

Love on the edge. A hermeneutical question on pornography and eroticism

Alin-Daniel PIROȘCĂ¹

*Motto: „Traveling outgrows its motives. It soon proves sufficient in itself.
You think you are making a tri, but soon it is making you,
or unmaking you.”
(Nicolas Bouvier, L'usage du monde)*

Abstract: *This study aims to- following philosophical and literary research on the subject of eroticism-make a subtle analysis of the distinction between eroticism and pornography in the view of famous philosophers of 20th century- Emmanuel Levinas, Julius Evola and Jean-Luc Marion. Not being a preoccupationThe temptation of inter- and transdisciplinary approaches inevitably leads to an extension of preoccupations and the inclusion of some subjects that seemed so far from the horizon of the source-discipline, into the subtle approach and instruments. For a long time, philosophy, as a university discipline, has traveled through an adventurous trajectory and has drawn into his adventure a few of sensitive subjects, such as eroticism and pornography. Once considered "foreign" or even exotic, the philosophical approach on these subjects revealed a new perspective upon the conceptual- territories*

Key-words: *pornography; eroticism; love; transgression; phenomenology*

The motto above seems, at the first sight, to be inadequate to the subject we propose. But, if we think under the conditions of inter and transdisciplinary approaches, we will see that its meaning is referring to a significance of the concept that is taking-over by the subject. In other words, as Lacan used to say, the concept floats into its own significance. In this article we will not talk about love, but in the end we will notice that we've been part of this subjects which has take over our analysis In fact, the idea of the journey which is not planned, but in the end it is the subject itself that makes or unmakes our research.

Whenever we are placed in the inter-disciplinary or transdisciplinary horizons of humanities, we are in a certain way, enthralled by the enthusiastic state that keeps a certain temptation. When the lack of the imposed subject denounces the penetration into the distant territories and perhaps even the virgins of a discipline, we obviously become captives of this temptation. The temptation for this is thought as a controlled departure to the subject that can claim its erudite support, its consistency and its essence at any time.

¹ Faculty of Arts of the University "Ovidius" from Constanta, danipirosca@yahoo.com

The research of any proposed subject assumes inclusion of that subject in a disciplinary area, whose subcategories breathe in a certain direction. In this article we aim to approach two subjects, which seems to be, at a first sight somehow inadequate to the study of philosophy –eroticism and pornography. . So, we are in the vortex of philosophical discourse, in the horizon of the phenomenological analysis exercise, inevitably inherited by hermeneutical clues.

The phenomenology of eroticism is probably one of the sensitive themes of philosophy. The recovery of this subject on the phenomenological level brings within the possibility of an interpretation conjugated to the hermeneutical exercise. In the following, we will analyze the chapter called *The Erothic'Phenomenology* from Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and infinity*, also taking into account the theoretical external contributions applied to the subject of the French philosopher's eroticism.

From the very beginning, we will say that the expression "eros phenomenology" is ambiguous. On the one hand, we could say that it includes erotic as a region or domain for phenomenology, on the other hand, the question arises whether an internal "eros" of the phenomenological reflection could be identified, so that it can be concluded that phenomenology requires this subject for reflection.

As a territory for the phenomenological description, the erotic has more possibilities of expression and analysis, phenomenology representing a neutral method that could describe this phenomenon. But if phenomenology is considered to have in correspondance a "eros", then we must give to this concept a central, not only in terms of thematic coverage, but also the constitutive role it plays in phenomenology. Therefore, it is possible to talk about an „eros of philosophy”.

This dichotomy may be exposed as false, allowing us to refuse to choose one of the two approaches. On the other hand, if we understand phenomenology as a continuous continuation of a philosophical self-determination about the subject of eroticism, insofar as each phenomenological "territory" or "domain" as such contributes to the formation of discipline, than erof of philosphy is immediately transferred to phenomenological approach on eros.

From the first discussion of the types of eros exhibited in Plato's philosophyⁱ, within the general framework we will say that eros is generated by wealth and poverty. Determination itself leads to a location within a range (agape and desire). This involves fighting inside a being, or, as Bataille formulated it, eroticism involves the game between continuity and discontinuityⁱⁱ. Eros is deeply involved in the human discovery of his nature, and so also the temptation to analyze the concept relates to the heart. Also in this context is the body-soul relationship. In the Western tradition, erotic journey is often described as a journey outside of one's own body, directed to the heart and soul. At the same time, the relationship between flesh and transcendence has been understood in a more complex and interdependent way.

