



Virgil W. Brower

Ethics is a Gustics: Phenomenology, Gender, and Oral Sexuality (from 'Entre Nous' to 'Lèvres Nous')

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Abstract: The 'traditional philosophical prestige' of seeing and touching, as analyzed by Emmanuel Levinas, comes to dominate the qualities of the other three senses. An investigation of the roles of these prestigious senses, along with the resultant privileged sense-organs of the hand and the eye, within phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and gender- or queer-theory suggests that the part of the prestige of touch will have been related to its function in the phenomenality of feeling. Yet the sense of taste seems to be as applicable, if not more so, to the phenomenal experience of selfhood based on feeling as theorized by Edmund Husserl and Jean-Luc Marion. The tongue, rather than the hand, is reconsidered as a sense-organ of touch in order to salvage the all but lost tang of the tangible. As such, the tongue and taste not only illuminate the shortcomings of binary gender theories based on either inner feeling or outer surface anatomy (or, either interior orifices or exterior appendages), but further discover a remarkable phenomenology of the body to be found in the writings of Hélène Cixous and Monique Wittig that moves beyond certain masculine tendencies lurking about the hand and observation (as described by Freud and Butler). The phenomenal experience of the other that yields either empathy (for Husserl), love/eros (for Marion), or hearing and heeding 'Thou shall not kill' (for Levinas) has much to learn from the orality of women's writing. The third body, as written by Cixous, can experience the self as selftaste (as considered by Derrida) and experiences the other as the taste of the other. It is, thereby, opened to a love or a justice (or an erotic justice) beyond the proclamation of Levinas that 'ethics is an optics' as well as any ethics as a mere haptics to be found in Husserl or Marion, where feeling seems always determined by the hand.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Body, Ethics, Orality, Sexuality, Kissing, Taste, Senses, Oral Sex

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Ethics is a Gustics: Phenomenology, Gender, and Oral Sexuality (from ‘*Entre Nous*’ to ‘*Lèvres Nous*’)¹

Virgil W. Brower (Chicago State University; Northwestern University; The Chicago Theological Seminary, USA)

§1. Tangibility of the Same: *Entre Nous*

‘But now you have become just as foolish...with your notion that you must handle the sacrament...by touching the sacrament with your hands...’

Martin Luther²

‘He saw by feel alone now...’

William Faulkner³

In *Totality and Infinity* (1961), Emmanuel Levinas addresses ‘the traditional philosophical prestige⁴ of vision and touch, which reserves ‘a transcendental function for visual and tactile qualities, and leave to qualities coming from other senses only the role of adjectives clinging to the visible and touched object’. An ‘object disclosed’ or any ‘phenomenon, is the visible or touched object’. The objectivity of any object is ‘found in the perspectives of vision or the movement of *the hand* that palpates’. Note the hand of Levinas as it writes of touch. He states that the ‘interpretation of experience on the basis of vision and touch is not due to chance and can go so far as to expand into a civilization’.⁵ The civilization of traditional Western philosophy, which I wish to call into question through the works of Monique Wittig and Hélène Cixous, is the civilization of the eye and the hand; a civilization of surveillance, watchmen, and handlers, which — as all civilizing projects — feels its way into the bedroom, leaving in its wake an erotics based on either the groping of the hand or what Judith Butler calls the ‘masculine observational point of view’.⁶

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² ‘The Eight Wittenberg Sermons’, trans. by A. Steimle, *Works of Martin Luther*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 413.

³ *Light in August* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 121.

⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 189

⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 63.

In his own unique and highly qualified way, Levinas opts (it is one of his tics) for ‘the privilege of vision’ because it seems less prone to efface the void and distance between (*entre*) seer and seen or between us (*entre nous*). Vision, he writes, ‘has over touch the privilege of maintaining the object in this void and receiving it always from this nothingness as from an origin, whereas in touch nothingness is manifested to the free movement of palpation’. One can actually see ‘the void of openness’ between self and other — ‘something *seen*’⁷ — whereas one cannot, perhaps, touch or feel the space between. This ‘schema of vision’, as he describes it, ‘ranges from Aristotle to Heidegger’.⁸

Yet between Aristotle and Heidegger — *entre eux* — is Edmund Husserl (whose work Levinas knows better than most), who makes quite the opposite point in §18 of *Ideas* II. Whereas for Levinas ‘touch resembles vision’⁹, by which ‘vision moves into grasp’ and ‘invites the hand to movement and contact’,¹⁰ for Husserl, vision is touch, and sight is contact. He writes that ‘if the sense of sight...yielded only hazy contours, while the sense of touch provided sharp and more subtle differentiations, then the seen form would indeed “coincide” with the touched, but the touched would acquire priority’.¹¹ It is the form of an object as touched and not the sense of touch, itself, that has this priority. But the point is that ‘visually, the world is not continually given; that is rather a privilege of the sense of touch.’¹² In a world of mere watchmen and seers, the world would no longer be given should the lights go out. Thus, ‘the sense of touch always plays its part, as it is indeed obviously privileged amongst the contributors to the constitution of the thing’.¹³ (A ‘very old thought’, Jacques Derrida might add, ‘that seeing and hearing come back to touch at a distance’.)¹⁴ As such, for Husserl, ‘the entire surface of the Body serves as a touch surface, and the Body itself as a series of touch organs.’¹⁵

⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 190.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Book 2, *Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Springer, 1989), p. 73.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 75. A ‘very old thought’, Jacques Derrida might add, ‘that seeing and hearing come back to touch at a distance’.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, ‘Telepathy’, trans. Nicholas Royle in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, Volume 1 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 236.

¹⁵ Husserl, *Ideas* II, p. 73.

Both Husserl and Levinas choose their respective sides of the touch-sight divide in order to support their respective experiential reductions and advances in phenomenology. One of Husserl's great advances is the corporealization of the apperception of the self. Since René Descartes, the I has been, arguably, confined to the incorporeal experience of thinking. This would be the incorporeal and theoretical act of thinking the *cogito*, the self-reflection of thinking oneself, and the experience one experiences while thinking, specifically, the thought: I think therefore I am. Husserl incarnates or embodies this experience in his reduction to the *lived-body* and the distinction he makes between *Körper* and *Leib*.

The experience of touching any and all physical bodies in the world is the same experience; that of touching something not-self. This is the experience of touching a physical object — a thing — a *Körper*. Something different or other is experienced when one touches oneself whereby one moves beyond merely physical touching to the experience of feeling. As he explains in §44 of *Cartesian Meditations* (1931),

Touching kinesthetically, I perceive 'with' my hands [*Ich nehme, mit den Händen kinästhetisch tastend*¹⁶]; seeing kinesthetically, I perceive also 'with' my eyes [*mit den Augen ebenso sehend usw.*]...I 'can' perceive one hand 'by means of' the other [*daß ich jeweils mittelst der einen Hand die andre*], an eye by means of a hand [*mittelst einer Hand ein Auge usw. wahrnehmen kann*], and so forth a procedure in which the functioning organ must become an Object and the Object a functioning organ [*wobei fungierendes Organ zum Objekt und Objekt zum fungierenden Organ werden muß*]. And it is the same in the case...with my animate organism itself [*Leiblichkeit selbst*]...which therefore is reflexively related to itself also in *practice* [*auch praktisch*].¹⁷

¹⁶ I would, of course, have liked to inscribe this entire essay around the complicated etymological history that yields the trace of a 'taste-' in the German verb 'to touch' [*tasten*]. In fact, you can't be sure that I'm not doing that. This would have everything to do with the legacy by which both the 'tangible' and 'tangibility', on the one hand, as well as 'tang', 'tangy', or 'tanginess' on the other hand [if it's possible to think an 'other-hand' worthy of the words], derive from the Latin verb 'to touch' [*tangere*]. To spell tangibility with a 'y' (as I will do below) is to retrieve the tangy aspect of touching — that is, a touching beyond the hand, alone: touching with one's tongue — which seems all but lost in the-civilization-of-the-hand-and-the-eye and the respective phenomenologies of Levinas and Husserl. Tangibility may be to the thing, the object, or the physical body as tangybility is to the *Leib* or the flesh as it would be impossible to experience one's *Leib* without also experiencing what Derrida calls (responding to J. Hillis Miller's reading of Gerard Manley Hopkins) one's 'selftaste'. Jacques Derrida, 'Justices' *Critical Inquiry* 31:3 (Spring 2005), pp. 698-9.

