

# The Ideas of God and Self Within a Phenomenology of Body

*Michelle Rebidoux*

## Preview

Were I to give this paper a subtitle, it would be: “Revisiting the metaphor of the body as house”; and if I were to give it a sub-subtitle, it would be: “The back door, the front door, the bedroom, and the hole in the roof.” In the end I decided not to add these sub-titles, not only for the sake of sheer titular manageability (if I may put it that way), but also because, in doing so, a certain dualism of body and soul or spirit<sup>1</sup> might be thereby evoked. Of course, the image of the house as a metaphor for the body—a house in which the soul or the spirit dwells, in which perhaps it is even trapped—is a familiar one within the Western tradition. Nevertheless, I will be appealing here to the metaphor of the body as a house in the attempt to articulate an idea of God and of the self from within a phenomenology of the body—and in doing so, precisely challenging any such dualism. To begin with, by “body” I intend the lived body, bound up in some way with an ipseic phenomenality, itself inseparable from the “sensual” awareness of itself—and, of course, the word “sensual,” or “sensuality,” is what precisely is going to be at issue in revisiting the metaphor. Indeed, in the phenomenological literature of recent decades, the word “flesh” is often used to distinguish this ipseic and somehow “sensual” self-awareness from the merely objective body appearing in the world, one object among others, capable of being an object, to some extent, even for the soul or self that “inhabits” it.<sup>2</sup> To that extent, if any dualism is to be identified here, it is less that of body and soul or spirit than that of “lived body” and “objective body” or “body object.”

## **The Ideas of God and Self Within a Phenomenology of Body**

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*Keywords: phenomenology, the subject, the body, spiritual senses, God, the self, mysticism, ethics, love*

Were I to give this paper a subtitle, it would be: “Revisiting the metaphor of the body as house”; and if I were to give it a sub-subtitle, it would be: “The back door, the front door, the bedroom, and the hole in the roof.” In the end I decided not to add these sub-titles, not only for the sake of sheer titular manageability (if I may put it that way), but also because, in doing so, a certain *dualism* of body and soul or spirit<sup>1</sup> might be thereby evoked. Of course, the image of the house as a metaphor for the body a house in which the soul or the spirit dwells, in which perhaps it is even trapped is a familiar one within the Western tradition. Nevertheless, I will be appealing here to the metaphor of the body as a house in the attempt to articulate an idea of God and of the self from within a phenomenology of the body and in doing so, precisely challenging any such dualism. To begin with, by “body” I intend the *lived* body, bound up in some way with an ipseic phenomenality, itself inseparable from the “sensual” awareness of itself and, of course, the word “sensual,” or “sensuality,” is what precisely is going to be at issue in revisiting the metaphor. Indeed, in the phenomenological literature of recent decades, the word “flesh” is often used to distinguish this ipseic and somehow “sensual” self-awareness from the merely objective body appearing in the world, one object among others, capable of being an object, to some extent, even for the soul or self that “inhabits” it.<sup>2</sup> To that extent, if any dualism is to be identified here, it is less that of body and soul or spirit than that of “lived body” and “objective body” or “body object.”

The primary influences for this paper are two: firstly, the (chiefly French) phenomenology of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, after what Dominique Janicaud

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<sup>1</sup> For the present I am ignoring the complex tradition of distinctions between these two.

<sup>2</sup> To some extent, this kind of phenomenological language is very much an attempt to rearticulate, in post-Cartesian terms, what the pre-Moderns might have called the “soul”. See, for instance, Michel Henry, “Does the Concept ‘soul’ Mean Anything?” trans. Girard Etzkorn, *Philosophy Today* 13, no. 2-4 (Summer 1969): 94-114; French original: “Le concept d’âme a-t-il un sens?” *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 67, (1966): 241–266.

has referred to as phenomenology's "theological turn"<sup>3</sup>; secondly, an important and, in recent years, much reinvigorated theme within the Christian mystical tradition, that of the "spiritual senses."<sup>4</sup> The contention of the paper is that, within these two influential streams, the ideas of God and of self are inextricably linked, but also that the idea of self emerges especially in the experience, or undergoing, of certain manifestations within the "lived body" (such as "openings" or "dilations," even "transmutations" of it) a body whose discreteness, as an hypostasis of ipseic sensuality, is ultimately neither limited by the "body object," nor wholly "in possession" of itself, i.e., in the sense that it serves as its own ontological ground.

