

FLIRTING AS A LIMINAL EXPERIENCE: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN A
PHILOSOPHICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF LIMINALITY
AND AN EMPIRICAL-EXISTENTIAL STUDY OF FLIRTING

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By

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ABSTRACT

FLIRTING AS A LIMINAL EXPERIENCE: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN A PHILOSOPHICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF LIMINALITY AND AN EMPIRICAL-EXISTENTIAL STUDY OF FLIRTING

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In this dissertation I attempt to bring out concealed aspects of the lived experience of flirting by studying it neither as a subjective act nor as an objective behavior, but as a liminal event. Liminality is an anthropological concept that designates a realm of experience that falls outside identity and mutually exclusive binaries. In my dissertation, I argue that flirting is a liminal experience in so far as it is an experience that both constitutes me through the other and is constituted by me as a way of relating to the other. What is primary is thus not self or other, but the relation or liminality between them.

To bring this liminality into view, I develop an interpretive framework that does not cover liminality over by subordinating it to one or the other identity, but seeks to think of liminality as a primary ontological concept. I find a basis for such a stance in the phenomenological concept of intentionality. Intentionality designates the idea that a subjective experience is always an experience of something nonsubjective or something

worldly. What intentionality therefore reveals is that lived experience belongs neither to the subject nor to the object, but to the “middle” or “relation” between them.

Trying to think of subject and object from out of this middle rather than to define the middle from either the subject or the object, brings me to an understanding of lived experience as an event that first brings subject and object into relation. Flirting can now be studied from the “middle” through which self and other become constituted as flirtatious and flirting’s phenomenal nature as event can be brought into view.

The contribution of my dissertation is thus two-fold: Firstly, I develop a phenomenology of the event based on a liminal interpretation of phenomenology. Secondly, I use this phenomenological understanding as an interpretive framework for studying 13 descriptions of lived experiences of flirting. The result is a dialogue through which a phenomenological interpretation of liminality is used to more fully illuminate the experience of flirting, and the experience of flirting is used to demonstrate the phenomenological concept of liminality in a practical everyday situation.

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Study of Flirting as a Liminal Experience

Introduction to Study

In this dissertation I will make an attempt to study flirting as an *event* rather than as a *subjective act* or an *objective behavior*. To do this requires two steps: First an elucidation of the concept of the event, second, an attempt to reveal something about flirting through a concept of the event.

Since the concept of the event is neither subjective nor objective, but emanates from a time and space in between these two poles of this classic dualism, it can be said to make possible a study of flirting as a liminal phenomenon in between subject and object. In this sense my study will be a study of flirting as a liminal experience, which a person neither completely initiates nor completely surrenders to, and which is therefore neither completely subjective nor completely non-subjective.

The research topic of my dissertation has been refined over the course of several years. I started out being interested in exploring the experience of flirting as part of a research methods class in phenomenological research. What I discovered through an initial empirical-phenomenological study of the phenomenon, and through my initial review of the literature on flirting, was that flirting could be said to involve a state of being in between states such as being and having, subject and object, self and other,

interest and withdrawal. In this sense it had a lot in common with what in the anthropological literature has been called a “liminal state.” It thus seemed to me that an understanding of the concept of liminality could be used to more fully illuminate the experience of flirting and that experiences of flirting could be used to demonstrate the concept of liminality in a practical everyday situation. The idea was therefore born to do a new study of flirting that would bring together a conceptual understanding of liminality with a more substantial and varied sample of experiences of flirting. Such a study would be a hermeneutic study in the sense that experiences of flirting would not be approached from the neutral starting point of a blank slate, but from a particular perspective which would help open up the experiences in particular ways. These experiences would in turn help illustrate or open up insight into the philosophical understanding of liminality and the event, giving rise to an interpretive dialogue.

The study I would like to do can be defined as a hermeneutic-phenomenological study of flirting which understands flirting as a lived experience that blends subjective and nonsubjective modes of being in such a way that it defines a particular liminal space of the “in between.” This liminal space will be understood not as a space that a subject enters into or that an object causes. Instead the purpose of my dissertation will be to develop a phenomenological understanding of liminality as an event or happening through which subject and object are first brought together. This phenomenological conception of liminality, which I intend to develop further in the pages that follow, will constitute the philosophical contribution of my dissertation and will be the starting point for my hermeneutic analysis of flirting.

My phenomenological understanding of liminality will be developed on the basis of an interpretation of the phenomenological concept of intentionality, which I argue privileges not the subject nor the object, but the space in between subject and object. This space has also been referred to in the phenomenological literature as “the event.” (Heidegger, 1969/2002; Deleuze, 1969/1990). The event, as the basis of both subjective experience and objective reality, designates a “happening” that is not caused by a thing (and is therefore not “an accident of nature”) and is not owned by a subject who is its agent or source (and is therefore not “a subjective occurrence”). Instead it designates a new meaning of liminality as an “in betweenness,” “thirdness,” or “gathering” through which subject and object first *come into their own*, what Heidegger (1938/1999) also refers to as a process of *enownment* or mutual appropriation. Such an interpretation of intentionality involves a particular interpretation of phenomenology, not as a phenomenology of the subject, as it is traditionally understood, but as a phenomenology of the event.

Through this interpretation of liminality as event, the meaning of the “experience of flirting” will shift such that it can no longer be said to refer to a “subjective experience” of undergoing liminality or an objective series of causalities that involves a stage of transition in between a stimulus and an end-goal. Instead, flirting itself becomes a form of liminality by which subjectivity and objective reality become woven together so as to constitute a flirtatious experience that belongs to neither but hold both together. Flirting is, in other words, not located in some substance, such as the objective reality of genes, automatic responses, pheromones, instincts, and so on, or the subjective reality of

will, values, and motivation, and so on. It has the substance “only” of an event or intertwinement of such substances and therefore inhabits the non-place of liminality itself.

This way of looking at flirting will constitute a radical break with certain prevalent interpretations of both phenomenology and flirting. A new phenomenology will have to be developed that does not seek to reduce experience to a subjective experience or to the conscious structures of the experienced, while a new understanding of flirting will be required that no longer views flirting as a subjective act or an objective behavior. The result will be a renewed understanding of liminality (as phenomenological concept and ground of lived experience) and its relation to flirting (as an existential manifestation or type of lived experience).

The term existential, as I use it in my dissertation, is meant to designate what phenomenologists sometimes refer to as *lived experience*, living in the *natural* or *practical attitude*, or experiencing things as we do in the *average everyday*. It has the benefit of designating an empirical reality, which is not simply a world that exists separately from me, but a world that has no meaning without me. It thus points toward an understanding of empirical reality as the reality in which we live (also sometimes referred to as the *life-world*), as opposed to an “objective” reality of mere sensory data.

The term phenomenology, as I use it, designates a philosophy and research method that seeks to reflect on this existential reality so as to make what is often passed over and invisible in this reality apparent again. We need phenomenological reflection because when we simply exist we lose ourselves in the content pole of our experience or in the end goals of our actions: We see the painting on the wall, not the glasses we use to see the painting on the wall; we go to visit our friend, but are not aware of how it is that

we can experience another person as a friend. Were we to become aware of how we see and how we comprehend what it is we see and comprehend, we would no longer strictly speaking see and comprehend, but would pass into a reflection on what is involved in seeing and comprehending. This is what it means to engage in a phenomenological reflection upon our experience. Phenomenology can thus be considered the disciplined retrieval of the many preunderstandings which we presuppose but often also pass over when we simply exist.

In the study that follows, I first seek to develop a phenomenological interpretation of existence as arising from a liminal encounter or event and then seek to use this understanding to reinterpret the experience of flirting so that aspects of this experience that we simply pass over when we flirt can become illuminated for the first time. In thus illuminating flirting, flirting will itself help illuminate the phenomenological understanding of everyday existence as arising out of the liminality of an event.

One could argue that such a study of flirting turns flirting into something else than a psychological phenomenon. The psychological certainly takes on a different role. It can no longer be said to refer to the simple subjective correlate of a physical/ biological substratum or the initiating calculations, thoughts, or passions of an acting self. It can thus not be related to flirting by situating it outside flirting as the intention behind flirting or by positing it as the non-subjective cause of flirting. This does not mean that subjective or psychological reality is undermined, but simply that it is understood in a new way. The psychological now becomes one way in which the event reveals itself in our current Western socio-historical epoch. By remaining focused on the relationship between the event and the subject as it gets played out in flirting, my study could be said to provide a

very valuable perspective on the emergence and sustenance of modes of subjectivity without assuming such modes to be grounded in some substance outside the event. In support of this view, Heidegger (1959/1966) has once said that the “question about man’s nature is not a question about man” (p. 58) and has also proclaimed that when I say “I” the loudest I am precisely not myself (1927/1996). In this very sense, my dissertation is intended to provide a fuller perspective on who we are by going back to the liminal source from which we come and thus grounding the essence of the psychological in something that is not itself psychological. This does not mean that there is no longer any role for subjective agency, but merely that this agency is not grounded in the subject as some autonomous substance, but emerges out of an event and gives rise to another event as any action becomes overtaken by that on which it acts. What emerges is thus a psychological subject who is always in the process of becoming something and does not exist outside of a particular interaction with the environment. In many ways we can therefore say that it is a liminal self, in the sense that its identity is not rooted within, but is the identity of a “style of becoming” or a series of transformations. My dissertation can thus still be said to have relevance for the field of psychology even though it resituates experience within a more primordial understanding of what it means to be a self.

Structure of Dissertation

In the remainder of this dissertation I would like to first provide a review of the literature on liminality and the literature on flirting in order to establish support for my idea that flirting involves traversing a liminal space. An understanding of this liminal space as something a subject initiates or which an objective behavior triggers (a

distinction that will later become clear as a distinction between act and behavior) will subsequently be critiqued, giving me an opportunity to situate my own study within the alternative understanding of flirting as an event. After providing a rationale for my study, I will then proceed to the actual study which can be said to consist of two components: 1. a philosophical-phenomenological analysis of liminality, developed from the starting point of the phenomenological concept of intentionality, which will lead us toward a concept of the event, and 2. an empirical study of flirting as a liminal event. Finally, in the last part of the dissertation, I will summarize and evaluate the main conclusions of the foregoing inquiries, which can now be considered from a point of completion.

Ontological and Epistemological Presuppositions of Study

By bringing together a phenomenological understanding of experience as liminal and the lived-through data of people's first hand accounts of flirting, my research can be said to take place as a dialogue or encounter between the horizons embedded in people's first hand accounts of flirting and the horizons brought to bear on this data through my own presence as an interpreting researcher. In the sense that my study aims at understanding flirting in and through a phenomenological understanding of experiences as liminal events, it can perhaps best be described as a hermeneutic study, for it involves understanding "something" in terms of an understanding of "something," which is how Heidegger (1927/1996), following Aristotle, defines interpretation.

A hermeneutic research stance acknowledges that reality is not simply out there in some reality independent of me. Instead it assumes that any empirical phenomenon is in need of an interpretation by a subject in order to be complete. A thing only becomes a

thing in and through “the opening” or “clearing” of a subjective world, and such openings are always multiple, allowing for a multiplicity of ways of bringing the unformed object into human reality. Reality, we could therefore say, is the result of an activity, *strife* (Heidegger, 1936/1993d) or *encounter* (Gadamer, 1975/2004) between subject and object: between something that resists disclosure by keeping part of itself back (the object, or what Heidegger calls *earth*) and something that keeps opening up aspects or dimensions of this self-concealing earth (the subject, or what Heidegger calls *world*). The concept of strife here indicates that there is never a final interpretation, or never a complete world-view or subjective experience, within which to understand the lived dimension of life in its totality. Something always withdraws from every interpretation since every interpretation is confined to particular existential interests or engagements with the earth (subjective modes of being human), leaving others out of the picture. Hence, what is primary is neither subject nor object, but the in-between of the strife itself which keeps the object from closing in on itself and keeps the subject from ever possessing a complete understanding of the object.

The ultimate remainder of the strife, which keeps every experience from being an absolute experience, is not tantamount to an “error” that can ultimately be eliminated through a more accurate and less biased perception of the world. The error inherent in the partial perception—or the looking that is also an over-looking—is inherent to perception itself. To eliminate it would be to eliminate the possibility of perception altogether. According to Gadamer (1975/2004), this translates into the fact that “pre-judice” or pre-judgment is a necessary condition *for* knowledge and not an obstacle that gets in the way of knowledge. Even the natural scientific stance, which strives for objectivity through

subjective noninterference, is itself already partaking in a concealing-revealing strife, in which certain dimensions of things (their a-subjective properties) hide other possible ways in which they could show themselves. The scientific world-view is thus not above the strife between earth and world, but is itself a particular instance of it. It reveals the world within its own prejudgments and thus makes up another instance of what we could refer to as the revelation of the earth, or as Heidegger (1927/1996) might put it, the disclosure of the Being of beings. Underlying scientific truth, which has its own world-view that both limits and makes possible a certain human disclosure of the earth, we thus find the more fundamental truth of the strife itself, which we could also refer to as the phenomenological truth of *unconcealment* (aletheia) (ibid).

The phenomenological truth of unconcealment can be defined as the process by which beings (things) attain their Being (come to show themselves in a particular way). Phenomenological truth is thus not something we are ever without, for any action or inquiry always already presupposes a certain understanding or revelation of things. As Heidegger (1949/1993c) also states this, “All working and achieving, all action and calculation, keep within an open region within which beings, with regard to what they are and how they are, can properly take their stand and become capable of being said” (p. 122).

To cut myself off from phenomenological truth in order to obtain an absolute and unbiased scientific truth, is thus always to be engaged in an impossible endeavor, since the phenomenon I study is always already a phenomenon that I am familiar with in and through one or the other interpretation or understanding of the world. As phenomenological psychiatrist Medard Boss (1979/1984) has also stated this, “Human

beings cannot qualitatively perceive or understand except in the light of some prior insights into the meaning and nature of each thing they perceive” (p. 85). We can thus not get out of the interpretive circle through which we have already understood aspects of the very world we seek to investigate. Another way to say this is that we are always already included in the phenomenon we study, since the way it shows itself always reveals something about us and our way of standing within a particular *clearing* (Lichtung) of meaning.

If we take flirting as an example, we can thus no longer reduce it to one or the other objective explanation, but must view it as a mode of disclosing the meaning of things, self, and others, and thus of being engaged in the strife of phenomenological truth-making. Flirting, in other words, is not so much an object of truth, as it is a process of living or standing within truth, that is, of disclosing reality. This can be said of any other phenomenon as well, since we do not have access to an absolute subjective viewpoint that could fix the objectivity of the object, but must forever remain engaged in encounters with things that involve particular ways of being human.

This ontological starting point, which situates my inquiry in the strife *between* earth and world rather than in my subjectivity or in the objectivity of the object-world, could be described as the fundamental prejudice of my study. As critics will undoubtedly point out, the understanding of truth as phenomenological truth is itself an assumption and therefore dependent on a hermeneutics. In my opinion this merely proves the primordially of strife, for strife is not an ontological concept in need of verification, but a by-product or remainder that follows from the fact that no ontological starting point can ever attain absolute validity for itself. Strife means precisely that no position can claim to

be unbiased or to escape the hermeneutic structure of understanding something by means of a pre-understanding of something. Strife thus ultimately refers not to a positive phenomenon that can be pointed out and verified, but to a fundamental *auto-deconstruction*, non-identity, or *difference* that lies at the heart of any claim to truth; the fact that any truth is a disclosure of meaning and not merely a representation of a pre-existing reality. Both the scientist and the phenomenologist thus engage in the disclosure of the world through their own initial prejudgments that cover over the strife. The natural scientist, for example, seeks to reduce phenomena to a determinism that does not allow for the free will of the scientist, which has to be granted in order for her to engage in the act of scientific inquiry in the first place. Likewise, the phenomenologist makes the hermeneutic claim that every experience conceals and reveals reality, which is itself dependent on a complete revelation that this is the case. An initial transcendence of paradox, by which something withdraws as a condition for something to show itself, is thus ultimately a requirement of any disclosure of the meaning or Being of beings.

However, even if we cannot claim ontological certainty for the phenomenological world-view, we can nevertheless justify it by means of its inclusiveness. Natural scientific truth depends on the disregard of phenomenological truth, whereas phenomenological truth still makes room for natural scientific truth as one of many subjective modes in which things can manifest themselves.

By adopting a phenomenological viewpoint of truth as my hermeneutic starting point, the purpose of my study will be to clear away obstacles to such a more inclusive understanding of the phenomenal nature of flirting. First step toward this clearing will be to not confine my study of flirting to a pre-understanding of the subject or the object. The

best I can do to reveal flirting in a more inclusive manner is to bracket these premature conceptions of flirting so that the experience of flirting can shine forth as a strife in which both subject and object participate. The attempt to study flirting as a “liminal experience,” rather than as a subjective act or an objective behavior, is an attempt to make this possible. To study flirting as a liminal experience is to postulate that flirting does not have a nature that preexists the specifics of concrete subjective ways of bringing it into being, and that such subjective ways of bringing it into being, do not exist independently of the ways that flirting itself allows for or bids the subject into particular world relations. Flirting’s nature does thus not reside in subjective ways of being or in the phenomenal nature of flirting as an independent “thing,” but in the event or happening of its strife. The expression “flirting as a liminal experience,” thus refers to the attempt to study flirting as the happening of truth that produces both the flirtatious subject and the flirtatious object. By making the assumption clear that I am adopting a phenomenological viewpoint on truth as the basis of my study, I hope the reader will be able to judge the merit of my study without forcing my findings into a natural scientific ideal of truth which I do not assume.

Chapter 2

Making the Case for My Study

Before I get into the actual study of flirting as a liminal experience, I would like to first establish a need for such a study. A good starting point for any phenomenological inquiry is a comprehension of the various ways in which the phenomenon of interest has already been illuminated. In my case, that means understanding the way in which the concept of liminality has been used in the past as well as understanding the various ways in which flirting has been studied as a “liminal” phenomenon.

The Concept of Liminality

Liminality denotes an experience that cannot be adequately understood on the basis of identity because it is defined precisely as what falls through the cracks of any binary division and thus precedes or escapes a moment of identification. Liminality is in this sense a designation of “the excluded third” that defies an ontology of the identical altogether. It is a “different space” or an “other scene,” but it is also a necessary presupposition for the ability of things or people to change, since periods of not being something identical must be presupposed if people are to be viewed as having the possibility of changing from one identity, state or social position to another and thus of becoming different or becoming something else. We do not just wake up one day transformed from boy to man, for example. There is a period of transition through which

one becomes a man by shedding one's former identity as a boy. Such periods were what anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1908/1960) was the first to demarcate by the word "liminality" or "liminal states." A liminal state is thus for example a state in which we are both boy and man or neither boy or man and in which we therefore fall through the cracks of our traditional binary logic.

Our traditional binary logic is founded on the principle of identity and the principle of exclusive disjunction (Deleuze, 1983). According to these principles, if I am a man, I am so because I and the identity "man" correspond to each other or are one and the same. Furthermore, if I am a man, I am, by definition, not a woman. It is not possible for me to both be a man *and* a woman, since being a woman contradicts my identity as a man. In principle, therefore, any essentialist or binary logic excludes something that falls in the "middle." It cannot encompass phenomena that are "betwixt and between" identities.

Nevertheless, our experience is filled with moments of such in between states: A man engages in a homo erotic sexual encounter that contradicts his social identity as a man whose penis is designated for a woman; a boy undergoes a process of acquiring the legal privileges accorded to a grown-up such as getting his driver's license at age 16, being able to vote at age 18, and being able to drink at age 21, thus going through a slow process of transitioning from child to adult; a daughter of Mexican parents grows up in the United States where she feels both Mexican *and* American or not quite either; a woman doing an internship in psychology finds herself to be both a student and a teacher depending on the different interactions she is in at work; a person reading a book finds

himself both the agent who actively makes sense of the book and the involuntary recipient of the story's meanings which carry him away.

These experiences and many others cannot be adequately understood from the starting point of identity and exclusive disjunction, for they all fall in between two identities, wherefore they must be said to be descriptions of "liminal states" or of living *between* identities.

In the literature on liminality, liminal experiences are usually defined in one of three ways:

1. *As a marginal, undefined area or unknown space.* Van Gennep (1908/1960), for example, uses metaphors such as "swamp area," "virgin forest," or "desert" to metaphorically describe liminality as some other space or state that lies outside the established civilized order of things. The liminal here becomes a definition of some otherness or absolute limit that lies outside of the binary divisions used in a given society. It becomes akin to what Martin Heidegger (1936/1993d), writing from within a phenomenological tradition, might have called "the mystery of Being" or "the earth" "which keeps itself closed up." Or it becomes akin to what another phenomenologist, Emmanuel Levinas (1961/1969), calls "the Other" and designates as that which can never be known in terms of an egoic understanding of the whole. While the concept of the Earth and the Other are different in many ways, they both designate something that is outside the known and other than what is present. In this sense they could both be said to provide us with a definition of Van Gennep's understanding of liminality as a "swamp area." Victor Turner (1967), who became instrumental in popularizing Van Gennep's concept

of liminality, spoke of this unknown state or otherness as what defines the pure or raw state of our humanity. When we exist within a social structure, he argued, our humanity is reduced to this or that social role or function; we obtain an identity within a social space or hierarchy. When we exist in between such roles or functions, however, what remains is something undefined. This undefined remainder can only designate our irreducible humanity understood as a pure state of being prior to any binary division that would pin us down and assign us a well-defined role. This understanding of a pure humanity that preexists social categorization and is therefore undefined, can also be found in process-oriented or existential definitions of the human being as something other than a thing or identity. We see this understanding played out in the psychologies of William James (1892), Rollo May (1983), or Carl Rogers (1995/1961). For these authors, liminality could be said to correspond to what has also simply been referred to as Being or “living” and has been contrasted with the objectification of “having” by which we come to take ourselves or others as objects of reflection or the sum total of our attributions (Marcel, 1960; Fromm, 1976). Whether we define the unknown as something transcendent to our egoic identity or something that defines us in a fuller way, liminality can in each case be said to designate some otherness which we are barred from experiencing in so far as we remain stuck within the binary divisions of a given society.

