unmeasured.”¹⁰¹ Like the Kantian mathematical sublime, it is “great beyond all comparison”;¹⁰² it is that which is “equal only to itself” and “in comparison with which everything else is small.”¹⁰³ And just as in the mathematical sublime, “the very inadequacy of our

⁹⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *Negative Certainties*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 165.

¹⁰⁰ Marion, *Being Given*, 200. Or again, “the intuition, which continually saturates it, forbids it from distinguishing and adding up a finite number of finite parts, thereby annulling all possibility of foreseeing the phenomenon before it gives itself.” *Ibid.*, 202

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁰² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 132.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 134.

faculty for estimating the magnitude ... awakens the feeling of a supersensible faculty in us,”¹⁰⁴ so too does the saturated phenomenon reveal the inadequacy of the successive synthesis: “as the saturated phenomenon passes beyond all summation of its parts—which often cannot be enumerated anyway—the successive synthesis must be abandoned in favor of what I will call an instantaneous synthesis.”¹⁰⁵ The saturated phenomenon is not marked by a successively constituted aggregate of parts, but by an instantaneous grasping of its whole; or in von Balthasar’s language, the immediate vision of the *Gestalt*.

While Marion will primarily unpack invisibility in terms of the event and revelation, it is by no means limited to these cases—“since in all cases, there is on principle saturation.”¹⁰⁶ For, it should not be forgotten, Marion’s “Sketch of the Saturated Phenomenon” in §21 of *Being Given* falls *before* the elaboration of the four figures of saturation—event, idol, flesh, icon—and should therefore best be understood as a prolegomenon to saturation *as such*. It is not merely the event that “cannot be aimed at,” it is “the saturated phenomenon [that] cannot be aimed at.”¹⁰⁷ Thus while, as we have seen (chapter 3), the flesh is drawn forward as an exemplary case of the saturation of relation, it nevertheless remains the case that all saturation *in principle* saturates every category (as least to some degree).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Marion, *Being Given*, 200.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 228.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 199.

¹⁰⁸ It is worth noting here that Marion remains extremely ambiguous on this point. As he writes at the opening of the discussion of the four “types” of saturation: “the guiding thread will no longer be the degree of intuition (since in all cases, there is on principle saturation), but the determination in relation to which saturation is each time accomplished (quantity, quality, relation, or modality). I will therefore distinguish, without intending any hierarchy, four types of saturation” (Ibid., 228). Here, it seems that the four types are divided by which category is saturated. But, as Marion continues, “in each case, it will be [a] question of paradoxes, never constitutable as objects within a horizon and by an I” (Ibid.) Insofar as these phenomena are not objects within a horizon or constituted by an I, it seems that, by Marion’s own account, they must saturate all four categories, as I have suggested above. But, if my

In point of fact, insofar as invisability is coined by Marion as roughly synonymous with unforeseeability, Marion seems to admit as much during *In Excess*'s discussion of suffering and the flesh. As he there notes, "I will never be able to precede the intuition of fulfillment of my fleshly pain with an intentional aim able to foresee."¹⁰⁹ This is because, expressly following Henry, Marion conceives the flesh as a carnal "monad";¹¹⁰ it lacks any gap or ekstasis. The flesh is defined, for Marion, as the identity that exists "before intentionality opens a gap";¹¹¹ it is "the immediacy of auto-affection [that] blocks the space where the ecstasy of an intentionality would become possible."¹¹² As he argues, in his discussion of suffering:

As soon as I suffer, I suffer myself. I do not suffer from fire or iron, as I see the sword or the flame before me, their form, their colors, their dimensions, and so on, in short, from a distance, in being able to describe them as objects. ... Thus I only suffer them in suffering from their phenomenality. I do not suffer from the fire and from the iron—but, because immediately they hurt me, they only hurt me. I suffer myself by them. Between the iron and the fire and me who suffers them, *the gap disappears*.¹¹³

Thus, insofar as Marion understands the saturated phenomenon to be invisible, and insofar as he understands the flesh as a paradigmatic figure of saturation, then the flesh is understood in monadic

reading is correct, then it becomes unclear what distinguishes "revelation," which, on Marion's account is unique insofar as it "encompasses all types of paradox" (235). Marion partially addresses these questions in "The Banality of Saturation," where he writes, "each of these excesses identifies a type of saturated phenomenon, which functions exactly like a paradox. I then suggested the possibility of combining, on the one hand, some of these types and, on the other hand, all four together in order to describe other, still more complex saturated phenomena. The face of the Other, for example, doubtless combines the transgression of all modality with the surpassing of quantity, quality, and relation." Jean-Luc Marion, "The Banality of Saturation" in *The Essential Writings*, ed. Kevin Hart (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 136. I might here then paraphrase Marion, by suggesting that the flesh "doubtless combines the transgression of all relation with the surpassing of quantity, quality, and modality."

¹⁰⁹ Marion, *In Excess*, 99.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹¹¹ Marion, *Being Given*, 231.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Marion, *In Excess*, 92.

terms—it bears no gaps and is constituted by no parts. Marion, as his predecessor Henry, thinks the flesh first and foremost as a whole, a *Gestalt*, irreducible to any part or member that might detract from its auto-affective ipseity. This irreducibility is nowhere clearer than in his discussion of the eroticization of the flesh in *The Erotic Phenomenon*. There, in language that perfectly echoes Henry’s condemnation of the organ, Marion writes:

The process of eroticization admits neither interruption nor limit, since it aims at everything being made flesh in me as in the other, so that nothing of us any longer obeys the phenomenality of bodies or of the world. ... Thus one cannot privilege any particular sense as the better operative of eroticization ... if it were necessary to distinguish one, we would rather stigmatize the impropriety of sight, almost inevitably prone to objectivization. Consequently, neither could one privilege certain organs: there are no erotic organs, only sexual organs. First of all, this is because these organs belong to the physical body, not the flesh.¹¹⁴

Such organs will only be drawn into eroticization when they lose their individuality and are drawn into, even “submerged” within, the monadic flesh: “the sexual organs ... should remain completely foreign to eroticization: they belong to the body, not the flesh. ... But emplacement in flesh includes them; it ends up by submerging them, as if by an erotic kenosis.”¹¹⁵ Thus the organ or member—the part—once again finds itself excluded or cast out of the monadic immanence of the flesh, or more precisely, the member must abandon its individuality and be absorbed into the undifferentiated unity of the monadic flesh.

¹¹⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 122.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

§2. The Multiplicity of the Flesh

A. Re-membering the Flesh

In order to rethink the flesh no longer as monadic, it will be necessary to offer a phenomenological account of the member—not only understood as a member or organ of the objective body, or even of the organic body, but truly as a *member of the flesh*. Even Marion himself, in a rare divergence from his consistent reduction of the flesh to its monadic simplicity, will even speak—if only once, and only in passing—of “the flesh of my members, muscles and bones.”¹¹⁶ The present section will aim to extend this insight into a defining feature of flesh, no longer understood as a monadic subjectivity or immediate *Gestalt*, but as a phenomenon at once transcendental, but nevertheless constituted from a multiplicity.

In order to arrive at the member of the flesh, I will here follow a path laid by the phenomenologist Jacob Rogozinski, who—despite some differences in regards to sexuality, that will be explored below—has done much to influence the present approach to radical phenomenology. In particular, Rogozinski has pioneered the synthesis of radical phenomenology with insights from psychoanalysis and the transcendental empiricism of Deleuze and Guattari, that I will here aim to extend.

Within phenomenology, the relationship between the flesh and its members, the organism and its organs, has been undertaken in two directions. On the one hand, there is a monadic tradition, that prioritizes the whole of the part. This tradition could be traced back to Hegel, who sources

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 95. This passage comes in the midst of an analysis of ageing. There Marion, speaks of the ageing of the face, in a manner that leaves it quite open whether the face should here be understood as a Levinasian face —the icon (Marion)—or perhaps as itself something like a member of the flesh.

bodily membership in the primordial, substantial unity of Life, “the simple substance of Life is the splitting-up of itself into shapes and at the same time the dissolution of these existent differences; and the dissolution of the splitting-up is just as much a splitting-up and a forming of members.”¹¹⁷ This tradition enters phenomenology through France, where, before solidifying in Henry and Marion, it periodically tempts Merleau-Ponty, who—despite his often rather elaborate phenomenologies of the various bodily members and insistence upon bodily constitution—nevertheless also argues that the subjective body “is not an assemblage of organs juxtaposed in space. *I am in undivided possession of it*”;¹¹⁸ “the spatiality of the body,” he continues, “must work downward from the whole to the parts.”¹¹⁹

On the other side is a tradition of thinkers who emphasize constitution. This tradition could perhaps be sourced in Kant, who writes of the organic being, “it is required, ... that its parts be combined into a whole by being reciprocally the cause and effect of their form. ... For a body, ... it is required that its parts reciprocally produce each other, as far as both their form and their combination is concerned, *and thus produce a whole* out of their own causality.”¹²⁰ For Kant, the whole of the living body is produced by the reciprocal relations of its various constituent parts. This tradition enters phenomenology through Husserl, who most clearly in *Ideas II* (as was seen above in chapter 1), insists that, despite its quasi-transcendental character, the *Leib* nevertheless undergoes an elaborate process of bodily constitution. Moreover, the various sensations (*Empfindung*) or sensings (*Empfindnisse*) that enter into this constitution are not themselves

¹¹⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 108.

¹¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 112-113.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 133. Or again, “the body synthesis is immediate and primordial. I do not bring together one by one the parts of my body; this translation and this unification are performed once and for all within me.” *Ibid.*, 150.

¹²⁰ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 245 [emphasis added].

homogeneous; they are drawn together into spheres of sensation that Husserl calls “sensation-fields.”¹²¹ Each field is granted its own relative autonomy and is differentiated from other fields. My hot/cold sensation-field, for example, is distinct from my balance sensation-field; my hunger sensation-field, from my touch sensation-field.¹²² The constitution of the *Leib* essentially involves the localization of diverse modalities of sensation. Thus, for Husserl, the flesh is not an organless monad but a multiplicity, a “system of organs,”¹²³ “an entire system of compatibly harmonizing organs of perception.”¹²⁴

These two approaches could be understood as alternate solutions to the problem introduced by French phenomenology; insofar as French phenomenology sought to conflate the flesh and the transcendental ego (as we saw in chapter 1), one must ask: does the flesh take on the monadic¹²⁵ character of the ego, or conversely, does the ego take on the complex constituted character of the flesh? While both Henry and Marion have taken the first path, I will here follow the groundwork laid by Rogozinski, who draws radical phenomenology back into the Husserlian tradition of the flesh, recapturing a key notion from Husserl’s account: constitution by passive synthesis.

¹²¹ Husserl, *Ideas II*, 162.

¹²² While touch-sensations are given primacy of place in Husserl’s account, these are nevertheless bolstered by “sensations belonging to totally different groups.” *Ibid.*, 160.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹²⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. Anthony J. Steinbock (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 50.

¹²⁵ See: Husserl, *Ideas II*, 118. The ego, like the soul, “has no places, no pieces. It is absolutely not a fragmentable unity” *Ibid.*, 141. Although, it is importantly worth noting, even the monadic ego is understood by Husserl to constantly undergo a process of constitution—albeit a “self-constitution”—in order that the “the same I” might be continuously present within the flux of the “flowing life.” (Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: an Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973], 66.) Much of Husserl’s vocabulary here will be adopted by Rogozinski’s account of the flesh.

B. The Constitution of the Flesh

Rogozinski's most important contribution to radical phenomenology is *The Ego and the Flesh*, the heart of which is a critique of egocide (*egicide*)¹²⁶—the erasure or rejection of any notion of ego from contemporary philosophy. For Rogozinski, Jacques Lacan and Martin Heidegger stand as the two principal defendants charged with this egocide. In each instance, he argues, one finds an identification of the genesis of the ego with a more primordial non-ego: “a Neuter, a Being, an Other.”¹²⁷ “From the earlier to the later Heidegger, or from Freud to Lacan,” he writes, “egocide is inexorably worsened, and no one is ever able to explain where in each of us the absolute certainty of being ego comes from or how this illusory ego could derive from a more originary non-ego.”¹²⁸

Against this egocide, Rogozinski posits a “return to Descartes”¹²⁹ of sorts, a retrieval of the notion of an ego—here understood in transparently Henrian terms¹³⁰ as the absolutely unique mode of phenomenological givenness wherein the self gives itself to itself in a radical immanence. As he writes:

Immanence [is] a manner of being given: what characterizes an immanent givenness is the power to be given from oneself to oneself; and in that it needs nothing else in order to be given, then it is a matter of an absolute givenness. I

¹²⁶ An intentional pun on “*régicide*.”

¹²⁷ Jacob Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh: an Introduction to Egoanalysis*, trans. Robert Vallier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 78.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Here Rogozinski is particularly influenced by Henry's reading of Descartes in *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*.

¹³⁰ Although he only occasionally cites Henry, the debt is clear throughout. In fact, Rogozinski dedicates the book to his mentor, writing, “I would like to express my gratitude to Michel Henry, my teacher and friend, who advised me to ‘follow my idea’” (*Ibid.*, vii). Yet, for reasons that will become clear, this debt is great, but limited, best exemplified by Rogozinski's comment that “I am guided by Michel Henry's analysis in *C'est moi la vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 1996)—but only to a certain point” (*Ibid.*, 320 n. 15). While in context this simply refers to the conception of the “truth of the world,” it might nevertheless serve as a helpful summary of the relationship *tout court*: Rogozinski follows Henry, “but only to a certain point.”

define immanence, then, as self-givenness, as the identity of what gives and what is given.¹³¹

Yet, siding with post-Husserlian French phenomenology against traditional Cartesianism, Rogozinski thinks this ego in embodied terms; it is an ego-flesh (*moi-chair*, from Husserl's "Ichleib").¹³² "The immanent ego," he writes, "is not lodged in its flesh in the same way that a captain is in his ship or that the Cartesian soul resides in the pineal gland: it is its flesh; it is *Ichleib*, an 'ego-body' or 'flesh of the ego,' an originally incarnated ego."¹³³ Thus his Egoanalysis¹³⁴ is, at one and the same time, a radical phenomenology of the flesh.

But, against Henry and Marion's monadic conception of the flesh, Rogozinski recognizes that the ego-flesh does not emerge into its self-givenness whole cloth; we must not move "too quickly toward the one, the same, the identical."¹³⁵ Instead, Rogozinski offers a genetic account of the synthetic constitution of the ego out of the primordial *multiplicity* of immanence.

Drawing upon a diverse set of sources—notably Deleuze, Husserl, and Kant—Rogozinski argues that immanence cannot be understood as the immediate, absolute unity of self-presence *presupposed* by Henry's phenomenology. Rather, under the guidance of the radical reduction,¹³⁶

¹³¹ Ibid., 142.

¹³² Rogozinski, following Franck (Didier Franck, *The Body and the Flesh*, trans. Joseph Rivera and Scott Davidson [New York: Bloomsbury, 2014]) et al, prefers the French *la chair* as a rendering of Husserl's *Leib*, rather than Merleau-Ponty's *le corps propre*. See translator's footnote: Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 323 n. 3.

¹³³ Ibid., 128.

¹³⁴ Rogozinski's "Egoanalysis" should be completely distinguished from the mid-century "ego-psychology" against which Lacan often writes, and instead is probably derived from Husserl's notion of a "pure egology" (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 30).

¹³⁵ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 139.

¹³⁶ Rogozinski self-consciously calls up the Henrian language of the "radical reduction" throughout *The Ego and the Flesh*, writing, for example, "in order to approach [the remainder], we must attempt a radical reduction..." (Rogozinski, 173).

one actually discovers that the “most originary layer”¹³⁷ of the ego is not a monadic whole, but a manifold of “innumerable sensible impressions,”¹³⁸ even a certain “chaos.”¹³⁹ Thus, we must not imagine the ego as a primordial unity, he argues, but as “as *the unity of the multiple*, as an ego originally divided yet unified.”¹⁴⁰ Following Deleuze, Rogozinski names this originary multiplicity: the flesh’s “plane of immanence.” But, insightfully recapitulating Husserl’s notion of “sensation-fields,” Rogozinski recognizes that this immanent plane is not a homogeneous field. It is rather populated by clusters of resonating impressions, which disseminate across this plane of immanence.

The field of immanence is not a pure chaos; ... regularities and constant concordances come to order the flux of appearances; ... different perspectives, series of divergent impressions, may also be able to converge on, intersect with, and cross one another; and ... each point of intersection is constituted as a pole of identification, allowing for always larger and more stable unities to be formed.¹⁴¹

Despite the Deleuzian resonances of this language, Rogozinski ultimately sides with Henry against Deleuze, insofar as he denies the Deleuzian thesis that the plane of immanence is marked by an “anonymous life.” For Deleuze and Guattari’s transcendental empiricism, the aim is to “do away with any subject in favor of an assemblage of the haecceity type that carries or brings out the event insofar as it is unformed and incapable of being effectuated by persons.”¹⁴² Thus, the multiplicities on the plane of immanence are “not a personal feeling.”¹⁴³ Even when Deleuze turns

¹³⁷ Ibid., 142.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 148.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 140.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 136.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 140.

¹⁴² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 265.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 240.

to a quasi-vitalism, it is an anonymous vitalism, an anonymous life: “the life of the individual,” Deleuze writes, “gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life.”¹⁴⁴ This, for Deleuze, is marked by the use of indefinite articles, which introduce an “individuation ... which does not pass into a form and is not effected by a subject”:¹⁴⁵ a haecceity that is not an ipseity. “The indefinite article is the indetermination of the person,” Deleuze writes;¹⁴⁶ it is not *my Life*, but *a Life*.

For Rogozinski, to follow Deleuze and Guattari in this direction would result in precisely the paradox of egocide that he is attempting to critique. For how does one get from non-ego to ego, from *a Life* to *my Life*? The answer that Rogozinski suggests, is simple, there is no anonymous life, there is no primordial non-ego—at least not from a phenomenological perspective. The plane of immanence discovered by the radical reduction is “a singular life, each time my own, my life.”¹⁴⁷ Regardless of what a turn to metaphysics might suggest, the radical reduction never digs below the givenness of the sensible impression to itself, its self-givenness. Such speculation is simply beyond the bounds of phenomenology, even a radical phenomenology.

For this reason, Rogozinski entitles the multiplicities that disseminates across the plane of immanence: “larval egos” or “fragments of ego,” in order to emphasize the ipseity of these fragments. While each certainly carries its own haecceity—my pain is not my anxiety, nor is my joy identical to my impression of yellow—they are all nevertheless equally mine and all are equally moments in the constitution of *my* flesh. As he writes, these “larval egos, fragments of ego, are still and always will be me. If it is impossible to derive the ego from a more originary non-ego—

¹⁴⁴ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 28.

¹⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 264.

¹⁴⁶ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 30.

¹⁴⁷ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 145.

from an unconscious Id or from an impersonal transcendental field—then we must conclude that the ego is always preceded by itself, is originally given to itself.”¹⁴⁸

Having followed the radical reduction from the unified ego-flesh, to the multiplicity of fragments that anticipate it, it is now necessary to reverse course, to articulate the process by which this multiplicity is unified, the way in which these diverse parts are constituted into a whole. As Rogozinski writes, the ego-flesh “must be broken into shards so that we can recuperate it in terms of a genesis. [For] every unity is formed from out of a primitive multiplicity; every identity (including the ego or the ‘individual’) is constituted through syntheses of identification.”¹⁴⁹ He therefore finds it necessary to return to Husserl, and suggest that the flesh emerges from “a passive synthesis that operates without me.”¹⁵⁰ Or, as Husserl writes of the self-constitution of the ego:

We encounter ... a second kind of synthesis, which embraces all the particular multiplicities of *cogitationes* collectively and in its own manner, namely as belonging to the identical Ego, who, as the active and affected subject of consciousness, lives in all processes of consciousness.¹⁵¹

If such a synthesis did not take place, he writes, “I would never be myself.”¹⁵² Rogozinski names this passive constitution of the flesh: the “*carnal synthesis*,”¹⁵³ or even simply, “my birth.”¹⁵⁴

Drawing from the language of Merleau-Ponty, Rogozinski models the carnal synthesis upon the *chiasm*. In the passive constitution of the flesh, there is an “intertwining” wherein the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 141.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 139

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 149.

¹⁵¹ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 66.

¹⁵² Ibid.,

¹⁵³ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 150-161.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 85.

larval or fragmentary egos touch one another and recognize one another “as another pole of the same flesh.”¹⁵⁵ In this chiasmic intertwining, these larval and fragmentary egos constitute a “community of resonance”¹⁵⁶ wherein the plane of immanence is part-by-part unified into a flesh, a self-presence capable of giving itself to itself, not only in each individual sensible impression, but also above these sensible impressions as a unified ego-flesh. Nevertheless, this self-constitution is by no means complete or final; the flesh, as Husserl famously noted, “is a remarkably imperfectly constituted thing.”¹⁵⁷ Thus it is necessary to recognize a partiality to this constitution, certain gaps or fissures that, despite the contestations of Henry and Marion, persist within the flesh.

C. The Remainder

Despite the carnal synthesis, the flesh nevertheless does not manifest without break or rupture: “between each [ego] pole, a gap [*écarte*] subsists.”¹⁵⁸ This *écarte* emerges from an impossibility already identified by Henry and Derrida’s critique of Merleau-Ponty: the impossibility of a total *chiasm*.¹⁵⁹ “The chiasm is brought about,” Rogozinski writes, “only by a *partial* and *precarious*

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 151. Here following Husserl’s suggestion that “the universal principle of passive genesis ... bears the title association.” Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 80. Although, it is worth noting that, in that context, Husserl is primarily describing the constitution of “objectivities” rather than the constitution of the flesh itself.

¹⁵⁶ A term drawn from Husserl, *Ideas II*, 520-523.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 187. Merleau-Ponty was particularly drawn to this passage, paraphrasing it in *Phenomenology of Perception* and “The Philosopher and his Shadow”—“What prevents [the body] ever being an object, ever being ‘completely constituted’ is that it is that by which there are objects” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 105), and “we may with equal truth say of these pre-givens (as Husserl says of the body) either that they are always ‘already constituted’ for us or that they are ‘never completely constituted’—in short, that consciousness is always behind or ahead of them, never contemporaneous” (Merleau-Ponty, “The Philosopher and his Shadow” in *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary [Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1967], 165.

¹⁵⁸ Rogozinski, 154.

¹⁵⁹ See: Jacob Rogozinski, “Le chiasme et le restant (la « phénoménologie française » au contact de l’intouchable)” *Rue Descartes*, No. 35, (Mars 2002): 125-144.

identification, endlessly put into question by some element X, a divergence or gap that destabilizes it.”¹⁶⁰ For Rogozinski, there can never be complete self-presence without the total loss of identity: were total self-identity enacted, “the flesh would fold back on itself, sink into itself. It would implode without ever successfully giving itself a body with differentiated organs.”¹⁶¹ That is to say, the “remarkably imperfectly constituted” (Husserl) status of the flesh, its gaps or fissures, are the condition of possibility for anything like the members of the flesh. It was precisely the converse which was found in Henry and Marion. Their accounts of the flesh were monadic—they folded back on themselves—precisely because they refused to see the persistence of the *écarte*, because they imagined the total self-presence, a self-givenness *sans reste*.¹⁶²

Against this monadic view, Rogozinski recognizes that while the larval ego-fragments are brought into a chiasmic relation, they do not cease to remain themselves in a meaningful way; they do not lose their prior haecceity. Even following the carnal synthesis my pain remains distinct from the sight of green, my hearing of a tone from my taste of salt. This differentiation requires an unbridgeable gap between each ego-pole,¹⁶³ a point of rupture that is manifest within immanence; it requires, to use Rogozinski’s language, a “remainder.”

¹⁶⁰ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 171.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁶² Marion is able to posit a certain *écarte* within the self, as attested in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, §30, but this is not a gap within the originary manifestation of the flesh, but rather a secondary gap between the various manifestations of the body (akin to the gap between the subjective flesh and objective body in Henry). Thus, while it is a gap “that each of us has within ourselves,” it is a gap *between* “my eroticized flesh” and my “person,” rather than a gap *within* my flesh. Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 156.

¹⁶³ “That two poles of the ego-flesh could recognize one another and be united does not imply that they are perfectly identified with one another.” Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 171.

This use of remainder [*le restant*], should not be confused with Derrida's *le restance* nor Lacan's *le reste*—both commonly translated into English as “remainder.” But neither should it be understood completely outside of reference to these important figures.

For example, there is a clear resonance between Rogozinski's remainder [*le restant*] and Lacan's *objet petit a* which, in *Seminar X*, Lacan expressly names the remainder [*le reste*].¹⁶⁴ “What is the remainder?” Lacan asks, “it is what survives the ordeal of the division of the field of the Other through the presence of the subject.”¹⁶⁵ Like *le restant*, it is a division or cut. As Lacan writes, glossing Freud's famous dictum, *anatomy is destiny*: “it becomes true if we give the term *anatomy* its strict and, if I may, etymological meaning that emphasizes *ana-tomy*, the function of the cut. ... Destiny, that is to say, man's relation to the function of desire, only assumes its full vitality inasmuch as the fragmentation of one's own body, the cut that lies at the locus of select moments of its functioning, is conceivable.”¹⁶⁶ The very function of desire—indeed sexuality itself—presumes the presence of the cut or the fragmentation of the flesh. But, whereas for Rogozinski this cut is immanent to the process of the self-constitution of the flesh in immanence, for Lacan, it is the excess of an intersubjective relation: “the object [*le petit a* or *le reste*] functioning as the leftover of the subject's dialectic with the Other.”¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, even given

¹⁶⁴ This resonance remains obvious, despite Lacan's insistence that “the *a* is inasmuch as it precedes any phenomenology.” Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X*, trans. A. R. Price (Malden: Polity, 2004), 284. Specifically, Lacan here seems to understand phenomenology as a phenomenology of positive objectivities. Thus, his description of the *objet petit a* as “the remainder left over from the constitution of the subject” (Ibid.), given its essential negativity, might be understood to elude an intentional phenomenology. But, first, Heidegger's phenomenology of *Angst* and nothingness in “What is Metaphysics?”—which Lacan is certainly not unfamiliar with (Ibid., 8, 292-293)—as well as Sartre's phenomenology of the various forms of negation in *Being and Nothingness* would suggest that even an intentional phenomenology could engage with the *objet petit a*. Moreover, it is even less clear why the *a* would elude a *radical phenomenology*, whose principal phenomena are not even bound by the conditions which determine the constitution of “objects” or “beings.”

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 220.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 236-237.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 230.

its intersubjective genesis, Lacan's *le reste* or *objet petit a* remains (pun intended) within one's own flesh—unlike anxiety which is on the side of the Other. Thus, for example, “the *a*,” Lacan writes, “is an object separated not from the mother's organism but from the child's organism.”¹⁶⁸ It is the “pound of flesh” that one must sacrifice from one's self.¹⁶⁹

Thus the two notions end up quite closely related; for Lacan *le reste* is the object which marks a certain heterogeneity in the relation to the Other, whereas for Rogozinski *le restant* functions *the condition of possibility* for heterogeneity. In this way, Rogozinski understands this remainder in the paradoxical language of “auto-hetero-giveness.”¹⁷⁰ Yet, this should not be understood as a vicious paradox, but rather as a gesture toward the Derridean language of the condition of possibility that is at once ostensibly a condition of impossibility: for “if there were no remainder,” Rogozinski writes, “there would be neither flesh nor ego. ... The remainder is above all what protects the ego-flesh and makes its genesis possible—it is my ultimate condition of possibility.”¹⁷¹

One may therefore, returning to the Lacanian vocabulary, describe the flesh through the Lacanian figure of the “not-all” (*pas-tout*). For Lacan, this feature describes the non-universalizability and structural incompleteness of woman—“*the* woman does not exist”¹⁷² [*il n'y*

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 235-236.

¹⁶⁹ For Lacan's connection of the *objet petit a* to *The Merchant of Venice*, see: Ibid., 219-220.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 172. As Rogozinski writes elsewhere, “hate reveals an auto-hetero-affection where the ego is affected by itself as if it were an other.” Jacob Rogozinski, “Democracy and Terror: towards a phenomenology of (dis-)embodiment,” Conference Presentation, *Die Phänomenologie und das Politische*, Hagen (2017), 3.

¹⁷¹ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 175.

¹⁷² Translation modified to emphasize the role of the definite article, lost in its translation as “woman does not exist.” Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973, Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 7.

a pas La femme—in opposition to masculine universality. But it might just as well stand in for the distinction between the flesh and the body—*la chair* and *le corps*—which by a happy coincidence are themselves grammatically gendered feminine (*la*) and masculine (*le*) respectively. Like masculine sexualization in Lacan, (the masculine-gendered) *le corps* is constituted by a logic of completion—there is no exception: $\forall x \Phi x$.¹⁷³ Insofar as the body is an object within the horizon of the world (Henry) or obeys the conditions of the I (Marion)—it is a common phenomenon whose concept, Marion might say, takes priority over its intuitive shortage. Yet, what both Henry and Marion fail to recognize is that insofar as the (feminine-gendered) flesh manifests outside of any horizon, it will not therefore manifest with complete self-presence. That which refuses objectification must necessarily contain a certain incompleteness—it is not whole, not-all—it bears the traces of a remainder.

Therefore, the condition of possibility of a unified ego-flesh is precisely this lack of complete unity: the failure of complete chiasm is precisely *a constitutive excess*. It is the gap within its identity, the very inability of the ego-flesh to fully seal itself in (monadic) immanence, that allows it to emerge at all. This remainder “guards my flesh against disaster, offering it a *mouvance*, a playing field”;¹⁷⁴ it is the first otherness, the Fichtean not-self¹⁷⁵—present already within the ego-flesh itself—which forms the condition of possibility for any experience of otherness.

¹⁷³ Roughly translatable as: *every* man is subject to the phallic function; or as Lacan writes, “it is through the phallic function that man as whole acquires his inscription.” *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁷⁴ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 175.

¹⁷⁵ “Nothing is posited to begin with, except the self; and this alone is asserted absolutely. Hence there can be an absolute opposition only to the self. But that which is opposed to the self = the not-self ... If I am to present anything at all, I must oppose it to the presenting self. Now within the object of presentation there can and must be an X of some sort, whereby it discloses itself as something to be presented, and not as that which presents. But that everything, wherein this X may be, is not that which presents, but an item to be presented, is something that no object can teach me; for merely in order to set up something as an object, I have to know this already” J. G. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 104-105.

Moreover, it is our relation to this arch-otherness that conditions the mode of our relation to subsequent others. *Le restant*, Rogozinski elsewhere suggests, “is the ‘first foreigner’ to whom I am confronted, the ‘first non-ego,’ which is not *another me* (an *alter-ego*), but an other *in me*.”¹⁷⁶ This is possible, because just as the impasse of anxiety incarnates itself in the Lacanian *objet petit a*, so too does the impasse or failure of complete synthesis incarnate itself in the remainder, understood not only negatively as a gap, but positively as an intruder within the flesh:

When the chiasm is interrupted, when the poles of flesh cease to mutually incarnate one another, the remainder disfigures itself: it reappears within my flesh as a foreign body whose apparition provokes angst and disgust. The ego endeavors to defend itself against this threatening intrusion by expelling this ‘foreign’ body. This gesture of exclusion can however only fail, as the remainder is not truly foreign to the ego.”¹⁷⁷

Therefore, as will be discussed below, if we are to relate to the Other without fear, disgust, or horror, then we must first learn to relate to the otherness within our own flesh without fear, disgust, or horror.

D. From the Organ to the Member

Before turning to the final step of the present argument—the reintroduction of the central figure of sexuality—it will be helpful to mark an important semantic decision. Until this point, I have spoken univocally of the organ and the member—employing these two terms as synonymous figures of incarnate parts of the fleshly whole. It is now necessary to mark a key distinction between these two terms that will become increasingly important in later chapters, which will shift from the constitution of the individual flesh to the communal body.

¹⁷⁶ Rogozinski, “Democracy and Terror,” 3.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Surprisingly—given his emphasis upon the manifold nature of sensible impressions, the synthetic nature of the ego’s constitution, and the persistence of the gap or remainder within immanence—Rogozinski nevertheless seems to follow Henry and Marion in insisting that the flesh appears *without organs*. Within the radical reduction that centers his phenomenological Egoanalysis, he writes, “I no longer have the right to say that it is my eyes that see, my ears that hear. When I effect the reduction, my material body disappears with all its organs and physical qualities; what remains is not the body but rather flesh. ... My flesh never crystallizes into a differentiated organic unity, ... it has neither eyes nor hands nor sex organs.”¹⁷⁸

For Rogozinski, like his predecessors, to speak of the “organ” is always already to speak of the organic body—the body insofar as it is marked by “spatial and temporal extension.”¹⁷⁹ Any discussion of “organs” must therefore be undertaken at the level of the material body (*le corps*), the body insofar as it is constituted—or “self-incorporated”—within the visibility of the world. This is the body that has “constitute[d] itself as one whole composed of differentiated organs.”¹⁸⁰ The flesh, on the other hand, *manifests without organs*.

Yet, this initial exclusion of the organ from Rogozinski’s phenomenology of the flesh, must be nuanced. For, while he remains deeply skeptical of the language of the organ, his reasoning differs considerably from that of Henry and Marion—a difference that opens up the space for a distinction between the organ and the “pole”¹⁸¹ or member.

¹⁷⁸ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 148.

¹⁷⁹ Henry, *Essence of Manifestation*, 605.

¹⁸⁰ Jacob Rogozinski, “Democracy and Terror,” 2.

¹⁸¹ Although uncited, the language of the pole is likely derived from Husserl who often describes the ego as an “Ego pole” [*Ichpol*] over and against the “object poles” of intentional experience. See, e.g.: Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, §§30-33.

Contrary to Henry and Marion, Rogozinski's critique of the organ is much more closely indebted to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the Body without Organs; as he flatly admits, "the flesh is not very different from Deleuze's 'body without organs'."¹⁸² While this language of a body *without* organs ostensibly supports a monadic rejection of all incarnate members, the reality is almost exactly the opposite. For, while Artaud articulated the language of the BwO, he also supplemented this language with a positive account of the "true organs." As Rogozinski writes, "this notion [of the BwO] has the defect of being purely negative and does not invoke this necessary *reorganization* of the flesh, the 'new dance of the organs' of which Artaud spoke."¹⁸³ For Deleuze and Guattari, this reorganization is not merely a supplement to the BwO, but stands at the heart of the BwO itself. "The BwO," they write in *A Thousand Plateaus*, "is not at all the opposite of the organs. The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism ... The BwO is not opposed to the organs; rather, the BwO and its 'true organs,' ... are opposed to the organism, the organic organization of the organs."¹⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari center their critique not on the notion of the organ, but on the notion of the *organism*: the theological, teleological, and hierarchical (read: authoritarian) organization of the organs—as exemplified by the organic body. The aim of the BwO is not the eradication of the organ, *but its very liberation*; the discovery of a line-of-flight whereby one "could patiently and momentarily dismantle the organization of the organs [that] we call the organism."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 148.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 158.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

Precisely the same critique can be found in Rogozinski's phenomenology. To again cite a key passage: "even if my flesh never crystallizes into a differentiated *organic unity*, if it has neither eyes nor hands nor sex organs..."¹⁸⁶ While the second clause appears to disqualify anything like an organ or a member, this disqualification is a response to the first clause—it is not organs that are the problem, but "organic unity," the implicitly hierarchical organization of the organs. It is for this reason that Rogozinski goes on to immediately qualify this disqualification:

[The flesh] has nevertheless, each one of which has its singular carnal site—many fluid and mobile micro-organs that open and close constantly and never stop touching, hearing, seeing, desiring, rejoicing, suffering. In order to avoid confusing them with corporal organs, I will henceforth designate them as *poles of flesh*.¹⁸⁷

The clause "in order to avoid confusing them..." is particularly enlightening here; it illustrates that Rogozinski is here making a *semantic decision* to avoid the language of the organ, in favor of the pole of flesh. Thus, Rogozinski both recognizes the danger of an organicist account of the body—in which everything has its "proper place" and "proper role"—as well as the phenomenological insufficiency of a purely monadic account of the flesh. The only remaining option, the option that Rogozinski takes, is to both recognize the multiplicity of the flesh, as well as the contingency and revisibility of any distribution of this multiplicity. "The organs," as Deleuze and Guattari write, "distribute themselves on the BwO, but they distribute themselves independently of the form of the organism; form becomes contingent, organs are no longer anything more than intensities that are produced, flows, thresholds, and gradients."¹⁸⁸

Insofar as the language of the organ seems to almost inevitably privilege this hierarchical organization—being co-opted by the organic body—the present project will therefore follow

¹⁸⁶ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 148 [emphasis added].

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 182.

Rogozinski's semantic decision to avoid the language of the organ. But, whereas Rogozinski chose to replace this language with the Husserlian language of the "poles of the flesh," I will here employ the language of the "*member of the flesh*," in order—in subsequent discussions of community and political bodies—to employ the double meaning of member as both a constituent of the individual body and a person belonging to a social group.

§3. The Irreducibility of Sexual Difference

A. Re-Sexualizing the Flesh

While I have here followed Rogozinski's critique of the "organ" and choice to offer differing language—"pole" in his case, "member" in my own—it is nevertheless worth noting a certain risk inherent in any attempt to avoid the language of the organ: a tendency to erase sexuality. Simply put, as soon as one conceives of an originary flesh that is "deprived of ... differentiated organs,"¹⁸⁹ then likewise this flesh is deprived of sexual organs. As Rogozinski argues, "under the phenomenological reduction, it is appropriate to put out of play every objective or worldly determination ... In truth, the originary flesh ... has neither eyes, nor hands, *nor sex organs*."¹⁹⁰ It is a quick step from here into a monadic erasure of every trace of sexual difference from the originary flesh.