### The Critique of the Subject

The reference to the self, as an hypostasis of ipseic sensuality, not being in possession of itself here points to the phenomenological concept of *givenness*, as articulated most notably by Jean-Luc Marion in the context of the post-Modern critique of the Modern concept of the self or subject. This critique, of course, owes much to Heidegger, but also adopts, in figures such as Marion and Levinas and Henry, a critical stance towards their predecessor's work, especially towards the analysis of so-called "authentic Dasein" of *Being and Time*. Nevertheless, Heidegger's development of the critique of onto-theology is definitive for this phenomenology in its own articulation of the "Modern subject" as an aporic expression of "onto-egology." Here, "beings" are intentionally posited, projected out onto, or within, an horizon of meaning an act or movement of the subject referred to as *ekstasis*. In this way, beings are established in their being by a centre of intentionality, the subject, which is *itself* grounded only in itself the main problem here, of course, being that the nature of this self-grounding (and this is really the core of the critique of such a subject) always remains, and *must* remain, the subject's most irritatingly obscure feature. In the end, such a grounding functions, according to Michel Henry's critique, quite unavoidably as a sort of peremptory representationalism: the self-ground "appears" only in the subject's turning back upon itself in an intention of itself cast out onto, or within, a sort of "interior" horizon though, of course, precisely *in* this very "turning back" upon itself, the ground which it now presumes to present in its intention of itself has *itself* turned back *along with* the subject, and so eschews phenomenality. For this reason, the phenomenology that critiques such a subject does so by critiquing the very possibility (or rather, the impossibility) of a self-ground established in an act or movement of ekstastic intentionality.

Now, starting out from this point, a number of different routes have been taken in the attempt to rearticulate the subject *non-ekstatically*. Michel Henry, for

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<sup>3</sup> See Dominique Janicaud, "The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology," trans. Bernard G. Prusak, in *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate*, Dominique Janicaud et al. (New York: Fordham University Press 2000).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Paul L. Gavriluk and Sarah Coakley, ed., *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

example, in some sense, does not himself even reject the project of onto-egology (nor, for that matter, onto-theology), only that project as carried out within what he calls an “ontological monism” by which he means an ontology conceiving of ekstastic intentionality as the *only* mode of phenomenality. Henry’s claim is that a more *originary* mode of phenomenality what he calls “revelation” *itself* serves as the ground and possibility in the subject of ekstastic phenomenality.<sup>5</sup> Levinas and Marion make similar attempts at rearticulating the subject, albeit in somewhat less explicitly ontological tones than Henry’s (and it is somewhat more from Levinas’ and Marion’s work that I am here taking my cue). Employing the language of grammar, both Levinas and Marion reject the Modern articulation of the subject in *nominative* terms. Levinas speaks rather of the subject as being *under an accusation* before the face of the other, while Marion appeals to the concept of *dativity* of being *given* to oneself as a self by a *counter-intentionality* that overflows the self’s capacity to intentionally master it. (And actually, Marion reads Levinas’ description of the accusation as ultimately being based in the idea of dativity, of givenness, as well.) In both cases, the subject or the self *receives* itself *from* the other in and as a *new hypostasis* determined *by* the other. Levinas speaks, for example, of the self as being “hypostasized in another way. It is bound in a knot that cannot be undone in responsibility for others.”<sup>6</sup> While Marion speaks of an “anamorphosis” or alteration of the consciousness “substituted for the centrifugal intentionality coming from me—a point of view come from another place, which imposes on me its angle of vision.”<sup>7</sup> This is what Marion calls “saturated phenomenality”, the overflowing by an excess of “givenness” of the capacity to intentionally master that givenness, thus recasting the heretofore nominative “I” into a dative “me.” Here the new hypostasis, as “me,” cannot simply be collapsed back into cannot be re-appropriated as the ekstastically-defined nominativity of a subject enjoying its intentional mastery as an “I” enjoying, as Levinas would say, its own place in the sun.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For Henry, that more originary mode of phenomenality is the ipseic self-revelation of “absolute Life,” functioning as the auto-affection of such Life in, and as the essence of, the subject itself serving as the ipseic ground and possibility in that subject of ekstastic phenomenality, thus grounding the individual subject, as a *living* subject, in that absolute Life itself, which is, for Henry, the ipseic being of God. Of course, there are all kinds of conceptual problems, too, arising with Henry’s articulation of the ontological ground as absolute ipseic Life, though a discussion of these (by now very well-known) problems is not the focus of this paper. For my own full discussion of these problems elsewhere, see my monograph on Henry: Michelle Rebidoux, *The Philosophy of Michel Henry (1922 – 2002): A French Christian Phenomenology of Life* (Lewiston / Queenston / Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 105.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 117.