2. *As a “borderline” or “threshold” between two spaces or identities.* Such an “inter-structural” (Turner, 1967, p. 93) definition of liminality is used at times by both Van Gennep and Victor Turner. This definition of liminality defines it by

means of what it is *not*, or as pure “negation:” I am *neither* man *nor* woman, boy *nor* man, subject *nor* object, A *nor* B, but am “between” the two. The “between,” being here defined by means of what it is not, has no positive identity in itself and is liminal precisely because of that. In Viljoen and van der Merwe’s (2007) compendium of essays about liminality, for example, they talk about the liminal as a boundary between two geographical areas, two bodies, two races, two classes, two cultures, or two countries. Such an inter-structural understanding might be said to be presupposed when the two poles of a binary are privileged in any given understanding of reality and are used to define everything that falls between as simply *not* one *or* the other. Within the arguably socially constructed heterosexual binary of man and woman, for example, everything in between can simply be grouped in the liminal category of the “queer” or the “perverse,” which here means nothing else but “*not* man” and “*not* woman.” We find a similar understanding of liminality in the work of psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1971/2005), when he carves out a space of living that is *not* extraverted and *not* introverted. Living in the state in between complete extraverted merger with one’s activity (objective world) and complete introspective fantasy and imagination (subjective world), he says, is the state of being that mostly defines everyday living, or “the place [. . .] where we most of the time are when we are experiencing life” (p. 140). He refers to this in between space as “potential space” and speaks of it as the source of a playful and creative engagement with the world. Some authors have used this understanding of liminality as a playful tension between the poles of a binary, as the starting point for their study of liminality

(Eigen, 1991). Liminality is here defined as the not quite subjective and the not quite objective, which prevents me from being hemmed in by the one or the other and thus releases a negatively defined freedom over and beyond any determinism (Simmel, 1923/1987).

3. *As a temporal transition or passage from an earlier state of being to a later state of being.* This notion of liminality defines it as a process of being underway, such as when a cocoon is underway to becoming a butterfly, or when I have departed from one country and will soon be arriving in another. In this temporal understanding, liminality becomes an *inter-tempo*s or a transition in time. This understanding corresponds well to an existential understanding of the human being as *ec-static* or as always on the way somewhere. According to Heidegger (1927/1996), for example, who I am always arrives at me from the future that I am not yet. I am thus never simply a self-corresponding entity in the present, for the meaning of each present is always defined by means of a future horizon of being ahead of myself. I am never simply “in” a bus, for example, but am always defining or revealing the meaning of “being in” a bus, by virtue of the future I have cast ahead of myself such as “being in a bus” in order to “go to work,” “visit my friend,” or “go home to cook my dinner.” Since I can never escape my future horizon, we must therefore say that I am always on my way somewhere and that it is only by virtue of being on my way that the present moment can achieve its identity. This fact about our existence gives life a transitional quality over and above a quality of static fixity. Phenomenologists also speak of this as the *ec-static* or temporal nature of our existence (Heidegger, 1927/1996) or the *ec-*

centric position of being someone who has no center in ourselves (Plessner, 1941/1970). In this view of liminality, liminality is really the foundation for identity since ecstatic or eccentric non-correspondence is the foundation for the ability of the human being to attain its momentary identity.

Critique of Defining Liminality within an Ontology of Identity

All of these notions of liminality can be argued to have a spatial bias, insofar as the liminal is understood either as a positively defined “other” space (definition 1), the negative space of a threshold between two spaces (definition 2), or the passage in a time between a prior place or state and a later place or state (definition 3). In these interpretations, the liminal gets understood only in relation to something identical that is presupposed in advance. In the first instance, the “other” space is often couched in terms of spatial metaphors such as “swamp,” “desert,” “forest,” or as an undefined state of being that one can nevertheless inhabit. In the second instance, the liminal is often defined as a boundary zone between two already known spaces or identities, sometimes referred to as pre-liminal and post-liminal (Van Gennep, 1908/1960). The liminal is here what “*lies half way* between separation and integration” (Viljoen & van der Merwe, 2007, p. 12), indicating a clear spatial bias. Even in the third instance, when a supposedly temporal definition is supplied, the change process tends to be understood as a movement “in” time, which, as Morss (1992) has rightly argued, presupposes a spatialized understanding of time. In this view, as Morss writes, “people’s lives are portrayed as taking place in a fourth pseudo-spatial dimension within which a coherent identity is conserved. The same one unique person is traveling through time” (quoted in Bradley, 2005, p. 137). This spatialized understanding of time is also evident in Turner’s writing.

Although he at one point writes, “I prefer to regard transition as a process, a becoming” (1967, p. 94), he tends to reduce becoming to a movement from one space to another, such as when he describes a transition as a “detachment [. . .] from an earlier *fixed point*,” that leads to a passage “through a *realm*” of the unfamiliar, and finally a “consummation” of the passage (ibid). At another point, he describes the temporal transition as if it happens to an individual who seems to travel through time while retaining its identity. As he states in *The Ritual Process* (1969/1995), “the neophytes are merely entities in transition, as yet without place or position” (p. 103). We sometimes also find a spatial bias in the humanistic interpretation of the ec-static or ec-centric nature of the human being. Korzybski, for example, speaks of the human being as “the binder of time” (quoted in May, 1953/2009, p. 219), casting the human being as some identity who projects the temporal horizon for things and is not itself transformed through these temporal horizons.

In contradistinction to these interpretations, my argument in this dissertation will be that we misunderstand liminality when we attempt to understand it in terms of spatial metaphors and thus in terms of something identical. Liminality is not best understood in terms of an essentialist or binary logic in terms of which it becomes the indefinable otherness, the excluded middle, or a passage from one space or identity to another. Rather, it is better understood on its own terms and not as fitted into a preconceived world of identities and predefined spaces. To study liminality as a first principle or “thing-in-itself” rather than a mere state of exception within an otherwise identical reality, will thus be the philosophical task of the first part of my dissertation (chapter 3-7). In this part I will seek to develop a phenomenological understanding of liminality that understands

liminality as a temporal event that does not presuppose identity, but creates identity. My argument will be that such a renewed understanding of liminality is needed to adequately study “flirting as a liminal experience.”

Flirting as a Liminal Experience: An Interdisciplinary Literature Review

In the literature on flirting, what I refer to as flirting’s liminality has been pointed out as an inescapable fact in many different sources across a wide variety of academic disciplines. Many of these sources interpret the liminality of flirting in and through a spatial bias or a metaphysics of identity, but they nevertheless give us a first glimpse of the phenomenon we are interested in and help us establish an initial horizon for the comprehension of the phenomenon of flirting.

Sociologist Peter Blau (1964) situates flirting between the opposing pulls of a “growing attraction” and a “fear of rejection and dependence.” This opposition between attraction and aversion leads the person who flirts to try to mitigate the risks of rejection by trying to evoke a confirmation of the other person’s attraction in advance of disclosing one’s own. As Blau states it, “Flirting involves largely the expression of attraction in a semi-serious or stereotyped fashion that is designed to elicit some commitment from the other in advance of making a serious commitment oneself” (p. 227).

Evolutionary psychologist David Givens (1978) describes the fundamental tension of flirting as that between wanting to get close to someone without getting close too fast and thus evoking the other person’s biological fear of being harmed by strangers. He finds this tension to be central to the mating behavior of all primates who are bound to enter into a transitional state of flirting before they can get close enough to another

animal to reproduce. Flirting is thus, according to Givens, a set of behaviors that have the function of solving a particular evolutionary problem: Only if you can successfully convey both interest in approaching and willingness to back off, and thus signal two opposite action tendencies at the same time, will you be able to fulfill your evolutionary purpose of passing on your genes through sexual intercourse. To achieve sexual consummation requires that you be neither the aggressor nor the passive one, but that you waver between the two or exist in the inter-structural space between them.

In popular flirting literature, the liminality inherent to the flirtatious situation is sometimes reduced to a skill or strategy that one can learn and master. The evolutionary understanding of flirting has, for example, been used by a group of male authors who have wished to harness insights into the hardwired responses of women to break down their fear of the stranger and make them attracted to men. A culture of so-called Pick-Up Artists has emerged led by figures such as Neil Strauss (2005) and Mystery (Erik von Markovich) (2006). These popular “gurus” of the art of flirting have developed concrete techniques designed to manipulate evolutionary mechanisms to their benefit. In what von Markovich calls “the technology” of “The Mystery Method,” for example, he teaches men to disarm a woman by falsely disqualifying himself as a potential suitor so as to not evoke her fear of the stranger. This is accomplished by “negging,” which refers to giving an underhanded compliment that lowers a woman’s value and makes her want to redeem herself while at the same time signaling that you have not approached her in an attempt to flirt with her. He then suggests you go on to “demonstrate higher value” by showing that you are “pre-selected by women” and are “the leader of men” and look for “indicators of interest” that would allow you to know when it is okay to “kino-escalate” (gradually

become more physical with her). What I call liminality is here reduced to a conscious strategy of alternating between showing interest and withdrawing interest, creating the allure of the “cat-string effect.” “The cat string effect,” refers to the fact that a cat only wants a string that is neither handed to it nor completely out of reach. Liminality thus becomes an inherent part of flirting and the very motor force of attraction. Nevertheless, the liminal is here subordinated to the will of the individual who can harness its force and produce it as an effect through conscious and rational strategies.

Such a rational-strategic interpretation of flirting is also emphasized in game theoretical approaches that liken flirting to a game of chess in which you make your move on the basis of the move made by the other, setting into motion a continuing feedback loop of probabilistic calculations (Cook & McHenry, 1978, p. 106). However, if flirting is like chess, then, as Grammer, Kruck & Magnusson (1998) have argued, the actions of each individual really belong to the “inter-action.” Grammer, Kruck & Magnusson thus focus on what they call *interaction-units*, rather than discrete behaviors or actions. This concept indicates that when one acts in flirting, one always responds to a sequence of actions that have preceded one’s response. I thus respond not to your action, but to your action as it relates to my prior action as it in turn related to a prior action of yours. In responding to you, I am thus including myself in my definition of you, since the you I am responding to is the you of an interaction of which I myself am a part. Such a view, which privileges the space between us rather an encounter between two separate calculating egos, nevertheless remains very cognitive.

Although a certain strategic component is undoubtedly a major part of flirting, especially when it serves as part of a strategy of seduction, such an exclusively cognitive

understanding of flirting seems to ignore the fullness of the experience. Flirting, as I will argue, is irreducible to a simple conscious act since it also involves moments of losing control and of being constituted in and through the actions of others as well as the circumstances of the situation.

According to sociologist Georg Simmel (1923/1987), flirting is not a desire for some specific outcome but is rather a way to play with or discover what I desire. In his phenomenological description of flirting as a certain attitude of not committing to any definite outcome, he defines flirting as a way to play with the tension between opposite desires. In flirting one can, for example, both want something and not want something, both have something and not have something, both reveal oneself and conceal oneself, and such indetermination reveals oneself as existing over and beyond a finite choice.

Simmel identifies three prototypical flirtatious attitudes:

Flirtation as flattery: ‘Although you might indeed be able to conquer me, I won’t allow myself to be conquered.’ Flirtations as contempt: ‘Although I would actually allow myself to be conquered, you aren’t able to do it.’ Flirtation as provocation: ‘Perhaps you can conquer me, perhaps not—try it!’ (p. 135).

In each of these attitudes, Simmel says, we affirm a sense of freedom beyond determinism that is enjoyed in its own right rather than serves as a mean to achieve some other goal.

Psychoanalyst Adam Phillips (1994) agrees with Simmel’s understanding of flirting. He uses it to describe a general life attitude that does not apply only to romantic encounters, but is broad enough to include all the ways in which we play with different possibilities without committing to any. Hence, we can flirt with different careers, with different ways of being a self, with different fashion senses, with different ideas, and so

forth. Flirting thus becomes a designation of an eroticization or enjoyment of the possible. It becomes an enjoyment of the postponement of actual choice.

Phillips locates the origin of flirting in the oedipal stage of development in which the child is only able to continue to direct its erotic desires toward the parent of the other gender by sublimating it into a flirtatious or nonserious eroticism. Other psychoanalysts (McWilliams, 1996; Klein, 1957/1984) have pointed out that this flirtatious compromise formation is the hallmark of the hysteric personality in which a desire for maternal love is sexualized, leading to a pervasive flirtatious way of relating to most people in the hysteric's environment. Melanie Klein (1957/1984), for example, has argued that frustration at the oral stage can precipitate a premature movement into the phallic stage as a means to achieve, by means of one's sexuality, the love that could not be internalized from the mother. She calls this phenomenon, "genitality based on a flight from orality" (p. 195). Flirting can in this view, be said to have a certain regressive quality and to bring about a return to an earlier stage of childhood development. Such a view corresponds well with the claim made by Givens (1978), that people who flirt take on a more child-like demeanor, and the claim made by Lott (1999), who argues that flirting has a resemblance to the child's play with the mother.

Much like Phillips who can be said to view flirting as a liminal compromise between being sexual and nonsexual, Filippo Osella & Caroline Osella (1998) have argued that flirting operates by both insinuating and covering over a sexual intent or meaning. They liken the operating mechanisms of flirting to those of a joke in which the punch line is always dependent upon a misreading of the literal meaning. Many flirting behaviors play with this specific human capacity to "read between the lines" to

understand an intended meaning beyond the purely literal expression of meaning. In their case study of flirting in Kerala in India, Osella & Osella argue that what at the surface seems to be a form of unpleasant harassment of young women by Indian men is really perceived as a sexual compliment in a culture in which aggressive behaviors are more socially acceptable than straightforward sexual advances. Harassment, which on the surface is unpleasant and repellent of women, can thus become flirtatious insofar as it carries a hidden sexual message by those who know how to decipher it. Through flirting, one can thus transgress norms while remaining within them, which is a perfect description of a liminal state.

From the vantage point of more philosophical sources, flirting could be explained as the outcome of an impossible eroticism and be said to be a consequence of a fundamental human predicament. In philosopher George Bataille's book on *Eroticism* (1957/1986), he argues that our erotic longing to fuse with another is also a fear of the death of the self which the moment of fusing with the other would entail. This simultaneous fear of and desire for death thus gives rise to what we could call a liminal space in between a desire for complete merger with the other and complete separation from the other. Flirting could here be viewed as the form our eroticism takes when it is played out between these two opposing pulls.

According to phenomenological philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1961/1969), human beings are not defined by a desire for something concrete, but by what he calls a *metaphysical desire* which is a desire for something beyond ourselves. For Levinas, "the face of the other" comes to represent this beyond since I can never completely possess or consume the other as I can an object. The other is thus the inexhaustible source that keeps

on evoking my desire because it always refuses itself to me and therefore remains forever transcendent. According to Levinas, there is thus something liminal about the encounter with another person: We both want to possess the transcendence of the other, to have it and to consume it, but were we to succeed in doing this, the other would cease to be transcendent and thus cease to be desirable.

A similar argument has been made by phenomenological philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1943/1992) who uses Hegel's dialectic between master and slave to argue that we want to possess the other person but lose interest in the other when we do, since they are then no longer free subjective beings. Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) gives a summary of this Hegelian position when he states, "Precisely when my value is recognized through the other's desire, he is no longer the person by whom I wished to be recognized, but a being fascinated, deprived of his freedom, and who therefore no longer counts in my eyes" (p. 193). In terms of flirting, this situation can be said to give rise to an inherent conflict: If I have too much subjective control over the other person's desire, I will lose interest in this person who has now become reduced to an object I can "have" and has thus been deprived of its subjectivity. However, if I become too desirous of the other person, I in turn will lose my subjective allure in the eyes of the other, for I will then reveal myself as a mere object that the other can "have." For flirting to be sustained, a position in between the roles of master and slave therefore has to be maintained, for if either person ever identifies as one or the other, the ambiguity of the other that fuels my desire will vanish from the situation.

Merleau-Ponty sees this Hegelian dialectic displaced onto the level of our bodily existence as well, where we can either wish to flagrantly display our body so as to attract

attention, or feel ashamed of our body and wish to hide it. In these two scenarios, as Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) writes, the person “has the impression that the alien gaze which runs over his body is stealing it from him, or else, on the other hand, that the display of his body will deliver the other person up to him, defenseless, and that in this case the other will be reduced to servitude” (p. 193). We here see an uneasy tension in the different bodily postures one can take toward the other person: one is either reduced to the slave whose body is being stolen by the other or becomes the master of the other’s attraction, in which case the other is reduced to the status of a slave. The flirtatious position would here be to prevent either of these outcomes from happening. Simmel (1923/1987), for example, makes the argument that a middle position between revealing and concealing one’s body, and thus between ostentatious display and modesty, is typically the most erotic. In favor of this argument, he states that what is most desirable is often not what is given nor what is completely hidden and refused. The middle ground is found in situations where what is veiled also becomes the focus of attention, such as when ornaments that are supposed to hide certain parts of the body also draw attention to these parts. In fact, Simmel argue that indigenous people started to wear clothes, not because of shame, but so as to eroticize and draw attention to the concealed parts of the body. In flirting, we are thus not attracted to what we can have, as much as we are attracted to the pleasurable tension between what we can have and what we cannot have, which creates a position for us in between the duality of master and slave.

What these philosophical sources have revealed is the existence of an ambiguity at the heart of the erotic desire in which we both want something and don’t want something at the same time. They reveal what psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1953/2004)

has also called a “desire for an unsatisfied desire.” Such a desire is a desire for a promise of something and not for its actual fulfillment, and as Adam Phillips (1994) has argued, it is precisely such a desire that keeps flirting alive by eroticizing the possible rather than the actual.

As I hope these arguments and examples have provided ample evidence of, flirting can rightfully be described as a liminal or transitional phenomenon. We can summarize this liminality simply by saying, as Simmel (1923/1987) has, that “every conclusive decision brings flirtation to an end” (p. 136). The lack of conclusiveness that defines flirting has been characterized variously as a liminality between closeness and distance, the forbidden and the allowed, fear and desire, finitude and transcendence, self and other, a desire to hide and a desire to display oneself. Surely we could add many more such tensions or ambiguities that rupture and postpone a definite and final moment of identification for both self and other. Consequently, the point I wish to make is that flirting is not best defined from the starting point of identity since its phenomenal nature consists precisely of suspending identity or the moment of a definitive identification. To flirt is therefore to be engaged in a liminal process by means of which one’s identity itself gets decided. I am not a self-identical “thing” who ventures to flirt, as much as I am someone who discovers myself through flirting and acts always only from such self-discoveries. I am thus neither the master nor the passive victim of flirting, but partake in flirting as an event that both sweeps me into itself and allows me to become an agent through itself. Before developing this idea further, however, we must first rid ourselves of both the subjectivist and objectivist biases that are typically presupposed in the flirting

literature. We must rediscover the liminality of flirting outside of an understanding of flirting as a subjective act or an objective behavior.

Critique of Studying Liminality through an Understanding of Flirting as a Subjective Act or an Objective Behavior

As I have already argued, the problem with most understandings of liminality is that the liminal is not allowed to show itself from itself (phenomenologically), but is typically understood in terms of something identical or spatial that is presupposed in advance and seems to force the liminal into a conceptuality that is foreign to its very nature. This is what makes a phenomenological clarification of liminality necessary prior to studying flirting as a liminal phenomenon.

In most studies of flirtatious liminality, the liminality of flirting is confined to show itself within an understanding of flirting as a *subjective act* or an *objective behavior*, which in each case refers liminality back to something “identical” that grounds it. Before going on to differentiate my own approach from these two approaches, I would first like to describe these two approaches more clearly so it can become apparent how my own approach differs from them and adds something valuable to my investigation.

The Difference between Act and Behavior

An objective behavior is a subjective act abstracted from its subjective intention and context-specific meaning and recaptured within a universal horizon of objective meaning. Conversely, a subjective act is an objective behavior that is understood within the unique context and meaning it has for an acting person (Hill, 2002; Schutz, 1932/1967). Schutz might characterize this difference as a difference between projecting

an objective meaning horizon for an other's experience (behavior) versus attempting to understand the other's experience within the subjective meaning horizon that she herself has projected (act). To exemplify this difference, we can say that at the level of subjective meaning, the same objective behavior can mean very different things. A kiss, for example, can, at the level of its subjective meaning, be experienced as friendly, passionate, delightful, disgusting, or awkward, while remaining, within an objective horizon, the exact same behavior (a kiss). When we transpose this difference unto our understanding of flirting, we can say that flirting is understood as an objective behavior when it is observed externally as a universal physical activity or collection of behaviors, while it is understood as an act once the specific subjective reasons or intentions behind the same objective behaviors are taken into account.

Flirting as Objective Behavior

When flirting is studied as an objective behavior it is understood within an objective horizon of meaning that turns the behavior into an object of nature. One very common objective horizon that is projected in order to understand flirting as a behavior is the theoretical understanding of flirting as a collection of behaviors of the human 'animal.' Within the evolutionary view of Givens (1978), for example, flirting behaviors have the objective meaning of negotiating proximity to another member of our species in order to get close enough to reproduce and secure the survival of our genes. If this evolutionary understanding is accepted as the objective horizon for interpreting flirting, different flirting behaviors can then be categorized and understood in terms of the evolutionary functions they serve. The context-specific meanings of different behaviors for the individuals who engage in specific acts of flirting now become irrelevant.

Furthermore, only if I can reduce subjective acts into universal behaviors, can I begin to compare them and understand them within a mathematical meaning horizon. This conversion from subjective meaning to objective meaning and finally to numerical value allows me to statistically verify different hypotheses about flirting and thus to study flirting in an empirical-scientific way. Objective behaviors can now be studied as variables whose cause-effect relationships can be tested according to a theory of probability that seeks to establish whether or not a given correlation between variables is more than just a random coincidence.

What such statistical research loses in terms of is faithfulness to the meaning flirting has in the actual lived reality of subjective acts, it gains in accuracy and predictive power in the physico-mathematical reality it substitutes for it. Nevertheless, just as the heaviness of the stone's burden to particular people gets lost when its weight gets represented only through an objective measurement¹, so too the flirtatious quality of flirting vanishes beneath its objective definitions and numerical correlations. As Young-Eisendrath (2001) points out,

The epistemologies of the natural sciences (often called the 'hard' sciences), which undergird biological determinism, necessarily eliminate all questions and accounts of human subjectivity and intention. To put this another way, the systems of knowledge used to study organic processes must exclude the experiences of the human subject... the natural sciences cannot ask or answer questions about human intention and its meanings. (p. 205)

¹ Heidegger (1993) writes, "If we try to lay hold of the stone's heaviness in another way, by placing the stone on a balance, we merely bring the heaviness into the form of a calculated weight. This perhaps very precise determination of the stone remains a number, but the weight's burden has escaped us" (p. 172).

Flirting as Subjective Act

What gets lost through the natural scientific approach to studying flirting as a behavior, one can attempt to recuperate by studying flirting as a subjective act. To study flirting as a subjective act means to study it not as a thing in itself (behavior), but as a mode of accomplishing one or the other human goal. In and through such an approach, flirting loses its objective meaning but in turn gains faithfulness to its phenomenal nature as a subjective experience. Subjective experience, as phenomenologists have argued, is not an experience that takes place “inside” a person’s head, but is a subjective way of passing into or making sense of the world. The blind man who carries a probing stick, for example, does not engage in the objective behavior of probing, but engages in the subjective act of “finding his way.” Similarly, the person who flirts does not engage in flirting behaviors, but seeks to satisfy his sexual urges (sex motivation), have some fun (fun motivation), manipulate others to do things for him (instrumental motivation), feel closer to someone (relational motivation), test whether or not he is interested in a romantic relation (exploring motivation), or increase his self esteem (esteem motivation)—six motivations that Henningsen (2004) has identified as the most common subjective meanings of flirting.