One can see this progression play out clearly in Rogozinski, who elsewhere argues rather straightforwardly, "I tend to consider sexual difference as being constituted on the plane of the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 187.

¹⁹⁰ "Sous réduction phénoménologique, il convient de mettre hors jeu toute détermination objective ou mondaine, ... En vérité, la chair originaire, ... n'a ni yeux, ni mains, ni sexe." Rogozinski, "Le chiasme et le restant," 130 [translation my own, emphasis added].

organic body, and therefore not belonging to the originary plane of immanence of the flesh.”¹⁹¹ Thus Rogozinski, for example, writes of Freud’s Dora case-study, “on the plane of the flesh, there is nothing equivalent to ... the gaping pit of the sexual orifice.”¹⁹² There is no *sexual* organ on the plane of the flesh, because there is simply no organ on the plane of the flesh.¹⁹³

Yet, as has been shown above, once one has stripped sexuality from the flesh, only two possibilities remain: either, as in Henry, the flesh is presented as an a-sexual transcendental field, or as in Marion, the flesh manifests in a binary of two monadic sexualities. Either way—insofar as these two options ultimately collapse into one another—what is rendered impossible is a thinking capable of accounting for sexual difference in the strong sense, a difference-beyond-binary exemplified by queer or trans* lived, embodied experience.

Thus, Rogozinski, like Henry, begins with a transcendental a-sexuality of the originary flesh, but nevertheless ends up (almost inevitably) recapitulating a binary account of sexual difference. This is evident in the transition from the a-sexual originary flesh into the sexed “body of flesh” [*Leibkörper*]. Whereas “the primordial flesh was too undifferentiated—both too disseminated and too homogenous”¹⁹⁴ for the emergence of sexual difference, the body of flesh is

¹⁹¹ “J’ai tendance à considérer que la différence sexuelle est constituée sur le plan du corps organique, et n’appartient donc pas au plan d’immanence originaire de la chair.” Jacob Rogozinski, email to author, Dec. 18, 2016 [translation my own].

¹⁹² Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 266.

¹⁹³ The instability of this thesis is apparent throughout Rogozinski’s corpus, in the unpublished “Democracy and Terror,” for example, he suggests that “my hate toward others always finds its source in a hate toward myself, toward an internal outsider that I recognize with horror in the other. If someone proclaims his disgust and his hate of women or of homosexuals, we may wonder that he detests in them his own femininity, which he refuses in himself” (Rogozinski, “Democracy and Terror,” 5). Although broadly consistent with the theses of *The Ego and the Flesh*, this passage nevertheless provokes the questions: what is this “femininity,” and where is it? The answer to the first question is straightforward, it is paradigmatic case of the remainder (*le restant*). Yet, to be a remainder is to be “pole of flesh” that—due to the incomplete nature of the *chiasm*—has failed to incarnate. What is unavoidable, therefore, is the conclusion that this “femininity” is a pole of flesh, that it occurs on the plane of immanence—there, precisely, where sexual difference is supposed not to manifest.

¹⁹⁴ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 194 [emphasis added].

marked by the constitution or incorporation of the organic body. “By letting itself be traversed and divided by the remainder in this way,” Rogozinski argues, “the body of flesh is opened to sexual desire.”¹⁹⁵ Thus, he continues, “the flesh is incorporated in the form of a sexed and sectioned body with its organs opening outwards, its cavities, its folds, intercellular spaces, and orificial crevices.”¹⁹⁶

It is here that the a-sexual flesh has become a sexed body. But it is likewise here that Rogozinski falls into a familiar, but suspect, binary thinking. For him, it is the incorporation of the flesh that is “able to arrange a place for *the Two* of sexual difference.”¹⁹⁷ The transition from the primordial ego-flesh to the sexuation of the organic body is marked as a transition from the unity of the undifferentiated One to the binary of the sexual Two. But, as even the most rudimentary phenomenology of queer experience has taught, *sexuality is neither one nor two, but always already multiple*. As Deleuze and Guattari, for example, articulate the dissemination of the binary Two into the multiplicity of the many: “the two sexes imply a multiplicity of molecular combinations bringing into play not only the man in the woman and the woman in the man, but the relation of each to the animal, the plant, etc.: a thousand tiny sexes.”¹⁹⁸ The question to be asked is: how has Rogozinski fallen into this binary thinking?

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. [emphasis added].

¹⁹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 213. Similarly Hocquenghem writes “There are two sexes on earth, but this is only to hide the fact that there are three, four, ten, thousands, once you throw that old hag of the idea of nature overboard.” Guy Hocquenghem, *The Screwball Asses*, trans. Noura Wedell (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2010), 69. For a feminist reading of this passage in Deleuze and Guattari, as well as their notion of “becoming-woman” see: Elizabeth Grosz, “A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics,” in Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (eds.), *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 187-212.

I would here like to suggest that Rogozinski has misplaced the gap or fissure constitutive of sexuality. For, as he rightly notes:

For sexuation to take place, a sectioning is necessary, an originary tearing distributed over the entire surface of the ego-skin in a series of local openings and differentiated orifices, thus making contact possible with different zones, on which desire is fixated; it makes possible displacements that let it migrate from one to another, distances, penetrations, ejections, and spasms—the unsettling intrigue of desire and of jouissance.¹⁹⁹

One finds a similar account of sexuation in Lacanian psychoanalysis, insofar as sexuation and sexuality as such, emerge not as a positive property of the sexed body—a fact that is always “secondary”²⁰⁰—, but as a “lack” or “fault” [*faillie*] in the field of signification. For Lacan, sexual difference is never reducible-without-excess to discourse. There is no simple binary signification: for, while “a man is nothing but a signifier. ... Woman is not-whole—there is always something in her that escapes discourse.”²⁰¹ Thus, Lacan’s famous dictum: “there is no sexual relationship” [*il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*].²⁰² Yet, this seeming denial of a sexual relationship—and its correlative denial of binary signification: Man/Woman—should not be misunderstood as a denial of sexual difference. Quite to the contrary, as Žižek clarifies:

Because the binary signifier is primordially repressed, there is no sexual relationship; sexual antagonism cannot be symbolized in a pair of opposed symbolic/differential features. However, the fact that there is no sexual relationship in no way implies that ‘there is no sexual difference in the unconscious,’ that the unconscious is beyond or beneath sexual difference, a fluid domain of partial drives which defy sexuation. One can even say that the unconscious is thoroughly and only about sexual difference.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 194.

²⁰⁰ “The body’s being is of course sexed [*sexué*], but it is secondary, as they say.” Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 7.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁰³ Slavoj Žižek, *Incontinence of the Void: Economico-Philosophical Spandrels* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 57.

Rather than a “fluid domain,” or we might say transcendental a-sexuality,²⁰⁴ sexual difference saturates the being of the individual—their unconscious (Žižek) or their body of flesh (Rogozinski)—precisely as a response to this primordial negativity or lack. Here Rogozinski and the Lacanians are in agreement.

But, where precisely is the necessary “sectioning” or “originary tearing” constitutive of sexuality? In vulgar readings of psychoanalysis, this cut is understood as the gap between the sexes, between man and woman. Rogozinski seems to flirt with this option when he describes the cut as generative of “the Two of sexual difference.”²⁰⁵ Yet, what the Slovenian school of psychoanalysis—particularly Zupančič and Žižek—have recently sought to demonstrate, is that this traditional reading misses the true depth of the cut formative of sexual difference. It is not a cut between each sex that is determinative of sexual difference, but a constitutive negativity at the heart of each. “The lesson here,” Žižek argues, “is that sexual difference qua the Real of an antagonism is not the difference between the two sexes (masculine and feminine), but a difference/antagonism which runs across (traverses) each of the two sexes, introducing a gap of inconsistency into its very heart.”²⁰⁶

Despite his avowed anti-Lacanianism, one finds a similar account—albeit in a phenomenological register—in Rogozinski. For Rogozinski, the immanent genesis of the sexed

²⁰⁴ I will here simply note my disagreement with Žižek, in regards to the primordially of partial drives, that will be explored more fully in the following chapter. For Žižek sexual difference precedes the constitution of the partial drives, whereas I will argue the converse.

²⁰⁵ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 194.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 68. Or again, “the original split is not between the One and the Other, but is strictly inherent to the One; it is the split between the One and its empty place of inscription.” Ibid., 72. Here Žižek is glossing Zupančič’s claim, “this, for example, is precisely what the Lacanian formulas of sexuation force us to think: not the contradiction between ‘opposite’ sexes, but the contradiction inherent to both, ‘barring’ them both from within.” Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 72.

body emerges from the inscription of the flesh's remainder onto the surface—the “ego-skin”—of the organic body, opening up the requisite distances, orifices, and penetrations which generate “the unsettling intrigue of desire and of jouissance.”²⁰⁷ But, this does not mean that the cut is itself in the transcendent milieu of the world. For, although he clearly marks the organic body as the site of sexual difference, this difference is constituted through the intercession of the remainder—which operates at the level of the originary flesh. Indeed, it appears the organic body itself is birthed through the intervention of the remainder:

There is also an essential relation between these corporeal orifices in which the body's erotic dimension finds its anchorage and the effects of the cutting up of the remainder. Because it hollows out a gap between my flesh and itself, impeding the two poles from joining up or from adhering to one another without distance, the flesh is incorporated in the form of a sexed and sectioned body with its organs opening outwards.²⁰⁸

Yet, by making this move towards the sexed body in this manner, Rogozinski risks overturning the radical innovation that marks his advancement beyond his predecessors. For here, incorporation appears to be understood as the necessary response to a gap opened by the remainder. Thus, rather than introducing an *écarte* into the immanence of the flesh, Rogozinski here seems to envision this gap between “the flesh and itself” being cast out of the radical immanence of the flesh and into a sexed body—what Henry would call a “sexually differentiated objective body.”²⁰⁹

In this way, Rogozinski falls into the Henrian trap of the monadic flesh, and its expulsion of every *écarte* and internal differentiation (member) from the flesh. Moreover, it is precisely by expelling the gap out of the flesh, and into the organic body, that Rogozinski—as his predecessors—is motivated to limit the multiplicitous diversity of sexual difference. Precisely as

²⁰⁷ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 194.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Henry, *Incarnation*, 215.

in Henry's erasure and Marion's condemnation of sexual minorities, the expulsion of the *écarte* from the flesh produces the implicit heteronormativity of the binary terms of the "Two of sexual difference."²¹⁰

But, might one instead think sexuality following Rogozinski's own principal intuition, might one be more Rogozinskian than Rogozinski? For, if he is right that the remainder is a necessary product of the impossibility of a complete *chiasm*, the necessity of an *écarte* within the flesh, and, if he is likewise correct in his judgment that sexuation is the product of a gap between the flesh and itself—could one not simply forego reference to the organic body entirely, and suggest that, even prior to the incorporation of the organic body, the flesh is itself already marked by sexual difference?

Indeed, one might here note another commonality between Rogozinski and Lacanian psychoanalysis. For, Lacanians tend to think sexuation in binary terms—"whichever way we turn," Žižek argues, "the Two lurks beneath."²¹¹ For these thinkers sexual difference is understood as the *two exclusive means* of relating to the lack of the signifier: "every speaking being situates itself on one side or the other."²¹² Yet, even if unintentional, Žižek's language in *Incontinence of the Void* nevertheless betrays the artificiality of this binary limitation: "the 'transcendental' genesis of the multiple resides in the lack of the binary signifier, i.e., the multiple emerges as the series of attempts to fill in the gap of the missing binary signifier."²¹³ For, what justifies a limitation of attempts to fill the gap to two? Neither Žižek nor Rogozinski give a satisfactory explanation.

²¹⁰ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 194. This effect is almost certainly unintentional, given Rogozinski's avowed concern for sexual minorities. See, e.g.: *Ibid.*, 305-307.

²¹¹ Žižek, *Incontinence of the Void*, 137.

²¹² Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 79.

²¹³ Žižek, *Incontinence of the Void*, 72.

Moreover, the artificiality of this binary is even more conspicuous insofar as there is not *a gap* in the heart of the flesh, but *a multiplicity of gaps*—“a series of local openings and differentiations”²¹⁴—each birthing new opportunities for response. Indeed, it might instead be suggested that the indeterminate multiplicity of sexual positions emerges from precisely the indeterminacy of possible attempts to fill these gaps: to the thousand possible responses to negativity correspond a thousand tiny sexes.

B. The Irreducibility of Sexual Difference

Insofar as sexual difference manifests within the originary immanence of the flesh, the phenomenologist might therefore affirm with psychoanalysis, “the subject is immanently, constitutively, sexed”;²¹⁵ “the subject is not only secondarily sexualized, it is sexualized in its very formal structure.”²¹⁶ In the language of radical phenomenology, one can say that there is no transcendental a-sexuality of the flesh. Rather, sexual difference goes “all the way down.”

Sexual difference is strictly speaking, irreducible. This can be understood both in its colloquial sense, and in a properly phenomenological sense. That is to say, even the most rigorous phenomenological reduction—the radical reduction or the reduction to givenness—cannot properly speaking get beyond or beneath sexual difference. The phenomenologist must therefore resist the temptation to *deduce* (in a Kantian manner) a transcendental-self beyond or before this disorganized manifold of sexuality. Phenomenologically speaking, it may very well be possible to peek behind the sexual organization of the organic body. But, even under the most rigorous *epoché*,

²¹⁴ Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 194.

²¹⁵ Žižek, *Incontinence of the Void*, 1.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

sexual difference, in all of its multiplicitous diversity, appears to stubbornly persist. This is precisely because, insofar as sexual difference is a product of the *écarte*—the necessary remainder of the chiasm by which the flesh is itself constituted as an ego-flesh—sexual difference is therefore *coterminus* with the ego-flesh.²¹⁷ As Zupančič argues, “there is no subjectivity beyond or beneath (or simply outside) the sexual division. Sexual difference is not a secondary distinction of subjectivity, or simply culturally constructed.”²¹⁸ The body, in its manifold membership, is originary, and this matters not only philosophically and phenomenologically, but also ethically and politically. As Jay Prosser argues, from a trans* perspective, “that a transsexual’s trajectory centers on reconfiguring the body reveals that it is the ability *to feel the bodily ego in conjunction and conformity with the material body parts* that matters in a transsexual context; and that sex is perceived as something that must be changed underlines its very un-phantasmatic status.”²¹⁹

Yet, this affirmation of sexual difference should not be misunderstood as a return to the traditional binary conception of sexual difference, this is not a rejection of Henry in favor of Marion (or von Balthasar). Rather, as I have hopefully illustrated above, despite its strong claims of respect for sexual difference, an approach that *a priori* delimits all sexuality to a binary

²¹⁷ Here one should challenge Žižek’s overly hasty distinction between psychoanalysis and philosophy. As he writes, “one of the crucial differences between psychoanalysis and philosophy concerns the status of sexual difference: for philosophy, the subject is not inherently sexualized, sexualization occurs only at the contingent, empirical level; whereas psychoanalysis promulgates sexuation into a kind of formal, a priori condition of the very emergence of the subject” (Ibid., 87). Against this rather simplistic distinction, it seems that if one follows the path of radical phenomenology, one discovers sexual difference which is not merely empirical, but rather formal or structural.

²¹⁸ Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 50.

²¹⁹ Jay Prosser, “Judith Butler: Queer Feminism, Transgender, and the Transubstantiation of Sex” in Donald E. Hall, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, and Susan Potter (eds.), *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 46. This argument highlights the unique role of phenomenology in Transgender Studies, as Henry Rubin writes, “in view of these tendencies for nontranssexuals to wrest away the terms through which we transsexuals define our lives, it seems particularly prudent to use a method that not only legitimates subjectively informed knowledge but also recognizes the significance of bodies for the lived experience of the I. Bodies are the ultimate point of view. The body as it exists for oneself is the point of reference by which the whole world unfolds.” Henry S. Rubin “Phenomenology as method in trans studies,” *GLQ* 4 (1998): 263–281; 268.

signification (male/female) and to a single mode of expression (monogamous and heterosexual), is not founded upon the respect for difference, but upon an enforced homogeneity, a binary logic of sameness. Thus while Enrique Dussel may describe homosexuality as “the denial of sexual diversity,”²²⁰ or von Balthasar may mark it as a narcissism in which “man has caught sight of his own beauty and made it into an object,”²²¹ the truth is precisely the opposite. As Lee Edelman elegantly puts it:

Homosexuality, though charged with, and convicted of, a future-negating sameness construed as reflecting its pathological inability to deal with the fact of difference, gets put in the position of difference from the heteronormativity that, despite its persistent propaganda for its own propagation through sexual difference, refuses homosexuality’s difference from the value of difference it claims as its own.²²²

It is therefore this deeper value of difference, that not only affirms the difference between the sexes, but likewise the multiplicitous differences between and among queer sexualities—indeed, even the multiplicitous sexual difference that resides *within* each individual—that is here phenomenologically recognized, in order that it might also be ethically and politically affirmed.

Therefore, if one wishes to open up an account of the body that refuses to serve as a model for political violence and exclusion (as will be explored below), then we are here tasked with thinking the member together with the flesh, of thinking *members of the flesh*—multiplicitous, momentary, mobile sites of sexual manifestation beyond the reach of the organized organic body. If we can learn to think such sexual members, within the flesh, rather than within the organic body,

²²⁰ “La negación de la diversidad sexual.” Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la liberación*, (Mexico: EDICOL, 1977), 106 [translation my own].

²²¹ Von Balthasar, *The Grain of Wheat: Aphorisms*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 89-90.

²²² Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 60.

then perhaps we might discover that the flesh possesses “a much stranger unity that applies only to the multiple.”²²³

²²³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 158.

Chapter 6: Studies on the Sexual Member

The relation of the subject with the organ is at the heart of our experience.

Jacques Lacan

If the previous chapter aimed to establish both the multiplicitous character of the flesh and its primordial saturation by sexual difference, then the following chapter will seek to further explore the relationship between these two insights, by undertaking a phenomenological account of the sexual member of the flesh. In order to explore the sheer multiplicity and complexity of sexual membership, the three studies presented here will follow a trajectory that intentionally inverts the Freudian stages of sexual development, aiming to thwart the traditional privilege of the genitalia as the sole “proper” libidinal outlet. Thus, following this trajectory, the first study will seek to investigate what is widely regarded as the “purely sexual organ”¹—the penis—through a phenomenology of acute sexual impotence. The second study will examine the role of anal eroticism in the early European gay liberation movement through a phenomenological lens, deconstructing the traditional “normal”/“pathological” distinction by tying this anal eroticism to the traditionally “non-pathological” uses of oral eroticism in sexuality—viz. kissing. The third and final study will look at polymorphous character of sexual membership through a phenomenology of erogenous zones writ large.

Each of these phenomenological studies aims to highlight a particular sexual phenomenon which has been relegated to the periphery of phenomenological considerations of sexuality. This design is intentional and seeks to both illuminate those aspects of sexual incarnation that have

¹ Hocquenghem is here being sarcastic, insofar as he aims to dethrone the phallus as the principal sexual outlet. Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 95.

traditionally been cast aside, as well as placing traditional phenomenologies and theologies of sexuality in question, insofar as such accounts of sexuality have been marked by a certain “proper” character. Simply put, traditional philosophical and theological accounts of sexuality are often conspicuously sterile. They give the sense that sexuality is clean and tidy—ignoring the complex, aleatory, dirty, and in a word *indecent* character that often marks sexuality. As will be considered more fully in the next two chapters, this erasure of the indecent character of sexuality motivates and permits such philosophies and theologies to marginalize those whose sexuality cannot be “cleaned up,” cannot be made proper. Thus, borrowing the language of Marcella Althaus-Reid, who names her fusion of liberation theology and queer theory *Indecent Theology*,² one might here speak of an *indecent phenomenology*. That is to say, I will here seek to undertake a phenomenology of these philosophically marginalized sexual phenomena—impotence, anal pleasure, polymorphous perversity—in an uncompromising fashion in order to uncover (undresses?)³ both the underlying structures of sexual incarnation as such as well as give the lie to any sterile notion of proper—i.e. “natural,” “normal”—sexuality.

² “By examining the dialectics of decency and indecency and exploring a theology of sexual stories from the margins, this book brings together for the first time Liberation Theology, Queer Theory, post-Marxism and Postcolonial analysis in an explosive mixture. ... Indecent Theology is based on the sexual experiences of the poor, using economic and political analysis while unveiling the sexual ideology of systematic theology. Theology is a sexual act and Indecent Theologians are called to be sexual performers of a committed praxis of social justice and transformation of the structures of economic and sexual oppression in their societies. ... Indecent Theology is a theology which problematizes and undresses the mythical layers of multiple oppression in Latin America, a theology which, finding its point of departure at the crossroads of Liberation Theology and Queer Thinking, will reflect on economic and theological oppression with passion and imprudence.” Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), i, 2.

³ “The paradigm is an indecent paradigm, because it undresses and uncovers sexuality and economy at the same time.” *Ibid.*, 19.

§1. “I Can’t,” a Phenomenology of Impotence

A. The “I Can” and Impotence

As we have already seen, since Husserl’s phenomenological analyses of the living body (*Leib*) in *Ideas II*, the subjective experience of the body, what later French thinkers will name the flesh, has been particularly marked by its capacity for action—its *potency*. As Husserl writes, “the Ego has the ‘faculty’ (the ‘I can’) to freely move this Body [*Leib*]*—i.e., the organ in which it is articulated—and to perceive an external world by means of it.*”⁴

This privileging of the acting flesh, the potent organ, is echoed throughout the subsequent phenomenological tradition, where it serves a valuable role in the critique of the Cartesian subject, aiding in the conceptualization of a truly embodied manner of existence. As Merleau-Ponty paradigmatically notes, “consciousness is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think that’ but of ‘I can’.”⁵ Indeed, this subjectively acting body can be traced back to Maine de Biran’s thesis of the “impression of effort,”⁶ later translated into a phenomenological idiom by Henry in *Philosophy*

⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book, Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 159.

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 1962), 159. Henry almost simultaneously makes the same claim, writing in 1948-49 that “the ego is a power, the *cogito* does not mean an ‘I think’ but an ‘I can’.” Although he will later nuance this claim, affirming Maine de Biran’s *identification* of the ‘I think’ and the ‘I can’; “the Biranian *cogito* is in no way opposed to the Cartesian *cogito*, there is no question of opposing an ‘I can’ to an ‘I think’ because the whole Biranian analysis of effort has as its sole and essential result the determining of this effort as a mode of subjectivity itself.” Michel Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 53, 55

⁶ See: Maine de Biran, *The Influence of Habit on the Faculty of Thinking*, trans. Margaret Donaldson Boehm (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1970). This “impression of effort” can be understood as Biran’s interpretation of Leibniz’s *conatus* or *nisus*, which is “over and above extension.” G. W. Leibniz, “A Specimen of Dynamics, Toward Uncovering and Reducing to Their Causes Astonishing Laws of Nature Concerning the Forces of Bodies and Their Actions on One Another” in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 118.

and Phenomenology of the Body.⁷ For this tradition, from de Biran and Husserl, to Merleau-Ponty and Henry, the flesh is distinguished from the mere body (*Körper*) by its unique capacity to act.

Moreover, for the later French tradition the flesh will be distinctly marked by the immediacy of its action. As Henry affirmatively notes of the Schopenhauerian will—whose very “mode in which it presents itself to us is our body”⁸—“there is only one force, never separate from itself, whose action is its deployment and necessary inner accomplishment.”⁹ For Henry, to be body is to be will, and to be will is to be action. Impotence (*impuissance*), insofar as it appears in Henry, only ever appears as the “impotence of thought.”¹⁰ This embodied-will therefore inverts the Cartesian *thinking* subject. The embodied-will “has nothing to do with understanding. ... It does not regard its action as a possibility; *it is that action* and has already decided to accomplish it. It is one with its action and its content.”¹¹ This identity of action and flesh is indebted to Henry’s broader commitment to the absolute ontological homogeneity of the monadic flesh [chapter 5].

This identification of flesh and action produces certain aporia when faced with the question of incapacity, impotence, or the inability to act. According to many phenomenological accounts of

⁷ There Henry rights, for example, “the body which acts is neither the represented body nor the organic body; it is the absolute body and, consequently, action is nothing other than a modality of the life of absolute subjectivity.” Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 201.

⁸ Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 133 [emphasis added].

⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁰ “L’impuissance de la pensée.” *Ibid.*, 298 [translation altered]. Apart from the impotence of thought, Henry will occasionally refer to an impotence of the flesh, but this is an impotence that transfigures into potency. As Cortel notes, “Le «je peux» oublie la Vie, parce que celle-ci se donne totalement et sans partage. Ainsi se réalise l’inversion de impuissance en puissance.” Yannick Courtel, “Chair et différence sexuelle chez Michel Henry,” *Revue des sciences religieuses* 83:1 (2009), 81. In this regard Henry often speaks of a quasi-dialectical relation between impotence and potency—an “ontological homogeneity of activity and passivity” (Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 166)—but this passivity is the self-given passivity in which life gives itself to itself, and should not be confused with impotence in the sense of incapacity to act.

¹¹ *Ibid.* [emphasis added].

the flesh, insofar as action is understood in its moments of impossibility, this incapacity must be understood as a consequence of “external” factors, as *resistance*. In the same way that, as Sartre writes, “my hand reveals to me the resistance of objects,”¹² so too must all incapacity, insofar as the body is understood as action incarnate, be understood as the imposition of external objects. Even when Henry attempts to account for resistance immanently in the “resisting continuum”¹³ of the organic body, he nevertheless inevitably reduces the organic body to mere representation—to the impotence of thought¹⁴—and subordinates this resistance to the originary power of the “I can”: the continuum “remains within the ‘I can’,”¹⁵ it “submits to the powers”¹⁶ of the “I can.” Thus, despite his use of the language of interiority, this resistance is likewise subjected to the transcendent reign of exteriority: “the ontological character which constitutes the being of the organ is transcendence,”¹⁷ therefore, “the constituted organic body is already a represented body.”¹⁸

Yet, this simple schema is upset by manifold phenomena wherein the impossibility of acting does not phenomenologically appear as the product of external resistance, but of the very incapacity of the flesh itself. Paradigmatically, the phenomenon of *acute sexual impotence*

¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Pocket Books, 1956), 402.

¹³ “That which resists the ‘I Can’ of my originary corporeity, which reveals itself to it and to it alone, and whose manner of doing this is just to resist it,” Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, trans. Karl Hefty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 148.

¹⁴ “The constituted organic body is already a represented body.” Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, trans. Karl Hefty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 165.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁷ Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 116.

¹⁸ Henry, *Incarnation*, 165.

provides an enlightening phenomenological study, not only revelatory of impotence, but of the relationship between the flesh and the sexual member as such.

B. Premodern and Psychological Conceptions of Impotence

Despite the commonality of its occurrence, its associated psychological difficulties, and the deep connections to masculine anxiety,¹⁹ philosophical (and particularly phenomenological) discussions of impotence are few and far between. Marion tangentially approaches some of these concerns with his discussion of the suspension of eroticization in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, there he discusses the “puerile yet obsessive anxieties about orgasms that are too rapid or, inversely, the difficulty of attaining one.”²⁰ But, if one seeks a direct philosophical engagement with impotence, one finds little to work with. In fact, it is quite noteworthy that, despite being four and a half centuries old, Montaigne’s *Essays*—particularly his essay “Of the Force of Imagination”—remain among the most substantial sustained philosophical treatments of impotence.²¹ While Montaigne’s *Essays* are certainly not phenomenological in a technical sense, they may nevertheless serve as a starting point for phenomenological investigation insofar as they offer something like a reflective

¹⁹ “A third phrase that is difficult for me and, I suspect, for many other man is ‘I can’t.’ ... ‘I can’t’ is a man’s admission of powerlessness. The words are difficult to say, for our conditioning is to be ‘can do’ men. In the process of that conditioning we learned a certain understanding of power. It was power as potency—phallic power, the capacity to inflict our will on others” (James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992], 100). Lou Sullivan perfectly captures the link between this anxiety around the penis and masculine self-identity, writing in his diary on May 31st, 1973: “and if there’s no penis, well, that’s what important isn’t it? That’s what makes you a man.” Lanei M. Rodemeyer, *Lou Sullivan Diaries (1970-1980) and Theories of Sexual Embodiment: Making Sense of Sensing* (New York: Springer International, 2018), 19.

²⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 152.

²¹ Nevertheless, even in Montaigne’s case, it is important to recognize, as Entin-Bates has noted, that while “sexual impotence is at the same time one of the most intriguing themes in the *Essays*,” it is also “one of the least talked about.” Lee R. Entin-Bates, “Montaigne’s Remarks on Impotence” *MLN*, Vol. 91, No. 4, French Issue (May, 1976): 640-654, 640.

attitude. As Montaigne himself notes, “some years ago ... finding myself entirely destitute and void of any other matter, I presented myself to myself for argument and subject.”²²

For Montaigne, impotence (*l'impuissance*) can be divided into two principal modes. The first, which Montaigne refers as the “*juste faiblesse*” (“genuine weakness”²³) represent a physico-medical impotence which remains the domain of doctors—and as phenomenologists we might say the domain of the *Körper* or *le corps*.²⁴ The second, which forms the bulk of Montaigne’s considerations, is the *nouements d’aiguillettes*, an impotence which cannot be resolved into a distinct physical cause.

In ancient and medieval literature, *nouements d’aiguillettes* are understood as a form of *acute* impotence, particularly common throughout the Medieval world and often associated with newly married men who are unable to consummate their marriage. Traditionally, this impotence was associated with wizardry and witchcraft. Thus one finds an extended discussion of impotence in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Part 2, Ch. VI), where it is associated with a wizard who “confessed that for many years he had by witchcraft brought sterility upon all the men and animals which inhabited a certain house,” and another of a man bewitched such that he would remain impotent with every woman, save the witch who cursed him.

This notion of impotence as a curse represented a supernatural reinterpretation of earlier Christian tradition. Responding to precisely the same paradox of the unruly will of the male

²² Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), 278.

²³ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁴ Some phenomenological work on medical impotence can be found in nursing and care studies literature. See, e.g.: Birgitte Schantz Laursen, “Sexuality in men after prostate cancer surgery: a qualitative interview study,” *The Scandinavian Journal of Caring Science* 31 (2017): 120–127; Laura Morgan, Judith Carrier, Deborah Edwards, “Men's perceptions of the impact of the physical consequences of radical prostatectomy on their quality of life: a qualitative systematic review protocol,” *JBIC Database of Systematic Reviews & Implementation Reports*, 13(12) (2015): 37-46.

member, Augustine, drawing upon Romans 7.23—“I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind”—suggests that the disruptive member, whether impotent or lustful,²⁵ operates by its own alien will.

Well, then, how significant is the fact that the eyes, and lips, and tongue, and hands, and feet, and the bending of back, and neck, and sides, are all placed within our power—to be applied to such operations as are suitable to them, when we have a body free from impediments and in a sound state of health; but when it must come to man's great function of the procreation of children the members which were expressly created for this purpose will not obey the direction of the will, but lust has to be waited for to set these members in motion, as if it had legal right over them, and sometimes it refuses to act when the mind wills, while often it acts against its will!²⁶

For Augustine, this will is the unique product of human sin: “when the first man transgressed the law of God, he began to have another law in his members which was repugnant to the law of his mind.”²⁷ Because the first humans, members of the body of Christ, rebelled against the head of that body, so too are they compelled to contend against their own willful members.

Now, this ardour, whether following or preceding the will, does somehow, by a power of its own, move the members which cannot be moved simply by the will, and in this manner it shows itself not to be the servant of a will which commands it, but rather to be the punishment of a will which disobeys it.²⁸

As suggested by its title, Montaigne's “Of the Force of Imagination” is marked by its rejection of these supernatural or theological explanations. Rather, Montaigne breaks with his

²⁵ Traditional discussions of impotence tend to see impotence and the inconvenient erection as two sides of the same coin.

²⁶ Augustine, “De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia,” trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, and revised Benjamin B. Warfield. in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 5. Ed. Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.), VII.

²⁷ Ibid. “Sexuality is not the original sin, ... but the punishment for it, and the locus of its perpetuation—it is subsequent addition to the original creation. In other words, in Saint Augustine's account, sexuality itself is problematic enough to be seen as a punishment, a curse.” Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 13.

²⁸ Augustine, “De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia,” XXVII.

premodern predecessors and seeks to offer a psychological explanation of acute impotence. Thus, for example, he considers a man who, upon hearing a description of another's impotence, finds himself immediately stricken with the same condition. Yet, just as it spontaneously emerged from this discussion, this impotence likewise disappears in an equally sudden manner. According to Montaigne, publicly admitting his condition releases the anxiety that binds him, freeing him from his self-imposed impotence.

For Montaigne, this solution reflects the psychological—or one might say psychosomatic—origin of acute impotence. The incapacity experienced by the suffering man is a product of the “imagination,” not in the sense that it is an imagined malady, but rather insofar as the overly invested imagination takes on an obsessive character. Thus, according to Montaigne, “impotence can be reversed only by diverting the imagination and allowing the body to respond, in a relaxed and spontaneous way, to erotic stimuli.”²⁹ More recent psychoanalytic and empirical research has often confirmed Montaigne's intuitions.

Freud, for example, writes of a “psychical impotence” that bears striking resemblance to Montaigne's discussions.³⁰ Indeed, apart from generalized anxiety, Freud suggests that impotence is the single most common complaint among his patients. Moreover, this complaint does not correlate with a lack of libidinous desire. Rather, “this singular disturbance affects men of strongly libidinous natures.”³¹ Thus, its principal form is that of an internal conflict, it “manifests itself in a refusal by the executive organs of sexuality to carry out the sexual act, ... and although a strong

²⁹ Lee R. Entin-Bates, 649-650.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 652.

³¹ Sigmund Freud, “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love: Contributions to the Psychology of Love II (1912),” trans. Alan Tyson in J. Strachey (Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Freud, Volume XI (1910): Five lectures on psycho-analysis, Leonardo da Vinci and other works* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis), 179.

psychical inclination to carry it out is present.”³² Thus, “he has a feeling of an obstacle inside him, the sensation of a counter-will which successfully interferes with his conscious intention.”³³ Freud offers a fairly expected etiology; psychical impotence becomes symptomatic of “psychical complexes which are withdrawn from the subject’s knowledge.”³⁴ That is to say, it is the product of unconscious cathexes, particularly incestual desire and infantile trauma.

Likewise, from the empirical side, one finds Masters and Johnson writing of impotence as a psychological phenomenon. “Fear of inadequacy,” they argue, “is the greatest known deterrent to effective sexual functioning, simply because it so completely distracts the fearful individual from his or her natural responsivity by blocking reception of sexual stimuli.”³⁵

While compelling within their own domains, these analyses remain firmly situated within the psychological region and its various metaphysical interpretations. My interest here is instead to undertake a phenomenological investigation of impotence, particularly one which centers the flesh, and may therefore serve to illustrate certain striking features of erotic embodiment.

C. A Phenomenology of Impotence

In the well-functioning sexual act, a certain correspondence arises between the erotic intention of the acting subject and their flesh. Simply put, using the language common from Husserl to Henry, the flesh manifests as an “I can”—the potent organ of action manifests within the quite literal “potent organ.” Within this alignment of drive and result, there is manifest something like an

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. Here Freud echoes the language of Schopenhauer who remarks: “the genitals [are] the focus of the will.” Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Vol. II*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 514. It is also perhaps worth noting the striking similarity between Freud’s language of the counter-will and Augustine’s discussion of the alien will within one’s members.

³⁴ Ibid., 180.

³⁵ William Masters and Virginia Johnson, *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), 12-13.

identity between action and flesh. Yet, this only represents one possible outcome of the erotic encounter. In reality, as Marion notes, one might find oneself struck with premature ejaculation or unable to achieve orgasm. Or, struck with acute impotence, one may find oneself unable to undertake the sexual act at all. In the case of impotence this presumed identity between subjective aim and incarnate act finds itself fractured by a *particularly conspicuous incapacity*. The flesh manifests as an “I can’t.”

Certainly, one might attempt to reconcile this incapacity within the traditional framework by positing impotence as a case in which there is a mismatch between the objective body (*le corps*) and the flesh. One might here recall, for example, Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the ill-formed corporeal schema, in the case of phantom limb syndrome or anosognosia. Yet, such a solution seems to miss the unique character of acute impotence. Whereas in phantom limb syndrome one subjectively experiences a limb on *le corps propre*, which is not manifest objectively, and conversely, in anosognosia one lacks a subjective experience of a limb that is objectively present—impotence presents a different case.

In impotence there is no misalignment between flesh and body. Rather, phenomenologically the member appears within both the corporeal schema and objective experience. One by no means lacks the sense that this member is one’s own—as in anosognosia. Yet, this fleshly member refuses to act in conjunction with the subject, even one might say, with the flesh itself. Indeed, speaking phenomenologically, the member simply refuses to act at all—it lacks the power to act: it is quite literally *im-puissant*. Whereas the phenomenological ontology of the flesh which runs from Husserl to Henry tends to think the flesh as action, as capacity, impotence reveals a member of the flesh which simply refuses action. But this member is still

mine, or more precisely is still me. It still bears the unique ipseity of my flesh. Thus “it cannot,” *is at one and the same time “I cannot.”*

Within the paradigm of Husserl, where the flesh (*Leib*) is itself passively constituted by a number of distinct fields of sensings (*Empfindnisse*) which through acts of localization organize into a “system of compatibly harmonizing organs,”³⁶ this phenomenon may be adjusted for. The same cannot be said for the monadic tradition of radical phenomenology.