<sup>8</sup> It could also be pointed out here that, for both Levinas and Marion, this so-called “new” hypostasis is, in fact, privileged as, in some sense, the condition for the very possibility of the old. For Levinas, an ekstastically-defined ontology *derives from* the originary revelation that is the ethical relation with the other. It is only when the immediacy of the “face-to-face” must open to a third party that the immediate ethical responsibility is suspended in order to be able to judge

## The Spiritual Senses

So where do the spiritual senses come in, then? The spiritual senses are a frequent theme throughout the history of the Christian mystical tradition, as well as within Christian theological thinking more generally, and there have been two main ways in which such senses have been understood and articulated. For the most part, Orthodox writers—with the exception of a handful whose positions suffered the condemnation of heresy by various of the Ecumenical Councils—have spoken of the exterior senses’ “spiritualization” in the process of becoming more like God. Since *all* matter had been sanctified in the Incarnation (and not just Jesus’ body), the whole of the creation, therefore, participates, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, in God’s uncreated energies. The spiritualization of the physical senses— opening the soul *and body* to illumination and to the perception of ever subtler

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between them, to “compare incomparables,” as Levinas says. This is what Levinas identifies as “Greek justice”; but such justice must always remember that it first arises out of and must serve the “Good,” which reveals itself, for Levinas, as the responsibility by which the “new” hypostasis is defined in the ethical relation. Similarly, for Marion, what he calls the “saturated phenomenality” of the counter-intentionality that overflows the self’s capacity to intentionally master it serves as the paradigm of *all* phenomenality, since it highlights the originary *givenness* of the other to which the self’s intentionality originally *responds*. That intentionality is, in essence, a *response* to givenness or better, to an *event* of givenness is a fact mostly obscured and forgotten in the ekstastic mode of phenomenality. Marion has in mind here Husserl’s discussion of the relation between the *noesis* (the intentional content, or idea, in the mind) and the *noema* (the real *givenness* of the object received in an intuition). The two sides of the relation, of course, meet to produce meaning, with the received *noema* being embraced by the *noesis* in response. But there is also a sense in which the *noesis* can be *projected*, as if in search of a *noema* that can *fulfill* it; it can even cover over a *noema*, thus misinterpreting it (perhaps to fulfill some desire or other on the part of the subject). In that case, the originally *responsive* character of the *noesis* is obscured in favour of an act of will (or, one might say, of will-to-power). Indeed, at the heart of Marion’s own critique of Husserl is that, little by little in the latter’s thinking, the *noesis* takes on such a priority that eventually the *noema* is all but subsumed into the *noesis*, with intentionality taking on more and more of a *projective* character accordingly. Whereas Marion wants to highlight instead the originally *responsive* character of the *noesis*, the bottom line here being that it is *givenness* that originally gives to the self the very *capacity* for intentionality, as a *power* of the self first received in an act of *self-appropriation* that is, appropriation of the self by a self who first *receives* itself precisely *as* one *addressed* by the givenness to which it is (so to speak) *called* to respond. See, for instance, Jean-Luc Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” trans. Thomas A. Carlson, in *Phenomenology and the ‘Theological Turn’: The French Debate*. It is worth pointing out here that a similar (so to speak) *duality* of hypostases, with their accompanying modes of phenomenality, can be found in a variety of other influences on the work of both Levinas and Marion. Buber’s 1923 classic, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), for example, is famous for its articulation of the two modes of being of the human, which he calls the two “basic words”: the “I-It” orientation (more or less equivalent to ekstastic intentionality) and the “I-You” relation, which, for Buber, is a revelation quite beyond the control of any self that is “taken up” into that mode. In fact, so much do these two modes constitute two distinct hypostases for Buber that he writes that “[t]here is no I as such, but only the I of the basic word I-You and the I of the basic word I-It” (54). Moreover, for Buber, as for Levinas and Marion, one of these modes of being the “I-You” mode is prior to, and serves as the very condition for the possibility of, the other, the “I-It” mode. See, for example, Buber’s analysis of the development of the “I-It” mode from out of the “I-You” mode in his discussion of the “primitive” and the child (69-79).