Problems with Understanding Liminality within an Ontology of Flirting as a Subjective Act or an Objective Behavior

What, then, are the consequences of studying liminality within an ontology of objective behaviors or subjective acts?

If we presuppose the behaving organism as our starting point, liminality becomes a stage of some objective flirting process that can in principle be explained in advance

because it gets replicated according to some objective logic as determined by our instincts, genes, biology, or brain chemistry, that is, by our human ‘nature.’ Liminality now becomes some objective stage between the preliminal stage of initial attraction and the postliminal stage of sexual consummation, and this intermediate stage might in turn be broken down into discrete sequential steps. Ethologist Desmond Morris (1971), for example, has identified 12 such graded steps of what could also be defined as “kino-escalation” (Mystery, 2006). Morris argues that the natural process of flirting goes from (1) eye to body, (2) eye to eye, (3) voice to voice, (4) hand to hand, (5) arm to shoulder, (6) arm to waist, (7) mouth to mouth, (8) head to head, (9) hand to body, (10), mouth to breast, (11) hand to genitals, and (12) genitals to genitals/ mouth to genitals.

It seems to me that the objective starting point, with its positivist and essentialist bias, ends up reintegrating the liminal into a knowledge that eradicates it. The liminal becomes positively defined as “something” identical and thus essentially loses its status as liminal. From a phenomenological perspective, the objective behavioral definition of flirting is thus a definite barrier or constraint to the degree to which the liminality of flirting can show itself as it really is. In its very spirit, liminality defies the very essentialist logic and conceptual binaries presupposed by a natural scientific world-view.

What then if we return to the perspective of the subject who flirts? We then no longer have to define the preliminal and postliminal states of flirting in advance but can follow the logic of the subjects themselves who may be elicited to flirt based on very different starting points or situations and may seek to accomplish very different things by flirting. This perspective would seem to open up a multitude of liminal experiences, as many as there are human ways of flirting. Nevertheless, the human being is here still

presupposed as a precondition for liminality. Liminality is experienced always within the parameters of certain subjective or cultural modes of existing that in each case refer back to the “I” who is having the experience or the “We” of certain culturally predefined subject positions. This makes the liminal a description of a type of experience that I as self-identical or as part of a community can have when I flirt. In this way, the liminality of flirting can still not reveal itself completely because it is subjected to an egocentric understanding of me as preexisting and initiating the event of flirting according to certain goals that “I,” as ego or as culturally defined self, am projecting.

Studying the Liminality of Flirting as an Asubjective and Nonobjective Event

What both the subjective and the objective position fail to do is to study flirting from an understanding of liminality that has not already been subordinated to one or the other identity. Flirting is thus not able to show itself from itself, in accordance with its phenomenological truth, but can only show itself within a worldview that forces liminality into non-liminal categories. To do a phenomenological study of flirting as a liminal experience is thus first to develop a phenomenological understanding of liminality that does not define it in terms of a priori constructs that are imposed from without and retranslates it into what it is *not*.

We find such a nonreductive understanding in the phenomenological concept of liminality as an event rather than a subjective act or an objective behavior. To start from the concept of the event is to start from the assumption that a subject who experiences or initiates flirting or an object that occasions it, does not have to be assumed for flirting to *take place*. In fact, subjective acts and objective behaviors can be said to presuppose a

liminal encounter, and the concept of liminality can be said to preexist and occasion identities (subject and objects).

In essence, therefore, to study flirting as a liminal experience, is to study the encounters from which subjective acts and objective behaviors emerge and first become differentiated as these specific acts and behavior. As a liminal experience, flirting must be studied as the concealment-revelment, or happening, of particular subjectivities and objectifications. It must be said to arise from the “excluded third” *between* subject and object instead of being confined to an ontology that privileges one or the other side of the subject-object binary in advance. Flirting, I will claim, is a liminal experience to the degree that I can become something or someone else *through* flirting. Flirting happens *to* me at the same time as it allows me to become an agent in relation to others and things. In this sense flirting is not merely an experience which I as subject can have. It is also an experience which subjects me to itself and from which I can receive myself as one or the other subjective agent. What is primary is thus not the subject or the environment, but the moment of co-constitution belonging to the event that takes place between the two. Liminality designates this prior moment of co-constitution that precedes an ontology of the subject or the object. Liminality should thus be understood as the very strife between subject and object (world and earth) that gives rise to any and every unconcealment of a present experience, including that of a specific subjective sense of self and a scientific, theoretical or practical object.

From a phenomenological vantage point, this third perspective is superior to the others because it presupposes less to begin with and allows experience to show itself in ways that the previous presuppositions made impossible. Our new liminal perspective is

thus more inclusive than that which presupposes an identical subject or object in advance. We can argue this because an ontology that starts from liminality can bring the emergence of subject and object into view, whereas an ontology that starts from subject and object cannot bring liminality into view.

Redefining Psychology as a Psychology of Events

At this point we might anticipate the criticism that to study flirting as an event is to no longer study it as a psychological experience and that such an understanding does nothing but undermine the very subject matter of psychology. This would be true, of course, if we rigidly adhered to an understanding of psychology as either a study of subjective meaning or objective causalities. However, is there not a third alternative? As I shall argue, although our focus might shift from subjective will and objective determinism, we do not do away with the psychological altogether, but merely account for it differently.

In the study of flirting I propose to carry out, the psychological is no longer postulated as an identity unto itself. It is not rooted in the self-certainty of the “I” to which every experience by necessity has to return. This position is consistent with Heidegger’s claim that the essence of the human being is not itself something human (1959/1966, 1947/1993b) and his comment that when I say “I” the loudest, I am precisely not myself (1927/1996). In line with Heidegger, I believe that the identity of the human being is not to be found by means of introspection as if our nature existed in some inner realm that is sealed off from the world. However, although the psychological is grounded in something nonpsychological, this nonpsychological origin is not defined in advance as

some other objective identity. I am not displacing the study of the psychological to a study of the neurological basis of the psychological, the cognitive processing system of the mind, or the organic basis of our behaviors. The rejection of subjectivity as the basis of explaining my sense of self does not have to mean the instatement of a reductionism of everything subjective to some physical or biological substratum.

Beginning from liminality, rather than from some first principle of identity, undercuts the need to make an exclusive choice between starting *either* from the identity of the subject *or* the identity of the object. The starting point of liminality, which originates in the “excluded third” between each side of the subject-object binary, instead privileges the space *between* subject and object and makes it the case that the psychological cannot be explained by either, but must be studied as the outcome of an encounter or happening between both. Instead of becoming a science of something subjective or something objective, the science of psychology thus instead becomes a science of a psychological reality or sense of self that is sustained in and through events, happenings, or encounters. It is the event that constitutes the psychological self as agent and allows it to act as if it were the sole initiator of events.

Such an understanding of the psychological as a happening is by no means new. It has been proposed at various points in our history. We see it both in the ancient tradition of Buddhism and in the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1927/1978). It even dovetails with arguments made by some contemporary social and developmental psychologists who have recently proposed that we resituate the psychological on the basis of an ontology of “difference” or “change” rather than “identity” and “stability” (Brown & Stenner, 2009; Bradley, 2005). In addition, the understanding of the psychological as a

happening, is already contained in the existential phenomenological understanding of reality, if only we interpret it in a certain way that challenges the adherence to a “psychological reduction.” Let us review each of these arguments in turn.

In Buddhism, what *is* (the identical), is viewed as the result of “inter-being” (Nhat Hanh, 1997). My identity as the “funny one,” for example, is not a characteristic of “me,” but is sustained only in and through others who find me funny by laughing at my jokes. In this sense my identity, or sense of self, is held together in and through a situation or context that allows me to be who I am in that particular moment. Identity is thus neither in me nor in the others but is produced in and through a situation that in turn has no other identity than the conjunction of elements that makes it up. The situation, in other words, is not caused by some object that is presupposed in advance and can be identified as external to the situation. Buddhism is thus an anti-foundational philosophy that does not posit something identical as the origin of what is, but starts from a liminal understanding of reality as a continuous becoming of what is, a principle that is also designated as “nothingness” (Nhat Hanh, 1997). Nothingness designates that the source of reality is not a cause that can be posited as an independently existing ‘thing,’ since nothingness is not a thing amongst other things. Yet, nothingness is not a simple absence of being, either, since it is what allows everything present to be present as it is and is therefore a positive presence in everything present.

Within the Western tradition, the development of a similar liminal ontology can be attributed to the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1927/1978) who proposed that process precedes identity and that identity is the outcome of process rather than the precondition for process. In their book *Psychology without Foundations* (2009), social

psychologists Steve Brown and Paul Stenner use Whitehead's ideas as the basis for constructing a new anti-foundational psychology. Whitehead, they say, claims that the sense of self is itself a product of a difference by which this self comes into being. The true subject of experience is to Whitehead a product of a creative encounter that brings the subject into being as a definite identity within the world. The psychological is thus in this view a continuous movement between the subject as "super-ject" (p. 27), or product of an event, and the subject as a process of transformation, or the emergence of a new super-ject. As Brown & Stenner conclude about Whitehead's relevance for psychology:

What he offers is a form of *deep empiricism* that radically extends and refines the domain of subjectivity, but refuses to 'detach' it from objects. In this manner, neither 'subject' nor 'object' play the role of first term or primary substance. The 'first term' is always, as we have seen, an actual occasion, and an actual occasion is always a fusion of subject and object in the unified event of an experience (p. 35).

Developmental psychologist Benjamin Bradley, in his book *Psychology and Experience* (2005), is another psychologist who has argued that although experience should be the subject matter of psychology, this experience cannot be treated as a subjective experience of individual meaning-making or as the experience of a subject made passive or objective in and through an experimental setting. He instead argues that the psychological occurs as a "psychic event" that is produced synchronically in a collective space of relationships between self and world or self and others. The psychological, in other words, emerges out of a situation that is defined by a complex array of factors such as the speech rules that apply in a given setting, the dynamics between people in that setting, and larger "contemporaneous cultural patterns and myths" (p. 10) by which reality gets interpreted or mediated. According to Bradley, this means

that subjectivity does not ground itself in some personal history, but that this history can itself be transformed in and through a situation that makes certain memories relevant and others irrelevant. Future events involving others thus to a large extent determine the meaning of my past personal experiences, and does so from a point outside myself (ie. from a future that happens to me rather than one that I project). My personal history (who I was) thus gets written and rewritten in and through social encounters that retroactively determine who I will have been.

A myth that Bradley thus seeks to lay to rest is the idea that future events are the outcomes of the activity of individuals whose personal pasts determine their interests and desires and cause them to act or take charge of their development according to some linear plan. This misconception is grounded in what he refers to as the “diachronic” understanding of the psychological as some developmental process by which something self-identical actualizes its predefined potential through some linear trajectory. Such a view is evident, for example, in stage-theories of development where my trajectory through time is always considered to be a change that I as a self-identical individual go through, as if I could simply travel through time without changing the fundamental sense of who I am. This false spatialization of time, as Bradley says, is a result of trying to make change and difference subordinate to a metaphysics of identity. Liminality is here reduced to being a transition, stage, or change of someone or something identical, and is no longer understood as an event that can change the very nature of who I am. To correct this error, Bradley refers to developmental psychologist J.R. Morss’ suggestion that we “drop the illusory spatialized conception of development-as-movement in which personal

identity is fixed,” for as he quotes Morss as saying, “Instead of identity there must be difference” (p. 137).

Phenomenological psychology is another approach that has the inherent potential to become a new foundation for psychology that does away with an understanding of the psychological as rooted on either side of a subject-object dichotomy. However, to accomplish this, we will need to interpret phenomenology through a phenomenology of the event rather than a phenomenology of the subject.

Although Amedeo Giorgi (1970, 2009) is not necessarily in disagreement with this view, his empirical phenomenological method nevertheless chooses to only “reduce” experience to a psychological level of meaning. The psychological becomes for Giorgi a hermeneutic horizon that sets limits on how far the psychologist would want to reduce a phenomenon. Although he acknowledges the possibility of a “transcendental reduction,” Giorgi believes that the psychologist should stick to an investigation of the psychological ways in which the world is experienced for the most part by the subjects living in the everyday world.

In my view, the psychological is here assumed by Giorgi as an a priori category that forces an experience, which need not show itself as psychological, into a psychological frame. By virtue of his psychological reduction, Giorgi excludes the possibility of a liminal experience in which I discover myself retroactively as *having been* claimed by an event, that is, as arising out of a situation which I not only experience, but which has created me as this or that experience. In this sense, the a priori interpretive lens of the “psychological reduction” becomes a barrier to understanding experiences that are not “owned” by the subject but consist of “happenings” through which we ourselves

are produced or through which we discover ourselves only in and through what we have become. Such experiences are not merely esoteric, but could be said to include the ethical encounter with the face of the other (Levinas), the sublime (Kant), being amazed (Descartes), nausea (Sartre), ontological anxiety (Heidegger), laughing and crying (Plessner), loving (Marion), peak experiences (Maslow), and also, as I will claim, flirting. While we might argue, that flirting is a more mundane event than the sublime or ontological anxiety, the point I wish to make is that events are not confined to certain extraordinary moments, but are experienced in situations that are also quite ordinary. All of these experiences could be said to be events insofar as they precede the self as a subject who “has” an experience. They simultaneously happen to me and change me in the process of happening to me. In all of these cases, as Marion (2002a) has stated, the experience “arrives to me from above; it is a fact made for me, not by me, but at my expense. It is a fact made on my account; by it, I am made. Along the same lines, intentionality is inverted. I become the objective of the object” (p. 146).

If we are only interested in experiences involving the mode of being a self that the phenomenological psychologist has defined a priori as an acting subject or existing being, we end up excluding other ways of being human than as an agent who is either in control of the experience or the passive victim of external forces. In order to avoid this and be more inclusive in our understanding of the concept of experience, the locus of our investigation needs to be displaced to a center beyond ourselves—from myself as ego-centric agent to the place or event of my genesis as an active or passive person.

In fact, we can even say that what from a psychological reduction would appear as a mere loss of control to events that simply happen to me, can in fact be a way to

discover a far greater power in me than the one belonging to my subjective agency. In the encounter with the other person, for example, I come up against my limit, but according to Levinas (1963/1986), despite the fact that “The relationship with another puts me into question, empties me of myself, and does not let off emptying me—uncovering for me ever new resources. I did not know myself so rich...” (p. 351). Similarly when Marion (2007) describes the phenomenon of becoming attracted to someone or falling in love, he states that, “At this instant, in which it is precisely too late, in which it has already happened, in which I am made by the other and by my desire—I am no longer the same, and thus I am, at last, myself; individualized beyond the point of return” (p. 109). Our most meaningful and, ironically, most personal experiences are, in other words, often transformative experiences in which we become “other.” They are not subjective experiences, but experiences that transform us as subjects from the “ground up.” Hence, as psychoanalyst Chris Oakley (2001) has said in his paraphrasing of Hegel, “experience is not to be reduced merely to one’s subjective awareness of an event; rather [...] when I truly experience something I am affected by it, it comes as a shock, violates my familiar view, it unsettles, it challenges, it transforms” (p. 225). Heidegger (1959/1982) points out something similar when he talks of experience as something we undergo rather than something we “have.” “To undergo an experience with something—be it a thing a person, or a god,” he says, “—means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms us and transforms us” (p. 57). He goes on to say that “When we talk of ‘undergoing’ an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is this something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens” (ibid).

In this sense, any psychological approach goes astray when it attempts to define the essence of the psychological a priori rather than looking at how psychological agency is itself produced in and through an event. As we can therefore conclude, the proper subject matter of psychology should be the very encounter or happening by means of which I become an acting subject and am able to participate in yet other encounters that can transform me or express themselves through me in turn. In this sense, studying the psychological from the vantage point of the event does not undermine the psychological and the subjective, but merely seeks to understand it on a new and more primordial basis.

The subject who “has” an experience, who observes the event, or acts on the world, is thus never a subject that emanates from itself, but is always a subject that owes its beginning to an experience that has always already claimed it and installed the subject within it. I am never *not* part of an event. This fact does not annul the agency of the subject, but merely resituates every subjective act as always already constituting a response to the world acting on me. The originating moment of any action is thus never located within me or in the world, but in the happening of an experience that grows from the middle space between subject and object or from the inter-im of every inter-action.

Consequently my goal in this dissertation will be to go beyond the psychological reduction to a reduction of the event. What this means is that I will no longer presuppose that persons live their lives in a somewhat linear fashion as authors of their own experiences and life-narratives. Instead my starting point will be that life “happens” and sometimes makes us awaken within new narratives, reorders the memory of who we were and allows us to exist in new ways. The psychological self, in other words, sometimes arrives at me from elsewhere, as a function of the events into which I am swept up or in

relation to some point outside myself such as the other who individualizes me beyond who I was.

Chapter 3

A Phenomenological Interpretation of Liminality as Event

Introduction to the Philosophical Part of Dissertation

A Note on My Interpretive Approach

In the following I would like to make the case for an interpretation of phenomenology as a phenomenology of the event. I would like to develop such a phenomenology through my own synthesis of insights and textual fragments from various phenomenological psychologists and philosophers, as well as authors who have gone beyond phenomenology while staying faithful to its basic truth. My intent will not be to give an adequate representation of the wholeness of each author's work, but to usurp parts of each author's arguments in the service of constructing my own. My argument can thus in many ways be described as a "bricolage" that seeks to find consistencies and harmonies in the disparate. I am going to assume that meaning is not the property of the author and his or her intentions, but is there to be appropriated by readers who can interpret what someone says in many different ways (Iser, 1980). This understanding treats interpretation as its own creative event, which is very much in keeping with the phenomenological viewpoint I will seek to develop. In the analysis that follows, my goal is therefore not to be faithful to some original meaning or subjective intention that the author may have had, but to make a "reading" or interpretation that seeks to be creative of something new by deemphasizing standard interpretations and reading against the

grain. This of course needs to be done without thereby falsifying the texts, which set definite limits on my interpretive freedom.

Phenomenology as a Reflective Grasping of Lived Experience

The basic claim of my interpretation of phenomenology is that phenomenology is a philosophy or reflective understanding of experience as lived. This definition of phenomenology is borrowed from phenomenologist Aron Gurwitsch (1974b) who defines phenomenology as a philosophy of existence. Phenomenology, he says, is a way of transcending “simply existing” (ie. living), by means of “formulating a philosophy of existence” that transcends living toward an understanding of living (p. 14). Lived experience or existence, which for the purpose of this dissertation I will take to be the same, is not a designation of the thoughts and objects we experience in everyday life, but of that realm of pre-reflective living in which we conduct ourselves most effortlessly when we do not “know” what we are doing. It is the realm of reading a book, for example, not of knowing that we are reading a book. To “live” reading a book is to be so engrossed in the reading that we have lost ourselves in the pages of the book and entered into the world of the characters of the book. In lived experience, as Van den Berg (1972) writes, “There is [therefore] an original contact with objects. We often even *are* the objects” (p. 67). In this sense, lived experience is both what is nearest to us and farthest away, just like the eyes we use to see are both nearer than anything we actually see and farther away than anything we see. Our eyes are not included within our view, yet nevertheless condition everything we see. In this sense, lived experience is not a designation of something apparent or visible, but of something unapparent and invisible that must first

be brought to light through phenomenological reflection. Lived experience is thus not first and foremost an experience that is already fully intelligible to us, but one that, as *lived* and not reflectively *understood*, remains obscure. This, in turn, makes phenomenology a science of uncovering what is unapparent in the apparent. Hence, as phenomenological philosopher Jean-Luc Marion (2002b) has argued, “Phenomenology is not first required where phenomena are already given and constituted, but only where they remain dissimulated or still invisible” (p. 110).

In the exposition that follows, I will explore the phenomenological reflections on lived experience that have already been carried out in the works of multiple phenomenologists. Although different lived experiences such as reading a book, falling in love, or flirting, hide over different secrets of the lived that must first be uncovered through the phenomenological method in order to become consciously “known,” most phenomenologists agree that different lived experiences have certain characteristics in common. Regardless of whether I am reading a book, falling in love, or flirting, I am doing so within the constraints and possibilities of life itself that determines the existential possibilities through which phenomena can be disclosed. There is thus a general phenomenology of experience or existence that underlies each and every distinct experience and it is this general understanding of experience that I am interested in developing in the pages that follow.

From a Phenomenology of Subject and Object to a Phenomenology of Liminality

Although different phenomenologists have offered different reflections on the Being or essence of the general structure of lived experience, my argument will be that

they tend to converge on the understanding that experience is “intentional.” Although the meaning and languaging of this basic phenomenological truth differs among phenomenologists, they seem to be articulating the same idea in different ways, namely that experience is fundamentally neither reducible to an experience that I as a subject can “have” or which objects themselves give rise to. The claim I will make is that a phenomenological interpretation of intentionality reveals to us that lived experience is neither subjective nor objective, but *liminal*. In other words, what intentionality reveals is that lived experience belongs neither to the subject nor to the object, but to the “middle” or “relationship” between them. Trying to think subject and object from out of this relation rather than to define the relation from the vantage point of either the subject or the object, is thus what will constitute the novelty of my interpretation of phenomenology. Phenomenology will now cease to become a phenomenology of the subject or the object and instead become a phenomenology of liminality, or of the event. It is to the purpose of developing this point of view that I will direct my efforts in the philosophical part of my dissertation that follows in chapter 4, 5, 6 and 7.

A Note on the Use of Some Unusual Terminology

In order to accomplish a move away from a phenomenology of the object or the subject, I will make several claims that might perhaps at first strike the reader as unusual and I therefore wish to provide a context and rationale for these claims before moving on to the actual analysis.

One of these claims will be that objects have just as much agency as subjects. This assertion is needed in order to counterbalance the constant temptation to fall back

into a subjectivistic interpretation of phenomenology. Only if we grant equal agency to subject and object, do we have the needed symmetry necessary to give priority to the liminality *between* subject and object. If this symmetry is not instated and objects are treated as inert or passive things, liminality will inevitably become reinternalized into a subjectivistic interpretation of phenomenology in which the subject is given priority in the dialectic between subject and objects. To avoid the pitfall of subjectivizing the between, I will make the claim that subjectivity always only emerges from a claim or invitation by the object and that the object therefore *acts* on the subject. This has the consequence of equaling out the power balance between subject and object, such that while the subject does indeed act on the object, it does so always already only by being claimed or acted on by the object.