What the phenomenon of impotence suggests, against the phenomenology of the flesh in Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion, is the unique ways in which the immanence of the flesh is itself marked by certain gaps or fissures. We are not, acute impotence suggests, in “undivided possession”³⁷ of our flesh, despite the fact that this flesh is still my own. The impotent member *is me*, is my flesh, but is also *not only me*, insofar as it can be extracted from my action.

Here one finds phenomenological support for Jacob Rogozinski’s conception of the “pole of flesh” or what I have suggested might be called the member of the flesh. For, insofar as the passive synthesis of the flesh—the carnal synthesis—is only ever “a *partial* and *precarious* identification,”³⁸ it is necessarily marked by a certain *écarte* or “remainder” (*le restant*). Against the monadic flesh of Henry and Marion, Rogozinski insists that there always remains gaps or fissures at the heart of the ego-flesh. It is precisely these “remainders” that are brought to the fore in an investigation of the phenomenon of acute impotence, the supposed total auto-affectivity of the flesh finds itself struck by a gap.

³⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. Anthony J. Steinbock (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 50.

³⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 112-113.

³⁸ Jacob Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh: an Introduction to Egoanalysis*, trans. Robert Vallier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 171.

While each member of the flesh is marked by a certain affective ipseity—each member is felt to be my own—the remainder’s inability to fully constitute within the flesh tends to mark it with a second affective characteristic: negative affect. For Rogozinski not only describes the constitution which produces the remainder, but also the unique way in which the remainder is affectively constituted as abject. Indeed, Rogozinski might just as well have been speaking of the impotent member when he writes of the remainder, “when this intimate Stranger reappears in our haunting, it necessarily takes on the appearance of a dissociated part of the whole, an errant fragment of the body outside of the body—a gaze without a face, an eye without a gaze, a shard of voice, a sliced member, excremental waste, and so on.”³⁹ Insofar as the remainder—or the impotent member—refuses full incarnation into the flesh, insofar as it refuses the identification of flesh and action, it becomes an object of anxiety, fear, and, ultimately, hate. As Mario Mieli recognizes, “any male heterosexual goes wild at the idea of ‘not being able to get it up’.”⁴⁰ Thus, for example, in Montaigne’s *Essays* one finds an account of a “lustful young man who, desperate over finding himself impotent with a beautiful mistress, cut off his penis to expiate his offense.”⁴¹

The impotent member—in precisely the same manner as its equally illuminating converse, the inconvenient erection—marks the manifestation of a flesh that is always only mostly me, precariously me. It is, as Augustine remarked, a member that seems to “operate [by] another law.”⁴² But its abject character does not emerge from its mere counter-will. Affectively, the

³⁹ Ibid., 197.

⁴⁰ Mario Mieli, *Homosexuality and Liberation: Elements of a Gay Critique*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1980), 139.

⁴¹ Entin-Bates, 648. “It is said of one young gentleman, amorous and lusty, having by his perseverance finally softened the heart of a beautiful mistress, despairing at the fact that on the point of the attack he had found that he himself was soft and failing, and that ‘Not in manly style / Had his limp penis raised its senile head’ (Tibullus) he bereft himself of it as soon as he returned home and sent it, a cruel and bleeding victim, for the expiation of his offense.” Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, 532.

⁴² Augustine, “De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia,” VII.

phenomenon of impotence is quite unlike the failure to control the member of another or a mere object—it is not a resistance. The incapacity of impotence is quite unlike the incapacity to bend the arm of another in an arm-wrestling match, for example. The disobedience of the member is only a fit punishment for original sin, according to Augustine, because it is a member of *my* flesh. This negative affect, the abject character of the impotent member emerges precisely from its precarious status; it is my flesh, it *should* obey my aims. Instead, in both its impotent and overly lustful state, as Montaigne notes, this member is *unruly*. “People,” he writes:

are right to notice the unruly liberty of this member, obtruding so importunately when we have no use for it, and failing so importunately when we have the most use for it, and struggling for mastery so imperiously without will, refusing with so much pride and obstinacy our solicitations, both mental and manual.⁴³

In each of these phenomena, the unruly member presents itself to the body not as a foreign object, but also not as a unified acting body. In Freud’s language, the patient’s impotence is experienced as an “obstacle,” but one that is “inside him.”⁴⁴ The complexity of human incarnation, and particularly erotic incarnation, is precisely this inability to fully demarcate the member that is mine, from that member that is not; the rebellious organ, from the demonic influence; the obstacle outside of me, from the obstacle within me—the flesh from its own remainder.

Yet, against Augustine’s theological reading cited above, this frustration is by no means limited to the genitalia. Rather, as Montaigne quite rightly notes:

I ask you to think whether there is a single one of the parts of our body that does not often refuse its function to our will and exercise it against our will. They each have passions of their own which rouse them and put them to sleep without our leave. ... we do not command our hair to stand on end or our skin to shiver with desire or fear. The hand often moves itself to where we do not send it.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, 72.

⁴⁴ Freud, “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love,” 179.

⁴⁵ Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, 72.

Every member is capable of exerting a will of its own because the carnal synthesis of the flesh is not a singular event; it is a synthesis renewed in each moment. And just as this synthesis is renewed in each moment, so too are its gaps and fissures, which move across the body in indeterminate and unpredictable ways. The members of the body are momentary and mobile sites; unruly characters “obtruding so importunately.” In like manner, so too are the erotic members. Eroticization is by no means limited to the genitalia. Rather, it moves across the flesh in often unexpected and unpredictable ways. But in order to recognize this fact, it will be necessary to break ourselves free from the phallic rule, by which “all sexual acts have an ‘aim’ which gives them their meaning; they are organized into preliminary caresses which will eventually crystallize in the necessary ejaculation, the touchstone of pleasure.”⁴⁶ Toward this end, I will now turn to key works in early European gay liberation movement.

§2. The Anal and the Oral: Eroticization Otherwise than the Phallus

A. Normality and Political Anality

For the early activists of the European gay liberation movement—Guy Hocquenghem and Mario Mieli—the political liberation of homosexuals was intimately bound both to the economic liberation from capitalism and the liberation of eroticism from the phallic law of the genital drive [*Geschlechtrieb*]. It is for this reason that both Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire* and Mieli’s *Homosexuality and Liberation* explicitly turn to the question of anal eroticism, as a key moment of liberative potential. This threefold relation between economics, sexuality, and anal eroticism is

⁴⁶ Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 95.

perfectly captured in the title of Hocquenghem's key chapter: "Capitalism, the Family and the Anus." In the words of Mieli:

The (re)conquest of anality contributes to subverting the system in its foundations. What in homosexuality particularly horrifies *homo normalis*, the policeman of the hetero-capitalist system, is being fucked in the arse; and this can only mean that one of the most delicious bodily pleasures, anal intercourse, is itself a significant revolutionary force.⁴⁷

This suggestion of a direct connection between "anality" and economics is not as arbitrary as it might first appear. For already in his earliest work, Freud believed himself to have detected a strange homology between money and faeces. As he writes in *Character and Anal Eroticism*, "the connections between the complexes of interest in money and of defaecation, which seem so dissimilar, appear to be the most extensive of all."⁴⁸ For Hocquenghem and Mieli, this homology suggests that the liberation of anal eroticism is uniquely positioned to disrupt the moral foundation of an oppressive—because *repressive*—"hetero-capitalism," by breaking through its presumptively natural normality. "The repressive society and the dominant morality," Mieli writes, "consider only heterosexuality as 'normal'—and only genital heterosexuality at that."⁴⁹ Hocquenghem likewise insists that "capitalism turns its homosexuals into failed 'normal people,' just as it turns its working class into an imitation of the middle class."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Mieli, *Homosexuality and Liberation*, 145.

⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Eroticism (1908)" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IX (1906-1908): Jensen's 'Gradiva' and Other Works* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 173. Even earlier, in a letter to Fleiss, he writes of "an old fantasy of mine, which I would like to recommend to your linguistic sagacity, it deals with the derivation of our verbs from originally coproerotic terms. I can scarcely detail for you all the things that resolve themselves into - excrement for me (a new Midas!). It fits in completely with the theory of internal stinking. Above all, money itself." Freud, "Letter to Wilhelm Fleiss, Vienna, December 22 1897," in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fleiss*, trans. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 1985), 288.

⁴⁹ Mieli, *Homosexuality and Liberation*, 24.

⁵⁰ Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 94.

In order to challenge the supposed normality of hetero-genital sexuality, Hocquenghem and Mieli target the “staged” developmental approach toward genitalization as understood by a traditional Freudian reading of childhood development, worked out most concisely in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*. In each case Freud aims to explain “perverts”—broadly understood as “people whose desires behave exactly like sexual ones but who at the same time entirely disregard the sexual organs or their normal use.”⁵¹ According to Freud, these perversions can be understood primarily as forms of stagnation or regression, wherein one fails to advance beyond, or returns to, an earlier stage of psycho-sexual development. Thus, in each case, his discussion of perversion quickly turns to a discussion of childhood sexuality: “the germs of all the perversions will only be demonstrable in children.”⁵²

This work begins in 1905 with the development of a tripartite theory of sexual development wherein the child is understood to pass through three stages: the oral, the anal, and the phallic.⁵³ Each of these stages is marked by the emergence of a special sexual signification upon a certain bodily zone [*Körperstellen*] thereafter marked as an erogenous zone [*Erogene Zonen*]. While multiplicitous, Freud argues that this development nevertheless moves through a predictable pattern that culminates in puberty with the emergence of genital sexuality:

Its activity had hitherto been impelled by individual drives and erogenous zones, which independently of one another sought a certain sort of pleasure as their sole sexual aim. Now [in puberty] there is a new sexual aim, for whose attainment all partial drives work together, while the erogenous zones become subordinated to the primacy of the genital zone.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1949), 22.

⁵² Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition*, trans. Ulrike Kistner (New York: Verso, 2016), 32.

⁵³ In his later writings, such as *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, this will be expanded into five stages: oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital. See: Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, 24-27.

⁵⁴ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 61.

Perversion is therefore marked as a regression to an erogenous zone other than the “natural” locus of sexuality, the genitalia. As Freud writes, “certain zones of the body [*Körperstellen*], such as the mucous membrane of the mouth and of the anus, constantly recur in these [perverted] practices, clamoring, as it were, for being viewed and treated as genitals in their own right.”⁵⁵

In their challenge to hetero-capitalism both Hocquenghem and Mieli argue that this hetero-genital norm—and its staged understanding of sexual development—is anything but natural: “there is nothing in life itself that requires the child to ‘grow out’ of autoeroticism and the homosexual ‘stage’ in order to attain this exclusive heterosexuality.”⁵⁶ Rather, the establishment of such norms as “natural stages” serves only to reify a political heteronormativity, which itself serves to justify an economic order: viz. capitalism. Thus, for Hocquenghem, anal eroticism is the key to new moral (dis)order, a “primary sexual communism”⁵⁷ which would not impose a telic organization of all sexuality toward genitalization and (re)production. In order to evidence this thesis, both thinkers aim to refigure anal desire, no longer as a regression or a perversion, but as an authentic form of erotic manifestation—for each the anus must become not merely the object of a perverse fetishization, but a member of the sexual flesh in its own right.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 16. Or again, “Like the labial zone, the anal zone is, by its position, suited to act as intermediary for the attachment of sexuality to other bodily functions.” Ibid., 46.

⁵⁶ Mieli, *Homosexuality and Liberation*, 24.

⁵⁷ Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 111.

B. A Phenomenology of Anal Pleasure

While neither Hocquenghem nor Mieli undertake their discussion of anal eroticism phenomenologically, their reflections may nevertheless serve as a starting point for a phenomenological analysis.

In the naturalistic account of sexuality, anal eroticism generally constitutes a form of perversion, insofar as it breaks with the “natural” reproductive aim of sexuality. Thus, for example, Augustine condemns anal eroticism, not only in the case of homosexuality, but likewise in the heterosexual relation. Indeed, he suggests, the act is even “more damnable” in the context of marriage.

Sexual intercourse for begetting is free from blame, and itself is alone worthy of marriage. But that which goes beyond this necessity no longer follows reason, but lust. ... By changing the natural use into that which is against nature, which is more damnable when it is done in the case of husband or wife.⁵⁸

Indeed, even in the case of heterosexuality, such eroticism is generally coded queer by implication. In Thomas Aquinas’ effort to delimit the “sins against nature,” for example, anal eroticism, even when undertaken within the confines of the marital bed, is directly linked to homosexuality and summarily condemned.

Among sins against nature ... comes the sin of sodomy, because use of the right sex is not observed. Lastly comes the sin of not observing the right manner of

⁵⁸ St. Augustine, “On the Good of Marriage,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 3*, trans. C.L. Cornish, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), §12.

copulation, which is more grievous if the abuse regards the ‘vas’ [vessel, orifice] than if it affects the manner of copulation in respect of other circumstances.⁵⁹

This naturalistic argument is certainly not limited to theological accounts of the natural law. Within psychoanalysis, Freud’s regressive conception of anal eroticism discussed above largely presupposes a reproductive and naturalistic account of anal sexuality. Where such eroticism appears within the “normal” sexual life, it is to be understood as a merely “preparatory act,” ultimately oriented toward genital sexuality—which constitutes sexuality’s natural aim. Therefore, according to Freud, perversion “consist in lingering over the preparatory acts of the sexual process.”⁶⁰ The pervert is the one who treats the preparatory act as a sexual end in itself.

In order to shift from this natural standpoint to a phenomenological investigation of anal eroticism, in order to bring anal pleasure to the fore as a phenomenon, it will therefore be necessary to undertake a phenomenological reduction, whereby these naturalistic and normative presuppositions might be methodologically set aside. Such a reduction is anticipated by the *Front Homosexuel d’Action Révolutionnaire* (FHAR)—a French gay liberation movement of which Hocquenghem was one of the first male members. In its 1971 booklet, *Rapport contre la normalité*, this organization directly targeted the normalization of the naturalistic condemnation of anal eroticism. As they write:

We must ask the bourgeois squarely: ‘What are your relations with your asshole apart from the obligation to shit? Is it part of your body, your word, your senses just like the mouth or the ears? And if you have decided that the anus only serves to defecate, why does the mouth have other uses than eating?’⁶¹

⁵⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. *Fathers of the English Dominican Province* (Cincinnati: Benziger Brothers, 1920), II-II.154.12.

⁶⁰ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 66.

⁶¹ “Il faut carrément demander au bourgeois: «Quelles sont tes relations avec ton trou du cul à part l’obligation de chier? Est-ce qu’il fait partie de ton corps, de ta parole, de tes sens au même titre que la bouche ou les oreilles? Et si tu as décidé que l’anus ne sert qu’à déféquer, pourquoi la bouche a-t-elle d’autres usages que manger?».” Anonymous, “Rapport contre la normalité,” trans. in Mieli, *Homosexuality and Liberation*, 138.

Through these questions, FHAR demands that anal eroticism and its unique pleasures be taken seriously, that it be a subject of investigation on its own grounds, no longer delimited by restrictions that might here be identified as pre-phenomenological prejudices. As Mieli writes, “the demand for the restoration of anal pleasure is one of the basic elements in the critique made by the gay movement.”⁶² It is from this starting point that the present investigation will begin.

Phenomenologically, anal eroticism can be decomposed into at least two acts of sexual intentionality. One intentional act can be understood as roughly correlative to the historical category of “active sodomy,” the second, to the historical category of “passivity.” In the words of David Halperin—writing specifically of *male* anal eroticism—“the discourses of pederasty or ‘active’ sodomy are shaped by a crucial distinction between *the male desire to penetrate and the male desire to be penetrated.*”⁶³ In each of these cases we are dealing with an intentional direction toward a constituted organ—what Hocquenghem calls the “anal-organ”⁶⁴—whether that of oneself or that of another. Insofar as this direction presupposes the distancing of an intentional distance and the constitution of a thing-like object, we are in each case thinking within the categories of intentional phenomenology. Thus a radical phenomenological investigation will require a further movement into the radical reduction.

Under such a radical reduction, all intentionality and all distance must be bracketed from this analysis in order that the phenomenon might be revealed in its most immanent self-giveness.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See: David M. Halperin, “How to do the History of Male Homosexuality” in Donald E. Hall, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, and Susan Potter (eds.), *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 267 [emphasis added].

⁶⁴ Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 103.

We will thus here deal not with the anus and anal desire as understood from the perspective of the objective body, but as an immanent givenness within the flesh. Given the “intentional” or directional connotations of “desire,” I will hereafter diverge from Hocquenghem and Mieli, and refer to this reduced phenomenon no longer as “anal desire” but as “anal pleasure” in order to mark a shift from intentionality to self-affectivity.⁶⁵

When a phenomenological investigation of anal pleasure is undertaken at this level, certain key features appear of which I will highlight five, which may be divided into two principal categories: the first two mark a certain sexual indeterminacy, the final three mark a certain incarnate particularity.

First, a phenomenological analysis of anal pleasure reveals a certain indeterminacy or open possibility in regards to sexual difference. That is to say, sexual difference—whether understood in the narrow sense of the difference between male and female, or the broader sense as exposed in queer theories of sexuality—is never essential (that is, eidetically determined) by anal pleasure. For, as Hocquenghem rightly, albeit rather inelegantly, put it, “the anus is not a substitute for the vagina: women have one as well as men.”⁶⁶ The same holds for other key determinations of sexual identity: neither sexual object choice, genital configuration, nor gender identity is essentially delimited by anal pleasure. Rather this pleasure reveals itself as a fundamentally indeterminate pleasure which, while not experienced by all, is nevertheless not essentially (eidetically) foreclosed to any.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ As Marcella Althaus-Reid wrote—albeit from a theological, rather than a phenomenological, perspective—“desire in Queer Theology needs to give a place to located desire, that is, pleasure. Queer Theology is a materialist theology that takes bodies seriously.” Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ This open character represents, in part, the logic underlying Hocquenghem’s identification of anality with a certain “sexual communism.” *Ibid.*, 111.

Second, this indeterminacy in regards to sexual and gender identity—and its neutrality in regard to gender configuration—correlates to a further indeterminacy of stimulation. Simply put, anal pleasure may be produced by manifold forms of anal stimulation, all possible in anal eroticism. Thus, anal pleasure refers not only to the genital penetration of the anus, but likewise to various manual and oral stimulations; such stimulation may be simply “organic” or assisted by any number of sex toys or other objects; and such stimulation of anal pleasure may be autoerotic or involve other partners.

Third, despite these indeterminacies or open possibilities, anal pleasure is also marked by key determinations or incarnate particularities. Thus although from the natural attitude, the biological boundaries between various organs are rather ambiguous, in anal eroticism there nevertheless *phenomenologically* emerges a distinct member of the flesh. Thus, like any other member of the flesh—be it hand, eye, or genitalia—the central anal orifice is bound together with its surrounding flesh and sphincter musculature not only as a distinct region of the body—what Freud might call a *Körperstelle*—but also as a region of the flesh. That is, anal eroticism reveals or makes manifest a certain self-constitution of the anus as a pole or member of the flesh.

Fourth, the anal-member is not only, to borrow Freud’s language, a *Körperstelle* but an *Erogene Zone*—an erogenous zone. That is to say, in anal eroticism one experiences a diversification of sexual meaning. The pleasure invoked in anal pleasure bears a distinctly sexual or erotic character. Not merely the passive receptacle for the genitalia of the other, in anal pleasure one finds a zone of pleasure within one’s own flesh which is distinct from genitalization. That is to say, this zone is experienced as the site of a uniquely sexual pleasure, despite the fact that it finds itself expanded beyond the region of the genitalia.

Fifth, and following directly from above, the emergence of this member as a site of a distinctly sexual pleasure is likewise revealed as an end in itself. That is to say, this pleasure need not be a merely “preparatory act” in anticipation of genital consummation—anal pleasure is not telically oriented towards genital fulfillment. Here a phenomenology of the erogenous zone must break from its Freudian predecessor. For according to Freud, erogenous zones “are used to facilitate, through the medium of the fore-pleasure which can be derived from them (as it was during infantile life), the production of the greater pleasure of satisfaction.”⁶⁸ Specifically, Freud here intends genital satisfaction.⁶⁹ This is not to suggest that such pleasure cannot function together with genital sexuality, nor that it cannot serve a preparatory role. Rather, it is to suggest that such a preparatory role is not eidetically mandated; it is not essential to the phenomenon of anal pleasure that it serve the higher eroticism of a “rightly sexual” act—viz. genital copulation. While anal eroticism may serve as a fore-pleasure, it is also found to constitute a possible satisfaction in its own right. Thus we might say of anal pleasure, what Hocquenghem said of homosexual desire, “this leads us to desire as the plugging in of organs subject to no rule or law”⁷⁰

C. Kissing, or the Banality of Oral Pleasure

Despite Freud’s naturalistic distinction between perverse and “normal” sexual function, he nevertheless was among the first to recognize the impossibility of unambiguously demarcating the two. As Freud notes, “everyday experience has shown that most of these extensions [of sexuality

⁶⁸ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 65.

⁶⁹ This conception of anality as a fore-pleasure or precursor to genital sexuality is likewise echoed in Lacan’s subordination of the anal and the excremental to the phallus and its castration. As Lacan writes, “the excremental *a* has come within the scope of our attention inasmuch as it symbolizes castration” (Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X*, trans. A. R. Price [Malden: Polity, 2004], 301). Or again, “the evacuation of the result of the anal function, inasmuch as it is done on command, will take on its full import at the phallic level as providing an image for the loss of the phallus” (Ibid., 303).

⁷⁰ Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 95.

to non-genital organs], or at any rate the less severe among them, are constituents rarely absent from the sexual life of healthy persons.”⁷¹ For Freud, the fetishistic bestowal of sexual meaning onto non-genital bodily members is not only a feature prominent in childhood sexual development and perverse sexuality, but also plays an important persisting role in a “healthy” or “normal” sexual life.⁷² The key example of this phenomenon according to Freud is the kiss, as he writes, “a certain degree of fetishism of this nature is thus a regular part of normal loving, especially in those stages of being in love in which the normal sexual aim seems unattainable, or its fulfillment deferred.”⁷³ In the kiss, one experiences the extension of a distinctly oral pleasure, beyond the boundaries of the oral developmental stage, yet in a manner that is, within naturalistic paradigms, almost universally regarded to be a “normal” sexual function.

For this reason, a phenomenology of the kiss provides a useful supplement to the discussion of anal pleasure. For, within the naturalistic attitude, kissing and anal pleasure often constitute polar phenomena. Whereas anal pleasure is generally regarded as an abnormal, perverse, or illicit sexual phenomenon, kissing is generally regarded as among the most benign manifestations of sexual pleasure. Yet, as will be suggested below, this moral distinction stands on questionable grounds insofar as the two phenomena share remarkably similar phenomenological characteristics. In order to clarify a phenomenological analysis of the kiss, it will be helpful to contrast it with the kiss in Marion’s *The Erotic Phenomenon*.

⁷¹ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 21. Or again, “a disposition to perversions is an original and universal disposition of the human genital drive.” *Ibid.*, 80.

⁷² “The neuroses in all their manifestations, it must also be borne in mind, shade off in an uninterrupted series toward health.” *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 17.

Within his crucial discussion of the eroticization of the flesh, Marion employs the language of *baiser*: translatable either as “to kiss” or “to fuck.”⁷⁴ Marion here intends this double meaning, marking the kiss as a preparatory act that provokes the eroticization of the flesh *as a whole*. As he writes:

By touching one another mouth to mouth, our two mouths set off a wave that traverses our two bodies, so as to transcribe them wholly into two fleshes, without remainder; the mouth begins the process, because, already open, without distinction between exterior and interior, it offers itself from the outset as flesh. ... the kiss of my mouth upon her mouth (where each mouth gives flesh to the other without distinction) inaugurates the infinite taking of flesh. All that remains for the whole of the other and of me to take flesh is to extend the kiss beyond the kissing and kissed mouth. The eroticization of everything is involved.⁷⁵

There is much to be commended in this phenomenological account. While uncited, there are here clear allusions to Luce Irigaray’s insightful account of the “lips.” According to Irigaray—who, it should be noted, is here, unlike Marion, speaking at once of the lips of the mouth and the vaginal lips—draws upon Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the chiasm in order to describe the impossibility of distinguishing the lips *as touching* from the lips *as touched*. It is, she writes, “that contact of at least two [lips] which keeps woman in touch with herself, but without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is touched.”⁷⁶ Thus, she argues, woman is always “self-embracing.”⁷⁷ Marion draws forward this analysis, linking it to a larger process of eroticization of the entire flesh.

⁷⁴ As Lewis’ helpful footnote writes: “Every student of French learns, usually very early on, to be careful when using the verb *baiser* or the noun *le baiser* because, depending on the context, they can mean either ‘to kiss’/‘a kiss’ or ‘to fuck’/‘a fuck’—and in contemporary usage, more often the latter than the former.” Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 124.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans, Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

Like the phenomenology of anal pleasure, the oral pleasure manifest in the kiss seems to be marked by fundamental indeterminacies. As in anal pleasure, the kiss appears essentially unbound by sexual difference, orientation, gender, or genital configuration—each of which remain an open possibility. Moreover, again as in anal pleasure, the kiss seems to manifest as a unique bodily zone: “the mouth,” as Marion writes, “slightly open in order to touch another flesh [or its own]—in order to give to the other his or her flesh.”⁷⁸ This zone, and one might here return to the double meaning of *le baiser*, is likewise potentially sexualized; it is an erogenous zone. Lastly, while the kiss often serves as a preparatory act, this is by no means an essential characteristic.

It is this final phenomenological characteristic that breaks with Marion’s account of the kiss. In his analysis of eroticization, Marion implicitly draws forward a naturalistic paradigm, that is, he has failed to employ the reduction in a sufficiently rigorous manner. For his analysis of the eroticization of the flesh, beginning with the lips, is nothing other than a quasi-phenomenological recapitulation of Freud’s notion of the “preparatory act.” For Marion, the kiss does not constitute a pleasure in itself, but rather serves the *necessary* role of eroticization, making possible the emplacement of the sexual organs within the flesh and therefore preparing for genital copulation: it is a fore-pleasure. Here, *le baiser* prepares the way for *le baiser*—the kiss for the fuck. Yet, despite its clever employment of a double entendre, it is certainly unclear that the kiss must essentially function as a fore-pleasure. Indeed, the kiss regularly serves as an act of romantic or sexual intimacy completely independently of genital sexuality. Thus, like anal pleasure, the kiss may serve as a fore-pleasure; but it is also found to constitute a possible satisfaction in its own right.

⁷⁸ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 124.

In this way, the nearly universal embrace of kissing as a normal function, despite the marked phenomenological similarity between oral and anal pleasure, calls into question the naturalistic endorsement of the former and condemnation of the latter, and perhaps reveals the arbitrary (from a radical phenomenological perspective) character of the naturalistic conceptions of sexual normalcy. Thus a radical phenomenology of anal and oral sexuality might say, together with Freud:

We can discern in the partial drives a contribution from an organ receiving stimuli (e.g., the skin, the mucous membrane, or a sense organ). An organ of this kind will be described here as an ‘erogenous zone’—as being the organ whose excitation lends the drive a sexual character. The part played by the erogenous zones is immediately obvious in the case of those inclinations to perversion that assign a sexual significance to the oral and anal orifices. These behave in every respect like a portion of the genital apparatus.⁷⁹

§3. Polymorphous Perversity

A. The Eroticization of Everything

If our analyses to this point have been correct, if the erogenous zone emerges within the flesh itself as a member with its own unique haecceity, and moreover, if this member is marked by unique pleasures by no means reducible to genitality, then it becomes possible to recognize an inevitability: the sexual member, this mobile, momentary, partial site of sexual pleasure can, by phenomenological right, appear on any surface. Indeed, a phenomenological consideration of the sexual member, certainly no longer delimited as genitalia—but moreover, neither as an anal or oral region—reveals the essential impossibility of marking a certain surface of the flesh as

⁷⁹ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 29.

incapable of eroticization: “sexual organs,” As Althaus-Reid suggests, “are excessive and therefore do not need to be biologically located.”⁸⁰

In order to establish this phenomenological possibility, it might be helpful to understand the work that has so far been undertaken as an extended case of what Husserl calls an “imaginative variation” [*Phantasievariation*] or “free variation” [*freie Variation*], a method that Husserl describes in the following manner:

We let ourselves be guided by the fact taken as a model. For this it is necessary that ever new similar images be obtained as copies, as images of the imagination, which are all concretely similar to the original image. Thus, by an act of volition we produce free variants ... It then becomes evident that a unity runs through this multiplicity of successive figures.⁸¹

That is to say, in imaginative variation one begins with a singular model of a phenomenon, and varies characteristics of the phenomenon in the imagination. Those features which can be varied without distorting or losing the meaning [*Sinn*] of the phenomenon are non-essential, are not a component of the phenomenon’s *eidos*, whereas those that cannot be changed without losing the phenomenon under investigation are essential to the thing itself, the phenomenon as such.

Without attempting a comprehensive imaginative variation on the sexual member, we can nevertheless employ this Husserlian methodology to consider a single aspect of this phenomenon: incarnate location. Here the genitals have functioned as a model of the sexual member, insofar as they are almost indisputably recognized as an (at least potential) zone of erotic significance. In the subsequent section this initial model passed through a variation of incarnate location: if eroticization was thought in connection to the anal zone, rather than the genital, would we lose

⁸⁰ Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 157.

⁸¹ Edmund Husserl, *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 292-293.

sight of our phenomenon, the sexual member? Under the guidance of Hocquenghem and Mieli, it was suggested to the contrary that this erotic potential remains clearly manifest in the case of anality. Following Marion, this was again shown to be the case in oral pleasure. The mouth, as attested by even the most sexually conservative, is a member clearly subject to potential eroticization.

But surely this method can be advanced further. Members commonly described as secondary sexual characteristics—such as the breast or the pubic hair—are undoubtedly recognized as zones of erogenous significance. As Althaus-Reid notes, “fetishism eroticizes the whole body, even the hairs of the head which appear powerfully erotic covered with leather wigs.”⁸² Beyond these secondary characteristics, one can consider the feet—a particularly common feature of fetishistic sexuality. One can consider the neck, of which Edmund Burke famously regarded as among the pinnacles of human beauty, writing:

Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix or whither it is carried. Is not this a demonstration of that change of surface, continual, and yet hardly perceptible at any point, which forms one of the great constituents of beauty?⁸³

Likewise in voyeurism the eye and its visual field is cast in an erotic mode. Whereas in masochism the entire skin and its sensations of pain and pleasure become erotic, as Freud writes:

In the sexual pleasure derived from watching, and in exhibitionism, the eye corresponds to an erogenous zone; while in the case of the component of the sexual drive which involves pain and cruelty, the same role is assumed by the skin, which

⁸² Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 157.

⁸³ Edmund Burke, *On Taste, On the Sublime and Beautiful, Reflections on the French Revolution, A Letter to a Noble Lord: with Introduction, Notes, and Illustrations*, ed. Charles W. Elliot (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1909), 98.

in particular parts of the body has become differentiated into sense organs and modified into mucous membranes, and is thus the erogenous zone par excellence.⁸⁴

Indeed, the final conclusion appears all but inevitable: every bodily zone is a potential site of erotic pleasure; the flesh is an open region of sexual potentiality: “any part of the skin and any sense organ could probably function as an erogenous zone.”⁸⁵ This phenomenological discovery necessitates a final step in the reversal of the Freudian stages of sexual development. Not only must we step back from the hetero-genitality of the genital stage in order to account for the persistence of anal and oral pleasure—with their respective erogenous zones and incarnate members—it ultimately appears that there remains no essential limit on sexual manifestation. Insofar as no phenomenological necessity delimits sexual expression to certain determinate regions of the flesh, we must, so to speak, recognize the “polymorphous” character of sexuality. As Marion writes, “my entire flesh can, and thus must, be eroticized. ... The eroticization of everything is involved.”⁸⁶

B. Polymorphous Perversity in Gay Rights and Feminist Discourse

Since Freud, the earliest stages of sexual development have been characterized as a disorganized multiplicity of sexual stimuli—what Freud calls “partial drives.” In these early years, far from being concentrated in a single organ of sexuality—the genitalia—the body is instead marked by a diversity of partial, momentary, and independent sensations. On Freud’s account, this

⁸⁴ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 29-30.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 82. Indeed, for Freud, erogenous zones are defined in their unique relationship to skin as such: the erogenous zone is defined as “a region of the skin or mucous membrane in which stimulations of a certain sort evoke a feeling of pleasure of a particular quality” Ibid., 43. Thus, on his account, “any other random part of the skin or mucous membrane can take over the functions of an erogenous zone, and must therefore have some aptitude in that respect. Thus the quality of the stimulus has more to do with the production of the pleasurable sensation than has the nature of the zone of the body concerned”(Ibid., 44) or again, “any other random zone of the body can become equipped with the excitability of the genitals, and can be elevated to an erogenous zone” (Ibid., 45).

⁸⁶ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 123-124.

multiplicitous sexuality—what Freud names polymorphous perversity—functions as a neutral state of the sexual drive, that persists in the absence of restricting structures:

Children can become polymorphously perverse, and can be tempted to all possible kinds of transgressions. This shows that the child already carries an appropriate aptitude within its disposition; acting on such aptitude thus encounters little resistance, because, depending on the age of the child, the psychical dams against sexual excesses—shame, disgust, and morality—have either not yet been erected, or are still in the process of being formed.⁸⁷

Through the Freudian process of development, which we have here traced in reverse—genital, anal, oral—, the child develops these “psychic dams,” funneling or restricting this originally open and indeterminate sexual multiplicity into the exclusive regime of hetero-genital sexuality. As Zupančič describes this process: “what Freud analyzed as polymorphous perverse infantile sexuality shared by both boys and girls is a heterogeneous multiplicity which subsequently gets organized around two different positions by means of both hormonal and cultural ‘injections’ and demands.”⁸⁸

For Hocquenghem and Mieli, this inscription of the individual into a hetero-genital regime is a necessary prerequisite for the constitution of the liberal subject: the liberal-capitalist subject demands the abandonment of the polymorphous character of sexuality. As Hocquenghem writes, “to identify oneself, to bind the organs into a single person, means to leave behind the polymorphously perverse, or rather to initiate the perversity of the polymorphous.”⁸⁹ In even stronger language, Mieli will mark this production of the liberal subject as a “mutilation” of sexuality: “the objective of educastration is the transformation of the infant, in tendency polymorphous and ‘perverse,’ into a heterosexual adult, erotically mutilated but conforming to the

⁸⁷ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 50.

⁸⁸ Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 49.

⁸⁹ Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 80.

Norm.”⁹⁰ It is for this reason that, on their account, the political liberation of homosexuals would not only require the awakening of anal desire, but likewise the opening up of the body in its totality as the site of erotic pleasure. For these early thinkers of the gay liberation movement, homosexual liberation would require the return to something like polymorphous perversity. “We all know,” Hocquenghem paradigmatically writes—in a manner at once descriptive and normative—, “that homosexual caresses have a greater tendency to stray over all the zones of the body than heterosexual caresses, whose aim is clearly determined.”⁹¹

One finds an analogous move in the feminist literature of the period. Already in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir marks holism as a unique feature of feminine jouissance. As she writes:

Feminine sex enjoyment [*la jouissance féminine*] radiates throughout the whole body; it is not always centered in the genital organs; even when it is, the vaginal contractions constitute, rather than a true orgasm, a system of waves that rhythmically arise, disappear, and re-form, attain from time to time a paroxysmal condition, become vague, and sink down without ever quite dying out. Because no definite term is set, woman’s sex feeling extends toward infinity.⁹²

What distinguishes masculine and feminine sexuality, on de Beauvoir’s account, is the polymorphous character of feminine eroticization. Whereas the phallic character of masculine desire necessitates the delimitation of sexual pleasure to the genital zone, with a particular focus on the achievement of orgasm as a concrete and singular experience—“male sex feeling arises like an arrow”⁹³—, in feminine sexuality the feminine flesh, in its entirety, is an actually or potentially

⁹⁰ Mieli, *Homosexuality and Liberation*, 24.

⁹¹ Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 118.

⁹² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 395-396.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 395.

erogenous zone: “the sensitivity of the erogenous zones is developing, and these are so numerous in woman that her whole body may be regarded as erogenous.”⁹⁴

The subsequent French feminist tradition, itself more directly influenced by psychoanalysis and deconstruction than existential phenomenology, will reframe this insight in order to develop a philosophy of feminine difference, that moreover aims to ground a philosophy of *difference as such*. Thus, according to Luce Irigaray, “woman has sex organs more or less everywhere. She finds pleasure almost anywhere. ... the geography of her pleasure is far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined—in an imaginary rather too narrowly focused on sameness.”⁹⁵ This multiplicity of difference is distinguished from a strictly Freudian conception of polymorphous perversity insofar as the latter is oriented toward the development of hetero-genitality: within the “polymorphous perversion of the child,” she writes, “the erogenous zones lie waiting to be regrouped under the primacy of the phallus.”⁹⁶ The polymorphous character of feminine sexuality, on the other hand, *is not a stage of development*; it is not awaiting the genital organization of Freudian subjectivity. Rather, it is the multiplicity and diversification of sexual members without telic orientation toward the genital.

