The Amorous Imagination: Individuating the Other-as-Beloved

Donald Andrew Yost
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd
Part of the Philosophy Commons, and the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
Yost, Donald Andrew, "The Amorous Imagination: Individuating the Other-as-Beloved" (2018). Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 1517.
https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/1517

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu,dig-commons@du.edu.
The Amorous Imagination: Individuating the Other-as-Beloved

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

by

Donald Andrew Yost

November 2018

Advisor: Dr. Sarah Pessin
ABSTRACT

This project attempts to answer the question, “How does the Other become the Beloved?” It conducts a hermeneutical phenomenology of love in order to describe the process of radical individuation that converts the Other into the Beloved. Drawing on Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology of givenness and saturation it argues that the Other becomes the Beloved through the activity of the amorous imagination. The amorous imagination is both a hermeneutical site of reception and a creative-responsive faculty that engages in an “endless hermeneutic” that individuates the Other-as-Beloved.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: The Philosophy of Love: Thesis, Method, Context……………….1

Chapter Two: The Lovers Emerge: Marion, Saturation, and Individuation.........27

Chapter Three: Key Features of the Imagination………………………………74

Chapter Four: The Amorous Event and the Endless Hermeneutic…………………94

Chapter Five: Toward a Phenomenology of the Amorous Imagination…………132

Chapter Six: Love & Philosophy: Some Reflections……………………………..161

Bibliography………………………………………………………………………..181
CHAPTER ONE

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE: THESIS, METHOD, CONTEXT

THESIS

According to French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion, love needs rethinking. “Philosophy today no longer has anything to say about love, or at best very little. And this silence is for the better, because when philosophy does venture to speak of love it mistreats it or betrays it.”¹ But what is philosophy about, if not love?² How is it that love remains one of the most meaningful human experiences and yet we rarely submit it to philosophical inquiry?

Examining the central question “How does the Other become the Beloved?,” my project develops what I call "the amorous imagination" as part of a hermeneutical phenomenology of love. I am informed by Marion’s phenomenology in developing the amorous imagination, particularly his account of givenness, the gifted (l’adonné), and the saturated phenomenon. However, in Marion’s description of the erotic phenomenon and oddly in spite of his own phenomenological tools he focuses too much on the lover’s advance and does not fully explain the evental nature of the Beloved’s givenness. Marion


² Philosophy, or philosophia, means “the love of wisdom.”
mentions the need for an “endless hermeneutic” to respond to saturated phenomena but leaves the idea undeveloped. I take inspiration from Marion’s phenomenology and the endless hermeneutic strikes me as a useful concept in philosophizing about love. Specifically, it provides me an opening to explore how lovers respond to one another through an imaginative process of individuation. I also take inspiration from the Romantics, who developed robust theories of the imagination as a hermeneutical faculty. Drawing on both Marion’s phenomenology and Romantic ideas of the imagination, I put forth the thesis that *through the amorous imagination the self-as-lover creatively responds to the saturating givenness of the Other-as-Beloved, individuating her through an endless hermeneutic.*

“Individuation” in this project refers to the process by which an Other comes to appear with such radical particularity that she is rendered unsubstitutable for the self who receives the phenomenon. The individuated Other stands out from the milieu of all Others. She appears distinct, arriving with all his “thisness,” all his *haccaeitas,* such that no Other could be this Other, no Other could be confused with or replace her. Her specificity denies anonymity. The individuated Other does not appear as an abstract, universal, or unnamed call. With the term “individuation” I mean to capture the phenomenological fact that my beloved appears differently to me than the stranger. It may be helpful to distinguish between other uses of the term “individuation” to fully explain my use of the term. Some

---

3 A brief note on pronouns: I will at times use “he” to refer to the subject-as-lover and “she” to refer to the Other-as-Beloved. At other times I will reverse the pronouns. I acknowledge the dangers of hetero-normative language and use these pronouns simply because it matches my own experience. See “Method” section for a more detailed explanation.
thinkers use the word “individuation” to describe the way in which the self comes to stand out from or apart from all that is; i.e., from the “world,” the il y a, being, etc. For these thinkers, the self is individuated when she becomes a separate subject. I am not using the term “individuation” in this sense. Other thinkers use the term “individuation” to describe a kind of human flourishing. For example, many Romantics argued that to be “fully human” was to be “fully individuated” in the sense that one was free to express oneself in a genuine, authentic manner. This is not the sense in which I use the term either. For this project, I use individuation as a phenomenological term to describe the way in which an Other appears as a phenomenon with such a radical particularity that she cannot be substituted for any Other; that she is unique, irreplaceable, specific, and distinct from all Others. As we will see, in love this sense of individuation plays out in at least two ways. First, the Other-as-Beloved is individuated through what I call the amorous event and the hermeneutic engagement of the amorous imagination. Second, the lover is individuated as lover insofar as he encounters the amorous event and participates in the endless hermeneutic. In these two phenomenological senses the Other and the self appear to one another with a radical particularity. It is the central task of this dissertation to explain how this process occurs.

In giving an account of the amorous imagination, my dissertation will make three central claims. First, the amorous imagination is my answer to the question of how the Other becomes the Beloved. Second, the amorous imagination highlights something that is missing in Marion’s account of the erotic phenomenon; namely, that love emerges not only because of the lover’s advance but also because of the evental nature of the Beloved’s
givenness, which calls for an imaginative response. Third, my phenomenology of the amorous imagination constitutes a substantive unpacking of the endless hermeneutic Marion signals toward in his work on saturated phenomena. In support of my thesis and these three assertions, the dissertation takes the following structure:

In this chapter, *The Philosophy of Love: Thesis, Method, Context*, I provide a roadmap of my project, thesis, and methodology. I consider the strengths and weaknesses of empiricism before looking closely at phenomenology as the mode of inquiry best-suited for my study. I briefly discuss some trends in the history of the philosophy of love and explain why I will not adopt the traditional topology of love but will instead employ a hermeneutical phenomenology. I also explain the role Romanticism plays in this project; namely, that it is the source of my inspiration for considering the role imagination plays in love. I then provide a short survey of phenomenology. The survey fleshes out my use of the terms “phenomenology” and “hermeneutics” and explains their relevance to the project.

In *Chapter Two: The Lovers Emerge: Marion, Saturation, and Individuation*, I outline Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology, noting its limitations but focusing on its generative openings, in order to lay the groundwork for my own phenomenological account of how the Other is individuated through the amorous imagination. I explain Marion’s phenomenological concepts of givenness, the gifted, and the saturated phenomenon and explore their usefulness in analyzing love and the imagination. I also provide a detailed analysis of Marion’s account of individuation in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, highlighting parts of his description I find compelling and identifying less-convincing descriptions that seem to either leave something important out of the picture (i.e., the imagination) or call
for further development (i.e., the endless hermeneutic). I end by accepting Marion’s invitation to explore the process of individuation and claim that a phenomenology of love should include a fuller account of the endless hermeneutic and the role the imagination plays in transforming the Other into the Beloved.

In Chapter Three: Key Features of the Imagination, I conduct a focused study of the imagination in order to examine the role the imagination plays in individuating the Other. I argue the imagination play a central role in individuating the Other. I identify key features of the imagination – its productive and reproductive capacities, its creative-responsive activity, its hermeneutical structure, its embodiment, and its unique mode of consciousness – and describe how they work in tandem to individuate. Anticipating objections that my account focuses too heavily on the imagination as a purely mental activity, I provide a brief phenomenological description of the enfleshed imagination and argue that the fact of the imagination’s embodiment supports my thesis that the amorous imagination is a hermeneutical, individuating faculty. While I recognize that the imagination may individuate other Others (friends, family, etc.) the focus of my study is on the Beloved.

In Chapter Four: The Amorous Event and the Endless Hermeneutic, I bring together my discussions of Marion and the imagination and return to my thesis that the amorous imagination is the site of the endless hermeneutic, a hermeneutic which serves to individuate the Other-as-Beloved. Marion’s account of the erotic phenomenon over-emphasizes the lover’s advance and under-emphasizes the Beloved’s saturation. Drawing upon my previous discussion of the imagination’s power to individuate, I argue that a
phomenology of love should describe the saturated phenomenon of what I call “the amorous event” as well as the endless hermeneutic, both of which implicate the amorous imagination. I describe how the amorous event is given as a call, response, and distance and separation and then examine what an endless hermeneutic might look like. I conclude that the amorous event invokes the amorous imagination.

In Chapter Five: Toward a Phenomenology of the Amorous Imagination, I provide a phenomenological sketch of the amorous imagination as the individuating site of the endless hermeneutic. Where the preceding discussion identified the fact that the amorous imagination is at play with and responds to the amorous event, my phenomenological sketch provides a descriptive account of how the amorous imagination individuates. I catalogue features of the amorous imagination, such as its productive capacity, its narrative function, its impressional intentionality, and the structure of amorous imaginings themselves, in order to show how through the amorous imagination the lovers participate in an individuating, endless hermeneutic.

In Chapter Six: Love & Philosophy: Some Reflections, I conclude my study with a discussion of the “dark side” of love and the imagination, acknowledging the problems of solipsism, narcissism, and idolatry and offer up some ideas on how love can avoid these pitfalls. After summarizing my argument, I suggest further lines of inquiry and identify a number of topics that merit additional consideration.

**METHOD**

We tend think of love empirically, according to a scientific worldview. Psychology suggests that love is a human disposition. It amounts to a desire, an impulse, or an
orientation toward another person arising from a sense of lack. There may or may not be an antidote for the lack but love is ultimately an expression of a psychological desire to fill it. Biology claims love is an evolutionary drive masquerading as a transcendent ideal. Animals need to reproduce to survive, and to do that they need to mate. Love is essentially the human term for our more basic sexual drive to procreate and preserve the species. Sociology, cultural theory, and anthropology adopt hermeneutics of suspicion and explain love in terms of an underlying substructure. Sociologists claim love is the communal manifestation of our need as people to form groups. Anthropologists argue humans are better-equipped to thrive in family organizations rather than in isolation. Love is a cultural institution arising out of a fundamental survival mechanism. And cultural theorists claim love is essentially a political or economic ideology. In each case, empirical methods consider love as symptomatic of an underlying cause that can be explained through scientific or pseudo-scientific observation.

Empiricism has its place in a study of love but it has its limits too. Empiricism’s explanatory force and ability to problematize our assumptions about love and why we care so much about it demonstrates its value in contributing to our understanding of the world in general, and love in particular. Empiricism reminds us that love is not simply some universal ideal or Platonic Form. It has roots in the basic structures of our human behavior or makeup as well. But empiricism cannot provide a complete picture either. Two schools of philosophical thought – phenomenology and hermeneutics – offer strong critiques of empiricism and suggest that there are some aspects of love that call for a different mode of inquiry.
In *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer provides a warning against the dangers accompanying any method, including empiricism. For Gadamer, truth and method are antithetical. Method conceals as much as it reveals. Because method sets out the parameters of what can be known even before engaging in an inquiry, one must at all times be conscious of the assumptions latent in method and be aware of what it may exclude from view. Heidegger reminds us that in order for a method to formulate a question – including empirical methods – we must have some preunderstanding of what it is we are asking about as well as what might count as a viable answer. There is no such thing as a purely objective method that provides access to a purely objective truth. Psychology, biology, anthropology, etc., are all human projects. They tell us as much about human concerns and orientations as they do about the subject matters they endeavor to study. Moreover, Heidegger points out that any act of understanding is also act of interpretation which carries certain “decisions” about the way the world is or is not. Faith in empiricism’s explanatory power should be tempered by philosophical reflection on empiricism’s values, biases, and prejudices. Science has its own hermeneutic.

Phenomenologists provide related critiques of empiricism. For example, Edmund Husserl argues that empiricism must be grounded in some sort of transcendental philosophy in order to justify its claims about the world. For Husserl, phenomenology is more fundamental than empiricism because it accounts for the very conditions for the

---

possibility of experience, what some phenomenologists call the structures of consciousness. Without an account of the structures required to observe the world it is hard to imagine how empiricism can provide a full account of it. And for Heidegger, phenomenology provides access to aspects of our experiences that empiricism conceals because it focuses on not only what is given in experience but how we make meaning of that experience. For Heidegger, meaning is built into the very structure of the way we encounter the world. Meaning for Heidegger is the milieu or web of pre-existing interpretations we find ourselves thrown into and upon which we rely to make sense of our world. For Heidegger, then, empiricism is a human activity aimed at generating meaning, not some abstract activity that gives access to universal truths, explanatory power notwithstanding.

My project employs a hermeneutical phenomenology rather than empiricism for several reasons. First, phenomenology allows me to bracket the metaphysical questions that underlie empiricism and focus solely on the way in which love gives itself as a phenomenon. My concern is with love’s appearance (phenomenology), not its causes (empiricism). Second, phenomenology allows space for a rigorous investigation into the way in which what appears does so within a context of meanings. The interplay between (a) what appears and (b) how what appears does so within a context of meaning, calls for a hermeneutical method, one that takes seriously the way in which interpretation accompanies appearance. Notably, while this project focuses on a 'hermeneutical supplement (to Marion)', it is ultimately informed by phenomenology (over hermeneutics) in the sense that it lays out what it takes to be a universal structure. It is important to keep
in mind, however, that there is an inherent tension between phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology purports to describe phenomena as they appear; that is, to use Marion’s term, in their “pure givenness.” But hermeneutics suggests that meaning goes “all the down” and that phenomena always appear within a context of meaning such that interpretation is at the very heart of what it means for phenomena to give themselves in the first place. The tension may be irresolvable. In any event, insofar as love is both a phenomenon that emerges within a context of meaning and itself generates meaning suggests that a proper study of love should include both phenomenological and hermeneutical modes of inquiry. Hermeneutically speaking, my project considers variations in the cultural expression of love but the phenomenological core of my method recommends that the underlying, “thin” structure of love is the same across time. Finally, as we will see below (in “Phenomenology”) and in Chapter Two, unlike many phenomenologists my project is not a search for grounds; rather, it is an examination of contours. I do not attempt an account of the fundamental structures of consciousness, the grounds of being, or a final phenomenological reduction. My project is a study of how one phenomenon becomes another. Metaphorically speaking, I am engaged in a “horizontal” analysis of the conversion of phenomena, not a “vertical” analysis of the grounds of phenomena. A hermeneutical phenomenology is best-suited for my project because it provides me the analytical tools to examine closely the way in which love appears as a phenomenon and the processes at play that convert one phenomenon (the Other) into another phenomenon (the Beloved). In other words, it attends to meaning as much as appearance; or better, the meaning of appearance. Despite its many strengths, empiricism
does not have the conceptual equipment I need to conduct my study and answer my question.

Before moving on, a comment is warranted on the importance of recognizing one’s positionality when making claims about the universal structure of an experience. All thinking happens from a specific location, and that location influences the way one writes, analyzes, considers, and prioritizes issues. As a white, heterosexual, male, I recognize that my position carries with it certain inflections, locutions, and assumptions that I cannot escape. Such is the case for any of us. I use hetero-normative language in my account simply because I am writing from that positionality and not because I am making any normative claims about the ethics of loving relationships, whatever form they take. And while I do think my account of amorous imagination applies to variously gendered love relations, I adopt what Dr. Sarah Pessin calls an “ethics of vulnerability” in assessing my method; that is, I acknowledge not only that I am writing from a gendered, racial, and economic position, but I am aware that this might well influence my phenomenological sense of structure and may even influence my sense that phenomenology takes precedence over hermeneutics. It could be the case that aspects of my autobiography and experience lead me to see a fixed phenomenological structure whereas had I been born two doors down I may find myself more intuitively swayed by a radical hermeneutics that denies the existence of any such structure. But as it stands my studies have led me to believe that there is indeed a phenomenological structure at play in the way in which the Other becomes the Beloved and this dissertation is an attempt to describe it. To that end, I will at times use “he” to refer to the self-as-lover and “she” to refer to the Other-as-Beloved. Sometimes I
will reverse the pronouns or use the same gendered pronouns to describe both the lover and Beloved. Whatever the combination, I do not mean to imply any priority, legitimacy, or value to any particular amorous relationship. The best I can do is acknowledge my positionality, its implications and its limits and then launch my exploration.

**CONTEXT**

**The Traditional Topology and the Romantic Turn**

Philosophy traditionally divides love into types: *eros*, *agape*, *philia*, and *nomos*. There is a rich history of thinking about love in terms of this topology, but there are also a number of problems. Once the types of love are identified and pulled-apart, philosophers have a hard time bringing them back together to show how — if at all — they can be synthesized. Love always seems to evade or exceed their boundaries. The conventional topology is especially problematic because it carries theological and metaphysical baggage that diverts attention away from the phenomenon of love itself, replacing the rich, lived experience of *amour* with unresolvable, logical problems. The history of the idea of love is replete with disputes and paradoxes regarding love’s ontology. Can *agape* and *eros* be reconciled with each other? Anders Nygren and Martin Luther say no. Thomas Aquinas and Augustine say yes.⁵ Some philosophers attempt to think love *qua* love but end up

---

reducing it to desire, passion, or a disposition. Philosophy tends to render love the handmaiden of epistemology, metaphysics, or ethics. In Plato’s *Symposium*, Diotima declares that love (*eros*) is the desire for the perpetual possession of the Good. But love is more than desire, disposition, or idea. The philosophy of love should not be limited to analytical categories and, as Marion asserts, would benefit from rethinking. What follows is my attempt to respond to Marion’s invitation and provide a phenomenological account of the role the imagination plays in individuating the Other-as-Beloved.

To do so requires that we breathe new life into old ideas. Romanticism, for example, represents a watershed moment in the history of the idea of love because it introduced the novelty of the imagination as a means by which lovers engage one another and harmonize or even merge their beings with Nature. Goethe, Keats, Shelley, and Friedrich Schlegel saw that the creative imagination was the key to sympathy. By imaginatively “reaching out,” the protean lovers could experience each other as part of themselves. They could bond with one another, transforming their world and propelling the lovers into a state of ecstatic rapture. At its idealized height, the imagination was even a way to transcend death. Sitting next to his lover’s tombstone, imagining her pulling him into the next world, Novalis contemplated the Night’s ability to dissolve boundaries and return the lover to his origin. Like the Night, Novalis believed the imaginative faculty was the amorphous site of

---


8 See e.g., Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. by Peter Firchow, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1971).
transcendence that allowed for fusion with the Beloved, even beyond the grave. The Romantics ushered in a new way of thinking about the amorous event that up to that point had been weighed down by the theological moorings of eros, agape, and philia. Thanks to the Romantics’ attention to the power of the imagination we can now think about love in a way that was not accessible prior to their insights; namely, that love fundamentally involves the creative engagement of the imagination. But the Romantics went too far. While they celebrated sympathy as a way to dissolve the self and merge with the Beloved they failed to see the violence inherent in the desire for oneness. They reinforced rather than overcame a metaphysics of the Sublime, which animated the lovers’ desire for union. Despite their attention to the experiences love can bring, the Romantics rarely if ever examined love on its own terms.

**Phenomenology**

The late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries ushered in a new philosophical method: phenomenology. Like Romanticism, phenomenology provides an opening onto love that was not available before its advent. By bracketing metaphysics and looking only at phenomena as they appear, phenomenology avoids the categorical pigeon-holing and psychological reductionism that has plagued the philosophy of love. Phenomenology gives us access to the phenomenon of the amorous event, not merely the idea of love. But not all phenomenologies are the same. The method has evolved over time.

**A. Edmund Husserl’s Eidetic Phenomenology**

Edmund Husserl set out to ground science in transcendental philosophy. He developed phenomenology as a method to describe the structures of consciousness that
allow for the possibility of scientific or “naturalist” knowledge in the first place. Husserl argued that so-called “objective science” fails to account for the role subjectivity plays in constituting the very world it purports to study. Scientific knowledge presupposes a subject-object dualism without investigating its ground.

Only a radical inquiry back into subjectivity – and specifically the subjectivity which ultimately brings about all world-validity, with its content and in all its prescientific and scientific modes, and into the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of the rational accomplishments – can make objective truth comprehensible and arrive at the ultimate ontic meaning of the world.⁹

In order to get “the things themselves” — their essences — we must first provide a detailed description of consciousness. Only after grounding the naturalistic world in an accurate account of consciousness can we then claim to know what a thing truly is. And for Husserl, a thing’s essence is that which endures after it is examined according to the phenomenological reduction. By stripping away its parts, we can come to know a thing’s essence when we have discovered what it cannot be without.

Husserl’s method is primarily eidetic phenomenology. His is a search for essences. Many scholars read Husserl as concluding that at the ground of experience lies the transcendental ego, which through the process of intending objects constitutes both them and itself. Regardless of whether the transcendental ego is a thing or a posit, Husserl’s phenomenological method proved useful in uncovering other central features of consciousness. For example, Husserl discovered that consciousness is always conscious of something. He calls this phenomenon intentionality. But conscious of what? Husserl’s

---

observations revealed another aspect of consciousness: the lived experience of “the world” involves an *intuition* of a phenomenon; that is, the phenomena appear to the consciousness which intends them. These two structures of consciousness – intention and intuition – make up the central features of subjectivity and allow for the possibility of knowledge. Husserl noticed something else too: there are a *variety of modes of consciousness*. Perception is one among many. Consciousness also intends in the manner of imagination, judgment, representation, and feeling. Although all modes of consciousness adhere to the intentionality/intuition structure, they intend “things” in different ways. Phenomenology’s task is to examine and account for both the *noesis*, or the acts of consciousness, and the *noema*, the entities constituted by them.

**B. Martin Heidegger’s Hermeneutical Phenomenology**

Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger, used phenomenology but for different ends. Heidegger employed what we might call *hermeneutical* phenomenology. By “hermeneutical” Heidegger means that the task of phenomenology is not to access essences but to uncover the pre-understandings and pre-existing meaning-structures that are built into our experiences of the world and allow for our experience of “a world” in the first place. Heidegger’s central question was deceptively straightforward: “What does it mean to be?” According to Heidegger, Western philosophy has concealed the question of Being and preoccupied itself with the question of beings. Failing to think this ontological difference precluded philosophy from taking up the question of the meaning of Being. Metaphysics, which for Heidegger is the study of beings (what they are, what types they can be, what laws or rules govern them, etc.), does not account for Being itself, which is
something like the sheer phenomenality of beings, or their mode of appearing, or how they “presence” or come out into the open in the world. Heidegger distinguishes between the study of ontology (Being qua Being) and metaphysics (the study of beings), privileging the former as the more fundamental philosophical question. Metaphysics not only covers over the question of Being as such, when it does address Being it renders it a being, the supreme Being. Heidegger critiques this sort of onto-theo-logy (a search for the highest, most general grounds) as mischaracterizing Being as yet another being, albeit a being that is the foundation of all other beings. In any event, that is not the question of Being. The question of Being requires a radical reorientation, a new method for doing philosophy that avoids the ontic pitfalls of metaphysics and examines Being on its own terms. And for that Heidegger turns to phenomenology.

Drawing from but critiquing Husserl’s eidetic phenomenology, Heidegger’s method does not abstract out the lived experience of Dasein but starts from them and focuses on them. For Heidegger, lived experience holds the key to Being. In other words, Heidegger saw the question of human meaning as prior to the question of science and so used phenomenology to uncover how it is that our lived experiences are given as meaningful. As we have seen, for Heidegger, science is a human activity of meaning-making and occurs only because of and within a context of pre-existing meanings. He is not concerned with revealing the fundamental structures or essence of consciousness but rather in uncovering the interpretive structure of lived meanings which constitute our human experience. Doing so, Heidegger claimed, gives us access to the question of Being

---

in a way the more abstracted eidetic method cannot. While both Husserl and Heidegger saw phenomenological description as the key to philosophy, they differed in the direction they pointed its gaze.

C. Emmanuel Levinas and the Limits of Phenomenology

The question of whether Emmanuel Levinas is a phenomenologist helps us think with care about what we mean by phenomenology and whether as a method it refers only to phenomena or whether it can indeed refer to that which exceed phenomena. On the one hand, his close attention to moods and concrete, lived experiences in works like *Existence and Existents* demonstrate his phenomenological tendencies. But on the other hand, in works like *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas seems to go beyond phenomenology by appealing to an infinite Other that never actually appears, but is given only in its traces. In any event, Levinas is deeply influenced by phenomenology, especially Heidegger’s question of Being. Like Heidegger, Levinas moved beyond Husserl’s concern with the structures of consciousness. But where Heidegger was concerned with Being, Levinas was concerned with the Other.

Levinas used phenomenology to describe how the Other is given in experience and the implications of our encounter with the Other for subjectivity, time, and ethics. His insights developed over the course of his career, but he began with a close analysis of the way in which the self separates from the *il y a* and emerges as a being. In subsequent works he explores the self’s encounter with radical alterity — the Other — who calls the self’s being into question. According to Levinas, “prior” to the encounter with the Other the self experiences the world as a kind of coiling tension between an egoism (marked by
enjoyment, in-dwelling, and at-home-ness) and oppression (marked by the experience of an overwhelming plenitude of Being). No effort on the part of the self allows it to escape its ontological suffocation or the sameness of its Being, both of which are two sides of the same ontological coin. Only when the self encounters the Other is the self liberated from Being and its isolation. But the Other appears as a radical alterity. The face of the other commands the self, placing it in a space of “difficult freedom” in its responsibility to the Other. Levinas’s phenomenology of the Other goes beyond phenomenology insofar as he characterizes the Other as a phenomenon which does not fully appear. The Other is an excess, transcendence, or infinity that resists any attempt to render it an object. Despite his insights (and mindful that the question of individuation is not central to Levinas’s project), one finds that his description of our encounter with the Other as an ethical injunction does not help describe the process of individuation that occurs in love. In other words, he does not (claim to) explain how the lover comes to love this Other.11

**D. Paul Ricoeur’s Linguistic Phenomenology**

Ricoeur’s phenomenology was, like Heidegger’s, hermeneutical. “Meaning” for Ricoeur refers to the role of language in the activity of human understanding. While Heidegger did not ignore language, it was not – at least in *Being and Time* – his primary focus. Ricoeur’s phenomenology was a linguistic phenomenology. For him, phenomenology must give account of the fact that whatever we experience, whatever

---

11 Levinas himself seemed to acknowledge that the anonymity of ethics may give way to the individuation of the erotic. See e.g., Emmanuel Levinas, “Beyond the Face,” *Totality and Infinity*, trns. by Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969); Jean-Luc Marion, “From the Other to the Individual,” *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 52; Gschwandtner, “Ethics, Eros, or Caritas,” 74.
appears in the form of intuition, does so through the prism of language. In his hermeneutic phenomenology “experience is to be read through expression.” For Ricoeur, Being is hermeneutical “all the way down” and so he emphasizes the interpretive and linguistic aspects of lived experience.

Central to Ricœur’s work is the question of selfhood. Who am I? How should I live? According to Ricœur, philosophy has failed to provide adequate answers to these fundamental questions. Where Heidegger took the “direct route” to Being through *Dasein*, Ricœur takes “detours” through various modes of inquiry in an attempt to understand how the human person understands itself. Ricœur determines through a detailed study of the process of understanding and language that the self is no “thing” at all but rather a capacity for agency and ascription. The self “comes to itself” over and over again by attesting to itself and graphing a “who” onto its concrete and abstract experiences, experiences that are fundamentally embedded and intertwined. The self has a “double nature” and exists at one and the same time in a material and a phenomenological world. Ricœur argues that the self is constructed through narrative and according to time. Our actions only become meaningful and constitutive of our selfhood when they are understood through *emplotment*; that is, a movement becomes an action when it is located within a meaningful plot. Ricoeur describes this process of narrativizing the self through time in three stages. The human field of action is always pre-figured insofar as there are conditions set down for us (e.g., our ability to use symbols, follow a narrative, etc.). But that pre-figuration is also

---

configured according to narrative. We are free to bring together cosmological and
phenomenological time by using narrative strategies (pace, order, etc.) so that experiences
do not happen one after the other but because of the other. And finally, the field of action
is refigured in terms of possibility. Through narrative we project and envision the type of
world we want to inhabit and can act toward it in the here-and-now, constantly re-
narrativizing our past in light of the present and future. Ricoeur’s linguistic emphasis in
his hermeneutical phenomenology highlights the important role that narrative plays in our
attempts to respond to events in our lives. As we will see, the creative meaning-making
that allows for and responds to disruptive events calls for a hermeneutical phenomenology
that attends to both Heideggerian and Ricoeurian senses of meaning. That is, it must attend
to both (a) the way in which we experience the world as always already full of meaning
(Heidegger) and (b) the way in which we use language and symbols to create meaning as
we move across the landscape of our existence (Ricoeur). Both are relevant to my project
because love “happens” within a pre-existing nest of meaning and “calls for” a
reconfiguration of meaning in light of its arrival.

**E. Jean-Luc Marion’s Reduction to Givenness**

French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion’s writings cover a wide range of topics from
philosophy to theology, and even love itself. Building on Levinas’s account of the Other,
in his 2003 work *The Erotic Phenomenon*, Marion provides a detailed phenomenology of

---


14 Ibid.
love and the Other’s individuation. But prior to his studies on love, Marion used phenomenology as a method to reveal what he argues is the “final reduction,” the reduction to givenness.

According to Marion, Husserl and Heidegger limit the appearance of phenomenon to objects and Being, respectively. The task of phenomenology is to liberate phenomenon from the confines of intention and reduce them to pure givenness, to examine them on their own terms. Marion attempts such a reduction in Being Given. He argues that, properly applied, phenomenology reveals the anonymous and self-giving nature of all phenomenon. Free from the constraints of the ego, phenomena are shown to give themselves freely - as a gift - and of their own accord. Marion’s reduction to givenness exposes the unconditioned nature of the given as well as the subject’s role in phenomenalizing the given by receiving it. The given is that to which all phenomena can be reduced and the limits of any reduction. As Marion claims, “so much reduction, so much givenness.” But Marion’s reduction to givenness leads to another, perhaps even more important observation regarding the nature of phenomenon. Phenomenon give themselves in different degrees. Some phenomena are “poor,” providing little or no intuition. Some phenomena are “common,” giving intuition adequate to the intention. And some phenomena saturate all intentionality, leaving it puzzled, blinded, or overwhelmed. Like Levinas’s face of the Other, saturated phenomena reveal the nature of phenomenon unconstrained by the transcendental ego. Phenomenology exposes the fundamental quality of all phenomena; that is, their givenness. In The Erotic Phenomenon, Marion extends his insights regarding the gift, the given, the saturated phenomenon, and individuation and applies them to love. He argues that through love the
Other is individuated in a way that ethics cannot accomplish. But as we will see, he does not fully account for the role of hermeneutics in love and fails to explain the evental nature of the Beloved who upends and overturns the lover’s pre-existing horizon of meaning.