¹⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1999), p. 97; emphasis added. *Husserliana*, Band 1. *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 128; lines 13-14; 21-27; emphasis added.

Beyond the *theoretical* reflexivity of Descartes, Husserl posits a *practical* reflexivity. *Körper* is the experience of touching any external object. But the experience of *Leib* (often translated as ‘flesh’ or ‘living body’: here, ‘animate organism’) is feeling-oneself-felt by oneself; feeling one’s hand or eye with one’s own hand, which is feeling feeling, itself; feeling the capacity to feel. As seen in Levinas, when dealing with the sense of touch, in this section from *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl, also, is all hands. As such, the privileged Husserlian sense is the sense of touch.¹⁸

In his 1925-1926 logic lectures, Martin Heidegger mentions that ‘Husserl himself learned a great deal, both positively and negatively, from [John Stuart] Mill’,¹⁹ specifically, Mill’s *A System of Logic*, which Heidegger claims had ‘a very strong influence on Germany in the nineteenth century’.²⁰ It is in his *Logic* that Mill discusses the great perversity of conflating touching with feeling.

A Feeling and a State of Consciousness are, in the language of philosophy, equivalent expressions: everything is a feeling of which the mind is conscious; everything which it *feels*...In popular language Feeling is not always synonymous with State of Consciousness; being often taken more peculiarly for those states which are conceived as belonging to the sensitive, or to the emotional...*The still greater perversion* by which *Feeling is sometimes confined* not only to the bodily sensations, but *to the sensations of a single sense, that of the sense of touch*, needs not to be more particularly adverted to. Feeling, in the proper sense of the term, is a genus, of which Sensation, Emotion, and Thought, are subordinate species. Under the word Thought is here to be included whatever we are internally conscious of when we are said to think; from the consciousness we have when we think of a red colour without having it before our eyes...Be it remembered, however, that by a thought is to be understood what passes in the mind itself, and *not any object external to the mind*.²¹

¹⁸ Those familiar with Husserl’s writings may be inclined to think that he privileges *seeing* above all. Though it is almost destined to further obfuscate rather than clarify, a discussion, such as this, must address Husserl’s constant and nuanced use of the German verb *schauen*: to see. The way by which the immanent and apperceptive consciousness ‘sees’ has nothing to do with optic visibility. Heidegger explains that ‘Husserl puts the word “seeing” in quotes...because he meant the word in a fundamentally broad sense, and not as limited to visual sight’. *Logic: The Question of Truth*, trans. Thomas Sheehan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 94. Husserl writes that ‘phenomenological perception [is] also called phenomenological seeing’ and goes so far to distinguish this from optical sensation to state that ‘after the phenomenological reduction, the eyes, the head, and everything else forfeit their existence’. *The Basic Problems*, pp. 70, 60. Elsewhere, as he consistently speaks of ‘pure “seeing”’ whereby ‘the “seeing” cognition of the *cogitation* is immanent’, he explains that ‘the task of phenomenology, or rather the area of its tasks and inquiries, is no such trivial things as merely looking, merely opening one’s eyes’. More to the point: ‘I can “see” the “seeing” itself’, an insight that was not lost by Levinas. *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), pp. 2, 7, 10, 24.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Logic*, p. 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²¹ John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2002), p. 32 [Book I, Chapter 3, §3].

Following Heidegger's claim, it seems that Husserl did learn a great deal from Mill and in many ways, Husserlian phenomenology goes to great pains to draw a distinction between touching (a thing or object) and feeling (one's *Leib*). This can be found in Husserl's note to §39 of *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*:

The touching motions (*Tastbewegungen*), the sensations of touch (*Tastempfindungen*) with which I build up the awareness of a touched thing in accordance with its respective properties are there and run their course according to the same rules [as "the entire physical world"]...However, there are just no muscles here, no touching fingers and, in general, there is no lived body at all...I move a thing by touching it, by 'grabbing' it, [*Ich bewege das Ding, indem ich es zunächst zum Tasten bringe, zum „Fassen“*] and by shoving it away with certain sensations of exertion...Thus I would have my entire lived body as one that senses, feels, and wills [*Ich hätte also meinen ganzen Empfindungs-, Gefühls- und Willensleib*], but no physical lived body [*aber keinen physischen Leib*]! There would be none that I myself can see [*Keinen, den ich selbst sehen kann*], that would be given to me as a thing [*der mir dinglich zu geben ist*], and that would effect its surroundings as a thing [*als Ding wirkt*].²²

Again, the fingers of the hand are privileged. One *feels* one's *Leib* (one's lived body or flesh), whereas one only *touches* the physical thing. As a feeling or felt *Leib*, one is not 'physical'. Physicality is an attribute of thinghood, not selfhood. As such, the *Leib* is invisible. 'There is none' to the *Leib* that 'I myself can see'. It cannot be given or experienced as seen any more than it can be given or experienced as touched. One sees and touches physical things. One feels the lived body. Jean-Luc Marion restates this very clearly, keeping in mind that Marion's 'flesh' [*chair*] is Husserl's *Leib*. 'Even if only one flesh touches a body (though no body ever touches another body), still one flesh never touches another flesh...my own flesh no longer touches anything...'²³ Despite Husserl's noble

²² Husserl, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, pp. 157-8 [Appendix X]; emphasis added. *Husserliana*, Band 13. *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität, Texte aus dem Nachlass, Erster Teil: 1905-1920*. (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 229; lines 31-42; emphasis added. This is an appendix and can be found under the heading: „Aus den Vorlesungen „Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie“ Wintersemester 1910/1911“ Beilage XXIX. Leiblichkeit als Vermittlung der Gesiter (wohlum 1912). It is noteworthy that when the translators first mention where there is 'no lived body at all' is where Husserl speaks of the visual object [*das visuelle Objekt*]. So it is not only the level of the thing and physicality that are pitted against the level of the *Leib* and feeling in this appendix, but also that of the object and the visual. The German text of this passage, as found in *Husserliana* 13, is more about the hand than the fingers (the word for which does not appear in the German) and begins with an interrogative that is lost in the translation: '*Auch willkürlich bewegen kann ich die Dinge, nicht durch meine Hand, aber wie?*'; something like: 'I can choose to move the things not through my hand, but how?' Translation mine; emphasis added.

²³ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 120. If Marion's parenthetical note — that 'no body ever touches another body' — seems confusing, it is perhaps illuminated by *Assuming Gender* 2:1

attempts to provide a phenomenology of empathy,²⁴ the *Leib* yet smacks of the solipsism so often alleged of Cartesian philosophy. Beyond Husserl, it is the work of Levinas that truly welcomes the other into the phenomenological rupture of experience.

The *Leib* that cannot be seen in Husserl remains just as invisible in Levinas, regardless of the latter's preoccupation with optics and the gaze. It is 'a "vision" without image'.²⁵ 'The face...is neither seen nor touched'.²⁶ In seeing-oneself-seen, one 'sees' and experiences something beyond the visibility of things. As one sees physical things, perhaps one sees skulls or heads, but one cannot see the face as Levinas develops it. 'The face...is not of the world [of physical things]'.²⁷ It is in this way that the face is invisible. Seeing anything in the field of vision is an experience of the same, but something different happens when, in the face to face relation, one sees oneself seen *by the other*. Only then is one faced with the possible humanity of the other, who is no longer a thing to be utilized, objectified, eaten, or murdered.²⁸

Heidegger's comments on a walking-stick in his 1925-1926 logic lectures: 'Imagine a walking stick leaning against the door or wall. One might say that the one touches the other. But on closer reflection we should not speak of "touching" — and not because we could show that there is ultimately some space between the two. Rather, on principle the walking-stick does not and never can touch the wall, even if there were absolutely no distance between it and the wall. For that to happen, the wall would have to be able to encounter, and be encountered by, the walking-stick as a thing in the world. One thing can touch another thing only if it is a being that — as such, intrinsically and of its ownmost being — has its world. Only in that way can it touch another being, and only thus can the thing touched be uncovered in the touching and become accessible in its being as something there. So we see [!] that in saying that "Two things touch", we are taking existence's way of being unto the world and transferring it to a thing that appears *within* the world and therefore, in itself, is worldless'. Heidegger, *Logic*, p. 180. A thing never touches another thing, in Heidegger, just as 'no body ever touches another body', in Marion.