For Hélène Cixous, this polymorphous character of feminine sexuality marks an escape from every hierarchical, organic organization of the body, the escape from the monarchy of the genitals. She writes:

If there is a self proper to woman, paradoxically it is her capacity to deappropriate herself without interest: endless body, without ‘end,’ without principal ‘parts’; if she is a whole, it is a whole made up of parts that are wholes, not simple, partial objects but varied entirety, moving and boundless change, a cosmos where eros

⁹⁴ Ibid., 318.

⁹⁵ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans, Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 28.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 31.

never stops traveling, vast astral space. ... That doesn't mean that she is undifferentiated magma; it means that he doesn't create a monarchy of her body or her desire.⁹⁷

In feminine sexuality one discovers a democracy of the flesh—what Hocquenghem would name a primary sexual communism. Insofar as the flesh refuses to await genitalization, it has no proper “end.” Rather, it exists in a dis-organized state; not, Cixous emphasizes, undifferentiated, but precisely the opposite: hyper-differentiated. The flesh is marked by the absolute diffusion of difference across each and every site of erotic potential.

What Irigaray discovered through psychoanalysis and Cixous through deconstruction is precisely what I have here suggested to uncover through the methodology of a radical phenomenology: the flesh is marked by a multiplicitous heterogeneity of differentiated members, which refuse organization, telos, or genitalization. “Heterogenous, yes, to her joyful benefit, she is erogenous; she is what is erogenous in the heterogenous.”⁹⁸

C. The Generalization of Polymorphous Sexuality

Yet, while taking these queer and feminist discourses as a point of departure, the phenomenological analyses here undertaken suggest a generalization of this diversified geography of pleasure. For, as was noted in the phenomenological analyses of anal and oral pleasure, such pleasures are by no means essentially restricted to a singular position within sexual difference.⁹⁹

Polymorphous pleasure is not a unique feature of feminine *jouissance*, but is rather a generalized

⁹⁷ Hélène Cixous, “Sorties: Out and Out Attacks/Ways Out/Forays” in *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 87.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹⁹ As Zupančič notes, “*Le sexual* is essentially related to different partial drives and their satisfaction; it is not innate, not object based, and not procreative. It refers to autoerotic, polymorphous, perverse, *non-gender-constricted*, protean sexuality.” Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 9 [emphasis added].

characteristic of flesh as such: all flesh, both the feminine and the masculine—as well as a thousand tiny sexes—are marked by an erotic potentiality that extends well beyond the narrow limits of hetero-genitality. We simply, as Freud remarks; “do not know to which organ or organs a person’s sex is attached.”¹⁰⁰

Exactly the same can be said of sexual orientation. Hocquenghem himself suggests precisely as much. Thus, although he argues that “only homosexuals make such *constant* libidinal use of this [anal] zone,”¹⁰¹ this privilege is by no means essential. Rather, as he clearly remarks: “it may be said that homosexuals are *not* alone in making a desiring use of the anus. ... Georges Bataille, although heterosexual, perceived the peculiarly repressed nature of this zone of the bourgeois body.”¹⁰² As was suggested above, phenomenologically speaking anality is a pleasure bounded by no discreet sexual orientation. The same may likewise be recognized in the phenomenology of polymorphous pleasure more broadly. There is no sexual position or orientation which is granted unique access to polymorphous pleasure, *the unbounded potential of eroticization is granted by right to all flesh.*

This generalization of polymorphous erotic potential to all flesh presents a clear risk. Does it not, it might rightly be asked, mark a return to precisely the “sameness” that thinkers as diverse as von Balthasar and Irigaray have sought to overturn? Does the dissemination of polymorphous pleasures coincide with the erasure of sexual difference? As Žižek argues: “the endeavor to liberate sexuality from all ‘binary’ oppressions in order to set it free in its entire polymorphous perversity

¹⁰⁰ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 69.

¹⁰¹ Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 98 [emphasis added].

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 97 [emphasis added].

necessarily ends up in the abandoning of the very sphere of sexuality—the liberation of sexuality has to end up in the liberation (of humanity) from sexuality.”¹⁰³

Quite to the contrary, I would here suggest that not only does the generalization of polymorphous eroticization not mark the erasure of sexual difference, but rather the expansion or radicalization of difference. But this radicalization necessitates a reconceptualization of the site of difference: here it will be helpful to return to the analysis of sexual difference found in recent Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse. Thus, in this way we will find the present analyses landing at precisely the same point as the previous chapter’s discussion of Rogozinski: the necessity of recognizing sexual difference not as an external fault *between* the sexes or genders, but as an internal fault, a disruption of the flesh *within* itself that functions as the precondition for the erotic potential of all flesh. As Zupančič notes, “difference cuts ‘through’ each sex, not between the sexes.”¹⁰⁴

As Philippe Van Haute and Herman Westerink note, sexuality—and I might add the sexual flesh—is the product of a complex process of constitution. “The sexual drive,” they write, “is most likely put together from various components. If the sexual activities are composites, maybe the source from which they spring (the sexual drive) is also something composite. ... What we call the sexual drive is actually a composition or bundle of partial drives.”¹⁰⁵ Yet, the multiplicitous disorganized sexuality of the partial drives or of non-hierarchical sexual members does not only temporally anticipate hetero-genital sexuality—as on a strictly developmental account. Rather, this

¹⁰³ Slavoj Žižek, *Incontinence of the Void: Economico-Philosophical Spandrels* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 134.

¹⁰⁴ Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 50.

¹⁰⁵ Philippe Van Haute and Herman Westerink, “Introduction: Hysteria, Sexuality, and the Deconstruction of Normativity—Rereading Freud’s 1905 edition of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*” in Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, xxxii, xli.

polymorphous character continually haunts even the most “normal” sexuality. As Freud himself recognized: “it becomes impossible in the end not to recognize that this same disposition to perversions of every kind is a universal and primary human characteristic.”¹⁰⁶

The cause of this persistence—of the inability of even the most rigorous imposition of cultural or environmental norms to erase non-genital sexuality—is twofold. First, as Rogozinski sought to establish, the *chiasm* is always haunted by an *écarte*. There is no constitution of the vast multiplicity of sexual drives and erogenous zones that could ever be produced without remainder; there is no constituted flesh that is not riven with gaps or faults. In the psychoanalytic language of Zupančič: “‘Genital sexual organization’ is far from being primordial. It involves unification of the originally heterogenous, dispersed, always-already compound sexual drive, composed of different partial drives, such as looking, touching, sucking, and so on. ... It is always a somehow forced and artificial unification. ... it is never really fully achieved or accomplished.”¹⁰⁷ Second, and as Zupančič again emphasizes, the negativity or gap at the heart of sexuality goes even deeper. It is not only that gaps persist between individuals or that gaps persist within the constitution of the individual—rather, the very members of the flesh are themselves haunted by difference and negativity. “The claim is stronger,” she writes, “these partial pleasures and satisfactions are already (in-)formed by the negativity implied by the non-relation.”¹⁰⁸

In a speculative-Hegelian reversal characteristic of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the gap or rupture at the heart of sexuality is recognized not as the failure of sexuality, but as its very condition of possibility. “Taken at this level,” Zupančič ultimately concludes, “sexuality ‘unifies’ the drives

¹⁰⁶ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 51.

¹⁰⁷ Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

not by uniting them in a more or less coherent whole (of sexual activity), but precisely as the crack around which they circulate and to which they keep returning. The ‘sexual’ refers to the ‘crack’ shared (and repeated) by different drives.”¹⁰⁹ The suggestion here is that there is no level of depth which can be attained, whether psychoanalytically—or, I might add, phenomenologically—where one discovers a pure sexual phenomenon, sexuality as wholeness or sameness, a site beyond the ruptures of differentiation and negativity.¹¹⁰ This is not only because sexuality always fails its unification, or in Rogozinski’s language, because as complete *chiasm* is impossible, but because the incomplete character of the *chiasm* is itself the genesis of sexuality. It is precisely *because* we are not monadic flesh that we experience all flesh as potentially eroticized.¹¹¹ To recall the words of Rogozinski: “by letting itself be traversed and divided by the remainder in this way, the body of flesh is opened to sexual desire.”¹¹² Thus sexuality not only emerges from the flesh insofar as the flesh contains irreducible gaps or ruptures within itself, but moreover, the very members of the sexual flesh, erogenous zones bearing sexual meaning and affect, are themselves situated in, among, or on these very gaps.

The result of this situatedness is not only phenomenological, but psychological (and in the following chapters it will be added: political and theological). Because the sexual members of the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 116.

¹¹⁰ Zupančič herself attempts to bring together these psychoanalytic and phenomenological points, writing: “Sexuality, considered from a phenomenological point of view, appears to be composed of several different partial drives, to which it provides a more or less accomplished unification. ... What we should add to this from the Lacanian perspective—and we are clearly on a speculative level here—is that we could also see sexuation as prior to the partial drives: not as a kind of primary substance, but precisely as the hole/crack around which the drives ‘congregate’.” Ibid., 115.

¹¹¹ This, in contradiction to Henry’s monadic insistence that erogenous zones be cast out of the flesh, into the world: “les zones érogènes ne sont que des pôles d’un monde érogène qui correspond à une certaine intentionalité.” Michel Henry, “Notes sur le phénomène érotique” in Jean Leclercq, (ed), “Michel Henry: Notes sur le phénomène érotique” *Revue Internationale Michel Henry* 4 (2013): 37.

¹¹² Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh*, 194.

flesh congregate in or around these gaps in our flesh—these unruly zones that have a will of their own and seem to manifest precariously as both flesh and other at the same time—these members are subject to suspicion, mistrust, and violence. They can even, as Rogozinski argues, trigger a crisis of disincarnation: “the texture of my flesh is torn apart, its nascent unity is undone, and I become anxious about being dismembered or infinitely cut to pieces.”¹¹³ The subjection of the sexual member to particularly harsh regulation and shaming can therefore be understood as a response to this phenomenological characteristic of flesh. The precepts that aim to suppress sexuality—whether social, political, or religious—are not arbitrary, but rather emerge from an anxiety produced within the flesh itself. Insofar as the flesh manifests as a precarious phenomenon—traversed by multiplicitous, polymorphous, and unstable sexual potential—insofar as it finds itself riddled with gaps and fissures around which a rich and variegated sexuality gathers, it refuses subjection to any rule of the same, any hierarchical or teleological organization. Every story of developmental stages, genital aim, evolutionary directedness, or rational ordering finds itself subverted by a flesh that continuously rebels against stratified organization. Anywhere that orderly hierarchical structuring is privileged, this flat ontology of sexual manifestation can only be experienced as disruptive and chaotic, even dangerous.

But, this anxiety directed toward the sexual member is not necessary; it is not an essential component of incarnate being. Rather, in what Rogozinski calls redemption or Cixous liberation and transformation, we can catch a glimpse of an alternative possibility of relating to the remainder or the otherness within our own flesh. In the language of Rogozinski, this necessitates a new synthesis of incorporation in which [the flesh] unites itself with the remainder engendered by the

¹¹³ Ibid., 244.

previous two syntheses.”¹¹⁴ For Rogozinski, this is the true “syn-thesis” insofar as it “puts differentiated elements in relation in order to unite them and identify them with one another.”¹¹⁵ That is to say, a structured system of sameness is *in principle* precluded from entering into a genuine synthesis. Authentic synthesis must be the synthesis of alterity, of otherness. Whereas the constitution of the flesh depended upon a precarious synthesis of a multiplicity of members of the flesh, this second-level synthesis marks the synthesis of the flesh with its own remainder, the incarnation of the remainder into the flesh—yet, without an abandonment of its alterity.

The ability to maintain a flat ontology of the polymorphous sexual flesh is not only key to constructing an adequate phenomenology of the flesh or even a psychology of sexual embodiment—polymorphous sexuality, as queer and feminist scholars have always recognized, *is political*. On the one hand, as Cixous emphasizes, this means that the liberation of sexuality stands upon a transformation of the politics of difference writ large. As she writes:

Let us imagine a real liberation of sexuality, that is to say, a transformation of each one’s relationship to his or her body (and to the other body), an approximation to the vast, material, organic, sensuous universe that we are. This cannot be accomplished, of course, without political transformations that are equally radical. ... Difference would be a bunch of new differences.¹¹⁶

On the other hand, the converse is also the case. Indeed, in the following chapters it will be suggested that the relationship that one maintains in regard to the alterity of one’s own sexuality is essential to the constitution of social, political, and religious communal bodies. The way in which one relates to the remainder within their own flesh prefigures the way in which they relate to marginalized figures in their political and religious communities.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 243.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Cixous, “Sorties,” 83.

Chapter 7 - Membership and the Body of Christ

Perhaps the body is the only factor in all spiritual development.

Gilles Deleuze

In the final chapters of this dissertation I will seek to extend the account of the flesh laid out in the previous two chapters in order to elucidate the constitution of religious *communities*. Thus methodologically, I will in the following chapters institute a shift from an explicitly phenomenological methodology to a theological methodology that, echoing Henry and Marion's own influence in the *ressourcement* tradition, will draw particularly strongly upon the writings of the Patristic fathers.

Most fundamentally this chapter will aim to unpack and clarify the logic underlying the contemporary all-to-common exclusion of gender and sexual minorities from religious communities, while also drawing out the possibility of an alternative conception of religious membership, a membership conceived through the logic of the multiplicitous flesh, rather than a logic of exclusion of the dysmember. Therefore these final two chapters can perhaps be understood as something like an incarnational ecclesiology in a Christological vernacular. That is to say, I will here be engaging not with ecclesiology in the sense of church structures or codes of regulation, but at the Christological level—as *the Body of Christ*. Moreover, this discussion of religious communities is incarnational insofar as it will seek to identify a fundamental homology between the constitution of the flesh of the individual and the constitution of the communal body of Christ.

§1. The Constitution of the Community as Flesh

A. The Body Politic

The correlation of the human body and the socio-political community is certainly not novel. Communities are commonly conceived in terms of the human body in both the religious and secular imaginary. This image emerges clearly in the political philosophy of the ancients—Plato and Aristotle,¹ for example—but gained particular currency within early-modern realist political philosophy. Thomas Hobbes, for example, famously unpacked the complex interrelation of political society in terms of a body, the *Corpore Politico*: “which may be defined to be a multitude of men, united as one person by a common power, for their common peace, defense, and benefit.”² This image is manifest most conspicuously in the frontispiece of *Leviathan*, where the regent is figured as an imposing giant, raised above the mountains, whose arms and torso are composed of hundreds of individual bodies. Each of these individual subjects (in the double sense), serve as a *member*—what Machiavelli had already named the *membros*—of the regent, members who are “united by covenants into one person civil or body politic.”³ Indeed, it is perhaps noteworthy that Hobbes divides *The Elements of Law* into two sections, the first describing human nature in its

¹ E.g. “What about the city is most like a single person? For example, when one of us hurts his finger, the entire organism that binds body and soul together into a single system under the ruling part within it is aware of this, and the whole feels the pain together with the part that suffers. That’s why we say that the man has a pain in his finger. And the same can be said about any part of a man, with regard either to the pain it suffers or to the pleasure it experiences when it finds itself. Certainly. And, as for your question, the city with the best government is most like such a person. Then, whenever anything good or bad happens to a single one of its citizens, such a city above all others will say that the affected part is its own and will share in the pleasure or pain as a whole.” Plato, “Republic,” trans. G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve in *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 1090 (462c-e). “The state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand.” Aristotle, “Politics” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. 2*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1988 (1253a 20).

² Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law: Natural and Politic* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1889), 104 (1.19.8).

³ *Ibid.*, 108 (2.1.1).

sensuous and embodied character, before turning to the “erection”—or one might say, constitution—of the political community. In like manner, Hobbes’ trilogy, *Elements of Philosophy*, despite being written out of order, is ultimately organized around the movement from the abstract logical/mathematical body (*De Corpore*, 1655), to the physiological human body (*De Homine*, 1658), before turning to the political body (*De Cive*, 1642). Simply put, for Hobbes, it is not possible to understand the right constitution of the body politic, unless one can understand it as homologous with the proper functioning human body.

This understanding of the body as an image of the social community is not restricted to this political usage. As Hobbes himself already notes:

And as this union into a city or body politic, is instituted with common power over all the particular persons, or members thereof, to the common good of them all; so also may there be amongst a multitude of those members, instituted a subordinate union of certain men, for certain common actions to be done by those men for some common benefit of theirs, or of the whole city; as for subordinate government, for counsel, for trade, and the like. And these subordinate bodies politic are usually called CORPORATIONS; and their power such over the particulars of their own society, as the whole city whereof they are members have allowed them.⁴

Thus, just as the political, so too is the economic community understood in analogy to the body. The very word corporation—from the Latin *corpore*, “to make a body”—marks the depth of this metaphor within the Western imaginary. Indeed, a company or firm “incorporates” (literally, enters embodiment), in order to constitute itself as a legal entity: a legal person or *persona ficta*.⁵

⁴ Ibid., 104 (1.19.9).

⁵ The question of corporate personhood is particularly controversial within the United States. Since the 19th century (*Louisville, C. & C.R. Co. v. Letson*, 1844), the Supreme Court of the United States has upheld the legal privileges of corporate personhood, including: the right to own property, to sue, to hire employees, etc. But, in its controversial 2010 decision of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, the supreme court granted legal personhood the full protection of the first amendment, including the right to free speech, understood in this context to overturn bans on electioneering by corporations and other legal persons.

Karl Marx was particularly fond of employing this body imagery in his descriptions of economic relations—particularly the industrial capitalism of his epoch. Thus, he writes of the structure of the capitalist economy, for example:

The result we arrive at, is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they are all members of one totality, different aspects of a unit. . . . Thus a definite form of production determines definite forms of consumption, distribution and exchange as well as definite relations between these different elements.... A mutual interaction takes place between these various elements. This is the case with *every organic body*.⁶

Likewise in the first volume of *Capital*, Marx will tend to conceptualize the industrial worker as the member or organ of the factory and its machines: “the workers are merely *conscious organs*, coordinated with the *unconscious organs* of the automaton, and together with the latter subordination to the central moving force”⁷; or again, “in manufacture the workers are the parts of a living mechanism. In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism which is independent of the workers, who are *incorporated* into it as its *living appendages*.”⁸ Or, in the words of the American socialist activist and presidential candidate, Eugene Debs: “the capitalist refers to you as mill hands, farm hands, factory hands, machine hands - hands, hands! ... A capitalist would feel insulted if you called him a hand. He’s a head. The trouble is he owns his head and your hands.”⁹

⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 99-100 [emphasis added].

⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes [New York: Penguin Books, 1976], 544-545 [emphasis added].

⁸ *Ibid.*, 548 [emphasis added].

⁹ David Karsner, *Debs: his authorized life and letters from Woodstock prison to Atlanta* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), 200. As Sara Ahmed similarly remarks, in a more contemporary feminist interpretation of this capitalist reality: “the arm matters. An arm is what allows you to reach, to carry, to hold, to complete certain kinds of tasks. Arms are identified throughout history as the limbs of labor or even the limbs of the laborer. Arms are supposed to be willing to labor. But not all arms. . . . When the laborers’ arms become tools in the creation of wealth, the laborers lose their arms. To become his arm is to lose your arm. The factory owner does not only acquire the laborers’ arms; he has his own arms freed. We can hear another sense in which arms are striking. To go on strike is to clench your fist, to refuse to be handy. When workers refuse to allow their arms to be the master’s tool, they strike. The clenched fist remains a revolutionary sign for labor movements, internationally” Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 85.

B. Phenomenology and Communal Constitution

Despite its tendency to center of the individual subject, this understanding of the community as correlate to the body is certainly not foreign to phenomenology. Indeed, already in Husserl one finds precisely this logic being unpacked as a phenomenological—rather than a merely cultural—assertion.

Husserl situates this idea within his language of “we-subjectivity” (*Wir-Subjektivität*). Against common (albeit unfounded) accusations of solipsism, texts such as *Ideas II* and the unpublished lectures on intersubjectivity show that Husserl became increasingly convinced of the necessity of thinking the constitution of the objective world as necessarily co-constituted with others: as an inextricably social act.¹⁰ Indeed, for Husserl, the true objective object simply is the object insofar as it appears across a multiplicity of intersubjective manifestations. As he writes in the *Ideas II*, “the ‘true thing’ is then *the Object that maintains its identity within the manifolds of appearances belonging to a multiplicity of subjects*, and specifically, again, it is the intuited Object, related to a community of normal subjects.”¹¹

¹⁰ “Rather than dividing the realm of phenomenology into two different domains – the individual and the social— Husserl aimed at articulating this difference in terms of two modalities of the single phenomenological absolute.” Timo Miettinen, “The Body Politic: Husserl and the Embodied Community,” in Rasmus Thybo Jensen and Dermot Moran (Eds.), *The Phenomenology of Embodied Subjectivity* (New York: Springer, 2014), 330.

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book, Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 87 [emphasis added]. For ease and concision of space, subsequent citations will simply refer to “Husserl, *Ideas II*.” For Husserl, this co-constitution of objectivity is most conspicuous at the point that it fails. In a thought experiment Husserl imagines a completely solipsistic subject, suddenly encountering other subjects: “let us imagine, however, that at a point of time within the time co-constituted along with the solipsistic world, suddenly in my domain of experience Bodies show up, things understandable as, and understood as, human Bodies. Now all of a sudden and for the first time human beings are there for me, with whom I can come to an understanding. And I come to an understanding with them about the things which are there for us in common in this new segment of time. Something very remarkable now comes out: extensive complexes of assertions about things which I made in earlier periods of time on the ground of earlier experiences, experiences which were perfectly concordant throughout, are *not corroborated* by my current companions, and this not because these experiences are simply lacking to them ... but because they thoroughly conflict with what the others

This phenomenological reality of co-constitution produces “personal unities of a higher order.”¹² Such social bodies, or communities (*Gemeinschaft*), are no mere fictions (*persona ficta*) or naive imaginative extensions of the individual to the communal. As Husserl insists, the notion of the body politic is not an “inventive coincidence of natural thinking.”¹³ Quite to the contrary, the notion of the social body identifies something “real” (*wirklich*) in social and communal relations. This objective reality is evidenced by the temporal persistence of the social body, despite the transience of its membership—social bodies “have their own lives, [and] preserve themselves by lasting through time despite the joining or leaving of individuals.”¹⁴ As Miettinen notes, “a certain social body is never tied to any particular subject, but has its existence regardless of the entry or withdrawal of particular members. ... it belongs to the very notion of communal person that it always transgresses its particular members—it is something that cannot be reduced back to individual subjects.”¹⁵ Mereologically speaking, that is to say, the member of the community is a part—or more precisely, a “piece” (*Stücke*)—of the social whole, but is not a necessary constituent—a “moment” (*Momente*).¹⁶

experience in experiences. ... As I communicate to my companions my earlier lived experiences and they become aware of how much these conflict with their world, constituted intersubjectively and continuously exhibited by means of a harmonious exchange of experiences, then I become for them an interesting *pathological* Object, and they call my actuality, so beautifully manifest to me, the hallucination of someone who up to this point in time has been mentally ill.” *Ibid.*, 84-85.

¹² Husserl, *Ideas II*, 191.

¹³ As cited in Miettinen, “The Body Politic,” 335.

¹⁴ Husserl, *Ideas II*, 191.

¹⁵ Miettinen, “The Body Politic,” 338-339.

¹⁶ For a mereological account of the social body, see: Sean Petranovich, “Husserlian Mereology and Intimate Community Membership,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 32.3 (2018): 462-474.

Because he draws upon this tradition of viewing the social unity as a body, Husserl tends to employ specifically biological language in his explication of social relations. He will thus speak of the “organic” relations between individuals. In fact, in a move that anticipates work that will be undertaken below, this organic-bodily imagery is drawn together with a decidedly theological vocabulary in his construction of the ideal social body: the “community of love” (*Liebesgemeinschaft*).¹⁷ To again cite Miettinen’s astute analysis, for Husserl, “it is love that opens up the peculiar form of ‘organic,’ reciprocal unity of perpetual striving towards good that constitutes the ideal form of communal life.”¹⁸ In such a community, the mere intimacy of proximity is transformed into the reciprocal unity of a shared project.¹⁹ “Lovers,” Husserl argues, “do not live alongside one another and with one another, but in one another [*ineinander*], actually and potentially.”²⁰ Through this reciprocal interpenetration (homologically akin to the synthesis of *empfindness* in the constitution of the *Leib*), the community of love emerges as a quasi-personal social body, with a certain set of social values, memories, and even something like a communal subjectivity.

This logic will be directly picked up by Michel Henry, who predictably re-centers the socio-ethical relationship to the other within the context of the auto-affective relationship that one maintains toward oneself. Thus, a cruelty directed toward the other finds its genesis within an auto-

¹⁷ For an analysis of Husserl’s *Liebesgemeinschaft*, see, e.g.: R. Philip Buckley, “Husserl’s Rational ‘Liebesgemeinschaft,’” *Research in Phenomenology* 26.1 (1996): 116-130.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 341.

¹⁹ Or, in the words of Petranovich, “a community of love is the achievement of an intertwining of wills, such that the strivings and willings of one member are immediately realized through the strivings and willings of another member.” Petranovich, “Husserlian Mereology and Intimate Community Membership,” 466.

²⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass, Zweiter Teil, 1921–1928*, ed. I. Kern (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 173-174, as translated in Petranovich, “Husserlian Mereology and Intimate Community Membership,” 466.

affective masochism toward oneself. As he writes in a commentary on Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*:

In place of the exteriority of the relation joy-suffering, which seems sufficient to explain cruelty as a mode of experience of the other, interiority, as the opposite of that relation, is here substituted as the relationship of the individual with himself. For cruelty in its most general and constant form is above all cruelty toward oneself, a cruelty consisting of making oneself suffer in which the individual takes pleasure in his own suffering and for that reason makes himself suffer.²¹

For Nietzsche, insofar as the relation to the other remains dependent upon this primordial relationship to self, it is this primary auto-affective relationship which must be mastered—if one cannot eliminate cruelty (what Henry would call “suffering”), then one must become “an artist and transfigurer of cruelty.”²² As Nietzsche argues, “almost everything we call ‘higher culture’ is based on the spiritualization of *cruelty*, on its becoming more profound: this is my proposition.”²³

This connection between social communities and the auto-affective relationship to one's own flesh—suggested in the *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*—is first worked out carefully in *Material Phenomenology*'s discussion of “pathos-with.” There—as was briefly discussed above (chapter 2)—Henry counters accusations that his auto-affective philosophy is necessarily solipsistic. Against such views, Henry posits the fundamental site of human intersubjectivity as an affective relationship: “pathos-with.”²⁴ “Before intentionally grasping the other as other and before the perception of the other's body,” he argues, “every experience of the other in the sense of a real

²¹ Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 236.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library 1968), §229.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ As discussed in Chapter 2, this notion of “pathos-with” is self-consciously developed as a counter to the Husserlian conception of “association” and the Heideggerian notion “mit-sein”—both of which position the intersubjective relation within the intentionality of the world.

being with the other occurs in us as an affect.”²⁵ In this way, Henry shifts the level at which the constitution of the community should be understood to occur. Rather than a worldly phenomenon in which temporally and spatially proximate individuals establish a relationship of mutuality, the community is first and foremost an affective bond between individuals outside (or before) the constitution of an ek-static spatio-temporal world.²⁶ “Must we then say that, in spite of all appearances, every community is invisible?” Henry asks, “let us take this risk.”²⁷

The theological intonation of a primary “invisible community” would not have been lost by Henry’s early readers, and throughout the following decade Henry will make this theological content explicit. Thus, by the time he writes *Incarnation*, this affective relation to the other—“pathos-with”—will be understood as triangulated through Life-itself: which since *I am the Truth*, Henry had unambiguously given the name God: “from Life means from God, since according to Christianity, the essence of Life and that of God are one and the same.”²⁸ As he writes, “every relation from one Self to another Self requires as its point of departure not this Self itself, an I—my own or the other’s—but their common transcendental possibility, which is nothing other than the possibility of their relation itself: absolute Life.”²⁹ Thus Henry’s phenomenological assertion of a privileged affective relationship to the other—itsself grounded in a primary affective relationship to oneself—is ultimately transfigured into a theological claim. The true community is

²⁵ Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 115.

²⁶ Every community is “foreign to the world and to its phenomenological categories, to space and time.” Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, trans. Karl Hefty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 245.

²⁷ Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 124.

²⁸ Michel Henry, *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 51.

²⁹ Henry, *Incarnation*, 243.

the invisible community of affective resonance triangulated toward the source of all affectivity and life: God. Thus, he writes, “every community is by essence religious.”³⁰

In the final section of *Incarnation*, this invisible community will be granted its traditional title in Christian theology: “the mystical body of Christ.”³¹ Here, like the Hobbesian *corpore politico*, the constitution of the community—its “process of continuous self-growth”³²—is directly correlated to the constitution of the individual body. This body is composed of many members—“its members are all those who, sanctified and deified in him and by him, belong to him from then on, to the point of becoming parts of this body itself, precisely its members.”³³ It is therefore essential to situate this discussion of the body of Christ within its context: the phenomenology of the flesh and of incarnation. For Henry, it is only possible to understand the body of Christ, if one understands its constitution as one with the constitution of the individual body. Thus he will have repeated recourse to his prior investigations of the impressional constitution of the flesh—“our critique of Husserl’s problematic concerning the Impression has shown...”³⁴—with the final result that the constitution of the body of Christ is constituted (“grows from”) the constitution of the individual:

Each transcendental Self’s givenness to itself—a givenness in which that Self is edified within, as growing from itself and thus from its own becoming—is the operation of the Word, and the Word repeats it in each conceivable transcendental Self, whether past, present, or future. Thus the mystical body of Christ grows indefinitely from everyone who is sanctified in Christ’s flesh.³⁵

³⁰ Henry, *Incarnation*, 244.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

³² *Ibid.*, 244.

³³ *Ibid.*, 250.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 250-251.

Insofar as the constitution of the individual flesh serves as the condition of possibility for the constitution of the community, the latter will reflect key characteristics of the former. In this way, the phenomenological correlation of the flesh and the social community—whether political, economic, or religious—is not merely analogical, but—to use the language introduced by Lacan’s seminar, *L’Autre à l’autre*—homological. “Homology, clearly means—as I emphasized—that the relation is not one of analogy,” Lacan there writes, “*it is indeed the same thing*.”³⁶ The constitution of the flesh and the constitution of the community are not comparable, analogical, or similar; they are two poles of *one and the same logic of incarnation*. The relation is, as Husserl argued, “real” [*wirklich*]. Thus the same appears in the case of the sexual member. Just as one may—through various philosophical or theological conjurings—seek to expel the sexual member of the immanence of the flesh, to dismember the flesh, so too does the community employ precisely the same logic of exclusion in regard to sexually divergent members. That is to say, the oppression of marginalized communities can in many instances be directly traced back to an unsustainable account of embodiment: a failure to reconcile the body with its various reminders, those disavowed members and gaps at the heart of the flesh itself. Thus, for example, just as Henry tends to conceive the flesh as monadic (Chapter 5), so too does he repeatedly speak of the body of Christ in monadic terms: it “is not divisible,” “neither are [its members] separated,” it is “identical,” Christ “remains in this ‘entire’ body.”³⁷ This monadic conception of the Christian community—itsself motivated by the prior expulsion from the sexual member from the flesh—in turn justifies Henry’s patriarchal posture and denigration of sexual minorities (Chapter 2).

³⁶ “Homologie, c’est bien dire—et je l’ai souligné—que leur rapport n’est pas d’analogie, il s’agit bien de la même chose.” Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre XVI: L’Autre à l’autre* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 45 [emphasis added, translation my own].

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

This possibility is directly picked up by Jacob Rogozinski who even more directly than Henry recognizes the key homological relationship between the flesh and the community—writing that “we can affirm too that there is a parallelism between the immanent life of the ego and the existence of social and political communities.”³⁸ Specifically, Rogozinski argues that the constitution of the community precisely mirrors the passive synthesis of the individual ego-flesh. Therefore, like Husserl, he will defend the notion of the body politic, not only as a useful cultural metaphor, but rather as a phenomenological discovery (or in the Lacanian jargon: no mere analogy, but a homology): “the synthesis of incorporation, which constitutes my body, is similarly repeated on the intersubjective level by uniting all the singular bodies within a unique Total Body.”³⁹

But even more than his predecessors, Rogozinski seeks to explicitly unpack the *violent and exclusionary potential* of this process. Thus, while from the outside it appears that Rogozinski’s philosophical production has recently turned from phenomenological consideration of the body to political critique, the reality is that this constitutes a continuation of precisely the same project discussed above (chapters 5-6). As he writes in the concluding pages of *The Ego and the Flesh*:

The *corpus mysticum* of the Church, the Kingdom, the Republic, or the Party ... is grounded in the immanent syntheses that gives body to my flesh. ... The haunting of the remainder reappears on the plane of the community by being fixated on an individual or particular group, on a ‘caste’ or class, a ‘racial’ or religious, political or sexual minority. ... The ‘political body’ is grounded, like my own body, on the exclusion of the remainder.⁴⁰

³⁸ Jacob Rogozinski, “Democracy and Terror: towards a phenomenology of (dis-)embodiment,” Conference Presentation, *Die Phänomenologie und das Politische*, Hagen (2017), 5.

³⁹ Ibid. Continuing: “most human societies represent themselves in the form of a collective body whose limbs are the individuals. It is the organic unity of the body and the subordination of the ‘inferior’ members that, in Plato, works as model for the ideal City; already with Saint Paul, the Church defines itself as a body with Christ as its head; and this representation will be transferred in the Middle age to the *Corpus Mysticum Republicae*, the Great Body of the State with the king at its head.” Ibid.

⁴⁰ Jacob Rogozinski, *The Ego and the Flesh: An Introduction to Egoanalysis*, trans. Robert Vallier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 305.

In a certain sense, this short passage therefore functions as a *précis* of his subsequent scholarship on politics, terrorism, and Islamism. For Rogozinski, the vast litany of 20th century violence can be understood as a problem of the (failed) incorporation of the remainder: “the experience that the twentieth century brings us,” he writes, “is the power of the opposing tendency that resists disincorporation, which in blood and in death strives to reinstitute the total unity of the great Body.”⁴¹ Multiplying examples from across modern Western History, from the French Revolution and Stalinism, to the rise of Nazism and contemporary Islamist violence, Rogozinski suggests each of these instances of authoritarian violence mark attempts to restore the unity of the body politic⁴² by excluding the social remainder:

This is what I specially take from Bataille: every political community constitutes itself while creating an accused share, a heterogeneous surplus. For a community to be capable of configuring itself as a body, it must reject part of itself—a cast, a class, or a sexual, racial, or religious minority—a detached fragment of its own flesh which it no longer recognizes as its own, though one that remains nonetheless flesh of its flesh. This excluded part that was rejected from the Great Body, this I call the remainder of the community.⁴³

One can see this logic of social exclusion of the communal remainder across political discourse: in every argument that seeks to root out an internal foe (e.g. anti-Semitic discourse) and/or police the communal or national boundaries (e.g. immigration or border discourse). For Rogozinski, following Henry and Nietzsche, in each instance one finds an externalization of what is primordially an auto-affective, masochistic hate: “my hate toward others always finds its source

⁴¹ Jacob Rogozinski, “Birth to the World (Nine Theses on the Possibility of the Political),” (unpublished), 3. The French text was published in 2002 as Jacob Rogozinski, “Naître au monde (neuf thèses sur la possibilité du politique)” *Lignes* 9 (2002): 111-133.

⁴² “The unrelenting energy and audacity that the totalitarian movements display is the energy of despair: they fiercely strive to rebuild some body matter in a society racked by an irreversible disincorporation.” Rogozinski, “Birth to the World,” 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

in a hate toward myself, toward an internal outsider that I recognize with horror in the other. If someone proclaims his disgust and his hate of women or of homosexuals, we may wonder that he detests in them his own femininity, which he refuses in himself.”⁴⁴ By projecting the rejected remainder of oneself or one’s community onto the other, one aims to disincorporate them, to remove them from the body. In this way the abject member of the community (the dysmember) is systematically cast out of the social body, which is itself thereby dismembered. “As soon as a community is configuring itself as a body,” Rogozinski writes, “it must reject a part of itself, a social, sexual, ‘racial’ or religious minority: a detached fragment of its own flesh, which it no longer recognizes as its own.”⁴⁵ This communal dismemberment serves to constitute a dichotomy between self and other—us and them, pure and impure, clean, and dirty, good and evil. As Rogozinski writes:

Such obsessive hate brings into play primordial oppositions between the self and the other, the inside and the outside, the native and the foreign, which we find in all cultures, all epochs, because they have their origin in our relationship with our singular body—or, more precisely, with our flesh.⁴⁶

The question opened by this analysis is the question of inevitably. Must the constitution of the community always stand upon the exclusion of the remainder? Is something like the Husserlian

⁴⁴ Rogozinski, “Democracy and Terror,” 5. Here Rogozinski echoes Freud, “we are led to the view that masochism is older than sadism, and that sadism is the destructive instinct directed outwards, thus acquiring the characteristic of aggressiveness” (Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey [New York: W.W. Norton, 1965], 131). While Rogozinski’s larger point stands on its own, one should perhaps here question the specific example brought to bear, which seems to echo a controversial hypothesis that homophobia is primarily a product of internalized homosexuality. For a critique of this argument from a natural-scientific perspective, see: Brian P. Meier et al, “A secret attraction or defensive loathing?: Homophobia, defense, and implicit cognition,” *Journal of Research in Personality* 40 (2006) 377–394; and Cara C. MacInnis and Gordon Hodson, “Is Homophobia Associated with an Implicit Same-Sex Attraction?” *The Journal of Sex Research* 50.8 (2013): 777-785.