spiritual realities—is part of the process of “deification,” *theosis*, which is the defining goal of Orthodoxy. Gregory Palamas, for example, writes that the uncreated Light, while seen with the (spiritualized) physical eyes, is nevertheless not seen by means of their “created and sensory power”: “The light has sometimes also been seen by the eyes of the body, but not with their created and sensory power; for they see it after having been transformed by the Spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

By contrast, writers of the Latin Church, who had been more deeply infected for centuries with Augustine’s rather chronic distrust of the flesh, tended by and large to do away with the exterior senses altogether, or at least to parallel them with specifically “spiritual” ones. On the traditional three-staged path, for example—beginning with purification, or purgation, moving through illumination, and arriving finally at union or communion with God—the first stage of purgation was usually seen as the stage in which the exterior senses are disciplined and ultimately withdrawn from all attachment to the world. The second stage, illumination, marks the awakening within the soul of its own spiritual senses and faculties (by, of course, the gift of grace), while the third stage of union or communion marks the perfection and fulfillment of the spiritual senses’ “sensings” (so to speak) of God. But even the descriptions of these so-called “spiritual senses”—held in some way to be opposed to, or parallel to, the exterior, physical ones—are themselves often cast metaphorically in distinctly physical terms: spiritual contemplation is said to give rise to all kinds of spiritual visions, auditions, tastings, delightful smells, even “touchings” or “contacts” with God. Indeed, given this kind of metaphorical language, it seems difficult to discern, *phenomenologically*—despite what subtle theological or anthropological distinctions could be unfolded—precisely what the difference is between “spiritualized physical senses” and separate “spiritual senses.”

But how does all of this relate to the metaphor of the house? My contention here is that the idea of God within a phenomenology of the lived body is precisely *as* the counter-intentionality or, perhaps, as the unmasterable (and as such, unthematizable) “source” of such a counter-intentionality (although, even *this* would in some sense be a *theme*<sup>10</sup>) from which the self *receives* itself in (indeed, *as*) the new hypostasis; and, to that extent, that the idea of self within

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<sup>9</sup> As quoted in Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 100.

<sup>10</sup> On this point, see Marion’s discussion of the “pure call” in Jean-Luc Marion, “L’*Interloqué*,” in *Who Comes After the Subject?* Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy ed. (New York & London: Routledge, 1991). Marion writes: “Who or what claims the *interloqué*? If we mention here God, the other, moral conscience, auto-affection, figures of difference, Being itself, etc., this only enables us to name the difficulty, not to solve it: as a matter of fact the *interloqué* would become in all cases a derivative and regional agency...” (244). It should be pointed out that, for Marion, what theology has identified as “revelation” is, on the basis of his articulation of phenomenology as *givenness*, a real *possibility* of phenomenality, though he himself insists upon a rigorous commitment to the principle of pure givenness as “first philosophy”. See, for instance, Jean-Luc Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” trans. Thomas A. Carlson, *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Summer 1994): 572-591; see also, Jean-Luc Marion, “The Other First Philosophy and the Question of Givenness,” trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Summer 1999): 784-800.