²⁴ See Husserl's attempt at a phenomenological reduction of empathy in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, pp. 79-86 [Chapter 6; §§ 36-39]. His meritorious desire to open one's immanent apperceptive experience to (what has heretofore been described as the *transcendence* of) the other is very apparent, though a bit looser and clumsier than his other analyses that will come down to an experience that *seems* to be an exception to the law of insularity, *eigen*, and *one's own*: 'Do we ever arrive at an *other* phenomenological I?...In empathy, the empathizing I experiences the inner life (*Seelenleben*) or, to be more precise, the consciousness of the other I. He experiences the other I, but no one will say he lives it and perceives it in inner perception...just like his own consciousness'. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-3. There is always a matter of *law* with which to contend: 'But there is the *law*, in principle, an empathized datum and the empathizing experiencing belong to it cannot belong to the same stream of consciousness, that is, the same phenomenological I...But what *seems* [my italics] to contradict this is that an act of empathy and the empathized act belong *to the same* time and the belong to the same time for *consciousness*'. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

²⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

²⁸ There is, to be sure, an important orality to be found in Levinas which has to do with his interest in the hunger that is part of the vulnerability and possible destitution of the other. A concern for nourishment and eating runs throughout *Totality and Infinity* and how it renders one's experience of others based on needs to be satisfied and satiated, rendering the world nothing but aliment. There may be a taste to consider beyond eating in Levinas since 'eating...does not reduce itself to the set of gustative, olfactory, kinesthetic, and other sensations [*manger ne se réduit pas davantage à l'ensemble de sensations gustatives*] that would constitute the consciousness of eating [*la conscience du manger*}'. Eating relates to reality rather than representation

The phenomenology of *eros* is exceptional in Levinas. The beloved ‘does not offer itself to be grasped’ as he envisions a *caress* that ‘transcends the sensible’. The caress ‘searches’. In the erotic phenomenon of Levinas, the hand is synthesized with the gaze (and one could even add the mouth since the caress also ‘forages’). The caress ‘seeks *what is not yet*’. One is left, after Levinas, with a kind of opticized hand and revaluated senses of touch and sight as those that seek and search.²⁹ As delicate and specialized as sensibility is in Levinas, it yet follows that the privileged sense, in his works, is sight. He repeatedly states in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* that ‘ethics is an optics [*l’éthique est une optique*]’.³⁰ To lift ourselves from the Levinasian void ‘entre nous’ to a Cixousian ‘lèvres nous’ (as I will try to do below) is at the same time to move from ‘ethics is an optics’ to ‘ethics is a gustics’, the word ‘gustics’ evoking the ‘gustative’ and the verb ‘to taste’ in Latin [*gusto*] and French [*goûter*]. This is a move from the eyes to the lips and from the distance of the gaze to the singular ‘touch’ of the kiss.

This requires a further phenomenological step that is made by Jean-Luc Marion in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, which can be read as a fusion of Husserl and Levinas, incorporating both the distanced and voided other with the corporeal proximity of *Leib*. In the erotic reduction of Marion, one is not given one’s flesh through feeling oneself felt as in Husserl, but by feeling oneself felt *by the other*. Marion gives a beautiful account of this (if one can give ‘accounts’ of such phenomena) in his discussion of *kissing*, which in French can be rendered as *baiser* (in common idiom, this means ‘to fuck’). One feels oneself felt by the other as the other’s mouth touches one’s own. ‘The mouth’, he writes,

slightly open in order to touch another flesh [*pour toucher une autre chair*] — in order to give the other his or her flesh [*pour donner à autrui sa chair*]...by touching one another mouth to mouth [*s’abouchant l’une l’autre*], our two mouths set off a wave that traverses our two bodies [*traverse*

and requires a ‘sinking of one’s teeth [*morsure*] into the things’. The difference between need and desire is that in the former ‘I sink my teeth into the real and satisfy myself’, whereas ‘in Desire there is no sinking one’s teeth into being [*Dans le Désir, pas de morsure sur l’être*]’. Ibid., pp. 128-9, 117; emphasis added. *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur L’extériorité* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1971), pp. 135, 121; emphasis added. As one moves into the erotic phenomenon, one must ask along with Jeanette Winterson, ‘Is food sexy?’ since it can render a ‘lover’s tongue come out in a rash’. *Written on the Body* (New York: Vintage, 1992), p. 36. Perhaps one eats, devours, and sinks one’s teeth into food, aliment, objects, things, and physical bodies [*Körper*] on the level of the same, beyond which one can taste lovers, beloveds, and fleshs [*chairs* and *Leiber*] on the level of the other.

²⁹ What it seeks is *the feminine*—which Levinas seems to paint white and bud virginal—all the more ‘untouchable’ and ‘ungraspable’. *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 257-8. It is worth asking how the feminine, as such, is not to be foraged in Levinas’ discussion.

³⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 23, q.v., 29; *Totalité et Infini*, pp. 8, q.v., 15.

nos deux corps], so as to transcribe them wholly into two fleshes [*pour les transcrire entiers en deux chairs*]...the mouth begins the process [*la bouche commence le procès*] it offers itself from the outset as flesh, it incarnates first the lack of distinction between touching and touching oneself, feeling and feeling (oneself) feeling [*elle incarne la première l'indifférence entre toucher et se toucher, sentir et (se) sentir (se) sentir*].³¹

In his endeavor to traverse *deux corps* (two bodies), Marion is on his way to thinking *le troisième corps* (the third body) of Cixous and, perhaps, what Marion calls *deux chairs* (two fleshes) comes close to what Cixous will call *le troisième corps* (below). The phrase, '*s'abouchant l'une l'autre*', translated as 'touching one another mouth to mouth', does not contain the verb 'to touch' (*toucher*). Literally, it suggests 'mouthing ourselves' or 'mouthing one another'. So, regardless of Marion's intention in this passage to elucidate the phenomenon of touching another flesh [*toucher une autre flesh*], the writing itself — that is, the writing of '*s'abouchant*' — suggests that whatever is happening in this mouth-to-mouth relation is somehow beyond the mere sense of touch.

Although, in the first line of this passage, Marion does use the verb *toucher* ('*pour toucher une autre chair*') to describe the mouth to mouth relation, prior to this he has already claimed that the hand, alone, can touch:

my hand, which alone can touch another thing [*ma main, qui peut seule toucher une autre chose*] (and not merely enter into contact with it [*et non pas seulement entrer en contact avec elle*]), only touches it precisely because it feels that it touches it [*elle sent qu'elle touche*]; and it only feels that it touches it by feeling itself touch it [*elle ne sent qu'elle la touche, qu'en se sentant la toucher*], that is, by feeling itself at the same time as it feels what it feels [*en se sentant elle-même en même temps que ce qu'elle sent*].³²

One feels manhandled, once again. The case can be made that Marion's description of the kiss (above) could be understood in terms of this hand, '*seulement*'.³³

At the end of the analysis, the mouth of Marion is little more than the hand of Husserl — it merely touches, at best, feels-as-a-hand-feels — at the very least because, oddly enough, one just

³¹ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p. 124; *Le phénomène érotique* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset & Fasquelle, 2003), p. 210; emphasis added.

³² Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p. 114; emphasis added; *Le phénomène érotique*, p. 194; emphasis added.