⁴⁵ Rogozinski, “Democracy and Terror,” 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1. Here Rogozinski echoes an argument given by Freud, who writes that: “it really seems as though it is necessary for us to destroy some other thing or person in order not to destroy ourselves, in order to guard against the impulsion to self-destruction” Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 131.

“Community of Love” possible? Or, as Rogozinski sometimes seems to suggest, must the very notion of the communal body be abandoned? Should we not, instead, seek to identify “new spaces of speech and action, the irruption of a multitude of ‘popular societies’ and of penniless [*sans-culottes*] sections that actively resist any reconstruction of a hierarchical political body”?⁴⁷ If Husserl, Henry, and Rogozinski are correct that the body politic is no mere “inventive coincidence of natural thinking,”⁴⁸ then it may not be possible to simply cast it aside as an unhelpful metaphor. We may find ourselves instead tasked with the project of determining a new way of thinking and living the communal body that actively resists this tendency towards exclusion. In the following section, this will be attempted by turning to the specific way in which the question of the body politic has been worked out—both unsuccessfully and successfully—in Christian theology under the name of the body of Christ.

§2. Bodies of Christ and the Persistence of Sexuality

In the first book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's eponymous messiah decries the “despisers of the body.” These despisers speak “childishly” of a transcendent soul: “Body am I, and soul.” Against this theologizing impulse, Zarathustra declares to the contrary: “body am I entirely and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body.” If these despisers wish to denigrate the body, Zarathustra suggests, perhaps they should simply “say farewell to their own bodies—and thus become silent.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Rogozinski, “Birth to the World,” 2.

⁴⁸ As cited in Miettinen, “The Body Politic,” 335.

⁴⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), 146.

This short invective against the “despisers of the body” is paradigmatic of traditional critiques of Christian theology. Christianity’s privileging of the soul has at the same time effaced the body, so the common criticism goes. Indeed, if one understands the body—as I have throughout this dissertation—always already as a sexual body, the condemnation is even more forceful. To the extent that the body has survived the advent of the soul, it has succumbed to the asexualizing impulse of Christianity’s prudish sexual ethic. There is no body in Christianity, or to the extent that there is, such a body remains a sterile figure divorced from the concrete embodiment of lived sexuality.

It is certainly beyond the scope of this chapter to negotiate the full nuances of this perennial debate. Suffice it to say, it is undeniable that many Christianities have advocated—and still do—a disembodied conception of the human person, having thereby precipitated sexual repression and having often stood at the forefront of the oppression of sexual minorities.⁵⁰ Yet, this is not the only tradition of Christianity.⁵¹ The diversity of Christianity necessitates that the theology of the body be a contested space. Not only contested academically or intellectually, but by the very bodily

⁵⁰ Althaus-Reid relays the following unfortunate example, wherein even an ostensibly radical, justice-oriented, liberation theology is unable to stand for sexual minorities: “when some years ago, the Metropolitan Community Church in Argentina sent a letter to a selected group amongst the main liberation theologians in Argentina, Perú and other countries of the Southern Cone, asking them to sign an open letter repudiating the killings of homosexuals in Argentina by a right-wing group, none of them agreed to do so. They were not being asked to sign a letter declaring their support for lesbian issues, but one declaring that the Bible did not support the killing of homosexuals. However, the theologians of solidarity did not want to show solidarity with victims of sexual persecution, some of them saying that homosexuality was not their issue.” Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 73.

⁵¹ As the Medievalist Caroline Walker Bynum remarks, for example: “medieval artists and devotional writers did not either equate body with sexuality or reject body as evil. There was a misogynist clerical tradition, to be sure. But medieval piety did not dismiss flesh—even female flesh—as polluting. Rather, it saw flesh as fertile and vulnerable; and it saw enfleshing—the enfleshing of God and of us all—as the occasion for salvation.” Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 116.

presence of alternative theologies. As Marcella Althaus-Reid argues, “Christian dogmatics is built upon bodily struggles.”⁵²

The locus of this struggle regarding the Christian conception of the sexual flesh, as suggested above, is Christological. The possibility of a Christian conception of the flesh depends, to a large extent, upon the possibility of theologizing the body of Christ. This body of Christ operates on countless registers, of which I will here isolate four: Jesus of Nazareth’s physical body of Christ, the resurrected body of Christ, the eucharistic body of Christ, and the communal body of Christ. While focus of later sections of this chapter will be centered on the latter—the communal body of Christ, insofar as that language appears with particular regularity in the writings of Paul—I would like to at least briefly gesture toward the key role played by the first three notions of the body of Christ, insofar as these directly inform the latter. For, any Christian theology of the flesh must situate itself in relation to the incarnational logic of the *assumptio carnis*—the Word that “became flesh and lived among us” (John 1.14).

A. The Physical Body of Christ

From the very beginning, Christian orthodoxy has insisted upon a certain materiality and physicality of the body of Christ. This demand is exemplified in Tertullian’s, *De Carne Christi*, dedicated as it is to the task of demonstrating the reality of Christ’s flesh—it’s “solidity” [*solidam*].⁵³ Without rehearsing the entirety of his arguments, this short text may be summarized in the following manner: contrary to heretical teachings, the reality of the Christ’s flesh is attested

⁵² Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 18.

⁵³ Tertullian attempts to feel the weight of the flesh of the incarnate Word in all its solidity and makes of his weight the defense against all our attempts to angelize the Incarnation.” Emmanuel Falque, *God, the Flesh, and the Other: From Irenaeus to Duns Scotus*, trans. William Christian Hackett (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 143.

by his earthly sufferings, his nativity, and his death. Speaking of the Christ's suffering, Tertullian writes that:

His very sufferings and the very contumely He endured bespeak it all. The sufferings attested His human flesh, the contumely proved its abject condition. ... He hungered under the devil's temptation; He thirsted with the woman of Samaria; He wept over Lazarus; He trembles at death (for 'the flesh,' as He says, 'is weak'); at last, He pours out His blood.⁵⁴

In like manner, the birth and death of Christ bespeak a mortality and finitude only possible for a fully incarnate being.⁵⁵ Indeed, according to Tertullian these two are but one and the same condition: "Christ, however, having been sent to die, had necessarily to be also born, that He might be capable of death; for nothing is in the habit of dying but that which is born. ... The law which makes us die is the cause of our being born."⁵⁶ Therefore, a being that is capable of death must first have been capable of birth, and moreover a birth into an earthly flesh—for against Marcion, Valentinus, and those who would contend that the Christ was clothed in a spiritual, celestial, or angelic body, Tertullian insists upon the mundane condition of the Christ's incarnation. "Christ," Tertullian insists, "had human flesh derived from man, and not spiritual, and that His flesh was not composed of soul, nor of stellar substance, and thus it was not an imaginary flesh."⁵⁷ Quite to the contrary, being born into flesh, the Christ is composed of the specific material flesh of human being with its associated members: "this flesh suffused with blood, built up with bones, interwoven

⁵⁴ Tertullian, "On the Flesh of Christ" trans. Dr. Holmes in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 3: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 530.

⁵⁵ "Since, however, it exists, it must needs have a something through which it exists. If it has this something, it must be its body. Everything which exists is a bodily existence sui generis. Nothing lacks bodily existence but that which is non-existent." *Ibid.*, 531.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 526-527.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 534.

with nerves, entwined with veins, a flesh which knows how to be born, and how to die, human without a doubt, as born of a human being.”⁵⁸

Nevertheless, despite this early Christian emphasis upon Jesus’ physical body, one immediately discovers a paucity of literary evidence regarding his sexual body. The reader of the New Testament may be struck by “the almost ritual silence of Jesus’ sexuality”⁵⁹ and sexual body within the text—Althaus-Reid marks Jesus’ circumcision in Luke’s Gospel as the only exception.⁶⁰ Furthermore, one finds no references by which Jesus’ sexual practices or orientation might be discerned. Nevertheless, recent queer theologians have offered a number of speculative reconstructions of Jesus’ sexuality and sexual embodiment. Thus one will now regularly find scholars arguing that Jesus was bisexual, homosexual, transgender, and/or intersex.⁶¹ Yet, despite the constructive-theological use of these arguments, their speculative character offers little help in a discussion of Jesus’ sexual embodiment. As Althaus-Reid notes in her own discussion of the Bi/Christ: “the question of a Bi/Christ is related not to the sexual performances of Jesus, which we

⁵⁸ Ibid., 525.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 107.

⁶⁰ “After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Luke 2.21). If one follows Williams, then one might also perhaps add the fragment of the so-called “Secret Gospel of Mark” discovered in a disputed letter of Clement of Alexandria. Robert Williams, *Just as I Am: A Practical Guide to Being Out, Proud, and Christian* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992).

⁶¹ For Jesus as bisexual, see: Nancy Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995); Laurel Dykstra, “Jesus, Bread, Wine, and Roses: A Bisexual Feminist at the Catholic Worker,” in Debra R. Kolodny (ed.) *Blessed Bi Spirit: Bisexual People of Faith* (New York: Continuum, 2000); and Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*. For Jesus as homosexual, see: Williams, *Just as I Am*. For Jesus as transgender, see: Kittredge Cherry, *Jesus in Love* (Berkeley: AndroGyne Press, 2006). For Jesus as intersex, see: Virginia Mollenkott, *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001). The list presented in this note is by no means complete, and is deeply indebted to Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 80-86.

ignore. As far we are concerned, Jesus may have been a transvestite, a butch lesbian, a gay or a heterosexual person.”⁶² *We simply do not know the sexual status of Jesus of Nazareth.*⁶³

Despite this uncertainty regarding the particularities of Jesus’ sexuality, it may nevertheless be possible to speak in general terms of the necessity of Jesus’ sexual embodiment by drawing upon the Chalcedon affirmation of the full humanity of the incarnate Christ, and—as Tertullian seeks to show—that this incarnation necessitates that the Christ take on flesh in the full human sense. That is to say, insofar as the Christ bore a fully human flesh, so too did the Christ bear a sexual flesh. Turning again to the patristics, one finds precisely this argument in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Oratio Catechetica*. There, Gregory contends against those who dismiss the incarnation on the grounds that taking on flesh would contaminate the Christ with the evils of materiality. Against this view, Gregory insists that only moral evil corrupts, insofar as it is created by the divine, material nature is in itself good: “the only thing which is essentially degraded is moral evil or whatever has an affinity with such evil; whereas the orderly process of Nature, arranged as it has been by the Divine will and law, is beyond the reach of any misrepresentation on the score of wickedness.”⁶⁴ For Gregory, this argument applies not only to flesh as such, but in particular to flesh in its sexual character. Defending the natural birth of Jesus, he questions his interlocutors on the nativity:

If, then, the Deity is separate only from evil, and if there is no nature in evil, and if the mystery declares that God was born in man but not in evil; and if, for man,

⁶² Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 114.

⁶³ As Graham Ward notes, “we have no access to the body of the gendered Jew. So all those attempts to determine the sexuality of Jesus are simply more recent symptoms of the search for the Historical Jesus—which Schweitzer demonstrated was pointless at the beginning of this century.” Graham Ward, “Bodies: The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ” in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 177.

⁶⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, “The Great Catechism” in Philip Schaff et al. (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Series II: Volume V: Apologetic Works*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 497 (Chapter XXVIII).

there is but one way of entrance upon life, namely that by which the embryo passes on to the stage of life, what other mode of entrance upon life would they prescribe for God?⁶⁵

Rather, he contends that “the whole organization of the body is of equal value throughout.”⁶⁶

Indeed, he will go further, insisting that the unique status of sexual members in reproduction grant them a uniquely honorable role. In this argument, worth citing in whole, he writes:

For the whole arrangement of the bodily organs and limbs has been constructed with one end in view, and that is, the continuance in life of humanity; and while the other organs of the body conserve the present actual vitality of men, each being apportioned to a different operation, and by their means the faculties of sense and action are exercised, the generative organs on the contrary involve a forecast of the future, introducing as they do, by themselves, their counteracting transmission for our race. Looking, therefore, to their utility, to which of those parts which are deemed more honourable are these inferior? Nay, than which must they not in all reason be deemed more worthy of honour? For not by the eye, or ear, or tongue, or any other sense, is the continuation of our race carried on. These, as has been remarked, pertain to the enjoyment of the present. But by those other organs the immortality of humanity is secured, so that death, though ever operating against us, thus in a certain measure becomes powerless and ineffectual, since Nature, to baffle him, is ever as it were throwing herself into the breach through those who come successively into being. What unseemliness, then, is contained in our revelation of God mingled with the life of humanity through those very means by which Nature carries on the combat against death?⁶⁷

Certainly, an analysis informed by contemporary queer theory—particularly Lee Edelman’s critique of “reproductive futurism” (see: Chapter 3)—should remain wary of an argument for the dignity of the sexual member that subordinates all sexual functions to reproduction. Indeed, even seemingly radical reconstructions of Jesus’ sexuality can often serve to reify a distinctly heterosexual theology. Althaus-Reid, for example, shows that an emphasis upon Jesus’ penis often merely serves to reinforce an implicit heteronormativity. “The ‘Jesus=Penis’ discourse,” she

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

writes, “is part of a homophobic discourse, which homologizes heterosexuality and normativity through a discourse of biology and (selective) penile penetration.”⁶⁸ This approach remains problematic, even in instances where Jesus’ exclusive masculinity appears to be placed in question. For example, medieval scholars such as Caroline Walker Bynum and Amy Hollywood have shown the extremely prominent use of female imagery in the iconography of Jesus and the mystical writings of the late Medieval period⁶⁹—most prominently the use of vaginal imagery in the portrayal of the wound on Jesus’ side.⁷⁰ But while such discoveries have opened new opportunities in queer theology—such as Virginia Mollenkott’s use of this work in *Omnigender*’s argument for an intersex Christ—they often presuppose the same implicit heterosexual logic of reproduction that one finds in Nyssa.⁷¹ As Linn Marie Tonstad suggests, “the womb-wound encapsulates the way difference—especially sexual difference—is represented in heterosexual and agonistic ways.”⁷² Thus, despite the present dissertation’s argument for the theological power of thinking the member of the flesh—Althaus-Reid rightly notes that the mere presence of Jesus’ sexual member, divorced from a radically queer hermeneutic, is itself insufficient. The member of the

⁶⁸ Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 106.

⁶⁹ Thus, as Bynum writes, “I wish to call attention to artistic depictions that suggest another sex for Christ’s body—depictions that suggest that Christ’s flesh was sometimes seen as female, as lactating and giving birth” Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 82. See also: Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁷⁰ “No matter how implausible it might seem to us to understand Christ’s side wound as a bloody slit that feminizes and eroticizes his corporeality, this is in fact what some medieval women (and men) did.” Amy Hollywood, “Queering the Beguines: Mechthild of Marburg, Hadewijch of Anvers, Marguerite Porete,” in Gerard Laughlin (ed.), *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 164.

⁷¹ Here I should gesture towards the discussion of Lee Edelman’s notion of “reproductive futurity” in chapter 3.

⁷² Linn Marie Tonstad, “Everything Queer, Nothing Radical?” *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 92 (2016), 121. Or again, “the womb-wound in all its forms only extends divine phallicism.” Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 190.

flesh is a necessary, but insufficient condition of a post-heteronormative theology of the body of Christ.

Nevertheless, this should not diminish the illustrative nature of Gregory of Nyssa's argument. For, Nyssa here illustrates the explicit concern among the early church to not only insist upon the full incarnation of the Christ, but moreover, to insist that this incarnation was intimately bound to questions of sexuality—both, in the case of the nativity (a concern likewise found in Tertullian) and in Jesus' own subsequent sexual embodiment.⁷³ For both the evangelists and later Christian theologians this concern for the flesh of the Christ and its sexual status not only persists throughout the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, but into the resurrection and beyond.⁷⁴ Therefore, Tertullian's concern for the materiality of Jesus' flesh in *De Carne Christi*, for example, is intimately bound to the second notion of the body of Christ—the resurrectional body.

B. The Resurrected Body of Christ

In *De Carne Christi*, Tertullian condemns the heretics who “cannot but be apprehensive that, if it be once determined that Christ's flesh was human, a presumption would immediately arise in opposition to them, that that flesh must by all means rise again.”⁷⁵ That is to say, for Tertullian, the heresies against which he contends not only strike at Christological doctrines of the Christ's

⁷³ Gregory of Nyssa here, “extols human genitalia as a matter from honor rather than for shame.” Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 275. As Symeon the New Theologian similarly remarks: “the members and parts which one is obliged to hide are unceasing prayer of the mind, the sweetness which derives from the shedding of tears, the joy of the heart and its inexpressible consolation” St. Symeon the New Theologian, *On The Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses, Vol. 2: On Virtue and Christian Life*, trans. Alexander Golitzin (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 24.

⁷⁴ In the words of Gregory of Nazianzen, “if any assert that He has now put off His holy flesh, and that His Godhead is stripped of the body, and deny that He is now with His body and will come again with it, let him not see the glory of His Coming.” Gregory Nazianzen, “To Cleodnius the Priest Against Apollinarius (Ep. Cl.),” in Philip Schaff et al (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Series II: Volume 7: Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 440.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 521.

human nature, but at the same moment put the very reality of salvation in question; for, “in putting on our flesh, He made it His own; in making it His own, He made it sinless.”⁷⁶

Likewise, in the Gospels, one finds that the evangelists go to great lengths to highlight the continued fully-embodied character of the resurrected Christ. *The resurrection of the Christ likewise means the resurrection of the bodily members of the Christ.* Here the Gospels consistently emphasize that the manifest Christ is no phantom, but an incarnate body of flesh. Thus despite the Christ’s apparent miraculous capacities—passing through locked doors, traveling vast distances suddenly, etc.—the texts repeatedly foreclose the possibility of a spectral manifestation. In the Gospel according to Luke, for example, the Christ appears to his disciples in an instant, and “they were startled and terrified, and thought that there were seeing a ghost” (Luke 24.37). Such ghostly apparitions are by no means completely foreign to the scriptural tradition—the medium of Endor, at the prompting of Saul, for example, conjures the ghostly apparition of Samuel (1 Samuel 28)—but in Luke, the evangelist insists upon the incarnate resurrected body of Christ, complete with its full diversity of incarnate members: “look at my hands and my feet [τὰς χεῖράς μου καὶ τοὺς πόδας μου]; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones [σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα] as you see that I have” (Luke 24.39).

Likewise in the Gospel according to John, the apostle Thomas—despite being passed down the tradition as the doubter *par excellence*—appears to embody precisely the same concern for incarnation.

But Thomas (who was called the twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe. (John 20.24-25)

⁷⁶ Ibid., 536. Here Tertullian expresses a notion akin to that popularized by Gregory of Nazianzen in the words: “for that which he has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.” Gregory Nazianzen, “To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius (Ep. CI.),” 440.

For Thomas, no mere phantom will do. The resurrection hope of the gospel demands an incarnate resurrection of an incarnate Christ. As Paul articulates, “if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is worthless, and so is your faith” (1 Cor. 15.14). For, according to Paul, the resurrection of the body of Christ is the “first fruits” (1 Cor. 15.20) of a general resurrection of the dead, not only in spirit, but in body. Certainly, Paul continues, such bodies will not be identical to the bodies that have preceded: “it is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. ... flesh and blood [σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα] cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor. 15.44, 50). But this recourse to the imperishable spiritual body should not itself be overly “spiritualized.” While incorruptible, the spiritual body is nonetheless still, for Paul, *body* [σῶμα].⁷⁷ Indeed, Paul’s condemnation of the flesh [σὰρξ] must be read in the context of his broader polemic against sin [ἁμαρτία], corruption [φθορὰ], and the world [κόσμος]. When Paul critiques flesh, he does not critique incarnate membership, which for him bears the name body [σῶμα]. Thus, despite the similarity of phrasing, Paul’s “flesh and blood” [σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα] should not be read as analogous to Luke’s “flesh and bones” [σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα]. Rather than incarnate membership, what Paul condemns under the name of flesh is the reign of sin within the world, a reign that condemns all to death and corruption. In the words of Tertullian, “what has been abolished in Christ is not *carnem peccati*, ‘sinful flesh,’ but *peccatum carnis*, ‘sin in the flesh,’—not the material thing, but its condition; not the substance, but its flaw.”⁷⁸ Indeed, Paul’s account of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus (1 Cor 15.3-11) appear to directly cohere with that of the gospels. Therefore, if the resurrection of the Christ constitutes the first fruits of the resurrection, and therefore the first

⁷⁷ As Tertullian argues, “This passage, however, has nothing to do with any difference of substance.” *Ibid.*, 529.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 535.

image of the spiritual body—as John the Elder notes “when he is revealed, we will be like him” (1 John 3.2)—one might rightly argue that the spiritual body of 1st Corinthians might not only bear the incarnate members of the pre-resurrection Christ (Luke’s “τὰς χεῖράς μου καὶ τοὺς πόδας ... σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα”), but moreover, according to John, bears the very marks of the crucifixion:

But [Thomas] said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20.25-28)

As in the case of Jesus’ physical or material flesh, the question of sexuality is likewise largely absent from the gospel accounts of the resurrected Christ. But, if we again assume an analogy between the resurrected flesh of Christ and the general resurrection (1 Cor. 15.20, 1 John 3.2), then Jesus’ words in the synoptic gospels—that “at the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage” (Matt. 22.30)—suggest an evacuation of sexuality in the resurrected body of Christ.⁷⁹ Yet, this approach is not uniformly affirmed by the early church. Quite to the contrary, in the concluding passages of Augustine’s *De civitate dei contra paganos*, for example,

⁷⁹ This view is affirmed by Gregory of Nyssa, for example, who explicitly evokes this passage in Matthew in his argument that the resurrection be understood as a return to a prelapsarian state of sexual indifference. Thus he writes of creation that “man, then, was made in the image of God; that is, the universal nature, the thing like God; not part of the whole. ... But as He perceived in our created nature the bias towards evil, and the fact that after its voluntary fall from equality with the angels it would acquire a fellowship with the lower nature, He mingled, for this reason, with His own image, an element of the irrational (for the distinction of male and female does not exist in the Divine and blessed nature); — transferring, I say, to man the special attribute of the irrational formation, He bestowed increase upon our race not according to the lofty character of our creation; for it was not when He made that which was in His own image that He bestowed on man the power of increasing and multiplying; but when He divided it by sexual distinctions, then He said, Increase and multiply, and replenish the earth (Genesis 1:28). For this belongs not to the Divine, but to the irrational element, as the history indicates when it narrates that these words were first spoken by God in the case of the irrational creatures; since we may be sure that, if He had bestowed on man, before imprinting on our nature the distinction of male and female, the power for increase conveyed by this utterance, we should not have needed this form of generation by which the brutes are generated” (Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man,” in Philip Schaff et al. (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Series II, Volume V: Apologetic Works*, [Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994], 411-412 [Chapter XXII]). Also noting, of the resurrection, that “the resurrection promises us nothing else than the restoration of the fallen to their ancient state” (Ibid., 411). For the distinction between Augustine and Nyssa on this question, see: Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 281-295.

Augustine directly reflects upon the question of post-resurrection sexual difference. Or, as he frames it, “will women rise as women?”⁸⁰ Against the Manichean orientation of his interlocutors, Augustine contends that, indeed, “both sexes will rise.”⁸¹ In this complex passage, Augustine deftly moves across the various notions of the body of Christ—connecting the creation of woman from the rib of a sleeping man, to the emergence of the church from the pierced side of the “sleeping” (dead) Christ. Etymologically linking this analogy, Augustine notes that the former is said to be “edified” [*aedificationem*] and the latter to be “built up” [*aedificavit*]:⁸² “for the scripture used this very word,” Augustine writes, “not saying ‘He formed’ or ‘framed,’ but ‘built her up into a woman;’ whence also the apostle speaks of the *edification* of the body of Christ, which is the Church.”⁸³ Because of this “edification” of the woman, whose very existence is a premonition of the emergence of the church, Augustine insists—against Aristotelian orthodoxy⁸⁴—that the female sex is not merely a corruption of the male, but a necessary component of reality, and thus a necessary component of heavenly reality. “The woman, therefore,” he argues, “is a creature of

⁸⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Barnes and Noble Press, 2006), 999.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² See Latin Vulgate: Gen 2.22, “et aedificavit Dominus Deus costam quam tulerat de Adam in mulierem et adduxit eam ad Adam” and Eph. 4.12 “ad consummationem sanctorum in opus ministerii in aedificationem corporis Christi.”

⁸³ Augustine, *The City of God*, 999.

⁸⁴ “For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male.” Aristotle, “On the Generation of Animals,” in Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1144 (II.3). Ostensibly, Thomas Aquinas will affirm this treatment, writing: “as regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence; such as that of a south wind, which is moist, as the Philosopher observes (De Gener. Animal. iv, 2).” Yet, he will continue, “on the other hand, as regards human nature in general, woman is not misbegotten, but is included in nature’s intention as directed to the work of generation.” Ultimately concluding that, “it was necessary for woman to be made,” and therefore striking out a position more akin to Augustine. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (Cincinnati: Benziger Brothers, 1920), I-I.92.1.

God even as the man; but by her creation prefigured, as has been said, Christ and the Church. He, then, who created both sexes will restore both.”⁸⁵ In this way, Augustine draws the question of the resurrected human body into dialogue with the Christ’s incarnate body and the nuptial conception of the Church (body of Christ)—a complex interplay wherein each facet interprets the others.⁸⁶ This rhetorical strategy underlies the necessity of thinking the multiple layers of the body of Christ together in any discussion of sexuality and the body of Christ, and serves as an impetus for turning to the third—eucharistic—conception of the body of Christ.

C. The Eucharistic Body of Christ

In 1st Corinthians, Paul offers the first attestation of the institution of the eucharist, writing:

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body [τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα] that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.⁸⁷

According to Graham Ward this eucharistic annunciation of the last supper functions as “the displacement of the physical body”⁸⁸ of Christ, that is at the same moment a dissemination of the

⁸⁵ Ibid., 999.

⁸⁶ One finds an analogous, but contemporary, interpretation of Jesus’ words in John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* which suggests that, in saying “they will take neither wife nor husband” “he [Jesus] does not affirm that this man of the ‘future world’ will no longer be male and female as he was ‘from the beginning.’ It is thus evident that the meaning of being, with respect to the body, male and female in the ‘future world’ should be sought outside of marriage and procreation, but there is no reason to seek it outside of that which (independently from the blessing of procreation) derives from the very mystery of creation and thereafter also forms the deepest structure of man’s history on earth” (John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein [Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006], 398-399). Here, and always noting John Paul II’s extreme gender and sexual essentialism, it is nevertheless noteworthy that he insists upon the perpetuation of sexual difference into the eschaton, and even admits a break with the biological-procreative logic of sexuality that generally marks his writing.

⁸⁷ This institution will be reiterated with minor variations in the synoptics: Mark 14; Matthew 26; Luke 22.

⁸⁸ Ward, “Bodies,” 167.

body of Christ. Thus, paradoxically, here “the body of Christ keeps absenting itself from the text”⁸⁹ (in the crucifixion and ascension) leaving a vacuum or lack, while at the same moment appearing in another register.⁹⁰ It is for this reason that Ward insists, “it is not that Jesus at this point stops being a physical presence. It is more that his physical presence can extend itself to incorporate other bodies, like bread, and make them extensions of his own.”⁹¹ The eucharistic body does not cease to be body or embodied, but this incarnation takes on a distinct form.⁹²

This extension or dissemination occurs materially in the consumption of the eucharistic host: as the Gospel of Matthew writes: “take, *eat*; this is my body [Λάβετε, φάγετε; τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου]” (Matt. 26.26). Through this consumption, the body of Christ first passes from an individuated being—that body, there, of Jesus of Nazareth—to a communal being, anticipating already its consummation in the ecclesiastical body of Christ.⁹³ As one reads in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “the Eucharist makes the Church. Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body—the Church. Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation into the Church.”⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Ibid., 174.

⁹⁰ This logic of dissemination is key, as it distinguishes Ward’s account of the displacement of the body of Christ from the Hegelian scheme (G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: One-Volume Edition: The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006], 464-475), as it appears, for example, in Michel de Certeau. For Ward, on the contrary, the body is not preeminently lack, rather “the body of Jesus Christ, the body of God, is permeable, transcorporeal, transpositional.” Ward, “Bodies,” 176.

⁹¹ Ibid., 167.

⁹² The embodied character of the eucharist has been engaged phenomenologically through the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet (see: *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeline Beaumont [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995]) and Jean-Yves Lacoste (see: *Experience and the Absolute*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skeban [New York: Fordham University Press, 2004]).

⁹³ “The eucharistic fracture, repeating differently the crucifixion, disseminates the body—of Christ and of the Church as body of Christ.” Ward, “Bodies,” 171.

⁹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: With Modifications from the Editio Typica*, (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 391 (Part 2, Section 2, Chapter 1, Article 3, VII).

Insofar as it constitutes a communal incarnation of the body of Christ, the eucharistic institution abstracts from the (presumed) sexual body of Jesus—both prior to and following the resurrection: “Jesus’ body as bread is no longer Christ as simply and biologically male.”⁹⁵ Yet this by no means necessitates an evacuation of sexuality from the eucharistic body nor from the eucharistic experience. On the contrary, throughout church history one consistently finds the eucharist to be a site of erotic desire and sexual contestation. As Lacan suggests, the eucharist marks a distinct oral *jouissance*—often a sublimation of copulation⁹⁶—at the heart of Christian liturgical life: “Christ, even when resurrected from the dead, is valued for his body, and his body is the means by which communion in his presence is incorporation—oral drive—with which Christ’s wife, the Church as it is called, contents itself very well, having nothing to expect from copulation. ... Everything is exhibition of the body evoking *jouissance* ... but without copulation.”⁹⁷ In this sense, the eucharist can indeed appear to express a certain “*jouissance* of the body,”⁹⁸ appearing in both sublimated and literal form.

This relationship is most clearly articulated in Catholic liturgy and doctrine, which at almost every turn binds the eucharist to sexuality, marriage, and reproduction—even if in an often un-thematized manner.⁹⁹ It is, in this regard, unsurprising that the eucharist holds primacy of place

⁹⁵ Ward, “Bodies,” 168.

⁹⁶ “For the kind of (social) bond it proposes, Christianity does not need copulation, which functions as the superfluous element, something on top of what would be (ideally) needed” (Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?* [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017], 12). One might here recall Paul’s words to the church in Corinth: “to the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am” (1 Cor. 7.8).

⁹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973, Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 113.

⁹⁸ Zupančič, *What is Sex?*, 14.

⁹⁹ One sees in the mid-term report of the 2014 Synod on the Family, for example, calls for “a greater theological study ... starting with the links between the sacrament of marriage and the Eucharist in relation to the Church-sacrament.” Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem* (Vatican City: 2014), 8.

in the Catholic liturgy of matrimony, and that the questions of eucharistic participation by couples using contraception, mixed religious households, and those who have undertaken divorce are common.¹⁰⁰ “There is no doubt that theological calculations have managed to reduce the list of those invited to the gift-festivities of the sacramental acts to a select number,” Althaus-Reid remarks, “sexual calculations, to be more specific, are very alienating in the gift-economy of, for instance, the Eucharist.”¹⁰¹ Yet, the erotic dimension of the eucharist is often much more explicitly apparent than these doctrinal disputes regarding marriage and reproduction might suggest—as is manifest most clearly in the medieval mystical traditions.

To offer only a single example, one might turn to the thirteenth century Flemish Beguine: Hadewijch. Throughout her poems and writings Hadewijch portrays an—at times playful, at times

¹⁰⁰ For the question of contraception, see, for example, the concern expressed by the 2014 Synod on the Family regarding those who refrain from confessing the use of contraception before partaking in Eucharist: “in this regard, almost all the responses mention that, in areas strongly influenced by secularization, couples generally do not consider the use of contraceptive methods to be a sin. As a result, they tend not to consider it a matter for confession or a problem in approaching the Eucharist.” Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *The Pastoral Challenges of The Family in the Context of Evangelization: Instrumentum Laboris* (Vatican City: 2014), 129.

On mixed religious families, the USCCB notes, “every marriage between Christians gives rise to a domestic church, though *marriages between two Catholics most fully reflect the life of the Church*, because ordinarily *only Catholic couples can fully participate in the sacraments of the Church, including the Eucharist*.” USCCB, “Marriage”, 40 [emphasis added].

For the question of divorce, the traditional view is clearly articulated by the USCCB: “we understand the pain of those for whom divorce seemed the only recourse. We urge them to make frequent use of the sacraments, especially the Sacraments of Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation. We also offer encouragement to those who have divorced and remarried civilly. Although the Church cannot recognize such subsequent unions as valid marriages, she hopes that people in this situation will participate in parish life and attend the Sunday Eucharist, *even without receiving the Sacrament*.” USCCB, “Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan: A Pastoral Letter of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009), 25 [emphasis added]. The 2014 Synod on the Family appeared to seriously consider rescinding this doctrine, but ultimately affirmed the traditional view, writing: “the synod father also considered the possibility of giving the divorced and remarried access to the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Various synod fathers insisted on maintaining the present discipline, because of the constitutive relationship between participation in the Eucharist and communion with the Church as well as her teaching on the indissoluble character of marriage.” Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization: Relatio Synodi* (Vatican City: 2014), 52.

¹⁰¹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 70.

fraught¹⁰²—erotic interchange between the soul and the Love (*Minne*) of God. Despite the clear influence of the Song of Songs and its interpretive history, Hadewijch’s writings on Love are rendered more sexually complex by her use of medieval courtly poetry as a theological model. Thus, whereas traditional interpretations of the Song of Songs, from Origen to von Balthasar, read God as a masculine figure positioned against *His* passive bride (the church), Hadewijch institutes a gender inversion, whereby God is generally figured as the feminine *Minne*,¹⁰³ while Hadewijch herself is portrayed as the chivalrous (and masculine) courtly knight pursuing his inaccessible beloved.¹⁰⁴ This imagery of the soul as a knight in pursuit of its courtly beloved is paralleled by a number of other ostensibly somatic or erotic images; from courtly flirtation, to marriage, sexual consummation (including orgasm), impregnation, gestation, and birth; an entire range of sexual and somatic phenomena permeate Hadewijch's writings. The result is a complex—and by contemporary standards, surprisingly queer¹⁰⁵—literature wherein masculine and feminine, passive and active, pain and pleasure, penetration and reception, desire and hate, all twist together in a Gordian knot of erotic—and remarkably embodied¹⁰⁶—mystical imagery.

¹⁰² “Hell is the seventh name / Of this Love wherein I suffer. / For there is nothing Love does not engulf and damn, / And no one who falls into her / And whom she seizes come out again, / Because no grace exists there. / As Hell turns everything to ruin, / In Love nothing else is acquired / But disquiet and torture without pity; / Forever to be in unrest, / Forever assault and new persecution; / To be wholly devoured and engulfed / In her unfathomable essence, / To founder unceasingly in heat and cold, / In the deep, / insurmountable darkness of Love. / This outdoes the torments of hell. / He who knows Love and her comings and goings / Has experienced and can understand / Why it is truly appropriate / That Hell should be the highest name of Love.” Hadewijch, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, trans. Mother Columba Hart (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 357.

¹⁰³ In Hadewijch, Love is almost always presented in the feminine, exempting the few cases in which the mystical seeker is presented as a “bride” and Love as a “Bridegroom.” E.g. “And the second eagle said: 'The loved one does not yet know what her highest way is!' and a third said: 'The loved one does not yet know what the great kingdom is that she as bride shall receive from her bridegroom.'” *Ibid.*, 294.

¹⁰⁴ “God knows, in the bliss there always remains woe. For the heart of the courtly lover, however, that is the law of chivalry. The only rest of such a heart is to do its utmost for the sake of its beloved.” *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁰⁵ See: Hollywood, “Queering the Beguines.”

¹⁰⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum describes this as the peculiarly “somatic quality of women's piety” (Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 16). Hadewijch will constantly write, for example, of the “touch,” “feel,” or

Together with her poetry and letters, Hadewijch collected a number of visions. Of particular note is the regular convergence of two notions in these visions: eucharist as the impetus for an experience of *unio mystica* and the presentation of that union as a sexual embrace. The clearest example of this tendency is her seventh vision, appropriately titled “Oneness in the Eucharist.” There Hadewijch recounts her experience of a Pentecost mass, wherein she was struck with an irrepressible desire for God:

My heart and my veins and all my limbs trembled and quivered with eager desire and, as often occurred with me, such madness and fear beset my mind that it seemed to me I did not content my Beloved, and that my Beloved did not fulfill my desire, so that dying I must go mad, and going mad I must die. On that day my mind was beset so fearfully and so painfully by desirous love that all my separate limbs threatened to break, and all my veins were in travail.¹⁰⁷

Hadewijch’s description of the content of this desire flips effortlessly between erotic and traditional mystical imagery.¹⁰⁸ Thus she at once desires to “understand” and to “taste” Him; that “his Humanity should to the fullest extent be one in fruition with [her] humanity” and that “he might content [her] interiorly with his Godhead”; that she might be “God with God” and “experience nothing else but sweet love, embraces, and kisses.”¹⁰⁹

This experience reaches fruition at the eucharistic blessing. There the priest is transfigured into the Christ-child, bearing the bread of the ciborium and a chalice of wine. At once the Christ-

“embrace,” of Love (Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, 63, 69, 97, 98, 107, 108, 119, 140, 145, 156, 157, 158, 178, 197, 240, 267, 281, 286, 295, 324, 334, 344, 351.); the “kiss” of Love (Ibid., 84, 97, 107, 108, 119, 135, 235, 236, 281, 285, 295, 341, 342, 355, 356); and the “nourishment,” “consumption,” and “taste” of Love (Ibid., 69, 140, 141, 158, 197, 240, 246, 251, 252, 280, 334, 344, 353, 355, 356). In the words of the poet Alejandra Pizarnik, “En la noche a tu lado / las palabras son claves, son llaves. / el deseo de morir es rey. / Que tu cuerpo sea siempre / un amado espacio de revelaciones.” Alejandra Pizarnik, “Revelaciones” <https://www.poeticous.com/alejandra-pizarnik/revelaciones/> (accessed January 20, 2019).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 280.