such a phenomenology of body is of a self precisely *given* to itself in (indeed, *as*) this new hypostasis, its own intentionality suspended (because out-mastered, so to speak); and, furthermore, that such a hypostasis is an undergoing, first, of a sort of radical opening up of the house, and secondly, of something like a sensuality capable of moving beyond the house, yet still bringing something of the house with it, or even being transmuted into a new *kind* of house. To that extent, for the purposes of this paper, my focus will be primarily on the spiritual sense of “touching” indeed, not so much touching as *being touched*, or *feeling*, in such a way that one *feels* oneself to be *given* to oneself *as* a (new) self by God.

### **The Back Door and the Front Door: Emmanuel Levinas**

Let’s begin with the back door. One need not look far into the writings of Levinas, for example, to appreciate how embodied, how *viscerally*-toned many of his “phenomenological descriptions”<sup>11</sup> of the ethical relation are. Indeed, Levinas himself uses the metaphor of the house (or of the intimate home) in the context of his analysis of the growth of what he calls the “psychism.” Section II of *Totality and Infinity*, entitled “Interiority and Economy,” seeks to articulate the phenomenon that is the psychism as “separation” from what Levinas calls “the element” off of which it lives. The psychism here is a sort of hypostasis accomplished as insularity, self-enjoyment, self-recollection, and it is only on the basis of such an accomplishment that anything like the movement of intentional ekstasis and mastery is possible at all.<sup>12</sup> Levinas’ language in this section is wonderfully rich; he speaks of the “dwelling,” which is, in some sense, both the structure that shelters and nourishes the psychism *and* the embodied psychism itself. The psychism, says Levinas (in one of his Talmudic readings), has “a place in the rear of the head, the occiput, in which [its] hidden thoughts and [its] mental reservations accumulate. Refuge which can hold [its] entire thought.”<sup>13</sup>

Yet it is precisely this refuge within the psychism this refuge *as* the psychism which is ruptured in the ethical relation. For Levinas, that rupture comes as a “catastrophe,” a “devouring fire,” a “trauma,” and it comes, so to speak, through a back door: “where the bolts that close the rear doors of

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<sup>11</sup> To be precise, Levinas does not really consider himself to be doing phenomenology at all. Rather, he considers his work an articulation of the ethical vision, which, for him, is “revelation” (not that that term is itself without ambiguity!). His own understanding of phenomenology is strictly in terms of intentionality; he did his doctoral work on Husserl’s theory of intuition, and his writings are chock full of Husserlian vocabulary, with which he continuously engages in critical debate. Nevertheless, his own descriptions of the “trauma,” as he calls it, of the ethical relation *can* be considered phenomenological in their own right for example, according to Marion’s redefining of phenomenology on the basis of “givenness” and what he calls “saturated phenomenality.” Dominique Janicaud includes Levinas in his list of those phenomenologists whom he accuses of having made a “theological turn.”

<sup>12</sup> Though elsewhere he posits that even this state of “being at home with oneself” is only possible on the basis of the ethical relation, with the introduction of the “third party” (see footnote 8 above).

<sup>13</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 167.

interiority burst,” as “a depth of undergoing that no capacity comprehends, and where no foundation supports it any longer.”<sup>14</sup> One notices in this passage two key things: first, the saturated nature of this phenomenon which “no capacity comprehends,” which “no foundation [of one’s own] supports”; and second, one notices the particularly visceral character of his language. He speaks, for example, of a “dazzling of the eye,” an “ignition of the skin,” the bursting open of “the rear doors of interiority,” of God coming to mind as the Infinite, no doubt completely blowing open the occiput.