This is the case of Plato, who writes that eros could not only appear through desire. Agape is also necessary to the extent that eros occupies a place within the tension area between finitude and infinity. The finitude implies the phenomenological assumption that every vision of something is necessarily. Somehow, this approach is closer to the idea of a "source of experience life", to recall an expression of Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka.

Patočka explains why viewing from other side can not be separated from viewing in general; That is why what is seen is necessarily always foretold from a perspective. The dream of pure objectivism, according to which a world without a man could be described and assumed independently from the existence of human understanding, is still and always a dream man, itself a built-in viewpoint. At the same time, the concept which is opposite than objectivism, namely subjectivism, can not be confused with the idea of an "I" or an isolated subject. The idea of an "I" isolated and without the world is as partial as the idea of an objective and external world at the same time.

Phenomenology, in Levinas' sense, puts in brackets the thesis on the external objectivity of the world, as well as the internal subjectivity of the subject. Man and the world, the consciousness and the things, "me" and "the others" each represent a relationship of reciprocity. This reciprocity and its residual interdependence can be considered as the possible nucleus of the erotic. That is why the erotic experience placed in a concrete "between" understood in the sense of the interval) must in one way or another always be considered in such an investigation.

The amplitude of the multiple erotic phenomenon signals the construction of a strict distinction between many different distinctions such as eroticism and sexuality, eroticism and desire, and, moreover, between eroticism and love. We return to this point to what has been said so far that eroticism should not be associated with these elements, but is delimited by generating the framework of an externalized analysis. That is why, according to Levinas, the phenomenology of love, desire, seduction, passion, sexuality and sexual difference are phenomenologies of the eros, and eros is also a phenomenology of those concepts. Reciprocity is assured. In Levinas' phenomenology, eroticism finds its generating sources in the vulnerability or fragility of the other.

The concepts of "eros" and "erotic phenomenon" are habits that show the interconnection between these meanings and evoke the platonic and neoplatonic basis for the eros philosophical meaning as well as the "erotic" wisdom of philosophy. From different attempts to design a phenomenology of eros, at least one common basis can be engaged. In its numerous faces and traces (sexuality, desire, passion, love, friendship, etc.), the "erotic phenomenon" appears and becomes central to any attempt capable of understanding the condition of the possibility of *uniqueness* (of self) and of *otherness* (of the other). As such, it provokes what can be called a "logical tendency" of the various phenomenologies of intersubjectivity. As in every logic, this logical tendency is a moment of critical absence or even of dogmatism in self-thinking; the thought tries to "solve" the contradictions of throwing the subject and asking about its "origin".

On the other hand, the logic of the "different phenomenologies of intersubjectivity" – as well we can say in the case of tendential logic of the dominant idea of phenomenology in general - is the logic of a phenomenological difference of the concept that "can be defined as the „quest” for solving paradoxical subjectivity by which the other is admitted as a self that I myself represent, but whose absolute direction can be sustained only if I recognize it in analogy with my own self.ⁱⁱⁱ". One of the main criticisms addressed by philosophical and even cultural divergent traditions of the different approaches to the phenomena of intersubjectivity are very close to a danger, to what can be called „existential solipsism”.

Following the phenomenological model of interpretation of Levinas, we move our attention on Julius Evola subtle analysis of sexuality. Julius Evola is part of the philosophers

eager to articulate, at the theoretical level of discipline, certain themes considered marginal to philosophical preoccupations and thus to determine a clear and original contour of the subject. The Italian philosopher, formed under the influence of Nietzsche, Michelstaedter and Weininger, had multiple humanist preoccupations, balancing philosophy, literature and art, his thinking confronting Marinetti's futurism, Paperian group Lacerba, and Tzara's Dadaism. The work that we hold for our research and on which we will linger in the following pages is *Metafisica del sesso*, which appeared in 1969.

A "metaphysics of sex," a subtle way to place the discourse upon this subject, as metaphysics is notionally grounded in the panoply of science, implies recognition of a certain identifiable state, at first sight assimilated to sexuality, a state to be re-affirmed and re-organized at the psychological level.