**Love and Religion**

One may wonder how this project is a project in a program on the study of religion. The answer is three-fold. First, this project is located along the trajectory of the theological turn in contemporary Continental philosophy, which takes as its central issue the question of transcendence as otherwise than being; or more specifically, the question of the Other. While this is admittedly not the traditional notion of religion it is the operative concept of religion in much of contemporary philosophy. Here, religion has less to do with the nature or worship of God and more to do with the way in which the Other appears, our relationship to the Other, and the way in which we experience the Other or respond to her call. This project interrogates religion in this manner, through the lenses of phenomenology and hermeneutics, in order to show how the Beloved is given as an excess that calls for an endless hermeneutic. Second (and relatedly), this project presents a hermeneutics of the imagination as a way of doing religion rooted in provisionality and a surplus of meaning, not religion-as-being or singular truth. Building on the work of thinkers like Richard Kearney, this dissertation argues that an analysis of the appearance of the Other calls for an analysis of the self’s hermeneutical engagement with excess, which is not given as a metaphysical “thing.” Because the Other is always given as a surplus the Other must be interpreted over and over again in a way that does not reduce engagement with her to a search for the highest most general, metaphysical grounds. This interpretative activity is
religious activity (in the continental sense) insofar as it attempts to take seriously the Other’s appearance and preserve her transcendence without falling victim to the problems of ontotheology. Third, this project is religious in the sense that it is about love. Western religious traditions have a history of idealizing love, especially Christianity. And other pseudo-religious movements like Romanticism proclaim a new “religion of love” that takes the place of the dogmatic, stifling iterations of religion that precede it. In either case, a study of love is a study of religion because it is a study of an ideal that carries with it a religious history.

CONCLUSION

What do phenomenology and Romanticism have to say to one another? They seem odd bedfellows. Phenomenology, the sharp-eyed and reflective Ishmael, focuses its gaze only on phenomena as they are given in experience, providing rigorous descriptions of their appearance. Romanticism, the unrestrained and creative Queequeg, seeks out new territories and landscapes of expression in order to imbue the world with poetic meaning. Where do their paths cross? In pursuit of that elusive mode of consciousness called the imagination. Like the leviathan Moby Dick, the imagination is always “out there” (or “in there,” if you like) lurking in the background, making sense of the world of sense, breaching the surface of perception and transforming it into something new, only to descend again into the unplumbed depths of the mind. Both phenomenology and Romanticism pursue the imagination, recognizing the power of its productive capacity and its ability to shape the world anew. Through the imagination we are able to live in the as if — in the world of possibility — engaging in the free play of ideas, images, and concepts.
But there’s more. The imagination is not just an image-making faculty. As we will see, Husserl’s phenomenology reveals that the imagination constitutes its own mode of consciousness, warranting a close examination of its activity and transcendental features. A phenomenological description of the imagination shows that, unlike other modes of consciousness (perception, judgment, memory, etc.), the imagination is not tethered to the as is. It intends things differently, according to its own “rules.” And this raises an additional question, one that echoes Levinas and Marion’s concern with the Other: What role does the imagination play in individuating the Other-as-Beloved? For Romanticism, the imagination is the source of creativity. It produces and projects a world of meaning. Through it the self becomes a lover, crystallizing the Beloved in amorous imaginings and re-temporalizing the lovers’ experiences of time. More questions come into view: What is the relationship between love, hermeneutics, and the imagination? How does the imagination as a site of meaning-making contribute to the Beloved’s individuation?

In this dissertation I take these questions head-on. I grant Levinas and Marion’s phenomenological accounts of the Other as a saturated phenomenon, a phenomenon that gives itself with so much excessive intuition that intentionality cannot reduce it to an object. But the Other is not the only saturated phenomenon to appear in love. There is also the amorous encounter which, in its evental structure, saturates according to quantity. It gives too much information, too much data, too much sensation so that it cannot be explained in terms of cause and effect, linear time, or within our reconstructed “nest” of meanings. The amorous event upends our pre-existing world and demands its reconfiguration, a reconfiguration that can only occur in and through the imagination’s capacity as a

25
hermeneutic faculty. Because the face and the event saturate they call for an endless
hermeneutic, as Marion points out. We can never exhaust their meaning. Building on
Marion’s ideas givenness and the endless hermeneutic, I argue that not only do saturated
phenomenon call for an endless interpretation, it is precisely in the imaginative engagement
of an endless hermeneutic that the Other is individuated, that he becomes the Beloved.
CHAPTER TWO
THE LOVERS EMERGE: MARION, SATURATION, AND INDIVIDUATION
FROM THE OTHER TO THE BELOVED

Jean-Luc Marion acknowledges a great debt to Emmanuel Levinas for his phenomenological account of the Other.\(^{15}\) Levinas’s descriptions of the self’s encounter with the Other in works like *Existence and Existents*, *Totality and Infinity*, and *Otherwise than Being* have changed the course of philosophy. But according to Marion, Levinas’s description leaves the question of individuation unresolved.\(^{16}\) It is not clear how for Levinas *the* Other becomes *this* Other. According to Marion, we do not experience all Others in precisely the same manner. We experience some Others as “other than” or perhaps even “more than” *an* Other. We experience the Other in different modes or according to different hermeneutical frameworks. Some Others are our friends. Some are our children, work colleagues, pastors, priests, neighbors, or enemies. Some are our lovers. There is a profound difference between the Other and the Beloved. This is not to say that

\(^{15}\) “It goes without saying that we owe it to Emmanuel Levinas to have ingeniously reconfigured phenomenology so as to let it finally reach the Other as saturated phenomenon.” Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 366-67, fn. 88.

each of these Others issues a different kind of injunction. Levinas would insist that the Other is first given as and through the ethical injunction. “Thou shalt not kill” is primordial. But if the inquiry shifts from a concern with grounds to a concern with contours then another question emerges, one that is not concerned with “firsts” or the originary but with “seconds” and the conversion of one phenomenon into another. Marion’s question regarding individuation turns our focus toward a process or transformation of one phenomenon into another, not a search for foundations. The new question that comes into view is subtle but no less profound than the question of grounds: How does the Other become this particular Other? How is the Other individuated in the face of alterity? How does the Other become the Beloved? In short: how does love emerge?

I rely heavily on Marion’s thinking in my work. Several of his ideas resonate with me and provide the conceptual tools I need to conduct a phenomenology of the amorous imagination. In this chapter, I will outline Marion’s phenomenology and through a running dialogue with his texts point out aspects of his thought that I find most useful in a study of the amorous imagination and those which I think need to be developed further. In particular, I find his accounts of givenness, saturation, the gifted, and the endless hermeneutic extremely useful in making sense of the phenomenon of love but I believe he misses important aspects of the process of individuation in his erotic phenomenology; namely, the way in which the Beloved is given as a saturated phenomenon, the role of the imagination in individuating the Other, and the role of hermeneutics in rendering the lovers unique to one another. Throughout this chapter I will comment on the relationship between Marion’s ideas and the phenomenology of love I plan to develop but the reader must wait
until Chapters Four and Five to see how all of these threads tie together. The most important point to note for now is that I provide a detailed account of Marion’s phenomenology in order to later use his conceptual tools to develop my own phenomenology of love, one that emphasizes the Beloved’s givenness and the role of the imagination.

**Givenness**

In *Being Given*, Marion sets out his phenomenology of givenness. Positioning himself as third in line following Husserl and Heidegger and providing a final phenomenological reduction. Marion argues that "what shows itself first gives itself." Givenness is the sole horizon of all phenomenality. Husserl claims to get to "the things themselves" but limits phenomenon to the confines of objectness. Heidegger claims to reveal the givenness of phenomena but limits their appearing to the horizon of Being (Being as the "ultimate" phenomenon.) In *Being Given*, Marion credits Husserl and Heidegger with glimpsing the given in certain ways but argues that neither truly broke free from metaphysics. For Marion, the given is that which is required before any phenomenon can appear. It is the unconditioned call of phenomena.

The central argument in *Being Given* is that givenness is that to which all phenomena may be reduced: “every phenomenon falls within the given, to the point that the terms could trade places.” Givenness represents the liberation of phenomenon from the limits of the ego. In describing the call of the phenomenon as *se donner*, Marion highlights the double nature of givenness. Phenomenon “are given” and “give themselves,”

---

17 Marion, *Being Given*, 5.

18 Ibid., 119.
according to and on their own terms (se donner is a reflexive French verb). It is important not to overstate Marion's critique of Husserl and Heidegger. He does not claim the philosophers utterly failed to glimpse the given. Rather, he argues their reductions do not allow phenomenon to give themselves according to their own terms. Put another way, objectness and Being do not provide a full or accurate account of phenomenality. Marion argues that phenomenon give themselves in degrees and that the reduction to givenness reveals as much. For example, some "poor" phenomenon like mathematical objects provide only a concept-as-intention which is sufficient to constitute the object. We never have an actual intuition of a circle, only of objects that approximate circularity.¹⁹ And yet these phenomena are fully knowable because we supply most of the content via intention. "Common" or technical objects give (slightly?) more intuition and are constituted via adequation between intuition and intention. Because intention matches intuition we are able to exercise control, mastery, or dispassionate observation over technical objects. But some phenomena exceed our intentions with the intuition they provide.²⁰ These phenomena saturate our intentionality, leaving us rubbing our eyes and asking, “What just happened?” The degrees of givenness illustrate the nature of phenomenon to give themselves from themselves without the limits set upon them by transcendental or even phenomenological investigation.

¹⁹ Gschwandtner, Marion & Theology, 58.

²⁰ Marion, Being Given, 222-225.
L’ADONNÉ

How is the given received? How does it show itself? We find the answers in Marion’s theory of the self. The self for Marion is both receptive and active, the site upon which pure phenomena land and the interpretive movement that gives them identity in “resisting” them. Marion uses a number of terms to describe that which receives the given. Early in his works he refers to the self as the interloqué, the interlocuted who is “taken by surprise” and must give account. He also uses the term witness to describe the one to whom an event “happens” and who attests to its occurrence. Later he refers to the self as the attributaire, the one to whom something is attributed. He finally settles on l’adonné, or the gifted, the one who receives the gift, is given over to, devoted to, or even addicted to the phenomenon.21 Notably, l’adonné is not passive, but rather, receptive. Receptivity has for Marion a passive dimension insofar as the phenomenon is given over to the self, but it also has an active capacity that may “increase the measure of the given and make sure it happens . . . [L’adonné must] work on itself in order to receive.”22

Initiative plays an important role in understanding l’adonné’s receptivity. Marion leaves nothing to question: the phenomenon gives itself first. It takes initiative. Givenness is fundamental and that to which all phenomenon may be reduced. It is only in this primary initiative that saturated phenomenon can even “happen” because they are by definition unrestrained by the self’s intention. Unlike Husserl and Heidegger, Marion claims to not limit phenomena to any conceptual schema brought to bear upon them. Givenness issues

21 Gschwandtner, Marion and Theology, 83-84.

22 Marion, In Excess, 48.
to l’adonné as a call (not an injunction) that is an “inconceivable, unnameable, and unforeseeable instance which is comprehended less than it surprises and which initially remains anonymous.”

Marion is not simply reversing intention and intuition, metaphorically characterizing the given a kind of “subject” while preserving the transcendental “I” that receives it. He is challenging the very question of a transcendental I which precedes any phenomenon. For Marion, the given gives me to myself. It is in receiving the given that I receive myself as a self. The phenomenon “arrives” to and for me but it must be phenomenalized. In receiving a phenomenon I receive myself and am gifted to myself by the given. But the given is not God. The saturated phenomenon always remains anonymous. As Gschwandtner points out, “[i]t is only in the reception of the phenomenon that we can identify whether the phenomenon comes from God, from Being (cf. Heidegger), from the Other (cf. Levinas), or from the flesh (cf. Henry).”

Here we see the important role the self plays in identifying the given: in receiving the given the phenomenon appears, it is phenomenalized. A phenomenon must happen to someone. “Beyond activity and passivity, reception gives form to what gives itself without yet showing itself.” Marion often describes the l’adonné as a screen upon which the light of the given splashes, or a control panel that lights up “at the very instant when and each time the information he should render phenomenal . . . arrives to him from a transistor by electric

---

23 Marion, Reduction and Givenness, 199.

24 Gschwandtner, Marion and Theology, 86.

25 Marion, Being Given, 264.
impulse without initiative or delay.” 26 The given calls and l’adonné responds. Indeed, the call itself is shown in the response.

At times Marion characterizes the response required to show the given as a resistance to it. L’adonné “bears up” against the given, or “holds up” under the pressure of its givenness. Resistance is not a phenomenological act of defiance but a way of describing how the given shows itself in landing upon the receptive self. The self “fixes” the given by phenomenalizing it. But l’adonné can fail to receive phenomenon appropriately. As we have seen, some phenomena give too much. In Marion’s terms, they “saturate” intentionality. L’adonné may “misidentify it or fail to hear it at all, I can be blinded by its excess or experience its fullness as an absence. Instead of giving a ‘sensible’ account, I may be reduced to fainting, babbling, an inability to speak or even contempt.” 27 Receiving the saturated given calls for a proper response, one that does not manifest merely as control, dominance, or manipulation but that includes careful description attention, and interpretation. And it is here that Marion introduces his idea of hermeneutics. The given first gives itself, anonymously and of its own initiative, but the given - particularly the saturated phenomenon - calls for an “endless hermeneutics.” The endless hermeneutic is the response to the saturated phenomenon that does not reduce it to objectness, the Other, Being, or any single identity. It is the proper, interpretive response to the saturated phenomenon. 28 The saturated phenomenon gives itself in so much excess that no single

26 Ibid., 217-218.

27 Gschwandtner, Marion and Theology, 87.

28 “This danger [of solipsism], while no doubt undeniable, results less from the saturated phenomenon itself
interpretation will ever suffice. Instead of knowing the phenomenon, l’adonné must understand it through an on-going hermeneutic enterprise. As we will see, the endless hermeneutic is full of possibility.

**THE SATURATED PHENOMENON**

The saturated phenomenon is perhaps Marion’s most well-known idea. Although he is not the first philosopher to articulate an experience of excess (see e.g., Kant’s sublime and Levinas’s “the face”) he is the first to provide a systematic account of the degrees of givenness and the implications of saturation for selfhood, the structures of consciousness, and phenomenality in general. Marion’s thinking about the saturated phenomenon shifts throughout his works. He first proposed his theory in an essay entitled, “The Saturated Phenomenon” (1992). In *Being Given* (1997), Marion gives saturation a complete philosophical treatment. And in *In Excess* (2001), Marion delves even deeper into saturation, conducting five case studies of the saturated phenomenon.

In his early texts the saturated phenomenon seems to be an exceptional phenomenon, one that only gives itself at the margins of phenomenality. But in *Being

---


30 Shane Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomenon, and Hermeneutics* (New
Given, In Excess, and in a later essay, “The Banality of Saturation,” Marion explains that the saturated phenomenon is not a special case of phenomenality but rather an everyday phenomenon that most anyone can experience. Saturated phenomena are not strictly religious or mystical phenomena. Marion provides five sense-related examples in “The Banality of Saturation.” Regarding vision, Marion notes that one usually experiences the colors on a country’s flag as “poor phenomena.” The colors are given in intuition but disappear into the intention or concept of the country that consciousness brings to them. The phenomenon conveys information and is rendered an object. On the other hand, when one encounters Rothko’s canvas Number 212 the intuition of the painting’s colors exceeds any intentionality consciousness can bring to it. The painting is, phenomenologically speaking, invisible. It cannot be intended. Regarding sound, Marion distinguishes between an announcement over an airport speaker, which again conveys information and is a poor phenomenon, and an opera diva whose voice provides a surplus of intuition that can never be fully heard. An aria sings in the language of saturation. Regarding smell, Marion describes the difference between the smell of gas which warns me of a danger and the smell of perfume, which gives itself as a rich and full abundance. Regarding touch, Marion contrasts the experience of stumbling through a dark room groping for items one can identify as objects, with the caress which provides the fullness of flesh that never gives itself as an object. “I caress in order to love, therefore in silence, in order to console and

31 Jean-Luc Marion, The Visible and the Revealed (New York: Fordham, 2008), 119-144.
soothe, to excite and enjoy, therefore without objective signification, indeed, without identifiable or sayable signification.”

Recall Marion’s critique of Husserl and Heidegger. Their failure was to limit the givenness of phenomenon to objects and Being. These sense-based examples illustrate the way in which the transcendental ego hides the givenness of the phenomenon and instead plots it on a pre-determined horizon. The horizon mask or obscures the movement of givenness itself as self-giving. Marion’s entire project in Being Given is to allow phenomenon to show themselves on their own terms. To that extent, the saturated phenomenon is the phenomenon *par excellence* because it cannot be reduced to a pre-determined horizon. It exceeds the limits of intentionality, objectness, or Being. “The saturated phenomenon in the end establishes the truth of all phenomenality because it marks, more than any other phenomenon, the givenness from which it comes.”

**FOUR CATEGORIES OF SATURATED PHENOMENON**

In Being Given and In Excess, Marion develops his idea of the saturated phenomenon against the backdrop of Kant’s categories of understanding: quantity, quality, relation, and modality. The categories provide a useful framework for exploring the various ways in which phenomenon saturate the horizons of experience. Marion uses them to demonstrate how the given exceeds or overflows what the conscious ego brings to it.

---

32 Mackinlay, Interpreting Excess, 58.

33 Marion, Being Given, 189.

34 Ibid., 227.

35 Ibid., 199.
While all saturated phenomena are marked by an inability to be grasped, a certain unforeseeability, and a kind of “control” or reorienting effect, they do not all saturate in the same manner. Kant’s categories are a horizon; or perhaps more precisely, conditions for the possibility of experience. But it is precisely the question of possibility that the saturated phenomenon calls into question. Through his account of the saturated phenomenon, Marion points us toward the impossible. He argues that there are phenomena that give themselves in excess of the categories, phenomena we cannot comprehend. The “possibility of the impossible” has radical implications for the self, the Other, and for love. And yet, Marion’s theory of the saturated phenomenon fails to explain the hermeneutic dimension of experience, without which no account of love can be complete. Before we turn to its limitations, however, we must first understand Marion’s idea. After explaining each type of saturated phenomenon, I will offer some commentary regarding its relationship to my project and how (if at all) that type of saturated phenomenon connects to my thesis. In particular, I will discuss how a category of saturated phenomenon might manifest in the way the Beloved is given, as well as the hermeneutical dimensions of the saturated phenomenon.

A. The Event & Friendship: Saturation According to Quantity

Marion first examines saturation according to quantity. In Kant’s schematic, quantity is the transcendental category that gives form to an intuition’s extensive

---

36 Not everyone is thrilled about this turn. See e.g., Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn,”* 16-103.

magnitude by “successive synthesis” of the whole in terms of its parts. “The magnitude of a quantum implies nothing more than the summation of the quanta that make it up.” Marion argues quantity as an axiom of intuition renders all phenomenon foreseeable “on the basis of another besides itself — more precisely, on the basis of the supposedly finite number of its parts and the supposedly finite magnitude of each among them.” But there are some phenomenon that give themselves with so much quantity that the phenomenon 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.” Such a phenomenon “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.” Phenomena that saturate according to quantity give too much information, are so rich and complex that they cannot be contained by a concept or successive synthesis. They are “incommensurable, not measurable (immense), unmeasured.” Indeed, they are “invisible” insofar as intentionality cannot aim (visé) at them and therefore cannot synthesize the manifold into a foreseeable totality of which the phenomenon is a part.

---

38 Ibid., 200; see also, Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A 162-65.

39 Marion, Being Given, 200.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Gschwandtner, Degrees of Givenness, 7.

43 Marion, Being Given, 200.

44 Mackinlay, Interpreting Excess, 90.
Historical events provide a clear example. Marion states:

When the arising event is not limited to in instant, a place, or an empirical individual, but overflows these singularities and become epoch-making in time . . . , covers a physical space such that no gaze encompasses it with one sweep . . . , and encompasses a population such that none of those who belong to it can take upon themselves an absolute or even privileged point of view, then it becomes an historical event.

An historical event is *evental* insofar as it has the following features. First, it is inexhaustible. It cannot be fully explained or interpreted. It resists any single story. It cannot be seen in its totality due to its vastness, excess, and “amount of happening.” The event gives too much information and therefore calls for an endless interpretation. Second, the event’s effects precede its causes. The event happens, it wells-up according to its own givenness and cannot be contained. It is only after the event occurs that we look back at its happening and give causal accounts as to why it happened. Because the event is unforeseeable it cannot be predicted. The evental effect takes phenomenological priority over its metaphysical causes.

The inverted experience of cause and effect becomes especially important in an analysis of the evental nature of love. The lover’s encounter with the Beloved constitutes an event. Phenomenologically speaking, the Other-as-Beloved is given to the lover as an

---

45 In *Being Given*, Book IV, Marion first cites Descartes’s idea of amazement and cubist paintings as “privileged examples” of saturation by quantity. But for our purposes Marion’s account of events in the later sections of *Being Given* and in *In Excess* provide a more relevant and insightful example as it relates to the phenomenology of love and, more specifically, the amorous event. See Marion, *Being Given*, 200-202; Marion, *In Excess*, 30-53.

46 Marion, *Being Given*, 228.

47 Ibid., 164-65.
unforeseeable event that is understood only after the effect has occurred. The Beloved’s striking givenness is not merely a romantic experience of “love-as-first-site” (though not excluding that either) but a phenomenological experience that overwhelms any successive synthesis and calls for endless interpretation. I discuss the importance of this “endless hermeneutic” in detail in the Chapter Four. Suffice it to say for now that Marion’s analysis of the saturated event yields the paradoxical result that our very experiences of cause and effect may be overturned or called into question as a condition for the possibility of saturating experience, and that description also applies to the event of love.48

Marion also cites friendship as an example of saturation according to quantity. In Chapter Two of In Excess, Marion describes the evental nature of the friendship between Montaigne and La Boétie. He begins his description by invoking a phenomenon he thinks is unique to our experience of certain others: the phenomenon of the crossing gazes [la croisée des regards]. As we will see later in this chapter (see e.g., “Individuation in The Erotic Phenomenon”) the crossing gazes inaugurate the first moment of individuation, catalyzing the conversion of the Other into this Other. Marion writes,

friendship with the other person first makes it my duty to cast a gaze on him, which does not follow my intentionality toward him but submits me to the point of view that he takes of me, therefore places me at the exact point where his own line of sight waits for me to expose myself.49

In his own reflections Montaigne acknowledges the evental and erotic nature of his first meeting with Boétie, as when he writes, “. . . it is I do not know which quintessence of all

48 This observation will also have important implications for Marion’s theory of the subject, l’adonné, as we will see in the next section.

49 Marion, In Excess, 37.
this mix that, having seized my will, brought it to plunge itself and lost itself in his . . . 50"

The iconic gaze of the Other calls me forward, but it is in the sudden arrival of the friendship which emerges and is accomplished all at once and as a fait accompli that we see friendship’s evental character. The friendship cannot be explained. Montaigne recounts that “at our first meeting . . . we found ourselves so taken, so known, so obliged between ourselves, that nothing from then on was as close as we were for one another.”51 The ultimate meaning of the friendship is never disclosed to Montaigne and Boétie. Indeed, it remains inaccessible. Friendship has no cause. It has no reason.52 And yet for Montaigne and Boétie it happened, it was experienced, it was given. When asked why he loved Boétie, Montaigne could only reply, “because it was him, because it was me.”53

One is struck not only by the evental but also the amorous tone of Montaigne and Boétie’s friendship. There is clearly a radical individuation at play. As I will argue later, love carries a structural similarity to friendship in its evental nature, but love saturates according to other categories as well and implicates the imagination in ways that may or may not be required for friendship. In any event, the key points to note for now are the features of phenomena that saturate according to quantity: (1) they cannot be repeated and are irreversible, (2) they cannot be explained in terms of causality and therefore call for an

50 Ibid., quoting Montaigne.

51 Ibid.

52 Neither does love, failure of which to recognize has lead to many metaphysical and logical “problems” to be resolved in the history of the idea of love. But love resists explanation.

endless hermeneutic, (3) they cannot be foreseen or predicted as their (partial) causes are only revealed after the effect and always remain insufficient.54 Additionally, with regard to the event of friendship the phenomenon of the crossing gazes inaugurates the first moment of individuation of the Other. As we will see, the phenomenon of the crossing gazes plays an important part in Marion’s account of individuation between lovers too.

B. The Idol: Saturation According to Quality

Marion examines saturation according to quality through a detailed analysis of paintings, which can function as what he calls “idols.”55 In Being Given, Marion distinguishes between the phenomenon of the idol and the phenomenon of the icon as two “ways of seeing.” Idols lure the gaze, which surveys the idol until it is absorbed and filled by it. Icons allow the gaze to travel through and beyond it while at the same time directing a gaze back toward the viewer, envisaging her rather than being envisaged.56 I provide a detailed account of icons in section D, “The Face: Saturation According to Modality.” We focus now on idols because they saturate according to quality. Marion begins his account of idols by describing the phenomenon of the gaze which turns toward an image and aims at it. When viewing a painting, for example, the viewer becomes “bedazzled” by what she sees. Her gaze is lured to the image. It searches for something that can fill it. It roves around

54 Marion, In Excess, 36.

55 Marion’s use of the term “idol” is complicated. In his earlier theological writings he employs the term to critique ontotheology. In his phenomenological works he refers to idols as both false images but also a real experience of seeing that merits phenomenological analysis in its own right. Marion shifts later in his writings and describes both the idol and icon as “different but essentially equivalent instances of saturated phenomena.” Gschwandtner, Degrees of Givenness, 52-53.

56 Gschwandtner, Degrees of Givenness, 53.
“looking beyond what it sees” until it finds the phenomenon that fills it, and there it lands, captivated and fascinated by the visible that captures it. Here, the viewer encounters the “first visible.”57 However, because the “first visible” is determined by the intention that searches it out it is actually a reflection of the intention itself. The gaze is “absorbed and filled” by the phenomenon but the gaze returns back to itself. The painting is a mirror, “an idol — dazzling to the site but made in our own image.”58

Despite its idolatrous nature (or really, because of it), Marion claims that this experience constitutes a saturated phenomenon in terms of quality. Kant’s category of quality refers to an appearance’s “intensive magnitude; that is, [its] degree.”59 Every sensation has a magnitude, a level of intensity that effects our sensation.60 A sensation’s intensity is experienced according to the continuum of possible degrees afforded to the sensation. For example, a shade of red has a particular intensity experienced in terms of the other possible shades of red that may be lighter or darker, or between no sensation of red and a sensation of the most intense degree.61 Paintings-as-idols saturate in terms of quality because they give themselves in such a way that the gaze can no longer bear the intensity of the sensation it receives.62 The idol draws our gaze and then “blinds us” with

57 Marion, Being Given, 229.
58 Mackinlay, Interpreting Excess, 119.
59 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A 166/B 207.
60 Ibid., B 208.
61 Ibid., A 168/B210; see also, Mackinlay, Interpreting Excess, 118.
62 Mackinlay, Interpreting Excess, 118.
its intensity (although strictly speaking we still “see” it as a perception, the “seeing” is not of an object but of a saturating excess). It is an invisible visible which “invades all [the look’s] angles; it accomplishes adaequatio — it fills. But the filling goes by itself beyond itself; it goes to the brink, too far.”

As we will see, Marion’s account of the idol highlights for me the darker side of the amorous imagination. In Chapter Six I use the term “idol” to refer to the dangers latent in imaginative individuation; that is, the danger that the lover might fall in love with his own imaginings rather than the Beloved. My analysis borrows from Marion’s concept of the idol insofar as I use his idea that the lover’s imaginative “gaze” can and often does seek that which captivates it and in doing so reflects his own desires back at him, at which point the lover no longer loves the Other but only himself. The language of love highlights this temptation: we say that a lover is “blinded” by love or that the Beloved has “captured” his imagination. Both terms may betray an underlying idolatry akin to what Marion describes in his work.

C. The Flesh: Saturation According to Relation

Phenomena that saturate according to relation appear so immediate that they render any relation impossible. In Kant’s schema, relation is a condition for the possibility of experience. The transcendental subject synthesizes the manifold of appearances “into a unity in terms of their relations to one another in time.” The three a priori synthetic

\[\text{63 Marion, Being Given, 203-04.}\]
\[\text{64 Mackinley, Interpreting Excess, 131.}\]
principles of substance, causality, and community regulate the way in which we perceive appearances and allow for their perception to be experienced as a unity. The understanding imposes the principles onto perceptions, laying down the horizons of experience.

Marion argues in Being Given that some phenomena give themselves with an immediacy and a “mineness” that is without relation, that is absolute.65 Take the flesh, for example. I never experience my flesh as distinct from me, nor as related to me.66 I always experience myself as flesh. Indeed, I am my flesh. The phenomenon of my flesh “evades any analogy of experience.”67 It is given as an auto-affection which refers to no object, according to no ecstasy, but only to itself; for it itself is sufficient to accomplish itself as affected . . . The flesh auto-affects itself in agony, suffering, and grief, as well as in desire, feeling, or orgasm.68

This auto-affection saturates the horizon of relation because it does not appear in relation to any other phenomenon. It always appears on its own and as its own. The flesh’s mode of appearing is therefore non-relational. It overflows or exceeds Kant’s regulative idea of relation because the flesh is experienced precisely as outside of or other than relation. It is its own experience.

Marion develops his description of the flesh further in In Excess and The Erotic Phenomenon. In In Excess, Marion emphasizes the priority or fundamental experience of

65 Marion, Being Given, 206-212, 231-32.
66 Marion follows Husserl’s distinction between body and flesh. The body is a knowable object, given as a common phenomenon. The flesh is unknowable, given as a saturated phenomenon.
67 Marion, Being Given, 206.
68 Ibid., 231.
my flesh; that is, it is always as flesh that I experience myself. Descartes relies on the *cogitatio* as indubitable evidence of an ego, but Marion argues that it is our sentience that is fundamentally indubitable. The ego’s existence as sentient precedes its existence as thinking.69 “The ego is given [*se donner*] as flesh.”70 And through my flesh I am individuated.71 I am fundamentally connected to my flesh and my flesh is strictly my own (no one else can experience my flesh). My experience of my flesh as “mine” is therefore given to me, it is not something that I constitute or assert. “I do not give myself my flesh, it is it that gives me to myself. In receiving my flesh, I receive myself - I am in this way gifted [*adonné, given over*] to it.”72 Flesh denies the standard phenomenological distinction between *noesis* and *noema* because the perceived is no longer clearly distinguishable from the perceiver. The intentional aim directed toward the flesh is accomplished as an essential immanence where “what I intend is blended with the possible fulfillment.”73 Relation is saturated by and in the flesh insofar as flesh collapses the very relations consciousness uses to constitute the world: intention and intuition.

In the fourth meditation in *The Erotic Phenomenon* Marion again takes up the phenomenon of flesh but this time within the context of love. Here, he emphasizes less the

---

69 Marion, *In Excess*, 86.

70 Ibid., 87.

71 “The individuation of the ego is thus made neither by form (the too universal understanding) nor by matter (the too undifferentiated physical body) but by the ‘unanimous white conflict’ of the one with the other - precisely by the taking of flesh.” Marion, *In Excess*, 97-98.