Furthermore, this coming to mind of God as the Infinite is, for Levinas, an ethical inspiration *towards* the other. Levinas refers to this as the “reversal” in which the “Desirable” (God) refuses objectification, refuses *presence*, as an object of the psychism’s devotion, instead turning the psychism outside of itself and out into the world in responsibility for the other. It is precisely this turning, as the ethical inspiration, that is constitutive of the new hypostasis, of the self “hypostasized in another way.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, with Levinas, the trauma goes something like this: God opens the back door and breathes into the psychism, like “a lung at the bottom of its substance,”<sup>16</sup> as an inspiration, as an infinite breath “the longest breath there is, spirit”<sup>17</sup> which at once turns the psychism, in an “expiration,” out through its own front door towards the other in responsibility. Levinas writes, for example, of “leaving one’s home to the point of leaving oneself”<sup>18</sup> in substitution for the other that is, in being responsible even for the other’s responsibility. But the self that one leaves here, the home that one leaves, is precisely the old, insular dwelling of the psychism at home with itself what Levinas calls “the Same” who is responsible for no one but himself. In the ethical relation, the self ceases to be precisely this insular self, but it does not cease to be a self altogether, since it is “hypostasized in another way.”

Moreover, even this newly hypostasized self is not without its own, discrete sensuality. Levinas writes, for example, of the (lived) body’s vulnerability in substitution for the other, even of the “motherhood” or “maternity” of the self in the ethical relation. Indeed, for Levinas, the other for whom I am responsible to the point of substitution is now my “child”—such that I, as responsible for the other, “gestate” the other within myself in utter passivity.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting, furthermore, that it is precisely the deeply *visceral* quality of this gestation (itself, in some sense, a form of inspiration) that contributes to the hypostasizing of the new identity of the self in responsibility. For in “the exposure to wounds and outrages, in the feeling proper to responsibility, the oneself is provoked as irreplaceable, as devoted to the others,

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<sup>14</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 66-67.

<sup>15</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 105.

<sup>16</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 180.

<sup>17</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 182.

<sup>18</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 182.

<sup>19</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 104-105.

without being able to resign, and thus as incarnated in order to offer itself, to suffer and to give.”<sup>20</sup> So the psychism, the dwelling, the lived body these all really mean the same thing here is undone in its insularity because God opens it to the infinite by breathing into it through the back door, and then by opening one, through the front door, infinitely to the other in responsibility, and in that opening into responsibility determining one as a new self.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Front Door and the Bedroom: Teresa of Avila**

So much for back doors! Let us now say more about front doors, and bedrooms! There is no dearth of examples, of course, from Jewish and Christian spiritual writing or for that matter, from Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or other religious writing of visceral descriptions of the (front) doors of the heart opening, of hearts being “strangely warmed,” being filled with light or love or understanding, with feelings of the presence of some spiritual being, and the like. In fact, although Marion articulates his phenomenology of “saturation” largely in response to Husserl and Kant, he himself takes inspiration from a common theme in much of the pre-modern spiritual writing of the Christian tradition namely, the *excess* of God (a theme quite distinct from, although certainly related to, that of God’s incomprehensibility).

Perhaps some of the *most* visceral descriptions of the undergoing of such excess are to be found in the writings of Teresa of Avila. First of all, it should be pointed out that Teresa readily uses the available vocabulary of her time, referring generally to the “soul” when describing her spiritual experiences. She also writes of the soul’s “spiritual senses,” paralleling the exterior, physical senses with a separate set of specifically spiritual ones, which, as mentioned above, is typical of the mystical writers of western Christianity. Yet these spiritual senses are described by her as allowing her, even in her body, to perceive all kinds of spiritual “visions,” “auditions,” and especially “touchings” of God. Further, she attributes emotions especially spiritual delights, love, and sufferings to the soul which, likewise, parallel the ordinary emotions of the

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<sup>20</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 105. Levinas’ use of the vocabulary of “infinite responsibility” and “substitution” and “exposure to wounds and outrages” and “incarnation” is precisely the reason why many have identified Christian themes in his writings.