¹⁰⁸ For, as Bataille argues, “what mysticism cannot put into words ... eroticism says.” Georges Bataille, *Eroticism* (London: Boyars, 1987), 269.

¹⁰⁹ Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, 280-281.

child is again transfigured into the adult Jesus: “with that he came in the form and clothing of a Man, as he was on the day when he gave us his Body for the first time.”¹¹⁰ As a man, the Christ gives Hadewijch the elements of the host, an act that Hadewijch experiences as sexual intimacy:

After that he came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him; and all my members felt his full felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. So I was outwardly satisfied and fully transported. . . . Then it was to me as if we were one without difference.¹¹¹

Here Hadewijch recounts an eucharistic vision that cannot be mistaken for anything other than sexual intimacy culminating in orgasm.¹¹² While this vision of sexual intimacy with God or the incarnate Christ is not unique in Hadewijch’s corpus,¹¹³ it is particularly noteworthy in the present context insofar as it illustrates the inseparability of sexual or erotic desire or experience from the eucharistic body. The thesis of the preceding chapters—that the flesh is inextricably a sexual flesh—applies even when one moves outside of the realm of the specific individual person.

This recognition will be essential to the following chapter, which will now fully turn to the logic of the communal or ecclesiastical body of Christ, but without forgetting that—like Hobbes’

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 281.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² “Hadewijch, in a Eucharistic vision of great beauty, describes mystical union with images that evoke female orgasm.” Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 169.

¹¹³ In her ninth letter, she writes: “with wondrous sweetness the loved one and the Beloved dwell one in the other, and how they penetrate each other in such a way that neither of the two distinguishes himself from the other. But they abide in one another in fruition, mouth in mouth, heart in heart, body in body, and soul in soul, while one sweet divine nature flows through them both” (Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, 66); and in her twelfth letter she writes: “think at all hours of God’s goodness, and regret that it is so untouched by us, while he has full fruition of it; and that we are exiled far from it, while he and his friends, in mutual interpenetration, enjoy such blissful fruition, and are flowing into his goodness and flowing out again in all good” (Ibid., 71). Moreover, this erotic mysticism is not unique to Hadewijch, it can be found in other Beguines (e.g. Marguerite Porete); in other female mystics, such as the 20th century mystic and philosopher Simone Weil, who describes “carnal love [as] a quest for the Incarnation” (Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, trans. Richard Rees [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970], 84); and even among male mystics (though less regularly), such as Symeon the New Theologian, who writes, “when, according to the invisible movements of your heart, you find yourself in this state, you will discover Him immediately embracing you and kissing you mystically, and bestowing on you a right spirit in your inward parts” (Symeon the New Theologian, *On The Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, Vol. 2, 110).

“corpore politico,” Husserl’s “Community of Love,” and Henry’s “mystical body”—the communal body politic is always grounded in the same syntheses that incarnate the flesh, and that these syntheses bear the marks of the member of the flesh, that remainder which resists easy identification and functions as the condition of all sexuality.

Chapter 8 - The Cut and the Body of Christ

All theology is sexual theology.

Marcella Althaus-Reid

§1. The Pauline Body of Christ

This final chapter will begin precisely where the previous chapter left off, completing the discussion of the body of Christ by turning toward the fourth and final sense of this term in the present context: the communal body of Christ; that is, the Christian community. The aim of this final chapter is neither to lionize nor to condemn the figure of the body of Christ, but rather, to suggest that this figure is deeply ambiguous; a site of hierarchical oppression that nevertheless may also constitute a site of transformation and emancipation. Like the previous chapter, the present discussion employs a theological method that privileges the voices of the early Patristic fathers—but not in an uncritical manner. Indeed figures like Cyprian and Augustine will here be directly contrasted with one another, in order to draw out the liberative potential of the body of Christ.

A. The Pauline *Corpus*

Throughout his *oeuvre*, Paul (and the deutero-Pauline authors) repeatedly employs the analogical figure of the “Body of Christ” as a metaphor for the religious communities of the early Christian

churches.¹ This includes passages in 1st Corinthians, Romans, Colossians, and Ephesians.² While the discussion below will draw from all three passages, 1st Corinthians offers the fullest and most worked-out account of the Body of Christ, and will therefore serve as the centerpiece of the present discussion. For that reason, it will be helpful to begin by citing this passage in full:

Now concerning spiritual gifts [πνευματικῶν], brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ... Now there are varieties of gifts [χαρισμάτων], but the same [αὐτὸ] Spirit; and there are varieties [διαρέσεις] of services, but the same [αὐτὸς] Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same [αὐτὸς] God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given [δίδεται] the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ... All these are activated by one and the same [ἐν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ] Spirit, who allots to each one individually [ἰδίᾳ ἐκάστῳ] just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one [τὸ σῶμα ἓν ἐστίν] and has many members [μέλη πολλά], and all the members of the body [τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος], though many, are one body [πολλά ὄντα ἓν ἐστίν σῶμα], so it is with Christ. For in the one [ἐνί] Spirit we were all baptized into one body [ἐν σῶμα]—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one [ἐν] Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many [σῶμα οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν μέλος, ἀλλὰ πολλά]. If the foot [πούς] would say, “Because I am not a hand [χεῖρ], I do not belong to the body [σώματος],” that would not make it any less a part of the body [ἐκ τοῦ σώματος]. And if the ear [οὖς] would say, “Because I am not an eye [ὀφθαλμός], I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body [ἐκ τοῦ σώματος]. If the whole body [ὅλον τὸ σῶμα] were an eye [ὀφθαλμός], where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged [ἔθετο] the members [μέλη] in the body, each one of them [ἐν ἑκαστὸν αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ σώματι], as he chose. If all were a single member [ἐν μέλος], where would the body [σῶμα] be? As it is, there are many members [πολλά μὲν μέλη], yet one body [ἐν δὲ σῶμα]. The eye [ὀφθαλμός] cannot say to the hand [χειρὶ], “I have no need of you,” nor again the head [κεφαλῇ] to the feet [ποσίν], “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker [μέλη τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενέστερα] are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members [ἀσχήμονα] are treated with greater respect [εὐσχήμονα]; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so constituted the body [συνεκέρασεν τὸ σῶμα], giving the

¹ “The Church in its identification becomes the body of Christ. This identification is not the logic of A=A—ultimately the vicious logic of Narcissus. It is the identification of analogy—a participation in and through difference that enables co-creativity.” Graham Ward, “Bodies: The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ” in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 172.

² 1 Corinthians 12.12-27, Romans 12.3-8, Colossians 1.15-20, 3.14-16, Ephesians 1.22-23, 4.1-16, 5.25-32.

greater honor to the inferior member [ὑστερουμένῳ], that there may be no division [σχίσμα] within the body [σώματι], but the members [μέλη] may have the same care for one another. If one member [ἐν μέλος] suffers, all the members [πάντα τὰ μέλη] suffer together [συμπάσχει] with it; if one member [μέλος] is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ [σῶμα Χριστοῦ] and individually members [μέλη ἐκ μέρους] of it. (Corinthians 12.12-27)

In order to introduce Paul’s notion of the body of Christ, I will here seek to unpack the specific language that Paul employs to discuss the body, highlighting the rhetorical and ideological background that they assume.

Body: σῶμα. Throughout these passages Paul draws upon an existing and well-established metaphor for thinking about the burgeoning Christian churches: the social body—the *corpore politico*.³ Here Paul employs precisely the same language with which he will speak of the individual human body, the resurrected body, and the eucharistic body: σῶμα (*sōma*, body). As he writes, for example, “just as the body [σῶμα] is one ... so it is with Christ” (1 Cor. 12.12). In fact, Paul will directly connect the notion of the Body of Christ to the eucharistic body, briefly introducing the notion two chapters earlier with the assertion: “because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10.17). As was noted in the discussion of the resurrected body above, this notion of the body should not be confused with the Pauline usage of the flesh [σὰρξ], which tends to refer not to the incarnate being-body of the human person, but rather to the reign of sin against the reign of spirit.⁴ In fact, only on one occasion will

³ “In order to press the point made in the previous paragraph, the need for diversity within unity, Paul adopts a common analogy from antiquity and applies it to the Corinthian situation.” Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians in The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (NICNT), eds. Ned B. Stonehouse et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 600-601.

⁴ “It is noteworthy that, whereas he speaks of the solidarity between the Messiah and ethnic Jews in terms of ‘flesh’ (9:4), something has happened to create a different unity, a different solidarity, which is spoken of instead in terms of ‘body’. Compare Paul’s language about ‘my flesh’ in 11:14, the background to which is found in 2 Sam 5:1//1 Chr 11:1, where the tribes of Israel say to David, ‘We are your bone and flesh’ (see also Judg 9:2, 2 Sam 19:12-13). This substitution of terms fits so well with Paul’s regular language about the corruptible dying self (‘flesh’) and the self that is to be resurrected (‘body’) that we may well wonder whether he is not suggesting that this new entity, the ‘one body in Christ; as here or the ‘body of Christ’ as in 1 Corinthians, is as it were the resurrected version of Israel

the language of σὰρξ appear in the context of the body of Christ—“for no one ever hates his own flesh [σάρκα]” (Ephesians 5.29)—a slippage that reflects the scholarly consensus that Ephesians was not authored by Paul and/or serves as an allusion to the language of the Septuagint’s translation of Genesis 2.24: “for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh [σάρκα μίαν].”⁵

Member(s): μέλος/μέλη. Central to this metaphor is a juxtaposition of the body with its various members [μέλη]. Here, one should strike out any notion of membership in the contemporary sense. As N. T. Wright notes, “we are so used to the word ‘member’ referring to someone who belongs to a society or club that we are in danger of ignoring the fact that here ‘member’ (μέλη *melē*) means ‘parts of the body,’ and belongs with the extended metaphor.”⁶ For Paul, a body cannot be understood apart from its composition as a differentiated series of individual and unique members, each granted a unique role. Thus, he contrasts “the whole body” [ὅλον τὸ σῶμα] with a variety of specifically demarcated members: foot [πούς], hand [χεῖρ], ear [οὔς], eye [ὀφθαλμός], head [κεφαλῆ], internal organs [μέλη τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενέστερα], and genitalia [ἀσχήμονα].⁷ Each of these members is noted for its specific capacities—the eye for seeing, the ear for hearing, etc.⁸—and therefore serve as a metaphor, particularly in 1st Corinthians and Romans, of the distribution of various spiritual gifts [πνευματικῶν, χαρισμάτων, δόματα] in the

according to the flesh’.” N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Vol. X*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 710.

⁵ Ephesians 5.31, citing: “ἕνεκεν τούτου καταλείψει ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ προσκολληθήσεται πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν.” Genesis 2.24 (LXX).

⁶ Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” 710.

⁷ For the reading of “μέλη τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενέστερα” as internal organs, see: Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 609. For the reading of “ἀσχήμονα” as genitalia, see the extended discussion in the introduction.

⁸ “Not all the members [μέλη πάντα οὐ] have the same [αὐτὴν] function,” Romans 12.4.

early church, of their ethnic diversity (“Jews or Greeks”), and of their socio-economic diversity (“slaves or free”).

One and many: ἐν/ἐνὶ/μίαν and πολλὰ. Between these two terms—body and member—Paul identifies a complex dialectic of unity and plurality, of individuality and participation: an incarnate mereology. For Paul, one can neither understand the body apart from its members, nor the members apart from their bodily incorporation. As he writes, “the body is one [τὸ σῶμα ἓν ἐστίν] and has many members [μέλη πολλὰ], and all the members of the body [τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος], though many, are one body [πολλὰ ὄντα ἓν ἐστίν σῶμα]” (1 Cor. 12.12). Yet, this insistence upon the interplay of the one and the many could serve two distinct rhetorical functions: either demanding unity despite diversity, or diversity despite unity. While it is undeniable that Paul intends both readings simultaneously,⁹ it is nevertheless the case that Paul strictly biases the second. In the words of Fee:

Paul’s primary concern with this imagery is not that the body is one even though it has many members, thus arguing for their need for unity despite their diversity. Rather, his concern is expressed in v. 14, that even though the body is one, it does not consist of one member but of many, thus arguing for their need for diversity, since they are in fact one body.¹⁰

Given/activated/distributed/arranged/assigned: δίδοται/ἐνεργῶν/ἔθετο/ἐμέρισεν. For Paul the differences within the community, like those within the body, are inspired by the spirit.¹¹ Just as God has constituted the body [συνεκέρασεν τὸ σῶμα, 1 Cor. 12.18] with its internal differentiation and multiplicity, so too has God given [δίδοται], worked/activated [ἐνεργῶν],

⁹ “The metaphor ... maintains a claim for unity—one body—while recognizing and honoring differences—many, quite different members.” J. Paul Sampley, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Vol. X*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 947.

¹⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 601.

¹¹ “Paul sees the differences as being inspired by the Holy Spirit and as enriching the community by God’s design.” Sampley, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” 943.

distributed [διαίρεσεις], arranged [ἔθετο], and assigned [ἐμέρισεν] the various gifts of the spirit. In the same way, Paul does not erase ethnic difference, but affirms its spiritual source.¹² A body composed of a single member—Paul conjures the monstrous image of a body composed entirely of eyes or ears (1 Cor. 12.17)—cannot function. Rather, he insists, “God arranged [ἔθετο] the members [μέλη] in the body, each one of them [ἐν ἑκαστῷ αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ σώματι], as he chose” (1 Cor. 12.18).

Same and different: αὐτὸς and διαίρεσις/ἑτέρω/διάφορα. Nevertheless, despite this concern for difference, Paul does not affirm division [σχίσμα]. Indeed, the context of Paul’s use of the body of Christ—particularly in 1st Corinthians—is the very real threat of internal schism [σχίσμα] within the early church. Having received a report of “quarrels” and division among the community—“each of you says ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ’” (1 Cor. 1.12)—Paul tasks himself with “distinguish[ing] proper diversity from schisms and from divisive subgroups within the community.”¹³ Toward this end, Paul insists upon a distinction between division and variety—between σχίσμα and διαίρεσις. This distinction ultimately depends upon the foundation of Christian unity-through-difference within the unity of Christ and of the spirit: “now there are varieties of gifts, but the same [αὐτὸ] Spirit; and there are varieties [διαίρεσεις] of services, but the same [αὐτὸς] Lord; and there are varieties [διαίρεσεις] of activities, but it is the same [αὐτὸς] God who activates all of them in everyone” (1 Cor. 12.4-6). For Paul, what distinguishes diversity/difference from division/schism is that, whereas the former stands in a dialectical relation with unity, the latter merely disintegrates unification; whereas the

¹² “Paul has affirmed their unity, which was grounded in their baptism, [and] has recognized once again their differences (in the expression ‘whether Jews or Greeks,’ etc.)” Ibid., 945.

¹³ Ibid., 943.

former offers an integration of the dysmember into the community, the latter institutes the dismemberment of the community.

Unity, love, peace: ἐνότητα, ἀγάπη, εἰρήνης. For Paul, this unity-through-difference finds its source in the divine, but is manifest through acts of love [ἀγάπη] and peace [εἰρήνης]. For these Pauline authors, this love and peace functions as “the key to communal solidarity.”¹⁴ Thus, one reads in Colossians, for example, “above all, clothe yourselves with love [ἀγάπην], which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace [εἰρήνη] of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body [ἐνὶ σώματι]” (Col. 3.14-15). This sentiment is directly echoed in Ephesians,¹⁵ which writes,

Bearing with one another in love [ἀγάπη], making every effort to maintain the unity [ἐνότητα] of the Spirit in the bond of peace [εἰρήνης]. There is one body [ἐν σώμα] and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4.2-5)¹⁶

The result of this unification through love and peace is a mutuality in which the members do not lose their unique ipseity¹⁷—“now you are the body of Christ and *individually members* [μέλη ἐκ

¹⁴ PHEME PERKINS, “The Letter to the Ephesians,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Vol. XI*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 423.

¹⁵ This is standard practice for Ephesians, which appears to draw a large portion of its argument directly from Colossians: “for the majority [of scholars] it is clear that the dependency is the other way and that the author of Ephesians has used Colossians as the model on which he builds.” Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Letter to the Colossians,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Vol. XI*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 577.

¹⁶ Or again: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love [ἀγαπᾶν] their wives as they do their own bodies [σώματα]. He who loves [ὁ ἀγαπῶν] his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own flesh [σάρκα], but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members [μέλη] of his body [τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ]. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh [σάρκα μίαν].” This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5.25-32)

¹⁷ Henry makes precisely this point in his phenomenological analysis of the Mystical Body in *Incarnation*: “This absolute unity (i.e. identity, see same page above) between all living Selves, far from signifying or implying the

μέρους] of it” (1 Cor. 12.27)—but, gain an affective intimacy. Thus Paul will commend the church in Rome to “love one another with mutual affection” (Romans, 12.10), or, as he writes to the church in Corinth, “if one member [ἐν μέλος] suffers, all the members [πάντα τὰ μέλη] suffer together [συμπάσχει] with it” (1 Cor. 12.26).¹⁸

B. Hierarchy and Sexuality in the Body of Christ

The articulation of the body of Christ in 1st Corinthians 12 opens up invaluable possibilities for thinking the sexual member of the flesh, through the introduction of the language of the ἀσχήμων discussed above (introduction). This language, as was already noted, literally refers to that which is “less respectable” or “unpresentable,” but in its context indisputably refers to the genitalia. The introduction of this term—together with the “weaker” [ἀσθενέστερα] members, i.e. internal organs—serves the function, for Paul, of shattering expectations of incarnate hierarchy. That is to say, an ideology of strength and respect would privilege those members which conspicuously manifest their strength (e.g. arms, legs, etc.) and which are shown without shame (e.g. face, hands,

dissolution or destruction of the individuality of each one, is on the contrary constitutive of it, in as much as each of them is joined to himself or herself in the phenomenological effectuation of Life in its Word, and generated in themselves as this irreducibly singular Self, irreducible to any other.” Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, trans. Karl Hefty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 248. Joseph Rivera provides a commentary of Henry, noting: “I cannot, as this member of the body occupying my own space, somehow ‘merge’ with or become one with another member of the body. My ‘here’ as this particular limb is here by virtue of its relation to the other’s ‘there’ as a different limb.” Joseph Rivera, *The Contemplative Self After Michel Henry: A Phenomenological Theology* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 315.

In a similar manner Karl Barth, in his characteristically Kierkegaardian tenor, will emphasize the persistence of individuality, writing: “it must be fellowship that is encountered in community: but this means an encountering of the OTHER in the full existentiality of his utter OTHERNESS. In the neighbour it must be the ONE who is disclosed. Thus understood, Fellowship is not an aggregate of individuals, nor is it an organism. In fact, Fellowship is no concrete thing at all. . . . Fellowship is communion. It is, however, not a communion in which the ‘otherness’ of each particular individual is blurred or limited or dissolved, but that ONENESS which both requires the ‘otherness’ of each individual and makes sense of it.” Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 443.

¹⁸ Here we have perhaps discovered the (not particularly well-hidden) source of Husserl’s “community of love” and Henry’s “pathos-with.”

etc.). Against this ideology, Paul institutes a distinctly Christian logic of reversal, wherein “the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matt. 20.16), or, as Paul himself puts it earlier in the same letter: “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor. 1.27). Through this logic of reversal, Paul suggests that despite their apparent weakness, the internal organs are “indispensable” [ἀναγκαῖά]; those organs which manifest a conspicuous strength, invisibly draw their strength from the internal organs without whom they could not function. In like manner, the cultural and religious imposition of regulations against nudity¹⁹ would seem to suggest that the genitalia are shameful and abject, a dysmember, as I suggest translating ἀσχήμονα. Yet, Paul suggests to the contrary, that the care in modesty and clothing represent a “greater respect” [εὐσχήμονα] and “honor” [τιμὴν] for these members.

Within the text itself, Paul gives no precise explanation for this greater respect, leading to various interpretations. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, as was seen above, in a move that perfectly captures the logic of “reproductive futurism,” grants primacy of place to these members because of their reproductive function: “the generative organs ... involve a forecast of the future, introducing as they do, by themselves, their counteracting transmission for our race. ... By those ... organs the immortality of humanity is secured.”²⁰ More recently, John Paul II has suggested that this passage institutes a reversal of Eden, and a partial intimation of prelapsarian humanity. “In Paul’s expression about ‘unpresentable members’ of the human body as well as about those that ‘seem to be weaker’ or those ‘that we think less honorable,’ we find, it seems to us, the testimony of the same shame that the first human beings, male and female, had experienced after

¹⁹ One might consider, for example, the ban on (even accidental) nudity in the presence of the altar: “you shall not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it” (Exodus 20.26), and the attendant requirements regarding priestly clothing: “you shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh; they shall reach from the hips to the thighs” (Exodus 28.42).

²⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, “The Great Catechism,” 497.

original sin,” but, John Paul II continues, Paul institutes a key reversal, whereby “one can say that *from shame is born ‘reverence’* for one’s own body, a reverence that Paul asks us to keep (1 Thess. 4:4).”²¹ But, here I would like to highlight neither Gregory’s model of reproductive futurism, nor John Paul II’s model of a return to primordial harmony. I will instead turn to the 10th-11th century mystic and hymnographer Symeon the New Theologian, who suggests a reading of 1st Corinthians that is at once mystical and eschatological.

According to Symeon, incorporation into the Body of Christ should be understood in the double sense; that is, not only should one recognize that the individual Christian becomes a member of the corporate body, but conversely, that in a sort of *coincidentia oppositorum* (to borrow a term from Nicholas of Cusa), in the same moment Christ inhabits every member of the individual’s body—granting a presentiment or intuition of the resurrection body. This double character marks the uniquely embodied conception of mystical union (θεωρία) in Symeon’s theology. To be one with God—or here, particularly, Christ—is not to leave or abandon the body for a platonic contemplation, but to experience the incarnation within one’s own flesh.²² This is explicated nowhere more clearly than in his “Hymn 15,” where he writes:

²¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 347. Continuing: “we wish to call attention to the fact that according to the author of the letter the particular effort to reach reverence for the human body and especially for its ‘weaker’ or ‘unpresentable’ members corresponds to the Creator’s original plan or to the vision about which Genesis speaks: ‘God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good’ (Gen 1:31). Paul writes, ‘God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the member that lacked it, that there may be no disunion within the body, but the members may have care for one another’ (1 Cor 12:24-25). ‘Disunion within the body,’ the result of which is that some members are considered weaker, ‘less’ honorable, and thus ‘unpresentable,’ is a further expression of the vision of man’s—that is, historical man’s—interior state after original sin. The man of original innocence, male and female, about whom we read, ‘both were naked ... but they did not feel shame’ (Gen 2:25), did not feel that ‘disunion within the body’ either. An analogous harmony in man’s innermost [being], the harmony of the ‘heart,’ corresponded to the objective harmony that the Creator gave to the human body, which Paul explains as reciprocal care of the various members (1 Cor 12:25).” *Ibid.*, 347-348.

²² Here Symeon articulates a logic akin to that of Meister Eckhart, who will later write, “we celebrate here in temporality with a view to the eternal birth, which God the Father has accomplished and accomplishes unceasingly in *eternity*, so that this same birth has now been accomplished *in time* within human nature. What does it avail me if this birth takes place unceasingly and yet does not take place within myself? It is quite fitting, however, that it should take place within me.” Meister Eckhart, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart’s Creation Spirituality in New Translation* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 293.

We become members of Christ—and Christ becomes our members, Christ becomes my hand, Christ, my miserable foot; and I, unhappy one, am Christ’s hand, Christ’s foot! ... If you so wish you will become a member of Christ, and similarly all our members individually will become members of Christ and Christ our members, and all which is dishonorable in us He will make honorable by adorning it with His divine beauty and His divine glory, since living with God at the same time, we shall become gods, no longer seeing the shameful of our body at all, but made completely like Christ in our whole body, each member of our body will be the whole Christ; because, becoming many members, He remains unique and indivisible, and each part is He, the whole Christ. Now, well you recognized Christ in my finger, or in my penis²³—did you not shudder, or blush? But God was not ashamed to become like you and you, you are ashamed to be like Him? No, I am not ashamed to be like Him, but, when you said, like a shameful member, I feared that you were uttering blasphemy. Well, you were wrong to fear, for there is nothing shameful, but they are the hidden members of Christ, because one covers them, and for that reason they are more worthy of honor than the others, as hidden members, invisible to all, of the One who is hidden.²⁴

In this way, Symeon suggests, the indwelling of Christ within our members glorifies our members, such that we should feel no shame in affirming not only the presence of God in our soul or in our heart, but in an affirmation no less shocking today as it was in the 11th century, our very penis (βάλλανος). In fact, it is nowhere more clear that Symeon’s message of the glorification and divinization of the body has *not* been received, then in the very translations of his own hymn, where reference to the penis is generally rendered ambiguously in order to obscure his direct use of sexual imagery. The word marked here as “penis” is the Greek βάλλανον (from βάλλανος), which comes from the word for “acorn” and, according to the Liddell-Scott, refers to the “*glans membri*

²³ Translation altered to reflect Symeon’s use of explicitly sexual language. I have here opted for the more literal translation of βάλλανον as “penis,” for what should be obvious reasons, following Thomas Arentzen’s discussion of Symeon (*The Virgin in Song: Mary and the Poetry of Romanos the Melodist* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017], 48-49).

²⁴ St. Symeon The New Theologian, “Hymn 15” in *Hymns of Divine Love*, trans. George A. Maloney (Denville: Dimension Books, 1976), 54-55 [translation modified, see prior footnote].

virilis.”²⁵ In Maloney’s translation of “Hymn 15,” it is rendered simply as “this organ,”²⁶ here likely following *Sources Chrétiennes*, which renders it as “cet organe.”²⁷

Unlike his interpreters, Symeon is here bold, noting the likelihood of scandalizing his audience (“did you not shudder, or blush?”), and generating accusations of blasphemy (“I feared that you were uttering blasphemy”), within the text of the hymn itself. But this possibility of scandal, as Thomas Arentzen points out, arises not only because of the simple use of “penis” in a hymn—despite the fact that this would still be unheard of in our supposedly “liberated” modern context. More radically still, Symeon not only uses βάλανον, but places it “in a rhyming *homeoteleuton* construction”²⁸ with “Christ” (Χριστον και βάλανον). What, within the context of a hymn, could more directly symbolize the glorification of the sexual member than this ostensibly blasphemous juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane—or more precisely, the sacred and the now sacralized sexual member?

This is precisely the power of Symeon’s reading of the body of Christ and the sexual member; he here neither subordinates it to a heterosexual logic of reproductive futurism, nor does he relegate its glorification to a prelapsarian goodness. Rather, he suggests a direct transfiguration of the supposedly shameful dysmember in its incorporation into the body of Christ. Moreover, he understands this logic to have direct repercussions within the social realm. Thus, not only should the reader no longer feel shame in their sexual member(s), but they should themselves, as an individual, no longer feel shame. For his invocation of the “shameful member” here refers not to

²⁵ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Seventh Edition (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1889), 273.

²⁶ Symeon, “Hymn 15,” 54.

²⁷ Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, *Hymnes: 1-15*, trans. Joseph Paramelle (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1969), 291.

²⁸ Arentzen, *The Virgin in Song*, 48-49.

the sexual member itself, but rather to the member of the community: “but, when you said, *like a shameful member ...*”²⁹

Nevertheless, despite Paul’s incorporation of the sexual member—or dysmember—into his discourse on the body of Christ, and its radical reading in Symeon, one should not permit these openings to obscure the less liberative aspects of Paul’s theology of the body of Christ, in regards to gender and sexuality. For, despite this affirmation of the sexual member in 1st Corinthians 12, Paul will elsewhere, within the same letter and in other letters, manifest a less-than-open stance towards deviations from sexual and gender norms: what he will generally denote by the umbrella term “sexual immorality” (πορνεία).³⁰ The most extended discourse on πορνεία in the communal context can be found in 1st Corinthians 5. There, Paul relays that “it is actually reported that there is sexual immorality [πορνεία] among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father’s wife” (1 Cor. 5.1). For Paul, this incestuous relationship between a man and his step mother, is redoubled by the Corinthian church’s inaction.³¹ Therefore, Paul attempts in this letter to intervene and suggest a course of action. According to Paul, the male offender³² is to be expelled from the community: “you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh” (1 Cor. 5.5). The precise nature of this “handing over” and of the “destruction of the flesh” remains ambiguous. Regarding the first, it is likely that the language of

²⁹ St. Symeon The New Theologian, “Hymn 15,” 55 [emphasis added].

³⁰ “The word *porneia* (“sexual immorality”) in the Greek world simply meant ‘prostitution’ in the sense of going to the prostitutes and paying for sexual pleasure. ... But the word had been picked up in Hellenistic Judaism, always pejoratively, to cover all extramarital sexual sins and aberrations, including homosexuality.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 200.

³¹ “Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?” (1 Cor. 5.2).

³² “The fact that the woman herself is not mentioned, especially since women are more often condemned for sexual sins than men (cf. John 8:1-11), is a sure indication that only the man was a member of the Christian community.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 200-201.

handing one over to Satan was quasi-technical language for expelling someone from the Christian community.³³ Regarding the second, it is unlikely that Paul understands the destruction of the flesh literally, and that this constitutes a death penalty. More likely, Paul understands “flesh” in the theological sense discussed above, and is hoping for a purgation, “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5.5).³⁴ Through this expulsion or “handing over,” the community seeks to establish clear boundaries between what is inside (sexually permissible) and what is outside (sexual impermissible).³⁵

For Paul, this boundary creation is not a one-time affair, rather he immediately seeks to generalize this course of action: “but now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral [πόρνος] or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. ... ‘Drive out the wicked person from among you’” (1 Cor. 5.11-13). As Sampley notes, “the vice list here functions in an et cetera fashion to suggest that *porneia* serves to typify the larger problem.”³⁶ This thesis is justified by Paul’s subsequent expansion of this list in the following chapter which condemns: “fornicators [πόρνοι], idolaters, adulterers [μοιχοὶ], male prostitutes [μαλακοὶ], sodomites [ἀρσενικοῖται],

³³ “The similar usage in 1 Tim. 1:20 suggests that for Paul this was quasi-technical language for some kind of expulsion from the Christian community, probably from the gatherings of the assembly for worship, including the meals and supper in honor of the Lord.” Ibid., 208. See also, “[Paul] directs the community, at their next assembly, to give the man over to Satan—that is, to put him out of the community.” Sampley, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” 847.

³⁴ “Nowhere else does Paul express death in terms of ‘destruction of the flesh’... with some degree of confidence, therefore, we may put aside the idea that Paul intended that the man should die. ... What this means, then, is that we have a typically Pauline contrast between ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit,’ although not necessarily typically expressed. What Paul was desiring by having this man put outside the believing community was the destruction of what was ‘carnal’ in him, so that he might be ‘saved’ eschatologically.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 212.

³⁵ “Paul assumes that it is the community’s responsibility to preserve its own God-given integrity by giving to Satan, by cleansing, and by driving out the violator. ... By community action, the boundaries of the community must be redrawn so that this man is outside.” Sampley, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” 850.

³⁶ Ibid.

thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6.9-10).

Here, of particular note are the terms *μαλακοὶ* and *ἀρσενοκοῖται*. Due to the ambiguity of these terms, one finds a variety of translations.³⁷ The first term, literally meaning “soft,” seems to refer to effeminate men—but, despite a tradition of identifying this term exclusively with homosexuality, in its original context it was probably considerably more general.³⁸ As David Halperin notes, “in various European cultural traditions men could be designated as ‘soft’ or ‘unmasculine’ (*malthakos* in Greek, *mollis* in Latin and its Romance derivatives) either because they were inverters or pathics—because they were *womanly*, or transgendered, and liked being fucked by other men—or because, on the contrary, they were womanizers, because they deviated from masculine gender norms insofar as they preferred the soft option of love to the hard option of war.”³⁹ The second, *ἀρσενοκοῖται*, is equally difficult to translate insofar as the term does not appear in earlier literature. Literally, it is a neologism of “male” (*ἄρσεν*) and “fucker” (*κοῖται*),⁴⁰

³⁷ To give just a few examples, the King James Version translated the first as “effeminate” and the second as “abusers of themselves with mankind,” whereas the New King James version renders the first “homosexuals” and the second “sodomites”; while the New International Version simply conflates the two terms into the single: “men who have sex with men.”

³⁸ Biblical scholarship has often sought to link this term with the passive member of a pederastic relationship, but even this attribution appears difficult to maintain with certainty. “The first word, *malakoi*, has the basic meaning of ‘soft’; but it also became a pejorative epithet for men who were ‘soft’ or ‘effeminate,’ most likely referring to the younger, ‘passive’ partner in a pederastic relationship—the most common form of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world. ... The problem is that there was a technical word for such men, and *malakos* is seldom, if ever, so used.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 243-244.

³⁹ David M. Halperin, “How to do the History of Male Homosexuality” in Donald E. Hall, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, and Susan Potter (eds.), *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 266.

⁴⁰ I have chosen “fucker” here—rather than the more clinical “intercourse”—following John Boswell, in order to reflect the use of this term as a crude or vulgar term within its context. “The claim that this word ‘obviously’ means ‘homosexual’ defies linguistic evidence and common sense. The second half of the compound ‘κοῖται,’ is a coarse word, generally denoting base or licentious sexual activities (see Rom. 13.13), and in this and other compounds corresponds to the vulgar English word ‘fucker,’ i.e. a person who, by insertion, takes the ‘active’ role in intercourse.” John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 342.

and seems to refer either to the active partners of a pederastic relationship (where “male” is the object) or to male prostitutes (where “male” is the subject).⁴¹ While John Boswell’s seminal *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980) opened up an extensive and ongoing discourse regarding the applicability of “homosexual” to either or both of these terms, settling that debate, even were such a thing possible, is unnecessary to the argument at hand. For, regardless of which interpretation is followed, it is undeniable that Paul is here using this constellation of terms—together with fornicators [πόρνοι] and adulterers [μοιχοῖ]—in order to flesh out the general category of “sexual immorality” [πορνεία], in such a way that it would condemn all deviations from strict monogamous, heterosexual norms.⁴²

One might suggest that this condemnation be held apart from the notion of the body of Christ, but Paul soon forecloses this possibility. In the conclusion to these sections, Paul writes:

The body is meant not for fornication [πορνεία] but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ... Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute [πόρνης]? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute [πόρνη] becomes one body with her? For it is said, ‘The two shall become one flesh.’ But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication

⁴¹ “This word (*arsenokoitai*), however, is also difficult. This is its first appearance in preserved literature, and subsequent authors are reluctant to use it, especially when describing homosexual activity. The word is a compound of ‘male’ and ‘intercourse.’ There is no question as to the meaning of the *koitai* part of the word; it is vulgar slang for ‘intercourse.’ ... What is not certain is whether ‘male’ is subject (= ‘males who have intercourse’; thus a word for male prostitutes of all kinds) or object (= ‘intercourse with males’; therefore male homosexual).” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 244.

⁴² For, even if Boswell is right that these terms should be conceived through the lens of prostitution, rather than homosexuality (and it is more likely that Paul intends some combination of both), Paul is clear elsewhere (Romans 1) that he does not condone same-sex sexuality. There, Paul offers yet another vice list, preceded by an unambiguous condemnation of same-sex eroticism: “for this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.” (Romans 1.26-32)

[πορνείαν]! Every sin that a person commits is outside of the body; but the fornicator [πορνεύων] sins against the body itself [ἴδιον σῶμα]. (1 Cor. 6.13-18)

Here Paul explicitly links his account of πορνεία to his account of the body of Christ. One is to refrain from sexuality, he suggests, for two reasons. Because, as the second half of the passage argues, this sin contaminates the interiority of the body, it is inside “the body itself” [ἴδιον σῶμα]. Second, and more directly applicable to the discussion at hand, this contamination of one’s own body is redoubled at a communal and Christological level. Because one has become a member of the body of Christ, one is uniquely bound both to the community and to Christ. To commit an act of sexual immorality [πορνεία], therefore, is to bring into the closed boundaries of the community, that which is to be expelled from the community, thereby risking the shattering or rupturing of the community itself. As Althaus-Reid writes of homosexual relations, “sodomy, by its mere structure of the man/man relating pattern, presented to society a fracture into the hierarchical men/women ethos; this was considered to be damaging for the life of society, the constitution of states and the relationship of humanity with God.”⁴³ To commit an act of sexual deviancy (to deviate from the sexual norm) is to contaminate the community and to contaminate Christ.⁴⁴

⁴³ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 195.

⁴⁴ This linkage between sexual immorality and logics of “contamination” are particularly prominent within American evangelical purity culture. The following is a particularly visceral example, that I can personally attest is a regular occurrence in evangelical sexual education curriculum:

“Special Brownies
February 6, 2006
Title: Special Brownies (A.K.A.–Chocolate Covered Poop!)

Bake 3 batches of brownies. Leave one batch plain, put some extras on the second batch (I used nuts, chocolate chips, and marshmallows on the top) and add peanut butter chips (or leave plain) to the third batch. For each batch, write out a recipe card with the ingredients – but for the 3rd batch, write down 1 Tbs. of dog poop at the end.