³³ Remember the hand and fingers of Jean Genet: fingers which can touch, enter, or penetrate, but can also form a 'hollow organ' that 'opens up' to be entered, which seems as much a mouth as the one described by Marion, above. *Our Lady of the Flowers*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 55.

cannot get any 'tongue'³⁴ from Marion. There is no *langue* (tongue) to be found in his description of the kiss. The kiss of the erotic reduction comes off, definitively, as one that is not a French kiss. As wonderful as the kiss of Marion is, the tongue and, more to the point, the sense of taste, make little to no contribution. It is remarkable that the erotic phenomenon (and, specifically, the saturated phenomenon of its kiss), so slow in coming in the phenomenological tradition, does little more to address the sense of taste than Marion's passing comment: 'It is no longer a question of the sense of touch, or of any other sense—because I see by feeling, just like I feel with a look, or by hearing, or even by taste [*parce que je vois en sentant, comme je sens aussi du regard, de l'ouïe, et même de goût.*]—but instead of a radicalized incarnation'.³⁵

As such, the kiss of the erotic reduction could be amended with that of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1113), for whom a kiss is *not* merely the contact or haptic meeting of mouths. 'A fertile kiss...is not a mere pressing of mouth upon mouth'. It must move beyond the normal 'touch of lip on lip'. For Bernard, 'just' lovers, that engage in a fertile kissing, do so in order to receive something beyond contact and haptic pressing. Marion, and his feeling-lips, would be in agreement with Bernard up to this point. But this 'just' reception is translated as a longing 'to taste the fullness'³⁶ of Christ. It is the 'taste' of the other that comes about in the kiss-that-feels the other that Marion seems reluctant to receive.³⁷

There are two other remarkable orality tales lurking in the erotic phenomenon. When Marion explains the primary importance of one's flesh [*chair*] or *Leib*—how one must auto-affect oneself and feel oneself in order to be able to feel any other, by which 'auto-affection alone makes possible hetero-affection'—using the nautical trope of wave and undertow, he writes that one's flesh 'allows itself to be sucked in [*se laisse aspirer par lui*]'³⁸ by the flesh of the other. The erotic phenomenon sucks us in as our *Leib*-hoods are inhaled or engulfed into it. My auto-affection and flesh are 'sucked

³⁴ Compare Kelman's description of a kiss. 'She just kissed me there and then, right on the lips. *It felt lovely*...It was warm and not too wet. *I didn't get any tongue*'. Stephen Kelman, *Pigeon English* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), p. 259; italics added. Not too wet, indeed. Such is the kiss of Marion. It feels lovely. But we just don't get any tongue.

³⁵ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p. 120; emphasis added; *Le phénomène érotique*, p. 204; emphasis added.

³⁶ *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, Vol. 2, *Song of Songs I*, trans. Kiliam Walsh (Trappist, Kentucky: Cistercian Publications, 1971), p. 10; emphasis added.

³⁷ But it should not be overlooked that Marion does draw a crucial distinction between 'to receive' and 'to possess': 'I do not possess my flesh, but receive it from the other [*je ne possède pas ma chair, mais la reçois d'autrui*]' *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p. 129; emphasis added; *Le phénomène érotique*, p. 218; emphasis added.

³⁸ *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p. 114; emphasis added; *Le phénomène érotique*, p. 194; emphases added.

in' by the other's auto-affection and flesh and this consensual suction makes possible the hetero-affection of receiving one's own flesh by the other's flesh.

Further, it is said of the other's flesh that it 'swallows me [*m'engloutit*] (in order that I experience it) and saves me [*m'épargne*] (in order that I testify to it) at the same time.'³⁹ This would be the implicit soteriology of oral sex, after the erotic reduction, in the play of savior and savor. The kiss redeems the body by way of oral sexuality. It is the mouth and the kiss that save the genitals which, until they are oralized (and hence, eroticized), are condemned to the realm of bodies, objects, and thinghood. Prior to the phenomenological rupture made possible by the kiss,

there are no erotic organs, only sexual organs [*il n'y a pas d'organes érotiques, mais seulement des organes sexuels*]...because these organs belong to the physical body, not the flesh [*parce que ces organes relèvent du corps physique, pas de la chair*]...these are organs for reproduction, which, as such, do not as yet have to do with the phenomenon of the other.⁴⁰

If Marion moves beyond the Levinasian tenet, 'ethics is an optics' (be it through seeing, feeling-with-a-look, or even a feeling-by-taste) by the end of the erotic reduction he remains in the same ethical sphere as Husserl. If ethics is no longer a mere optics after the erotic reduction it is only insofar as ethics is a haptics. The haptic mouth of Marion performs as a hand with a kiss devoid of tongue. But although he only speaks of a mouth-to-mouth relation that touches and feels, there is yet an incredible advance in Marion: his proclamation of the evocative possibility—albeit undeveloped—that one can feel even by taste; '*je sens...même de goût*'.⁴¹

³⁹ *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p. 133; emphasis added; *Le phénomène érotique*, p. 224; emphasis added.

⁴⁰ *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p. 122; emphasis added; *Le phénomène érotique*, p. 208; emphasis added.

⁴¹ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p. 120; *Le phénomène érotique*, p. 204.

§2. Surface Trouble

...he crawls forward to kiss...and can feel
her...beneath his tongue...
Thomas Pynchon⁴²

...to points that are openings, a limited
number of mouths at the body's surface...
Jacques Lacan⁴³

One could argue that Freud attempts to formulate his own version of the Husserlian *Leib* or, at least, a body that — by way of the privileged sense of touch — experiences simultaneously a kind of external touching and an internal feeling in his short discussion of the *Körper-Ich* in *The Ego and the Id*.

A person's own body [*Der eigene Körper*], and above all its surface [*Oberfläche*], is a place [*Ort*] from which both external and internal perceptions may spring. It is *seen* [*gesehen*] like any other object, but to the *touch* [*Getast*] it yields two kinds of sensations, one of which may be equivalent [*gleichkommen*] to an internal perception [...] a person's own body [*eigene Körper*] attains its special position among other objects in the world of perception [...] The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego [*Das Ich ist vor allem ein körperliches*]; it is not merely a surface entity [*Oberflächenwesen*], but is itself the projection of a surface.⁴⁴

Das Ich ist körperliches. The ego is physical. The I is corporeal. It is only in the concluding line to this chapter that Freud writes of the *corporeal-ego* or *physical-ego*, by name (as its own hyphenated entity) rather than simply using the adjective for *physical* or *corporeal* —*körperliches* — as in the above passage. 'It is as if we were thus supplied with a proof of what we have just asserted of the conscious ego [*bewußten Ich*]: that it is first and foremost a body-ego [*Körper-Ich*]'.⁴⁵

The *Körper-Ich* plays no small role in Judith Butler's conception of the performativity of gender by way of the surface of the body that acts and is culturally determined as the limit between inner

⁴² *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Penguin Classics, Deluxe Edition, 1973), p. 236.

⁴³ *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 7, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), p. 93.

⁴⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 19, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1961), pp. 25-26; *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 13 (London: Imago Publishing, 1940), p. 253. To this, a footnote is added by James Strachey (said to have been 'authorized by Freud') which further states that 'the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body'.

⁴⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 19, p. 27; *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 13, p. 255.
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(gender) and outer (anatomy, or sex).⁴⁶ For Butler, this is a binary dichotomy and determination that culture never successfully achieves. As Jay Prosser points out, it appears that as Butler cites this passage she misinterprets Freud's 'it' in 'it is not merely a surface entity' for the body rather than the corporeal-ego, which does considerable damage to her understanding of transsexuality.⁴⁷ Yet Butler is still able to find in transsexuality (to which we should add transgendered individuals) ways by which desire exceeds the physical body and its surface which demands an alteration of the bodily-ego. It has been suggested that after Butler and Prosser, the divide between both seeing and feeling as well as surface and interior represent the difference between feminist or queer theory and transgender or transsexual theory.⁴⁸ Butler writes,

Transsexuals often claim a radical discontinuity between sexual pleasures and bodily parts. Very often what is wanted in terms of pleasure requires an imaginary participation in body parts, *either appendages or orifices*, that one might not actually possess, or, similarly, pleasure may require imagining an exaggerated or diminished set of parts [...] The strategy of desire is in part the *transfiguration of the desiring body itself*. Indeed, in order to desire at all it may be necessary to believe in *an altered bodily ego*.⁴⁹

Such transfiguration and alteration is perhaps at work in her later analysis of drag, which 'plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed'.⁵⁰ This vision⁵¹ of surface defined by the disjunction between either appendages or orifices must not be

⁴⁶ It should be noted that Butler's understanding of the surface of the body is not only influenced by Freud (and other psychoanalysts) but also by Michel Foucault and Mary Douglas. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 165, 167.