<sup>21</sup> Actually, in Levinas’ later writings, specifically in *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, the phenomenological character of his description of the ethical inspiration becomes even more rigorous, so that, in a move similar to Marion’s insistence upon the “pure call,” he explicitly avoids positing God as the “source” of that inspiration: “This trauma has surprised me completely; the order has never been represented, for it has never been presented, not even in the past coming in memory, to the point that it is I that only says, and after the event, this unheard-of obligation. This ambivalence is the exception and subjectivity of the subject, its very psyche, a possibility of inspiration. It is the possibility of being the author of what had been breathed in unbeknownst to me, of having received, one knows not from where, that of which I am the author. In responsibility for the other we are at the very heart of the ambiguity of inspiration. The unheard-of saying is enigmatically in the anarchic response.... One is tempted to call this plot religious; it is not stated in terms of certainty or uncertainty, and does not rest on any positive theology” (147-149).

vital heart. Indeed, what is interesting here is the way in which such “spiritual sensuality” and “spiritual emotion” constitute (in phenomenological terms) very much the *lived body* of a new hypostasis, cast in its being *as* such by the overwhelming intentionality of (what Teresa understands to be) the infinite God.

In her *Interior Castle*, Teresa famously analogized the soul to a castle with seven rooms, or seven mansions, each having its own specific form of “sensuality.” In the fourth of these mansions, for example, the “spiritual senses” awaken, so that the soul begins to feel presences and “touches” of God which wound it deeply, filling it with love, but also with a great suffering. At this point, the soul begins to feel itself “called” ever deeper within, precisely by an “other” (whom Teresa calls the Spouse) who dwells within the soul in the intimacy of the seventh mansion. In the sixth mansion we have, then, that famous account—referred to as the Transverberation—of the fiery arrow of God which, coming now as though in through the front door, pierces Teresa’s heart and penetrates her even to the depths of her entrails; it hollows her out on the inside and so fills her in those depths with a love and a great distress in the soul’s knowledge of the immediate and unmistakable presence of God there that she cries aloud. She writes that “when He that has wounded [the soul] draws out the arrow, the bowels seem to come with it, so deeply does it feel this love.”<sup>22</sup>

So let’s just take stock of Teresa’s symbolic language for a moment. We have the Spouse, whom she understands to be God, calling her from *within* the house, from the most intimate, interior chamber, namely, the bedroom; and we have God, as well, from outside, coming now in through the front door with his fiery arrow, disemboweling her, and filling up the now empty space within her with his love. Finally, it is precisely this emptying out and filling up with love that enables her (as though her entrails had previously been somehow viscerally in the way) to finally enter into that intimate bedroom, the most interior of the seven mansions. This is God’s own dwelling place within her, in which the “spiritual marriage” of the soul with God takes place. And yet this bedroom is a strange room indeed. One would suppose perhaps that the bedroom, of all rooms, would be the most insular, the most enclosed and private the most, as Levinas would say, like a refuge. Yet for Teresa, it, too, is open to the infinite, because the Spouse who is said to come and go as he pleases, and she knows not by what doors is himself the infinite God. Moreover, precisely within this spiritual marriage, a new hypostasis of the self emerges. For in the opening to the infinite that this Spouse effects in the soul in the bedroom, Teresa *feels* herself to become a new self, a “spirit,” in and by the embrace of God’s love: in the very “centre of our soul, or spirit,” she writes, which is “something so difficult to describe”<sup>23</sup>; “[i]t is impossible to say more than that, as far as one can understand, the soul (I mean the spirit of the soul) is made one with God, Who, being likewise a Spirit, has been pleased to reveal the love that He has for us.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Dover Publications, Inc., 1946), 94.

<sup>23</sup> Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, 155.

<sup>24</sup> Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, 152.