72 Ibid., 98.

73 Ibid., 99.
flesh’s auto-affectivity and instead speaks of the way in which another gives me my flesh through touch and *eros*. Marion first argues that worldly bodies affect me only because of the flesh’s passivity. In taking flesh I open myself up to worldly bodies, allowing “the things of the world the right to affect me and to reduce me to my passivity.” But this apparent hetero-affection of the flesh disguises a more primordial and active auto-affection moving beneath the surface of passivity. Marion states,

> I would feel nothing other (than myself) if I could not first feel myself, with an undertow more original than the wave that seems to result, but which, in fact, announces the undertow and, at once, allows itself to be caught up into it: auto-affection alone makes possible hetero-affection.

Marion then turns to the difference between my experience of worldly bodies and the flesh of another. The fundamental difference is that worldly bodies are given in their resistance to my touch whereas another’s flesh affects me by opening itself up to me and for me. Unlike worldly bodies, the flesh of another “withdraws, effaces itself and makes room for me.” Then Marion seems to turn back to hetero-affectivity:

> I can only free myself and become myself *by touching another flesh*, as one touches land at a port, because only another flesh can make room for me, welcome me, and not turn me away or resist me — that is, comply with my flesh and reveal it to me by providing it a place... By entering into the flesh of the other, I exit the world and become flesh in her flesh, flesh of her flesh.

---


75 Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 113.

76 Ibid., 114.

77 Ibid., 117-18; Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, 141.

78 Ibid., 118.

79 Ibid.
The other gives me to myself for the first time, because she takes the initiative to give me my own flesh for the first time. She awakens me, because she eroticizes me. (emphasis mine).

Here we see an unresolved tension in Marion’s work between the flesh’s auto-affectivity to hetero-affectivity. On the one hand, Marion describes the flesh as radically auto-affective, “it is it that gives me to myself.” The flesh saturates relation. But on the other hand, he describes the phenomenon of the flesh of the other as that which “gives me to myself for the first time.” Which is it? Do I receive myself from my flesh or the flesh of another? Does my flesh give itself as an absolute phenomenon without relation to anything else? Or does it give itself through relation; that is, relation with another’s flesh?

Mackinlay makes the astute observation that for Marion it seems as though “I become fully flesh, not by sensing myself, but by sensing that I am sensed in the flesh of another.” Marion’s description of the erotic phenomenon emphasizes both hetero-affection and auto-affection. But his description of the flesh as saturated phenomenon requires strict auto-affection. One way to resolve this dilemma may be to read Marion’s account of the erotic phenomenon as beginning and ending with auto-affection but recognizing the unique way in which the other’s flesh is given in order to induce my experience of the saturated phenomenon of my own flesh. In other words, I always experience my flesh as strict auto-affection (immediate and mine) but the fullness of that experience is only revealed to me

---

80 Ibid., 118-119.

81 Mackinlay raises this question in his analysis of flesh in Interpreting Excess, 140-141.

82 Mackinley, Interpreting Excess, 141.
through contact with another’s flesh which exposes me to myself in a way that no worldly
object can. Marion says as much when he writes,

[a]nd yet the other’s flesh is truly phenomenalized, but under a unique mode that
must be admitted: it is phenomenalized without, however, making itself seen, by
allowing itself simply and radically to be felt. By allowing itself to be felt in such
a way of course, that I feel that I am feeling it (by definition of my flesh), but also
that I feel that it feels me (by the definition of the other)’ and what then does this
flesh of the other feel, if not that I feel it and even that I feel it feel me? And, at the
end of this interlacing, what do our two fleshes feel, if not each the feeling of the
feeling of the other?\(^{83}\)

But even this charitable reading fails to demonstrate the strict auto-affection Marion
requires to show that flesh saturates all relation. Even if it is the case that the flesh is given
uniquely as immediate and mine, that immediacy and mineness appears only through the
flesh’s contact with a world, and especially through its contact with another’s flesh. As we
will see, my flesh’s encounter with the flesh of another constitutes a radical moment of
individuation. Marion’s strongest argument for auto-affection still reveals a hetero-
affection at play. My flesh appears only to me (auto-affection) but its appearance is induced
by its contact with another’s flesh (hetero-affection). The other’s flesh is phenomenolized
for me when it allows me to feel it, which actually reveals to me that I am feeling it and
that it is being felt by me. Although I do not experience the flesh of another, the flesh of
another revels me to myself. My flesh is not therefore strictly absolute insofar as it is given
to me through a relation with the flesh of another.

---

\(^{83}\) Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 117.
Whether Marion is simply inconsistent in his description of the flesh or is instead trying to signal toward a subtler relationship between auto-affectivity and hetero-affectivity remains unclear. For our purposes, however, it is crucial to note that if I am given to myself through the flesh of another then I am given to myself hermeneutically. I come to understand myself through another’s flesh. The flesh opens to interpretation. The flesh mediates. The phenomenon of the flesh is given not as an absolute phenomenon but in and through a relationship with other things, and in a unique way through a relationship with an Other (which is profoundly not as “a thing”). The Other plays a special role in individuating me and individuation occurs within both a phenomenological and hermeneutical register. Marion does not speak of the structural role of hermeneutics in the givenness of the flesh. His emphasis on auto-affection conceals the mediating role the flesh plays in understanding and responding to the Beloved. As we will see in Chapter Four, the hermeneutical structure of the flesh is central to the process of individuation. Through the relationship between my flesh and the world and my flesh and another I come to experience an Other as the Beloved. And through the amorous imagination I engage in an endless hermeneutic in which I continuously interpret the Beloved without ever knowing her. Individuation occurs in and is expressed through the flesh. Indeed, the amorous imagination is an embodied imagination and is therefore hermeneutical “all the way down.”

As I assert in my thesis, any account of the phenomenology of love should include a description of the amorous imagination precisely because of the role it plays in individuating the Beloved, a role that is always already enfleshed. But we get ahead of ourselves. Before unpacking the implications of Marion’s ideas for a phenomenology of
the amorous imagination we must conclude our discussion of saturation by looking at the final category: saturation according to modality.\textsuperscript{84}

D. The Face: Saturation According to Modality

The fourth type of saturated phenomenon saturates according to modality. These phenomena are irregardable because they cannot be reduced to an object and so remain invisible to object-constituting intentionality. In Marion’s parlance we can “see” (voir) these phenomena but we cannot “look” (regarder) at them. They cannot be kept “under the control of the one who sees.”\textsuperscript{85} Marion provides three examples: anamorphosis, icons, and the face of the Other. Each inflects modal saturation differently but for our purposes the face suffices as both a case study of saturation and, more importantly, an opening onto love and the amorous imagination.

Marion relies heavily on Levinas’s account of the unseeable face of the Other. According to Levinas, the face of the Other is unlike any other phenomenon. It is experienced as an infinite excess and transcendence. It withdraws. A chasm exists between the subject and the Other that cannot be traversed. The Other remains at a distance and yet enjoins us to responsibility through our encounter with it. The face demands, “Though shalt not kill!” The look of the Other converts the self into a me that is seen rather than an I that sees. Here we have the first individuation: the Other weighs upon me as a responsibility for this Other who stands before me in her concreteness. Marion questions the apparent

\textsuperscript{84} Marion does describe a fifth category of saturation, what he calls “revelation,” but it is not relevant to my project.

\textsuperscript{85} Marion, Being Given, 214.
individuation of the ethical injunction on the grounds that it ultimately renders the Other substitutable. In *Prolegomena to Charity, In Excess, and The Erotic Phenomenon*, Marion attempts to go beyond Levinas by describing a second, more radical individuation which occurs through love. Rather than insisting upon an asymmetry in the encounter with the Other Marion describes the face in both iconic and erotic terms. In encountering the Beloved or icon I am envisaged but I also open myself up to and envisage the Other. As in friendship, envisaging the Beloved gives rise to the phenomenon of the crossing gazes. Envisaging is an alternative to intending. To envisage the Other is to “admit that he or she expresses herself without signification [i.e., without uniquely determinate signification]” and to accept “an endless diversity of significations, all possible, all provisional, all insufficient.” To envisage is therefore to enter into an “endless hermeneutics” in which the lover commits to the on-going project of interpreting the boundless givenness of the Beloved:

Only someone who has lived with the life and the death of the other knows to what extent he or she does not know that other. Only such a person can hence recognize the other as the saturated phenomenon par excellence, and consequently also knows that it would take an eternity to envisage this saturated phenomenon as such — not constituting it as an object, but interpreting it in loving it. 

---


87 In the next section, “Individuation in *The Erotic Phenomenon,*” I explain in detail the phenomenon of the crossing gazes as it relates to love.

88 Marion, In Excess, 117, 122-23.

89 Ibid., 126-127.
For Marion, the face saturates modality by exceeding any attempt to reduce its appearing to an object. The face of the Other is irregardable. The face’s invisibility opens up to the possibility of love through “envisaging” rather than simply “looking at” the other. The crossing gazes individuate beyond the ethical toward the erotic because they can only be experienced between the lovers who mutually envisage one another. And to love is to love without end, to respond to the erotic call of the invisible Beloved by engaging in an endless hermeneutic that eternally interprets the meaning of her saturating givenness.

**INDIVIDUATION IN THE EROTIC PHENOMENON**

How then for Marion does love emerge? How do givenness, saturation, and the endless hermeneutic relate and what do they have to do love and individuation? How does Marion think the Other become this Other, the Beloved? We are now in a position to examine Marion’s answer to these questions. Doing so sets the stage for both a critical and generative reading of his account of individuation and provides an opening to describe the role of the imagination in individuating the Beloved.

Marion’s work on love culminates in *The Erotic Phenomenon*. The book has three aims: to show that love (1) is univocal, (2) has its own rationality, and (3) is free from being. Marion performs a series of “erotic reductions” in which he brackets the history and philosophy of love and — consistent with the phenomenological method — attempts

---

90 “Mutuality” is key to understanding Marion’s treatment of love. The crossing gazes are mutual, not reciprocal. Reciprocity occurs in the domain of economy but love according to Marion is a gift and therefore exceeds the metaphysics of transaction.

91 Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 9. “All of my books . . . have been just so many steps toward the question of the erotic phenomenon.”

92 Ibid., 4-6.
to describe love as it appears. He moves through the different “stages” of love, analyzing the way in which the self emerges as lover and gives the gift of love without the expectation of reciprocity. The question of individuation pervades his discussion. The text can therefore be understood as a continuation of Marion’s thematic encounter with Levinas (beginning with *Prolegomena to Charity*) and a fully articulated answer to the question of how the Other becomes the Beloved; that is, how the self and Other are individuated.

A. The Lover’s Advance & The Crossing Gazes

The first erotic reduction reveals a great desire; that is, the desire to be loved. By suspending metaphysical concerns and looking only at the self as engaged in the question of love we discover that we care more for love than anything else. We are all vain Hamlets, questioning the meaning of being absent love. We ask, “What’s the use?” Another question follows: “Does anyone out there love me?” 93 I cannot resolve the question by demanding that another love me. And I cannot convert love into an exchange, although I try. I think to myself, “I will play the game of love, certainly, but I will only risk the least amount possible, and on condition that the other go first.” 94 But this converts love into a transaction. It submits the gift of love to the economy of exchange. It destroys the possibility of love. I discover that love must be freely given. I cannot resolve the question by loving myself because I know myself too well. I know my own shame and unworthiness. Self-love turns to self-hate. Love must come from somewhere else.

93 Ibid., 40.

94 Ibid., 69.
The second reduction reveals the lover’s advance. To escape vanity, we realize that rather than asking, “Does anyone love me?” we must ask, “Can I love first?” The lover’s advance marks the first individuation: in stepping forward to love first I individuate myself as lover. It is an act of will; a decision:

I alone make the decision to love in advance and, as I love to love, I provoke through myself and by myself alone the intuition (in this case, the amorous affective tonality): this auto-affection actively produces, in immanence itself, intentional lived experiences, which can validate nothing other than myself: my amorous lived experiences only confirm my status as lover, and that I make love; they do not render the other that I love visible or accessible to me (supposing that I really do love one).

Notably, in loving first I do not receive an assurance that I am loved. I am only assured of loving. Nevertheless, “I become myself definitively each time and for as long as I, as lover, can love first.” Suspending reciprocity and acting without expectation of assurance allows the lover to appear as such and, in appearing, abolish the metaphysics of economy. But this individuation poses a problem. While the lover is individuated, the Beloved is not. The lover loves “for the sake of love;” his intuition is filled with “the vague

---


96 Marion, The Erotic Phenomenon, 97.

97 “When I pass on to the question, ‘Can I love first?’ what assurance can I legitimately hope for, as a lover? Evidently not the assurance to be able to continue or to persevere in my being despite the suspension of vanity, but the sole assurance appropriate to the radicalized erotic reduction – not the assurance of being, nor of being itself, but the assurance of loving . . . understood as the pure and simple assurance of the precise fact that [I love].” Marion, The Erotic Phenomenon, 73.

98 Ibid., 76.

99 Ibid., 78.
intuition of loving to love” but with no clear signification attributed to it. The lover’s advance risks replicating the idolater’s gaze, endlessly wandering through the hazy landscape of amorous intuition according to the impulses of “desire, expectation, suffering, happiness, jealousy, hatred, etc.” The lover needs a Beloved. But no signification provided by the lover can ever reach the Other because to do so would render the Other an object. Marion states,

It will not be enough that the signification attempts to represent the other to me, since the signification would degrade the other to the dishonorable rank of an object, which I could constitute at will and modify at my leisure.

The lover cannot know the Beloved. The lover’s significations can only prepare the lover to receive alterity.

What does it mean to receive alterity with the kind of individuation Marion envisions? From whence comes the signification? According to Marion, the Other remains anonymous unless there is a counter-signification — or more accurately, a counter-intentionality — originating with and coming from the Other. “The signification in question will only arrive if it comes upon me from this alterity itself,” as that which “affects me from out there, beginning with itself.” Echoing Levinas, Marion acknowledges that this first counter-intentionality is the ethical injunction. The Other first enjoins me not to kill. The Other’s counter-intentionality delivers “exteriority’s irrefutable shock,” manifesting

100 Marion, The Erotic Phenomenon, 101; Gschwandtner, Marion and Theology, 91.

101 Marion, The Erotic Phenomenon, 99.

102 Ibid, 98.

103 Ibid.
the Other as a whole phenomenon. But in hearing “Thou shalt not kill,” the lover “can and must, by virtue of being a lover, hear ‘Do not touch me’ — do not advance here, where I arise, for you would tread ground that, in order for me to appear, must remain intact[.]” The ethical injunction always signifies anonymously. It is universal, not a particular call, and love requires radical particularity. We must go beyond the ethical to the erotic in order to individuate fully. The erotic phenomenon appears not when the Other enjoins me, but when she gives herself to me, when she calls to me forward in the “Here I am!”

Marion argues that this counter-intentionality takes its initial form as a unique phenomenon – “the crossing gazes” – and it marks the inaugural moment of individuation between lovers. Love renders the Other unsubstitutable through the phenomenon of the crossing gazes, in which I expose myself to the gaze of the Other and she exposes herself to me. We disclose ourselves to each other, “uncovered, stripped bare, decentered.” I do not try to render the Other an object and she does not attempt to render me an object either. We are “unconscious” of each other in the sense that we cannot bring an intentionality to the gaze of the Other that is adequate to the intuition it provides. We are neither subject nor object. Marion writes:

Whence comes what we will from now on consider the phenomenological determination of love: two definitively invisible gazes (intentionality and the injunction) cross one another, and this together trace a cross that is invisible to every gaze other than theirs alone. Each of the two gazes renounces seeing

---

104 Ibid.
106 Ibid., 104.
107 Marion, “The Intentionality of Love,” 84.
visibly the other gaze — the object alone cannot be seen, the eye’s corpse — in order to expose its own invisible intention to the invisible impact of the other intention. Two gazes, definitively invisible, cross and, in this crossing, renounce their invisibility. They cannot consent to let themselves be seen without seeing and invert the original disposition of every (de)nominative gaze — to see without being seen. To love would thus be defined as seeing the definitively invisible aim of my gaze nonetheless exposed by the aim of another invisible gaze; the two gazes, invisible forever, expose themselves to each other in the crossing of their reciprocal aims.\footnote{Ibid., 87. (emphasis added)}

The crossing of gazes is only “visible” to the lover and the Beloved. They alone experience the crossing, which is its own, unique phenomenon (not two phenomenon that co-occur). The lovers “feel the weight of a counter-aim” and “experience each other in the common lived experience of their two efforts.”\footnote{Ibid., 88.} Alone, intentionality and the injunction do not constitute an exchange. They are one-directional. The Other issues the injunction. The ego directs intention. But the crossing gazes are mutual. They “come together in a lived experience which can only be experienced in common, since it consists in the balanced resistance of two intentional impetuses.”\footnote{Ibid.} Marion compares this phenomenon to two dueling fencers, who when crossing swords feel the weight of each other’s weapon, arm, and entire bodies in a crisscross moment of balance and equilibrium. Like the fencers, the lovers do not “see” each other in any phenomenological sense (as objects) but they do experience their encounter, “the lived experience of their tensions.”\footnote{Ibid., 89.} This phenomenon-in-common individuates the Other and me when I expose myself to the weight of the gaze
of the Other and the Other advances, steps forward, throwing himself “madly into his alterity.” It is only in this movement that “the Other as such attains its final individuality because it moves ecstatically, through the haecceitas, into a gaze: the other passes completely into his gaze, and will never have a more complete manifestation.” The gaze of the Other gives me to myself and gives me the Other “without reserve or defense, the perfect operative of the unsubstitutable him.” The Other becomes this Other through or as his “uncontrollable gaze,” which does not “passively reflect” my gaze but responds to it with his own.” In his later works Marion describes the result of the crossing gazes not as a final individuation but as a moment on a continuum of individuation:

The lover, and he alone, sees something else, a thing that nobody except him sees — precisely no longer a thing, but, for the first time, this other, unique, individualized, furthermore cut off from economy, disengaged from objectivity, unveiled by the initiative of love, surging up as a phenomenon so far unseen.

The crossed phenomenon does not fully individuate the Other (although it does render her unique; without her the crossed phenomenon could not occur) because it too remains indeterminate. In being held in common the crossed phenomenon remains a formality. Like the ethical injunction, the declaration of a loving commitment could issue

---

112 Ibid., 99.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
116 Marion, The Erotic Phenomenon, 131.
to any other. It “signifies nothing in itself and thus applies to each and everyone.” The lover’s advance and the crossed phenomenon open onto love and invite individuation but by themselves are not enough to fully individuate the Beloved. Another crossing must be invoked: the crossing of flesh.

Before turning to his analysis of flesh Marion highlights three ways the lover is individuated in the lover’s advance. First, by desire. The lover’s desire is his alone and is a desire for what he alone lacks: “nothing belongs to me more than that which I desire, for that is what I lack.” The Other desires the Other because he lacks her and experiences this lack as a kind of deep mystery which “shows me my most secret center,” revealing to me myself by “showing me what arouses me.” My gaze settles upon this Other and

I confess in petto that ‘this time, this one’s for me’ . . . at this instant the other becomes for me a personal affair and appears to me different from all others, reserved for me and me for her; the other destines me for her and individualizes me through her.

Second, by eternity. Each time the lovers says “I love you” he expresses a conviction that “this time, it will be for good, that this time will be for good and forever.” It does not matter whether the love lasts. What matters is the moment of eternity expressed by the lover in the amorous vow. The vow can never be unsaid. It validates the lover’s status as lover once and for all. This eternal moment marked in time belongs only to the lover, thus

117 Ibid., 107.
118 Ibid., 108.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid., 108-109.
121 Ibid., 109.
individuating him as lover once and for all. Third, by passivity. Passivity describes the impact the Other has on the lover which manifests as the oath she issues in the “Here I am!”, the lover’s advance itself, which “sets in motion an intuition all the more radically passive” (the vague loving to love that must receive signification from elsewhere), and the risk that opens up when the lover decides to love first without the expectation of return, leaving both lovers “like two castaways, holding onto the same piece of debris, treading water.”

Thus the lover is individuated of his own accord in his decision to love. As we will see in Chapter Four, Marion’s erotic phenomenology over-emphasizes the lover’s advance and does not sufficiently account for the saturating nature of the Beloved’s givenness. While he does equate her appearance with the appearance of the face, which saturates according to modality, he does not explore her appearance in terms of a saturating event. If, as I argue, the Beloved saturates according to both modality and quantity then a phenomenology of love should include a description and analysis of the evental arrival of the Beloved in addition to the lover’s advance.

**B. The Crossing of Flesh**

Marion describes the flesh as a saturated phenomenon given as a strict auto-affection. But he also recognizes the hetero-affectivity present in the erotic encounter: the Beloved gives me my flesh by making room for me, by allowing me to touch her flesh, by not resisting me as other objects do, and by welcoming me and not turning me away. Flesh exhibits a passivity akin to the passivity that emerges in the lover’s advance because in receiving the flesh of the Other my flesh delivers me to myself. The lover gives the Other

---

122 Ibid., 112.
her flesh as well by eroticizing her flesh for her, and welcoming her flesh without resistance. The crossed phenomenon takes the form of crossing flesh. The eroticized Other is individuated when the flesh of the Other is phenomenlized in mine and mine in her. The eroticized Other exceed ethics by again rendering the Other radically unsubstitutable:

We must recognize that the privilege of the face, supposing that it remains, no longer depends here on a distance, nor on an ethical height. Here, the face of the other, if she still wants or is able to speak to me, certainly no longer says to me, “Thou shalt not kill!”; not only because the other has no doubts about this point; and not only because she says to me, in sighs or in words, “Here I am, come!” [ ]; but above all because she and I have left the universal, even the ethical universal, in order to strive toward particularity — mine and hers, because it is a question of me and of you, and surely not of a universally obligating neighbor. In the situation of mutual eroticization, where each gives to the other the flesh that he or she does not have, each only aims at being individualized in individualizing the other person, thus exactly piercing and transgressing the universal.123

Here, Marion boldly asserts his claim that love overcomes ethics insofar as it delivers radical particularity and individuation. There is nothing universal about the erotic phenomenon. Through the flesh the lovers experience each other not as objects in the world nor as ethical commands but as intimate, saturated phenomena that exceed any intentionality the ego might bring to them. The flesh delivers up to both the lover and the Beloved their own haecceitas. The lovers open their flesh to the touch of the other and in doing so receive their flesh, their own unsubstitutbaility, from the flesh of the other. But in this immanence, transcendence remains. The intimacy of the flesh preserves distance. The erotic phenomenon is not metaphysical merging. I can never experience the flesh of the

123 Ibid., 126.
Other as flesh of my own and so “the other’s transcendence, far from fading away, stands out like never before.”\textsuperscript{124}

For all its profundity, particularity, and saturation, the individuation delivered by eroticized flesh does not endure. After climax the flesh returns to body. “The phenomenon of the other appears in the white light of eroticization. But this light is ineluctably extinguished in the very moment of its flashing forth, and the other thus disappears in his or her very apparition.”\textsuperscript{125} The erotic encounter — and with it, the radical individuation present in the crossing of flesh — ends. Eros reveals to me my own finitude.\textsuperscript{126} I recognize that I have only reached the Other through the medium of flesh, indirectly (though intimately). A paradox emerges: the erotic encounter both assures the lovers of their individuation and calls it into question. The lovers grow suspicious, asking, “did the erotic phenomenon really take place?”, “did she feel anything?”, and “did it change anything between the other and me?”\textsuperscript{127} Moreover, the erotic phenomenon exposes a gap between the eroticized flesh and the person of the other. I never actually reach the lover through the flesh. My flesh appears only in its auto-affection (according to Marion). Each lover experiences climax alone. The erotic moment is therefore ultimately impersonal and anonymous. The gap opened up by the erotic encounter allows space for suspicion, which invites the possibility of lying, deceit, unfaithfulness, jealousy, and even hatred. Marion is

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 151.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 142.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 152.
no Romantic: “In the end, one could ask oneself if the enterprise of phenomenalizing the other does not owe as much, or even more, to hatred than to love itself.” To avoid the death of love stirring in the seed of suspicion the lovers must remain free and faithful to one another. Only faith can enable the erotic phenomenon – and the individuation it engenders – to endure.

C. The Adieu

Marion describes the oath of fidelity issued mutually and between the lovers as the key to temporalizing the erotic phenomenon and thus delivering up true individuation. Faithfulness assures the erotic phenomenon “a visibility that lasts and imposes itself.” Marion returns to his account of the lover’s oath as a pledge that in a moment of time reaches eternity. To say, “I love you” is to say “I love you now and for all time.” But the oath must issue again and again. The mere annunciation of the oath is not enough to sustain love. Marion might add here that the oath of fidelity manifests according to different modalities. Lovers confess their love in more ways than the “I love you.” Indeed, the oath itself is an expression of the endless hermeneutic Marion referenced earlier in his discussion of saturation. The lovers are faithful not only to the erotic phenomenon but to

128 Ibid., 175.

129 Marion argues that free love is love liberated from the automatic or un-chosen nature of the flesh. Ibid., 179-183. Indeed, he claims that the lover can only actually reach the other person as such in speaking rather than touching. Chastity may be the erotic virtue par excellence. Ibid., 183. See also, Gschwandtner, Marion and Theology, 92; Robyn Horner, Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2005), 139-140.

130 Marion, The Erotic Phenomenon, 184.

131 Ibid., 185.
its endless interpretation. The oath of faithfulness issues as much as an imaginative and hermeneutic activity as a linguistic or spoken performance. In any event, Marion concludes that the oath does not issue once but over and over again, each time as a vow directed toward eternity. Full individuation emerges:

I thus receive myself, in the end, from the other. I will receive my ipseity from the other, just as I have already received my signification in her oath, my flesh in the eroticization of her flesh, and even my own faithfulness in her declaration, ‘You truly love me!’

Marion is left with a final challenge: can a third witness to the oath in a way that solidifies it more permanently than its performative repetition? Marion considers the child.

The child renders the oath visible. Phenomenologically,

the passage to the child has the function of producing a more stable visibility of the erotic phenomenon already accomplished by the oath and repeated by enjoyment, and thus of assuring the visibility the lovers, as it is present and to come.

But of course, the child is not merely a composite of lovers. He is his own flesh. The child grows up and leaves the lovers to their own world. The child receives the gift of life from the lovers but cannot return it in the same fashion. Like eroticized flesh, the child leaves “too soon, and inevitably; for time takes back to its empire these two finitutes, which in fact form only one. Eroticization and the child thus quiet themselves with the same silence.”

---

132 Ibid., 195.
133 Ibid., 197.
134 Ibid., 205-206.
Marion concludes *The Erotic Phenomenon* by considering God. The lover’s oath is a moment of eternity. Each instantiation is an eschatological *as if*.\(^\text{135}\) “The lovers do not promise one another eternity, they provoke it and give it to one another starting now.”\(^\text{136}\) In order to temporalize the erotic phenomenon the lovers must vow to each other toward God, in the *adieu*. The lovers summon God as their final witness, their first witness, the one who never leaves and never lies. Then, for the first time, they say to each other ‘*adieu*’: next year in Jerusalem — the next time to God. To think to/about God can only be done erotically, in this ‘*adieu*’.\(^\text{137}\)

What are we to make of Marion’s theological turn? Is it a mere reversion to ontotheology? Does the old God creep in the backdoor? For those familiar with Marion’s distinction between theology and philosophy it is clear that the appeal to God is not a simple doubling-down on God as Being. The *adieu* should not be read metaphysically. Indeed, for Marion, God is without being. God is not simply givenness either.\(^\text{138}\) Marion’s *adieu* is more akin to Levinas or Derrida than Aquinas. “It is a matter of supplication, not cognition.”\(^\text{139}\) The lovers hymn to each other in the *adieu*, abolishing repetition and signaling now the eternal expressed as the yet-to-come. “Loving demands that the first time

\(^{135}\) Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 141.

\(^{136}\) Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 209.

\(^{137}\) Ibid., 212.

\(^{138}\) “[W]hen I say that reduced givenness does not demand any giver for its given, I am *not* insinuating that it last claim to a transcendent giver; when I say that the phenomenology of givenness by definition passes beyond metaphysics, I do *not* say between the lines that this phenomenology restores metaphysics[.]” Marion, *Being Given*, 5.

\(^{139}\) Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 142.
already coincide with the last time. The dawn and the evening make one single twilight."140 Thus, the adieu signals toward God insofar as God is the eternal moment captured in the oath of fidelity issued by the lovers to each other in a moment of time. God is not “out there” witnessing to the lover’s oath. God is another name for the oath itself. Vowing to God radicalizes the erotic phenomenon by dissolving “the difference between the present instant and the final instance, between the ‘now’ and ‘again.’”141 Unlike the oath that repeats, the adieu announces the “I love you” once and for all. “The adieu casts me into the accomplishment of my oath.”142

---


141 Ibid.

142 Ibid., 212. Marion also describes God as the first lover whom we encounter in the final erotic reduction. There we find ourselves always already loved by the eternal witness that preceded us. While this assertion is less relevant to our present study, it is worth a brief comment. The reference to God as first lover again raises the question of ontotheology. How should we understand it? On the one hand, we can read Marion as proposing a straightforward theological solution to a phenomenological problem. But that reading does not take into account his earlier works distinguishing between theology and philosophy. On the other hand, we might read this reference to God in light of his previous work on language and God. According to this line of argument, references to God are pragmatic and undecidable. They are not a metaphysical claim. Horner, Jean-Luc Marion, 144. But there is a third way to understanding Marion’s God as first lover in terms of hermeneutics. Recall that for Heidegger the answer to the question of Being in some way has to precede its very asking. The question reveals a hermeneutic circle: it is only because I already know what Being is - even if only vaguely and intuitively - that I can ask what Being is in the first place. I have a sense of the whole of Being and that allows me to look at the parts of Being and clarify it through the method of hermeneutical phenomenology. Likewise, Marion can be seen as arguing here not that God is “out there” loving us and that allows for love to occur or serves as the witness to the oath of faithfulness but rather as a Heideggerian acknowledgment that to even enter into the erotic reduction means that we have already in some sense been loved and therefore know what to look for. Like the answer to the question of Being, the answer to the question of Love precedes its very asking. The eschatological witness to the oath of faith is the sense of love that we must already have before we are even able to investigate love at all. The erotic reduction allows us to clarify what we already know about love just as the question of Being allows us to clarify what we already know to be true of Being. So the adieu, the witness, God, is not a loving God that exists “out there” but is the love itself to which we have always already been exposed. Indeed, it is the precondition that allows for the possibility of the reduction in the first place. Recall God Without Being and 1 John 4:8: “God is love.” In this sense, to enter into the erotic reduction does indeed mean we have already been loved, even if the call of the lover remains “in silence.”
MARION’S PHENOMENOLOGY, INDIVIDUATION, AND THE AMOROUS IMAGINATION

What is Marion’s answer to the question of individuation? To summarize: we begin with the “erotic reduction,” bracketing all other concerns and looking only at what appears in the erotic phenomenon. A self calls into question the meaning of her own existence, asking, “Am I loved?” Realizing that the answer cannot come from within, she asks, “Can I love first?,” advances, and becomes a lover. The first individuation occurs: the self becomes a lover according to her own initiative, because of her decision to advance. But the lover’s intuition is filled with love alone and lacks signification. It is not until the Beloved gazes back at the lover in a counter-intentionality that the vague intuition of love manifests as a particular Beloved. The second individuation occurs: the lover and Beloved experience the phenomenon of the crossing gazes. But this individuation falls short. It remains a formality. Individuation requires a fuller intimacy in the crossing of flesh. Here the lovers individuate one another in the radical unsubstitutablility of the erotic moment. But the individuation of the flesh exposes finitude and calls into question the very individuation it reveals. The erotic moment ends. Individuation takes its final form in the oath of fidelity. The oath accomplishes individuation by touching eternity. “I at last see whom I love in the final instance — her face will arise and impose itself at the heart of the eschatological anticipation by passing into eternity.”