⁴⁷ Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 40-1.

⁴⁸ Janet Halley, *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 269. It could be added that authorial signatures throughout Halley's text suggest that she might land on the seeing/surface side of this debate. Her stylistic use of *to see* is reminiscent of Husserl's use of *schauen* (but without the phenomenological qualification). To name a few, consider, for example: 'I don't want to *see* theory that way. I want to *see* it as the effort to form hypotheses'. 'A bold total theory can startle you out of worn-out habits of mind, enable you *to see* newly and act creatively' or phrases such as 'interests that we can *see* and articulate', 'being *in relation* to problem *seeing* and problem solving', 'seeking to "see the world" politically', how 'feminist theory...can't *see* injury to men and women', 'there's something thrilling about *seeing* these new objects of desire come into view', or how 'we are asked to *see* the critical relation between all the oppositions that divide feminist queer theory's desiderata from those of transsexuality'. *Ibid.*, 6, 7, 6, 7, 9, 33, 270, 273 (respectively).

⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 90; emphasis added. Q.v., p. 86.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁵¹ And it is precisely that: a *vision*. Prosser is justified in his allegation that Butler's 'prioritization of surface is *emphatically occularcentric*, as is *Gender Trouble's* concomitant investment in the transgendered subject'. It 'relies heavily on a body as that which can be seen, the body as visual surface...girls who *look like* boys and boys who *look like* girls'. The occularcentricity of Butler accounts for her relegation of anything beyond her panopticon of *surfaces as visible and seen* — i.e., *feeling* — to the realm of the 'phantasmatic [and] symptomatic of heterosexual melancholia'. Prosser, *Second Skins*, p. 43; emphasis added.

overlooked, as an important facet of orality and taste (developed in §3, below) is that the mouth does not conform to such a disjunctive synthesis and is just as much orifice as appendage. The tongue that tastes does so as an appendage in an orifice. The tongue is the orificed-appendage. Aside from a few remarks on male oral sex, the mouth plays almost no role in this disjointed configuration of surface (and it is just as difficult to ‘get any tongue’⁵² from Butler as it is from Marion).

Mouthless as it often is, Butler’s orifice-approach to surface serves her well as she supports what are arguably many of the main insights throughout *Gender Trouble*. She applies an understanding of surface developed from Mary Douglas—that ‘the limit of the body is never merely material, but that the surface, the skin, is systematically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions’⁵³—to the crisis of pollution and contamination in the presence of AIDS.

Since anal *and oral sex* among men clearly establishes certain kinds of *bodily permeabilities unsanctioned by the hegemonic order*, male homosexuality would, within such a hegemonic point of view, constitute a site of danger and pollution, prior to and regardless of the cultural presence of AIDS. Similarly, the “polluted” status of lesbians, regardless of their low-risk status with respect to AIDS, brings into relief the dangers of their bodily exchanges.⁵⁴

Whereas the presence of AIDS places center stage the possible *oral permeabilities of the body* (as well as anal ones) that threaten the hegemonic order, they help discover the constant affront such permeabilities pose to hegemonic and culturally defined sexualities, regardless of such illnesses. She continues,

Those sexual practices in both homosexual and heterosexual contexts that open surfaces and orifices to erotic signification or close down others effectively reinscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines [...] Further, the rites of passage that govern various bodily orifices presuppose a heterosexual construction of gendered exchange, positions, and erotic possibilities. The deregulation of such exchanges accordingly disrupts the very boundaries that determine what it is to be a body at all.⁵⁵

Practices that open surfaces and orifices re-inscribe and disrupt the boundaries of heteronormative constructions of gender and the body, itself. The boundary of all such boundaries is

⁵² See fn. 34, above.

⁵³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 167.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 168; emphasis added.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

perhaps that imagined between inner and outer. This is an insight that is not wasted on Marion (which in no way means that he escapes *de facto* such heteronormative constructions), for whom 'the mouth begins the process, because, already open, without distinction between exterior and interior [*sans distinction de l'extérieur et de l'intérieur*], it offers itself from the outset as flesh'.⁵⁶ But Butler opts not to transgress the boundary 'between internal and external', by way of the mouth or orality, but by the way of excretion. Following a reading of Julia Kristeva, Butler writes that the 'boundary between the inner and the outer is confounded by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively becomes outer'.⁵⁷

It is on these issues of surface, boundaries, permeability, and ex- or internality that *Gender Trouble* draws to a close. Namely, that if 'reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of [...] the surface politics of the body'. It is 'the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer'.⁵⁸ The internal is a 'surface signification'⁵⁹ and such 'surfaces can become the site of dissonant and denaturalized performances that reveals the performative status of the natural itself'.⁶⁰

There are two questions to consider. In her tacit emphasis on seeing the surface rather than feeling what possibly lies beyond it, Prosser suggests that Butler strands transsexual feeling within an imaginary heteronormative ethos that she discerns in Lacan. Yet for Prosser, 'it is the ability *to feel the bodily ego* [...] that matters in a transsexual context'.⁶¹ While reading Butler, Prosser asks, 'What

⁵⁶ Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, p. 124; *Le Phénomène Érotique*, p. 210.

⁵⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 170. The orality or oral possibilities of Kristeva's text seem completely ignored by Butler. After all, in the text Butler cites, Kristeva speaks about spitting rather than shitting: 'I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself*...' Julia Kristeva, *Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 3. (This is not to insinuate that Kristeva intends to leave excretion outside her discussion.) Note Halley's playful response to Butler's essay, 'Against Proper Objects': 'Let's suppose I set out to write an essay, "Two Orifices", on the erotic possibilities of the mouth and the anus... Surely I could emphasize... their location, as quite different sphincters, at either end of the alimentary canal... I think that when Butler doubts that such an essay "is possible",... whether it could make sense, be adequate—and inasmuch as she is a feminist 24/7, her answer would have to be "no". Halley, *Split Decisions*, pp. 275-6. (Whether such an essay be entitled 'Two Orifices' or 'Ethics is a Gustics', it can perhaps be written without succumbing to the pitfalls Halley discerns in this Butlerian Ego-Ideal: either 'the omission of gender as its elision' or 'recapitulating masculinist epistemology and reinstating male dominance'. *Ibid.*, p. 276.)

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁶¹ Prosser, *Second Skins*, p. 44. Feeling, as such, would be applicable to a *feeling backward* that resists aspects of 'visibility' in theodic pride movements of '*looking forward*' offering 'antidotes to shame' which would not be unrelated to a certain gustics: 'feelings of *bitterness*' or '*sweetness* and anguish'. And could we not add *dis-gust* to the 'backward feelings [of] shame, Assuming Gender 2:1

imaginary body (parts or surfaces) does the heterosexual male who literalizes [i.e., surfacizes] his penis forget'? Secondly, as she draws *Gender Trouble* to a close, Butler asks, 'if the body is [...] a surface whose permeability is politically regulated...then what language is left for understanding this corporeal enactment, gender, that constitutes its "interior" signification on its surface'?'⁶²

I hazard two responses. To Prosser, I suggest that perhaps the part of heteronormative and male body that is often forgotten is the tongue as well as its equally forgotten surface, which feels as much as — and insofar as — it tastes. And, with regards to Butler, perhaps the language of orality can address this interior signification on the surface.

depression, and regret'? See Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 2, 27, 4, 40, 8.

⁶² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 177.

§3. Tangibility of the Other: *Lèvres Nous*⁶³

“take’ does not mean to receive with the hands only
but also *to convey to ourselves in other ways.*’

Martin Luther⁶⁴

‘By taste and not seeing he contemplated...’