What Evola affirms in the economy of the relationship of eroticism with pleasure, putting an identifying sign between the sexual instinct and the tendency to pleasure is in part what literature will be able to accomplish: the tendency to liberate sexuality through the desire to obtain pleasure. It is noteworthy that this link, at hand, could be said and even used by many psychologists and theorists, yet outlines the original reflection of the Italian philosopher. Evola says that beyond these two regimes of pleasure and sexual instinct, which is the determining factor in eros normality, it is not the idea of pleasure, but the impulse.

Thus, if we retain this first moment, (which is also the end!), eros restricts itself to the elimination and annihilation of the latent desire for sexual intercourse. But if we stay at this stage, it would be not so much. Eroticism would be neither more nor less than a prime and lasting source, in other words, the definitive of an ecstatic state that is consumed in a then and there.

But certainly there is much more than that and Evola continues in his book searches and ventures eros on the traits of love, myth, magic, and sacred. The exotic titles of the chapters of Evola's book, such as *The Magnetic Theory of Love*, or *The Steps of Sexuality*, give the reader the plan of a complex circuit of clarification of the matter, with the pretense of systematized absolutisation and inventory.

We share the same view with Evola on the eros-love relationship, namely that neither the abstract idea of pleasure as a goal explains eros nor love is not the defining and sufficient element. At most, love can be considered a stage, a first stage to be followed by others concepts. However, as far as we are concerned, we will not exclude from the preoccupations that this research will be the theme of love, upon which we will come back later.

We will limit ourselves here to saying that love manages to become not a meaning (because we should know what the purpose is, and we do not really know it!), but a mechanism that produces a certain insight into what can stand a possible definition of eroticism. In this sense, even with regard to this process of defining the concept of love, we have difficulties, unless we retrospectively review its phenomenological aspect. In this sense, literature traits more clearly the meanings of erotic and love, the literary character being more than a road opener and an individual who establishes the theories, is the one who proves them.

In Evola's book we find a very good reference to this in exemplifying the words expressed by Erich Maria Remarque, a character from his novel *Drei Kameraden*, which we quote in the following: "(...) *once it can be something for a human being, just by standing beside her. So, it sounds very simple, but if you think, you feel it is a huge thing, without*

limits: one thing that can destroy and transform you in the whole. It's love, and it's something else. ^{iv}

By denouncing from the title of the book the subject of his research in which his observations will be rotated, Evola states that the way in which human nature is conceived denotes the meaning attributed to sex. We have, in these circumstances, two ways of anthropological approach. If we think in the terms of a Darwinian evolution, man's sexuality would only be an extension of the animal instincts.

There is, however, a trend of modernity to reduce the superior by inferior and to explain the superior to the inferior. In this sense Evola brings into discussion the perspective of psychoanalytic anthropology, where the foundation of man is explained through a elementary scale (instinct, subconscious) capable of explaining love and eroticism. Evola's conclusion on the relationship of eros with sexual love is that ontogenesis does not repeat phylogenesis, the latter only going through the possibilities eliminated, and then proceeding further in its path. Evola analyzes love under the limiting aspect of sexual love, and what is the subject of study of a part of his book is love-passion. About this latter Paul Bourget said that "(...) there is a mental and physical state during which everything is abolished in us, in our thinking, in our hearts and in our senses ... this abbot is called abbot." ^v

Along with the theories of Marion and Derrida, we are approaching the conceptual essentialization of eroticism and delimit the framework of our reference point and our starting point in our research. Marion is the author of several philosophical and theological works in which he practices the phenomenological exercise in a symbiosis with philosophical reflection and hermeneutical analysis. In the following, we will focus our attention on the theories of the two philosophers through two reference works "*The Eros Phenomenon. Six meditations.*" by Jean Luc Marion and *On hospitality* by Jacques Derrida

Concerning the reflections on eroticism and love, Marion notes the lack of interest from philosophy for this subject. But this is not necessarily bad, but it can not be considered as beneficial either. The fact that philosophy can not express itself on subject of love and eroticism, can point out about philosophy that it expresses its desire not to maltreat, not to betray the theme in the words of the French philosopher.