Does Marion’s description of the erotic phenomenon explain individuation? In many ways, yes, but in some ways, no. As compelling as his descriptions are they remain incomplete. His emphasis on the lover’s advance masks the way in which the Beloved

saturates according to quantity and modality. While Marion is right to identify the importance of the lover’s advance he underemphasizes the evental quality of the Beloved’s givenness. Moreover, although he signals the need for an “endless hermeneutic” he does not explain what that hermeneutic entails or how it unfolds. Neither does he attempt to account for the creative-responsive nature such a hermeneutic would involve as the lovers seek to understand but never know each other. Finally, Marion’s discussion makes no mention of the role of the imagination generally, or the amorous imagination in particular, and its contribution to the process of individuation. Some of these “gaps” in Marion’s account make sense in light of the aim and scope of his project. Marion does not purport to provide a phenomenology of the amorous imagination nor does he claim to have developed a robust theory of the endless hermeneutic. My identification of these “gaps” is not intended as a strong critique of Marion’s project but instead to identify openings or invitations to develop the ideas he signals toward and unpack the implications of saturation, individuation, and the imagination for a phenomenology of love.

With all of this in mind, let us consider the conceptual tools Marion has developed through his phenomenology and their relevance to a study of the amorous imagination. Marion’s phenomenology is a search for grounds, or “firsts.” The reduction to givenness aims to reveal the fundamental structure of all phenomenon; namely, that all phenomena are given according to the structure of a gift, freely appearing of their own accord. Marion’s study of saturated phenomenon exposes the structure of phenomenon-as-gift by showing that in giving themselves in excess of categories imposed upon them phenomena are not limited by the subject’s intentionality. According to Marion, the fact of saturated
phenomenon reveals an underlying structure to the self. The self is l’adonné, the gifted who receives and bears up against the given, showing it in resisting it. Marion’s theory of the self raises a number of interesting questions regarding how love shows itself. For example, if receptivity and resistance play instrumental roles in a the given showing itself, and the nature of the resistance identifies the phenomenon as a certain kind of phenomenon or effects the way l’adonné understands it, then is not the very reception and resistance itself a hermeneutical enterprise? If, as Gschwandter points out, the “impact of the phenomenon functions indeed like a call or appeal, especially in the case of the saturated phenomena, which each issue their own kind of claim,” what kind of claim does each issue? How do the flesh, the face, the event, and the imagination conspire to render the Other-as-Beloved? More specifically, how does the hermeneutic response of l’adonné to the call of the Other convert the Other into the Beloved? Is the imagination a hermeneutic site or medium that brings together the various calls of the saturating Other? Or does the Beloved first give herself as an event which the lover resists (in the Marionian sense) and then imaginatively interprets? Both? Something else? Is the call of the Beloved shown in the imaginative response of the lover? How does the Beloved capture the lover’s imagination? We turn to these questions in the remaining chapters

Let us next consider Marion’s claim that love’s emergence depends primarily upon the lover’s advance. Several authors criticize Marion’s emphasis on the lover’s initiative in individuating both the lover and the Beloved. Gschwandtner argues that for Marion “it is always the ‘lover’ who phenomenalizes the ‘beloved’ and allows for her to appear.”

144 Gschwandtner, Degrees of Givenness, 105-106.
Claude Romano reads Marion’s insistence on the lover’s initiative as the core of the erotic phenomenon, that love “boil[s] down to a single requirement from which all the others flow: to love first, to arrive ahead of the other in love.” Horner provides a more sympathetic interpretation, noting the serial structure of *The Erotic Phenomenon* and plotting the lover’s advance as an early but ultimately inadequate stage in individuation. All agree, however, that for Marion the lover’s advance is an essential step in overcoming the problem of economy that emerges in conceiving love as reciprocity. As Stephen Lewis states, “the decision to advance in love discloses an infinite human will that is both passive and active, one that seeks to participate in the other through the gift of participation.” Love is indeed a gift. But why must love rely only upon the lover’s advance? Why does Marion not invoke the saturating qualities of the face and the event to describe the way in which the Beloved bursts onto the scene, disrupting the lover’s solitude? He discusses the role of the Beloved in individuating the lover through the counter-intentional gaze, the flesh, and the oath but he underemphasizes the Beloved’s initiative in manifesting love. Indeed, one might argue that the saturating givenness of the Beloved does more to bring about the lover’s individuation than his own advance. The idea of the saturating Beloved is not meant to imply a simple inversion of advances, replacing the lover’s with the

---


Beloved’s (who is also a lover, of course), but highlights the evental way in which the Beloved is given in experience. While the lover’s advance no doubt opens onto the landscape of love, it is the mutual and perhaps even simultaneous event of the Beloved that calls the lover into that landscape. A phenomenology of love should include a description of the Beloved as a saturated phenomenon.

Marion also draws criticism from his peers for failing to account for the role of hermeneutics in his phenomenology. While I agree generally with these critiques I do think Marion’s idea of the endless hermeneutic provides an opening to explore the way in which the Beloved is individuated beyond the advance, the flesh, and the adieu. If the Beloved is given as a phenomenon that saturates at least according to modality and quantity, then like any other saturated phenomenon she calls for an endless hermeneutic. The core of my thesis is that it is precisely in the imaginative playing-out of this hermeneutic that the Beloved is individuated, over-and-over again, in an on-going, interpretive project. Moreover, like Claude Romano, I argue that the event itself is structurally hermeneutical and so a description of the Beloved’s givenness should include the way in which she arrives onto the scene of a pre-existing horizon of meaning and how her arrival effects that horizon, what I call the “amorous event.” In addition, a phenomenological description of love should explain how it is that the life-world of the

lovers is reconstituted in light of the amorous event, according to a new horizon of meaning, and along a new temporal trajectory. In the following chapters I argue that much of this can occur only because of and through the creative-responsive activity of the amorous imagination. But before looking specifically at the *amorous* imagination I will provide an analysis of what I argue are the key features of the imagination-in-general, insofar as it operates as an individuating faculty.
CHAPTER THREE

KEY FEATURES OF THE IMAGINATION & THEIR ROLE IN

INDIVIDUATION

Overview

The history of the idea of the imagination is defined largely by the “mirror or lamp debate.” Is the imagination mimetic or productive? Does it simply *re-present* to the mind sense impressions, concepts, or whatever it is the mind “takes-in”? Or does it *produce* the world of perception by shining its synthesizing light on all that appears? The answer is more complicated than the metaphor allows. As Kant argues in *Critique of Pure Reason*, it is both, and as Husserl argues in *Ideas* and *Logical Investigations*, it is also much more. In this chapter, rather than providing an historical overview of the imagination I will examine its role in individuating certain Others in order to explain how the imagination transforms the Other into *this* Other: a radical particular. In the first section, I identify and analyze five key features of the imagination insofar as it operates as an individuating faculty: (A) its productive and reproductive capacities, (B) its hermeneutical structure, (C) its creative-responsive activity, (D) its embodied “location,” and (E) its unique mode of consciousness. I will relate these key features to my study of individuation and explain how they work in tandem to render certain Others unique. In the second section, I connect these features to my thesis and core assertions, providing a preliminary explanation of how the imagination
individuates. In the final section I refocus the discussion on the question of the amorous imagination as the site of the endless hermeneutic and explain how this chapter feeds into the more focused study of love that follows. But the reader must wait until Chapters Four and Five for a complete, detailed account of the amorous imagination and its role in individuating the Beloved.

**Key Features of the Imagination**

A. The Imagination’s Productive and Reproductive Capacities

Most theories prior to Kant’s account in the *Critique of Pure Reason* endorse a mimetic view of the imagination. From Plato to Hume, philosophers concerned with the imagination examined only its ability to recreate sense impressions or ideas and represent them to the intellect. They viewed the imagination primarily as an image-making faculty: its power lied in its ability to reproduce. But with Kant, everything changed. Kant recognized the mimetic function of the imagination but he also discovered a deeper, more productive faculty at play. Kant argued that in order for experience to be possible consciousness must bring to phenomena a conceptual apparatus that orders and makes sense of the sensible. Quality, quantity, modality, relation, time, and space all work together as ordering principles that “convert” phenomena into objects of experience. Absent these forms and categories of understanding phenomena would appear as chaos.

---

149 The imagination’s relationship to time and space is more complicated than its relationship to the categories of understanding. “…Kant wavers, saying in one place that the synthesis of the imagination depends on the conditions of experience in time and space, but elsewhere clinging to the idea that even conditions of experience in item and space, and hence the categories, are themselves founded on an overall synthesis of mind and nature that is performed by the imagination.” James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 133.
The transcendental features of consciousness provide a pure synthesis out of the manifold of appearances by “acting on” our sensible intuitions, giving us access to a world and establishing the grounds for knowledge. But Kant recognized that something was still missing from this account. What, asked Kant, brings the categories and sensibility together? What power animates the synthesis? His answer was deceptively simple: the imagination; or more specifically, the *productive* imagination. Kant argued that the imagination is not only a mirror but also (and more importantly) a lamp. It illuminates the world by bringing it into a synthetic unity.\(^{150}\) Moreover, while the productive imagination constructs a unity of perception, it also plays a pivotal role in the experience of the unity of apperception. My consciousness of myself as the ultimate source of the unity of my perceptions is intimately related to the transcendental imagination.\(^ {151}\) Kant was aware of the radical implications of this account of the productive imagination. Grounding experience in the transcendental imagination implicitly suggests that existence is ultimately an act of creation, and that “I” am an imaginative projection.\(^ {152}\) But this implication carried

\(^{150}\) Ibid., 27-33.

\(^{151}\) Scholars disagree about the nature of the relationship between the unity of apperception and the transcendental imagination. It is not clear in Kant which is prior to the other. Kant writes, “The transcendental unity of apperception thus relates to the pure synthesis of imagination, as an *a priori* condition of the possibility of all combination of the manifold in one knowledge.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1958), 142. But shortly later, he writes: “Thus the principle of the necessary unity of pure (productive) synthesis of imagination, prior to apperception, is the ground of the possibility of all knowledge, especially of experience.” Ibid., 142-143. Heidegger, for example, argued that Kant grounds the transcendental ego in the productive imagination. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Patrick Bourgeois disagrees, critiquing Heidegger’s read as a misappropriation and emphasizing Kant’s account of the mediating role of the productive imagination which connects the categories with intuition but does not itself construct the unity of apperception. Patrick Bourgeois, *Imagination and Postmodernity* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2013), 70-714.

\(^{152}\) Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. J. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana
with it significant consequences for Kant’s system. In the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* Kant recalibrated his account and provided a more modest description of the power of the productive imagination.\(^{153}\)

The first key feature of the imagination is its capacity to reproduce images and produce a synthesis of phenomena, converting them into experience. Both aspects of the imagination are relevant to a study of individuation in general, and love in particular. The productive and reproductive capacities of the imagination play an instrumental role in individuating the Other because through them the self is able to “see” the Other uniquely, envisioning the Other as a particular Other accessible in some ways only to the self which envisions her. In other words, as a matter of reproduction, through the imagination we regard certain Others as holding a special place amongst the milieu of givenness. Only I see my wife the way I (imaginatively) “see” her. Dangers of narcissism notwithstanding, only I have access to the image of my wife, father, or friend that my imagination conjures. There is a privateness that marks my experience of certain Others, and this privateness helps to render them individuated. In secret the imagination holds certain others out from against all Others. The vague phenomenon of the stranger does not carry with it the same phenomenological force as the specific phenomenon of my child. While the stranger may move me to action he does not give himself to me as an unsubstituable Other, as an Other

with the a radical particularity akin to my child. Unlike the child, the stranger’s appearance always remains in some way anonymous because it does not fully capture the imagination. Moreover, through the productive capacity of the imagination the self is able to synthesize the world in light of the fact of this Other’s givenness in it. In performing this synthesis, the imagination “embeds” certain Others into a construction of the world, into the very way my consciousness produces a world of experience. Phenomena appear and relate to one another against the backdrop of certain Others’ givenness. As we will see in the following sections not only does one “envision” certain Others in unique way, one also imaginatively produces an entire world around the phenomenon of the envisioned Other. Indeed, through the imagination the self is able to synthesize phenomena according to a new horizon of meaning, one that only comes into view in light of the event of the Other’s appearance in the field of the given.

B. The Imagination’s Hermeneutical Structure

The imagination is hermeneutical “all the way down.” In the very act of imagining we assemble, order, relate, oppose, connect, and generate meanings. By “meaning” I mean a cluster of ideas: the nest of significations in which we always already find ourselves (e.g., language), the significance we attach to phenomena as they appear (e.g., valuation), and the fundamental way in which we cannot but experience the world as a network of references, signs, signifiers, and symbols (e.g., prefiguration). Experience is itself an act of understanding, an interpretive enterprise. Paul Ricoeur taught us that. Writing in the wake of Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein, Ricoeur re-posed the question of selfhood in terms of the on-going human project to understand itself. Questions like, “Who am I?” and “How
should I live?” require not only an ontological or ethical answer but also a phenomenological and hermeneutical account. Unlike Heidegger, Ricoeur did not see the various ways in which Dasein seeks to understand itself (anthropology, literature, psychology, etc.,) as detours on the way to Being but as keys to understanding how Dasein constructs itself through a plurality of methods, modes of inquiry, and investigations. For Ricoeur, there is no self, only selfhood: “an intersubjectively constituted capacity for agency and self-ascription that can be had by individual human beings.” Selfhood is a hermeneutical attestation, a taking-up of one’s self as a self. We experience ourselves as something to be understood and “structured along the fault lines of the voluntary and involuntary.” Our minds and bodies are not distinct. They cannot be abstracted from one another. Ricoeur’s insight into the constructed nature of the self (i.e, selfhood) leads him to an analysis of imagination, time, and narrative. Through the imagination’s hermeneutical structure, we narrativize our actions by understanding them in terms of a plot, giving them meaning within a broader story. Self-certainty is a conviction rather than a clear and distinct idea. Recall that Ricoeur describes narrativizing in three stages. The human field of action is always pre-figured in so far at there are conditions set down for us (e.g., our ability to use symbols, follow a narrative, etc.). But that pre-figuration is also configured according to narrative. We are free to bring together cosmological and phenomenological


155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.
time by using narrative strategies (pace, order, etc.) so that experiences do not happen one after the other but because of the other.\textsuperscript{157} They find meaning in relation to one another. And finally, the field of action is refigured in terms of imaginative possibility. Through narrative we project and envision the type of world we want to inhabit and can act toward it in the here-and-now, constantly re-narrativizing our past in light of the present and future.\textsuperscript{158}

Narrativity demonstrates the imagination’s hermeneutical structure and highlights the role the imagination plays in individuating both the self and certain Others. Without the hermeneutical structure of the imagination I could not tell my own story, I could not attest to myself. Moreover, I am not only capable of self-individuation but I am also able to individuate certain Others who, like my own actions, take on meaning to me in their role or place in my narrative. For example, my ninth grade English teacher stands out against other Others because of the place my imagination assigns her in the development of my

\textsuperscript{157} Henry Isaac Venema, Identifying Selfhood: Imagination, Narrative, and Hermeneutics in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur (Albany: Statue University of New York Press, 2000), 92-94.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 93-94. Ricoeur critiques the tendency in philosophy to view imagination only in terms of “seeing” and “imaging.” Kearney, The Poetics of Imagining, 145-147. For Ricoeur, the imagination is verbal and linguistic. It is poetic. Championing “semantic innovation” as the primary function of the imagination, Ricoeur argues that through the “inherently symbolizing-metaphorizing-narrativizing-activity” of imagining we open ourselves up to the possibility of something else, something more (the Other, new meaning, utopia, etc.). Kearney, Richard. “Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutic Imagination.” Philosophy and Social Criticism 14 (2) (1988): 115-145. Metaphor is the paradigm example. Metaphor holds both identity and difference in tension by putting together words that both are and are not equivalent. This “clash of meanings” opens up the space of possibility for new meaning. It is the “invention” of innovation. But, importantly, innovation does not occur in a vacuum. The second meaning embedded in innovation is “inventory.” Metaphor operates by drawing upon the pre-existing inventory of language to invent a new meaning and produce a semantic innovation. This imaginative process gives rise to possibilities that were not otherwise available prior to the metaphor’s construction.
narrative self and my self’s narrative. I find myself saying things like, “Without Ms. Cavis I never would have learned to love literature.” Narrativizing signals toward the more fundamental structure of the imagination as hermeneutical because it showcases the way in which the imagination takes inventory of available phenomena and configures them into a structural whole, a whole that quite literally makes sense to me. It also suggests imagining is an innovative activity, one that is engaged in an on-going project of re-figuration, forming new assemblages of meanings in light of what is given. The imagination is not a pure, transcendental receptacle into which our sense impressions fall and out of which our minds pluck ideas. Quite the contrary. The imagination is fundamentally about meaning. It is structurally hermeneutical insofar as it is a site of signification and synthesis. To imagine is to mean. And through the imagination’s meaning-making activity the Other becomes this Other.

C. The Imagination’s Creative-Responsive Activity

Charles Larmore argues in The Romantic Legacy that Romantic accounts of the imagination highlight its most important quality: the ability to creatively respond to what is given in experience.

There is, among the Romantics, a resistance to the idea that reality has a given structure, consisting in a tidy division of realms and relevancies, which the mind has but to mirror and respect. The mind is instead understood in terms of its creative power, our notion of reality is seen as rooted in the imagination, so that our mission – that of the artist, but also the task of us all – is to transform what we are given in experience.159

It is through the imagination that we experience our fullest sense of reality. In fact, the Romantic view puts at issue the distinction between “reality” and “imagination,” asserting that we “all poeticize reality already, and that indeed our sense of reality, and of the claims it makes on us, is inseparable from the creative imagination.” The creative imagination is not make-believe, nor as Carl Schmitt argue does it amount to a substitution of what one imaginatively envisions for what is otherwise an objective reality. The imagination is more complex than that. It is both and at the same time creative and responsive. It is responsive to what is given in experience. And what is given in experience “makes claims” on the imagination, to use Larmore’s language, claims that cannot simply be dismissed. In Marionian terms the given calls, and l’adonné responds. In imaginatively responding to the given l’adonné shows it in a certain light, articulating its meaning and constructing a world. The imagination’s dual nature as both and at once creative and responsive shields it from Schmitt-like criticisms that all that is imagined is fancy, idolatry, or narcissism. Again, we see the imagination is both mirror and lamp. While receiving the given it at the same time has the power to intensify, poeticize, and beautify it, but not transcend it. As Larmore puts it, “[t]he essential work of the imagination lies . . . in the enrichment of experience through expression.” The imagination responds to the world by creating its own “forms of understanding,” by engaging in a hermeneutical enterprise.

---

160 Ibid., 11.
161 Ibid., 8.
162 Ibid., 5.
163 Ibid., 22 (emphasis in original)
that seeks to receive what is given and to make sense of it through its interpretive and expressive projections. Truth is at once made and found.\textsuperscript{164}

Understanding the imagination’s creative-responsive activity is key to understanding the role it plays in individuation. Without the creative aspect of the imagination l’adonné is beholden to what is given and is not free to generate meaning from it, to see it as this or that. Without the responsive aspect of the imagination l’adonné risks veering off into escapism or solipsism, replacing what is given with one’s own projected conjurings. But because the imagination is at once both creative and responsive l’adonné remains accountable to the given (responsive) while at the same time capable of enriching the given through expression (creative). This may be precisely what the French Romantic Stendhal was thinking when described the process of “crystallization.” In \textit{Love}, he writes:

\begin{quote}
Leave a lover alone with his thoughts for twenty-four hours, and this is what will happen:
At the salt mines of Salzburg, they throw a leafless wintry bough into one of the abandoned workings. Two or three months later they haul it out covered with a shining deposit of crystals. The smallest twig, no bigger than a tom-tit’s claw, is studded with a galaxy of scintillating diamonds. The original branch is no longer recognizable.
What I call crystallization is a mental process which draws from everything new proofs of the perfection of the loved one.\textsuperscript{165}
\end{quote}

Building on the idea that crystallization is creative-responsive and not merely a lover’s delusion, Stendhal seems to imply \textit{not} that the Beloved remains the “wintry bough” and is now simply decorated with the lover’s imagined diamonds but that through the

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 31.

imagination the lover creatively-responds to the Beloved, receiving her hermeneutically within an imaginative space of possibility. Thus, to crystallize is not simply to fool one’s self into believing that an object has qualities it does not actually possess. To crystallize is to creatively respond to the Other in a way that remains accountable to the given while at the same time intensifying, enriching, and rendering it unique. This “form of understanding” deployed by the imagination shows the Other as an unsubstitutable Other, a radical particularity whose givenness is accompanied by a set of unique meanings that only make sense in reference to her. In doing so, in creatively responding to the Other through the imagination, she becomes this Other, she becomes individuated.

D. The Imagination is Embodied

Mind-body dualism haunts the history of the idea of the imagination. Many philosophers seem to imply that the imagination is fundamentally a mental activity that impacts the body indirectly, or as an after effect. But this view is misguided. Imagining happens in and to a body. The body; or, phenomenologically speaking, the flesh, is the site of the imagination’s activity. There is no strict division between the two. As Merleau-Ponty points out, the flesh is the vinculum that connects me to the world and to myself. Touch, imagination, seeing, and sensing all happen together, informing one another within a rich, intertwining web that can never be pulled apart. To put it crudely, what happens in the imagination affects the body and what happens in the body affects the imagination. The flesh is the site of a complex hermeneutical negotiation between what is given, what is imagined, and what is expressed. The lover claims the Beloved has “captured” her imagination and her body is aroused. The widow recalls her life with her husband and feels
the weight of his loss in her chest. My experience of the world is always a confluence of
the demands of the body and the imaginings of the psyche. Or, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, there is a constant “descent of the invisible into the visible,” an on-going “commerce”
between the world of the imagination and the world of the flesh.

In the next chapter I provide a detailed account of the embodied imagination as a
hermeneutical site that receives and responds to the Beloved as a saturated phenomenon. But for now, I will highlight more generally the role the embodied imagination plays in
individuating certain Others with an eye toward the more nuanced discussion to come. The
fact of the imagination’s embodiment provides a condition for the possibility of radical
intimacy between self and Other, and out of this intimacy the Other is individuated. If the
world is always mediated through flesh, and the world includes the Other, then I encounter
the Other in and through my flesh – and his flesh too – in an interplay that has the potential
to deliver radical particularity. Indeed, when one touches or is touched the distance between
self and Other is traversed (though not eliminated). Flesh-touching-flesh is a diacritical
reading across distance. As Marion describes in The Erotic Phenomenon, the crossing of
flesh delivers radical particularity: the one who touches me stands out against all others as
the one who traverses the distance between myself and Other and reaches me in my own
haecceitas. This crossing is not purely biological. It is not simply stimulation. It invokes
the imagination. When I receive the touch of another (or give him my touch) I do so within
the context of meanings synthesized, projected, and enriched by my imagination. My hand
and imagination touch together. And this bodily, hermeneutical, and imaginative
confluence transforms what might otherwise be an anonymous encounter into a moment of
radical intimacy. In other words, it individuates. The phenomenon of the flesh and the imagination implicates a complex interplay but for now suffice it to say that the fact of the imagination’s embodiment is a condition for the possibility of individuation because of the unique, carnal hermeneutic it implicates.

E. The Imagination as a Mode of Consciousness

Phenomenology’s as a way of describing what appears while bracketing metaphysical questions casts the imagination’s productive role takes with a different inflection. Rather than celebrating its hermeneutical and creative aspects, Edmund Husserl examines the imagination as an act of consciousness. Husserl begins with the insight that all consciousness, whether perception, judgment imagination, representation or memory, is intentional. That is, it aims at something. We are always conscious of something. Rather than viewing imaginings as mimetic images of less-intense sense impressions, Husserl argues that imagination is itself a unique mode of consciousness. It is not just another kind of perception. The thing imagined (noema) and the act of imagining (noesis) should not be conflated. Bourgeois writes that, for Husserl,

While both perception and imagination present an object in a ‘fulfilling’ intuition as distinct from the empty intending of a sign, the object of imagination is somehow intuited in its absence, thus liberating us from the here-and-now limits of perception.\(^\text{166}\)

And this liberation is the key to knowing essences. Unmoored from presence, actuality, and the as is, imagination is free to intuit imaginings as a quasi-real absence, potentiality, and as if.\(^\text{167}\) Imagined objects can be manipulated, varied, explored, and reduced.

---


\(^{167}\) Kearney, *The Poetics of Imagining*, 16.
Consciousness can see beyond the normal mode of being and intuit an “ideal, unvarying paradigm.” Husserl argues that the addition and (attempted) subtraction of qualities like extension or time at play in free variation enabled by the imagination exposes an object’s eidos. Imaginative variation reveals what is necessary to an object. Perception cannot provide access to an essence because it does not present to consciousness the “test cases” required to distill an object to its essence. It only presents intuitions in the here-and-now. The imagination gives us access to knowledge. Where Hume saw in imaginings only a ‘collage of fictions’ Husserl sees eidetic truths.

The imagination as its own mode of consciousness carries with it a number of implications regarding the imagination’s role in individuating the Other. Access to the as if opens a space for individuation that remains closed off in the mode of perception. It a unique act, a unique way of intending objects. And this act has its own structural qualities. As Husserl claims, imagining can unmoor the imagined from the perceived and engage in the free play of variation. In terms of individuation, imagining as a mode of consciousness engaged in the as if rather than the as is invites creativity in a way that perception does not, and it is in part because of the possibility of creative play that the Other can be converted into a particular, unsubstitutable Other. Through the imagination the self can “see” or intend an Other in a way not limited by perception, memory, or judgment. The imagined given

168 Ibid., 22.
169 Ibid., 25; see also, Brian Elliott, *Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger*, 69-80.
appears differently, under different conditions, in the *as if*. And this fact becomes a condition for the possibility of individuation because it allows for the self to experience and to imbue the Other with meaning that is not given in the mode of perception. Individuation occurs in the space of the *as if*. Consider the age-old riddle: does the lover love the Beloved as such, or merely her qualities? The answer is neither. The lover loves the Beloved because of the way she appears to him, and the way she appears is contingent in part upon how he imagines her, how he intends her. To the extent that it needs justification, love finds recourse in the *as if*, not the *as is*.

Husserl does not set out to resolve the question of the ontological status of imaginings but he does suggest they appear in a form of “quasi-reality.” Does this mean that the Other’s individuation is also quasi-real insofar as it is imagined, that it is “made up” in someone’s mind? I think not. To come to that conclusion is to fall back into the “real” (perceived) vs. “unreal” (imagined) dichotomy and to fail to appreciate the phenomenological method. The question is not whether an Other is “really” individuated but how is it that an Other appears, is given, or shows herself *as* individuated. Recall that for Marion the given shows itself in being received by *l’adonné*. *L’adonné* “bears up against” or even “resists” the phenomenon and in so doing shows it, identifies it, and receives it. The given and the gifted work in tandem to allow a phenomenon to appear. Similarly, in individuation the Other is given as a saturated phenomenon but only shows itself when it is received by *l’adonné*. It is in the Other’s reception that she appears, and it is in the *l’adonné*’s *imaginative* reception and response that she appears as *this* Other, as a certain Other. The imagination as a mode of consciousness intends the Other as a radial
particularity but the Other must first be given; the Other takes initiative. To receive the Other in the mode of consciousness of perception is to render her an object. But to receive her in the mode of consciousness of imagination is to acknowledge her saturation and respond to her in the *as if*, in the space of understanding, innovation, and hermeneutics. It is to receive her in a space of possibility, not adequation. The individuated Other appears as such, in the mode of the *as if*, which says nothing about the “reality” of her qualities (that she truly is lovely; that she really is kind, etc.) but says much about the way *l’adonné* receives her. Through the imagination the Other is received in a space of possibility, and in that space *l’adonné* is free to intend her as radically particular and unsubstitutable.

But Husserl’s account can go too far. If the imagination becomes fully unmoored from the *as is* it ends up adrift in a sea of solipsism. That is precisely the charge issued by Husserl’s critics.¹⁷¹ When the imagination is no longer accountable to the given it wanders into flights of fancy, reveling in its own images rather than creatively-responding to what

---

¹⁷¹ The limits of the imagination and the problem of solipsism take their strongest form in Husserl’s account of the Other. Scholars disagree as to whether Husserl’s theory of intersubjectivity overcomes solipsism. See e.g., Dan Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 109-140; Kearney, *The Poetic of Imagining*, 26-27. Richard Kearney argues that for Husserl “no matter how liberally it may vary the facts of the world, imagination can never transcend *itself* as transcendental consciousness.” *Kearney, The Poetics of Imagining*, 26. Paradoxically, Kearney observes, Husserl’s best attempt at overcoming solipsism actually relies on the imagination (although the argument ultimately fails). Ibid. Kearney adopts the traditional read of Husserl’s theory of the Other as experienced through analogy:

*Husserl’s argument is based on the following programme of imaginative variation: I am here (*hic*), the other is there (*illic*); but there (*illic*) is where I could be if I were to move. From over there (*illic*) I would see the same things but under a different perspective. Hence, through imagination I can co-ordinate the other perspectives to my place and to my perspective. But because the life of the other is not given to me in an ‘original production’ (*Leistungen*), but merely in a fictive ‘reproduction’ in the mode of the ‘*as if* I were there’, the life of the other can never become for me the equivalent of the one life of which I have originary experience, the is, my own. Husserl cannot escape the self-enclosing mesh which his own theory of imagination has cast. Ibid., 26-27.*
appears. In terms of individuation, complete unmooring yields the undesirable result that there is no longer any Other to individuate: the imagination reaches only “inward,” toward itself, not “outward,” toward the Other. Thus, as a mode of consciousness the imagination is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it opens up to the possibility of the given appearing as something other than perception; that is, the *as if*, which is the space of individuation. On the other hand, the *as if* invites self-love and solipsism when it no longer answers to what appears but instead turns its gaze toward its own imaginings. To avoid solipsism and engage in individuation the imagination must be as responsive as it is creative. It must recognize that the *as if* is not “free” in the sense that it has no responsibility to the given, but that it is “free” from the confines of perception as a narrow mode of consciousness.