The idea of attributing agency to the object might sound incredulous at first, but it finds support in both nonphenomenological and phenomenological sources. One inspiration for this claim has been Bruno Latour's *actor-network theory* (2005) in which both "humans" and "non-humans" are given equal agency in so far as they both take part in a structure (network) that determines their agencies or action potentials as a result of each other. An agent is here an "actor" who acts on a previous action in a continuous chain of actions. Hence, agency never pertains to some absolute will that is not already a response to being acted on. When I "will" something, the will that defines me is thus not initiated from some autonomous center within me, but is already a response to the thing having acted on me. My will thus forms a response to the world, even though it also changes this very world by giving form to new objects. According to Latour, the object can be said to have agency insofar as "kettles 'boil' water, knives 'cut' meat, baskets

‘hold’ provisions, hammers ‘hit’ nails on the head, rails ‘keep’ kids from falling, locks ‘close’ rooms against uninvited visitors, soap ‘takes’ the dirt away, schedules ‘list’ class sessions, prize tags ‘help’ people calculating, and so on” (Latour, 2005, p. 71). In each of these cases, we could say that the action of the object creates a subjective possibility of drinking a cup of tea or making a meal, just as much as the desire to make a cup of tea or a meal creates the kettle as a boiling device or the knife as a cutting device.

Further support for attributing agency to things in a way that is not simply dependent upon the subject as a “user” of things, but is also instrumental in bringing the subject about as “user,” can be found in the later works of Heidegger. In his essay on *The Thing* (1971/2001), for example, Heidegger uses the word “thinging” (p. 175) to designate the essence of the thing which is now thought of as *active*. According to Heidegger, the thing accomplishes something. It is not just an inert or passive object that awaits subjective discovery. Instead it brings me into a relationship to the world. It “connects” me with other things into a network of associations that define my subjective world at any given moment. This phenomenon also makes Heidegger refer to the thing as a “gathering” (Versammlung) (p. 172), a concept he takes from the synonym in German between “thing” and “a political gathering.” As Heidegger writes, “To be sure, the Old High German word *thing* means a gathering, and specifically a gathering to deliberate on a matter under discussion, a contested matter” (p. 172). The thing, in other words, concerns us with the same vigor of a “political cause” that inspires us into action. As Heidegger says, “Thinking in this way, we are called by the thing as the thing. In the strict sense of the German word *bedingt*, we are the be-thinged, the conditioned ones.” (p. 179). When in the following analysis, I therefore speak of the object as having an agency

of its own I do so in the sense that things invite me, call me, inspire me, claim me, and do so in a way that first bring me into being as a subject through a particular possibility of the thing. This possibility of the thing is, in other words, not merely one that I discover in the thing, but a possibility into which I have been gathered by the thing prior to any intent or will of my own. I believe such a position is both faithful to a certain strand of phenomenological thinking and needed in order to maintain the symmetry that will allow me to think the difference (liminality) between subject and object as a phenomenon in and of itself. This symmetry, of course, does not mean that things have consciousness and is thus not a symmetry that flattens or obliterates the difference between humans and non-humans. Rather, it is a symmetry that allows me to situate agency in the inter-action between subject and object without reducing this interaction to an objective causality or a subjective will.

A related aspect of my interpretation of phenomenology, which some readers might find troublesome, is the idea that a phenomenon, such as flirting, is sometimes described as being able to *show itself from itself*. Some readers might find this assertion bizarre because it seems to ignore that a subject is needed to disclose the phenomenon of flirting in the first place. The phrase “flirting is made apparent” might thus be preferred to “flirting shows itself,” since the latter statement emphasizes the activity of the subject who makes the phenomenon show itself. Nevertheless, in many works of phenomenology, agency is indeed attributed to the phenomenon independently of the subject who experiences the phenomenon.

In *Being and Time* (1927/1996), for example, Heidegger defines the phenomenon as an appearing that makes “itself known through something that shows itself” (p. 26).

The phenomenon here appears to have agency in and of itself, a declaration that is corroborated when he says that the method of phenomenology consists of letting “what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself” (p. 30). In his later works, such as *On Time and Being* (1969/2002), Heidegger reinforces the idea that a phenomenon can give itself through some nonsubjective agency. Here he speaks of a giving of what is present that is rooted not in the subject who gives meaning, but in an experience that gives itself (the “it gives” (es gibt)).

This position has later become the basis of the work of the phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion, who in his book *Being Given* (2002) “reduces” experience to a giving beyond subjectivity. As he says, “...appearing always has the rank and function not of a representation submitted to the imperial initiative of the gaze of consciousness, but of an event whose happening stems [...] from an upsurging, a coming-up, an arising” (p. 49). And as he further comments, “No being, no actuality, no appearance, no concept, and no sensation could reach us, or even concern us, if it did not first give [itself] to us” (p. 54).

If we can speak of a phenomenology of the subject and a phenomenology of the object, my phenomenology would thus in comparison be classifiable as a phenomenology of the “it,” for we must start from the “it” of the bringing into being of subject and object in order to be faithful to “the middle” of their arising. To start from the “middle” is thus to make the claim that phenomena can give themselves as events from a place that transcends subjective agency and objective causality. This, in my opinion, is the only way to release phenomena from a subjectivism that reduces them to products of “my” experience and to study “my experience” as part and parcel of an event in which I partake but which I do not solely constitute. When, in the following, I therefore speak of a

phenomenon that shows itself, I speak of the phenomenon as an “event” or an arising, and not as a subjective experience or a “thing.”

Intentionality as the Hermeneutic Starting Point for Interpreting the Meaning of Liminality as Event

My analysis of a phenomenology of the event will proceed from the phenomenological concept of *intentionality*, which I will claim refers first and foremost to an event rather than a subjective intention or an objective cause.

Intentionality is a scholastic philosophical concept that was reintroduced in modern times by the philosopher Franz Brentano (1874/1995) and subsequently taken up as the “fundamental assumption of phenomenology” (Spinelli, 1995) by the “father of phenomenology,” Edmund Husserl (1981/2002). As a first approximation, intentionality designates the fact that no thing can initially be experienced outside of a relation to a subject who is experiencing it. Brentano (1874/1995) makes this early definition of intentionality clear in his book *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, when he writes:

Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on (p. 41)

Although this idea might initially seem very simple, its implications are profound, for “It creates an entirely new climate of thought in which the classical antinomy of idealism versus empiricism is overcome” (Luijpen, 1972). Intentionality points to the fact that there can be no perception that is not a perception “of something,” which means, conversely, that there can be no perception of something that is not a subjective

perception. As a consequence of this original belongingness between the subjective and the objective, we can thus no longer speak of a subjective realm of feelings, desires, and thoughts as existing separately from an objective realm of inanimate objects. To feel sad, angry, or tired, for example, is to feel sad, angry or tired about something in the world and hence to be in a world-relation. Van den Berg (1972) provides a good example of this when he writes that:

A person who, in the morning after a restless night, finds himself ill and decides to stay in bed for the day can, if invited to do so, report on his condition by stating how he feels subjectively: tired, nauseated, without appetite and with a headache—data which seem subjective but which, in reality, can hardly be called that. For one feels tiredness in legs and head, nausea in the throat, no appetite in relation to a cracker, etc. To express a strictly subjective complaint, a complaint pertaining to the subject and not to the body or its environment, is beyond our powers. He who complains, complains about things there, in the body or in the objects there” (p. 44)

Although Heidegger uses the concept of being-in-the-world rather than the concept of intentionality, this concept nevertheless gives expression to the same idea, namely that the subject or the self has no independent reality of the object or the world. As Heidegger explains in *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* (1922/2001a):

I encounter myself in the world, in that which I live and in that which engages me, in my successes and failures, in my environment, in my surrounding world, in my shared world. I encounter myself in a world which acquires and takes its determinate meaningfulness from my own self, but in which the self ‘is’ not there qua self, and where ‘from my own self’ is neither reflectively given nor explicitly placed on stage within this reflection (p. 72).

Strasser (1968) also seems to express this principle in his dialogal phenomenology when he writes that, “Man depends on something which he is not [. . .] To acquire experiences, his finite consciousness has to address itself to ‘something.’ In

doing so, it opens itself and lets itself be determined by that which it experiences” (p. 84). In Strasser’s example, the human being is thus not a thing that perceives another thing by initially standing outside experience as a “thinking thing.” Rather, as Van den Berg (1987) has also pointed out, the person “evaporates into a void, when we [. . .] take his world away from him” (p. 61).

These variations of the principle of intentionality, although dissimilar in some regards, are not far from Husserl’s original understanding of intentionality. Although Husserl (1925/1977) sometimes speaks of phenomenology as “the science of pure subjectivity” (p. 146), indicating that he is still stuck in the subject-object split, what Husserl calls subjective is not set against the objective as a separate entity that relates to the objective. As he writes in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929/1969), “Psychological experience, including internal experience, is an experience of something worldly; it is intimately combined in its intentionality, with experience of Nature” (p. 284), and as he writes in *Ideas* (1913/1962), “The experiencing Ego is still nothing that might be taken *for itself* and made into an object of inquiry on its *own* account. Apart from its ‘ways of being related’ or ‘ways of behaving’, it is completely empty of essential components, it has no content that could be unraveled, it is in and for itself indescribable: pure ego and nothing further” (p. 214). We thus already see in Husserl the precursor to Heidegger’s use of the term “being-in-the-world” as a way to express the nature of a subjectivity that is always already worldly. Husserl even gave perfect expression to this idea when in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929/1969) he wrote, “As a human being (as living in the natural attitude), I am ‘in’ the world, I find myself as being ‘in’ it

and, accordingly, as determined in many different respects from the outside (a spatio-temporal externality)” (p. 276).

Although different in many other respects, both the concept of intentionality and the concept of being-in-the-world define an experience that is primarily relational, that is, which is not pasted together of two separate entities that exist independently first and only subsequently enter into a relation with each other. What both concepts indicate is that an independently existing subject does not go into an independently existing world of which it *has* an experience. Rather, the subject is always already defined by the world or by the object of its experience. An initial intertwining thus seems to precede the moment in which I can identify myself as this particular subject and can identify an object as this particular object. It is this act of granting the subject to the object and vice versa that I will designate as the original essence of intentionality and will seek to understand as “the event” from which experience originates.

Starting from the event leads us away from a subjective interpretation of intentionality as rooted in “my” subjective being or an objective interpretation of intentionality as a property of the conscious structures of particular objects. The event undermines these views, because the event implies this: that I cannot “have” an experience in any original sense, for the moment I “have” it, the experience always already “has” me as this particular subject who stands in a relationship of “having” to this particular object. The event thus articulates the very occasion by which I become myself and the object becomes itself. In this sense, intentionality points us toward an original liminality as a basis for understanding lived experience. Lived experience can now no longer be referred back to some absolute identity that stands outside of it or behind it as

the cause. It can only be studied as the very moment of a self-concealing revealment. It designates a belongingness between something subjective and something objective that cannot be captured by a thought or presented as a ‘thing,’ because any such thought or presentation is always already the product of a certain belonging. The belonging itself thus remains a happening that escapes identification. It is a passage into experience rather than an experience itself. This idea can be said to be faithful to the implicit truth captured in phenomenological psychiatrist R.D. Laing’s (1982) statement that “All experiences are instances of experience, but experience is not itself an experience” (p. 9). The original moment of the lived can, in other words, never be experienced as an object in itself or as an object for a subject, because every such experience is already an instance of lived experience and thus already a happening of the lived. It is this fundamental truth, with all its ramifications, that I will seek to develop in the analysis that follows.

Starting from a liminal understanding of the intentionality of lived experience, I will first take up the question of what becomes of the identity of the subject and the object when we no longer grant them their identity a priori but only grant it to them in and through their relation to each other (chapter 4). Through examples and arguments from the phenomenological literature, I will seek to show what it means to think of both the subject and the object as receiving themselves from beyond themselves and thus as having the identity only of a difference or a non-correspondence. Next, I will examine the phenomenal nature of this difference by means of which something can first become itself or become identical. I will study this phenomenon through the phenomenological concept of “strife,” which I borrow from Martin Heidegger (chapter 5). Starting from the strife as a ‘thirdness’ between subject and object, I will be able to resituate lived

experience as a kind of groundless ground (event). What I mean by this is that although lived experience, as a strife between earth and world, is grounding, it cannot itself be grounded. Instead we must accept that the ground of experience is that of a concealing-revealing ‘difference’ that allows something to appear always only on the basis of something else withdrawing from view. In this sense every subjective experience and experience of worldly things rests not on a metaphysics of identity but on a metaphysics of liminality or nonidentity.

Liminality refers to the very moment of the strife between the concealed and the unconcealed. The moment of the actualization of this strife is always the phenomenon of a happening or an “event” that cannot itself be grounded and captured as a thing in itself. In my analysis I will examine this “truth” of the event from both the perspective of what conceals itself and the perspective of what reveals itself, which addresses the two sides of its non-correspondence or difference (chapter 6). Finally, I will articulate the methodological consequences of starting from an understanding of lived experience as an event and will seek to replace an understanding of the phenomenological reduction with an understanding of what I will call the *double reduction*. The double reduction seeks to locate the subjectivity of the researcher and of the person as always already part of an event. The concept refers to the idea that the “reducer” is herself “reduced” and that the reduction is thus itself an event and not a subjective act (chapter 7). All of these steps of my analysis will finally pave the way for my phenomenological analysis of flirting as a liminal experience and an existential example of the happening of an event.

Chapter 4

The Liminal Nature of Subjects and Objects

As a starting point for the unconcealment of the meaning of intentionality, I will take the standard definition of intentionality as the fact that the subject is always a worldly subject and the object is always an object for a subject. Based on this starting point, I will seek to show that such an understanding essentially deconstructs the idea that the subject has its identity from within and that the object has its identity in itself. Instead, I will argue that we discover the identity of the thing only through the fact that the subject discovers itself through things, and that we discover the identity of the subject only through the fact that the object expresses itself through the subject. The identity of both subject and object thus rests on a fundamental difference by means of which both become themselves in and through being different from themselves or in and through being constituted by the other. I will seek to show the meaning of this conclusion first in regard to the object, which encompasses everything nonsubjective, including worldly experiences that are not yet objective such as “the other,” and then in regard to the subject, which includes every sense of mineness, not merely of the “thinking I,” but also of the bodily, action-oriented and feeling self.

The Subject Discovers itself through Things: A Liminal Interpretation of the Object

The Pathic Agency of the Thing

According to Heidegger (1927/1996), the subject has no content in and of itself, no inner space in which feelings, memories or thoughts can reside. I discover myself always only in relation to things. An inquiry into the nature of subjectivity thus ultimately entails an inquiry into the manifestations of the thing, for “any landscape is a state of soul” (Amiel quoted in Van den Berg, 1987, p. 62), and “psychology is cosmology,” a “physiology of the elements: earth, air, water, and fire.” (Van den Berg, *ibid*).

To illustrate, I would like to offer an example of a recent experience I had in a therapy group that involved training in mindfulness. One day as part of a mindfulness exercise, stones in various colors, shapes and textures were passed around to the group members and we were all asked to notice as much as we could about these stones. What became apparent, however, was that in noticing different aspects of the stones, each participant also noticed aspects of him or herself. This mirrors Merleau-Ponty’s (1964/2000) statement that “since the seer is caught up in what he sees, it is still himself he sees: there is a fundamental narcissism of all vision” (p. 139).

As one person, for example, caressed the stone with her hand and fingernails and was asked to comment on what she had noticed, she said, “I realized that I wanted to get my finger nails done, which I haven’t felt like for months.” Another person noticed the cracks in the stone she had picked out, which made her realize that she is the kind of person who “always goes for the underdogs.” In each case, the appearance of the stone both determined and was determined by a particular subjective state. The people in question were not just imagining or thinking something about themselves, they were

discovering themselves *through* the stone. The stone allowed them to understand something about themselves. We can therefore say that my desire to treat myself to a spa treatment resides in the sensation of a smooth stone on my finger nail, not in some inner will, and that my identity as someone who cares for the underprivileged resides in the cracks and imperfections that surround me, not in some inner core of my being. In each of these cases, our subjective state resides outside ourselves. This is why Heidegger (1927/1996) speaks of the human being as being-in-the-world, for subjectivity in each of these instances is not a free floating consciousness that goes out to meet the things of the world, but is itself a response to a claim made on it *by* the things that evoke particular kinds of subjectivity. It is this fact that Langeveld (1984) refers to when, rather than speaking of things as inanimate objects, he speaks of them as *invitations*. The ball, for example, is never initially just there in front of me as some alien object, but is there first as an invitation to kick, to throw or to roll, that is, as an evocation of a particular subjective state or act.

What Langeveld brings to view by thinking of things as invitations is what Straus (1966/1980) has also talked about as the *pathic* quality of things. The pathic quality of the thing refers to how the thing *moves* us, that is, how it calls for us to respond. It refers to that realm of reality which the thing inhabits prior to our knowledge of it. When we listen to the radio, for example, the song on the radio does not initially reveal itself to us as an object in front of us, that is, as pure sound. It reveals itself as something that has already moved us into a particular relationship to itself. We know the song because we find ourselves tapping our feet to its rhythm, humming its lyrics, wanting to turn off the radio and so forth. In short, music reveals itself to us first and foremost as a change in *us* and

not as a thing in-itself. According to Straus, all things first and foremost reveal themselves in such an affective attunement. It is this which he defines as the pathic quality of things and which he locates in “the immediate communication we have with things on the basis of their changing mode of sensory givenness” (Straus, 1966/1980, p. 12). He distinguishes this pathic relation we have with things from that of a *gnostic* or knowing relation which is always only a retroactive elaboration of the former and requires an analytic separation of self from world that departs from an original synthetic unity or harmony with the things.

This argument is in line with Husserl’s analysis in *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* (1966/2001), in which he describes the thing that affects us as having an “allure that awakens” (p. 196) the subject. Without this initial allure, the object would not become differentiated or focal but would remain part of an indistinct mass or landscape. To come to the forefront, an object must therefore always make an initial claim on me by drawing my attention to it and thus directing my subjectivity in a way that transcends my own conscious act to look.

Based on these examples, the object of phenomenology, we could therefore say, is not some thing external to consciousness, waiting to be represented, but something sensible that “enwraps me and infiltrates through all my senses” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, p. 330). It is an object of “non-thetic” consciousness (Sartre, 1948/1989), a kind of knowledge of the hand or of the senses that my body knows before I consciously know that I know. My subjective self-awareness is thus always an appropriation or thetic reflection upon a world of which I am already a part, in which I already know how to act and to which I have already responded without being aware of it. The objectivity of the

object is thus an objectivity of a world that is already part of my very flesh or included within me the moment I become aware of myself as a “me.” “The thing” therefore is never initially a simple object in front of me as indicated by the German word for object (“Gegenstand”), which means something that stands over and against me.

The Thing as Body

Insofar as the thing has already revealed itself through me, the subject who says I and who considers itself the initiator of its own movements and actions upon the world could be considered to be born out of another more primordial self that belongs to the world. Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) calls this self, which is not yet an ego, for “the body.” By this term, he means, not the objective body that I “have” and the limbs of which I can manipulate, but the *lived* or *phenomenal body* to which I myself am entrusted as that prior space in which possible courses of action for being a subject have always already been delineated. As Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/2002),

There is, therefore, another subject beneath me, for whom a world exists before I am here, and who marks out my place in it. This captive or natural spirit is my body, not that momentary body which is the instrument of my personal choices and which fastens upon this or that world, but the system of anonymous ‘functions’ which draw every particular focus into a general project” (p. 296).

The phenomenal body, as Merleau-Ponty describes it, is a body that I receive from the world as much as a body with which I confront the world. In fact to speak of it as exclusively mine would be to ignore the fact that I myself am thrown back upon it and that my body is really a configuration of potentials of the world expressing itself through me. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) writes, “the phenomenal forces at work in my visual

field elicit from me, without any calculation on my part, the motor reactions which establish the most effective balance between them,” and, “the conventions of our social group, or our set of listeners, immediately elicit from us the words, attitudes and tone which are fitting” (p. 122). The world, we could therefore say, is always a world that acts on me and that delineates certain action potentials for me which I take over as my own. The empiricism of the world is thus not first of all a set of data for a spectating mind, but an experience that has passed into my actions, what Von Eckartsberg (1986) also calls an *experi-action*. “The thing,” as Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) therefore writes, “is [initially] correlative of my body” (p. 373).

Take for example the experience of driving a car. As Van Lennep (1987a) has argued, to drive a car is not to approach it as a thing in front of me to be operated on, for when one drives one does not drive the car, but drives the road. The car itself has passed into one’s body. One has *become* the car, meaning that one’s perception has become perception *from* the car rather than *of* the car. From this moment on, one starts to see things as if one *were* the car. This is what Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) means when he states that we inhabit objects instead of merely look at them (p. 79). Merleau-Ponty gives plenty of examples of this “inhabited object” in his book *Phenomenology of Perception*, where he speaks of a woman who wears a feather in her hat and starts moving around in such a way that the feather won’t break off. In this instance, he says, “she feels where her feather is just as we feel where our hand is” (p. 165). Another example he gives is that of a blind man whose walking stick is not possessed as an object but “has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight” (p. 165).

A further consequence follows: To inhabit an object is to be referred back to something that comes before our perception as the source of this perception, something so present that it itself remains imperceptible. This is what Heidegger (1954/1968) refers to when he states that “The presence of what is present is not finally and *also* something we face, rather it comes before. Prior to all else it stands before us, only we do not see it because we stand within it” (p. 98).

Correspondingly, what Levinas (1961/1969) calls the thing is a content that precedes form in that it is the very condition or nourishment of the I that gives form to the thing. Every act of subjective constitution has thus always already received its direction from an initial worldly enjoyment or sympathy that serves as the non-representable root of this subjective act. In this sense we live *from* things rather than toward them. “It is they that ground me. I welcome them without thinking them. I enjoy this world of things as pure elements, as qualities without support, without substance” (p. 137).

The Temporality of the Thing

What it means to be related to the thing or to have a body through which the world expresses itself is to be related backward to something that perpetually withdraws or holds itself back as past, since it always already preceded me as a conscious, willing subject. Phenomenologically, we can understand the meaning of this past in several ways.

For one, it can be described, like Husserl (1936/1970) has, as the perpetual retentions of previous presents that make up the background from which we can make sense of new presents. In the experience of listening to music, for example, or of having a conversation with someone, each new tone or each new word always relates backwards to

tones and words that are now past, but which have been *retained* as part of the present experience. These past presents are not merely past in the sense of existing no longer, but are precisely what continues to orient our listening and thus to act as a background that guides our future expectations and makes us attuned to particular possibilities of the future. It is only because of such retentions that we experience words or musical notes not primarily as disconnected sounds, but as “the unfolding of a conversation” (of which *I am already in the process*) or “the playing of a melody” (that I *have been* listening to for awhile). The thing as such, is thus never simply given in a “now,” but is always given as an unfolding event with a temporal duration and a “comet’s tail” of what “has-been” that is continuously shaping my expectations. Another way to say this is that each new moment always inserts itself into something that has already happened and that helps me find my bearing in this moment. No thing and no experience is thus ever just there in some isolated span of time, but always requires a past “memory” from which it makes sense. My body is thus always temporal and my awakening as a conscious subject always owes a debt to an experience from which I emerge and which is required as the condition for my being able to “have” this experience.