But at the same time, the inability to express itself on this subject may correlate with a precariousness of philosophy. Starting from the etymology of *philo-sophia* in the sense of *love of wisdom*, Marion states that philosophy is based on eros. In the words of the French philosopher "(...) *philosophy is defined as* the love of wisdom *"because, before claiming to know, it must indeed begin by loving. To get to understand we must first want it; in other words, to be surprised that we do not understand (this astonishment also offers a beginning of wisdom); or suffer because we did not understand, even fear that we did not understand (this fear also opens to wisdom). Philosophy understands only to the extent that he loves - I love to understand, so I love to understand.*" ^{vi}

Exceeding modernity, sexuality stirred up a "new amorous disorder" to quote the title of a complex book. The clear focus of sexuality on current social dynamics has led to the reconfiguration of gender distinctions and reciprocity. Generally speaking, in social societies, social codes do not outsource the issue of sexuality.

If sexuality was for the ancient Greeks the place of a double encounter - with oneself and with the other, in an attempt to amplify the process of knowledge, to modernity sexuality is thought of as a form of everyday necessity in the extension of natural pleasure. Sexuality

today occupies the place of a necessary organic identification device in the social perimeter. The other is faced with sexual desire without knowing, as in love.

Modernity brings to the fore, together with the theme of sexuality, privacy and love, both placed in the complex device of sexuality. Anthony Giddens devotes an excellent work to the subject of sexuality in relation to intimacy and love. About sexuality, Giddens states that ... sexuality today has been discovered, opened and made accessible to the development of varying life-styles. It is something that everybody has or cultivates, no longer a natural condition that an individual accepts as a preordained state of affairs. Somehow, in a way that has to be investigated, sexuality functions as a malleable feature of self, and a prime connecting point between body, self-identity and social norms. "

Sexuality brings to the fore the dynamic picture of a balance between body and representation. Things are or at least seem pretty clear when it comes to sexuality. We automatically perceive as sexual any direct connection to sexuality represented by action.

Of the sexual connotation of eroticism, there is little to say if we limit ourselves to the emphasized emphasis that the sex-body-eroticism implies on our understanding. However, what might be interesting to analyze consists precisely in the rest that it offers, but it also abandons its sexuality in relation to eroticism. We are here in the idea of the rest because even at the discursive level, sexuality does not reveal everything, it does not show up in everything

We will go from a cultural perspective that can be applied to this distinction. While eroticism, essentially recovered in the territory of a universal customization of desire and attraction, can be manifested in all societies, love can be thought only in the cultural and historical perspective. In the first chapter I mentioned Paz's theory of love, we return to this part and complete this theory with what the Mexican poet called "amateur feeling", talking about love. Even if it can happen that a mysterious and passionate desire, determined in the key of love, is manifested, it is a particular case and can not be generalized and identified in the case of societies and historical periods. However, this "amateur feeling" denouncing love is explained by Paz^{vii} as having two contradictory conditions of manifestation. First, the mysterious desire of the subject to encounter (and, ultimately, to love) the other is perceived as an involuntary force that seizes the being of the one who wants to offer. Second, the being of the chosen one to receive love must be placed in the device of an opportunity for an opening to make a decision.

Exhaustion of the subject in front of the great events makes the pure meaning to disperse from its comprehensive function. It seems to us that we understand, although in essence, we set ourselves in an area of ideas, having the inability to take a certain meaning. In terms of eroticism, our approach as subjects seems impossible and equally unlikely. Our particular significance upon the meaning of pornography and eroticism leads to a new placing of these two concepts in our conceptual areas and from this we extend the meaning to a general territory. From dressing up to the behavioral typologies present in the daily newspaper, we would find it very hard to cheat ourselves, telling us that we really do not have to do with pornography, but with another significance of eroticism. But, in short time, we realize that it is not like this at all... Obviously, pornography destroys our capacity for hermeneutical reformulation of the concept, in other words what seemed to be configuration of a concept turns out soon to be understood as something else.. .

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- i See Plato's *Symposium*, Translated from Greek into Romanian by. Petru Cretia, in Plato's *Dialogues*, Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, Bucuresti, 1972[
- ii This idea is taken from Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, Cambridge University Press, 1981
- iii Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and infinity*, ed.
- iv Apud. Erich Maria Remarque, *Drei Kamareden* in Julius Evola, *Metaphysics of sex*,
- v Apud P. Bourque, *Physiologie de l'amour moderne* in. Julius Evola, *op. cit.*p. 141
- vi See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon. Six meditations*
- vii See Octavio Paz, *Double flame*,

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