**THE IMAGINATION AND INDIVIDUATION: A PRELIMINARY SKETCH**

We return now to the question, thesis, and core assertions of this dissertation. The key features of the imagination I have just outlined provide the preliminary answers to my question and begin to unpack my thesis. Notably, however, the answers I am about to provide are only preliminary. Chapters Four and Five offer a complete account of my theory of amorous individuation and the endless hermeneutic. Also note that while I have only so far discussed the imagination as it contributes the individuation of certain Others I am building toward my argument that the imagination individuates *the Beloved*. I will explain that process overtly in the next chapters but for now the reader should understand that I am claiming that certain people are individuated by the imagination (friends, spouses, etc.) and that the features I have outlined above are key to that process.
So how does the imagination contribute to the Other’s individuation? The Other gives himself as a saturated phenomenon that lands upon the self, upending the self’s pre-existing horizon of meaning and calling for an endless hermeneutic that plays itself out through the on-going, creative-responsive activity of the imagination, an imagination which is always and at all times embodied. Let me explain. The imagination in its productive capacity constitutes the world according to a horizon of meanings that precede the given’s arrival and accompany its appearance. But some phenomena leave a greater mark on the productive imagination’s synthesis. Some phenomena saturate. Events, for example, upend, overturn, or disrupt our prefigured horizons of meaning such that their “happening” changes our sense of meaning forever. As we saw in Chapter Two, the event of friendship interrupts and calls into question the world we’ve configured for ourselves. We are forced to restructure our world in light of the friend’s arrival, and we do so by invoking the imagination’s hermeneutical structure. The structure is two-fold. The imagination provides (1) a pre-existing nest of meaning onto or into which the given “lands” and (2) it provides the interpretive apparatus the self uses to make sense of the given after its arrival. This “double hermeneutic” allows for the Other’s individuation by providing the hermeneutical landscape and the possibility of its subsequent upheaval. It also provides the imagination’s narrative capacity to reconfigure the horizon of meaning according to the saturated phenomenon; that is, the Other that has arrived and is now

172 I will use a temporal metaphor to describe this process but the reader should not conclude that the phenomenon of individuation unfolds in a chronological fashion.
“folded into” the plot of my life. Moreover, through the creative-responsive activity of the imagination I am able to “see” this Other as radically unique and unsubstitutable. I respond to her saturating givenness by poeticizing it, enriching its meaning, and “crystallizing” her with “new proofs” of her significance. This imagined form of “seeing” is a form of seeing in the as if, made possible only in the unique mode of consciousness that is the imagination. Unmoored from the confines of perception my imagination is free to imbue the Other with special significance, hold her out as fundamental to my own sense-of-self in a way that no other is, or appraise her value according to a private and unspoken criterion that need make no reference to an objective reality. All of this happens in and to a body, my body and the body of the Other. When our bodies see, touch, and sense one another they do so while at the same time imagining one another. Indeed, what my flesh feels my imagination images, and vice-versa. The gazes and the flesh cross at a nexus of bodies and imagination, at the confluence that is the embodied imagination. The radial intimacy delivered by the crossing of gazes and flesh ascends into the world of thought, affecting narrative and meaning. The world of thought descends into the world of bodies effecting their orientation and activity. Out of this milieu of imaginative activity emerges this Other, unsubstituable, radically particular, and in her own haecceitas.

**LOVE AND THE ENDLESS HERMENEUTIC**

In Chapter One I made three core assertions intended to clarify my central argument. We revisit them now in order to remind the reader where we are in the development of my argument. The assertions: First, the amorous imagination is my answer to the question of how the Other becomes the Beloved. That phenomenon in many ways
tracks the more general, preliminary process I’ve outlined in the above section but, as I argue in detail in the next two chapters, it takes on a particular inflection in the case of amorous individuation. My thesis concerns individuating not just any Other, but individuating the Beloved. To that end, this chapter laid out the key features of the imagination to show how it contributes to individuating an Other. The next two chapters focus on the role of the imagination in individuating the Beloved. As we will see, this calls for a close analysis of the event of the Beloved as a saturated phenomenon and the hermeneutic response for which it calls. This leads me to my second assertion: the amorous imagination highlights something that is missing in Marion’s account of the erotic phenomenon; namely, that love emerges not only because of the lover’s advance but also because of the saturating nature of the Beloved’s givenness. Recall that in The Erotic Phenomenon Marion emphasizes (and takes criticism for) his description of the lover’s initiative in inaugurating love. In the next chapter I argue that while Marion is right to identify the lover’s advance as a critical moment in love’s appearance he under-emphasizes the role of the Beloved, who gives herself as a saturated phenomenon. And as we have seen, saturated phenomena call for an endless hermeneutic which, in the case of love, is carried out by the amorous imagination. My third assertion is that my phenomenology of the amorous imagination constitutes a substantive unpacking of the endless hermeneutic. As such, after describing the Beloved’s saturating givenness in Chapter Four, I will provide a sketch of a phenomenology of the amorous imagination in Chapter Five in order to show how the endless hermeneutic unfolds and sustains the Beloved’s individuation.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE AMOROUS EVENT AND THE ENDLESS HERMENEUTIC

FROM THE LOVER’S ADVANCE TO THE BELOVED’S GIVENNESS

Marion’s erotic phenomenology goes a long way toward rethinking love, and his phenomenology of givenness provides the conceptual tools for an analysis of the Other’s individuation. But while his phenomenological descriptions in The Erotic Phenomenon shed light on the lover’s role in love’s emergence, his account over-emphasizes the lover’s advance and under-emphasizes the Beloved’s saturation. Drawing upon my previous discussion of the imagination’s power to individuate, in this chapter I argue that a phenomenology of love should describe the Beloved’s givenness as a saturated phenomenon, or what I call “the amorous event,” as well as the endless hermeneutic, both of which implicate the amorous imagination as an individuating faculty. More specifically, in dialogue with Marion’s phenomenology of saturation and l’adonné (including his analysis of the self’s interplay of receptivity and resistance when it comes to receiving the given), my question about how the Other becomes the Beloved focuses in on the question of whether the Beloved gives herself as an event which the gifted then interprets, or whether imagination is itself the hermeneutic site of the Other’s disclosure. To that end, I examine the structure of the Beloved’s givenness (focusing closely on the hermeneutical dimensions of event, flesh, and face) and the response she calls for in the endless hermeneutic in order
to expose what I argue is an underlying hermeneutical process of individuation, the imaginative process by which the Other becomes the Beloved.

**The Hermeneutical Structure of Events**

We begin with a few general comments regarding Marion’s concept of the event to highlight the need for a fuller description of the hermeneutical dimensions at play in the Beloved’s givenness. Recall that, according to Marion, events saturate according to quantity. They provide too much data, too much information, too much givenness. They cannot be limited by a concept, divided or assembled together as a finite set of parts, or explained according to causality. Indeed, events invert causation, providing first their effects and then (only after hermeneutical engagement) their innumerable causes. They disrupt. To use Ricœur’s language, they call for a narrative reconfiguration. Events are inexplicable in the truest sense. But they can be understood, they can be interpreted. Marion insightfully observes that it is the very nature of events as inexplicable that provides the grounds for the endless hermeneutic: we know that we can never explain an event in its fullness and so we must interpret it over and over again, making new meanings, seeing new insights, and reconfiguring our narrative according to its horizon.

But events implicate hermeneutics not only after the fact, in interpreting them, but before the fact, structurally, as a condition for their reception. Marion scholars like Claude Romano, John Greisch, Jean Grondin, Richard Kearney, Tasmin Jones, and Shane Mackinlay all argue to varying degrees that there is a structurally hermeneutic dimension of phenomenalization in which *l’adonné*’s reception of a phenomenon operates on an
interpretive level as well as on a phenomenological level. The given shows itself in being understood, in being responded to. Marion’s account of structural hermeneutics is not always clear but he does try to strike a balance between the given’s priority in initiative and l’adonné’s receptive role in showing the given by receiving (or resisting) it. L’adonné is not purely passive despite the fact that phenomena always give themselves first. There is a movement back and forth between the given and the gifted. The given takes initiative. It gives itself from itself, anonymously and freely, but it cannot show itself unless it is resisted by a self who is always already interpreting it. But Marion stops there. He does not explicitly unpack the hermeneutical structure of receptivity.

Shane Mackinlay provides a helpful critique of the hermeneutical gap in Marion’s account of the event. Drawing on Claude Romano’s theory of the event, Mackinlay argues that rather than appearing as pure givenness, events always give themselves as personal, reconfiguring, inexplicable (that is, non-causal), and opening phenomena. Events constitute “[t]he fundamental phenomenological structure of our encounter with phenomena, and of both the world and the ‘subject’ which are opened to it.” Like Marion, Mackinlay and Romano give events the phenomenological initiative: events first happen to the self but the self is in its very structure open to and opened by events. Romano calls this self the advenant, the one who has the “capacity to appropriate eventual

---


174 Mackinlay, *In Excess*, 42. It is unclear whether Marion would go so far as to say that events are the fundamental phenomenological structure of our encounter with phenomena, or that only saturated phenomena have an evental character insofar as they provide an excess of intuition, are unforeseeable, and so on.
possibilities articulated in a world that surface from an event, and to understand oneself from them.”¹⁷⁵ This opening is fundamentally hermeneutical and allows for the possibility of individuation. Romano states,

*Advenant* is the term for describing the event that is constantly underway of my own advent to myself from the events that happen to me [*m’adviennent*] and that, by addressing themselves to me, give me a destiny: adventure without return . . . [T]he very opening to events in general.¹⁷⁶

The *advenant* comes to herself from an origin that is other than herself but is fundamentally related to the world and the event which opens her. Unlike *l’adonné*, who operates as a receptive screen or control panel that is lit up by the given, the *advenant* is a hermeneutic “nest” in which the event lands and upends a preexisting horizon of meanings.¹⁷⁷ The difference is subtle but is important with regards to the hermeneutical structure of receptivity. According to Mackinlay and Romano (and as we will see, Richard Kearney), Marion is silent on the important point that the event is always a hermeneutical event in its very structure, and the pre-existing horizon of meaning laid out before the self is a precondition for the evental nature of the event to occur. Moreover, Mackinlay and Romano’s accounts highlight the personal nature of events: they arrive and upend *ex aliquo* not *ex nihilo*. The event overturns and reconfigures the self’s hermeneutical horizon but it does not create out of nothing. The self recreates and reconfigures a new horizon out of what was already there. Events always address a particular entity who understands herself


¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 51.

¹⁷⁷ Mackinaly, *In Excess*, 48-49.
within a pre-existing hermeneutical context. Events are more akin to Ricœur’s concept of invention than to pure creation. Events open a new world but only because a world already existed. And events are radically personal. They happen for and to a particular *advenant*. As Romano states, “I am myself at play in the possibilities which [the event] assigns to me.”178

Romano’s view of the event is relevant to our study of the Beloved’s individuation for several reasons. First, it identifies an important dimension of the event missing in Marion’s description. The event is structurally hermeneutical. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Romano’s view raises the question as to what role the hermeneutical dimension of the event plays in the Other’s appearance as the Beloved. In other words, the hermeneutical structure of the event forces us to consider how the Beloved appears with the kind of radical particularity we associate with love. If Romano is correct then a phenomenology of love should include a description of the Beloved’s givenness as an event insofar as it overturns, upends, and reconfigures the lover’s personal horizon of meaning. It should account for how that upending and reconfiguration happens. It is my thesis that it happens in and through the amorous imagination. Romano’s emphasis on the personal nature of events further raises the question of individuation by highlighting the way our hermeneutical response to the event is not only an on-going interpretive activity but one that brings the event “closer to home,” personalizes it, and incorporates it into our sense-of-self. The hermeneutical act of folding the event into our selves is an intriguing idea when

considering the question of individuation because (as we have seen) it is precisely through such an imaginative, hermeneutical act of narrative “absorption” that certain Others come to stand out against the milieu of all Others. In the following section I provide a phenomenological account of the amorous event, taking into consideration Romano’s critique of Marion’s theory of the event and highlighting the role the amorous imagination plays in individuating the Beloved as both the site of her reception and the lover’s response.

**THE AMOROUS EVENT**

Love first appears as an event. Its evental structure is implied in the language we use to describe it. We “fall” in love. We are “lovestruck.” We are “enamored” with the Beloved. She comes out of nowhere and we find ourselves “in love at first sight.” Even when love emerges slowly there is an evental quality to it: friends develop an intimacy over time but once they realize they love each other their world is never the same. In each case, love is described as a “happening,” an event that reconstitutes our horizon and rearranges the way in which we exist in the world. Despite his numerous insights in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, Marion misses this point. He over-emphasizes the lover’s initiative, concealing the evental nature of the Beloved’s givenness. Like Montaigne and Boétique’s

---

179 Note here that I am not claiming the self absorbs the Other in any metaphysical sense. I am claiming that the amorous imagination “absorbs” amorous event into the self’s narrative in a meaning-making enterprise. The event always comes from “outside,” of its own accord. As we will see, the Beloved’s appearance is marked by distance and separation, not absorption.

180 To be clear, I am not arguing that the amorous event always occurs like a lightning strike out of nowhere. Clearly strangers, friends, or colleagues can slowly grow to love one another. But that is not the point. The point is that on a basic level, in the very grammar of love, we seem to acknowledge its evental nature. Love upends us and reconfigures our horizons whether it emerges over time or hits us all at once. It is the structural dimension of the amorous event which concerns me, not whether it happens all at once or over time, although temporality will play an important role in our analysis.
friendship, the encounter with the Beloved constitutes a disruptive event that reconfigures the lover’s (ontological and hermeneutical) horizons. This event marks the beginning of love’s emergence. The amorous event has several features and is a condition for the possibility of the Other’s individuation as the Beloved.

A. The Encounter

First comes the encounter. Two selves appear to each other as saturated phenomena. In *The Erotic Phenomenon*, Marion describes the lovers’ advance as the inaugural moment of love and the first individuation. But what he does not fully account for is the Beloved’s appearance as an event that saturates according to quantity. Both Marion and Romano reference friendship as a paradigm event that gives itself as disruptive and intimate. Friendship carries a structural similarity to the amorous event. According to Marion, friendship’s occurrence is both inexplicable and unforeseeable. Citing Montaigne and Boétie’s initial encounter, Marion and Romano highlight the way in which neither Montaigne nor Boétie can describe what gave rise to their friendship. Its causes remain hidden. The friendship always exceeds the fact of the encounter. That Montaigne and Boétie attended a gala on such and such a night and that they spoke to one another does not explain the phenomenon of their friendship which “happened” to them, uniquely and privately. Their friendship is not the effect of deliberate action or willful advance. It is, as Romano claims, the moment of new possibilities opened up by the very encounter with the other-as-friend. And the event of their friendship is deeply personal. It is intimate. Their friendship takes on meaning because it happens to them, between them, and for them.

181 Indeed, this is one reason why the traditional typology of love includes *philia*. 
particularity of the Other-as-friend makes all the difference. As Montaigne states, there is only one explanation for their friendship: “because it was him, because it was me.” Intimacy gives way to particularity, the pre-existing horizon of meaning each friend brings to the encounter is a necessary condition for the event that upends it. The event of friendship wells-up and reconfigures the friends’ hermeneutical nests, forcing a reconfiguration in light of the event. But to ask “What is it?” that caused the event of friendship to appear remains an unanswerable question. The best phenomenology can do is identify and describe its structure. Like all events, the cause of friendship eludes us.

The amorous event appears in a similar fashion. Indeed, the Beloved’s appearance is an event. Like the face of any Other, the Beloved is first encountered as a saturated phenomenon, an excess of givenness. The Beloved cannot be rendered an object by the lover’s intentionality. She is invisible, resists reduction, and arrived onto the scene of the lover’s pre-existing horizon of meaning only to call it into question, to upend it and force its reconfiguration. Like a friend, the Beloved seems to come from nowhere, without cause or explanation. We see this phenomenon in any number of literary love affairs. In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine and Heathcliff are not set-up, they are not betrothed, they “happen” to each other. They beckon to each other to come forth. However, the Beloved emerges from the milieu of Others by issuing not only an ethical injunction but also an erotic call. The lovers’ gazes cross. They bear the weight of one another’s appearance, giving rise to an initial individuation. But the event of the encounter is not reducible to the crossing gazes. The givenness of the Beloved is itself an event. The first individuation of the Other-as-Beloved occurs not only when the gazes cross but when the crossing gazes
land upon and call into question the pre-existing horizon of meaning each lover brings to
the encounter. The crossing gazes and the hermeneutical upheaval conspire to bring about
the amorous event. The encounter therefore constitutes an opening onto new possibilities
for both lovers. It not only upends their sense of time, place, and meaning, it invites a new
configuration and new assemblage of all three. As we will see, the amorous event captures
the lovers’ imaginations from the moment of the encounter forward. It becomes their
existential anchor, temporal compass, and hermeneutical wellspring.

The amorous event is inexplicable and unforeseeable. No causal explanation can
account for the event, no litany of reasons can ever provide a sufficient description of the
event’s occurrence. The amorous event arrives as a \textit{fait accompli}, it leaves the lovers no
option, it is as if love was already decided for them.\textsuperscript{182} Tristan and Isolde drink the love
potion and their fate is sealed. The amorous event inverts causal relationships: the lovers
first experience the effect of the event and then, upon reflection and interpretation, look for
its causes. But of course, no single cause is sufficient to explain love’s appearance. The
event gives too much, it saturates with a quantity of givenness that no concept can fully
capture. And because the amorous event inverts causation it remains unforeseeable. Once
cannot predict which Other will induce the amorous event. Failure to appreciate the evental
nature of the amorous event has lead philosophers of love to wrangle with questions like,

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{182} This description is not meant to be romantic in the common sense of the term. My goal is to describe love
as it appears. That it appears as a \textit{fait accompli} can in part explain our grammar of love, such as when we say
one was “lovestruck” or “was destined” for another, or “fell in love,” and so on. While this language may
attest to a cultural mythology of romantic destiny it also characterizes the amorous phenomenon as a certain
kind of appearing. One must look “behind” or “below” the language of love to uncover its structures, which
are expressed in and at times covered over by the language we use to describe it.}
“Why does one person love another?” or “Do you love me, or just my qualities?” But under a phenomenological lens we see that these questions miss the point by concealing the way in which love arrives in a non-causal manner. Once we realize that love’s inauguration begins with the amorous event, questions like, “Why do I love you?” become affective expressions of the endless hermeneutic, not logical, philosophical problems. Finally, the amorous event is irreversible. The lovers cannot go back, they cannot reconfigure their lives according to the horizons of meaning that pre-existed the event. The amorous event becomes the focal point, the ground, and the nucleus of the lovers’ possibilities. Even if love dissolves the lovers cannot undo the event. It remains an eruptive moment for the remainder of their lives.

Examining the evental structure of love reveals a number of hermeneutical insights about the nature of individuation. Consistent with Romano and Mackinlay’s observations regarding friendship, the amorous event has both a structural and interpretive component. Structurally, the event cannot occur with the kind of radical individuality necessary for love unless the lover’s bring with them to the event a pre-existing hermeneutical horizon which the event upends. Therefore, the amorous event is hermeneutical “all the way down,” in its very structure. Indeed, the amorous event happens insofar as it disrupts and forces the lovers to reconfigure their horizon of meaning. Interpretively, the event calls for a response. As Marion argues, saturated phenomena call for an endless hermeneutic that acknowledges their irreducibility but still engages in the creative act of meaning-making and interpretation which the excess of givenness demands. Thus, the amorous event happens insofar as it calls for a hermeneutic response. The hermeneutical dimensions of
the amorous event are key to understanding the Beloved’s individuation. The amorous event opens up to the possibility of the Beloved as a radically particular, unique, and unsubstitutable Other in a swirl of saturation, counter-intentionality, and intimacy that comes from nowhere, happens to the lovers, and upends their pre-existing horizons. Because of the hermeneutical structure of the amorous event the lovers are capable of engaging in the imaginative, hermeneutical activity necessary to bring about individuation. But the Beloved is not fully individuated in the event of the amorous encounter. She remains a saturated phenomenon, an erotic call awaiting a response.

**B. The Call**

Evental structure aside, the amorous event includes a number of co-occurring phenomena that work together to constitute the amorous event as its own unique phenomenon. We begin with the face of the Other, which in love issues not only an ethical demand, but an erotic call. As we have seen, Marion relies heavily on Levinas’s account of the face to describe the way in which it saturates. In Marion’s language, the face saturates according to modality: its givenness calls into question categorical distinctions between possibility and impossibility, existence and non-existence, and necessity and contingency. The face appears (if it “appears” at all) as an infinite excess, a transcendence that cannot be constituted in terms of modality. Strictly speaking, the face of the Other remains invisible. Marion describes the Other’s face as an encounter that weighs upon me, that arrives with a force that cannot be denied and which calls me into question. But unlike Levinas, Marion insists that the ethical injunction always remains anonymous and must give way to an erotic call if the Other is to become fully individuated. For Marion,
individuation occurs first as the crossing gazes, the phenomenon of mutual envisaging between myself and the Other in which I am seen and see, and where I accept the surplus of significations given by the Other’s face. Envisaging is the inaugural moment of the endless hermeneutic because it is the moment in which I accept the provisionality of any meaning I give to the Other and recognize her saturated givenness. The only appropriate response to her is to interpret her again and again, over and over in an endless act of understanding.

Although as Levinas and Marion point out, the face of the Other is initially experienced as an ethical injunction, in the amorous event the Beloved’s appearance gives an additional phenomenon: it calls to the lover, inciting her desire, beckoning her advance, and inviting her individuation. The Beloved lures the lover in a way the orphan, the stranger, and the widow do not. Unlike the injunction, the call identifies the lover out of the milieu of Others. The Other commands, “Thou shalt not kill” while the Beloved beckons, “Come to me.” The call entices the lover to step forward and approach the Other-as-Beloved. But the Beloved recedes, or more properly, exceeds. The face of the Beloved is an icon. It saturates according to modality. At the same time that it calls the lover forward it exceeds the lover’s advance, initially expressed as the lover’s intentionality. The lover desires the Beloved but his excess resists knowledge. The lover is stunned, she cannot settle her gaze and render the Beloved an object but neither can she withdraw her gaze and look away. As with an idol, the lover’s gaze roves around the Beloved’s givenness searching for a place to land, but the excess and counter-intentionality of the Beloved converts the idol into an icon which sees back and is seen through. Unlike Simone de Beauvoir’s “male
gaze,” the lover’s gaze responds appropriately to the saturated phenomenon. It recognizes the irreducible and non-objective nature of the phenomenon and does not seek to render it a thing, object, or concept. When the lover does look away, her imagination conjures the Beloved for her and to her.\footnote{More on this in the next chapter.} Paradoxically, the Beloved’s givenness issuing as a call lures \textit{and} resists the lover’s gaze insofar as the lover cannot, strictly speaking, \textit{look} at the Beloved and yet she \textit{sees} him. The Beloved’s call is an erotic call that arouses a desire for excess. In the amorous event the erotic call does not promise to fill the lover’s ontological lack; rather, it promises more, saturation, abundance, a surplus of meaning.\footnote{Marion, \textit{The Erotic Phenomenon}, 94. Marion’s concept of desire is complicated. A full treatment of it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For a complete analysis see Jason Alvis, \textit{Marion and Derrida on the Gift and Desire: Debating the Generosity of Things} (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2016).} And it is precisely in the interplay between call and response, saturation and desire, that the Beloved is individuated in the second sense: the lovers creatively respond to one another’s call through an endless act of interpretation and in doing so personalize one another, rendering them unique and unsubstitutable.

\textbf{C. The Response}

Marion’s concept of \textit{l’adonné} is grounded in the self’s receptivity. The given first gives itself but only shows itself when received by \textit{l’adonné}. \textit{L’adonné} bears the weight of the given and in doing so receives it and phenomenalizes it. Reception is therefore inherently hermeneutical. It is not until \textit{l’adonné} identifies the given that it shows itself as that which is phenomenalized. The Beloved is no exception. The Beloved gives herself freely but only shows herself in the lover’s reception of her givenness, which bears up
against the weight of her counter-gaze, the event, and her call. The Beloved can only be shown by a lover who receives her, by a lover who responds. And the lover’s response is hermeneutical. He resists the Beloved and in doing so phenomenalizes her as the Beloved. The lover’s response is yet another moment of individuation. The Beloved is individuated in being received but the lover, in his response to her. And the lover is individuated by and through the Beloved’s givenness, which gives the lover to himself by giving itself in the first place. While the Beloved cannot be shown without a lover who receives her, it is the lover’s pleasure to hear and respond to the call of the Beloved, to become aroused by her impact and through an endless hermeneutic answer her call by engaging his imagination. He sees the world anew, declares his fidelity in the now, and reorients his selfhood according to a new horizon: the horizon of Her.

Proper reception of the saturated phenomenon of the Beloved involves the lover’s recognition that the Beloved cannot be reduced to an object. This is how the lover avoids idolatry. Attempting to reduce the Beloved to objectness constitutes a form of phenomenological violence insofar as it reduces the Beloved to the Same, as Levinas eloquently points out with regard to the Other. Indeed, dangers lurk within the lover’s gaze. The lover may phenomenalize the Beloved inappropriately. She may misidentify the call of the Beloved or hear a call where none has issued. She may fail to hear the call altogether. She may be blinded by the Beloved’s excess, responding rashly, without constraint, or with an obsession that arises out of confusion. Like Goethe’s Werther, the lover may be consumed by the abundance of the Beloved and suffer self-harm or unrestrained passion. Indeed, the Beloved never actually appears in such a case. Only an idol does. If the self
“responds” to a call that was never issued by an Other but was (mis)perceived by the self as a call, the Beloved never emerges. What shows itself is Narcissus. The self shows himself to himself in the improper response to the givenness of the Other, a response that reflects back to the self a desire for metaphysics rather than excess. The Beloved remains hidden and what shows itself is the lover’s own obsession, his own desire.

Finally, the call captures the lover’s imagination. It echoes even in the Beloved’s absence. The amorous imagination, captivated by the Beloved’s givenness, becomes the site of the endless hermeneutic. It is the creative space in which the lover responds to the call, interprets the amorous event, and reconfigures his horizon. The lover returns to the call and the event over and over again, like a painting or symphony, always reinterpreting it and never exhausting it. The lover becomes preoccupied by, even devoted to, the Beloved, and that devotion plays itself out in the amorous imagination. But more on this later (see “Love and the Endless Hermeneutic,” below).

D. Distance and Separation

The amorous event is marked by distance and separation. The Other is always radically other and is given as an infinite alterity. But Western philosophy is characterized by a desire to know; viz., a desire to convert intuition into objects and to explain them within a totalizing system, to reduce them to the Same. Knowledge consumes. Levinas saw what the Romantics did not: when love is conflated with knowledge and becomes an urge for metaphysical merging it also becomes violent. If the Other is radically other and the task of love is to reduce the Other to the Same then the aim of love violates the very nature of the Other as alterity. There is a lesson here for lovers. Like the passionate youth in
Keats’s *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, lovers must forever remain at a distance in order to avoid idolatry, violence, and death.\textsuperscript{185} Indeed, only in the space of distance can the Beloved appear as fully individuated.

Distance, separation, advance, and withdraw are all at play in the amorous event. The lover is attracted to the Beloved, lured by his gaze, and drawn to his call, but the Beloved also recedes, steps back, and remains wholly other. The distance between lover and Beloved never collapses. The lover must choose. On the one hand, she can deny the Beloved’s advance and withdraw and try to overcome them, insisting that the lovers merge into one. This converts love of the Other into love of death. Here, the “lover” is no longer a lover at all insofar as she no longer appropriately responds to the saturated phenomenon of the Beloved. On the other hand, the lover can “stand still.” She can acknowledge the distance between herself and the Beloved and respond to the call from afar, within the space that is the distance between them. And it is a fecund space, a creative space, an imaginative space. It is in that space that love grows and sustains itself, that it renews and reinvents itself, that it interprets and reconfigures, over and over again, the Beloved’s infinite advance and withdraw. It is the space of the endless hermeneutic. Of course, it is also a tragic space: the desire to merge is a strong one and it must be denied in order to avoid violence. Distance can be as painful to endure as it is joyful to experience.

Is this not the story of Tristan and Isolde? The two lovers decline to consummate in the woods of Morois not because it would be a breach of fidelity to their liege lord but

\textsuperscript{185} “Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss, / Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve; / She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss, / For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!”
because it would be a breach of fidelity to each other. They know that love requires distance. And not, as Denis de Rougemont argues, because theirs is a love of love which is really a love of death, but because it is a love of life, a love that is played out through the endless hermeneutic of their constant advance and withdraw. That is the phenomenology of love unfolding in the drama of the Tristan myth. The lovers are together and then apart, they experience both proximity and distance, indeed, they embrace it. And in that distance which is never to be collapsed but instead to be dwelled in, they think of each other, praise each other, long for each other, they imagine each other. Their imaginations are both productive and reproductive. They see the world anew because of or in light of each other. Light is the operative metaphor here: their imaginations are lamps that illuminate the world, that allow them to reconstitute the world according to the horizon of each other. A new world emerges because of their amorous imaginings. Their imaginations are also reproductive. They mirror back both the Beloved and themselves.

One might argue that Tristan and Isolde’s imaginings are at best solipsistic and at worst narcissistic. But neither need be the case. Tristan avoids a reduction to solipsism because his imaginings find their root, their ground, their cause, or (better) their inspiration from outside. They are in a very important way given to him by Isolde. Isolde captures Tristan’s imagination. She comes to him from outside of him (the given gives itself freely). This is not mere solipsism because the imaginings require an exteriority for their induction. They are at the mercy of whatever captures the imagination: the body, the other, that which exceeds. And what captures the amorous imagination enamors it. The amorous imagination is enflamed or filled with love as a result of something that comes from outside. The
imaginings give themselves as a paradox. On the one hand they are my imaginings, only I “see” them in the mind’s eye. They are my own vision of the past, the present, and the future. But their inspiration comes to me from outside myself. The imagination must be fed, stimulated, and inspired by that which is outside of me. It cannot produce imaginings on its own. It must be enamored. It has no content without the gift of the Beloved who, like Isolde, comes from a distant land.

Tristan also avoids narcissism if he recognizes the hermeneutic project of love and does not reduce it to desire, impulse, or idealization. Love as amorous imagining is less about my vision of myself projected in my own imaginings of the Beloved (although it can devolve into that) and more about the free play of imaginings that constantly draw from their source, the wellspring of love that is the Beloved. On so many medieval caskets given between courtly lovers we see the motif of the fountain of youth: old folks crawling into a crystal-clear spring, playfully splashing about, and then leaving the fountain refreshed and young, their age literally dripping off their skin. Love is like that. Love avoids narcissism when it holds its imaginings lightly, when it understands the project of love as an endless hermeneutic that constantly rejuvenates itself and in so doing rejuvenates the lovers love for each other. The imagination must not cling to its imaginings or it will fall into narcissism. Imaginings are not about naming or construction or knowing. They are instead a kind of *hymning* toward the Beloved. They are a motion of praise that speaks out of the bedazzlement, saturation, and excess that is the Beloved. It is the response to the call, a response that calls back from the distance between the lovers that must remain a distance for the lovers to remain as lovers. Love of this kind is not love of self but love as *doing*, a
gesturing toward, a praising response. Indeed, this love can never be narcissistic because it is always directed away from the self toward the infinity of the Beloved. And the imagination is the interpretive space in which all of this occurs. The amorous imagination is the site of love as an endless hermeneutic.