That something always precedes my experience is true even when the melody or the conversation has just begun, for no conversation or melody is ever experienced without arising from within a wider understanding of the world within which one already stands. We can formulate this principle in the words of Levinas (1961/1969) who states that “the consciousness of a world is already consciousness *through* that world” (p. 153). No thing can ever be a thing without first evoking the memory or understanding of other things that are always already understood. Hence, as Gurwitsch (1966) writes,

When we deal with an object and choose it as the theme of our mental activity— of whatever kind our mental activity may be – our conscious life is never confined to the exclusive experience of our theme. At the time of our dealing with the theme, we are aware, in varying degrees of clarity and explicitness, of other objects and events (p. 123).

Hence, if I meet someone in a bar with whom I engage myself in lively conversation, I retain not just the immediate memories of what the person has talked about, but retain the fact that I am in a bar, that I am here with friends who might be expecting my return to their table, that I consider myself to be this particular kind of person who the other may or may not like, and so forth. More generally, this knowledge presupposes some pre-understanding of what a “bar,” “friend,” “personality” and so forth *is*. Depending on the nature of these presuppositions, which have been recollected from prior experiences, told to me by others, or simply refer back to a knowledge of the body which I was born with, the same conversational material can be revealed in many different ways. Different interlocutors are evoked by the same thing into different past horizons and therefore approach the present from different “bodies” or “worlds.”

In both of these cases, to say that *I* am the one who remembers and that *I* therefore constitute the meaning of the thing, would be a mistake, because it would be equally true to say that it is the thing that remembers for me in the sense that it elicits from me a certain way of being related to it and thereby first brings me into a region of my past experiences of being related. I often have this experience as a therapist, where I do not need to read my session notes before each session in order to remember what went on in our last session, but can trust that when such memories become relevant they will be evoked in me by a particular statement or gesture by the client.

Instead of starting from an understanding of the subject as having “memories,” Jean-Luc Marion (1996, 2002a) therefore instead redefines the subject as *the gifted* (*adonné*) or the one who is called into being by the thing. According to Marion, in receiving myself from a particular memory or horizon of the thing, the I that acts, thinks or wills always takes over a self which it is called into by the thing. As Marion (2002a) therefore writes, “‘Who comes after the subject’—I call him ‘the gifted,’ with no other *subjectum* besides his capacity to receive and to receive *himself* from what he receives” (p. 4). The starting point of human existence is thus, according to Marion, always a self that I did not have before I received it. My self is always the result of having been called away from something I was and into something I haven’t been before. Consequently I do not pre-exist my memories as some agent who projects them onto things, but first discover myself in the memories of things: in the thickness of their varying mnemonic layers in which I see myself, as the people caressing the stones did when they discovered their desires and beliefs by being called into them by the stones. We can thus just as well say that memory lives “in” the things, as we can say that it lives “inside” of us. A better way to state it, however, is to say that a memory requires both a subject and an object in order to come into being and that it therefore exists only in the encounter between us. I don’t own my memories which I then simply project onto things. I have to be called into my own memories by means of an encounter with the thing, which first returns to myself in this or that prior recollection of the thing.

The Thing as Earth

When we attempt to remove the thing from the many subjective horizons of the past that it evokes and through which it constitutes itself as a particular event, we merely end up abstracting a conceptual image of the thing that destroys its everyday reality. Although we may attempt to do this in order to be more objective, the “objective” practices of measurement, experimentation, and statistical analysis are never without their own subjective horizons.

Social phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (1932/1967) has argued that no experience, even a scientific or objective one, can take place outside of a subjective or cultural *stock of knowledge*. This stock of knowledge, which can be based on both personal experiences that have been retained as well as the transmission of mere hearsay, is most often only implicitly understood in everyday life. It ultimately refers us back to what Husserl describes as “a realm of something subjective which is completely closed off within itself, existing in its own way, functioning in all experiencing, all thinking, all life, thus everywhere inseparably involved,” but which, “has never been held in view, never been grasped and understood” (Husserl, 1936/1970, p. 112).

This closed realm consists, according to Heidegger, not only of retentions and presuppositions, but also of what Heidegger (1936/1993d) calls “the earth”—a constant background of what is not revealed and is therefore also sometimes referred to as “the mystery.” In revealing the ball through kicking it, for example, I may remain blind to the fact that I know how to kick or the fact that my familiarity with kicking things of various types of material and sizes gives me a rough estimate of how far the ball will fly before it lands. These presuppositions, however, although initially implicit, can in principle be

made explicit by a simple act of reflection. Yet, by having certain presuppositions evoked in my encounter with the ball, there is a whole dimension of possible manifestations of the ball that become entirely foreclosed. By kicking the ball, for example, I remain totally closed off to the possibility of throwing it, of using it to play fetch with my dog, or of slitting it open and using it as a hat. These possibilities remain inactive in my current engagement with the ball and are thus not amenable to being made explicit on the basis of this experience. They are simply forgone opportunities, but as such, they remain present as the absence which allows the ball to be present as it is. These foregone opportunities are not ahead of the thing as other possible futures of engaging with it, but remain buried by it and in a sense “forgotten.” In this sense they can be spoken about as part of the “past,” for in their withdrawal from view as actual possibilities, they have allowed a selection process to take place. The forgoing of certain possibilities of the thing remains a condition for the possibilities through which an actual thing can show itself. The “forgone” thus designates a perpetual ground that we can never completely bring into view. It designates “not something ontically past,” which presupposes that it has once been present, “but rather what is always earlier, what we are referred back to in the question of being as such” (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 79).

This understanding of the foregone is contained in Heidegger’s (1936/1993d) concept of the earth, which he defines as “that which is essentially undisclosable, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up” (p. 172). He also speaks of it as “that which proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what shows

itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground”
(Heidegger quoted in Buytendijk, 1959/1987, p. 36).

The past, as we can see, is therefore not simply “my” past. It is not simply based on previous experiences that I have had and does therefore not merely make up a personal memory. Instead, it refers to a past to which I have been entrusted as a previous stock of knowledge and as an earth that conditions and precedes my ability to experience anything at all.

A consequence of the above argument is that subjectivity never starts from itself or, as Heidegger (1927/1996) would say, never “owns itself from the ground up.” This is so because, as Van den Berg (1972) states, “he who sees does not see nothing at first and only then, after his projection, an object” (p. 64). Rather we always already owe our beginning to a claim by the thing, which has called us into a past that does not have its beginning in me—is not a souvenir that I have retained—but an experience into which I was already *thrown* (Heidegger, 1927/1996). As thrown, I am delivered over to my own starting point as located not in my own self, but outside myself or before myself in the world to which I am always already a response. As thrown, therefore, one is brought before oneself “not as perceiving oneself to be there, but as one finds one’s self in attunement” (p. 128).

Gendlin (1979) has made a very fine analysis of the meaning of Heidegger’s use of the term *attunement*, which is the English translation of the German word *Befindlichkeit*. As Gendlin points out, *befindlichkeit* has the dual meaning of referring to how one is located in space as well as the mood one is in. The notion of *befindlichkeit* thus points to the fundamental moodedness of the human sense of spatiality or *thatness*

(the sense “that I am” prior to a knowledge of “what I am”). This *befindlichkeit*, Gendlin goes on to argue, is a *felt sense* (ibid) that has the potential to be articulated in many different ways but always remains in excess of any particular attempt to grasp it. There is thus always an excess of world over cogito, whereby I can never recover myself fully by a thought. Through being referred back to our *befindlichkeit* as the ground of our articulations and projections, we are thus always referred back, as Moran and Mooney (2002) say, to a reality “characterized by a quality of resistance, whereby it cannot be encompassed by the intentional act relating to it.” (p. 201). Marion (2002b) refers to this excess as the ultimate phenomenal nature of the thing, and refers to it as the thing’s “saturation,” the process by which the thing overflows any subjective intention and thus reveals itself as beyond my subjectivity, much like Kant’s description of the sublime.

Conclusion: The Liminal Object

From the perspective of intentionality, subjectivity always inhabits a liminal space involving the thing. The thing is therefore never just an object in front of me, but something that speaks through me and makes my subjectivity inextricably tied to a beginning outside myself. This novel understanding of the thing has been explored through the phenomenological concepts of invitation, pathos, attunement, body, enjoyment, thrownness, and giftedness. The upshot of this analysis is that the word object, relying as it does on the conscious meanings of representation, no longer suits the objectivity of the phenomenological “thing.” Something more akin to what the French phenomenology inspired psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1975/1991) calls “the real” and what Heidegger calls “the earth” is thus needed to designate the material conditions of

our existence as subjects. The real as Lacan thinks of it is what drives me in my conscious pursuits because, in its withdrawal from view, it becomes precisely that which introduces a lack in my subjectivity that I seek to fill. Rather than thinking of the object as lacking, phenomenologists would rather think of it as consisting of an excess (Marion, 2002b) or nourishment (Levinas, 1961/1969) that makes it possible for me to come into being as something worldly in the first place. In fact, as we have seen, the earth is not some passive “lost object” but is participating actively in its own realization through a subject. It calls me or invites me. It is akin to the flower that actively incites the bee to pollinate it. In this sense, we could therefore speak of it as being an “actant” (Latour, 2000) of its own, and not just some passive or inert matter, for it acts on subjects just as much as subjects act on it. In a similar recognition, Heidegger (1971/2001c, p. 178) therefore also speaks of the thing as “thinging,” which is the English translation of the German word “bedingt.” The word thinging, both denotes the thing as active and as founding. In other words, thinging denotes that the thing becomes a thing only through the founding of a non-thing, which in this case we can call the subject.

The Thing Reveals itself through the Subject: A Liminal Interpretation of the Subject

The Subject as a Mode of Completing the Thing

Just as the subject always owes a debt to the thing that first invites it, attunes it, or calls it into a relation from which or out of which it can think and act, so too the thing owes a debt to the subject for providing it with the purpose or direction that first brings it to appearance as something that has a meaning or a significance and can be talked about with others.

In the example I gave of the mindfulness group, for example, we could say that the one stone only revealed itself as smooth because it was caressed and that the other stone only revealed itself as cracked because it was looked at. The stone has thus in each example already fallen away from its pure state as an object in itself (earth) and has already become an object for a subject (a worldly thing). It took a caress to bring the stone into its smoothness, as opposed to its hardness or heaviness, and it took looking for its imperfections to bring it into its fragility as opposed to one of its other visible features. In this sense, the smoothness and the cracks of the stones are not so much properties of the stones as they are products or effects of the encounter between subject *and* stone. The answer to the ancient Zen riddle, “If a tree falls in the woods and no one is there to hear it, does it still make a sound?,” is therefore “no,” since sound is not a property of the tree, nor for that matter of the ear. Rather, it is the property of a particular relationship the ear can have with the tree and therefore of an encounter.

The nature of this encounter between subject and object is, however, not simply that of an encounter of a subject who looks at or caresses an object. Instead, it is that of a subject who discovers its very purpose in the thing. This is so because looking and caressing are always purposive, always guided by certain aims and thus always revelatory of a human way of existing beyond the thing. Initially the human encounter with the thing is thus not directed at a present state of affairs, but at the future promise of the thing, understood as the human possibility of engaging with it that the thing opens up. In this sense, what we are really attuned to when we are attuned to a thing is not its sheer materiality, but rather its subjective possibility. Stated differently, what shows itself of the thing is always already a sign that points us toward something else that does not show

itself. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) writes, “It is thus of the essence of the thing and of the world to present themselves as ‘open’, to send us beyond their determinate manifestations, to promise us always ‘something else to see’” (p. 388).

According to Husserl (1925/1977), the identity of the thing always depends on a subjective act of going beyond the purely visible aspects of the thing toward an invisible horizon of other *potentially* visible aspects of the thing. To see a cup as a cup, for example, requires the “knowledge” by a subject that the particular profile of the cup, which I am presented with now, points toward other possible profiles that are currently hidden from view but *could* become present in the future. Without such an understanding, the cup would not have the full dimensionality of a human cup, but would remain a one-dimensional profile. We could therefore say that it is only because I *complete* the cup by leaping ahead of the purely visible aspects of the cup into an understanding of the cup that it appears to me as a cup with a back side and as a vessel for drinking. The thing needs this leaping ahead of the present, which characterizes human consciousness, in order to become itself. The “thingness” or “cupness” of the cup can thus not be said to reside in the mere materiality of the cup, for it requires a subjective understanding to achieve the fullness of its being. If we said of the subject that it can only become revealed through a “cosmology of things,” then we must therefore also say of the thing that it can only be revealed through the invisible completions by a subject who discovers itself in the thing’s potentials and possibilities. The cup, can in other words, not be reduced to its mere sensory data, as empiricists would have it, for it loses its cupness if we take away its invisible subjective horizon and thus ceases to be the thing as we know it in the everyday.

Thus, when Van den Berg (1972) wants to know about the nature of diabetes, he does not look for its essence in some “objective realm” purified of subjective influence, but asks instead for a description of the subjective worlds through which diabetes becomes the thing that it is. He does not attempt to extract from diabetes certain objective qualities that can be said to exist independently of subjective ways of completing the thing. Instead of discovering diabetes from a list of objective symptoms that define it as a medical disease, one of them being “extreme thirst,” he discovers it rather from the fact that a person with diabetes, “sees water more often, hears streams more often and enjoys a bath more intensively than a healthy person” (p. 44). In looking for the object, Van den Berg thus finds himself redirected into the subjective possibilities through which the object reveals itself.

Whereas Husserl privileges the way in which subjectivity goes beyond the thing towards a unified “idea” of the thing in both its manifest and nonmanifest aspects, Heidegger (1927/1996) believes we primarily discover the thing through the unity of a practical purpose. The hammer, for example, does not first and foremost exist as a thing in itself with a front side and a back side, with a certain weight and with certain material properties, but exists first and foremost as a tool with which to get something done. It thus refers me to the wooden boards which I can nail together in order to build a house and not to its own self-contained essence. The thing is thus not only revealed within a horizon of its anticipated other sides, but is revealed within what Husserl (1936/1970) calls the thing’s *external horizon* and what Heidegger (1927/1996) calls its *world*. The world of the thing is defined through the thing’s usefulness for other things.

Through the hammer's usefulness as a knocking device, for example, it reveals the boards of wood as *pliable*, the nails as *piercing*, the soil as a *foundation* for the nailed together planks of wood, the four walls of the planks as the four sides of a *house*, and the house as a *shelter* that will help protect me from the weather. In this way, the hammer gathers a whole world within which it can first show itself as this particular hammer, but also within which it helps unveil the possibilities of other things that first receive their meaning in light of their connection with the hammer. The nail was not piercing until the hammer became a tool that made it piercing, the wood was not pliable until the hammer made it possible to pierce a nail through it, the soil was not a foundation until the hammer made it possible to build a house and so forth.

According to Heidegger, the way we for the most part disclose the meaning of the thing is by going beyond it toward its world, understood as the chain of references of "in order to's" that connects hammer with nail, nail with wood, wood with planks, planks with walls, walls with house and house with shelter. The last term in this order of things is "shelter" as the "for-the-sake-of-which" all of these things are put to use. This for-the-sake-of-which is always indicative of a possibility of being human and hence of one or the other human purpose or horizon that I discover in the things.

The subject that is here assumed to discover itself as the ultimate purpose of things is not initially an "I think," but rather an "I can" (Merleau-Ponty's, 1945/2002, p. 159). I am not necessarily consciously aware of the horizons within which I discover the thing. Initially when I discover the thing within a world, the world is merely presupposed, not posited as a plan or contained in a thought. I discover the world as a precondition for my every doing. Even when I go to take a shower, walk the dog, or shovel the snow, I

presuppose an understanding of the world of the shower, the dog, and the snow. This understanding, however, is an “understanding of the hand” not of the “head”: it is what allows me to act purposefully even when I am not thinking about what I am trying to accomplish. It is thus an understanding that is contained in simple living or in the “know-how” of an initial bodily rapport with things.

Sartre (1948/1989) has argued that a thing’s meaning can change not only as a result of different existential projects by means of which the thing becomes part of a “practical world.” He has argued that the meaning of the thing can also be discovered by means of fantasy or magic rather than through action. He refers to this mode of completing the thing as an emotional intentionality (what I shall call an intentionality of the heart), which we could contrast with Heidegger’s practical intentionality (intentionality of the hand) and Husserl’s conceptual intentionality (intentionality of the eye). According to the intentionality of the heart, the grapes that I cannot reach from the vines, become grapes I did not want anyway, rather than grapes I could not reach. In this example, I thus change the way the thing is brought into a world, by substituting the thing’s practical horizon with a change in my own felt relation to the thing. Rather than disclosing the thing as a lack in relation to an “I can” that I was living towards, I here instead change my attitude to the thing and disclose it through an “I could, but would rather not.” A similar logic can be provided for other emotional responses: Sadness or grief in the face of losing an important person in one’s life, for example, changes the world of things into a world which it is pointless to act in and thus relieves me of the burden or fear of creating new meaningful relations with others and things, which I can also lose. In this way, sadness substitutes the need to bring about changes in my life with

a felt change in my relation to the thing. What characterizes emotions as “affective significations” (Sartre, 1948/1989, p. 75), or particular ways of understanding or completing things, is thus that “they all are tantamount to setting up a magical world by using the body as a means of incantation” (ibid, p. 70), and by doing so, “dimming or degrading our consciousness in the face of the exigencies of the world, much like a state of sleep or dreaming is a dimming of a wakeful state” (p. 77).

Another essential subjective completion through which we can bring the thing into being is that of an aesthetic completion (intentionality of the flesh). An aesthetic completion of the thing is neither theoretical, practical, nor emotional, but sensuous. Through it, we do not seek to *do* anything with the thing, but to feel ourselves through the thing. It is this way of providing a horizon for the thing that can be said to be the basis of an erotic disclosure of the thing as well as the disclosure of the thing’s beauty. In the erotic disclosure, I do not disclose the thing as much as I disclose myself through the thing. I receive myself from the thing in the pleasurable incarnation of the thing as my own flesh. In the disclosure of the beautiful object, I do not use my sight as an instrument with which to look for something to do with the object or with which to “see” it. I instead have my sight returned to me as the enjoyment of seeing.

Characteristic of both of these aesthetic completions is that they transform a goal-oriented possibility of the thing into a sensuous auto-affectation of the body: The hand becomes a caress that feels itself touching, the mouth becomes a kiss that receives itself in the soft moist lips of another, feeling depressed becomes enjoyable², an object becomes a work of art that captivates my eyes and constitutes the pleasure of sight itself.

² Danish existentialist Søren Kierkegaard writes: “My depression is the most faithful mistress I have known -- no wonder, then, that I return the love” (Kierkegaard, 1843/1987, p. 20)

In and through an aesthetic way of disclosing the thing, the completion through which I go beyond the thing, thus loses its practical goal-orientation, and makes it possible that I receive myself from the thing in the enjoyment (or disgust) of my own sensibility. Deleuze & Guattari (1980/1987) have captured the essence of this intentionality of the flesh through their concept of *hapticity*, by which they denote the transformations of bodily organs into organs of “touch.” My eyes, for example, no longer become organs for “seeing” (Husserl), organs that look around for things to do (Heidegger), or organs that do not wish to see things truthfully (Sartre), but organs for touching another human being so as to have “eye-contact” and be touched in return. The same would go for the hand, which no longer “handles,” but lingers so as to feel itself touching and thus to become experienced in its own flesh.

According to Linschoten (1969), the aesthetic completion is the starting point for a feminine disclosure of the thing whereas it requires a transformation of a more goal-oriented masculine way of existing. “It is extremely difficult,” he therefore writes, “to distinguish between the ‘really feminine’ and the aesthetic” (p. 181). What we refer to as gender differences in ways of experiencing the world, may thus be related to fundamentally different gendered ways of retrieving ourselves from the possibilities of things. Iris Marion Young (1990), for example, has offered her own description of a particular feminine way of completing the thing that in many ways contrasts with the supposedly male dominant goal-oriented intentionality of the hand. Such a feminine way of completing the thing is, according to Young, entirely a socially constructed subjectivity and not a transhistorical or transcultural intentionality grounded in biological differences between the sexes. Nevertheless, to be a woman in our current socio-

historical climate often means to disclose the thing in particular ways that are considered feminine or to live up to what Schutz (1967) calls certain feminine *act types*. In her essay *Throwing Like a Girl*, Young (1990) delineates three characteristics of such feminine ways of disclosing things, which she refer to as *ambiguous transcendence*, *inhibited intentionality*, and *discontinuous unity* (p. 147). Whereas men tend to exist more unambiguously as simply directed towards a worldly activity, most women, Young argues, tend to be somewhat aware of their bodies as objects, even when they are directed toward achieving some goal through their bodies as subjects. This makes their relation to their bodies more ambiguous than is the case for most men, because they alternate more between an aesthetic and a practical completion of the thing. The second characteristic of a feminine way of disclosing the thing seems to be tied closely to the first: By inhibited intentionality Young means experiencing the world through possibilities that do not necessarily refer back to an “I can,” as is the case for the typical male way of existing, but simply refers to a “someone can” (but not necessarily me). In the female position, the “I can” is thus often inhibited by the hesitation of an “I cannot.” This mode of living one’s body often leads to the under-use of one’s body or the forfeiting of certain active relations with things: The world is there for others to conquer but not necessarily for me. The third characteristic of a feminine way of disclosing things, denoted as discontinuous unity, refers to the idea that a woman often does not direct herself to worldly goals through her whole body, but only through parts of her body. When a typical woman throws a ball, for example, she uses only her hand, wrist and arm and not also her torso, back and hips as a man typically would. Her way of being in the world is thus often through a fragmented body (or zones of the body), which means that her intentionality is

an intentionality of the wrist, of the leg or of the mouth, for example, and not of the body in its totality. It is important to note that Marion does not suggest that women are inherently inhabiting these privative intentionalities, but that power structures in society are reinforcing them. I will further address this issue in chapter 6, in the section on falling prey, in which I describe the role of social dynamics in shaping our identities.

We can likely add many other subjective completions to the intentionality of the eye, hand, heart, and flesh, but what I have wanted to demonstrate is simply that the thing is revealed according to many different subjective ways of disclosing its meaning, making its way of appearing inseparable from a particular subjective way of existing and thus inseparable from a way in which the subject discovers itself.

Subjective Completions as Modes of Interpretation

Common to all completions is the fact that whether we complete the thing through the eye, the hand, the heart, or the flesh, every completion constitutes an interpretation by which we understand “something as something” (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 176). Interpretation is not confined to the mere conceptual understanding of the meaning of things, but is also at work in the know-how of picking up the phone, cooking a dinner, and going for a bicycle ride. When I take a sip of water, for example, I already demonstrate a comprehension of water as drinkable and as something I can use to quench my thirst (hand), as something which therefore also has a certain internal consistency or object-constancy (eye), as something which I tell myself is healthier for me than the Coke I really wanted (heart), or as something that gives me a pleasurable sensation on my tongue (flesh). That these completions are interpretations follows from the fact that water

is not inherently a thing with which to quench my thirst, it can also be a thing with which to clean myself, a thing with which to keep my plants alive, a thing to get another person wet as in a water balloon fight, and so forth. Within each of these practical contexts, the thing will have a different utility, conceptual unity, emotional quality, and sensuous feel, and thus be brought into the world and disclosed as a thing in very different ways.