Have a student read off the ingredients for each batch – starting with the first and take a vote to see which students would eat that brownie. They will go nuts when he/she reads the last ingredient on the 3rd batch!! Most likely, no one will want to eat that batch – but that’s the point. (I had one who thought he would eat it anyway ... there’s always one!)

This rigid attempt to establish the boundaries *outside or around* the Christian community is supplemented with periodic reintroductions of hierarchical boundaries *within* the Christian community. For Paul, the body is specifically arranged by God, “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose” (1 Cor. 12.18). In the same manner, as was seen above, God distributes difference within the community—in the context of 1 Cor., the difference between the gifts of the spirit—in an ordered manner: “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.” (1 Cor. 12.28). Nevertheless, as his analogy with the body sought to expose, these differences are not hierarchical.⁴⁵ Here, it will be helpful to begin by briefly noting the general Pauline conception of sexual difference, in order to more clearly highlight those moments—within Paul, and more commonly within the Deutero-Pauline literature—where something considerably less liberative emerges.

For obvious historical reasons, Paul’s account of sexual difference is certainly far from identical to that proposed by contemporary queer theory or feminist discourse. Nevertheless, Paul

THE EXPLANATION ...

We are all called to be pure and whole. Even a little bit of sin in our lives makes us unacceptable to God (brownies with dog poop). If we keep ourselves free from sin, and seek reconciliation to God, then our lives can be decorated with good things, and unique gifts that make us special brownies in God's eyes (brownies with extra stuff). But at the very minimum, we have to be pure. Even a little bit of dog poop makes the whole brownie bad.”

Jonathan McKee, “Special Brownies,” *The Source for Youth Ministry*, <https://thesource4ym.com/special-brownies/> (retrieved 01/14/19).

For a recent autobiographical account of evangelical purity culture, see: Linda Kay Klein, *Pure: Inside the Evangelical Movement That Shamed a Generation of Young Women and How I Broke Free* (New York: Touchstone, 2018).

⁴⁵ “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ ... there may be no dissention within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Cor. 12.21, 25). As Fee notes, “this is demonstrated by the further elaborations in vv. 22-24a, which emphasize the strictly apparent nature of such ‘hierarchy.’ He argues that the apparently weaker, the internal organs, are the more necessary, and that the apparently less seemly, the sexual organs, are the more necessary, are accorded the higher honor (of clothing being implied).” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 609.

does seem to go to great lengths to undercut a hierarchical-subordinationist account of sexual difference. For Paul, sexual difference appears to play a role akin to ethnic or socio-economic difference. Thus, he can write: “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3.28). As has already been seen in the discussion of membership above, Paul does not seek to erase these distinctions (as the so-called “New Perspective on Paul” definitively established in regard to Paul’s persistent Jewish self-identity, for example). But, while Paul exhibits a great respect for difference, he does oppose any production of *division* within the body of Christ. In the discussion of the Eucharist in 1st Corinthians 11, for example, Paul laments that “I hear that there are divisions among you” (1 Cor. 11.18). Specifically, Paul here targets those who “show contempt for the Church of God and humiliate those who have nothing” (1 Cor. 22)—that is, the poor. By replicating the socio-economic *divisions*, and not merely difference, of Roman society within their practice of the Lord’s supper, the church in Corinth “eats the bread [and] drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner” (1 Cor. 11.27). The consequence for such a divisive humiliation of the poor is decisive: “all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves,” in fact, he continues, “for this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” (1 Cor. 11.29-30).

Within the specific context of *sexual* difference, this resistance to hierarchy tends to take the form of parallel and complementary suggestions for conduct. Thus Paul writes that “the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does;” before immediately adding the complementary converse, “likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Cor. 7.4). Here Paul upends the normative assumptions of his contemporary society which presumed an asymmetrical relationship between the sexes.

But this egalitarian—or at least complementarian—account of sexual difference does not persist without exception. This is evidenced by Paul’s discussion of head coverings within the religious service. Without delving into the extreme complexities of this passage,⁴⁶ what is particularly relevant here is Paul’s allusion to the body of Christ image, not for the purpose of deconstructing hierarchies, but seemingly toward the end of affirming an asymmetrical relationship between men and women. As he writes, “I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ” (1 Cor. 11.3). Here a first of two figures emerges that will become increasingly important within the deutero-Pauline writers: “the head” [κεφαλή].⁴⁷ This emphasis upon the head serves to disrupt the flat social-ontology established in Paul’s fuller examination of the body of Christ, through the introduction of a layered hierarchy of authority. Here, the head is no longer conceived as one member among many, manifesting a logic of mutual care and shared affection. Rather, the head becomes the source of bodily authority, controlling and directing its subordinate members.⁴⁸ Unsurprisingly, this image of the authoritative head at the bodily level, likewise manifests as asymmetrical relations at the communal level, generated first in regards to the church and its

⁴⁶ “This passage is full of notorious exegetical difficulties, including (1) the ‘logic’ of the argument as a whole, which in turn is related to (2) our uncertainty about the meaning of some absolutely crucial terms and (3) our uncertainty about prevailing customs, both in the culture(s) in general and in the church(es) in particular (including the whole complex question of early Christian worship).” Ibid., 492.

⁴⁷ “The term ‘head’ (κεφαλή *kephalē*) denotes Christ’s rule or authority over the church as his body.” Lincoln, “The Letter to the Colossians,” 599.

⁴⁸ This language of subordination appears explicitly in a short passage in 1 Cor. 14, widely regarded as a 2nd century interpolation: “as in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, *but should be subordinate*, as the law also says” (1 Cor. 14.33-34 [emphasis added]). For an argument against the Pauline authorship of these passages, see: Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 699-702.

generative principle—Christ—, and second in regards to the sexual difference found within the church: (viz. husbands and wives or men and women⁴⁹).

This opening to asymmetrical relations of authority within the logic of the body of Christ is picked up by the deutero-Pauline authors and expanded into the definitive image of the body of Christ. Colossians, for example, writes of the Christ:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body [κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος], the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. (Colossians 1.15-18)

Here, the analogy of the body has been radically reconfigured. Where 1st Corinthians 12 directly targeted a notion of superiority between members, Colossians (following 1 Cor. 11) explicitly posits the superiority of a head, which is to be granted “first place in everything,” over and against the members of the body. This logic is brought to fruition in Ephesians, where the figure of the head is paired with its rhetorical opposite, the foot (ποδός). As one reads in Ephesians, “he has put all things under his feet [ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ] and has made him the head over all things [κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα] for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Eph. 1.22-23). Whereas in 1st Corinthians 12 the head and the foot serve as ontologically equal members of the body—“the head [cannot say] to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’ (1 Cor. 12.21)—here the foot becomes symbolic of the radical transcendence of the head vis-a-vis the members of the body. These shifts suggests the introduction of the image of the body of Christ into a completely new rhetorical context, whereas Paul drew upon the figure in order to tackle the question of

⁴⁹ Insofar as the Greek lacks separate words for man/husband [άνήρ] and woman/wife [γυναϊκός], the Greek is ambiguous regarding whether the difference at hand refers to the context of marriage specifically, or to any instance of sexual difference as such.

division within the church, and to articulate a logic of unity-through-difference, Colossians and Ephesians instead evidence a concern for right authority.⁵⁰

Just as in Paul's discourse on head coverings, this concern for the authority of Christ, and the hierarchical figure of the body of Christ emerges onto the social plane, generating an asymmetrical account sexual and social difference. Thus, in Colossians, one finds a radically multi-layered hierarchical household code:

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. ... Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven. (Colossians, 3.18-4.1)

Here one finds a household code that structurally mimics the complementarity of Paul's account of sexual difference in 1st Corinthians 7.4, but with a key difference. Whereas Paul identifies

⁵⁰ "Unlike the use of the 'body' metaphor in 1 Corinthians and Romans, Ephesians does not point to a crisis of disunity" Perkins, "The Letter to the Ephesians," 423; "in Ephesians and Colossians a subtly different point is made, Christ there being spoken of as the head of the body." Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," 709.

This is not to suggest that Ephesians never shares Paul's concern. In Chapter 4 the image of the Body of Christ is worked out in a manner considerably more reminiscent of 1 Cor. 12: "Therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, begs you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love [ἀγάπη], making every effort to maintain the unity [ἐνότητα] of the Spirit in the bond of peace [εἰρήνης]. There is one body [ἐν σῶμα] and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift [δωρεᾶς]. Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts [δόματα] to his people." (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ [σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ], until all of us come to the unity [ἐνότητα] of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love [ἀγάπη], we must grow up in every way into him who is the head [κεφαλή], into Christ, from whom the whole body [πᾶν τὸ σῶμα], joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part [μέρους] is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love [ἀγάπη]." (Ephesians 4.1-16)

mutual commands of care—“the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does”—in Colossians, these imperatives are *only structurally symmetrical*. Thus wives are to be “subject” to their husbands, who are themselves only commanded not to “treat [their wives] harshly”; children are to “obey” their parents, while fathers (notably, mothers abruptly disappear here) are not to “provoke”; likewise, slaves are to “obey,” whereas masters are merely to “treat ... justly and fairly.” The extreme asymmetry of this passage is nowhere more evident than in the final passage, where the master’s leniency is grounded not in mercy or respect for the slave, but in the master’s own submission to a higher authority. The mutuality, equality, and shared affection that marked the Christian community in Romans and 1st Corinthians has been fully effaced in the deutero-Pauline quest for authority.⁵¹

C. The Ambivalence of the Pauline Body of Christ

When the evidence of the prior two sections is taken together, the result is a conflicted conception of the body of Christ. For, on the one hand, at points (e.g. 1 Cor. 12) the body of Christ seems to represent a profound logic of unity-through-difference. Here, agapic love serves the function of bridging divisions and generating mutual affective relations, such that the diffusion of difference and multiplicity is no longer a roadblock to unity, but is instead its very condition of possibility. Here the dysmember [ἀσχήμων] finds itself fully incarnated into the body, not as a merely abject remainder, but as a member in full standing, granted equal respect and dignity [εὐσχήμονα]. Yet, on the other hand, Paul simultaneously undertakes a theology of exclusion or dismemberment (e.g.

⁵¹ Certainly, this should not be overly exaggerated, there is still something of a “transcending of divisions” (Lincoln, “The Letter to the Colossians,” 648) in these epistles. See, e.g.: “in that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” (Col. 3.11). But, it is perhaps important in the present context to note that this revision of the formula from Galatians 3.28 has erased reference to the radical equality of “male and female.”

1 Cor. 5-6), whereby any practitioner of non-normative sexuality is cast out of the community in order to secure the borders of the community against any corruption or impurity; a logic which is taken up by the later deuterio-Pauline authors (Colossians and Ephesians) and worked out into an elaborate multi-tiered cosmological and social hierarchy—descending from the father into the son, the husband, the wife, the child, and finally, the slave.

For these reasons, the construction of a properly liberatory social community will require more than a mere gesture toward the earliest Christian tradition. That is to say, despite the fact that “the body of Christ is a multigendered body,”⁵² and therefore necessarily displays queer moments of profound opening, it will be necessary to resist the temptation to simply cast the traditional account of the body of Christ as always already queer.⁵³ Such approaches, even if well-intentioned, Tonstad shows, “domesticate both queerness and Christianity, reducing them to flat reflections of widely shared liberal assumptions.”⁵⁴ In resistance to this approach, Tonstad recommends a pivot toward the anti-social turn in queer theory, exemplified by Guy Hocquenghem and Lee Edelman, and already profoundly influential on the account of the sexual flesh developed in the two preceding chapters.

According to Edelman, the proper posture of queer theory should not be that of a liberal universalism.⁵⁵ “Rather than rejecting, with liberal discourse, th[e] ascription of negativity to the

⁵² Ward, “Bodies,” 177.

⁵³ “It has, in other words, become almost *de rigueur* for aspiring queer or radical theologians to advance claims that authentic or orthodox Christianity is at least potentially and often, more strongly yet, inherently queer.” Linn Marie Tonstad, “Everything Queer, Nothing Radical?” *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 92 (2016), 118.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Queer theologies must avoid becoming what Althaus-Reid names “dictionary theologies,” that is, theologies which simply offer an “explanation of a center-based theology in the native’s terms.” Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 51.

⁵⁵ As Althaus-Reid similarly suggests, “in theology, to repeat can be associated with many modern habitual trappings, such as those into which ‘theologies at the margins’ may fall when they become simple attempts to induce oppressed multitudes to invest their identities in the centre-defined theological exercise by a simple economy of inclusion.” *Ibid.*, 51.

queer, we might ... do better to consider accepting and even embracing it.”⁵⁶ In this way, Edelman provocatively suggests that queer theory should recognize itself in the discourse of conservatism: “conservatives acknowledge the radical potential, which is also to say, the radical threat, of queerness.”⁵⁷ Thus, citing a “hyperbolic rant” of Donald Wildmon, founder of the American Family Association—“acceptance or indifference to the homosexual movement will result in society’s destruction”⁵⁸—Edelman recommends against an all-too-easy recourse to liberal totalism. Perhaps, he ventures, “Mr. Wildmon might be right—or more important, *ought to be right*: that queerness should and must redefine such notions as ‘civil order’?”⁵⁹ Against a discourse that moves too quickly toward a logic of universal tolerance and acceptance—and therefore de-radicalization—Edelman instead affirms queerness as the very site where every social body finds its own failure to fully incorporate. Queerness, in its very otherness, refuses simple incorporation into the body; or, as Althaus-Reid suggests, “queer theologies are a refusal to normalization.”⁶⁰ Rather, like the impotent member that will not cooperate with the incorporation (and therefore control) of a hierarchical organization of the body, queerness disrupts the self-presence of the body politic—“queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one.”⁶¹

Queerness, on the social level, therefore plays precisely the role granted the dysmember in the preceding chapters. The queer is the social remainder, that which cannot be made “same.” Or,

⁵⁶ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 16-17.

⁶⁰ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 50.

⁶¹ Edelman, *No Future*, 17.

in Edelman's terms, the queer is the "sinthomosexual"⁶²: "a surrogate for the perpetual failure of universalism."⁶³ Just as radical phenomenology—in its monadic aspirations—has imagined a total access to the flesh *sans faille*, so too have they participated in and perpetuated the sexual-political imaginary which seeks to construct a social body *sans faille*. Any gap or fault within the social body—notably that produced by the queer body, the social dysmember—necessarily had to be cast out of the flesh in order preserve the purity and boundaries of the flesh. Thus, the dismemberment of the flesh has served the role of preserving the unity—or more precisely, the unanimity—of the social body. This conception of the social body is "a universalization at the expense of particularity."⁶⁴ Moreover, this dismemberment is not merely rhetorical or philosophical, but in its political dimension often takes the form of concrete violence against particular populations, notably queer folk. As Tonstad remarks, "the hope of a fully unified community becomes an alibi for the violence directed against whoever stands in for "the obstacle destabilizing every unity."⁶⁵ In this way, in an unexpected reversal, it is precisely the apologists of unity without gap or fault who become the champions of dismemberment. In their quest for a social whole, they seek to excise every social hole. In the name of a total presence of the social body to itself, they constitute the Other of this body as an "unpresentable member" [ἀσχήμονα], who may be justly "handed over to Satan," expelled from the community on behalf of the community's sense of self-presence.

⁶² This neologism is coined by Edelman; "bringing together the Lacanian *sinthome*, which defines the specific formation of the subject's access to jouissance, and a homosexuality distinctively abjected as a figure of the antibiotic, a figure opposed, in dominant fantasy, to life and futurity both, the sinthomosexual conjures a politicality unrecognizable as such by virtue of its resistance to futurism's constraining definition of the political field." Lee Edelman, "Ever After: History, Negativity, and the Social," *South Atlantic Quarterly* Vol. 106 No. 3 (2007): 469-476, 471-472.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 473.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 474.

⁶⁵ Tonstad, "Everything Queer, Nothing Radical?," 123.

It therefore becomes necessary to rethink the social body no longer on the terms of direct presence of the self to itself without gap, but from the perspective of the rupture. Unity, on such an account, is no longer the product of a violent excision of difference, but rather takes difference as its condition of possibility. Within the early Christian community, this possibility and its opposite manifested through two competing social metaphors around division within the body of Christ. Each of these models drew upon medical terminology in order to think through the possibility of mending a divided community—of building “unity.” Yet, despite these similarities in method and aim, the means by which these two imaginaries generate unity are nearly opposite. I have named these two models the surgical model and the healing model, and it is with a comparison of these two models that this dissertation will conclude.

§2. The Cut

A. The Surgical Model — Cyprian

The surgical model, as I have already begun to suggest, is constructed upon the tension of self-presence and dismemberment. Simply put, the surgical model suggests that the proper form of unity within a social body is the direct presence of the body to itself, a logic of sameness wherein difference functions as an obstacle to uniformity and therefore unity. Because difference functions as an obstacle, any form of difference or otherness (or queerness) must be cast as external to the body politic. This is the logic of the policed border; the community, in its deepest etymological sense, the *com-munus*: those who take up arms (*munire*) together (*com*), that is to say, those who maintain a common defense.⁶⁶ While external opposition is easily dealt with under such a

⁶⁶ For an analysis of community as *com-munus*, see the work of Robert Esposito, e.g. *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) and *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics*, trans. Rhiannon Noel Welch (Fordham University Press, 2012).

paradigm, internal difference or otherness necessarily constitutes a crisis. It is here that the “surgical” aspect of this model appears. For, any otherness within the community itself, within the borders or boundaries that have been established to ward off difference, constitutes an existential threat, often thought in terms of the gangrenous or the cancerous. Ontologically speaking, “in order to speak of ‘being qua being,’ one has to amputate something in being that is not being.”⁶⁷ Simply put, for exponents of the surgical model—whether explicit or implicit—internal difference necessitates the institution of a “cut”; the dysmember, the abject figure of otherness, must be cut out of the body politic in order to maintain the health of the community.⁶⁸ “Walls,” as Althaus-Reid notes, “have teeth and can bite and can dismember.”⁶⁹

Within the specific context of the Christian community—the body of Christ—this tendency can be identified from the very beginning. As the reader has no doubt gathered, this paradigm appears already in the Pauline corpus, first in Paul’s own discussion of the necessity of expelling those members of the community who engage in sexually unpermitted activities—*πόρνοι, μοιχοί, μαλακοί, ἀρσενικοῖται*—and subsequently in the deutero-Pauline authors who likewise employ its logic of exclusion, unveiling at the same moment the necessary hierarchical supplement. A logic of sameness which demands uniformity of practice and unanimity of thought

⁶⁷ Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 129.

⁶⁸ Within the domain of sexuality, this can often appear in a literal form, as in the *Sentences of Sextus*, which suggest: “every part of the body which persuades you to not practice moderation, cast [it] away! For it is better to live in moderation without this part than destructively with it” (Sent. 13), or again, “you see men cutting off and casting away part of their body to keep their health. How much better to do so on behalf of moderation?” (Sent. 273).” Here, the maintenance of sexual purity and the conquering of lust is attained through self-castration. The text above is presented as cited in Origen who, despite the almost certainly spurious claim that he self-castrated, regards the text with disdain, and as a failure to read the Matthew 19’s discussion of “eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven” in a properly allegorical fashion. Origen of Alexandria, “Commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew, Books 15 & 16: Translation & Notes,” trans. Justin M. Gohl (unpublished, 2017), 15.3.

⁶⁹ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 105.

under the guise of unity, requires an asymmetrical hierarchical structure as a political support for this uniformity/unanimity.

The link between this uniformity/unanimity and hierarchy can already be found in the generations of Christian leadership immediately following the Pauline authors. On this point the early Christian bishop Ignatius of Antioch is particularly enlightening, insofar as he reveals the hierarchical character implicit in the surgical model. For Ignatius, the unity of the Christian community is threatened by heretics—what he will call “wildlings,”⁷⁰ or offshoots of Satan. Such wildlings, despite their apparent presence in the community are not truly “members of his body,”⁷¹ for “God means complete oneness.”⁷² While the Ignatian conception of unity or “oneness” is unspecified in the letter to the Trallians, it will be marked with full clarity in the letter to the Ephesians. There, Ignatius glosses Jesus’ promise “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matt. 18.20), writing that “when you meet frequently in the same place, the forces of Satan are overthrown.”⁷³ But for Ignatius, it is not merely the gathering together that overthrows, but more specifically, “his baneful influence is neutralized by the *unanimity* (ὁμολογία) of your faith.”⁷⁴ This unanimity, as Ignatius makes perfectly clear, is defined not simply by the community, but by the authoritative word of the bishop: “it is therefore proper in every way to glorify Jesus Christ who has glorified you, so that you, fully trained in unanimous submission

⁷⁰ St. Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians” in James A. Kleist (trans.), *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation No. 1* (New York: Newman Press, 1946), 78 (11).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ St. Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians” in James A. Kleist (trans.), *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation No. 1* (New York: Newman Press, 1946), 65 (13).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* [emphasis added].

(ὕποταγῆ), may be submissive (ὕποτασσόμενοι) to the bishop and the presbytery, and thus be sanctified in every respect.”⁷⁵ In this episcopal ecclesiology, the authority of Christ, the head of the body of Christ, has been hierarchically delegated to the bishop and the presbyters. Thus, the congregant is expected to submit themselves to the authority of the bishop precisely as they would Christ, just as the deuterio-Pauline authors demand wives’ submission to their husbands, as an extension of the husbands’ submission to Christ (e.g. 1 Cor. 11.3, Col. 3.18).⁷⁶ It is only through this submission that the congregant is to gain access to the eucharistic body of Christ: “show obedience with undivided mind (ἀπερισπᾶστω κιανοίᾳ) to the bishop and the presbyter, and to breaking of the same Bread, which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death, and everlasting life in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁷ This “medicine of immortality” is available only to those who have submitted themselves to the patriarchal authority of the bishop, all others must be purged from the community for the sake of the community.⁷⁸

Despite its appearance in Paul and echoes in Ignatius, this model finds its apogee in Cyprian’s *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate* and *De lapsis*. The context of these texts is the Decian

⁷⁵ Ibid., 61 (2).

⁷⁶ This parallel between patriarchal authority in sexuality (paternity) and patriarchal authority vis-a-vis the bishop is manifest quite clearly in Marion’s own discussion privilege of the bishop in *God Without Being* (see: chapter 3).

⁷⁷ Ignatius, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians,” 68 (20).

⁷⁸ The deep connection between the sole patriarchal authority of the bishop, the eucharist, sexuality, and the logic of the “cut,” is exemplified in a remarkable manner by the 4th Lateran Council (1215). There a single church council proffered canons: demanding that regions maintain a single bishop (“We altogether forbid one and the same city or diocese to have more than one bishop, as if it were a body with several heads like a monster” [Canon 9]), defined the doctrine of transubstantiation (“His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance, by God’s power, into his body and blood” [Canon 1]), reaffirmed clerical chastity (“Let them beware of every vice involving lust ... so that they may be worthy to minister in the sight of almighty God with a pure heart and an unsullied body” [Canon 14]), specific regulations regarding marriage (Canons 50-52) and incest (“moreover the prohibition against marriage shall not in future go beyond the fourth degree of consanguinity and of affinity ... The number four agrees well with the prohibition concerning bodily union about which the Apostle says, that the husband does not rule over his body, but the wife does; and the wife does not rule over her body, but the husband does; for there are four humours in the body” [Canon 50]), and regulated excommunication (Canons 47-49).

persecution which began at the end of 249.⁷⁹ These texts offer a pathos driven plea for the unity of the Christian Church in the wake of this disaster. As *De lapsis* notes, this persecution greatly fragmented the church, not simply in its execution and direct persecution of Christians, but in a sense more traumatically, in its creation of a caste of Christians, the “*lapsi*”—those who “fell away” from the church during the persecution—whose status was a source of great conflict in the North African church. On the one side stood the Novatianists, who utterly rejected any readmittance of the *lapsi* into the Christian community. On the other side stood those bishops who re-admitted without condition. In this sense, Cyprian attempts to offer a moderate or middle-route between these two extreme positions vis-à-vis the *lapsi*.

Given the great upheaval and fragmentation generated by this catastrophe, Cyprian offers *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate* in order to address the question of Christian unity. Toward this end, *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate* is primarily addressed not to those who would threaten the church from without (those outside of the borders), but to the inconspicuous forces that threaten the church from within: the heretics and the schismatics (e.g. the Novatianists). “Thereupon the Enemy,” Cyprian writes, “seeing his idols abandoned and his temples and haunts deserted by the ever growing numbers of the faithful, devised a fresh deceit, using the Christian name itself to mislead the unwary. He invented heresies and schisms so as to undermine the faith, to corrupt, to sunder our unity.”⁸⁰ Being primarily addressed to the question of Christian unity in the context of heresy and schism, it is unsurprising that Cyprian's approach would make consistent reference to

⁷⁹ “Le *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate* est d'abord un cri d'alarme et un appel passionné à l'unité de l'Église auquel l'évêque Cyprien a probablement donné un retentissement public à l'occasion du synode provincial qui s'est tenu à Carthage vers la fin de l'année 251.” Paolo Siniscalco and Paul Mattei “Préface” in *L'unité de L'Église* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2006), VI.

⁸⁰ St. Cyprian, “The Lapsed and the Unity of the Catholic Church,” in *Ancient Christian Writers No. 25*, trans. Maurice Bévenot S.J. (Westminster MD: The Newman Press, 1957), 45.

dogmatic conformity, even going so far as interpreting Christian unity primarily in the language of *doctrinal unanimity*.

From the beginning of *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate*, Cyprian identifies the body of Christ as one of the central images of the Catholic church, writing, “if a man does not hold fast to this oneness [*unitatem*] of the Church, does he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he resists and withstands the Church, has he still confidence that he is in the Church, when the blessed Apostle Paul gives us this very teaching and points to the mystery of Oneness [*unitatis*] saying ‘*One body* and one Spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God?’”⁸¹

In *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate*, Cyprian employs a wide array of interrelated terms in order to express his notion of unity—including: *unitas*, *concordia/discordia*, *pacem*, *unanimis*, and *consentio/dissideo*—the entirety of which must be put into play if the subtlety of his notion, and its divergence from competing notions of unity is to be revealed with requisite clarity. The clearest exposition of this notion of unity can be found in *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate*’s exegesis of Matt. 18.19-20: “truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” For Cyprian, the exegetical center of this passage is to be found in the “agree on earth” [συμφωνήσωσιν ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς], through which the “two or three” [δύο ἢ τρεῖς] are to be interpreted and limited. As he writes, “for Our Lord was urging His disciples to unanimity [*unanimatatem*] and peace [*pacem*] ... showing that it is not the number but the unanimity [*unanimatatem*] of those praying that counted most.”⁸²

⁸¹ Ibid., 47 [emphasis added].

⁸² Ibid., 54.

Two points are essential to this exegesis: first, is the linguistic shift from *unitas* to *unanimitas*. While certainly these terms are not unrelated, both referring fundamentally to a coming together, they do nevertheless bear quite distinct connotations. Unlike the broader *unitas*, *unanimitas* directly connotes a conformity of opinion, as the English equivalent “unanimous” indicates. Thus, having slipped from the broader *unitas* to *unanimitas*, it is unsurprising that the numerical coming together of the “two or three,” the gathering [συνηγμένοι], is relegated to a secondary role, beneath the primacy of the “agree on earth,” understood by Cyprian in dogmatic/doctrinal terms. The dogmatic nature of this concern can be seen in Cyprian's assertion that “Our Lord is speaking of His Church, ... He is telling those who are in the Church, that *if they are of one mind* [*si ipsi concordēs fuerint*] ...”⁸³ Thus, for Cyprian, the impetus of this passage is primarily a call to agreement [*concordēs fuerint*], and a call to physical or ecclesial gathering [συνηγμένοι] only tangentially.⁸⁴

In this way, Cyprian has not only transitioned from *unitas* to *unanimitas*, but further, from *unanimitas* to *concordia*. This transition is made explicit in Cyprian's continuing exegesis:

“He [Jesus] condemns the discord [*discordiam*] of the faithless; and with His own lips He commends concord [*pacem*] to His faithful, by making clear that He is with two or three who pray in harmony [*unianimiter*], rather than with any number of dissenters [*dissentibus pluribus*], and that more can be obtained by the united [*concordi*] prayers of a few than by the petitioning of many who are in disagreement [*discordiosa*].”⁸⁵

Cyprianic unity, can thus be seen to primarily revolve around the suppression of dissidence and disagreement—otherness and difference are obstacles to unity. And lest this dissidence be understood in overly schismatic terms (as a breaking of communion, rather than primarily as

⁸³ Ibid., 55 [emphasis added].

⁸⁴ “Corruptors and false interpreters of the Gospel,” he insists, “quote the end [οὗ γὰρ εἰσιν δύο ἢ τρεῖς συνηγμένοι ... ἐκεῖ εἰμὶ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν] and ignore what has gone before.” Ibid., 54.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 55.

doctrinal dissonance), Cyprian writes elsewhere that “our Mother should have the happiness of clasping to her bosom all her people in one *like-minded* body [*consentientis populi corpus unum*].”⁸⁶ Thus *consentio*, agreement or assent, joins *unanimis* and *concordia*, further cementing the doctrinal bent of Cyprianic *unitas*.

For Cyprian, the heretic or schismatics break in *unanimis/concordia/consentio* corrupts the flesh of the body of Christ. Thus, Cyprian insists that dissent is a disease or a cancer which violently tears apart the internal organs of the church. “God is one, and Christ is one, and his church is one; one is the faith and one the people cemented together by harmony into the strong unity of a body,” Cyprian writes, “that unity cannot be split; that one body cannot be divided by any cleavage of its structure, nor cut up in fragments with its vitals torn apart.”⁸⁷ Simply put, the church cannot fragment *and survive*; the unity and therefore survival of the Christian community depends upon the erasure or excision of any rupture or gap within the body of Christ. “Nothing that is separated from the parent stock,” Cyprian insists, “can ever live or breathe apart; all hope of its salvation is lost.”⁸⁸

Thus for Cyprian, the manner by which schism grows and develops is clear. Schism begins in *discordia* or *dissideo*, where it festers in the body of the church, spreading until it is “cut out.” For as Cyprian writes in *De lapsis*, “he is a poor doctor whose timid hand spares the swelling, festering wound, and who, by letting the poison remain buried deep in the body, only aggravates the ill. *The wound must be cut open, the infected parts cut out*, and the wound treated with stringent remedies.”⁸⁹ For Cyprian, such a “cutting out” of the heretical infection is not the generation of

⁸⁶ Ibid., 64-65.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 65.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 24 [emphasis added].

schism, for already in their *discordia* and *dissideo* these dissenters have committed the sin of schism; “for it is not we who have left them, but they who have left us ... they have cut themselves off from the source and origin of [Christian] realities.”⁹⁰

One will find consistent echoes of this logic throughout the subsequent medieval and modern periods, both in religious and secular contexts. Thus, for example, Aquinas employs precisely the same argument in his justification of the death penalty, writing:

For this reason we observe that if the health of the whole body demands the excision of a member, through its being decayed or infectious to the other members, it will be both praiseworthy and advantageous to have it cut away. Now every individual person is compared to the whole community, as part to whole. Therefore if a man be dangerous and infectious to the community, on account of some sin, it is praiseworthy and advantageous that he be killed in order to safeguard the common good, since “a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5:6).⁹¹

More recently, Jacob Rogozinski has also traced the way in which this logic informed political violence in the terror of the French revolution,:

When Saint-Just strikes out at the “factions” (i.e., mostly the “Enragés” and the most radical penniless “Sansculottes”) who enter “into the bowels of the Republic” to “corrupt” it, when his colleague Billaud-Varenne denounces to the committee of Public Safety, “the members who want to act without the direction of the head” and wants to “give back to the political body a strong health,” cutting off the “gangrened members,” they bring to light the ultimate purpose of the Jacobin Terror: the project of rebuilding the body and rebuilding a One, of re-founding the unity of the political body while eliminating those that, from the bottom, oppose any form of tentative reincorporation.⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibid., 54-55. Tertullian employs a similar logic in regard to Marcion, suggesting that Marcion’s *cutting out* of certain texts from the canon, in order to *cut out* suffering from Christ’s flesh— “have you, then, cut away all sufferings from Christ, on the ground that, as a mere phantom, He was incapable of experiencing them” (Tertullian, “On the Flesh of Christ,” 525)—, results in the heretics *cutting themselves out* of the Christian community.

⁹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Cincinnati: Benziger Brothers, 1920), II-II 64.2.

⁹² Jacob Rogozinski, “Birth to the World (Nine Theses on the Possibility of the Political),” (unpublished), 2. The French text was published in 2002 as Jacob Rogozinski, “Naître au monde (neuf thèses sur la possibilité du politique)” *Lignes* 9 (2002): 111-133.

In an analogous way, he argues, one finds this surgical logic of the One-body, that nevertheless demands dismemberment, in mid-20th century fascism and contemporary Islamist violence, writing of the two:

In what bodily configuration does fascism or its inverse, Islamist totalitarianism, root themselves? That of a body in crisis, a sick body, invaded by a foreign Enemy seeking to destroy it. They claim to “heal” it, to soothe its pain by throwing out its blistering gangrene.⁹³

Yet, despite its historical importance within the Western imaginary, this surgical logic of community exclusion is by no means the only viable option. Rather, there remains a strain of thinking which does not constitute difference as an obstacle to unity, but rather—as was already seen in the case of 1st Corinthians 12—this alternative understands difference as unity’s very condition of possibility, because for these thinkers, the gap or fault within the individual and the social body is unavoidable. Paradoxically, it is precisely these thinkers who affirm the ruptured heart of every body—whether sexual or social—who articulate a logic capable of offering an alternative to dismemberment. It is to this model that I will now turn.

B. Circumcision and the Cut

Before turning to the alternative healing model of community health, it may be helpful to briefly consider Paul’s discussion of “the cut” in the letter to the Galatians. This letter perhaps constitutes Paul’s most sustained single argument, challenging the movement traditionally designated the “Judaizers,” “legalists,” or “nomists,” an early group of Christian missionaries who preach “a different gospel” [ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον] (1.6) than that first proclaimed by Paul.⁹⁴ The Pauline

⁹³ Ibid., 11. For a phenomenological analysis of this logic, within the specific context of Nazi Germany, see: Boaz Neumann, “The Phenomenology of the German People’s Body (*Volkskörper*) and the Extermination of the Jewish Body” *New German Critique*, no. 106 (2009): 149-81.

⁹⁴ The word ἀκροβυστίας is often rendered in a sanitized fashion as “uncircumcised”—as in the gospel of the uncircumcised—a translation that is certainly not completely inappropriate insofar as the term is also a slang term

argument functions on two levels simultaneously: at the level of the body of the gentile believer, Paul challenges the requirement of gentile circumcision, while at the level of the social-body of the burgeoning Christian community, Paul will seek to universalize the Abrahamic covenant without universalizing the law.⁹⁵ Drawing these levels together, Paul suggests that these teachers' insistence upon circumcision as a prerequisite for communal participation stands in for the broader character of this different gospel, a perverse (μεταστρέψαι) orientation that substitutes the law for the role justly reserved for love.

The culminating thesis of the Pauline argument finds clear statements at two points: first in 5.6 where Paul declares that “in Christ Jesus neither the circumcision nor the foreskin has any value” [ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ (Ἰησοῦ) οὔτε περιτομή τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία], and second, in the closing of the letter, where this phrase is repeated almost verbatim: “for neither circumcision nor the foreskin are anything” [οὔτε γὰρ περιτομή τι ἔστιν οὔτε ἀκροβυστία] (6.15). In these passages, Paul ostensibly dismisses the “value” (ἰσχύει) of these concrete differences, if not their very reality (ἔστιν). Does he not therefore repeat the central gesture of exclusion of the remainder against which I have been developing an argument? Is this condemnation of difference (ἕτερον) not counter to the affirmation of bodily, sexual, and social difference developed throughout the preceding sections? Examining Paul's argument more closely, it can be shown that the reality is precisely the opposite.⁹⁶

for gentiles (akin, to the modern colloquial use of “goy”). But, given the focus on the sexual member, I will here employ its most direct meaning, “foreskin.”

⁹⁵ “The passage is all about the covenant, membership in which is now thrown open to Jew and Gentile alike.” N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 128.

⁹⁶ The following argument will proffer a generous reading of Galatians, akin to that offered by Mollenkott. For a more critical reading of Galatians, see: Joseph A. Marchail “Bodies Bound for Circumcision and Baptism: An Intersex Critique and the Interpretation of Galatians” *Theology & Sexuality* 6.2 (2010): 163-182. As Marchail writes, “in the arguments of these texts, circumcision and specific forms of gendered behavior become focal points for eliminating ambiguities and valorizing a particular vision of community” (166), continuing, “to Paul's constrained

These agitators—“those who unsettle” [οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες] (5.12)—are, for Paul, marked by their disruption of the agapic unity of the community: that is, they “cut in” [ἐνέκοψεν] (5.7) on the community (pun intended), separating the gentile converts from the truth: that is, from “faith working through agapic love” [πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη] (5.6). What is at stake here is not primarily the ritual activity of circumcision as such; Paul is not concerned with the maintenance of the physical member and its foreskin. Rather, the target of Pauline condemnation is not the act of circumcision, but the disruption and disunity introduced by these advocates and the logic which would underlie such a demand.⁹⁷

Paul—in his idiomatic, sarcastic (even crass) manner—satirizes this alternative gospel’s logic of mandated circumcision. Since, he suggests, these agitators insist that the cut [περιτέμνω] is a necessary condition for the constitution of the social-body, perhaps they should simply go the rest of the way and fully “castrate themselves” [ἀποκόψονται] (5.12).⁹⁸ Here Paul not only denies the necessary sacrifice of the remainder in the constitution of the social-body, but openly mocks those who would substitute such a symbolic exclusion—or perhaps more precisely, who would

anatomy of belonging, ... treatment of the ‘member’ centers around the presence or absence of the appropriate kind of genitalia as an exemplary signifier” (166). Thus, rather than the inclusive interpretation that will here be suggested, Marchail finds a logic of exclusion in this text akin to the Cyprianic surgical model: “Paul seems ... much more concerned with keeping certain embodied experiences, sensations, and subjects out of (his version of) the assembly communities” (174).