THE HERMENEUTICAL NATURE OF THE FLESH

I now turn to an analysis of the flesh-as-hermeneutical-site in order to further demonstrate the hermeneutical structures of the Beloved’s givenness that make her individuation possible. More specifically, I will show that it is (in part) due to the amorous imagination’s embodiment that allows for individuation to occur. The amorous event does not simply unfold in the minds of the lovers, in the world of thought. It happens to their bodies, in the world of flesh. As we will see, the two are inseparable. The amorous event is received by l’adonné, an enfleshed self who always encounters phenomena in and through a body.

First, a few general comments. Marion hints at the idea of a “hermeneutical flesh” but he is generally more concerned with the flesh’s auto-affection than its hetero-affection (although he does describe the flesh in terms of both). Marion argues that the flesh saturates according to relation because it is given with such immediacy and “mineness” that it is dis-analogous to any other experience. For Marion, the flesh refers to nothing other than itself. But Marion’s insistence on the flesh’s auto-affection conceals the need to develop a more robust carnal hermeneutic arising out of the flesh’s hetero-affectivity in order to show how the amorous event gives itself as a fundamentally hermeneutical event that opens up to the possibility of the Beloved’s individuation. If, as Marion states, I am given to myself
through the flesh of another then I am given to myself hermeneutically. I come to understand myself through the mediation of my flesh in contact with another’s flesh. The flesh signifies me to myself and is itself the signified. Rather than as a strict auto-affection the flesh always appears in and through the world in which it finds itself. Therefore, the flesh is not absolute. It is hermeneutic. It appears in and through its relation to the world. Moreover, it is through the mediation of the flesh that the Other accomplishes a form of individuation beyond the ethical because the crossing of flesh delivers intimacy. Touch signifies with radical particularity. As we will see, the “intertwinings” of flesh and flesh and flesh and sign call for a carnal hermeneutic, a hermeneutic that explains the way in which the imagination’s embodiment contributes to the Beloved’s individuation.

A. Flesh as a Hermeneutical Phenomenon

We begin, as always, with Edmund Husserl. Husserl introduced the key phenomenological distinction between body (Körper) and flesh (Leib) that opens up to carnal hermeneutics. In section two, chapter 3 of Ideas II, Husserl provides his famous example of the phenomenon of the left hand touching the right, which reveals a “double sensation” unique to the flesh. In one sense, my body is like any other object in that it can be perceived by the senses. But unlike other objects, my body also senses. When I touch something I sense not only the object that I touch but also the sensation of my hand sensing. The features of the object that I touch are sensed in my hand and belong to my hand. When I touch my hands together I experience both hands touching the other as an

object but I also experience my hands experiencing the other hand. In sensing, my body becomes flesh. The sensations are double because both of them (my sense of the object and my sense of my sensing) belong to the flesh and yet refer to the features of the world that are being sensed. As Kearney states,

“[i]n this bilateral gesture, one is no longer an isolated subject experiencing the body as mere object: one is flesh experiencing flesh, both active and passive, constitutive and receptive, spirit and matter — or to use Husserl’s terms, Empfindung and Empfindnis.”

Unlike sight, which provides the ego control over objects, the flesh opens to a vulnerability and exposes me to the world. It is “the place where I enjoy my most primordial experience of the other.”188 The doubleness of my flesh reveals to me an interdependence that marks all of my being in the world. I experience myself experiencing and being experienced by others, as an embodied psyche, an enfleshed self that imagines, desires, and loves and that is imagined, desired, and loved by others. I project and am projected upon.

The “intertwining” of world and flesh provides the foundation for carnal hermeneutics. All sensations carry with them values, desires, repulsions, and attractions. Sensations carry meaning. Ricœur states,

Through need, values emerge without my having posited them in my act generating role: bread is good, wine is good. Before I will it, a value already appeals to me because I exist in flesh . . . The first non-deductible is the body as existing, life as value.”189


188 Ibid.

Following Husserl’s initial phenomenological insights, the idea of carnal hermeneutics goes off in a number of directions. Jean-Paul Sartre describes the body as exposed to the gaze of the Other and opposed to it in space and time. The look of the Other expropriates me. “We resign ourselves to seeing ourselves through the Other’s eyes.” And we become flesh for the other (as in the erotic caress) “in order to appropriate the Other’s flesh.” Bodies as flesh become enemies, mechanisms for control. Levinas describes the caress as sensibility that “transcends the sensible.” Like Marion’s gaze roving about the idol, the caress forages for what is not yet, searches for a future never future enough, and reaches toward the impossible Other that lies beyond the flesh itself. But it is in the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Paul Ricoeur that carnal hermeneutics is truly fleshed-out and a space is opened up to examine the amorous imagination as an individuating, embodied phenomenon. We turn to their accounts now before tying together the threads of carnal hermeneutics and explaining how they contribute to the Beloved’s individuation.

**B. Imagining as an Embodied Phenomenon**

While a full treatment of Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the flesh is beyond the scope of this dissertation, a summary of his insights regarding double-sensation, distance, and embodiment will suffice to illustrate his contributions to carnal hermeneutics and, more importantly, demonstrate how the very fact of the amorous imagination’s embodiment

---


191 Ibid., 389.

192 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 257.

provides for the possibility of the Beloved’s individuation vis-à-vis the endless hermeneutic.

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty introduces his idea of the flesh as a “chiasm” between the human being in-the-world and the world itself. Flesh connects. It is a “mutual interweaving between perceiving and perceived.” Extending Husserl’s theory of double-sensation, Merleau-Ponty argues that the flesh reveals a “reversibility” between and across all senses. The body touches and is touched, sees and is seen (Husserl) but also sees-by-touching or touches-by-speaking. This deep double-sensation marks all perception for Merleau-Ponty and reveals the fundamental truth that our primordial experience of the world is intertwined: flesh makes the world appear and flesh belongs to the world. Ontologically, I am first flesh. It is the layered vinculum that connects me to the life world in which I always already find myself by virtue of being flesh. Language also carries a kind of “double sensation” within itself and with flesh. As Kearney puts it, “[t]he I which speaks words is the I spoken in words.” And flesh has a language. Indeed, flesh and language are reversible. The flesh signifies. Contrary to Marion’s account of flesh, Merleau-Ponty argues for a radical hetero-affection of the flesh in which the self and the world are deeply interconnected by a chiasmic tissue that pre-exists, precedes, and preconditions any perception, subject-object dualism, or matter and form dichotomy.


195 Ibid., 38.

But the flesh and the world are not reducible to one another. There is always a gap between the self and the Other. To use Merleau-Ponty’s words, there is always an element of the invisible in the visible. While my visible body and visible things intermingle in the world there remains at least two “invisibles” that persist: the invisible on “this side” of perception (the world of thought) and the invisible on “that side” of perception (the world of transcendence). The invisible on “that side” of perception is given as an absence but also an excess. It is that which grounds, an “interior armature” that lies “behind” the visible.\textsuperscript{197} The invisible on “this side” of perception is “the inner of what is outer,” the mind, spirit, or soul that is attached to the visible but does not appear in it.\textsuperscript{198} Merleau-Ponty makes the crucial point that the invisible world of thought arises from its interaction with the visible world of perception.\textsuperscript{199} The “entities” and “domains” of the world of thought come to the self through its fleshy “commerce with the visible, to which they remain attached.”\textsuperscript{200} The world of thought is not disembodied. It is not unrelated or removed from the visible world. It is an “emergence of a life in its cradle.”\textsuperscript{201} Moreover, the visible “borrows from” and “intersects with” the world of thought.\textsuperscript{202} Merleau-Ponty describes a “descent of the

\textsuperscript{197} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Visible and the Invisible}, 149, 209, 215-16, 228, 246.


\textsuperscript{199} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Visible and the Invisible}, 149-151.

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 150-51.

\textsuperscript{201} Maurice Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Nature}, 218.

\textsuperscript{202} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Visible and the Invisible}, 261.
invisible into the visible” which manifests as culture, art, and history. Thought gives flesh “its axes, its depth, its dimensions.” In a phenomenological move that echoes Hume’s theory of the empirical imagination, Merleau-Ponty identifies and describes the deep interconnection between the world of thought and the world of things, the world of flesh and the invisible world of excess. One effects and affects the other. Indeed, they are co-constituted. These worlds do not create a subject-object dichotomy nor do they reduce the self to a mind-body dualism; rather, they capture the complexity of the world that arises from the ontology of flesh-in-the-world. For Merleau-Ponty, the chiasm of flesh is both a connective tissue and a membrane the preserves the “mineness” of my own experience and the “otherness” of the others without over-emphasizing transcendence (Levinas) or insisting on metaphysical merging (Romanticism). The flesh and the world are intertwined but they do not fuse. The gap, distance, or separation between self and other invites interpretation and translation, but not reduction. The flesh provides for a diacritical reading across difference, that is, it is a condition for the possibility of the lovers’ endless hermeneutic.

The flesh opens onto the world. Flesh is not just biological or subject to biological impulses. To live in and as body, Merleau-Ponty argues, is to express, to take on a certain form of life in a particular kind of world. “The life of the flesh and the life of the psyche

---

203 Ibid., 151, 212.
204 Ibid., 151.
are involved in a relationship of reciprocal expression.” Expression is a hermeneutical activity that occurs because of and as part of existence-in-flesh. Speaking is a movement of the body. Touch is animated by desire. As Kearney puts it, “[t]he body signifies meaning because it is that meaning.” This interwoven relationship between psyche and body that manifests as expression constitutes a kind of carnal hermeneutics that runs “all the way down,” that penetrates all of human existence. Meaning and being are inseparable. Flesh and existence are each other. Embodiment in this robust sense marks a fundamental structure of human being. The flesh opens onto the world in an ever-expressing interplay of body and psyche, visible and invisible, self and alterity. My flesh allows the world to show itself. Like Marion, Merleau-Ponty describes the self as fundamentally receptive. One might say that l’adonné (Marion’s term) is enfleshed and in receiving the given shows it, allows it to appear, and imbues it with meaning. The interlacing of flesh and world, of self and the given, constitutes a natal pact where the world and self give birth to one another.

Merleau-Ponty provides a compelling account of the flesh that has important implications for a phenomenology of the amorous imagination as the site of the Beloved’s

---


208 Ibid., 41.

209 Ibid., 46. Of course, there are stark differences between Marion and Merleau-Ponty’s accounts of the self, flesh, and world. My point here is not to conflate their views but to highlight the role of receptivity in Marion while adding the role of carnal hermeneutics in Merleau-Ponty. Marion neglects the important role of hermeneutics in l’adonné’s reception of the given. Merleau-Ponty’s account of the flesh as expressive, opening, and double provides a more robust account of the flesh as the site of meaning-making and Marion’s view benefits from the richness of Merleau-Ponty’s account.
individuation. First, the flesh is hermeneutic, it is not absolute. Contrary to Marion’s description, Merleau-Ponty convincingly demonstrates how the flesh operates as an expressive condition of existence. While Marion is correct to point out the unique “mineness” of my own flesh he fails to fully account for the hetero-affectivity and hermeneutics of the flesh. The flesh does give me myself but it does so through its contact with other things, with the world, and with others. It is unlike other things but it is given in relation to them. While the flesh may not provide the paradigm example of phenomena that saturate according to relation it is a unique phenomenon and plays a fundamental role in love’s emergence. Indeed, it is a condition for its possibility. Merleau-Ponty’s account of the flesh illustrates the hermeneutical structure of phenomenality absent in Marion’s account. While this does not undermine Marion’s project it does call into question the possibility of the “pure given” with regard to the flesh. In any event, the key is that the flesh is hermeneutical and when it receives the given it does so in and through the process of interpretation. In this sense, the endless hermeneutic of which Marion speaks begins at the moment of reception, as soon as l’adonné bears up against the given, identifying it and responding to it.

The amorous event is hermeneutical both before the fact, structurally, and after the fact, in the lover’s response. The amorous event takes its hermeneutical structure from the flesh and the pre-existing horizon of meaning it upends. Love happens to a person, and that person is embodied and makes-meaning “along the way” of its existence. To put it in Heideggerian terms, Dasein’s fundamental openness to the world is marked by a hermeneutical engagement with it. While the amorous event does indeed saturate according
to quantity, it does so through the hermeneutic upheaval of the self’s horizon of being. The amorous event does not occur *ex nihilo* but *ex aliquo*. And the amorous event is hermeneutic after its occurrence, in the lover’s response to the event which seeks to interpret its inexhaustible causes over and over again, meaning without end. As I argue in the next section, the amorous imagination is the site in which the endless hermeneutic unfolds as well as the condition for its possibility. As such, it is in short, the condition for the possibility of the Beloved’s individuation. Here we might distinguish between the subject’s *knowing* and the lover’s *understanding*. Phenomenologically speaking, the transcendental subject is a knowing subject: it renders a phenomenon an object by intending it, bringing a concept adequate to the intuition. It constitutes a world that it can manipulate, master, and describe. The lover is an understanding self: she engages the saturated phenomenon of the amorous event and the Beloved, recognizing that no concept is adequate to the phenomenon, it cannot be rendered an object, and instead must be interpreted through an on-going hermeneutic process. The lover seeks to understand, not to know. Understanding is the never-ending process of hermeneutic engagement with the saturated phenomenon. The amorous event is hermeneutic after the fact insofar as the lover seeks to understand it, not to know it. Indeed, it is this hermeneutic orientation that sustains the lover as lover and opens the space for the Beloved’s individuation. For the lover to lose this orientation is for the lover to revert to a subject, to “fall out of love,” and to (attempt to) reduce the Beloved to a (substitutable) thing.

Finally, Merleau-Ponty’s description of the flesh signals toward a fundamental quality of the amorous imagination (which we will explore in the next chapter): the
amorous imagination is an embodied phenomenon, and its embodiment contributes to its ability to individuate. If the amorous imagination is the site of both the structural and endless hermeneutic, a complete account of the amorous imagination should include a description of its relationship to embodiment, the flesh, and the world in order to show how through the hermeneutical activity of the amorous imagination the Other becomes the Beloved. The imagination is not a floating mind. It is not a world of illusion disconnected to the world of things. Imagination “happens” in and to a body and a world. As Merleau-Ponty suggests in his analysis of the expressive flesh, the visible and the invisible are always at play with one another. They are not two separate domains - thought and things - but a single, intertwining phenomenon that includes experiences of both presence and absence. The interconnected relationship between the visible and the invisible characterizes the amorous imagination’s relationship to the hermeneutical structure of the flesh. And these hermeneutical structures set the stage for individuation. Imaginings emerge in the cradle of the flesh. The world gives rise to imaginings and imaginings descend into the visible world, effecting it by taking the form of culture, art, and signification. They help me make the world my own, and they provide the me the ability to “see” the Other as radically unsubstitutable to interpret her excess as such. The hermeneutical relationship between world, self, and imagination is a condition for the possibility of love.

C. Flesh, Imagination, and the Hermeneutical Response

While Merleau-Ponty’s description of the flesh highlights the hermeneutic structure of the amorous event as a markedly carnal hermeneutic, Paul Ricœur’s account of embodiment highlights the carnality of the hermeneutic response to the event. In his early
work, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Ricœur examines the life of the “incarnate cogito” as a “dialectical rapport between the voluntary and the involuntary.”

Like Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur argues that “incarnation” is experienced through the phenomenon of affectivity, which mediates between our existence-in-flesh and the order of thought. Affectivity is at its root a mixing of the two. For example, my experience of need is a confluence of the demands of the body and the values that animate it. Values emerge from the phenomenon of embodiment itself. Ricœur describes the imagination in a similar fashion: it is a carnal imagination that “takes place” in a body, projecting out and taking in the world of bodies, reading the affective signs of the sensible world, and “mobilizing our desires and discerning between good and bad ways of realizing them [so] that our life can be evaluated.”

Ricœur returns to the body and carnal hermeneutics later in his career, after his linguistic turn. In *Oneself as Another* Ricœur argues (in a vein similar to Merleau-Ponty) that the flesh mediates and opens the self to the world. The flesh is the point of hermeneutical negotiation between the immanent transcendental ego and the transcendent face of the Other. Like Marion and Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur recognizes the phenomenological receptivity of the self-in-flesh which gives to us our sense of belonging in the world while also maintaining a distance between “me” and “the world.” The paradox of the flesh is the paradox of proximity and distance, intimacy and separation. It is the

---

210 Ibid., 47.

211 Ibid.

touch that never touches. In a move that beckons toward what Marion will later describe as the flesh which “gives me myself,” Ricoeur insists that the flesh reveals to me both myself and the Other. The gap between myself and the Other which is traversed across flesh but never eliminated gives to me the phenomenon of the Other as an intimate absence. Indeed, the gap between what I experience and what you experience, what I am and who you are, can never be closed. Nor should it be. The distance makes all the difference. Like Tristan’s sword in the woods of Morois, in creating a boundary and preserving distance the phenomenological gap between self and Other opens up to the demand for hermeneutical mediation. The Beloved calls and the lover responds but there is no consummation, no merging, no fusion. Unlike the Romantic vision of metaphysical union, the phenomenological account of the flesh reveals the very conditions of love as an act of radial individuation, conditions which create perpetual separation, inviting the lovers to read across difference rather than to dissolve into sameness.213

THE AMOROUS IMAGINATION AS THE SITE OF THE ENDLESS HERMENEUTIC

Let us recap. Marion’s description of the erotic phenomenon provides a number of insights into the way in which the Other is individuated and becomes the Beloved. But his description fails to fully account for the role hermeneutics plays in individuating the Beloved. Building on Marion’s theory of the self, I argued that his concept of l’adonné suggests a hermeneutical dimension to phenomenalizing the given, one that must be unpacked in order to understand the Beloved’s individuation. L’adonné receives the given and in doing so shows it. Reception is neither passive nor active but a combination of the

two: it “bears up” against the given, converting the anonymous call into an identifiable phenomenon. L’adonné’s resistance to the Other as a saturated phenomenon is the first step toward individuation because it suggests that l’adonné in some way “converts” the given into a phenomenon. Shane Mackinlay and Claude Romano (among others) recognize this hermeneutic dimension of Marion’s phenomenology. They describe phenomena as structurally hermeneutical “all the way down.” While Marion says little of the hermeneutic structure of phenomena, he does suggest that an endless hermeneutic is the appropriate response to saturated phenomenon. Because saturated phenomena exceed all intentionality they call for endless interpretation. They are inexplicable. Combining the insights of MacKinlay, Romano, and Marion, I argued that love first emerges within the context of an amorous event. The amorous event is hermeneutically structured and calls for an endless hermeneutic in response to its excessive givenness. The amorous event is characterized phenomenologically as an encounter, a call, a response, and distance and separation. Because the amorous event is hermeneutically structured it implicates the imagination as a meaning-making faculty. Through this imaginative, hermeneutical activity the Other is able to become the Beloved. The amorous event is not abstract. It happens to an embodied self. The lover receives the amorous event and responds to it in and through the embodied imagination as a site of interpretive activity. Therefore, a proper account of love requires attention not only to the amorous event but also carnal hermeneutics. Examining the phenomenology of the flesh in Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Marion, I highlighted the deep intertwining between flesh and world. The flesh is not absolute. Like the event, it is structurally hermeneutical. It is given in relation to a world. The flesh opens the self to the
world with an intimacy and distance that invites a reading across gaps. Again, this “reading” requires imaginative engagement. But it does not collapse the gap between self and Other. Carnal hermeneutics strikes an interpretive balance, a negotiation and navigation along the membrane of flesh and the world. The endless hermeneutic takes place in the affective, embodied, amorous imagination, and imagination that reads from and into the world of meaning all the while preserving the distance between lover and Beloved.

How do these ideas contribute to an understanding of phenomenological individuation? In short: through the amorous imagination the subject-as-lover creatively responds to the saturating givenness of the Other-as-Beloved, acknowledging that the lover can never know the Beloved and choosing instead to individuate the Beloved, by “seeing” her as radically particular and imbuing the world with meanings generated though the lover’s endless hermeneutic. The amorous imagination is the embodied site of the endless hermeneutic. It is the nest in which the amorous event lands and the inventive activity that interprets it. It is a condition for the possibility of love.

I conclude this chapter with a number of conclusions regarding the nature of amorous individuation. First, recall that the amorous event saturates according to quantity, upending the lover’s pre-existing horizon of meaning. The amorous event is radical in the truest sense: it overturns a pre-existing order and re-roots the lover’s orientation in the world. The first individuation occurs not only when the lover advances, as Marion argues in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, but when the Beloved calls. The call and response individuate the lovers for the first time. The call and response are not reciprocal. They are an event, not a transaction. Marion is right to point out the non-economic, non-metaphysical nature of
love. But they do constitute a phenomenological moment in which the Other appears to the lover with a particularity that sets him apart from all Others. The lover experiences the Beloved not only as an injunction but as an erotic call. For Levinas, the injunction is a command that places one’s being in question. It is a phenomenological moment that implicates the ontological status of the self as separated from the il y a. But in love, the call places one’s meaning in question. It is a phenomenological moment that calls into question the hermeneutical status of the self and Other as substitutable, indistinct, or one-among-many-others. The endless hermeneutic plays out according to the amorous event insofar as it is a moment of hermeneutical upheaval and reorientation. To put it in terms of Ricoeurian narrativity, the amorous event happens to a self whose constitution is pre-figured and configured but must then be reconfigured in light of the event. The amorous event must be received by the lover who in responding to its call identifies it as such. Reconfiguration, response, and reception work in concert to individuate the Other as the Beloved.

The imagination’s embodiment is a necessary condition to individuation. The amorous event always gives itself in and to embodied selves, selves-in-the-flesh. The signifying flesh is a condition for the possibility of love because love requires a hermeneutical response and the flesh is the site or nest of meaning in which the event lands and is taken up as a new orientation or disposition — a new set of significations — expressed through the enfleshed self’s being-in-the-world. The amorous event happens as much to a body as to a psyche. Their deep intertwining means that the amorous event is not reducible to some psychological disposition or biological impulse. It is ontological insofar as it gives to the lovers a new horizon of being that is lived out in the flesh. It marks their
being in the world as lovers who experience the world with a new affect, a new grounding as a result of the amorous event. The call of the Beloved touches our bodies. It arouses the flesh both literally and metaphorically. It invokes desire. It lures. The amorous event is felt, heard, and seen in and through the flesh. The desire for excess appears in the body. And the lover responds to the call through the body. The lover’s caress is not a transcendental ego intending the Beloved’s body in search of an adequate intuition. The lover does not grope about in the dark looking for some object she can identify. She signifies differently with her flesh. In love, the lover responds to the Beloved’s call through the hermeneutical caress that seeks to understand but not to know. In the intimacy of the flesh the lovers are individuated vis-a-vis a carnal and hermeneutical encounter. The caress signifies, “you and only you.” The Beloved cannot be substituted within the context of the amorous event and the carnal hermeneutic for which it calls.

The amorous event opens to the possibility of individuation not only in the flesh it arouses, but in the way in which it captures the imagination. The lover’s imagination is “caught up” in and by the amorous event. The imagination is (in part) a productive faculty. It is does not merely reflect sense impressions or conjure fanciful ideas. It provides a unity to perception and apperception (Kant) or even the possibility of our experience of being (Heidegger) by allowing the possibility of projecting presence over time. Understood in this manner, the individuating capacity of the imagination become clear: the lover sees himself and the world anew when his imagination is captured by the Beloved. His experience of being is contingent upon his imaginative synthesis and projections which now take on an amorous inflection because his horizon is constituted in light of the
Beloved’s abiding presence within it. In other words, the captured imagination sees the self and the world differently in light of love’s emergence. The captured imagination arouse, enamors, and kindles the desires of the flesh. Lovers often feel “aflame” in their passions. In the hermeneutical phenomenon of touch the lovers imagine each other’s satisfaction as much as they feel it. And in this touch the Beloved is given as unsubstitutable. The truth delivered in intimacy is the truth – and once made and found – of the Other’s radical particularity. The amorous event sets the lovers off on a passionate path marked by imaginative and carnal engagement, hermeneutic interpretation, individuation, and diacritical reading across distance. The endless hermeneutic is the lover’s conversation. It reifies the Beloved’s uniqueness. It is amorous expression said again and again, for now as if for all time. And no saying could happen without the amorous imagination.

How might we account for the various ways in which love is expressed in different cultures? Is all love the same? Yes and no. The amorous event is a universal phenomenon but the endless hermeneutic renders it a particular manifestation in place and time. Through the structural and endless hermeneutic the amorous event is expressed culturally, linguistically, and aesthetically. The event happens to situated, enfleshed selves who despite their common hermeneutical structure express and respond to the amorous event from their own specific historical locations. The playful, courtly poetry of Bernart de Ventadorn is different from John Donne’s honorific verse in “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” or Edna St. Vincent Millay’s lament in “What lips my lips have kissed and where and why.” But the underlying phenomenon is the same. The endless hermeneutic is the birthplace of individuation expressed through creative variation. It inspires. Its
inexhaustibility calls for an inventive response, and that response draws from and takes on the cultural norms, values, and inflections in which it is expressed. We explore this aspect of the phenomenon in the next chapter but suffice it to say for now that love’s universal appearance and particular expression arises out of its hermeneutical structure. The Beloved is shown as such in the lover’s hermeneutical response to him.

One final comment regarding the “co-occurring” nature of the amorous phenomenon: the face, event, and flesh “happen” together in a confluence of phenomena that constitute their own, unique phenomenon. The whole of love is greater than the sum of its parts. The erotic and the ethical are caught up in amour. Like streams merging together to form a river, the various phenomena that make up love join in a single current that takes on a force of its own. The phenomena do not layer, unfold chronologically, or cancel each other out like a sound wave; rather, they magnify and intensify in their co-occurrence such that the weight of their pull takes on a new life and appearance not reducible to any one phenomenon that makes it up. Love appears as its own, unique phenomenon.

At the confluence of all these hermeneutical phenomena lies the imagination. The Beloved gives himself in and to the gifted’s imagination, which is so much more than an image-making faculty. It fashions a world of meaning out of myriad phenomena. It creatively responds to the given, able to intend them in the as if. Through its receptive and responsive hermeneutical activity, the amorous imagination transforms the Other into this Other, into the Beloved. The hermeneutical structure of phenomena provides the imagination the capacity to allow the Beloved to show herself as individuated, radically
particular, and unsubstituable. And it is in the amorous imagination’s hermeneutical reception and response to the Other that allows for the endless hermeneutic to unfold, and the imaginative, hermeneutical activity of the lover renders the Beloved unique. In the next chapter I turn to a phenomenological study of the amorous imagination. While in this chapter I argued that the amorous imagination is a condition for the possibility of love because of its power to individuate, in the next chapter I provide a preliminary, phenomenological sketch of the amorous imagination in order to show how it individuates.
CHAPTER FIVE
TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE AMOROUS IMAGINATION

INTRODUCTION

The imagination plays a fundamental role in individuating the Other-as-Beloved. In its productive capacity it lays out a new horizon, a new world that the lover inhabits as a result of the amorous event. In its reproductive capacity it conjures amorous imaginings that work together to constitute the lover’s new way of “seeing” the Beloved. Operating in the as if the amorous imagination opens to creative-responsive interpretations of the Beloved, interpretations that are not constrained by the mode of perception. The amorous imagination is the site of the endless hermeneutic which, rather than individuating the Beloved once-and-for-all, continuously individuates though an on-going process of invention, of seeing and re-seeing, of providing assurance of the Beloved’s meaning through the act of understanding. The Beloved is shown in the lover’s response to his call. And the response manifests in and through the lover’s enfleshed, amorous imagination. But how precisely does all of this happen? How does the productive activity of the amorous imagination operate? How do amorous imaginings appear? This chapter provides a phenomenological sketch of the amorous imagination in order to examine the structures that allow for the possibility of the Beloved’s individuation.
AMOROUS ILLUMINATION

Kant’s theory of the productive imagination revolutionized the way we understand perception, knowledge, and the self. Recall that for Kant the imagination is both a mirror and a lamp. It brings together the categories and sensibility, forming a unity of perception and apperception. But the imagination’s productive power in many ways exposes the limits of Kant’s project because, as Kant readily admits, the productive imagination does not show itself as an intuition. It operates “in the background,” synthesizing our experience into a unity. And yet without it knowledge would not be possible. Heidegger saw the radical implications of Kant’s observations. Heidegger argued that Kant’s insight revealed a deeper truth: the imagination operates according to the horizon of time and through its projections provides the experience of abiding presence. In other words, the imagination conjures being. Through the imagination’s productive and projective faculty Dasein experiences a world of beings. Indeed, Dasein’s experience of itself as a being is constituted by the imagination. Whether or not one finds Kant or Heidegger’s accounts convincing, it is hard to disagree with their fundamental observation that the imagination plays a productive role in the self’s experience of the world. Without its ordering capacity our experiences would not be experiences at all. They would be chaos. And its projective capacity is no less obvious. As beings-in-time we constantly experience ourselves as having been, being, and yet-to-be. Time, the self, and the imagination are intimately related. Kant and Heidegger were right to emphasize the imagination’s power to illuminate existence.

---

214 Heidegger, Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, 248-49.
The amorous imagination in its transcendental form exhibits at least three features. First, as Kant and Heidegger observed, the amorous imagination is productive. The amorous event upends the self’s horizon of meaning and world and the amorous imagination reconstitutes it according to the horizon of the Beloved. After the amorous event the world is never the same. Our experience of time becomes contingent upon it’s having happened. We experience the past, present, and future in light of the amorous event. It becomes the beacon or anchor of not only chronological time but also existential time. Our entire experience of our temporal landscape orbits around the amorous event. And it is the amorous imagination that produces this new world, that synthesizes it according to the horizon of the Beloved. Like Kant’s transcendental imagination, the amorous imagination brings the world into a unity that is penetrated by the presence of love. As Marion points out in the first erotic reduction, before love we experience life as meaningless, aimless, or empty. We ask, “What’s the use?” Even before the amorous event we find ourselves in search of love, or at least in search of the assurance of our own meaning, which we suspect love can provide. The amorous imagination brings together a world framed by love, imbued with a desire for amour, and built upon the possibilities opened up by the amorous event. The synthesis of experience assembled but the amorous imagination is framed by the boundaries set by the Beloved’s givenness. One might say

\[215\] How if at all does the amorous imagination differ from other types of imagination? The answer is two-fold. In one sense, it doesn’t. The amorous imagination is a particular way of imagining. It is a manifestation of the imagination, or better, a certain way the imagination manifests in light of the amorous event. Insofar as it exhibits the classical productive and reproductive qualities of the imagination it is not in itself a separate transcendental activity. It is a subset or type of imagining. In another sense, however, the amorous imagination is unique insofar as it contributes to a new way of “seeing” the world and “responding” to it amorously, in the wake of the amorous event. Because of its role in love the amorous imagination merits its own phenomenological description.
that the Beloved operates like a “fifth Category” according to which experience is given. The amorous imagination produces a synthesis of meaning, a world of possibility, and an experience of experience that at all times carries with it the trace of love.