The Subject as a Temporal Phenomenon

According to Heidegger (1927/1996), the priority of interpretation in making a thing the thing that it is, introduces human temporality into the very heart of things. This is so, because to interpret something “as something” is to transcend the mere apprehension of what presents itself in the present toward a future horizon of the thing that first determines the nature of this present. Consequently, who I am as a subject and what the thing is as a thing always comes to me from the future. The world that I am projecting for the thing is a world that I have always already leapt into and presupposed as the condition for my present activity. I thus receive myself in the present always from a future that precedes the present or from which the present is always arriving. This is the paradoxical fact which Van den Berg (1972) points out when he says that, “no one travels to another country if he is not in that country already, even when he does not know it. Always, the future has the slightly paradoxical meaning of *meeting oneself*. The traveler is there already; now that he travels through the country by train, he is meeting himself: he is meeting the self that he made go to this country before boarding his train” (p. 90).

What this example illustrates is that who I am as a human being is always deferred, for I *am* never *what I am* but *am* always beyond myself in the worldly horizon

of *what I am not yet*. Potentiality here precedes and determines actuality such that I meet myself from the future rather than exist first in a present in order subsequently to plan for the future. I am thus already lost in the possibilities of the thing and to know myself is thus always to retrieve myself from the future. I can only retrieve myself in a present, however, if I turn my future into a future which I have already accomplished understood in the sense of “what I will have been, done, thought, felt.” Such an interpretation, however, brings me into a present as something else than a living human being, for when my future is considered from a point of completion, I have lost the being proper to me as a being who is always ahead of the thing and arriving at myself from the future. When I retrieve myself from the lived experience of reading a book, by now considering myself as someone who “will have read the book” at some point in the future, I am merely displacing my lived experience into the future horizon from which I am now trying to catch myself. In contemplating having read the book, I do therefore not finally possess myself in a present, but possess myself in a present from a new future which now escapes me. Something belonging to the horizons I presuppose when I think that I will have read the book, including my understanding of what a book is, why I am reading a book, what it means to read, and so forth, escapes me. At the very moment I think I have grasped myself, I am thus always already elsewhere, in a different future which I live as the condition of possibility for my current reflection. As Schutz (1932/1967) also formulates this, “The intended meaning of a lived experience is nothing more nor less than a self-interpretation of that lived experience from the point of view of a new lived experience” (p. 78). In this sense, the future that I *am* is always dividing in two: the one I can grasp as past and the one I am presupposing when I grasp it as past. The consequence is that we as

human beings always remain divided between our *facticity* (our future as past) and our potentiality (our living future). We always retrieve ourselves as facticity from a future that perpetually escapes us. The implication, of course, is that we can never perceive ourselves fully, for in any perception there is always an act of perception, or a projected understanding, that is not itself perceived. As Husserl (1936/1970) says, “we are capable of coming back and reflecting on ourselves and our current activity: it now becomes thematic and objective through a new act, the vitally functioning one, which itself is now unthematic” (p. 155). Since any subjective perception is always a perception of things, this conversely means that no thing can ever present itself fully. It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) can write that, “The ipseity [of the thing] is, of course, never *reached*: each aspect of the thing which falls to our perception is still only an invitation to perceive beyond it, still only a momentary halt in the perceptual process.” (p. 271).

To be a subject thus never means to be present as a self-identical thing who wills, who feels, or who interprets. Instead to be a subject is to be engaged in the constant process of retrieving ourselves from a future that continuously escapes us, and thus to continuously retrieve ourselves through ever displaced understandings of ourselves as who we “will have been.” This means that our being as subjects is determined not by factuality, but by what Heidegger (1927/1996) calls *facticity* (p. 127). Facticity is a factuality that is entirely historical in the sense that it designates who we have been in light of who we are becoming. Unlike a “fact”, which remains constant through time, our facticity remains entirely contingent upon the changing futures through which we interpret ourselves as past. It is this peculiar temporality of our nature that Freud has described so well by the term *nachträglichkeit*, translated by Jean Laplanche (1992) as

“afterwardsness,” and also sometimes referred to as “retroactive determination.” This expression indicates, as one saying has it, “that life must be lived forwards but understood backwards,” meaning that the understanding of the past is always deferred to a later point in time and thus to a future that is yet to come.

We have an experience of this when we watch a movie, for example. Here it is the case that things are happening in the beginning of the movie that only make sense at the end. In the movie *American Beauty*, for example, we do not understand the strict belief in rules and discipline of colonel Frank Fitts, until he later attempts to kiss another man whose rejection of him leads to great shame. We are now able to interpret his strict moral beliefs as a defense against forbidden desires. Frank Fitts, in other words, receives his facticity only from a future point of reference that allows us and himself to interpret his past behaviors. A good movie frequently creates such a play with the facticity of its characters, leaving us in suspense about the real meaning of the chronological events we observe. The difference between life and a movie, of course, is that a movie *does* have a definite end from which we can retroactively assign meaning to its events, but as long as we are alive, we are never in possession of an end, and so our past will always remain contingent upon later moments. Since our future can never be completely possessed until the moment when we are dead and thus no longer capable of possessing anything, neither *can* our factitious nature.

Who we are is therefore always a question for us. We never actually possess ourselves in a present moment but are always living in a disjunctive gap between being ahead of ourselves and always already having become something. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) therefore writes, “The lived is thus never entirely comprehensible, what I

understand never quite tallies with my living experience, in short, I am never quite at one with myself” (p. 404). It is this fact of our being outside ourselves or of our not being containable in a present moment that Heidegger refers to as our *ec-static* nature (the in itself of being outside ourselves or our “outstanding standing within” (Heidegger, 1936/1993d, p. 192)). It is also this fact that Plessner (1941/1970) has in mind when he defines subjectivity as *ec-centric*, which he describes as a perpetual displacement between being oneself (living) and having oneself (knowing), such that one has no center in which to stand. As Plessner writes:

This position of being at once in the middle [subject] and on the periphery [object] deserves the name of eccentricity. Man must constantly find a relation to this eccentricity, since his nature is exhausted neither by the mid-point position alone (being ‘in’ the body, or having it) nor by the peripheral position alone (being the body itself) (p. 150)

The eccentricity and ecstasy of subjectivity owes to the fact that we are interpretive beings who do not exist first in order to subsequently interpret the thing, but first receive ourselves in the act of interpreting the thing. We only know ourselves through the ways in which we go beyond the significances in terms of which we are already living and thus in terms of how we take up our thrownness or facticity from the future. We are thus the kind of beings who are constantly relating ourselves to a “place” that has already claimed us and which we have to “be” by going beyond it. It is in this sense that we must understand Heidegger’s notion of the human being as *Da-sein* (“existence” “having to be one’s there”), which is not meant as an adjective that we can attach to the human being as a noun, that is as “the human being’s way to be.” Instead it refers to the perpetual process of becoming who one will have been from the future and

thus of receiving one's facticity from a process of relating to a world to which we have always already been thrown or entrusted.

Language and Discourse as a Special Mode of Completing the Thing as a Thing We Have in Common with Others

According to many phenomenologists (Heidegger, 1927/1996; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002; Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1989), the way we most of the time take up our "there," and bring ourselves back from the future, is not through a theoretical reflection, but first and foremost through speech, which has a nascent (non-explicit) thought, reflexivity and self-understanding of its own.

According to Heidegger (1927/1996), speech proceeds from a "hearing" (*horchen*), and hearing is always initially a hearing that understands. We do not hear sounds first in order to subsequently figure out what they mean, but we hear "the 'creaking' of a 'wagon,' the 'the woodpecker tapping' or the 'crackling fire' (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 153). Hearing is thus always already a hearing that interprets an understanding of the eye, hand, heart or flesh: We hear meanings, not sounds, and to hear a meaning is to listen in on an understanding of the thing that has already been revealed to us through one of the other subjective mode of completing the thing.

Only because we have always already heard meanings does it become possible for us to articulate our understanding of the thing and to bring our experience into words. To articulate the meaning of an experience is to externalize an experience into the "word-things" of a language. Speech thus inherently interprets my own idiosyncratic lived experience in terms of a supra-individual world of linguistic significations that I share with others. Through language my experience thus becomes an experience that I share

with others and one that “we” can have in common. In so far as I did not create language, but was thrown into it as an inescapable condition of my ability to speak, the way in which I experience the thing has thus always already been socialized. As Wood (2001) states, “‘lived’ experience is already impregnated with the very reflective structures elaborated in textuality in general and narrative in particular” (p. 359), and as Buytendijk (1959/1987) states, “Every new word illuminates in a *different* way an experience already designated by a name...” (p. 31).

The world of things I live in is thus always a world that includes both material and ‘spiritual’ things; in which “love” or “democracy” can “claim” me just as well as “an apple” or a “stone.” The lived world is thus already, as psychoanalyst Lucie Cantin (2002) has argued, a world in which we give names for our “children to bear,” in which we “write Laws and Constitutions,” and in which we “live on hope and love and on illusions, and readily die for honor or get killed for ideas” (p. 38). The world through which I bring the thing into being is, in other words, always already a fully-fledged symbolic world, in which what I “hear” is already that of a socialized understanding of meanings.

In the end, however, trying to determine what came first, the word or the experience, is a chicken and egg discussion, for every articulation of an experience is already a transport into another hearing/ understanding and every hearing/ understanding is already the occasion of another articulation. Hence, when a person declares their love for me, they do so always from a particular way in which they have disclosed a romantic or a friendly world and thus from a hearing that proceeds from a certain understanding (lived experience → articulation), while when that declaration is heard by me, it transports me right back into an understanding of the world (articulation → lived

experience) that can now become the occasion of another articulation. A hearing that understands (lived experience) and an articulation that externalizes and communicates what has been understood (language), thus constantly intertwine in a process without beginning or end.

Conclusion: The Liminal Subject

The thing is always dependent on a subject, for it requires a subject in order to give itself a world and hence in order to come into being in the only way it can, namely as a subjective or existential possibility. Because subjectivity is interpretive in nature, meaning that it discovers itself only by developing the possibilities inherent in the thing, the way the thing shows itself is ultimately always dependent upon the way subjectivity discovers itself as the finality of things. Since subjectivity refers to a permanent process of interpreting things, the traditional idea of the subject as a thing that corresponds to itself (whether in feeling, thinking, or acting) is no longer accurate. Heidegger has therefore proposed the term *Da-sein* instead (the process of being one's there). *Dasein* provides a definition of the facticity of the subject as always arriving from a particular future of the thing. *Da-sein* designates the imperative of my having to be or my having to become myself from the future. It does not designate an adjective or attribute of myself as a thing existing in the present, but designates the fact that I have no present in which to restfully stand. I am thus forced into a process of perpetually retrieving myself from the futures of things from which I win my facticity and discover myself retroactively. The "in-itself" of my subjectivity or identity is thus that of a place that is out-of-joint or

continuously overflowing itself. It is a place defined by eccentricity (Plessner, 1941/1970) or ecstasy (Heidegger, 1927/1996): the in-itself of something that is outside itself.

Chapter 5

Interpreting Intentionality as a Strife between Earth and World

What my interpretation of intentionality has revealed so far is that the subject becomes a subject in and through a completion of an object and that the object becomes an object in and through inviting the subject into particular of its possibilities. Stated differently, intentionality is not the property of a subject or the property of an object but the outcome of a strife *between* subject and object. In the following I will seek to provide phenomenological support for this claim. First I would like to introduce the concept of a strife between earth and world as the primary descriptor of this intentionality. Next, I would like to argue that strife is not the strife of something self-same such as the human being's way of being. Instead we need to think strife as a primary ontological concept through which identity comes into being and not only as a secondary adjective or characteristic of something identical, which would have the effect of reabsorbing it into a sameness or unity.

The Concept of Strife

In the *Origin of the Work of Art* (1936/1993d), Heidegger first mentions the concept of "strife." Here he speaks of experience as a "strife between earth and world."

The earth here designates “that which is essentially undisclosable, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up” (p. 172). It designates the thing as the source or reserve from which objects and artifacts are disclosed within the world. The world, on the other hand, designates “the ever non-objective” (p. 170) horizon for things that corresponds to a particular subjective or existential engagement with things. The use of the term world instead of subject here has the implication that it is not I as a self-identical subject who projects a world for things, but I myself who come into being through the very worlding or horizoning of the thing. The use of the terms “earth” and “world” thus transcends a simple distinction between object and subject. The materiality of the earth is essentially what can never become an object within the world – what by definition resists such disclosure and keeps every world-view incomplete. The subjectivity of the world essentially refers to a future of the thing that gives rise to a subjective or existential way of being through which I can first recuperate myself as this or that identity. Strife thus ties together a subjectivity that is always beyond me since it arrives at me from the future and an objectivity that is always prior to any object. The lived experience of any given moment is thus that of a strife of forces pulling in two different directions. It is not that of a perfect self-correspondence in which subject and object become one, such as when a thought or idea corresponds to a perception or state of affairs. Instead, as Heidegger writes, confronted with each other, world and earth are “always intrinsically and essentially in conflict, belligerent by nature” (p. 180). As he explains this: “The world, in resting upon the earth strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there” (p. 174). The

earth, in other words, always tends towards concealment, while the world always tends toward unconcealment, and it is for this reason that the strife itself is always a concealing-revealing. Nevertheless, the result of this strife of forces is not that of a fundamental discord, dispute or exclusive disjunction (either/or), but is that of a mutual enrichment of the one by the other, for “in strife each opponent carries the other beyond itself” (ibid). Another way to say this is that the world allows the earth to function as earth, while the earth allows the world to function as world. Their opposition is a precondition for them to be what they are.

To give a concrete example of how the concept of strife could be put to use in a concrete way, let us take any ‘thing’ that we readily take for granted in our everyday and ask how it can be the thing that it is. Let us say I am holding a pen in my hand. From a dualistic perspective of thought and matter, the pen could be said to be constituted either through its material properties that are “out there” in some empirical spatial reality or inside a thinking mind that has the power to conceive of matter in terms of cultural or theoretical concepts. The pen, in other words, is through this dualistic conception either a self-subsisting “thing” or a subjective “idea.” From the perspective of intentionality as strife, however, the nature of the pen is not *in* the matter and not *in* the head of a subject, but *in* the encounter *between* subject and object that holds them both together. If subjectivity is defined as a process of always going beyond what is given in the present, then subjectivity first gives the pen a future and allows it to be some kind of pen (now with which to sign my will, now with which to write a love letter, now as something I can give as a present etc.) Subjectivity, in other words, is displayed in and through the particular existential horizons opened up by the pen. What then about the objective nature

of the pen? The objectivity of the pen is never quite what is revealed in such subjective completions of the pen, for with every completion, something always holds itself back as the continuous source from which yet other completions are possible. The material nature of the thing is thus not something that can be made empirically present, for if the present always involves a subjective completion that makes it a present in light of a particular future, then the materiality of the thing can only be said to pertain to something that always withdraws from the present because it has always already been transcended. The picture we have is therefore of a present that is only held together in and through the strife of two opposing forces that bring forth the nature of the pen in a concrete way in and through their struggle. The pen, we can also say, never actually exists in a present as a self-subsisting thing, but only exists in and through *the dif-ference* or opening created by a subjectivity that always carries an objectivity beyond itself and an objectivity that always roots this subjective possibility in a source that withdraws from view.

The strife of earth and world thus points us toward the middle of their dif-ference that alone defines the presence of what is present. The dif-ference that we here have in mind is not an empirical difference between two things such as matter and thought or subject and object, for it “does not mediate after the fact by connecting world and things through a middle added to them” (Heidegger, 1971/2001b, p. 200). Rather, “Being the middle, it first determines world and things in their presence, i.e. in their being toward one another, whose unity it carries out” (ibid). What Heidegger calls the dif-ference is thus the unity of a strife that both joins and divides. Experience is held together, he says, through the “pain of intimacy” (ibid, p. 204) described as “the joining agent in the rending that divides” (ibid, p. 200). What Heidegger seems to be expressing here is that

of the simultaneous unity *and* separation of earth and world, of an exclusive difference (separation) that is also an inclusive difference (unity). It is this tension that his translators are trying to capture in and through the hyphen in the word difference, which simultaneously indicates division and unity.

Misinterpretation of Strife as a Strife Inherent to the Subject or the Human Way of Being

In many interpretations of phenomenology, the understanding of the original strife between subject and object tends to get lost from view. Although the aforementioned strife might get acknowledged, it is often treated as a property of the human being and re-internalized in an ontology of the identity of human existence or subjective experience.

As some phenomenologists might say, the strife between earth and world is really a strife introduced into reality by the fact that we are human. It is because we as human beings are ec-static, ec-centric, or never correspond to ourselves, that the dialectic between earth and world gets started. The difference that unites and divides subject and object is thus the difference of a self-relation inherent to the human being's way of being.

Such appears to be the view of many an existential phenomenologist (Giorgi, 1970; May, 1983; Plessner, 1941/1970; Heidegger, 1927/1996; Van Manen, 1990). In its most pure expression it leads to a reinternalization of intentionality to the human being who through its nature (whether as human *da-sein* or as transcendental *cogito*) becomes the foundation for each and every phenomenon. Everything that shows itself now does so only for a human consciousness or through the projects of the human being's way of being. Phenomenology, in this view, becomes an attempt to trace back an experience of the world to the structures of an underlying consciousness within which it shows itself, or

to the structures of the human being's way of being as having to take over the "there" (Da-sein). If we adhere to this understanding of the strife, which claims that something identical is the basis of the strife, the liminality of that strife can always only become a moment within the existence of a subject and not, as I am proposing, the very condition of the subject's coming into being. If we adopt a humanistic interpretation of the strife, then liminality loses its importance as ontological ground and instead becomes a transition within the sameness or identity of human existence as the more original ground.

Challenging a Humanistic Interpretation of the Strife

In keeping with my mission to develop a liminal ontology for the phenomenological method, the question must therefore be raised: How may we challenge the re-absorption of the strife into an ontology of the human being? And: What basis can we find in the phenomenological literature for developing a different viewpoint? Is phenomenology ultimately a humanism that raises the human being as the measure of all things or is there another way to think the difference?

We do indeed find evidence of another possibility of conceptualizing the difference in the phenomenological literature.

Let us take Merleau-Ponty, for example: When he speaks of the body, does he mean a personal body or does he mean what he later comes to call "the flesh of the world?" At one point in his book *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/2002), Merleau-Ponty speaks of a "bodily existence which runs through me, yet does so independently of me" (p. 192). There is thus the hint here of an other agency that expresses itself through me. A volition here seems to be attributable to the earth, which speaks through me and

demands to be completed prior to any subjective choice. I am thus not the lord of beings, we could say, but the shepherd or guardian of Being as something that has always already been entrusted to me and precedes any subjective intentionality (Heidegger, 1947/1993b). The “Da” of da-sein, the “there” that I have to be, thus no longer seems to belong to a prior me but to something that precedes me and from out of which I first am able to come into being.

In his book *Reduction and Givenness* (1998), Jean-Luc Marion finds evidence of the idea of a non-human “there” (Da) in the experience of boredom, where, he says, we experience a “there” that is not yet a “there” of human possibilities (*human Dasein*). In boredom, Marion says, the world has not yet claimed us or admitted us into the possibilities of things. Marion uses this intuition to argue that the claim itself, by which I am admitted into the world and into a worldly concern, pre-exists any human intention or activity. The “there” must therefore be said to refer back to the non-human agency of the claim itself that first institutes me as someone who takes over the there or does not take over the there (ie. claims me as bored or interested). The “there” can indeed become a human “there,” but it can also remain a “there” in which I am not interested, that I do not take over, and that has not claimed me in any way. According to Marion, therefore, something must happen to jolt me into a relationship with things, something that comes from “elsewhere” and cannot be said to originate from me.

In his posthumous work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty (1964/2000) also begins to abandon the language of the ex-isting subject as a ground for experience. He now begins to attribute agency to what he calls “the flesh of the world,” which he defines as “a relation of the visible with itself” (p. 146) or of the visible “as the formative

medium of the object and the subject” (p. 147). He now seems to abandon a humanistic interpretation of the strife between subject and object and to think of subject and object as two moments in the unfolding of the same flesh. As he now says, “We must not think the flesh starting from substances, from body and spirit—for then it would be the union of contradictories—but we must think of it, as we said, as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general way of being” (p. 147). I take this to mean that the true subject of experience is that of water constituting itself alternately as the subjective wetness of being immersed in water and the objective drinkability of a glass of water, or of fire constituting itself alternately in the warm interior feelings of a subject and the objective heat of a fireplace. In other words, the subject and the object are caught up in and produced by the same element that announces itself through the style or manner in which the one is folded into the other. Both water and fire are thus never presented as things in themselves, but hold themselves back as Earth. The way we know of water and fire is always through concrete instances of subjective perceptions and objective qualities, that when combined, make up an “event” of fire or of water. We are never in possession of fire or water as pure phenomena. Fire and water are here considered elements, not things, and Merleau-Ponty defines an element as “a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being” (p. 140).

This understanding of something elemental that exceeds subjective experience and a reality of ready made things also finds expression in Heidegger’s later works. Granted, in *Being and Time* (1927/1996), Heidegger does seem to suggest that the originating source of experience is situated within human existence. This in fact is the

very reason why he tries to work out an ontology of existence as the basis for phenomenology. Yet, he later backs away from this stance. As he writes in his notes now published as *Contributions to Philosophy* (1938/1999), “In *Being and Time* Da-sein still stands in the shadow of the ‘anthropological,’ the ‘subjectivistic,’ and the individualist,’ etc.—and yet the opposite of all this is what we have in view...” (p. 208). Instead as he now says, “[Da-sein is] not something that could be simply found in extant man but rather the ground of the truth of be-in made necessary by the fundamental experience of be-ing as enowning, through which ground (and its grounding) man is transformed from the ground up” (p. 209). The translator here translates Heidegger’s old German usage of “Seyn” instead of “sein,” as be-ing. The hyphen is here intended to designate that what is primary in experience is not an identity (the human being as a thing or substance) or the unity of a flowing experience (the human being as ex-isting), but a fundamental difference irreducible to self as object or self as subject. The hyphenation of the word difference does this by indicating both unity and separation: The very difference that divides is also the difference that unites, or, as we have phrased it earlier, earth and world are different, but only in and through this difference are they themselves identical. Second of all, Heidegger here uses the word *ereignis* (enowning) to designate the being of this difference and, we could say, the being of the “Da” of Da-sein that the human being has to take over as part of its being. “Ereignis” means “event” in German but it also means what the translator here refers to as “enowning.” Enowning implies a process by which something can come into its *own* or attain the status of its identity. It thus designates a moment prior to the moment of identity through which identity itself comes into being. Hence the “Da”, as Heidegger says, “itself nowhere placeable – moves away from the

relation to man and reveals itself as the ‘between’ [Zwischen] that is unfolded by being itself...” (p. 211).