⁹⁷ As Lacan will later suggest, “this object *a* [foreskin] as something cut off presentifies a quintessential relation to separation as such” (Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X*, trans. A. R. Price [Malden: Polity, 2004], 213). That is to say, insofar as circumcision is not merely a surgical, but a ritual act, its function is always additionally social. Drawing from Jeremiah 9.5’s critique of “all those who are circumcised only in the foreskin,” Lacan suggests that “what’s really involved here is some permanent relation to a lost object as such. This *object a* as something cut off presentifies a quintessential relation to separation as such. ... What’s involved is in no way localized, far from it, in that little piece of flesh that forms the object of the rite. ... The essential separation from a particular part of the body, a particular appendage, comes to symbolize for the now alienated subject a fundamental relationship with his body” (Ibid.).

⁹⁸ Marchail will particularly target this rhetorical flourish in his critique, writing, “in this letter Paul curses and name-calls, insults and isolates, cuts out and cuts off. Rhetorically speaking, Paul is militantly masculine in Galatians.” Ibid., 173.

substitute *the social distinction between* the foreskin and its symbolic rejection—with the role properly apportioned to love (ἀγάπη/caritas). To those who might ask, “must one ‘cut away’ a basic part of oneself in order to approach God?,”⁹⁹ Paul therefore offers a clear “no!”

Paul situates love as the alternative to “the cut,” as the true guarantor of unity. This is clarified in the two summary statements discussed above. In each instance, Paul posits an alternate source of value [τι ἰσχύει] (5.6.) or being [τι ἔστιν] (6.15) that supersedes the social distinction between foreskin and circumcision. In the first case, he writes that “the only thing that has value is faith working through love” [πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη] (5.6)—that is, as Paul will subsequently make clear, simply a repetition of the greatest commandment: “love your neighbor as yourself” [ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν] (5.14). Likewise in the second iteration he repeats the same disjunctive, ἀλλὰ, contrasting the disunity of the Galatian community with “the new creation” [καινὴ κτίσις] (6.15). Given the near identity of the first clause of each statement, we might therefore tentatively presume an identity, or at least a deep conformity between these two statements. Against the exclusion of the remainder, Paul posits a new creation, a new community of mutual self-giving love.

This agapic love is defined by two principles. First, as we have already seen in the gesture toward the greatest commandment, agapic love is marked by a reciprocal self-giving: “through love become slaves to one another” [διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις] (5.13). Second, this love cuts across traditional socio-ethnic boundaries. For Paul, “there is not Jew nor Greek, not slave nor

⁹⁹ Thomas Bohache, “‘To Cut or not to Cut?’ Is Compulsory Heterosexuality a Prerequisite for Christianity?” in R. Goss and M. West (eds.), *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 231. According to Bohache, Paul’s discourse on circumcision “is directly comparable to homosexuality because both [homosexuality and non-circumcision] challenge long-accepted standards of religious entry requirements.” Ibid.

free, not male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3.28).¹⁰⁰ Simply put, for Paul, love functions as the means of unification or identity formation for the burgeoning Christian community; “it is love itself that enjoins us to ‘unplug’ from the organic community into which we were born.”¹⁰¹ The dismemberment of the body—the symbolic exclusion of the remainder—cannot achieve this end. This is because, for Paul, the agitators’ insistence upon the bodily cut is inevitably recapitulated in a cut across the social-body (the distinction between those who are “in” and those who are “out”). Paul decries this logic of dismemberment in scandalous language, insisting “that if you should be circumcised, then Christ will be of no benefit to you” (5.2). The gentile does not face the requirement to submit to the law, because the gospel exceeds such demarcations: “we know that a person is not justified by the law, but through the faith of Christ Jesus” (2.16).

Of course, as has been clear since the emergence of the so-called New Perspective on Paul, and counter to anti-Semitic readings of the Pauline corpus, Paul is not here advocating for the rejection or condemnation of Judaism, nor the total erasure of any social, ethnic, or sexual difference.¹⁰² Such differences are not, as Alain Badiou suggests “obsolete.”¹⁰³ As Hays writes,

¹⁰⁰ “In this new world in Christ, three binary oppositions that characterized all human existence in the old age have been dissolved.” Richard B. Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Vol. XI*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 272.

¹⁰¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute—or, Why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for?* (New York: Verso, 2000), 121.

¹⁰² Here, Paul’s arguments for difference in 1st Corinthians constitute a helpful supplement, resisting a totalizing interpretation: “[Paul’s] concern is for its essential unity. That does not mean uniformity. That was the Corinthian error, to think that uniformity was a value, or that it represented true spirituality. Paul’s concern is for their unity; but there is no such thing as true unity without diversity” (Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 602).

¹⁰³ This is against the position that Alain Badiou attributes to Paul: “universalizable singularity necessarily breaks with identitarian singularity” (Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003], 11) or again, in less technical jargon, “this is the driving force behind Paul’s universalist conviction: that ‘ethnic’ or cultural difference, of which the opposition between Greek and Jew is in his time, and in the empire as a whole, the prototype, is no longer significant with regard to the real, or to the new object that sets out a new discourse (the resurrection)” (Ibid., 57). While Badiou rightly sees a *political* necessity to read Paul against identitarianism (he cites, for example, the French identitarianism of *Le Front Nationale*), and

“does Paul mean that Jews cannot be believers? Clearly he cannot mean that; Paul himself, as a Jew, was circumcised.”¹⁰⁴ Rather, Paul remained a Jew, “an Israelite from the seed of Abraham” (Rom. 11.1), a “Hebrew born of the Hebrews ... according to the righteousness of the law, blameless” (Phil 3.5-6). Paul is here instead proposing that the Christian community can only be unified through an agapic spiritual unity, the traditional means of socio-ethnic community formation are, for the Christian, mere division.¹⁰⁵ It is for this reason that the Pauline Gospel is “the gospel of the foreskin [τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς ἀκροβυστίας]” (2.7). For Paul, neither the body nor the social-body must be dismembered, the remainder need not be cast-off, in order to constitute a community. Indeed, if the community removes difference, through the exclusion of the gentile as-gentile, than love has been lost, and the community cannot hold. It is precisely this conception of unity-through-difference in love, that Augustine will draw from Paul in his turn from Cyprianic surgical metaphors to healing metaphors.

C. The Healing Model — Augustine

Like the surgical model, the healing model has deep roots in the earliest Christian tradition. In his own letter to the Corinthians, for example, Clement of Rome (cf. Phil. 4.3) manifests precisely the same concern for the maintenance of difference within the Christian community that Paul had

rightly sees the *exegetical* necessity of relativizing all prior identities in relating to that of the Gospel (Gal. 3.28), he seems to read this relativizing in an overly strict manner, that pushes against the grain of contemporary Pauline scholarship. Thus, for example, retreating from the work of the “New Perspective” on Paul, Badiou attributes to Paul the tropes of a vaguely Lutheran antinomianism: “In [Paul’s] eyes, the event [of the resurrection] renders prior markings obsolete, and the new universality bears no privileged relation to the Jewish community” (Ibid., 23).

¹⁰⁴ Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians.”

¹⁰⁵ “God established the family of Abraham. Paul reaffirms it. What matters is who belongs to it. Paul says that all those in Christ belong, whatever their racial background.” Wright, *What Paul Really Said*, 121.

expressed in 1st Corinthians 12. In a passage that seems intent to directly echo the apostle's earlier analogy, Clement writes of the body of the burgeoning Christian community;

The great cannot exist without the small, nor can the small without the great. A certain organic unity binds all parts, and therein lies the advantage. Let us take our body. The head is nothing without the feet, and the feet are nothing without the head. The smallest organs of our body are necessary and valuable to the whole body; in fact, all parts conspire and yield the same obedience toward maintaining the whole of the body. Therefore let the whole of our body be maintained in Christ Jesus, and let each submit to his neighbor's rights in the measure determined by the special gift bestowed on him. Let the strong care for the weak, and the weak respect the strong; let the rich support the poor, and the poor render thanks to God for giving them the means of supplying their needs; let the wise man show his wisdom not in words but in active help; the humble man must not testify for himself, but leave it to another to testify on his behalf.¹⁰⁶

Here one does not find the language of the head [κεφαλή] employed in contradistinction to that which is “under His feet” (Eph. 1.22), but rather, as that which, against any hierarchical organization of the body, exists in an axiological and ontological equality with the supposedly lesser member (cf. 1 Cor. 12.21). For Clement, this is symbolic of the social relations of the early church which are intended to subvert the ostensibly “obvious” social hierarchies of the Roman world—particularly here, economic inequality.

Yet, as should be clear at this point, Clement's reference to the “whole of our body” is profoundly ambiguous, for the unity or integrity of the body can be obtained or maintained through a recourse to the “cut,” as the Cypriatic surgical model suggests. Yet, Clement expresses a deep antipathy toward any dismemberment of the body. As he writes, against schismatic tendencies within the church, “why do we tear apart and disjoint the members of Christ and revolt against our own body, and go to such extremes of madness as to forget that we are mutually dependent

¹⁰⁶ Clement of Rome, “Epistle to the Corinthians,” in James A. Kleist (trans.), *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation No. 1* (New York: Newman Press, 1946), 32 (37-38).

members?”¹⁰⁷ Here, Clement seems to suggest some alternative to the surgical model, a possibility that will be picked up by his younger contemporary, Polycarp of Smyrna, who writes in a letter to the Church in Philippi, “I am deeply grieved, therefore, brethren, for him (Valens) and his wife; to whom may the Lord grant true repentance! And be then moderate in regard to this matter, and do not count such as enemies (2 Thessalonians 3:15) but call them back as suffering and straying members, *that you may save your whole body.*”¹⁰⁸

Here schism¹⁰⁹ is not treated as a cancerous growth that must be excised for the sake of the body. Rather, drawing from medicinal—rather than surgical—imagery, Polycarp suggests that the health of the community be understood as a holistic phenomenon. It is not that schismatics or heretics should be “cut out” from the community in order to safeguard the purity and health of the body, but rather, insofar as these schismatics are understood as “straying members,” who nevertheless remain legitimate members (not enemies), the health of the community can only be attained when these “mutually dependent” members—to borrow Clement’s phrase—are brought back into the fold; the health of the community depends directly upon the healing of the schismatic member.

It is this alternative model, and its grounding in a metaphor of medicinal healing, that I will here seek to draw out of the later Christian tradition, particularly the work of Augustine. What will be suggested is that whereas the surgical model privileges unity (understood as unanimity and

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁸ St. Polycarp, “Epistles to the Philippians” in James A. Kleist (trans.), *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation No. 6* (New York: Newman Press, 1948), 81 (11).

¹⁰⁹ Contemporary research suggests that the sin of Valens may have been a recantation of the faith in the face of economic persecution, making Valens a useful comparison to Cyprian’s *Lapsi* or Augustine’s *Traditores*. See, e.g.: Harry O. Maier, “Purity and Danger in Polycarp’s Epistle to the Philippians: The Sin of Valens in Social Perspective,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1.3 (1993): 229–247.

uniformity), but eventuates in the establishment of a social cut against all difference within the community; the healing model begins with an affirmation of difference and multiplicity, but ends up generating a theology of unity-through-difference, by its emphasis upon love [*caritas*]. For, as Gregory of Nyssa remarks, “it is only in the union of all the particular members that the beauty of [Christ’s] body is complete.”¹¹⁰

Any attempt to place Augustine in conversation with Cyprian, particularly in a critical manner, must first contend with the great debt owed by Augustine to “the holy Cyprian, whose dignity is only increased by his humility.”¹¹¹ While I will below argue that Augustine offers a considerably more tenable interpretation of the body of Christ, it is worth noting that he does not appear to have conceived his reading of Christian unity to have been markedly divergent from his predecessor. In fact, given the similarity between Augustine’s context and Cyprian’s situation with the *lapsi*, Augustine relies on a considerable amount of Cyprianic material in his defense of Christian unity, particularly in *De baptismo contra donatistas*. Yet, as will be shown below, even his direct use of Cyprianic material is offered in a different register, that of *caritas*, which, in the Augustinian corpus, supplants *unanimis* or *concordia* as the mechanism of unification.

This divergence can be identified in Augustine's adaptation of the medical metaphor of Cyprian's *De lapsi* and *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate*. In a passage undeniably drawn from the former, Augustine writes:

If anyone is brought to the surgeon, afflicted with a grievous wound in some vital part of the body, ... they entrust him to the surgeon to be cured [*curandum*]. Nor, again, because they so entrust him, do they ask the surgeon to cure the limbs that are sound as well; but they desire him to apply drugs with all care to the one part from which death is threatening. ... What will it then profit a man that he has sound faith,

¹¹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Canticles*, 13 (1049B– 1052A), as cited in Ward, “Bodies,” 177.

¹¹¹ St. Augustine, *The Seven Books of Augustin, Bishop of Hippo, On Baptism, Against the Donatists*, trans. Rev. J. R. King, M.A. (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 2.4.5.

or perhaps only soundness in the sacrament of faith, when the soundness of his charity [*caritatis*] is done away with by the fatal wound of schism, so that by the overthrow of it the other points, which were in themselves sound, are brought into the infection of death?¹¹²

Three points are worth noting in this passage. First, as a strictly exegetical note, it should be recognized that, whereas in Cyprian this image functioned primarily in regards to the body of Christ—the “member” representing an individual Christian (or schismatic)—for Augustine, this image is here employed at the level of the individual Christian—thus the “member” or “limb” represents aspects of the individual: faith, charity, etc. Yet, this shift to the individual should not be taken as absolute, for as will be shown below, Augustine's account of the “individual body” is completely homologous with his conception of the body of Christ at large. Second, whereas in Cyprian's account of schism, the imagery tends to focus upon the necessity of a cutting out [*amputatis*]¹¹³ and removal of the diseased member, Augustine maintains healing or curing [*curandum* and *sanetur*]¹¹⁴ as the principle metaphors of a proper Christian response to schism.¹¹⁵ Thus, where in Cyprian one finds quite literally “divisive” language of separation and expulsion of the corrupt, Augustine manifests a decidedly more inclusive posture, emphasizing health, reintegration, and reincorporation. This emphasis upon the individual health of the schismatic will be reiterated in his larger inclusive notion of the church as body of Christ. Third, and connected to this emphasis upon integration, the principal mechanism for the maintenance of ecclesial

¹¹² Ibid., 1.8.11.

¹¹³ St. Cyprian, *Libri De Catholicae ecclesiae unitate: De lapsis et De habitu virginum* (H. Laupp, 1852), 79.

¹¹⁴ St. Augustine, *Traité Anti-Donatistes Vol. II: De baptismo libri VII*, trans. G. Finaert (Heno: Desclée de Brouwer, 1964), 82-84.

¹¹⁵ It is worth noting that Cyprian does use the language of *curandum*, but exclusively in the context of *amputatis*. That is to say, while the two share the language of *curandum*, for Cyprian, the only appropriate cure is a metaphorical amputation.

communion is *caritas*. As seen above, it is neither *discordia* nor *dissideo* which generates schism, but rather, schism is directly tied to a failure or lack of *caritas*. Thus, in the same way that Cyprian's understanding of unity of the body of Christ was elaborated through an examination of the web of related terminology, Augustine's thought too may be clarified through an analogous examination.

Primacy of place, for Augustine—as was already seen in his examination of the “individual body”—is given to love and health [*caritas* and *sanitas*]. These two terms can be found throughout Augustine's corpus, and appear with conspicuous regularity in reference to the body of Christ. In *De doctrina christiana*, for example, we read that “the Church is His body, as the apostle's teaching shows us; ... His body, then, which has many members, and all performing different functions, He holds together in the body of unity and love, which is its true health.”¹¹⁶ Given this intimate connection between unity, love, and health, it is unsurprising that Augustine's account of the schism in *De baptismo* directly correlates schism and a failure of *caritas*. Where love succeeds, unity flourishes; where love fails, schism spreads. The theological consequences of this conception of the body of Christ—constructed from a model of love and health, rather than from a model of unanimity and consent—can be found throughout Augustine's corpus, but I will here limit myself to two examples: the relation between married and widowed women, and a refutation of Manichaeism.¹¹⁷

In this first example, taken from Augustine's *De bono viduitatis*, Augustine attempts to moderate any potentially excessive interpretations of his commendation of widowhood.

¹¹⁶ St. Augustine, *St. Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine [a Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church - Volume II]*, trans. J.F. Shaw (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 526.

¹¹⁷ One might also benefit from a consideration of post-resurrectional sexual difference discussed above.

Specifically, as in the case of Paul's famous exhortation in 1st Corinthians 7.8-9,¹¹⁸ Augustine does not wish his call to celibacy to be taken as an absolute requirement. Rather, drawing upon the image of the body of Christ, Augustine insists that “assuredly he was addressing married persons also, [when] he saith, 'Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?' So great then is the good of faithful marriage, that even the very members of are (members) of Christ.”¹¹⁹ Continuing in this vein, Augustine—citing Romans 12.4-6—emphasizes the “diverse” gifts of those who are members of the body of Christ. Thus, rather than a model of unanimity, Augustine here emphasizes the Pauline conception of the body of Christ as a symbol of unity-through-difference.

Analogous concerns can be identified in Augustine's rejection of the Manichaean dualistic ontology. For Augustine, the Manichean rejection of the material world, the questions of bodily resurrection, and the body of Christ are all intimately united concerns. This interrelation relies upon the bi-directionality of the symbol “body of Christ.” Just as “the body of Christ” informs the church that it should be structured as the healthful members of a human body, so too does it inform the body that it is to be structured as the mystical unity of the church. Thus, Augustine is able to ask, in the midst of a polemic against the Manichaeans:

How is the flesh evil, when the souls [of the church] themselves are admonished to imitate the peace of its members? How is it the creation of the enemy, when the souls themselves, which rule the bodies, take pattern from the members of the body, not to have schisms of enmities among themselves, in order that, what God hath granted unto the body by nature, this themselves also may love to have by grace?¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion”

¹¹⁹ St. Augustine, “On the Good of Widowhood” in *St. Augustine's On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, and Moral Treatises [a Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church - Volume III]*, trans. Rev. C.L. Cornish, M.A. (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 442.

¹²⁰ St. Augustine, “On Continence” in *St. Augustine's On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, and Moral Treatises [a Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church - Volume III]*, trans. Rev. C.L. Cornish, M.A. (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 389.

Here, the common interpretation of the symbol has been inverted. Because the body is able to function as a model for the church, it is accorded an added dignity. Drawing upon this bi-directionality, Augustine is able to make use of the symbol in two distinct contexts: in defense of the unity of the church and in defense of a positive affirmation of material embodiment. When combined with the more “literal” reading of the body of Christ as the physical body of Jesus of Nazareth, Augustine models a tripartite symbol, whose complexity permits his arguments to move with great speed and in quite unexpected directions, as I have sought to emulate above.¹²¹

What marks these three examples as exceptional is not their conclusions—e.g. the acceptance of both the married and the unmarried into the church, the rejection of Manichaeism, etc. Rather, the particular interest of these examples is the specific way in which the discourse regarding the body of Christ *functions*. Having interpreted the unity of the body of Christ as *unanymis, concordia*, and thus, uniformity, Cyprian's potential use of the body is contextually limited to the controversies of *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate* and *De Lapsis*, or similar disputes: that is, the affirmation of dogmatic unity against heretics and schismatics. Augustine, on the contrary, by viewing the unity of the body of Christ through the lens of *caritas* and *sanitas* is able to, on the one hand, use the symbol in such manners, as exemplified in his critiques of the Donatists or Arians, but also in a precisely inverted manner, *as a tool in the pure affirmation of difference*. In *De bono viduitatis* the body of Christ appears, not to demand conformity in sexual expression, but to admit to a variance or “diversity” in sexual “gifts.” In *De civitate dei contra paganos*, the

¹²¹ Linguistically, it is worth noting that the use of “*corpus christi*” is reserved for the church alone, for, “when he speaks of Christ’s human nature or of its components, he refers to it or to them as *anima, caro, homo, humana natura* and *corpus*” (Stanislaus Grabowski, “St. Augustine and the Doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ,” *Theological Studies*, 7 no. 1, March 1946, 73). Yet, this fact does not deter Augustine from seeing a symbolic or analogical relationship between the two.

body of Christ appears, not to regulate sexual determination, but rather to justify this differentiation as such. While Augustine's conception of the body of Christ certainly privileges unity, this unity is not undertaken at the cost of difference, but rather presupposes difference as its condition.

The unity of *caritas* cannot presuppose a prior uniformity, because, for Augustine, *caritas* is always the union of the diverse.¹²² Augustine attests to this necessity throughout his corpus—and it is thus no coincidence that his principal image of love is the union of the sexually differentiated male and female in marriage.¹²³ As Augustine writes of marriage in *De civitate dei*, “but we, for our part, have no manner of doubt that to increase and multiply and replenish the earth in virtue of the blessing of God, is a gift of marriage as God instituted it from the beginning before man sinned, when He created them male and female—in other words, two sexes *manifestly distinct*.”¹²⁴ God's creation here is presented as the generation of two “manifestly distinct” [*evidens utique in carne*] sexes; distinct not only socially or politically, but distinct in the flesh, *in carne*; that is to say, God creates humanity as a materially differentiated substrate. It is not simply the case that this differentiation is posited as static, but rather, as illustrated by Augustine's emphasis upon the call to increase and multiply [*crescere* and *multiplicari*], the unity of these diversities in marriage is understood as a generative process. From the unity of difference springs further

¹²² As Hegel will summarize a dialectical conception of love, closely akin to Augustine's notion of love as unity-through-difference: “love is a distinguishing of two, who nevertheless are absolutely not distinguished for each other. The consciousness or feeling of the identity of the two—to be outside of myself and in the other—this is love. I have my self-consciousness not in me but in the other. ... This other, because it likewise exists outside itself, has its self-consciousness only in me, and both the other and the I are only this consciousness of being-outside-ourselves and of our identity; we are only this intuition, feeling, and knowledge of our unity. This is love, and without knowing that love is both a distinguishing and the sublation of the distinction, one speaks emptily of it.” Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 418.

¹²³ And often, emphasizing the previous analysis of the plurivocity of the body of Christ, these images will appear in tandem with images of the body of Christ and the church. E.g. Augustine “On Continence,” 388.

¹²⁴ Augustine, *The City of God*, 560. Latin: St. Augustine, “La cité de Dieu: Livres XI-XIV, formation des deux cités,” in *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, trans. G. Combès (Henao: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), 440.

difference. Or as Augustine writes, “‘male and female’ cannot be understood of two things in one man, as if there were in him one thing which rules, another which is ruled; but it is quite clear that they were created male and female, with bodies of different [*diversi*] sexes, for the very purpose of begetting offspring, and so increasing, multiplying, and replenishing the earth.”¹²⁵

In light of this insistence that an affirmation of difference stood at the ground of human existence, is not surprising that Augustine would immediately move into a consideration of the possibility of prelapsarian procreation.¹²⁶ For Augustine, to deny the possibility of such procreation is to affirm that “man's sin was necessary to complete the number of the saints.”¹²⁷ Or said differently, for Augustine, the multiplication and differentiation of humanity is not external to the inherent good of creation, but rather, a manifest component of that good. Thus, even when Augustine seeks to uphold sexual norms, for example the condemnation of incest, his critique is centered around the dissemination of difference. “It is very reasonable and just [*ratio rectissima caritatis*],” Augustine insists, “that man [sic], ... should not himself sustain many [*diversarum*] relationships, but that the various relationships should be distributed among several.”¹²⁸ That is to say, one man should not hold the relation “father” and “father-in-law” to the same child, nor should one woman hold the relationship “sister” and “mother” to the same sibling. It is not that such relations are unnatural in a strong sense,¹²⁹ but rather, that by limiting the distribution of difference,

¹²⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, 561.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, Book IV, Chapter 23 (561-564).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 561.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 597.

¹²⁹ For, as Augustine points out, it was necessary that Adam and Eve's children reproduce in precisely this manner. “And as there were no human beings except those who had been born of these two, men took their sisters for wives—an act which was as certainly dictated by necessity in these ancient days as afterwards it was condemned by the prohibitions of religion.” *Ibid.*

they discourage the multiplication which strands at the ground of Augustine's anthropology. That is to say, the act of incest represents the fullest case of unity as uniformity, wherein several relationships are maintained by a single individual. The demand of *caritas*, on the other hand, here translated as the "reasonable and just" [*ratio rectissima caritatis*], is once again understood as a command to unity-through-difference. It is neither the case, Augustine insists, that unity be understood as a call toward incestuous anti-differentiation, nor that such differentiation be permitted to fragment the social fabric. Rather, this act of differentiation, "should thus serve to bind together the greatest number in the same social interests."¹³⁰

Like the surgical model, this paradigm continues to echo through the subsequent tradition. To cite only one prominent example, Symeon the New Theologian meditates constantly upon the theme of the body of Christ and its members. And yet, for Symeon, any loss or cut of membership is a source of great tragedy: "for my part, I will naturally grieve and weep at the breaking up of my own members, my own race, of brothers according to flesh and spirit."¹³¹ Like Augustine before him, therefore, Symeon aims toward a medicinal healing: "true repentance through confession and tears, like a kind of medicine and dressing, cleanses and clears away the wound of the heart and the scar which the sting of spiritual death had opened in it."¹³² Indeed, for Symeon, the entire Christian narrative can be understood as a process of restitution. As Symeon argues in his "Second Ethical Discourse," the taking of one member from Adam (his rib), opened up a wound which would be repeated historically throughout the Biblical narrative. At Babel, for example, "it is as if he cut limbs off from the body of Adam, separating and scattering them away from him

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Symeon, *On The Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, Vol. 2, 112.

¹³² Ibid., 123.

and each other. To each limb He gave a separate language so that never again would they be able to join together.”¹³³ And yet, despite this seeming impossibility of reconstitution of the body, this is precisely, according to Symeon, what one discovers in the incarnation, where God reverses the extraction of Adam’s member by taking a member from Eve (Jesus), and repairing the breach.

Yet, while this Augustinian paradigm offers a powerful model of health, wherein the social body is maintained through love-grounded-in-difference, it is nevertheless the case that Augustine often finds himself falling into precisely the same traps as Paul and the Deutero-Pauline authors. Just as with Paul, the construction of a post-heteronormative account of the body of Christ will require more than an uncritical appropriation of Augustine. For, while Augustine privileges difference, it should always be recognized that he has a tendency to cast this difference in dualistic terms of a binary sexual difference—thereby generating precisely those failures that will later manifest in von Balthasar and Marion’s attempt to construct a theology of eros from difference understood in an essentialist manner. Thus, while Augustine identifies sexual differentiation as a fundamental good, and as a constitutive structure of human embodiment, he will generally cast this difference as the difference between “male and female,” or more specifically, the difference manifest in the monogamous heterosexual male and female. This is because, despite the positive valence that I have given to his discussion of multiplicity above, this multiplicity is generally thought in terms of heterosexual reproduction; difference is “for the very purpose of begetting offspring, and so increasing, multiplying, and replenishing the earth.”¹³⁴ One should not forget that (as noted in chapter 1) it is precisely by recourse to a Levinasian account of difference, among the

¹³³ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *On The Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses, Vol. 1: The Church and the Last Things*, trans. Alexander Golitzin (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 90.

¹³⁴ Augustine, *The City of God*, 561.

most extreme articulations of difference as an intrinsic value, that Dussel constructed his critique of feminism and homosexuality as pursuits of “the same”—or in Marion’s words “homosexuality [is] the ultimate refusal of dissimilarity”¹³⁵—here echoing precisely the same logic that Augustine employed in his critique of incest. In this manner, Augustine falls prey to precisely the privileging of heterosexual reproduction that marks the logic of “reproductive futurism” that I have been seeking to challenge throughout this dissertation. And while Augustine’s discussion of chastity as a viable (even preferable) alternative to monogamy prevents a total subsumption of his account of bodily and sexual difference into reproductive futurism, the clear rhetorical privilege of the reproducing monogamous couple ends up undeniably coloring his theology. The result is a tendency to construct sexual relations in a hierarchical manner, eventuating with the claim that only men are independently the image of God, whereas women require the union with a husband to achieve full standing and dignity: “the woman *together with her own husband* is the image of God ... but when she is referred separately to her quality of *help-meet*, with regards the woman herself alone, then she is not the image of God; *but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God* as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined to him as one.”¹³⁶

For these reasons, and without belittling the contribution that Augustine’s “*curandum*” and “*sanetur*” make to a reimagining of the body of Christ, it is necessary to again invoke Tonstad’s warning against attempts to simply recast Christian orthodoxy as always already radical, and

¹³⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Future of Catholicism” in *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 78.

¹³⁶ St. Augustine, “On the Trinity” in Philip Schaff (ed), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2, Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 159 (12.7) [emphasis added]. Glossing this passage, Sarah Coakley remarks that “Augustine confronts the paradox of equality and difference, but the dice are this time ... loaded toward the latter, to subordinate difference, He bows, significantly, to authority, ‘order,’ and subordination. Yet another instinct, equally mandated by scripture (in Galatians 3.28), continues to draw him in a different direction. And so the paradox remains.” Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 292.

always already queer. Indeed, Augustine, together with his predecessors and successors (Paul, Clement, Polycarp, Symeon, etc.) provide invaluable resources to the contemporary thinker of the political and social body, but these resources must be read together with contemporary resources in radical and queer thinking in order to guard against their inherent limitations.

§3. In the Position of the Dysmember

Drawing forward what is liberatory from these traditions, while holding in abeyance those aspects which have historically lent themselves toward sexual hierarchy and dismemberment, what can then be said of the body of Christ? What can the religious community learn from a phenomenology and theology of the sexual flesh?

If the prior chapters have sought to unveil the way in which a monadic insistence upon the direct presence of the flesh to itself without gap, motivates problematic and rhetorically violent claims about women and sexual minorities, then the present chapter has sought to suggest that the same privilege of the direct presence of the community to itself, without the ruptures of otherness and difference, creates the condition for patriarchal and heteronormative hierarchy and violence at a social level. And yet, as has been shown, this tendency toward hierarchical constructions of the body of Christ—of the Christian community—are not the only tradition available. For, in their most creative and generative moments Paul, Augustine, and other members of the Christian tradition reveal the possibility of a genuinely new mode of organizing social relations that submits unity to a love grounded in embodied difference, and that rejects the privilege of the unanimous and uniform community of dogmatic and sexual conformity.

In order to achieve a post-heteronormative theology of the body of Christ, it will therefore be necessary to reject any account which privileges a monadic wholeness, and instead construct a

community that founds itself in the abject sexual member that is constituted as a dysmember: the ἀσχήμων. As Rogozinski argues, “those who want to discover the truth about community must first reject the fantasy of the One-Body, and for that purpose place themselves in the position of the remainder.”¹³⁷

One can find precisely this logic being worked out in the early Christian community, where Jesus’ death, particularly his death *on a cross*, is understood as a kenotic self-emptying into an abject condition: “but [Christ] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil. 2.7-8). For the Christians of the early church, such a death was a true scandal (σκάνδαλον, 1 Cor. 1.23) because execution on a “tree” was a mark of accursedness. As the law stated: “for anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (Deut. 21.23).¹³⁸ Paul draws out this connection unambiguously, arguing that the Christ becomes the very curse of Deuteronomy 21; the Christ is the abject remainder. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law,” Paul suggests, “by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (Gal. 3.13). For the early church, the proper posture of the Christian is to likewise take up precisely this abject condition, to—like the Christ—kenotically empty oneself and become the accursed remainder. As Jesus proclaims in the gospels, “if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9.23, cf. Luke 14.27; Matt 10.38, 16.24). Or, as Lacan describes this logic, “the Christian has learnt, through the

¹³⁷ Rogozinski, “Birth to the World,” 9.

¹³⁸ Key passages in the New Testament will even substitute “tree” [ξύλον] for cross in order to explicitly mark this connection to the curse of Deuteronomy 21: “when they had carried out everything that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.” Acts 13.29.

dialectic of Redemption, to identify ideally with he who made himself identical with this same object, the waste object.”¹³⁹

When a community is structured in this way, no longer around a logic of the “head” but of the dysmember, there is opened a possibility of a reconstitution of the flesh of the community, no longer on the logic of the exclusion of the remainder, but on the logic of the universalization of the remainder, and therefore the incarnation of the dysmember. This universalization should not be misread as assimilation, as a return to the logic of the same, but rather as the instigation of a disruption of the social itself. As Rogozinski argues, “the position of the remainder creates the possibility of dissidence, of revolt, a position capable of tearing down the establishment.”¹⁴⁰ One sees this logic play out in the political sphere in Karl Marx’s *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*. There Marx names the proletariat as the “positive possibility of a German emancipation.”¹⁴¹ And while many have noted the religious character of Marx’s socialism, this character is not a product of his substitution of the proletariat for a victorious messiah, as has often been claimed.¹⁴² To the contrary, the truly “Christian” gesture in Marx is the identification of the figure of salvation with that of the abject remainder. The proletariat are not the center of a socialist hope because they are by some dialectical necessity determined for victory. It is rather their embodied suffering that picks them out as the site of the universal. As Marx argues, liberation depends upon:

The formulation of a class with radical chains, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere

¹³⁹ Lacan, *Anxiety*, 220.

¹⁴⁰ Rogozinski, “Birth to the World,” 9.

¹⁴¹ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. Joseph O’Malley (Oxford University Press, 1970), 141.

¹⁴² “The old liberal slander which draws on the parallel between Christian and Marxist ‘Messianic’ notion of history as the process of the final deliverance of the faithful (the notorious ‘Communist-parties-are-secularized-religious-sects’ theme).” Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 2.

which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no particular right because no particular wrong, but wrong generally, is perpetuated against it; which can invoke no historical, but only human, title; which does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the consequences but in all-round antithesis to the premises of German statehood; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the complete loss of man and hence can win itself only through the complete re-winning of man. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the proletariat.¹⁴³

What Marx here argues, is that the abject remainder offers a privileged position for universal emancipation, precisely because the emancipation of this class-which-is-no-class, precipitates the dissolution of the fantasy of the One-body.¹⁴⁴

If the early Christian church sought the abject dysmember in the executed body, and Marx in the political body of the proletariat, then the present work can perhaps be read as a suggestion that it is precisely in the figure of the sexual body—the body of the marginalized woman, of the marginalized sexual minority—that this abject dysmember might be found today. For if Irigaray is correct that sexual difference is *the question* of our time; if sexuality, in other words, constitutes the horizon of all politics, sociality, and theology,¹⁴⁵ then it is within the realm of sexual difference that one might expect to find the figure of universal resistance, the figure of an otherness that refuses to capitulate to the logic of the same. Such a figure, I hope to have established, can be found in the queer sexual body: “the queer comes to figure,” as Edelman writes, “the resistance,

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ As Žižek argues, what we need is “not an organic seamless Whole, but an assemblage of disparate elements, a bricolage full of gaps and inconsistencies—the name for this mess is overdetermination. ... So far from being a seamless Whole, a differential structure is by definition unbalanced, traversed by antagonisms.” Slavoj Žižek, *Incontinent of the Void: Economico-Philosophical Spandrels* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 41.

¹⁴⁵ For as Edelman argues, reproductive futurism and its compulsory heterosexuality “invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought” (Edelman, *No Future*, 2); or, in Althaus-Reid’s words, “all political theories are sexual theories with theological frames of support” (Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 176), adding also that “all theology is sexual theology” (Ibid., i).

internal to the social, to every social structure.”¹⁴⁶ Or, in theological language, “queer holiness,” as Althaus-Reid suggests, “is always the holiness of the Other.”¹⁴⁷

The hope incarnated by the queer sexual body, is precisely the hope of a radical social, even political, transformation:¹⁴⁸ “the flesh of the community comes to the surface in the shape of a wild democracy.”¹⁴⁹ It is this that Hocquenghem named “sexual communism,”¹⁵⁰ the hope incarnate in the dysmember, which interrupts every wholeness: insisting upon its own reality, refusing assimilation, and demanding transformation. “The more we insisted on the body,” Negri declares, “the more communist we became.”¹⁵¹ This is the sexual member which reminds us that our communities, as our bodies, are constituted with gaps and fissures; this is the member of the flesh that could be our redemption, if only we could learn to see the irreducible power of incarnation.

¹⁴⁶ Edelman, *No Future*, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 134.

¹⁴⁸ This more optimistic employment of the language of “hope” here, in distinction to Edelman’s “queer negativity,” is drawn from José Muñoz, according to whom, “queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world”; and for whom hope, is “indispensable to the act of imagining transformation.” José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 2-3.

¹⁴⁹ Rogozinski, “Birth to the World,” 2.

¹⁵⁰ Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 111.

¹⁵¹ Antonio Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), xx.

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