The amorous imagination’s productive function opens up to its narrative, hermeneutical function. While the amorous imagination’s productive capacity synthesizes being according to the horizon of the Beloved, in its narrative capacity the amorous imagination operates by reconfiguring the lover’s sense-of-self in terms of a new story, a new plot. The amorous imagination folds the fact of the Beloved’s givenness into the narrative self. In the wake of the amorous event the lover is no longer constituted by her autonomous existence as One, but as a “Two scene,” as Alain Badiou calls it.216 In this “Two scene,” the lover engages in an on-going, narrativizing project of constituting and re-constituting selfhood in terms of the Beloved’s appearance in the amorous event, which serves as an anchoring point around which her new narrative revolves. The narrativizing feature of the amorous imagination is inventive in the double sense of the term: it draws from the inventory of meaning which precedes the amorous event in order to innovate meaning by reconfiguring the hermeneutical nest into a new arrangement which has as its existential node the Beloved. We see here again the structurally hermeneutical quality of the amorous event and imagination that leads to the Beloved’s individuation. The lover attests to his new sense-of-self in and through his imaginative projections that always carry with them the touch of love. When the lover imaginatively envisions his past, it is a past which was before his encounter with the Beloved. When he considers himself in the

present, he does so as a lover to the Beloved, as linked to her in a way that cannot be undone. And when he projects into his future he does so with the secret presence of the Beloved always in mind. It is a future that is no future unless she is there. Both cosmologically and phenomenologically the lover’s sense of time is experienced in terms of the Beloved, given as amorous event. Without her – and her alone – the story of his life would be radically different.

The amorous imagination also has an ontological function that contributes to individuation that is not unrelated to its narrative function. The ontological function of the amorous imagination effects the lover’s experience of time, but with a particular focus on the enigmatic relationship between love and death. The lover no longer experiences time according only to his own death but according to the death of the Beloved. Being-toward-death becomes being-toward-love but only after the amorous event occurs. Love is not more primordial than time. But it reconfigures it. It also anticipates separation, which always haunts the lovers, especially in the distance they experience between each other. As we have seen the distance of love must, paradoxically, be preserved. Distance and separation open to the anxiety of death. Indeed, love is haunted by death. Death lurks within the amorous imagination (perhaps in our experience of imaginings as a kind of negation? See e.g., Sartre). The death of the Other-as-Beloved, the fact of her impending death intensifies her singularity and unsubstitutability. The possibility of the Beloved’s death is “taken up” in the imaginative projections of the amorous imagination. The Beloved alone can give the lover an assurance of meaning and thus reifies her individuation. The lover cannot give it to himself without falling into vanity. But the Beloved’s impending death
radically calls this assurance into question. More than that though, the Beloved’s impending death is itself an event that the lovers know will again reconfigure existence. It always threatens to undo the world created by love. And here we find the ontological function of the amorous imagination: Being-toward-death issues a radical call to transform the self into Being-toward-love. The lovers can never reverse the trajectory upon which the amorous event has set them. The lovers are always being-toward-the-death-of-the-Beloved, which intensifies the lover’s project of being-toward-love. The phenomenon of the Beloved’s death in many ways happens now, over and over again. It is an event that only arrives for the lover. The phenomenon of death never gives itself to the dead. The lover must carry with his love the impending event of the Beloved’s death, which is phenomenologically given as both a presence and an absence, a death that is yet to come. No other death is like the death of the Beloved.

**AMOROUS INTENTION**

The amorous imagination is for the lover a lamp that illuminates the world in light of the amorous event. It synthesizes the world according to the category of love, lays down a new plot or narrative self to which the lover attests through his on-going invention, and imbues existence with an experience of distance and separation that reorients the lover’s being-in-the world toward love and death. But the amorous imagination is not only productive, it is also its own way of “seeing.” It is a variation of the imaginative mode of consciousness, to use Husserl’s term. Insofar as the amorous imagination is precisely that - an act of imagination - it intends in its own unique way. It “sees” phenomenon according to its own mode, a mode distinguishable from other modes of consciousness such memory,
perception, or judgment. Recall that, unlike perception, the imagination unmoors what it intends from the *as is* and leaves the subject free to intuit imaginings in the *as if*. The free play of the imagination allows for creative activity (and access to eidetic truth). Unlike memory, which relives past perceptions over again in the present (albeit in a peculiar, absent way) with a belief that they really happened, the imagination conjures a sort of “nowhere” that is unbound by belief grounded in past perception. While the imagination’s *as if* mode of intending allows for innovation, it also displaces the self and feeds anticipation. The self that imagines finds itself in another time and place (memory does this too), it experiences itself as both here and there. And imaginative activity allows the self to project itself into another place and anticipate a future that has not yet come, as we have seen in the amorous imagination’s ontological function. These distinctions are not trivial. They reveal a fundamental activity of consciousness that is at play in the amorous. As we will see in the next section, an imagination animated by love beautifies, builds, responds, to and individuates the Beloved through its creative-responsive activity. Suffice it to say for now that the amorous imagination is a kind of imaginative intending that exhibits the unique qualities of imagination as a mode of consciousness.

Despite talk about the imagination’s projective capacities one must not lose site of the fact that the imagination is an embodied phenomenon. We always imagine in the flesh. The imagination may conjure a “nowhere” but it does so in a body. For Merleau-Ponty and Ricœur the invisible world of thought and the imagination both have a distinctly carnal dimension. For Merleau-Ponty the invisible world of thought is always engaged in

---

217 Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 66-76.
“commerce” with the visible. It is never an abstracted mind afloat in a transcendent realm. The world of thought is “attached” to the visible world of things (and the invisible world of things too). Thought penetrates into the visible and the visible penetrates into thought. For Ricœur, the imagination is both semantical and carnal. It innovates through language but always in an enfleshed self. In both cases the fundamental point is the same: the world effects and affects the imagination and the imagination effects and affects the world. Marion’s concept of the given adds another layer. The given always takes initiative, it always comes from “without,” landing upon l’adonné like light upon a screen. Cartesian mind-body dualism is untenable when one looks closely at the structures of consciousness and experience. And with regard to the imagination, we see that the imagination is not solipsistic. Its content is not mere fancy or fantasy. The imagination draws its content from the world of things, from what is given to it from “without,” from what lands upon it anonymously and of its own accord. Because the imagination is enfleshed it is intimately tied to the world of things and its creative-responsive activity remains accountable to the given.

Not only does the imagination receive what it can imagine from outside itself, it also produces, projects, and conjures imaginings that “descend into the visible,” to use Merleau-Ponty’s language. What the lover imagines is not limited to the confines of his imagination. As we saw with Larmore and Stendhal, the imagination has the capacity to create a new world but it does so in a way that responds to what is given, enriching it through creative expression. Through her imagination the lover “crystallizes” the Beloved with layers of meaning. She sees the world anew in light of what she sees through the
creative lens of imagination. The mode of consciousness of the imagination is the mode of
*as if*, which is not a mode of delusion or illusion but a mode that employs its own
epistemology, axiology, and ontology. The *as if* invites possibility and creation. Like
Husserl’s eidetic imagination, the amorous imagination is free from the limits of perception
(the *as is*) and free to imbue the lover’s experience of the Beloved with truths more akin to
mythology, poetry, and art. That the lover “sees” the Beloved in a way that no one else sees
her makes complete sense according to this description for it is he alone that receives her
call and imaginatively responds to it and, in doing so, shows her in her unique individuation
as Beloved (to him). Thus, the lover experiences the Beloved in and through the enfleshed,
amorous imagination. The flesh mediates the imagination’s reception of the given and its
expression of meaning, giving shape to the Beloved as such.

When the lover imagines the Beloved her imaginings appear amidst an impressional
manifestation of the lover’s own flesh. The Beloved is given as a saturated phenomenon
that captures her imagination and in so doing captures her flesh. The experience of love is
in many ways a “total experience” insofar as it affects the lover “all the way down”: she is
“taken” by the event and enamored of the Beloved. When he is present his givenness calls
her imagination to respond, and the call and the response are felt in the body. In his absence
she imagines him. She feels his absence. The lover takes on the *as if* mode of
consciousness, wondering what the Beloved might think, say, or do in any particular
scenario in which she finds herself. As Stendhal noted in *Love*, the lover projects and
renders present the Beloved through her amorous imagination. Her body longs for him.

*Would that the Beloved be here beside me in the cool orange groves beside the sea at*
But where Stendhal in some ways trivializes these imaginings as mental fictions or delusions we now see that they are actually quite profound. Stendhal’s pseudo-scientific method conceals the truth of the imagination as a creative-responsive, hermeneutical faculty. Husserl is more helpful. Understood in the as is mode of perception the lover’s imagination does indeed seem to be fancy or even obsession. She does not “see clearly” or even “idealizes” the Beloved. But understood in the as if mode of imagination the lover’s imaginings become a hermeneutical enterprise. They amount to her interpretive response to a saturated phenomenon. She sees the world anew and always in light of the amorous event, an event that has affected her completely, through to her flesh. Her entire disposition and orientation toward the world and herself has changed. She experiences the world differently and others experience her differently as well (the invisible descends into the visible). The amorous imagination intends the Beloved in non-objectifying way that opens up to understanding and interpretation; that is, to possibility, creation, and individuation.

**AMOROUS IMAGININGS**

We now turn to amorous imaginings themselves. Traditionally, when one thinks of the imagination one thinks of the imagination’s content: the images it conjures. But as we have seen the imagination is not reducible to its content. At least this much should be clear. Nevertheless, the amorous imagination’s images are an important part of its individuating capacity and so a detailed description of how images appear, or particularly how amorous images appear, is warranted.

A few threshold observations: first, imaginings are themselves phenomenon. They are given. They appear to consciousness, albeit with a peculiar kind of presence/absence.
Second, imaginings raise important ontological questions. What is the ontological status of an imagining? Is it real? Unreal? Quasi-real? The answer is outside the scope of this dissertation. I will bracket ontological questions and look only at phenomenon as they appear. Third, we limit our focus to amorous imaginings rather than imaginings as a whole. By way of brief reminder, however, recall that for much of Western philosophical history from Plato to Sartre imaginings were considered reflections or a kind of negation of the world. For Husserl they are the product of the as if, open to the free play of the mind. For Ricoeur imaginings provide for linguistic invention by holding identity and difference in tension and opening up a new space of possibility. And for Romantics like Novalis, Stendhal, and Shelly, the imagination creative-responsive activity enriches our experience of the world, transforming it into a rich, expressive experience of myth, value, poetry, and meaning. Finally, the main point of this discussion will be to demonstrate how amorous imaginings appear, explain their hermeneutic dimension, and describe how, ultimately, through the amorous imagination the lover individuates the Other-as-Beloved.

A. Romantic Envisioning

For Novalis, Romantic philosophy involves two movements: “alternating elevation and lowering.” To “romanticize” the world is to “give the commonplace a higher meaning, the ordinary a mysterious countenance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite an appearance of infinity.” Poetic “making” is not an illusion, delusion, or self-
deception. As Kneller points out, “[t]o make the familiar unfamiliar is not to seek cognitive oblivion, but simply to look at the world again with wonder.”

Imaginative creation is the expression of a living power. But Novalis also recognized the inverse: to romanticize is to demystify the mysterious. The imagination moves from the extraordinary to the ordinary at the same time that it creates the world anew. This latter movement is seldom emphasized in Novalis studies and runs counter to the traditional interpretation of “romanticizing” articulated by Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, but it constitutes an important aspect of Novalis’s theory of the imagination, one relevant to understanding the imagination’s creative-responsive ability to individuate. Romantic “lowering” provides a counter-balance to romantic “elevation” and restrains its impulse to “seek the undetermined — a child of fantasy — an ideal.”

Novalis recognized that “[a]n unknown lover of course has a magical charm. Striving for the unknown, the undetermined, is extremely dangerous and disadvantageous. Revelation must not be forced.” While the imagination is the power to create a new reality by drawing out of the world what is there and making it appear magical, it is also the power to naturalize the mysterious and see in the world an order, structure, or form that is in no way mysterious. The Romantic imagination does both “at one and the same time,” resisting any simple reduction or distinction between reality and fantasy.

---

220 Ibid., 23.


223 Ibid.

Amorous imaginings operate in a similar fashion and constitute a new way of “seeing” the Beloved, which I term envisioning. In responding to the Beloved through the amorous imagination the lover engages in the endless hermeneutic. She interprets, understands, and creatively answers the call of the saturated phenomenon. She “sees” the Beloved differently than she sees anyone else in part because of what the Beloved gives but also in part because of what the lover creates. Amorous imaginings are a creative-responsive activity that radically calls into question any simple distinction between the imaginary and the real. In phenomenological terms, recognizing that the Beloved cannot be reduced to an object, that the Beloved resists intentionality and yet calls to be shown in the lover’s response, the lover imagines the Beloved as extraordinary and expresses her love for the Beloved through her amorous imaginings. Amorous imaginings are akin to romantic imaginings in that they express the truth of the Beloved which is “at once made and found.” When the lover envisions the Beloved she sees and experiences the unsubstitutable Other. The Beloved is more beautiful than any Other not simply because he has an attractive figure, charming smile, or intelligent wit. The Beloved is more beautiful than any Other because the lover imagines him to be so and because she experiences him through creative expression. She sees him in a different light, a light illuminated by the amorous imagination. Any single quality he might display ultimately signals to his excessive givenness. The lover’s amorous imaginings are not delusions or deceptions. They are a way of seeing the Beloved with wonder but they remain responsive to what gives

---

225 Ibid., 31.
itself. As any long-time lover knows, the Beloved is not perfect. He is not without his flaws, idiosyncrasies, and failures. Amorous imaginings do not wash over the ordinary. They respond to it. They understand it. They envision it as much as they envision the extraordinary. In “romanticizing” the Beloved the lover does not idealize him but she does imbue him with significance that goes beyond the significance of any other given. Amorous imaginings “elevate” and “lower” the Beloved, render him both mysterious and ordinary, all the while signifying his unsubstitutability. Amorous imaginings are the lover’s way of envisioning the Beloved, of seeing him as this Other, as other than any Other, as radically unique.226

B. Reading Across Distance

As we have seen, amorous imaginings happen in and to the flesh. But they also happen across flesh. They are the activity of reading across the distance and separation that

---

226 Stendhal’s notion of “crystallization” also illustrates this point. According to Stendhal through the imagination the lover “endows” the Beloved with “a thousand perfections” that “crystallize” around her like a wintry bough left too long in a salt mine. Although for Stendhal crystallization is a pseudo-psychological projection, considered phenomenologically, crystallization provides an apt metaphor for the way in which the lover envisions the Beloved through the amorous imagination. Following the amorous event the lover is enamored with the Beloved. The event captures her imagination, she recounts her experience of the Beloved, relives moments spent with him, and “sees” him differently than she sees anyone else precisely because of the amorous encounter in which the lovers took part. Unlike any Other, the Beloved is imbued with a multiplicity of meanings, values, and adornments that arise from and are perpetuated by the amorous imagination. But, contrary to Stendhal’s account, the crystals which form around the Beloved as a result of the amorous imaginings are not mere fabrications or fancy. They are “romanticizations” in Novalis’s sense of the term. They are the lover’s creative-responsive expression to the saturated phenomenon of the Beloved. The lover answers to the call. Indeed, amorous imaginings are themselves the lover’s response to what gives itself as excess. Amorous imaginings are not free-wheeling fantasies that surrender the lover to indeterminacy. They draw from the Beloved as he gives himself phenomenologically. They are answerable to the call of the Beloved, a call which can never itself be fully answered.
marks the Beloved’s givenness. Paradoxically, the Beloved is given as both a radical intimacy and alterity. She is nearer to the lover than any Other can ever be and yet each time the lover advances she recedes, like the pool of Tantalus. Intimacy and distance, proximity and separation characterize the saturated phenomenon that is the Other-as-Beloved. What is a lover to do in the face of this tiny, carnal chasm?

The lover understands, interprets, translates, transmits, mediates, discerns, recognizes, envisions. In short, he imagines. Amorous imaginings are the lover’s hermeneutical activity offered in response to the Beloved’s amorous call. Through them the lover reads across the distance that separates him from the Beloved. As we have seen, the flesh mediates but it also marks a boundary and border. It is a threshold the lover can never cross or escape. But it is not a prison. It is a possibility. It is a messenger. It signifies. It opens us up to the world. The gaps between the lovers are both traversed and preserved through their enfleshed imaginings. Like the gaps in texts and in language (e.g., between plot points, différance, translations, the saying and the said, parole and langue, speech and silence, etc.) the gaps between bodies offer a surplus of meaning. Who is the Beloved? The lover can never know. Instead, from moment to moment or perhaps all at once, he reads the Beloved as this way and now that; eroticized and mundane; counselor or muse; a mother, friend, or enemy; a violent storm, a placid ocean; a victor; a partner; an obstacle or a cause. Each time the lover imagines the Beloved he expresses her and enriches the experience of her. The imaginings descend into the visible world and affect the Beloved as

---

well. She sees the way she is seen. She hears the lover’s words, sees his body speak, and moves within the same shared milieu of meaning. The Beloved speaks too. She reads across distance. The at times artful play of interpretation that is the amorous imagination crosses the phenomenological chasm that exists between lovers, but it never collapses it.

The distance between lovers can be dangerous too. As we will see in Chapter Six, Idolatry, narcissism, and solipsism lurk in the dark corners of the amorous imagination. The lover’s imaginings can, as Novalis warns, become “forced revelation.” They can provide too much elevation without the counter-balance of lowering. They can render an ideal or idol of the Beloved. Or worse, they can become the lover’s own reflections, mirroring back to him an image of his own desires (though, properly speaking, he is no longer a lover at this point but a narcissist). The amorous imagination becomes solipsistic when it does not respond to the call of the Beloved (which gives itself from “without”) and instead becomes infatuated with its own visions, unmooring them completely from what gives itself. In each case the lover betrays the endless hermeneutic by failing to answer the call and address the Beloved as alterity. Love is not merging. It is separation.

C. Belief, Presence, and Absence

In “Amorous Intention” I argued that, generally, the imagination is as much an act of consciousness as its imaginings are objects of its intentionality. But unlike perceptions, imaginings are not tethered to the as is and are given in the as if. And unlike memories, which rely on past perceptions and a certain kind of belief, imaginings arise in a liminal sort of “nowhere” and do not require belief in the same sense as memory. But amorous imaginings are a special case of imaging. They do not appear in exactly the same way as
generic imaginings. In love, the lover’s amorous imaginings are accountable to the Beloved’s givenness and remain rooted in the flesh. Contrary to Husserl’s account, amorous imaginings are not disembodied acts of consciousness that allow for free variation of objects but are instead ways of envisioning the Beloved anew and, drawing on and from her givenness, interpreting that which exceeds objectness. Moreover, amorous imaginings carry with them an element of belief, although not the sort of belief present in memory. In memory, the self recalls and relives past perceptions on the belief that what is remembered actually happened. But in amorous imaginings, the Beloved happens to the lover and the lover responds to his saturating givenness by interpreting it in the endless hermeneutic. The lover’s imaginings are accompanied by a belief that the Beloved is actually given as a phenomenon and that the imaginings are an appropriate response to his saturating nature. In other words, memories appear accompanied by a belief that they happened in the past and amorous imaginings appear accompanied by a belief that they are responding to what is happening now and has happened since the amorous event (and, as we will see, what may happen in the future). The presence of belief in amorous imaginings demonstrates the way in which amorous imaginings remain tied to the given and, unlike Husserl’s eidetic account, are always accountable to what gives itself. When they become untied from the Beloved’s givenness the lover’s imaginings are no longer amorous and become narcissistic, idolatrous, and solipsistic. Amorous imaginings contribute to individuation only so long as they remain accountable to the Beloved as given.

Amorous imaginings appear in a peculiar mix of presence and absence. When the Beloved is “present” (given in experience) the lover imagines him by envisioning him. But
her romantic envisionings are accompanied by another set of impressional amorous imaginings that, while perhaps less specific and clear than what the lover envisions of the Beloved, are nonetheless present in her reception of the Beloved. For example, when the lover receives and imagines the Beloved she “sees” in him qualities that beautify and crystallize around him. Her experience of the Beloved is enriched by her creative-responsive expression of him. But she also experiences a sense or has an impression of time and a world with and without him. Always accompanying the lover’s encounter with the Beloved is an imaginative impression that the world and the lover’s experience of time are different because the Beloved is in it. The lover not only imagines the Beloved before her but also the world reconstituted as a result of the amorous encounter. I call this an “impressional amorous imagining” because it is not given as an object but rather as a pre-reflexive, originary experience of time and the world that co-occurs with the Beloved’s givenness following the amorous encounter. It is part of the lover’s amorous imaginings.

Consider the lover who sees before her the Beloved. She envisions him, but she also has the impression that she will be with him in the future, that her world will include him in some way, that her past is what it is only in relation to his presence in her present. This impression manifests as an imaginative “sense,” a way of experiencing the world that is qualitatively different than the way the lover experienced the world prior to the amorous encounter.\(^{228}\)

\(^{228}\) And of course, like any imagining, amorous imaginings always carry with them an impressional manifestation of the flesh as well.
Amorous imaginings appear somewhat differently when the Beloved is no longer given directly in experience. When the Beloved leaves the lover he still “sees” her, still envisions her. While he may not conjure images of her, he moves about the world with an impressional sense of her presence, which is given to him as an absence. The lover is alone and faced with a decision. In his deliberations he asks, “What would my Beloved say?” He is viewing a piece of art and wonders, “What would my Beloved think?” He meets someone new and considers, “Who is this person in relation to my Beloved?” In the Beloved’s absence the lover imagines the Beloved’s presence. And this sort of imagining is not limited to mundane occurrences. Indeed, the lover carries with him an impressional imagining of the Beloved’s perpetual absence which can manifest as a fear of her death. Because she is absent he wonders when she will once again be present. He wonders when she will return. He anticipates her presence in light of her absence. He imagines her present, but his imaginings are marked with an absence insofar as their ontological status is called into question. The Beloved imagined is not the Beloved given. Despite their creative force amorous imaginings cannot replace the Beloved’s givenness. A tension therefore emerges between presence and absence which pervades every aspect of the amorous imagination. The Beloved is not an object and is never fully present before the intending ego. The Beloved is irreducible and so her ultimate meaning is never fully disclosed. Distance and separation keep the lovers apart. The Beloved withdraws as much as she advances. She is present when she is absent and absent when she is present. The lover attempts to navigate this tension through the amorous imagination but amorous imaginings themselves manifest the very tension they try to address. Love is indeed a paradox.
D. Impossibility and Insufficiency

According to John Caputo, the “Enlightenment imposed certain restraints upon our thinking, certain ‘conditions of the possibility,’ to use Kant’s expression, which, like border police, mark off the boundaries and patrol the limits of possible experience[.].” Caputo continues:

A new Enlightenment would constitute a second childhood which is given over to dreaming to the impossible, arising from a deep desire for what, given the constraints and conditions imposed by modernity, is precisely not possible, which for that reason is precisely what we most deeply desire.

Descartes constrained knowledge to rationalism and the cogito. Kant set out the limits of the possibility of experience in his first Critique. And Husserl limited phenomenon to the constituting acts of the transcendental ego. But thinkers like Derrida and Marion contest these limits. They question the authority of reason; examine its underlying assumptions and its own limitations; challenge the self-grounding self; invite a discourse on language, narrative, and excess; ask: what do we make of our desire for the impossible which persists even in the face of the constraints laid down by modernity?

Derrida and Marion answer these questions from two angles. For Derrida, Husserl discovered the fact that signifiers can be empty of intuition and therefore are free to play and defer endlessly. In other words, Husserl discovered the possibility for the impossible fulfillment of intentionality (a kind of intentional emptiness or “blindness”). Impossibility is emptiness. This liberation of the signifier allowed Derrida to develop the program of

---


230 Ibid., 3.
deconstruction, which at its best takes seriously the desire we have for the impossible intuition which is yet to come: justice, messiah, etc. This represents for deconstruction a kind of theological turn of its own. Marion took the other route: there are at times too much intuition, there are phenomenon that exceed our intentions and appear as invisible or impossible. They saturate our conditions for experience itself. This degree of saturation calls into question all of western philosophy’s obsessions with ontotheology and opens the door to the impossible in phenomenology and theology.

Love flirts with the impossible in both the Derridian and Marionian senses. From a deconstructive point of view amorous imaginings are in some way “empty” signifiers. They do not adequately correspond to any specific intuition. The imagination’s power lies in its freedom from the as is, from perception or intuition. The lover can transform the world. But the imagination’s freedom can also be its limitation. Unrestrained imaginings can drift away, taken by the current of endlessly streaming reflections. They can mirror themselves and transform into an infinite play of parody rather than a hermeneutic response to a saturated phenomenon. And yet, amorous imaginings do reference the impossible. They signal to what is always yet-to-come. The Beloved is given as separate, distant, other. She is never fully “here” in the same way an object is “here” because intentionality cannot reach her, cannot constitute her. The Beloved exceeds the lover’s concepts. The lover imagines the Beloved’s presence but, as we have seen, love is always marked by absence. Therefore, the structure of love includes a desire for the impossible that is the Beloved, and the lover responds to the Beloved’s impossibility through the endless hermeneutic. All
amorous significations remain insufficient because of impossibility. Amorous imaginings signal a desire for the Beloved’s arrival, a yet-to-come which is never fully here.

From a phenomenological perspective amorous imaginings can be seen as the only adequate response to the excess of intuition given by the Beloved. The Beloved is impossible in a second sense: she gives too much. She exceeds the limits for the possibility of experience set down by Descartes, Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger. The Beloved’s saturating givenness saves amorous imaginings from endless deferral and empty signification because the Beloved does appear as a phenomenon. Indeed, from a phenomenological perspective the Beloved does arrive, but her arrival is too much, so much in fact that any signification or hermeneutic response is shown to be insufficient. No amount of amorous imagining can ever capture the Beloved as such. The Beloved cannot be said. She cannot be known. She cannot be fully described. The endless hermeneutic is never complete. The lover can never receive enough assurance of his own meaning expressed through love, nor can he ever provide enough assurance to the Beloved. Love is characterized by an excessiveness and an incomplete-ability. This excessiveness induces both anxiety and the call for more assurance (more below). The “I love you” is a pledge of eternity given in the present that is never fully realized and so must recur. The lover must repeatedly “love first.” The pledge takes shape in and through the creative space of the amorous imagination: the lover orbits around the grounding principle that is the Beloved, saying to her over and over again, “It is you. It has been and will always be you.” The
lover’s amorous imaginings always appear with a trace of insufficiency, with a sense of “not enough,” or as the Upanishads say, “neti, neti.”

One should not mistake a desire for the impossible or the insufficiency of amorous imaginings as the lover’s desire to know the Beloved or to merge with her. The desire for the impossible — both deconstructive or phenomenological — is a condition of love, not an epistemic impulse. In other words, the desire for the impossibility is a characteristic of the experience of love expressed through the endless hermeneutic. It is a structure of love revealed by a close examination of the amorous imagination. The amorous imagination’s activity demonstrates a desire for the impossible that animates or gives rise to amorous imaginings. But the lover’s desire for the impossible is not something the lover overcomes, nor does she desire to overcome it. Another paradox of love emerges: the desire for the impossible is a condition for the possibility of love itself.

**E. Castle-Building**

In his 1729 *Hibernicus’s Letters*, James Arbuckle discusses the free play of the imagination and its ability to construct a world that, although fleeting and somewhat subjective, contributes to both society and one’s own personal happiness. Though the imagination philosophers, artists, and historians explore the range of human possibility and sympathetically reach out to one another. Arbuckle calls this imaginative activity “castle-building” because of its ability to construct a world out of a milieu of experiences. Although not exactly the same, the amorous imagination engages in its own sort of castle-building.

---

231 “Not this, not this.”

As a phenomenon of alterity, the Other-as-Beloved is always advancing toward and retreating from the self-as-lover. Because the Other can never be known, through the creative, amorous imagination the lovers construct a word of meaning around each other and engage in an on-going hermeneutic, providing assurance to each other that each is meaningful to the other. A world of meaning emerges as a result of the Beloved’s givenness. Signification is always tied to the Beloved, even if indirectly. ‘Things’ take their meaning in reference to the Beloved. The lovers themselves become embodied symbols whose meaning is created though the play of the amorous imagination. The world references the Beloved and the Beloved gives rise to a new world. In other words, the amorous imagination works “on” the Beloved through romantic envisioning, but it also works “on” the world by constructing a castle of meaning and signification that “surrounds” the Beloved. But the castle is not a cage. It constantly opens up to new meaning, new possibility, to a new future that is always unfolding. The lover’s actions, his possessions, his experiences take their meaning from the fact of the irreducible phenomenon of the Beloved. The lover builds a castle of meaning around the Beloved. His world is constructed according to the Beloved’s presence in it. Indeed, she is its cornerstone.

F. Hidden Away

Insofar as the lovers receive and respond to each other through the amorous imagination they appear not fully part of the world of others, of community. Love occurs between lovers, not lovers and others. The interplay of the lovers’ amorous imaginings is “hidden-away” and there is an aspect of the phenomenon of love that is always secret and
withdrawn from all Others save this Other. Of course, love is not completely private. The expression of love is carried out in relationship with an Other who is in the world. Philosophers like Heidegger and Nancy point out that being-in-the-world is being-with-others. The lovers demonstrate their love before a community in their interactivity, their speech, their expressions, their shared flesh. And yet love is radically intimate. It is a society of Two. Amorous imaginings lie “in the eye of the beholder,” so to speak. Indeed, the amorous imagination constructs a hidden world shared only between the lovers. The lover cannot explain to his friend what draws him to the Beloved. He cannot do justice to the givenness of the Beloved. He babbles endlessly about her “qualities” or remains silent. Echoing Montaigne, the best explanation he can give regarding the cause of his love is simply, “because it is her, because it is me.” For Levinas, erotic intimacy precludes justice precisely because it closes off society, it neglects all others. And for Badiou, intimacy is a structure of the truth procedure of love: the lovers become militant with regard to their love. Their truth takes shape in the “Two scene” that inaugurates a new truth and testifies to an event. Both accounts recognize the hidden nature of love. Regardless of the ethical or procedural aspects of intimacy, from a phenomenological perspective the hidden nature of amorous imaginings suggests that love is not a phenomenon given communally. Amorous imaginings do not appear for non-lovers. The lover’s conduct may signal their love but it is always only between the lover and the Beloved.

G. Fidelity, Assurance, and Meaning

Amorous imaginings are an expression of fidelity to the Beloved. In *The Erotic Phenomenon*, Marion argues that final individuation comes in the form of the mutual oath
issued between the lovers. The pledge of fidelity temporalizes the erotic phenomenon and individuates the other-as-Beloved because it delivers an assurance of the erotic phenomenon that “lasts and imposes itself.” It signifies the unsubstitutability of the Beloved. One must not confuse love with Being. Marion’s insistence on fidelity at the end of the Erotic Phenomenon and his appeal to the adieu might be read as a reversion to metaphysics because at first glance he seems to appeal to Being, or at least the trace of Being. He claims that “faithfulness requires nothing less than eternity.”233 But he does not mean love must abide to be authentic. Love is not Being. Love can end and often does. The point is that the oath must express eternity in its saying. The lover cannot claim to love provisionally. She cannot agree to love for only a set amount of time. Amorous imaginings do not make love endure. They do not convert love into a thing, an abiding presence, or being. They attest. They hymn. They proclaim. The oath must be repeated. No single expression is enough to assure the Beloved of his individuation. “I love you” takes its meaning not only in what it says, but in its saying.