In conclusion: In the later works of phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, as well as in the work of Marion, we seem to find a concept of the strife as an original liminality that can no longer be reabsorbed into an ontology of the subject or the human being. Difference here comes to designate a liminality that cannot be subordinated to a material substance or thinking substance, but must be thought of as the very turning point that first gives thought something to think about and first gives matter someone for whom it matters. Heidegger gives a good example of this new vantage point in his discussion of the relationship between artist (subject) and artwork (object) in his essay *The Origins of the Work of Art* (1936/1993d). Here he writes, “The artist is the origin of the work and the work is the origin of the artist. Nevertheless, neither is the sole support of the other. In themselves and in their interrelations artist and work *are* each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both...” (p. 143). It is this third thing, obfuscated or ignored by more standard interpretations of phenomenology, which I propose to develop as the basis for a phenomenology of liminality.

Chapter 6

An Existential-Phenomenology of the Event

Strife as the Happening of an Event

The moment of the happening of the strife we shall designate as “the event” because it has no substance other than a coming to pass, transition or transformation. If the strife between earth and world is what creates events, the event is the experience or manifestation of strife. Another way to say this is that the phenomenal nature of the strife is that it *happens*.

A happening is the minimal phenomenal nature needed for an experience to take place or for something to be. Different from a subjective experience or an objective state of affairs, it consists of a transformation that both creates something and vanishes in the very actualization of its creation. It thus has no identifiable ground. “The event,” as Heidegger (1969/2002) also says, “expropriates itself of itself” (pp. 22-23) and it is in this becoming other than itself that it fulfills its nature. One image of this would be that of the spark that vanishes but also actualizes itself in and through the flame. Other examples would be that of water and fire as elements that never appear in themselves but always manifest themselves in and through a concrete event of water or of fire. The event, we can therefore say, is the minimal identity or name given to a fundamentally non-identical phenomenon, or a phenomenon of difference or creation. The event is *not* what it is (not reducible to what shows itself) and it *is* what it is not (only has being by virtue of

showing itself as it is not). It is therefore liminal pure and simple. It defines the moment of a pure transformation, such as the one that psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1933/2001) attributes to the interpersonal encounter when he writes, “The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: If there is any reaction, both are transformed” (p. 49). In this example by Jung, it would not suffice to claim that I as a subject initiated or “had” the experience of this transformation, for the experience consisted precisely in transforming “me” or creating me in and through an event. The reality of such an experience must thus be said to have the phenomenal nature of a pure event that creates me at the same time as I create “it” by receiving it. The essence of the event is thus something that sidesteps identity: it transforms the very person it is happening to and is transformed in the very process of happening to this person. In this sense we know it only in and through having become changed by it and as having re-appropriated it within a new sense of self and world. This new sense of self and world, however, is not representative of the event itself, since what it leaves us with is only the event’s aftermath or effects. The event thus perpetually escapes from its own manifestation, withdrawing into itself as the earth withdraws from any and every disclosure of the world.

In the following I will seek to describe what it means to take the event as the new ontological basis of the phenomenological method and will seek to develop in an explicit way what can be called a *phenomenology of the event*. I will do so by delving into both sides of the dif-ference that accounts for the event’s peculiar phenomenal nature as *both earth and world, both concealment and revealment*. From the perspective of the earth, the event becomes what *gives itself* in what shows itself (the spark), while from the

perspective of the world, the event becomes what *shows itself* of what gives itself (the flame). However, both movements are in constant tension or strife. To understand the nature of the event is thus to understand both earth and world, as well as the strife between them.

The difference between the two sides of the event (the world and the earth), can be likened to the difference deployed in existential-phenomenology between existence, on the one hand, and phenomenology, on the other. The existential pole would here designate the concrete manifestation of liminality in lives of concrete individuals who experience liminality after the fact in and through the revelations of identity and unity through which they discover who they are. The term existential is here understood not in the sense of a philosophy of existence (existentialism), but as short hand for our lived everyday reality. Interpreting the event from the perspective of lived existence is thus to interpret it from the identities to which it has *fallen prey* (*verfallen*) (Heidegger, 1927/1996), not to interpret it from the perspective of existential philosophy. In contrast, the phenomenological pole designates a reflection upon such lived experiences in order to grasp from the manifest experiences what has fundamentally withdrawn or concealed itself about the event in these experiences. As Gurwitsch (1974b) adds, “For the latter, acts of a specific kind of reflection, i.e., specific acts and operations of consciousness, are required by means of which mere existing is articulated and rendered explicit, hence, in a sense, transcended” (p. 14).

In the following, I will first develop a phenomenological understanding of the event that seeks to transcend actual experience to make explicit what is presupposed but not apparent in such an experience. Next, I will I seek to develop an existential or lived

understanding of how it is that the event falls prey to worlds that cover it over. Finally I will seek to tie these two dimensions of the event together in a coherent understanding of the event as a self-concealing self-revealing of the truth, also referred to by Heidegger (1927/1996) as *aletheia* (a Greek term meaning *unconcealment*). This will bring the event forth as having the identity of something that happens in the interstice between the phenomenological truth that it presupposes but conceals, and the existential or lived truth that it gives rise to and reveals. In essence, it will complete my analysis and elaboration of an existential-phenomenology of the event.

A Phenomenological Interpretation of the Event as the Earth of Lived Experience

The Event as a Giving that Appropriates

Heidegger finds etymological evidence of the idea that experience is the product of a happening or activity in the German expression for what exists: “es gibt.” This German expression, which means “there is” as when we say “there is money in the bank” or “there is a woman standing in front of a door,” literally translates into English as “it gives.” In German there is thus a sense that the present of what *is* is something that has to be granted or given. Furthermore, the expression indicates that there is something (an “it”) that does the giving. Essentially this means that what *is* (the given) always only *is* in and through a giving that brings what *is* into being. This giving, is according to Heidegger, a mutual giving of earth to world and world to earth, what we have previously referred to as strife. The earth exists only in the process of giving itself as world, that is, as “a sending and a destiny of presence” that “preserves” the present (Heidegger, 1969/2002, p. 17), and the world exists only in the process of giving itself as the “extending, opening

up” of the Earth that opens the present (ibid). The “it” of “it gives,” the giver of “there is,” is thus the giving of the earth to the world and the world to the earth. This mutual giving of the one to the other happens as what Heidegger calls *ereignis*, translated as “the event of appropriation” (p. 19) or “enowning.” We can understand this term as designating the coming into itself of the earth, which can only happen via world, and the coming into itself of world, which can only happen via earth. A parallel argument would here be the idea that only through an encounter with an otherness, which one is not, does one come into being as something positive and therefore achieve an identity. Yet the difference between earth and world is not an opposition but rather a bringing to fruition or completion, much like when we say of somebody whom we love that they complete us or make us feel whole. The “eigen” (ownness) of the German word *ereignis* is thus important since the giving of an event is always a process of something coming into its proper element or being granted to itself. As Heidegger also writes, “the event of appropriation brings man into its own and the thing into its own; allows them to be what they are” (p. 23).

The Temporality of the Event

The mutual appropriation that happens in the eventing of the present implies that the being of something present cannot itself serve as the starting point for explaining the event. The event, as Heidegger (1969/2002) writes, is “not simply an occurrence, but that which makes any occurrence possible” (p. 19). An occurrence would be something that takes place in time and space and would thus either presuppose a mental space or a physical space that would exist a priori. Yet, the event is the very creation of space or the

very bringing into being of something. In this sense it transcends both something that could happen “within” time as well as something that could happen “within” space. Heidegger therefore also speaks of the event as *the fourth dimension of time* (p. 15), which he defines as the time in which the past, the present and the future are given to each other.

Deleuze (1969/1990) calls this temporality of the event for the time of the *Aion*. He distinguishes this time from the chronological passing away of presents, which he calls for the time of the *Chronos*. The *Aion*, Deleuze says, is the time of “a present without thickness” since the “past and future [here] divide the present in both directions at once” (p. 164). What passes in this time is thus never something identical or present but is always that of a “pure event” defined as the becoming of something “which has just happened and something about to happen” (p. 63), or something that “retreats and advances in two directions at once” (ibid.). The *Aion* thus designates a time in which things are simultaneously *about* to happen and have *already* happened but are never *actually* happening as such.

Gadamer (1966/1977) gives an example this temporality when he refers to Aristotle’s philosophical question: When does an army in flight come to a stand again? In response to this question, Gadamer answers:

We cannot say that the army stands when a certain number of fleeing soldiers stops its flight, and also certainly not when the last has stopped. For the army does not begin to stand with him; it has long since begun to come to a stand. How it begins, how it spreads, and how the army finally at some point stands again (that is, how it comes once again to obey the unity of the command) is not knowingly prescribed, controlled by planning, or known with precision by anyone. And nonetheless it has undoubtedly happened (p. 64).

What is pointed out here is the fundamental temporal stretch of the event whereby something happens that is nevertheless not corresponding to itself, but is precisely both ahead of itself and before itself, happening in all three temporalities at once. The event happens in all three temporalities because it occurs as the disjunction of the past and the future (earth and world) that gives rise to or holds together a fleeting present. Jacques Lacan (1953/2004) has described this temporality of the event that eludes the present as “what will have been, given what is in the process of becoming” (p. 84) and Luce Irigaray (1985/2002) has referred to it as “The negation of an accomplished present, and the assertion of a non-accomplished future” (p. 62). In one of Bruce Fink’s (1996) commentaries on Lacan, he provides an example of an expression that captures this logical paradox of the 4th temporality quite well. In the expression, “The bomb was to go off two seconds later,” the explosion can both be said to already have happened and to be about to happen. The present moment of chronological time can here either be said to have been sidestepped completely or to have become the effect of a strife between the past and the future. If we take the latter vantage point, then the present becomes a moment where something happens that does not happen *in the moment* as much as it brings the moment about. Understood as Aion, the event thus becomes the creation of the temporal moment as such, which it can occasion because it *gives* time rather than being itself *given* within time.

The point I am trying to make, of course, is that all of life originally happens in the dimension of time of the Aion rather than in the dimension of objective or chronological time. Experiences are first and foremost events and not experiences of something that is present as an object. Take, for example, the experience of visiting the

Eiffel Tower. Here it is quite clear that I am never at a point where I can simply make the tower present and experience it in its totality. The tower always simultaneously refuses itself and lets more to be seen. I'm always stuck in between its past and future horizons, which both robs me of its present as well as robs me of my present. I come there, for example, on a rainy day, which makes the tower appear in a dreary light and makes me predisposed to its dreary possibilities. But this attunement conceals it as much as it reveals it. I may now experience the tower as a tower of suicides or as symbol of a sad culture. I might notice its lack-luster color and the squeakiness of the elevator that carries me to the top, and as I look out from the top I may see a Paris that reminds me of the black and white movie of a French "Film Noir." But is the Eiffel Tower ever present here as a thing that shows itself as it is? Have I not only experienced it as an event that side-stepped the present and suspended me in between an always particular past and future horizon? Is the present not here defined as the difference between my being subjectively ahead of the object (world) and my being called into a particular objectivity of the having-been (earth)? I might come back on another day and be claimed differently by the possibilities of the tower, but I could never see it all or experience it all. There could be no encounter with the tower that was not a thrown-projective encounter, an encounter that would not open it up according to certain active engagements and close it down according to certain passive attunements.

To talk of experience as an event is precisely to talk of it as something that can never be possessed or consumed since there is not a present for this to be able to happen. The event is the happening of what *is* itself, not a happening of something that already is. It is a pure creation or becoming of that which we call an experience. At the level of our

most immediate experience, the present, we could therefore say, does not exist, for the idea of the present is a thought construct that seeks to fix time and to grasp it as an object, when in reality it is not. To fix an experience in and through the concept of the present is thus much like trying to capture the essence of the river by carrying it away in buckets. As the Buddhist philosopher Alan Watts (1951/1993) has said, “If you try to capture running water in a bucket, it is clear that you do not understand it and that you will always be disappointed, for in the bucket the water does not run. To ‘have’ running water you must let go of it and let it run” (p. 23). Consequently, no experience is ever there fully in the present, but is always a thrown-projecting becoming of the Aion. It is always a “moment” that protends into a particular future and retains itself in particular moods and fore-structures. It is always a concealing – revealing event that continues to bring about a presencing that is irreducible to *a* present.

The Spatiality of the Event

The example of visiting the Eiffel Tower, of course, still has a minor flaw. It privileged the subject in the sense that it was I who visited the Eiffel Tower and assumedly brought myself to France. This, however, would be a one-sided interpretation, for in order to bring myself to France I would first have to be claimed by a brochure, by a friend or by some other “thing” into a particular desire for traveling. In keeping with the idea of the event, the desire to travel did not emerge from some space inside me, but was itself evoked in and through an encounter with things. Every event is thus always a transformation of yet other events. The “I” that visited the Eiffel Tower was not some independent agent who initiated the event, but was itself an agency emerging out of

another event whose whereabouts has been forgotten. There is thus never such a thing as a first or initiating event that we can refer to as the absolute cause of an experience. The implication of this is, as Deleuze & Guattari (1980/1987) have claimed, that “we are always in the middle of a path, in the middle of something” (p. 28).

This undermining of an original subjective will does not entail its opposite, namely that I am completely determined from without as some passive object in a world of mechanisms. The agency of the person who went to visit the Eiffel Tower resided neither in the independent will of the person nor in the pure causality of the friend or the brochure, but in the result brought about by their shared event. Instead of talking about a subject who goes to Paris to have an impossible encounter with the Eiffel Tower, or an object that imposes itself upon my retina or causes me to act, Deleuze would instead say that the subject enters into a becoming with the Eiffel Tower, in which the Eiffel tower helps the subject become something (“tourist”), at the same time as the subject helps the Eiffel Tower become something (“landmark”). Hence neither thing nor subject ever act alone, they receive their support from the other, which first allows them to become what they are. Perhaps this is what is given expression to by psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden when he writes about crises in therapy, that “Crises are not events that take place between separate people. They are events in which patient and therapist are in it together” (Ogden quoted in Altman, 1995, p. 12). Such a statement points out that both therapist and client are here subjected to a crisis, which neither one single-handedly produced, yet which both have a part in constituting. The crisis is not here an objective cause nor is it the product of a subjective will. Therapist and client are both the agents and recipients of the crisis and the crisis itself nothing other than an event which defies a simple reduction to

subject or object. The crisis does not exist in itself but only in this particular situation of a therapist and a client, with their particular subjectivities and the material elements that support the endeavor of therapy, such as chairs, words, and walls. The crisis manifests itself in people and things but also withdraws as the source of yet other crises involving other people and other things. The crisis, in other words, is what *gives* subject and object and, yet, it is also what hides itself beneath the givens of a particular crisis that always only shows facets of the crisis as a phenomenon. The crisis does not show itself, for it does not exist in itself. It always only shows itself as a particular existential event, involving particular subjects and objects whose strife both hides it and reveals it.

If subjects and objects are always part of an event, be it a crisis, a birthday, the writing of a paper, or flirting, we can say of them that they always exist in some way as part of an amalgam. This amalgam is what we can also refer to as a *gathering* (Versammlung). Just like the temporality of the event does not take place within time, since it is the very temporality that brings past, present and future together, so too the spatiality of the event does not take place in space, since it is the very instituting of spatial relations.

According to Heidegger, spatial relations are created in and through the way in which the thing draws itself together in the gathering of a world. In an excellent example of this provided in the essay *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (1954/1993a), Heidegger talks of a bridge that does not exist somewhere in itself first in order to subsequently be placed somewhere between two banks. Instead:

The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge expressly causes them to lie across from each other [. . .] With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying

behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighborhood. The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream (p. 354).

Furthermore, in doing so, "the bridge initiates the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may go to other banks and in the end, as mortals, to the other side" (p. 354). Hence, the bridge can only become the bridge that it is by constituting an event that draws the banks, the stream and the possibilities of a subject into it as part of its own gathering or world. It attains its individuality not from itself but from the locale which it draws together. Its thinghood resides in the distribution of the subjective and objective elements through which it shows itself and becomes this particular event of a bridge. The bridge thus has the substantiality of a happening that can always only be defined spatially in and through the particular elements of a gathering. To say of the bridge that it has the substantiality of an event is thus to say that it has the nature of a specific belonging between subjects and objects that endures or stays for awhile. It has the kind of individuation we attribute to "a river, a climate, a day, a happening" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 261). Or, it has the quiddity of a *haecceity*, a word Deleuze & Guattari borrow from the philosopher Duns Scotus who originally used it as a designation for "this thing" (*haec*), but which also has a fruitful etymological connection to "here is" (*ecce*). The "here is" evokes parallels to Heidegger's talk of "da," "site," "locale," or "gathering," and suggests "a mode of individuation that is distinct from that of a thing or a subject" (*ibid*, note 33, pp. 540-1).

Heidegger (1954/1993a) goes on to differentiate the spatiality of the locale of the gathering from the space created by dividing a locale up into independently existing objects (identities) that stand in a particular measurable spatial distances to each other. As

he says, “In a space that is represented purely as *spatium*, the bridge now appears as a mere something at some position, which can be occupied at any time by something else or replaced by a mere marker” (p. 357). Thus considered, space becomes completely independent of its original locale or “gathering” and comes to refer to an independently existing world-space (*spatium*) in which events can be said to happen. However, the event in its original phenomenological sense is not an event that happens *in* space, it is the happening of space itself. The event is thus not a happening involving preformed identities that already exist in space, but the gathering of elements from other events into a new event. It is therefore the event that is primary and not the elements which can be abstracted from the event as independently existing identities only after the fact.

Personhood and the Event

The perspective of the gathering as an event that brings subjects and objects into a site of proximity, raises the question of what becomes of the “I” of the person that we normally designate by the proper name or the pronoun of the first person singular. To elucidate this question, Callon & Law (1997) ask what would happen to Andrew, a strategic director of a British laboratory:

...if we were to take away Andrew’s fax machine and telephones. If we blocked the reports and messages that flow across his desk. If his secretary were to disappear. If there were no longer planes or trains to Brussels. If his e-mail account were closed, and his personal computer was taken away. If the members of his laboratory began to ignore him—or, started to treat him as a porter or secretary. Would Andrew still be a strategist? (p. 176).

The answer to this question would surely be *no*, since all of Andrew's action potentials, and therefore ways of being himself, existed only by virtue of the locale into which he was gathered and could become Andrew "the strategic director."

Some degree of permanence, it is true, could here be assumed from the fact that Andrew is not only a strategic director, but maybe also a father to his children, and a husband to his wife. It would thus seem that Andrew exists independently of the event as someone who participates in events but who remains fundamentally unaltered by them. Yet, in each of these instances, Andrew is a name that resides not so much in the attributes belonging to a person with that name, but to a situation in which who Andrew is gets determined by the elements of an site. In reality therefore, Andrew is not simply a self-identical subject who takes on the additional attributions of being a family man or a strategic manager. Instead he is called into the name, just as he is called into being a father or being a manager. Without the support of people who calls him "Andrew" and act toward him through a series of consistent expectations, such as Andrew being a hard worker, an introverted person, thoughtful, etc, Andrew could not maintain his subjective position as this particular Andrew. Andrew is thus itself, despite the illusion of referring back to a specific person with that name, the product of a collective event that resides outside any one individual in the site of the gathering itself.

The "I" as a subject or an agent can thus no longer serve as some final point of reference to which we can reduce the event, for the "I" is itself an event that can happen to someone as well as a term that can change its meaning in and through the support of different locales. As Michel Serres (1982/1995) has stated, "Who am I, beyond the joy coming from this shudder of awakening, the growth of this green ivy, this dancing flame,

this living fire? [...] Who am I? A blank domino, a joker, that can take any value. A pure capacity” (p. 31). As can be deduced from this statement, according to Serres, the I is either a concrete event that gets determined in and through a locale, or a completely undetermined “joker” or “domino” waiting to take on one or the other determination through a new event. “In the one case,” Deleuze (1969/1990) says, “it is my life, which seems too weak for me and slips away at a point which, in a determined relation to me, has become present. In the other case, it is I who am too weak for life, it is life which overwhelms me, scattering its singularities³ all about, in no relation to me, nor to a moment determinable as the present, except an impersonal instant which is divided into still-future and already-past” (p. 151).

What Deleuze is here suggesting is the idea that we exist both as part of an event in which we come into being as an identity and as an eventing (coming into being) where we exist only as a movement, “threshold” or bridge between events and are thus as of yet undefined. We are in a sense truer to ourselves in those moments when we are not misrecognizing ourselves by holding fast to this or that identity and claiming an identity within a particular site as our own, but are instead allowing ourselves to be swept away by a new event that will allow us to be gathered as part of a new locale. Whereas it is easy to become identified with a particular identity and to begin to experience the world

³ What Deleuze calls singularities can be equated with what Heidegger refers to as the Earth. It is the purely sensible which has not yet become interpreted or worlded. It is the purely deterritorialized “thing” and deterritorialized “self” as the source of many possible gatherings, designating a whole “molecular” reality of objective forms and subjective functions that have yet to be actualized through a “site.” We have to imagine a whole other reality; a reality of the event prior to subjectivity and objects. This reality consists of a bridge that has not yet become a bridge (and hence exists as pure potential), of banks which have not yet become banks, of streams which have not yet become streams and of subjects which have not yet become subjects. This reality could be said to consist of a field of functions, capacities or potentials which have not yet been brought together to form an “event” or have not yet passed the threshold of perceptibility.

from the vantage point of this identity, this interpretation always rests on a denial of oneself as an event or a “blank domino” who has yet to be given a value from a future that has yet to arrive.

When the event is given priority over the subject in defining our nature, then who we are is always somewhere between the “me” of a particular identification and the “not me” of an experience that transforms me from the ground up, between the I of the event and the eventing of the I, or between the “Da” that has been granted to me and the projections by which I take it over as my own.

So as to not privilege the subject as a self-identical being that exists as the unperturbed person who experiences the event, Deleuze & Guattari (1980/1987) speak of the process of identification and transformation as a process of *deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization*. Deterritorialization here corresponds to breaking up a locale, whereas reterritorialization refers to becoming appropriated within a new locale. By acting as a director, for example, Andrew deterritorializes the phone as a tool for staying in contact with his family (phone as family phone) and reterritorializes the phone as a tool for coordinating strategies with his work colleagues in order to make money (phone as business phone). However, in doing so, Andrew himself becomes deterritorialized as a family man and reterritorialized as a strategic director. In and through their encounter, both Andrew and the phone thus become something else. They both existed in different form and as part of different “locales” until they were changed in and through their mutual encounter and the creation of a new “gathering.” As a metaphor for this process, Deleuze & Guattari (1980/1987) give the example of the wasp and the orchid who each provide the other with their identity in and through an interchange: “The wasp becomes

part of the orchid's reproductive apparatus at the same time as the orchid becomes the sexual organ of the wasp" (p. 2).