William Faulkner⁶⁵

In his *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905), Freud speaks of the ‘instinct for mastery’ indicative of ‘masculine sexual activity’ inherent to the ‘preference for the hand which is shown by boys’ in masturbation.⁶⁶ It is one of his earliest developments of an aggressive drive; a sort of precursor to what is eventually formulated as the death drive; a preliminary example within the myriad of which Derrida calls ‘the cruelty drives’.⁶⁷ There is perhaps such a preference for the hand lurking throughout the phenomenological tradition; the Husserlian hand that feels feeling, the Levinasian sense of touch that seeks and searches, and the hand that alone can touch in Marion that quietly slips into his description of the mouth with no tongue that yet touches and feels in a kiss with no taste. A definitive lack in the phenomenology of self, body, and sensation is the sense of taste. It is as if philosophy has forgotten that the sense of taste already takes part in the sense of touch and the phenomenality of feeling. No doubt, Husserl, Levinas, and Marion offer outstanding works on the body. But it is instructive to read them alongside two other great texts on the body, which do more than simply man-handle it: Monique Wittig’s *The Lesbian Body* (1973) and Hélène Cixous’ *The Third Body* (1970).

⁶³ On the spelling of ‘tangibility’ with an extra ‘y’, see fn. 16, above. ‘*Lèvres nous*’ is a phrase found in Hélène Cixous, *The Third Body*, trans. Keith Cohen (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 119; *Le Troisième Corps* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1999; réédition), p. 144, based on her playful use of the French word for ‘lips’ (*lèvres*) in a succession of second person imperative conjugations of the French verb ‘to lift’ (*lever*)—‘lift me’ (*lève moi*) and ‘lift yourself’ or ‘arise’ (*lève toi*)—rendering *lèvres* a subtle portmanteau word evincing the ‘*lève*’ always lurking about ‘*lèvres*’. With her *langue douée*, Cixous softly inserts her ‘r’. As such, ‘lips’ can now be read as a verb. ‘*Lèvres nous*’ insinuates a command to ‘lift us’ or ‘raise us’ (like Lazarus or bread dough), while at the same time a plea to ‘elevate us with your lips’. *Lip us up!*

⁶⁴ ‘The Eight Wittenberg Sermons’, *Works of Martin Luther*, Vol. 2, p. 413; emphasis added.

⁶⁵ *Light in August* (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 121.

⁶⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 7, trans. James Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953), p. 188. Cf. Levinas: ‘The power of the hand that grasps or tears up or crushes or kneads relates the element, not to an infinity...but to the goal of need’. *Totality and Infinity*, p. 160.

⁶⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 258, 271.

These two French novels (for lack of a better term), written by women, are all the more fitting to supplement the philosophical texts of the phenomenologists since, according to Simone de Beauvoir:

That is the miracle of literature...that an other truth becomes mine without ceasing to be other [c'est qu'une vérité autre deviant mienne sans cesser d'être autre]...it is the only kind of communication capable of giving me that which cannot be communicated, capable of giving me the taste of another life [qui soit capable de me donner le goût d'une autre vie].⁶⁸

The orality⁶⁹ of *The Lesbian Body* can be read as a critique of Levinas and Husserl. Wittig describes touching and feeling physical bodies with the mouth:

I have access to your glottis and your larynx...I gather into m/y mouth your entire reserves of air...large soft sticky fragments insinuate themselves between m/y lips, *shape themselves* to m/y palate, the entire *mass* is engulfed into m/y open mouth, m/y tongue is caught in an indescribable glue...at this moment...it is impossible to conceive a more magistral a more inevitable coupling.⁷⁰

Though there is no mention of taste in this particular passage, the classical qualities of physicality, shape and mass, are determined not with the hand, but with the mouth, tongue, and lips. She speaks of caressing as licking and touching, searching, or seeking with the mouth. 'I lick it, I caress it [j/e le lèche, j/e/ le caresse]⁷¹'; 'my clitoris touched by one of the mouths';⁷² 'I find it pleasurable when I touch

⁶⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, Contribution to *Que peut la littérature?* Quoted in Toril Moi, 'What Can Literature Do? Simone de Beauvoir as Literary Theorist'. *PMLA* (January 2009) 124:1, p. 193.

⁶⁹ The harrowing aspect of the orality of Wittig is the prevalence of *devouring*. E.g., Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, trans. David Le Vay (New York: Avon, 1975), pp. 62, 120, 129, 157. Elsewhere Wittig addresses 'the dilemma [she] had to face' in writing *The Lesbian Body* and how 'violence was doubly at the nexus and the core of this undertaking'. The readers were 'to feel the shock of the words' but also 'the violence of ...lesbian passion' that she felt had 'no existence yet'. The 'textual violence' was also a rebellion against 'the mass of texts devoted to love'. Wittig, 'Some Remarks on *The Lesbian Body*' in *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), pp. 45-6. Though such textual strategies are perhaps permissible in such a context or lacuna of genre and allow for a remarkable mode of 'remembering' (as discussed by Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 171), it is worth remembering the consumption of otherness inherent to rape as conceived by some theorists which has been compared to 'a cannibalism through which the other perishes...and is allowed to continue to exist only as appropriated and included in the body of the one who *devoured* it'. Rita Laura Segato, 'Territory, Sovereignty, and Crimes of the Second State: The Writing on the Body of Murdered Women', trans. Sara Koopman in *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas*, eds. Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 74. It is equally as necessary, perhaps, to move from such necessary textual violence (if it is that) to something beyond devourment. Such a move is perhaps found in the works of Cixous, who in an early essay, 'Sorties' (1975), speaks of Penthesileia 'devouring [Achilles] with kisses' but in a later text, 'Love of the Wolf' (1994), writes of love as that which 'makes an exception' to devouring. See Cixous, 'Sorties' in *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 121; 'Love of the Wolf', trans. Keith Cohen in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (New York: Routledge, 1998) pp. 93-4.

⁷⁰ Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, p. 66.

⁷¹ Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, 29; *Le Corps Lesbien* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1973), p. 27.

m/y fur with m/y mouth'. 'I seek your mouth with m/y mouth [*J/e cherche ta bouche avec m/a bouche*]'.⁷³ It is precisely because of orality that the *ungraspable* face⁷⁴ in Levinas is *touchable* for Wittig; 'm/y lips and m/y tongue touch [your face]'.⁷⁵

For Wittig, merely seeking the face implies a loss of the tongue: 'Oh that I might be dumb or *m/y tongue fall out* when I *seek* your black shining *visage*'.⁷⁶ The void between self and other does not culminate in seeing oneself seen in Wittig but rather seeing oneself not seen as vision is drawn into the mouth: '*Your eyes are not closed, they do not see*. The women bearing torches kneel beside you, *your face is lit* by the gleams. Shadows pass over your teeth, *in your mouth I see your palate*'.⁷⁷ When she describes a corporeal relation with no sight at all ('I have no unitary vision of your body'), the relation is not accomplished by seeing but rather by sucking. There are 'vaginal juices long congealed...dried spittle on your cheeks.../ suck up all the fine particles.../ absorb the juices'.⁷⁸ Even Wittig's hand and fingers find the oral, feeling the substance of the other from the other's mouth. 'Saliva falls in great strings from your mouth. / hold its elastic substance between m/y fingers'.⁷⁹

In a stunning critique of the role of the eye, Wittig uses the hand to overcome the eye to move from the visual to an oral experience the other.

M/y hand presses...at the top of your left cheek.../ succeed thus in making your eyeball topple out, / watch it hanging.../ insert my tongue.../ touch the part of your eyeball that is normally hidden, / spread my saliva over it, / lick it, / take it between m/y lips.../ make it roll entire within m/y mouth, / suck it, / suckle at it, / swallow it.../ insert m/yself, m/y mouth, m/y tongue...your mouth wide open.⁸⁰

If anything, Wittig is not ocularcentric. Here, one does not see herself seen, nor merely feel herself felt, but rather feels herself seen with her tongue.