So what we see here is that, for Teresa, at the utmost *interior limit* of the sensitivity of the body's viscera, precisely the point at which the most interior chamber of the self opens to the infinite, is revealed to that self a one whose touch affects it, *shows* to it its *limit* as a self, and with that touch *recasts* the self as a *new* self, as "spirit." Here Teresa very much shares with Levinas the deeply "sensual," visceral undergoing of the opening to the infinite of the interior insularity of her being, yet without, it seems, the "reversal" (as God's refusal to be present to the self) that the ethical inspiration entails for Levinas (the dwelling that is the psychism, it would seem, for Levinas, has no bedroom). Nevertheless, the intimacy of the bedroom and its spiritual delights, for Teresa, is not a perpetual honeymoon. For in the spiritual marriage, the infinite God perpetually *disturbs* the soul; he does *not* allow his bride to rest, but inspires in the soul the will and the power to do his work. In fact, Teresa contrasts what were very much the sweet days of her betrothal and of her early spiritual delights when she was, in some sense, still *her own*, still concerned with her own affairs to her later days as the faithful wife who must ever be about her husband's business. Then she was *recast* as one *bound* to do his work, to go out into the world and in Teresa's case, to personally initiate a reform of the Carmelite Order and to found personally no less than sixteen new convents in the twenty years before her death, with at least as many more being founded by others under her direct guidance.

### **The Hole in the Roof: John of the Cross**

So we've discussed back doors, front doors, and bedrooms. Now what about the hole in the roof? Teresa herself does not discuss such an opening, nor does Levinas. But a myriad of others do both East and West as well as discussing some kind of ascent, presumably through just such a hole. Augustine, of course, made his famous ascent with his mother Monica, as he tells us in his *Confessions*, which he afterwards attempted to repeat with the goal of "touching God" with the mind, or even of going beyond the mind. The great Indian philosopher and yogi of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sri Aurobindo, speaks also of the ascent beyond mind, and the difficulty of *piercing through* we he calls the "strong, hard, and bright lid of mind."<sup>25</sup> The anonymous 14<sup>th</sup> century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* speaks, likewise, of *piercing through* the cloud to enter into a kind of non-discursive knowledge of God defined rather by love than by reason. Then, of course, there's the wonderful poetic articulation of the ascent by John of the Cross a younger colleague of Teresa in the reform of the Carmelites who, "fired by love's urgent longings," goes out to meet his beloved by the "secret ladder," his "house being now all stilled."<sup>26</sup> Certainly in this last use of the house

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<sup>25</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Light Publications, 1990), 910.

<sup>26</sup> John of the Cross, "The Dark Night", in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 1991).

metaphor, there does indeed appear to be something of a dualism of body and soul: the house here is precisely the body whose senses must be stilled in order for the soul to get out of it by the secret ladder. What is even more eloquent here, metaphorically speaking, is that John, of course, wrote this poem while in prison, just before he very cleverly managed to escape from his cell, legendarily lowering himself to the ground with his bed sheets. What I want to suggest here, however, for all John's own seeming dualism, is that we might call a *lived body*, or *lived flesh*, precisely that *feeling* of the self in its very ascending, the sensual discreteness (and in this case discreetness, too!) of the ipseic consciousness in its new hypostasis as it leaves its "old self," its "old house," behind, while nevertheless taking something of that house with it namely, its *lived sensuality*, a sensuality here defined primarily by "love's urgent longings," to which John refers as a "sheer grace." As with Augustine, then, here too John's "weight is his love, and by it he was borne wherever he was borne."<sup>27</sup> That "love-weight" is itself the very "sensual factitude" (so to speak) of the new hypostasis. And as with Augustine who, upon failing in his efforts to repeat his ascent of the mind by his own power, realizes that such an ascent was and is and must be a gift of God's grace John too rises up in that factitude by the secret ladder by "sheer grace," leaving the house through a hole in the roof and venturing forth in urgent longing, into the embrace of his beloved.

There are, of course, endless other examples from both Eastern and Western traditions which, while making ready use of highly symbolic language at times, point towards the emergence of some new kind of identity or hypostasis of the self as an effect of some event of grace or divine call or touch. To that extent, the idea of God becomes inextricably linked to the idea of the radical givenness of the self in/as this new hypostasis. The focus of this paper has been, eschewing any strict soul/body or spirit/body dualism, to undertake a phenomenological exploration of such a hypostatic emergence in relation to the lived body.

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<sup>27</sup> A reference to Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII, 9, 10: "My weight is my love; by it am I borne wherever I am borne. By Your Gift we are inflamed, and are borne upwards."