Amorous imaginings expand the various ways the lovers express the oath. Because no single expression can provide the lover enough assurance the lover’s amorous imaginings reveal a second fidelity: a faithfulness not to the abiding presence of love but to the creative project of love. The lover promises to engage the Beloved in the endless hermeneutic, to be faithful to the call of the saturating phenomenon. Lovers do fail, however. They are at times unfaithful. But infidelity does not render the love inauthentic or negate the prior affirmations. It is taken up as a part of the project of love that is riddled

233 Marion, The Erotic Phenomenon, 185.
with failures and creativity. In this way love is more akin to Derridean impossibility than to the phenomenological given. Enduring love is always yet-to-come. Loving and the activity of the amorous imagination signals toward an impossible love that endures over time, the love that can never be. But there’s the rub: the signaling is the love. It is Rumi’s *Love Dogs*. The lover must give her life to be one of them, to howl and assure, to whisper “you alone” and creatively respond to the excess of the Beloved that never becomes visible, that can never be known. Each moment of hermeneutic response, each amorous imagining is a moment of love. Love expressed through the amorous imagination is the now, the present gesture, the erotic caress, the “Look!” moment, the romantic envisioning, the child.

H. Haunted by Death

In “Amorous Illumination” we examined the power of the amorous imagination to re-temporalize the lovers’ experience of time according to the amorous event. The productive, narrative, and ontological functions of the amorous imagination allow the lover to constitute a new world, but that world is always marked by an anxiety and anticipation of the Beloved’s death. In Heideggerian terms, *Dasein* moves from being-toward-death to being-toward-love because without love *Dasein’s* life seems meaningless in the face of its own impending death. Amorous imaginings can take the form of imaginative projections. Lovers imagine their life together. They envision growing old. They recall past memories and relive them through the intimacy of conversation. They mark out a path together and aspire to achieve a certain life together. But all the while death is present in its absence. Amorous imaginings give themselves with a trace of mortality, of finality, and of finitude. Amorous imaginings appear as fragile possibilities, not adventurous projections. The
lovers know that their love is a wager, a risk that carries with it the ultimate loss: the loss of meaning; the loss of assurance; the loss of individuation and un substitutability. Amorous imaginings include the lover imagining the death of the Beloved and the end of love that comes with his passing. Of course, in one sense, the death of the Beloved is not an end to love because the lover can still express fidelity through the amorous imagination. But in another sense the creative project of love that is a shared project does indeed come to an end. The widow wonders what her life means after the Beloved has died. She does not know. She cannot provide her own meaning, it must come from without. Only the Beloved can provide it but he is gone. She may search for meaning in other activities, other people, or other concerns but nothing can replace the Beloved because nothing can replace his ability to imagine her as a Beloved. Amorous imaginings are haunted by death while at the same time giving meaning to life.

**AMOROUS INDIVIDUATION**

We return now to our original set of questions: How does *the* Other become *this* Other? How does the Other become the Beloved? How does love emerge? Through the encounter, the call, the response, and the endless hermeneutic. In short, through the amorous imagination. As Marion claims of all saturated phenomenon, the Beloved is shown in the lover’s response. The Other becomes the Beloved through a process of individuation that originates with the amorous encounter and is expressed in the on-going activity of the lovers’ interpretation. The lover receives the Beloved and shows her as such. The lover’s interpretation is an embodied phenomenon and an imaginative one. It arises in the world of thought and the world of flesh. It is affected by the world of things and imparts
its own affect upon the world. Through the amorous imagination the lover renders the Beloved unsubstitutable. But the hermeneutic is truly endless. The Beloved is *never fully individuated*. She is *always being individuated* through the creative activity of the amorous imagination. The amorous imagination is active at all times. We can see it at play in the lover’s passing glance, in the pleasure of the erotic moment, and in the anticipation of the Beloved’s death. The amorous imagination produces a new unity experience. It “crystallizes” the Beloved through romantic envisioning. It projects across a new time scape and horizon, reconstituting the self as lover and issuing a new wager of life-as-love and accepting the risk and vulnerability that emerges as a result of that exposure (hurt, betrayal, death, suffering, disharmony, resentment, frailty, etc.). It reinterprets the meaning of any subsequent event in light of the amorous event and the Beloved. It eroticizes and give meaning to the Beloved by reading across the thin veil of flesh. Marion is right to suggest that the crossing gazes, the lover’s advance, the flesh, the oath, and the *adieu* all contribute to the Beloved’s individuation. But he only hints at the evental nature of the Beloved and never mentions the role of the lover’s imagination in rendering the Beloved unsubstitutable. The amorous imagination is an essential aspect of how the Other becomes the Beloved. Without it love cannot emerge.
CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS ON LOVE & PHILOSOPHY

SYNOPSIS

Love has always been a bit of a mystery. Perhaps it will remain so and that’s why we find it fascinating. But one thing is for certain: love matters. It is among (if not the) most important experiences we have. Like other objects of philosophical inquiry such as reality, truth, beauty, or justice, love seems to evade totalizing systemization and yet it calls for rigorous analysis. There is a “there, there” but it is hard to put a finger on. Historically, philosophy has treated this enigmatic quality as something in need of dissection, classification, and clarification. Love is something we need to know. And with good reason: that is philosophy’s call, its aim. This study is no exception. But philosophy can obscure what it seeks to explicate. The traditional topology of eros, agape, and philia provide clear categorizes for analyzing love may distort its appearance by insisting that it speaks with many voices, that there are indeed several types of love. Are there? Or, as Marion argues in The Erotic Phenomenon, does love speak with one voice — the voice of the gift — manifesting in different domains but always with the same, non-reciprocal structure? Love’s univocality remains an open question. What I have attempted to show in this study is that when love does speak, it speaks imaginatively. Love is not reducible to imagination but the imagination plays a central role in love’s emergence. More precisely,
I have argued that through the amorous imagination the self-as-lover creatively responds to the saturating givenness of the Other-as-Beloved, individuating her and affirming the Beloved’s meaning by engaging in an endless hermeneutic.

I began with a discussion on method. While acknowledging the limitations of all method I also recognized the need to determine a method before engaging in my study. I provided thumbnail critiques of psychology, biology, cultural theory, and a handful of other methods before settling on phenomenology. Phenomenology, I argued, is best-suited for a philosophical analysis of love because it allows love to “speak for itself.” Phenomenology insists on rigorous descriptions of phenomenon as they appear without limiting them to predetermined categories. Of course, phenomenology is beholden to language, consciousness, and description itself and so like any other method it is not free from bias. Still, it presents the best methodological option for an analysis of love and the imagination because it avoids reductionism. It does not insist that love is the byproduct of some underlying structure, drive, or complex chemical reaction. I critiqued love’s traditional topology and identified Romanticism as a watershed moment that opens onto new possibilities because of the way in which the Romantics took seriously the power of the imagination. I then discussed different types of phenomenologies, starting with Husserl and working through Heidegger, Levinas, Ricœur, and Marion. I concluded my discussion on method by demonstrating how when Romanticism and phenomenology cross they provide fertile ground to examine the relationship between love, individuation, and the imagination.
Next, I provided a brief history of the imagination in order to orient the reader and explain the different ways philosophers have conceived of the imagination. Relying on Abram’s famous metaphor of “the mirror and the lamp,” I traced the evolution of the imagination through various historical epochs, beginning with Plato and building to Hume and Kant. Plato and Hume, I argued, viewed the imagination as an image-making faculty. It reproduces images of images or sensations. Kant, however, thought the imagination was much more powerful. Kant observed that, in addition to its mimetic function, the imagination has a productive function. Through it the transcendental subject synthesizes sensation into a unity of experience. The imagination is the foundation for knowledge.

Next, I argued that the Romantics extended Kant’s insight as far as it could go, in some cases deifying the imagination for its creative prowess. Avoiding caricatures of Romantic thinkers, however, I took a “deep dive” into three Romantics (Novalis, Stendhal, and Shelley) to provide case studies of how the Romantic saw the imagination as a creative-responsive faculty that, while truly inventive, remained accountable to that which actually appears in experience. The creative imagination is not delusion, fancy, or make believe. I also highlighted what I called “early examples” of the amorous imagination. The Romantics were perhaps the first thinkers to explicitly recognize the central role the imagination plays in bring love about. But the Romantics could not escape the logic of Being and too often conflated love with the One, insisting that the most amorous experience is the experience of metaphysical merging. Like courtly love, Romantic love carried with it the trace of death. I concluded my historical survey with a description of Ricœur’s
semantic imagination and the important role of language in meaning-making, before briefly touching on post-modern theories of the imagination.

I explicated Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology before turning to a close reading of *The Erotic Phenomenon*. I used the debate between Marion and Levinas regarding individuation as an entry point into the broader question of love. While I agreed with most scholars that Marion’s critique of Levinas on individuation is a misreading of Levinas, I maintained that Marion’s deeper question about the emergence of love and the Other’s conversion into the Beloved is quite significant and worth examining. I then turned to Marion’s phenomenology of givenness and the saturated phenomenon, analyzing their implications for a phenomenology of love and the imagination. Tracing the theme of individuation through Marion’s *The Erotic Phenomenon*, I argued that, while compelling, his description of love does not fully explain the role of hermeneutics and imagination in individuating the Other-as-Beloved. Marion’s phenomenology emphasizes the lover’s advance as the inaugural moment of love rather than the Beloved’s saturating givenness. While this emphasis preserves the idea that love has a non-reciprocal structure (because the lover must step forward first, without the expectation of return), it conceals the evental nature of the amorous encounter and the Beloved’s appearance as a saturated phenomenon. I then traced Marion’s individuation argument through the flesh to its ultimate expression in the *adieu*. I concluded that Marion’s phenomenology of love is compelling and demonstrates the deep insights a phenomenology of love can yield. And yet, *The Erotic Phenomenon* is missing some key descriptions, particularly regarding hermeneutics and the imagination’s role in individuating the Beloved.
My argument then took a generative turn. I attempted a phenomenological account of love that takes seriously its imaginative and hermeneutical dimensions. Drawing from Marion’s theory of l’adonné and Romantic theories of the creative imagination, I argued that love begins with an amorous event which gives itself as a saturated phenomenon and happens to the lover. The amorous even emphasizes the Beloved’s givenness rather than the lover’s advance, as well as the evental nature of love as a phenomenon. The amorous event is marked by an encounter, a call, a response, and distance and separation. It is also an embodied phenomenon that happens in and to the flesh. The encounter is an event that upends the lover’s pre-existing world. The event has a hermeneutic structure insofar as the event “lands” upon the lover who already has a pre-constructed “nest” of meanings which the event overturns. Moreover, the lover must then reconfigure her world in light of the amorous event, revealing another hermeneutic dimension to love. Like any Other, the Beloved appears as an ethical injunction but the injunction is accompanied by something more: the erotic call. The call shows itself in the lover’s response to the call, which is hermeneutical through and through. The lover identifies the saturated phenomenon as the Beloved and in doing so interprets her. A third hermeneutic dimension emerges: the Beloved’s alterity brings with it an experience of distance and separation that must be “read across” but not collapsed. Through the embodied imagination the lovers seek to understand (but not to know) each other and engage in an endless hermeneutic.

I concluded my study by sketching out the contours of a phenomenology of the amorous imagination. While my description was far from exhaustive, I tried to provide a detailed enough account to unpack the way in which the amorous imagination functions in
individuating the Other-as-Beloved. I observed three aspects of the amorous imagination. First, I described its transcendental activities; that is, the ways in which the imagination functions as a lamp that “illuminates” the world through its synthetic power. The amorous imagination has a productive dimension insofar as it produces a new world from the inventory of meanings that are upended by the amorous event. The amorous imagination has a narrative dimension evidenced by the lover’s ability to reconstitute her self through her imaginative projections that always in some way signal toward the amorous event. She attests to her self through a new plot, a new story that finds its meaning in relation to the Beloved’s givenness. The amorous imagination has an ontological dimension. Through it the lover’s experiences of being and time become grounded in the Beloved’s life and death. In light of the amorous event, the lover moves from being-toward-death to being-toward-love. The amorous imagination reconfigures time according to the horizon of the Beloved. I then argued that the amorous imagination is a special case of the imagination’s unique mode of consciousness. The amorous imagination intends in the as if but is not completely untethered from the as is. The amorous imagination responds to the Beloved and is therefore tied to her appearance. Moreover, the amorous imagination is an embodied activity. Its projections, synthesis, and images occur in the flesh of the lovers, affecting and effecting the world in which they live. This intertwining between the world of imagination and the world of flesh reveals another phenomenological dimension of the amorous imagination: it produces an impressional affectivity in the lover such that she is aware of her intended imagining, that she is imaging, and that her imagining happens in the flesh. And what captures the imagination captures the flesh. The two cannot be abstracted apart.
Finally, I looked at amorous imaginings themselves as phenomenon that call for detailed description. I looked at a number of features of amorous imaginings, such as envisioning, reading across distance, presence and absence, insufficiency, etc., to explain the way in which amorous imaginings give themselves in such a way that they contribute to the Beloved’s individuation in their very appearance. I concluded my argument by answering the original question: How does the Other become the Beloved? My answer, in short, is that individuation happens in large part through the on-going activity of the amorous imagination.

**THE DARK SIDE OF THE AMOROUS IMAGINATION**

Romanticism is often critiqued for its at times outlandish claims about the power of poetry, imagination, and myth to reinvent the world. The bigger-than-life personalities of Romantics like Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Friedrich Schlegel did little to counteract these claims. But it is important not to ignore or dismiss their ideas simply because some of them were a bit extreme. Take the imagination, for example. It is true: many Romantics deified the imagination or at least viewed it as the primary vehicle for attaining divinity. Through it, they argued, we can fuse with the Absolute and reach human perfection. Critics of Romanticism claim the “perfectibility thesis” amounts to a “confusion of orders” that fails to appreciate the objective distinctions between nature and “the standards that govern reality.” Romantics are also criticized for the political

---


235 Ibid., 2.
indecisiveness that accompanied their primary concern with subjective expression. Carl Schmitt argued in *Politische Romantik*, that the “root of romantic sublimity is the inability to make a decision.” 236 Citing Novalis’s claim that reality is but “the start of an unending novel,” Schmitt concluded that political romanticism was a contradiction in terms and that Romanticism’s so-called obsession with the imagination resulted in unprincipled commitments and a lot of chatter. 237 These sorts of criticisms are not without merit but they tend to over-state the case and in doing so paint a caricature of a rather sophisticated theory of the imagination. Sadly, Schmitt-style critiques still hold purchase today and many post-modern thinkers (in an age “after” God) banish Romantic theory to the backwaters of metaphysics or trivialize its contributions by historicizing and dismissing their claims. But we must not move from one extreme to the other. We can take seriously the dark side of the imagination and in analyzing its aspects refine our understanding of the imagination without relegating it to fancy. It is no secret that love under the sway of the imagination can take an ugly turn. Literature is replete with mad lovers lost in the tempestuous seas of their own passion. But where does it all go wrong? At what point does the amorous imagination become solipsism, delusion, or narcissism? We turn again to phenomenology for the answers.

**A. Solipsism**

Husserl’s phenomenology can be understood as a certain kind of Cartesianism. On his account, the transcendental ego aims its intentionality at intuition, constituting objects

---


in the world. The mind is the primary agent. Through it the subject comes to know the world. While it is true that Husserl paid close attention to the flesh and its relationship to the mind, his emphasis was clearly on the transcendental ego’s structure and the role it plays in allowing for the possibility of scientific knowledge. To that end, Husserl has been accused of solipsism, or at least an inability to fully escape critiques of solipsism in light of his account to the transcendental ego. The problem of solipsism arises any time there is a categorical distinction between mind and body or subject and object.\textsuperscript{238} Although I have tried to demonstrate throughout this work that such a distinction is misplaced and mischaracterizes the way the amorous imagination operates, the danger of solipsism lurks in the background for the lover who fails to see that amorous imaginings are only amorous insofar as they are accountable to the given Beloved.

Amorous imaginings become solipsistic when they become completely untethered from what appears. The imagination finds both its greatest strength and greatest weakness in its ability to engage the \textit{as if}. Structurally, the amorous imagination is untethered to perception. Once the imagination has its content it does not need perception to engage in the free play of images, to access eidetic truths. This was Husserl’s initial insight into the imagination as its own mode of consciousness. But imaginings are not completely unmoored from perception insofar as they do draw their content from what the self perceives. The \textit{as if} is a creative response to the \textit{as is}. Imaginings are not pure fancy. They appear in relationship to the world. But they can become pure fancy when they totally disengage from the given (to use Marion’s term) and make reference only to other

\textsuperscript{238} Whether Husserl made such a distinction is up for debate, but some critics do read him this way.
imaginings. Lost in a labyrinth of mirrors, amorous imaginings that no longer look to what is given to make their meaning get lost in their own free play and become solipsistic fantasies. The lover is blind to the Beloved, seeing only his own visions of her, not her as she appears. Indeed, in the case of solipsism the Beloved is no longer a participant in the call and response of the amorous event. The lover responds only to himself. He is no longer accountable to the Beloved as saturated phenomenon. He no longer engages in the endless hermeneutic. Untethered from all phenomena save his own imaginings, the lover becomes lost in his own visions. He can no longer envision romantically. To avoid solipsism the lover must always respond to the given, to the Beloved as saturated phenomenon. The amorous imagination is a creative-responsive power. It creates in the *as if* but it responds to the *as is*. The two are interconnected. Like Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the visible and the invisible, amorous imaginings must interact with the visible, they must draw from and descend into the world as it appears. And the world of things moves into the world of thought through he imagination, influencing it, animating it, and inspiring it. The same intertwining that marks the psyche’s flesh’s relationship to the flesh marks the lover’s relationship to the Beloved. In order to become a lover one must imagine the Beloved and not become lost one’s own imagination.

**B. Delusion**

Recall that for Marion, the endless hermeneutic is the proper interpretive response to the saturated phenomenon. Because the saturated phenomenon is given with an excess of intuition it cannot be reduced to an object. However, *l’adonné* can misinterpret the saturated phenomenon, mistaking it for a common phenomenon. *L’adonné* can attempt to
bring an intention adequate to the intuition, although ultimately any adequation will fail. Recall also that the given gives itself anonymously. It is only in the given’s reception that it is identified as God, Being, Other, or Beloved. In phenomenalizing the given l’adonné identifies it. The call of the given is shown in l’adonné’s response. The self bears up against the given and in resisting it phenomenalizes it. In chapters 4 and 5 I argued that the lover shows the Beloved by receiving him and responding to him through the endless hermeneutic. The Beloved appears as a saturated phenomenon. He exceeds all intention. The proper response to the Beloved is not knowledge but understanding. It is the endless hermeneutic. By receiving and responding to the Beloved the lover shows him as such. Love emerges. But like l’adonné, the lover can misapprehend the Beloved. She can mistake him for a common law phenomenon and try to render him an object (of desire). She can seek mastery over him. But her attempts lead only to delusion. She either persists in her phenomenological futility or else convinces herself that she has indeed captured the Beloved in objectness. Neither amounts to love.

Delusion threatens in a second way. Not all Others issue the erotic call. Because the amorous event itself arrives as a saturated phenomenon it escapes causal explanation. But it is nevertheless true that some Others are silent while other Others beckon. We cannot say why, only that it is the case. When the would-be lover misidentifies the injunction for the call he misapprehends the given for an amorous phenomenon that does not actually appear. The would-be lover is wrong. The Other is not the Beloved. She does not beckon him to step forward, and yet in his delusion he does. The lover responds to the injunction as though it is a call and in interpreting it as such fails to appropriately respond to the
saturated phenomenon. He is faced with a choice: insist that the injunction is the call and engage his imagination hermeneutically with the hopes that Beloved emerges, or accept the injunction and await the call from another Other. In the first case, the would-be lover’s advance may never identify a Beloved. It may either dissolve or persist. If it persists, delusion appears in the form of the self-in-denial: the would-be lover roams about like a fool, listening for a call the never comes. He imaginatively projects onto Others a call which they do not issue. He deludes himself into thinking - through his own imaginings - that the call can be heard without making reference to the phenomenon itself. Again, we see the ontological function of the imagination at play: absent love the self is being-toward-death, its own death, and yet it yearns to orient itself around the life of another, around the life of the Beloved.

C. Idolatry and Narcissism

In *In Excess*, Jean-Luc Marion describes the way in which what he calls “idols” saturate according to quality. Marion’s uses the term “idol” with different inflections throughout the course of his thinking. In some works, idols refer to ideas or concepts caught up in metaphysics. To create an idol of an idea is to claim that it serves an ontotheological purpose, that it is a grounding principle. Marion’s use of the term in these cases strikes a critical tone. But in other works, such as *Idol and Distance*, Marion develops his idea of the idol to a fuller degree, nuancing it in order to demonstrate the way idols (and icons) function as their own mode of seeing. Idols are not inauthentic or false; rather, they reflect the desires of the devotee in all their fullness. As always, Marion’s descriptions are phenomenological. The viewer’s gaze roves about the given looking for something that
interests it. When it encounters the idol, the idol saturates the gaze completely. It dazzles the viewer, capturing her attention. It provides “an exact measure of what the gaze can bear.” The idol corresponds precisely to the viewer’s vision of the divine and, in doing so, like a mirror, reflects the viewer’s desires back at her. Idolatry occurs because it makes a god of the idolater.

Amorous imaginings can become idolatrous and convert what may have been an endless hermeneutic into narcissism. When the lover becomes fascinated by his own imaginings rather than what is given in excess he runs the risk of becoming an idolater. Disconnected from what appears, the imaginings no longer reflect the Beloved but the lover’s own desires. He “sees” only what he wants to see, the Beloved appears only on the lover’s terms, according to what his gaze can bear. The Beloved is in a sense “constrained” or even masked over insofar as the lover’s imaging ins take the place of her givenness. Indeed, it is not the Beloved that becomes the idol, but the lover’s image of her. The lover imagines her to be something that she is not: she is not only what he desires but more, and yet rather than her givenness his imaginings capture his gaze and limits her to his own desires. In reflecting the lover’s gaze back to himself amorous imaginings are no longer amorous. They are narcissistic. They are vivid, dazzling, and captivating images, but they are not accountable to the given. They speak only of the lover’s desires, not of the Beloved. Like with solipsism and delusion, the amorous imagination avoids narcissism when it remains both creative and responsive to the Beloved’s givenness and does not become

---

239 Gschwandtner, Marion and Theology, 32.

completely unmoored and set adrift in the *as if*. Amorous imaginings are not fancy, fantasy, or idealization. They are a creative-responsive hermeneutic.

**D. Violence**

Many Romantics championed the sympathetic power of the imagination. Through the imagination the poet could represent to himself the feelings of another. He could imaginatively transform himself into the Other in what Novalis called an act of “spiritual mimesis.” But sympathy gave way to merging. Not only could the poet imaginatively recreate the Other’s experiences, he could metaphysically unify with the Other through the imagination’s capacity to dissolve distinctions. According to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “[l]ove is a desire of the whole being to be united to some thing, or some being, felt necessary to its completeness, by the most perfect means that nature permits, and reason dictates.”

Coleridge argued that all ideals, even religious ones, issue from a search for union between male and female. The goal of philosophy was the idealization of ever-increasing totalities: “in everything the blending of the similar with the dissimilar is the secret of all pure delight.” The ecstasy of oneness runs throughout the grand corpus of Romantic literature. For many Romantics, the quest for the Absolute, a quest made possible by the power of the imagination, culminated in a collapse of difference, in a union of the Other with the Same.

---


The desire for oneness expressed by the Romantics is an old mythology. It originates with Plato and still dominates modern concepts of love. Popular culture is replete with references to “two becoming one” and lovers uniting under the stars or before a congregation. But the Romantic ideal of metaphysical merging is not without its critics (I am among them). A desire to collapse the distance and separation between self and Other — between lover and Beloved — can become a sort of ontological violence. As Levinas warns and I have echoed, reducing the Other to the Same, and totalizing all difference amounts to a denial of the radical alterity that marks the Other as such. To insist that the Other merge with me, that he fit into a totalizing system, that he ceases enjoining me and comport with my own demands, is to violate the nature of the Other as difference. Or to put it in Marionian terms, to mistake the saturated phenomenon for a common phenomenon and (attempt to) reduce her to an object is to misapprehend the Beloved and construct an idol. When the lover demands that the Beloved join with him and deny the distance and separation that is the space for the endless hermeneutic he in effect demands the dissolution of love itself. Distance and separation must remain precisely because the Beloved is an Other and the space of alterity is the space of possibility: it is the site of the free play of love as the lovers seek to understand (hermeneutics) but never to know (epistemology) one another. The desire for merging betrays the very conditions that make love possible. The imagination can become a tool for violence when it becomes a means to insist on oneness over difference. But not all sympathy is violent. There is a balance to be struck. The amorous imagination need not go so far as to insist on unity in the lover’s attempt to understand the Beloved. The lover can through her imaginative projections mirror or
attempt to simulate in herself the Beloved’s experiences without totalizing him. We must be careful not to overstate our critique of the Romantics. Moreover, the lover can sympathetically “reach out” to the Beloved in a gentle act of concern rather than a violent act of dissolution. After all, she cares about him. The point is that the amorous imagination is not always violent when through it the lovers attempt to share an experience. It only becomes so when the lover uses it as a medium to destroy the very distance that enables love to flourish.

E. Death

But what if the desire to merge is mutual? What if it is not just the lover’s desire to merge with the Beloved but both the lover and the Beloved seek union? In Love in the Western World, Denis de Rougemont asks this very question, and provides a chilling answer:

The love of love itself has concealed a far more awful passion, a desire altogether unavowable, something that could only be ‘betrayed’ by means of symbols such as that of the drawn sword and that of perilous chastity. Unawares and in spite of themselves, the lovers have never had but one desire – the desire for death! [...] In the innermost recesses of their hearts they have been obeying the fatal dictates of a wish of death; they have been in the throes of the active passion of Darkness.244

Although in this passage Rougemont is describing courtly love as ultimately a desire for desire itself (“the love of love”), his observation is germane to the broader idea of love as a desire for metaphysical merging. In short, phenomenologically speaking, the lovers’ mutual desire to merge into one phenomenon constitutes a sort of “death-wish” insofar as

244 Rougemont, Love in the Western World, 46 (emphasis in original).
the desire is a desire for the annihilation of a separate self. The death-wish of mutual desire is a variation on Levinasian violence: the lovers seek the experience of union which is itself an experience of dissolution. To the extent the amorous imagination plays a part in the lovers’ “active passion of Darkness” it is a mechanism of death. While a full analysis of the relationship between love and death is outside the scope of the current study, it is important to note that the imagination’s creative and sympathetic capacity can manifest as a desire to dissolve into oneness in such a way that it carries the mark of death, if not literally, at least metaphorically.

The power of the amorous imagination to foment the death-wish is intensified and more dangerous when the desire is experienced only by the lover.\textsuperscript{245} Take Werther, for example. In\textit{ The Sorrows of Young Werther}, Goethe explores the tragedy of the lover lost in the throes of the death-wish. The novel is composed of a series of letters written by the young artist Werther recounting his growing passion for Charlotte, a beautiful woman engaged to a suitor eleven years her elder. While Charlotte’s feelings for Werther remain ambivalent throughout the novel (we only ever get Werther’s side of the story), Werther’s desire to be with Charlotte eventually overwhelms him with suffering and he sees one solution to his dilemma: he must die. In a pathetic scene of romantic excess Werther attempts suicide but botches the job, causing a slow and painful death. Charlotte does not attend his funeral. Throughout the text we see Werther’s passions escalate, gaining more

\begin{footnote}
I use the terms “amorous” and “lover” loosely here. As we have seen, phenomenologically speaking, the lover ceases to be a lover when he mistakes the injunction for the call of the Beloved.
\end{footnote}
and more momentum as they drive him toward his fated end. But to what end? Werther’s sad story exemplifies the dangers of the amorous imagination when it is taken by all of its darker aspects: solipsism, delusion, narcissism, idolatry, and violence. This is no trivial thing. The imagination can indeed, as David Hume warned, “interfuse and combine passions with ideas,” leaving us at the whim of imaginative impressions that seems to carry more force than the original sense impressions from which they were derived. The Beloved can capture the imagination, but the imagination can also capture the lover.

One could spend an entire career exploring the relationship between love and death, but we end our discussion here, with a final, phenomenological observation and a final paradox. Death is the phenomenon that never appears. Death never gives itself to the self. The death never experiences its non-being. Death is beyond experience because, as Epicurus reminds us, when I am here, death is not; and when death is here, I am not. And yet death is always present in its absence. To the extent that it does appear it appears as a haunting, to use Derrida’s term, a phantom that lurks in the background of Being. But the death of the Beloved does appear for the lover, or at least it can appear. Unlike my own death, the death of the Beloved is a possible given. I can experience the world without her. As we have seen, the possibility of the appearance of the Beloved’s death reorients the lover’s sense of time and ontology. But for Werther neither love nor death would appear. Like his own death, love would not give itself to him. Love appeared only as an absence, as a haunting. Love and death are given as the same phenomenon in their non-appearance. And so Werther, or the lover for whom the amorous call never issues, experiences a world without meaning, a world that can only resolve itself in one way. Werther can think of only
one way to resolve the paradox. He must make appear what can never appear: his own death.

**Future Lines of Inquiry**

Like the Beloved, the philosophy of love seems to be inexhaustible. I conclude by highlighting a handful of trajectories one might pursue in light of the current study and mark out some lines of inquiry for future projects. First, hermeneutics. Thanks to the groundbreaking work of Richard Kearney, there remains much more to be said about carnal hermeneutics and the relationship between flesh, imagination, and meaning-making as love “plays itself out” over time. How do the lovers negotiate the balance that must be maintained between distance and separation, between Other and Same? How does the lovers’ dialogue, which speaks in and through flesh, provide not only hermeneutical understanding but also existential orientation to their world? Theological questions abound: How does a phenomenology of human love contribute to our understanding of divine love? If God is love, and love implicates the amorous imagination, what does it mean to seek God, envision God, or experience God? Historical and literary questions emerge as well. If there are indeed universal conditions for the possibility of love, one of which is the amorous imagination, how can we make sense of the incredible variety of amorous expressions we find throughout the world and throughout history? Any number of historical or literary epochs invite more specialized study. What images of the divine feminine emerge in Romantic literature and what have they to do with the imagination? How do the songs and poems of Twelfth century troubadours express the lovers’ movement between distance and separation? How does the post-modern idea of imagination-as-
mimetic parody challenge our experience of love as a fundamentally imaginative and hermeneutical enterprise? How can we reclaim the imagination without deifying it (Romanticism) or becoming cynical toward it (post-modernism)? Can we recover the power of the imagination in a world that always seems void of meaning? Can the amorous imagination avoid the pitfalls of both radical idealism and radical materialism? The questions seem endless. Indeed, there is much more to be said about love.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Ihde, Don, Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, Evanston:


----- *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh:


----- *Givenness & Hermeneutics (Pere Marquette Lectures in Theology)*, Marquette University Press, 2013