Although there is much licking and tonguing in *The Lesbian Body*, only once does Wittig speak directly of taste. It is the taste of hair, specifically when not visible (which is found just before

⁷² Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, p. 32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁷⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 197, 258

⁷⁵ Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, p. 119.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91; italics added.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92; italics added.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

she gives her own version of the caress): ‘your hair when licked has a delectable *taste*. Your pubic hair is *not visible*’.⁸¹ Whereas Husserl moves to touch when deprived of vision, Wittig moves to *taste* which would already be a mode of touching. Wittig’s version of the caress moves beyond Levinas and Marion:

I kiss [*j//embrasse*] your wrists the inward of your arms your nape your feet, I *cause m/y saliva to flow inside your mouth* [*j/e fais couler m/a salive à l’intérieur de ta bouche*], I eat [*j/e mange*] your hair, I scrape m/y teeth [*j/e râcle*] at the skin of your cranium, I lick you [*j/e te lèche*] from head to foot mouth slack, m/y tongue licks [*m/a langue lèche*] your knees licks your thighs licks your vulva licks your belly licks your breasts licks your shoulders licks your neck licks your chin licks your closed lips [*lèvres fermées*]...⁸²

Over the course of this passage, the ‘I’ is replaced with ‘my tongue’. The ‘I’ kisses, salivates, eats, and scrapes its teeth but beyond the ‘I’ is a ‘my tongue’ that licks from knees to lips (and it should not go without saying why these lips on which the ‘my tongue’ licks are ‘closed’). This move from the ‘I’ (*j/e*) to ‘my tongue’ (*m/a langue*) would be an ego revaluated and oralized as a kind of selftaste tasting other.

Though Wittig does not develop it, when she causes her saliva to run into the other’s mouth (*fais couler m/a salive à l’intérieur de ta bouche*), the other would thereby taste her own selftaste. One does not only taste the other, but tastes what the other tastes within herself; arguably a more radical experience of the other than is found in Levinas or Marion. There is an important point to be made here about this specific entering into the other — be it tongue or saliva — that moves not only beyond the phallogentrism of penetrability but also that understanding of the phenomena of space in the erotic reduction where Marion describes the encounter with the other as with one who ‘makes room for me’ — ‘puts up no resistance’ — allowing me to penetrate and ‘stretch myself out’ thereby overcoming the classic impenetrable spatiality of physical things.⁸³ The penetration of tongues moves beyond sexualities focused on insertion to a more radical experience of the other’s body that can (but need not) penetrate; or at least revalues the very notion of penetration to include the soft insertion of tongues and the glorification of oral sex.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 61; italics added.

⁸² Ibid., p. 63; *Le Corps Lesbien*, p. 69.

⁸³ Marion, *The Erotic Reduction*, p. 118.

There is a passage in Cixous that may lead one to think that what takes place throughout *The Third Body* is in resistance to the phenomenologies of the body found in Husserl and Levinas. (She is perhaps still open to the phenomenal flesh as will be given by Marion.) She proclaims:

I no longer have and never did have a body to touch with my own fingers [*de corps à toucher de mes propres doigts*], and I have never seen my eyes [*je n'ai jamais vu mes yeux*] in such a way that I could cross over to see myself [*pour me voir*]: a violent realization, to which I offered no resistance.⁸⁴

Earlier, while gazing in the mirror (where I may try 'to see my eyes' [*voir mes yeux*] or 'see myself [*me voir*']), she discovers a shortcoming of vision. 'I open my mouth in front of the mirror, and in the dazzle of my white teeth...I don't see my tongue [*je ne vois pas ma langue*]'. Immediately after this encounter with the tongue that exceeds the realm of vision, she expresses a 'need [*boisson*]': 'Lève-moi'.⁸⁵ Lift me up. It reads as if a cry thrown up from one trapped within the civilization of the eye: Lift me up from this spectrum, in which all that my tongue ('*ma langue*') could be, is rendered but invisible.

Cixous (who certainly knows her Freud)⁸⁶ mentions the power of the hand: 'the hand [*la main*] is the locus of human power [*pouvoir humain*]...'.⁸⁷ Like Wittig, she speaks of searching with the tongue. The other's 'tongue can even go looking [*chercher*] in my mouth'.⁸⁸ She also moves from hand to mouth and describes caressing with the lips. 'He could touch her hand with his, he could press his lips against it'.⁸⁹ 'He caresses with his finger and lips...'.⁹⁰

The Third Body contains a more developed critique of vision and focuses on the paradox of the eye:

...each eye is an eye inside another eye [*chaque oeil est un oeil dans un oeil*]. The second eye [*deuxième*] lights up the first [*premier*] eye. What astonishes me is that these eyes do not see [*ces yeux ne voient pas*], are not intended, in spite of their form, for looking [*ne sont sans doute pas destinés malgré leur forme, à regarder*]...they've been created to receive images [*créés pour recevoir des images*] and not to reflect them [*et ne pas les transmettre*].⁹¹

⁸⁴ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 101; *Le Troisième Corps*, p. 124.

⁸⁵ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 47; *Le Troisième Corps*, p. 63.

⁸⁶ Derrida calls Cixous Freud's 'great-niece' and a 'prodigal' one, at that. Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That is to Say...*, trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 13; q.v., pp. 104, 109.

⁸⁷ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 141; *Le Troisième Corps*, p. 168.

⁸⁸ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 132.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁹¹ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 154; italics added; *Le Troisième Corps*, p. 184.

Reflection, by the way, is a great concern for Levinas, who believes it to occur in seeing the other, seeing oneself seen, but not in seeing things or seeing the same. But as Cixous' mirror experience suggests (above), the virtuality of a visual reflection fails at actual self-reflection. Dependent on virtual images, the eye never truly sees itself seeing as the flesh can feel itself feeling or, further, as selftaste can taste itself tasting. (No wonder Cixous could not 'see' her tongue in the mirror.) The first and second eyes will need a third body that emerges beyond this paradox of the eye.

Not only is there part of the eye (a second eye) that cannot see — the very part that allows for seeing, the optic disc at the back of the retina that connects the optic nerve to the eye, is, itself, a blind spot⁹² — but also the one thing that the eye cannot see is the eye itself, the back of the eye that Wittig rolls in her mouth. Here, Cixous sees the shortcomings of sight, reminiscent of §5.633 of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.⁹³ The first eye (that is invisible insofar it can never see itself) and the second eye (that is the very condition for the possibility of vision insofar as it is blind), together, succor one into the phenomenal need for an experience of a third body no longer reliant on seeing or seeing oneself seen.

This ocularcentric version of the self-reflexive paradox is not, however, in effect within Husserl's *Leib* or Marion's flesh, which feels feeling as it feels itself feel. This is also not the case with the tongue and the sense of taste. Experiencing in a way that vision and the eye cannot, the surface of the tongue is, itself, tastable. Selftaste would be the tongue tasting itself with all the apperceptive *feeling* of the *Leib* but with the additional sense of taste. Everything *Leib* and flesh can do, selftaste can do better. Selftasting is tastefeeling. But whereas, one cannot share the experience of one's flesh/*Leib* with the other, one can perhaps share one's selftaste with the other, at the very least through kissing.⁹⁴

While Cixous thinks and writes of a third body, she moves from touch and fingers, as well as from eyes and sight, to lips and taste, finding 'ocular eyes...that resemble the mouth of a timid

⁹² 'At the nerve point where the image on the retina becomes true and proper vision, the eye is necessarily blind. It organizes vision around this invisible center, which also means that the entirety of vision is organized in such a way as to prevent one from seeing this blindness'. Giorgio Agamben, 'An Idea of Glory'. *Flash Art*, 124 (October-November 1985), p. 81.

⁹³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 69.

⁹⁴ Cf. 'Je baisse les yeux'. Hélène Cixous, *Si Près* (Paris: Galilée, 2007), p. 201.

lover'.⁹⁵ The revaluated eyes of the third body are ones that touch, kiss, and taste. 'Drinking and seeing blend [*Boire et voir se confondent*] there where they open, these eyes *kiss* my eyes and my lips [*ces yeux me baisent les yeux et les lèvres*], they touch, taste, take [*ils touchent, goûtent, prennent*]'.⁹⁶ The move from optics to gustics allows *taste* to *take* what is *shareable*. The other 'smacks my mouth with four kisses. As though he were drinking from my mouth, but drinking what?'⁹⁷

But drinking what? What else but my *Leib*, my flesh, myself, and my selftaste. In the kiss, the other drinks and tastes one's own self as one's own selftaste. As such, my experience of me is, now, opened to possible experiences of us. In the other's tasting of my selftaste, I simultaneously taste (and feel) the taste (and feeling) of the other...from *entre nous* to *lèvres nous*. It is here, in the novel, that Cixous moves from '*Lève-moi*'⁹⁸ (which was uttered, earlier, from the mirror: that place where the phenomenal attempt at self-reflexivity fails within the limits of vision, leaving no place for 'my tongue') to '*lèvres nous*'. It reads as if an imperative directed to the lips. Lips, look at me! Look, not with your eyes, but with those parts not delimited by seeing; parts that can kiss, touch, and taste. 'Lips...look at me, nurturing lips open up...lip us up [*Lèvres...regardez-moi, lèvres nouricières ouvrez-vous...lèvres nous*]'.⁹⁹

The kiss of the third body is a uniting of tongues. The other's tongue becomes my tongue. 'His mouth is my mouth [*Sa bouche est ma bouche*]'.¹⁰⁰ 'I take him by the lips and by the tongue that is mine'.¹⁰¹ But it is not simply a matter of appropriation, since she gives up her own, as well: 'take my tongue into your folds...take my tongue and keep it'.¹⁰² The intersection of the desires of both self and other is '*stretched* straight out, sprung from the same side of *our silent united tongues...in the form of a third body*...The third body will pick up force...*in what has never been seen*'.¹⁰³ Like *Leib* and the flesh, the third body 'has never been seen'. Here, the *stretching* that emerges through kissing and the

⁹⁵ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 120.

⁹⁶ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 119; *Le Troisième Corps*, p. 144.

⁹⁷ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 111.

⁹⁸ Although, one should not pass over or forget the step of the '*Lève-toi*'. Cixous, *Le Troisième Corps*, p. 128.

⁹⁹ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 119; *Le Troisième Corps*, p. 144.

¹⁰⁰ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 47; *Le Troisième Corps*, p. 63. Keith Cohen's translation of '*Sa bouche est ma bouche*' actually reads, 'His mouth is my mother'. Whether misprint, mistranslation, or remarkable transliteration, it certainly merits considering the natality, femininity, or the impossible maternalization of masculinity, that may lurk about such oral phenomena or oral phases.

¹⁰¹ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 149.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 153; italics added.

uniting of tongues moves beyond the description that comes off, in Marion, as a parable of phallic penetration.¹⁰⁴

Cixous' understanding of the third body, in its inclusion of taste and tongues, accomplishes what Marion's kiss-that-feels does not. Touch and taste (and, as such, selftaste and feeling) considered together not only allow the kiss of the third body to receive its flesh from the other, as it does in the erotic reduction (though it should be remembered that *The Third Body* was written 30 years before Marion's *The Erotic Phenomenon*), but beyond this, it allows selftaste to taste the other's selftaste as it simultaneously tastes and feels the other's selftaste tasting oneself while the other's *Leib* feels one's own *Leib*. This is, perhaps, the first true sharing (and overcoming, to a certain extent) of the heretofore insular corporeal experience of the lived body in the entire phenomenological tradition.

By way of the tongue and taste, the insularity of the other's flesh dissolves into my flesh, which was previously just as insular prior to my tonguing and tasting. Cixous accomplishes this by supplementing the eyes with the tongue.

I kiss his breast [*j'embrasse son sein*]...For certain parts of his body I feel a love in my eyes and in my tongue [*j'ai...un amour des yeux et de la langue*], which is not only physical, but also, spiritual [*qui n'est pas seulement physique, mais surtout spirituel*]...While my tongue recognizes that slight, strange, acrid taste where he dissolves [*Tandis que ma langue reconnaît ce gout étrange, léger, âcre où il se dissout*]...¹⁰⁵

Like *Leib* and flesh, this strange taste ('*ce gout étrange*') is not merely physical, but is granted the status of spiritual. With her gifted tongue, Cixous rediscovers a facet of taste that distinguishes it from the other senses discussed in a rarely cited 1677 text of Leibniz. As he considers how each of the senses analyzes bodies, Leibniz suggests that,

It is possible that bodies which are exceedingly subtle and cannot be caught or perceived by sense in one substance can be caught in another...Bodies and preparations made from them are to be examined by means of the instruments of experimentation—scales, thermometers, hygrometers, pneumatic pumps—and also by vision, whether naked or fortified, by smell, and by taste. I believe there is no medium more effective than taste for discerning the essential nature of bodies, because taste brings bodies to us in their substance and dissolves them in us so that we may perceive the

¹⁰⁴ See fn. 83, above.

¹⁰⁵ Cixous, *The Third Body*, p. 122; *Le Troisième Corps*, p. 148. It is more an 'embrace' than a 'kiss' and she does not so much 'feel' this love as 'has' this love of the eyes and the mouth.

whole solution closely [Nullum puto esse medium intimas corporum naturas discernendi efficacius gustu, quia gustus corpora nobis in substantia applicat, et in nobis dissolvit, ita ut nos totam dissolutionem intime percipiamus].¹⁰⁶

If this strange taste is not on the level of the spiritual for Leibniz, it is at least on the level of substance. Since Descartes' experiment with the piece of wax in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), the alleged incorporeal aspect of substance has been one of classical rationalism's reasons for doubting the senses, on the whole. But, here, Leibniz and Cixous seem to suggest that the heretofore insensible and inexperiential substance of the other (an avatar for what will become the insularity of *Leib* and flesh in Husserl and Marion) 'dissolves' on the tongue and is taken into 'us' (*nous*) by way of taste. 'No medium is more effective than taste' to discern the essence or substance of the other that may disclose it as more than a mere thing, object, or physical body.

As in Levinas, where seeing the other (or, more specifically, seeing oneself seen by the other) discovers the humanity of the other that demands one shall not murder her or him, in tasting the other one precisely refuses to eat the other; to devour or cannibalize the other. As such, the taste of the third body is the taste of justice. As the 'welcoming of the Other is ipso facto the consciousness of my own injustice',¹⁰⁷ in Levinas, the experience of kissing the open mouth of the other (whereby one's selftaste is shared with the other while simultaneously feeling-tasting that othertaste feeling-tasting oneself) is also the consciousness of the 'erotic injustice' Gayle S. Rubin finds in 'sexual essentialism',¹⁰⁸ (such as the heteronormativity criticized by Butler, an understanding of homosexuality closed off to transsexuality criticized by Prosser, or simply any erotics focused on insertion or penetration, which one may or may not discern in Marion.)

The Levinasian justice of the commandment, 'thou shall not murder'¹⁰⁹ but rather love¹¹⁰ — that one experiences (but does not see) in the face to face relation — becomes the *erotic justice* of a

¹⁰⁶ Gottfried Leibniz, 'On a Method of Arriving at a True Analysis of Bodies and the Causes of Natural Things' in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), pp. 174-175; emphasis added; 'De modo perveniendi ad veram Corporum Analysin et rerum naturalium causas' in *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, Band 7 (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1978), p. 267; [Paragraphs 9-10]; emphasis added.

¹⁰⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁸ Gayle S. Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality' in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 9. It is no mere coincidence that Rubin's landmark essay moves from the 'complexities of cuisine' and the codes of 'proper diet [and] differences in menu' to the disproportionate terror that accompanies 'differences in erotic taste'. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁰⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 199.

'thou shall not devour' but rather taste—that one experiences (but does not eat) in the mouth to mouth relation of the third body. The taste of the third body moves from the Levinasian void *entre nous* to the impossible, yet phenomenal, shared experience of love and justice between self as selftaste and the other as other in the Cixousian body *lèvres nous*; lifted from the void between us, to an *us* finally *lipped* from it.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 265-6.

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