What remains as the identity of our personhood is thus not an a priori self-identity, but the identity of what I will have been given what I am in the process of becoming. It is an identity that is neither rooted in the past nor determined by any predictable or foreseeable future. As long as I live, my past continues to be open to revisions based on the encounters in which I end up finding myself, and these encounters are not always the product of my own planning, but more often than not, the product of unforeseeable events that change me from a point outside myself and allow me to discover who I was only retroactively. The "I" is thus always in abeyance; it does not describe someone or something definite, but refers to the identity of an open-ended event in which I partake and from which I am made.

The Object and the Event

To speak of the event as the proper locus of my experience, which is therefore granted to me from elsewhere than from myself, is to speak of an identity of self and thing that requires the participation and activity of both subjects and objects. I can walk over to the other side of the stream only because the bridge affords me this opportunity for actualizing one of my potentials, and the bridge can be a passage way only because in using it as such I actualize this potential in it. If we took away one of these elements, the action itself would not be possible and the eventing of the bridge could not take place. Intentionality is thus neither in me nor in the object, for any action is always a zig-zag movement by which "action is slightly overtaken by what it acts upon" (Latour, 2000, p.

298). What acts is thus always the product of “an actor” who is located within a whole series of actions that did not emanate from the actor. I cannot visit the Eiffel Tower, for example, without the actions of the architects who built the Tower, an airplane that can fly me there, and money to enter the premises, as it is these things that allow me to be a “visitor” of this tower. Objects are thus not just dead, inert or inactive, but actors in their own right since they can “authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on” (Latour, 2005, p. 74). They thus allow me to come into being through particular subjective possibilities which they afford me.

One example of this agency of objects is given by Langdon Winner (1980), when he recounts the real story of a bridge that was built on a passageway leading to a beach, thus instituting a particular locale for things and human beings. The bridge gathered asphalt and cement into a particular form and function that allowed these materials to act as vehicles for transportation and decongestion. The bridge was built tall enough to allow passenger vehicles to pass through, but low enough that busses could not. In this sense the bridge effectively created a locale in which the relatively affluent people who owned their own cars could go to the beach, while the relatively poor who had to take the bus could not. The bridge, we could therefore say, was not simply a universal “thing” placed in a pre-existing three-dimensional space, but a veritable event that brought cement and asphalt into a world and both opened up and closed down particular possibilities of being a subject. The bridge itself was nothing without these elements that defined its very identity as an event, but these elements in turn were nothing if the bridge itself did not bring them together in a “site” or “gathering.” To play along with the example, the bridge as a happening does not preclude me from acting as a subject, but my subjectivity will

now emanate from either the fact that I can pass under the bridge or not pass under the bridge, and thus from the fact that I am either part of a disenfranchised group of “poor” subjects or a privileged group of well-to-do subjects. Taking on one of these identities, which the bridge has constituted, can then become the basis of yet other events. Finding myself claimed by the bridge as disenfranchised, might spur me into political action to have the bridge torn down, but this would require a political event which would have to deterritorialize the bridge as a passage way and reterritorialize it as an obstacle to the principles of equality and justice.

Conclusion: A Phenomenological Understanding of the Event

What has been brought about by the reduction of experience to the level of the event is a new realm of phenomenal experience that is irreducible to the actions of a subject and the causalities of an object. We have specified the nature of this experience as the happening of a time and space through which subjects and object can come into being as discrete identities. We have spoken of this event as having the temporality of a non-present moment and as having the spatiality of a “locale” or “gathering” between subjective and objective elements. In and through this temporality and spatiality both subjects and objects become robbed of their primacy as self-identical beings. Now instead, they always “owe” part of their identity to that elusive event that keeps bringing them into being in new ways and ultimately always deprives them of becoming stabilized things in themselves. What remains to be done is to explain why this liminal experience of the event that makes us who we are and brings objects into existence gets covered over in everyday life. To provide such an explanation will require an investigation of the

event's inherent tendency to conceal itself beneath the subjects and objects to which it gives rise.

An Existential Interpretation of the Event as Falling Prey to the World

In line with the challenge issued above, we must now ask: How is it that we come to experience the event as an experience belonging to me or as an experience belonging to the world, but not as a liminal phenomenon of mutual appropriation, an experience held together in and through strife?

The Event Falls Prey to Identity

It is as if experience itself gives rise to this illusion by means of a centrifugal force inherent to its own actualization. In and through the mutual appropriation of a becoming, the earth “withdraws” from view, allowing the worlding of the thing to solidify into a *world-view* or a definite interpretation of the thing that can stand alone. In doing its work of bringing about experience, the event hides itself beneath its own result: the relatively stable duration of a present through which earth and world converge and in which unity shows itself in the gift of “what is.”

Experience, we could also say, *falls prey* (Heidegger, 1927/1996) to the content pole of its own movement, just as vision could be said to fall prey to what is seen, hearing to what is heard and speech to the meanings which its sounds refer us to. Initially I am absorbed in “what” it is I am taking care of, whether it be the table I see, the grapes I find too sour, or the work for which I am going to be late. I simply feel “at home” with things within the definite horizons through which *their* possibilities have already been disclosed

as *my* possibilities. But in this directedness toward “what” is disclosed, in my very falling toward that of which I take care, I am constantly falling away from myself as event and into the world of discrete identities. Through this *happening* of my falling prey, I get *entangled* in the world of a present perception. I am deceived or duped by the very perceptual process to only see the apple on the table and not the happening of the seeing of the apple on the table. I simply grasp the last “something” when I interpret “something as something.” In every perceiving, acting, and feeling there is thus a constant *temptation* (Heidegger, 1927/1996) to get lost in the world that experience has brought forth and to live away from myself and the event of my becoming in and through the interpretations of myself and things derived *from* that event. “Da-sein,” as Heidegger writes, “is inclined to fall upon the world where it is and to interpret itself reflectively on the basis of that world” (Heidegger, quoted in Marion, 1998, p. 88). According to Heidegger, I have thus initially already *plunged* (*abgestürzen*) (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 167) into the world as ready-made and lost awareness of the event of its making. I have substituted a present for the coming into being of the present, or the Chronos for the Aion.

As having fallen away from myself and into the world, I now appear to exist in a world that is no longer worlded and alongside things that no longer appear to be manifestations of an earth that has withdrawn. I thus find myself within a world that has drawn its focus away from its supporting structures and which, like the eye of a storm, has eliminated every trace of strife. The world that I have plunged into is thus a world of semblances in which the phenomenological truth of experience as an event is revealed in an imperfect or concealed way in and through the practical horizons of a concrete everyday existence. Although I stand within an event that first grants me to myself from

out of the thing that withdraws, what reveals itself through this activity is this or that concrete thing and this or that concrete subjective possibility of dealing with the thing, and not the event itself of the mutual appropriation.

In and through a concrete existential way of taking over the “da” of the event, the possibility of experiences’ own misrecognition is thus perpetually prepared. It is as if I find myself living on the illuminated side of the moon (granted to me by the “it gives”) and mistaking it for the totality of the moon. This then has the further consequence that not only am I initially lost in the possibilities of a concrete experience of the thing, but I do not know that I am, because I cannot see what I cannot see. Instead, as Heidegger writes, I live within a world in which everything initially appears to be already revealed in its totality and appears to be in need of no further elucidation. Husserl (1936/1970) refers to this state of affairs as the way the world shows itself in the *natural attitude* of simple living, and Heidegger (1927/1996) refers to it as the world as it is revealed in the *average everyday*.

In this state of living toward things that appear to hold nothing about themselves back, I do not first of all perceive myself as separate from the things. Initially, I and the thing make up one of the same experi-action or concrete event. I am in a “situation” with the thing: the thing is an extension of me and I an extension of the thing. What I have fallen prey to is thus neither the thing as separate from myself or myself as separate from the thing but a practical pre-reflective life, which we have previously described as a lived experience and have taken as the starting point for our investigation of intentionality. In my lived experience of the everyday, I live to go to work, to visit my friend, to save for retirement, not to understand how it is that I can go to work, how it is that I am able to

perceive my friend as a friend, and how it is that I understand the meaning of retirement. I am guided by practical interests. I am busy living, which means busy taking care of things. It is thus into this busy-ness that I have initially plunged and it is through the practical interpretations of things guided by this busy-ness that I maintain myself when I initially fall prey toward the termina of my experience. “Da-sein,” as Heidegger (1927/1996) writes, “initially finds ‘itself’ in *what* it does, needs, expects, has charge of, in the things at hand which it initially takes care of in the surrounding world” (p. 112).

According to Heidegger, the thing only claims me as being separate and independent from me when this practical living encounters obstacles, such as when the car will not start, when I cannot find my house door keys, when a person is in my way. Then I discover an interruption of my activity by which the thing for the first time reveals itself as conspicuous in its own right (as missing, as obtrusive, etc). This difference, revealed by the interruption of living, is the event by which we come into being as an independent subject at the same time as the thing comes into being as an object that stands over and against us (*gegen-stand*). This does not mean that there was no subject present when I was simply living, but this subject was the *ex-isting* or *ec-centric* subject that had its being only in terms of its world and became something only by virtue of making the thing’s possibilities its own. This mode of falling prey gave rise to as many subjects as there were modes of actualizing the thing in some concrete way, and seemed in some sense to make the subject a mere “mouthpiece,” eye, heart, hand, ear or flesh of the thing—of a world expressing itself through me.

When the thing gets severed from such practical subjectivities, however, the possibility arises of a thing that appears to maintain itself independently of me and

appears to owe nothing to an act of worlding or interpretation. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) writes, “The act of transcendence whereby the subject is thrown open to the world runs away with itself and we find ourselves in the presence of a nature which has no need to be perceived in order to exist” (p. 179). Now, ousted from the realm of the thing, the “I” becomes a subject who stands over and against things as their agent, perceiver, thinker, planner, calculator, molder (Heidegger, 1938/1977a, p. 135), or valuer (p. 142).

Although they write from a humanistic-existential bias, Berger & Luckmann (1966/1989) use the word *reification* (p. 89) to describe this process by which human beings mistake the products of their own subjective engagements with things as existing independently of this engagement. “Reification,” they write, “implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness” (ibid). We would have to add to this that what is truly forgotten is not the subjective activity but the strife of subject and object as the original moment of appropriation of earth to world.

The subject-object split, however, is still an abstract theoretical deduction from the way subjectivity and the object becomes reified in the everyday. First and foremost we are this concrete subject emerging from an event with this concrete object, not a universal subject confronting a universal object. “Through man’s being limited to that which, at any particular time, is unconcealed, there is given to him the measure that always confine a self to this or that. Man does not, from out of some detached I-ness, set forth the measure to which everything that is, in its Being, must conform itself” (Heidegger, 1938/1977a, pp. 145-6).

Falling Prey to 'Das Man'

The concrete subject that we are in the everyday is a cultural subject, not a universal subject. We discover ourselves as different from the things mostly within a normatively prescribed type of subjectivity by which “one” experiences the world. This subject of the “one,” which we recognize in statements such as “one shouldn’t swear,” “one can’t help but to feel compassion,” etc, is translated by Joan Stambaugh (Heidegger 1927/1996) as “the they,” which takes the place of the German “man,” which is both the pronoun of a neuter subject (“one”) and the invocation of the word human (“man”). In this mode of experiencing the world, as Heidegger (1927/1996) says, subjectivity is dissolved completely...

into the kind of being of ‘the others’ in such a way that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, disappear more and more [...] We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way *they* enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way *they* see and judge. But we also withdraw from the ‘great mass’ the way *they* withdraw, find ‘shocking’ what *they* find shocking. The they, which is nothing definite and which all are, though not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness (p. 119).

The outcome of interpreting our experience in terms of the impersonal subject of “the one” is, according to social phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (1932/1967), that we come to live in an abstract or general world where we relate to others and ourselves as *personal types* and engage in activity with things through *course-of-action types* (p. 187). A course-of-action type is a *type* of social action, such as for example “playing poker” or “mailing a letter,” which is presented as a typical way of completing things and hence as the objective meaning of a projection that in principle is readily available for everyone and thus belongs to no one in particular. A personal type is an abstraction of a type of

agent and is often either indirectly inferred from a course of action type, such as “the poker player” of a game of poker, or predictive of course-of-action types, such as “the miser” who is expected to engage in certain miserly acts.

Schutz has furthermore argued that personal types can be based on more or less situational and more or less abstract course of action types. At the most concrete level, the generalization I can make about a person and about myself is based on specific interactions and experiences that I have had with another person. Schutz calls this personal type *characterological* (p. 196) because it typifies an actor through courses of action types that are uniquely ascribed to someone’s character or proper name. At a further level of abstraction, we can typify someone through a general type of course-of-action that is more like an anonymous function that can be taken over by any characterological type. An example of such a typification would be the type “postal worker” that is defined by the course-of-action type of “distributing letters.” Schutz refers to this personal typification as a *habitual* type (p. 197), since it is defined exclusively by a general type of action. Even farther away from a concrete experience, we find the typification of subjects as *social collectives* (p. 198), such as “the board of directors,” “the state,” or “the economy,” that exist only as grammatical subjects, since they amount to personifications of completely abstract processes that cannot be carried out by any one individual. According to Schutz, as the interpretation becomes more and more removed from the direct concrete experience of the event, the interpretation becomes more prejudiced. Prejudice here means that the interpretation takes more and more for granted that has not actually been comprehended in an experience but resides merely in a stock of

knowledge of hearsay rather than a stock of knowledge of one's own previous experiences.

Along with Schutz's latter point, Heidegger (1927/1996) has argued that for the most part when we interpret things, we do so through typifications that are completely removed from an original experience of the thing and resides only in a passed down discourse about experience. This is what Heidegger refers to as the phenomenon of "idle talk" (p. 198) – a talk about what has already been spoken and interpreted rather than a talk that listens to and proceeds from experience. In this mode of interpretation we simply recycle ready-made meanings of former acts of interpretation that have become sedimented in a particular language. We thus come to live within a world of language in which previous interpretations of the meanings of things have sedimented themselves as facts, and in which we mistake such meanings for the things themselves without further need for a reference to direct experience to prove or disprove what has thus been spoken about and generally taken to be true. In other words, "We have been told and shown by our teachers and parent what the things mean, how they are to be used—that is, how they are interpreted and typified in our society" (Gurwitsch, 1974a, p. 117). As Gurwitsch therefore also writes, "Only a very small part of my stock of knowledge has originated in my personal experience; the bulk of it is socially derived –handed down to me and accepted by me" (p. 119)

As we can see, therefore, the way we first of all discover ourselves as subjects standing over and against objects (and thus take over "the there") is in the form of a type of subject that can either be characterological, habitual or collective but which in any

case refers to an impersonal cultural subjectivity that does not properly belong to me as a cogito emanating from myself.

Falling Prey to Theory

In the average everyday way of retrieving ourselves as subjects from the lived futures of the thing, we are no longer a completely existentially freed person who lives the possibilities of things in new creative ways. However, neither are we a universal subjective consciousness, for the “I” is always spoken from within a subjective role to which I have been destined by each situation. To find one and the same “I” in all of these events thus requires a further degree of abstraction of the subject into a disembodied observer. This abstraction becomes possible at the same time as the object becomes possible as a de-contextualized object or “object of thought.” The letter now no longer becomes a different letter for the writer who completes it as a means of rekindling an old friendship, the postal worker who completes it by delivering it to its recipient, or the recipient who completes it by letting its words transport her into the world of her friend. Only when the letter becomes a piece of paper with writing on it that persists unchanged in and through its transportation from context to context (ie. when it loses connection to a “locale”), does the object appear as an object completely purified of subjectivity. Conversely, the subject, rather than referring to this or that particular subject, now appears as a universal thinker or spectator who can represent the world to itself in the disengaged manner of pure theoretical ideas or concepts. As Husserl (1936/1970) writes, “man becomes gripped by the passion of a world-view and world-knowledge that turns

away from all practical interests and within the closed sphere of its cognitive activity, in the times devoted to it, strives for and achieves nothing but pure *theoria*” (p. 285).

In such a purely theoretical world, the thing becomes farther removed from the worlding that completes it and the earth that withdraws from it. The theoretical idea of the thing uproots the thing from its lived horizons and makes it world-less (independent of its worldly context) (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 88).

Falling Prey to Science and Technology

The worldless thing, which exists only in thought, forms the basis of a further abstraction when the thing as pure object becomes grasped within the physico-mathematical horizon of a pure time and space and the calculative horizon that quantifies it according to the maxim, “whatever exists at all exists in some amount” (Thorndike quoted in Newman & Holzman, 1996, p. 88). The mathematical exactitude that we thereby obtain, comes at the price, however, of a loss of the meaning a thing has in the life-world of everyday experience. As Heidegger (1936/1993d) writes, “If we try to lay hold of the stone’s heaviness in another way, by placing the stone on a balance, we merely bring the heaviness into the form of a calculated weight. This perhaps very precise determination of the stone remains a number, but the weight’s burden has escaped us” (p. 172). Heidegger thus goes on to say that such reductionism ultimately turns into a destruction of the thing and not to its further clarification.

The scientific exactitude gives rise to another subjective way of completing things that can be referred to as *technical* or *technological*. The world of objects, Heidegger (1949/1977b) says, can now become transformed into a collection of “resources” that can

be stored, transported and used up in a way that now even bypasses the thing's manifestation as an object. The object as a universal representation now "disappears into the objectlessness of standing reserve" (p. 19). A river not only becomes reduced to the object of the chemical compound of H₂O but now becomes a quantity of hydraulic pressure needed for the supply of electricity. This in turn allows the subject to come into being as a user or consumer of the world, with the world considered to be a storehouse of quantifiable resources that can be bought and sold in and through a market place that reduces everything to amounts of quantity and value.

All of these understandings of subjectivity in relation to the thing, which I have shown the emergence of, cannot be understood as the progressive self-discovery of the world and of our being from an initial forgetfulness, as the enlightenment story tells it. Instead, these subjects and objects are all the outcome of events and the inherent tendency of the event to fall prey to "the gift" of experience from which the "giving" moment itself becomes more and more concealed. In and through the existential horizons that reveal the event only through a certain concealment, the thing can thus undergo several transformations from its initial instituting of a "locale" or gathering, to its generalization as a type of experience, to its existence as a universal object, and finally to a technological resource or quantity. In and through these progressive alienations from immediate lived experience, which each time take the product of a former misrecognition of the event as their starting point, subjectivity itself becomes further and further alienated from its initiating moment in the event. I receive myself as I am *not* in and through these completions of the thing, first as a type of social actor with its own

subjective intention, then as a universal thinker, and then as a planner, manipulator and consumer of resources.

Falling Prey to Objectifications of Ourselves

As the subject gets split off from the site into which it has been gathered, and interprets itself as an independent agent or master of things, the possibility also first arises that we can become an object for another subject and an object for ourselves.

We can now become represented through social attributions assigned to us by other actors, categorizations imposed upon us by universal categories of thought, and quantifications of our attributes in and through scientific studies that reduce us to a standard deviation from the statistical norm and allow for us to be managed as a human resource. Hence, the mailman who delivers me my letter turns me into the citizen who lives at “1420 Centre Ave,” the thinker who devises a theory in which people are split into conscious and unconscious motivations turns me into a “neurotic,” and the psychologist who uses questionnaires to quantify me as a standard deviation from the norm, turns me into someone who has an IQ of “80” or is 23% more depressed than the average person. These objectifications can be taken over as the basis for yet other events such that it is the alienated self or “self as other” that enters into new gatherings and not the self as transformation or becoming. Hence, most of the time, lived experience is likely to happen within a certain stock of knowledge about reality that is presupposed in advance. I become the object that I am for the other, even if this other is not a concrete person, but more like a general “gaze” of the “one” (Das Man). Sartre (1943/1986), for example, has been an advocate of the idea that it is through “the look” of the other that

we first recognize our own objectivity. As he states, “For me the Other is the first being for whom I am an object; that is, the being *through whom* I gain my objectness” (p. 307). What Sartre refers to as the “look” is not located in the eyes of the other. It is a field of awareness within which I tend to exist even when I am not looked at, but am simply aware that my actions can be judged from some locus outside myself. The look is thus the presence of a generalized Other that can be unique to each of us and contains an awareness of how others might see us or objectify us. It is the presence of this other perspective on ourselves that can be said to give rise to the idea of a split between a real self, on the one hand, and an ideal self, persona, or public self, on the other. It is also this split that in turn gives rise to the distinction between public events and private events. Nevertheless, Foucault (1978), Cushman (1995), and others, have argued that the private self is itself a relatively recent reification supported by events such as the Catholic confession, the rise of individualism and consumerism, and so forth. Although we may therefore identify with one objectification of ourselves more than others, this self remains an alienated self that is dependent upon an initial misidentification of ourselves as separate from and as the master of the event.

Falling Prey to Power

Finally, we have to mention that when the event takes place within social, institutional, technological and theoretical reifications of the world, power differentials⁴

⁴ One such power differential, which it seems particularly crucial to keep in mind in a study of flirting, is the gender difference to which loving often seems to both fall prey and to already have plunged. De Beauvoir (1989) has argued that to exist as a woman is often to exist in a man’s world and to become subjected as “the other sex” rather than as a positive identity in one’s own right. This way of being thrown often has profound impact on styles of loving, since it often reproduces an event in which the man is whole and considers the woman to be an adjunct, whereas the

are likely to be reproduced and maintained. I am called into existing categories of self-identification within a general political economy of pre-defined possibilities and constraints. Being called into the characterological type of a woman is not to be assigned or adopt a neutral label, but to enter into act types deemed socially appropriate to being a woman. To be a woman means to uphold oneself to feminine standards in and for the Other “who” alone can grant me this objectivity. Furthermore, in the face of the Other, it may be very difficult to refuse certain characterological types and act types. If you are sent to the county jail in Pittsburgh, for example, you will be treated like a man if you were born with male genitalia, regardless of whether you identify as trans-gendered and have had a sex-change operation in later life. Hence, we sometimes, if not mostly, receive ourselves from the Other whose binary divisions are built into institutional ways of interacting. In our current society, it is thus difficult if not impossible to resist the

woman is often ‘lacking’ and considering the attention and affection of the man to be necessary to become whole. In fact, Linschoten (1969) would argue that a woman only becomes a woman in and through the male admirer who first makes it possible for her to come into her body as a sexualized body, whereas the man discovers his body as sexual on his own in and through the pleasures of masturbation. The discrepancy here between the sexuality of the woman and the sexuality of the man thus gives rise to a fundamental difference in what is wanted in and through love: The woman’s “womanhood” depends in large part on being the exclusive focus of a male desire, whereas the male, initially sufficient onto himself, is oriented toward a more time-limited sexual discharge and finds the woman’s incessant demand for love to be stifling. It is not clear to what extent this difference is exclusively a social reification and to what extent it has roots in the bodily differentials of male/ female anatomy. Linschoten seems to suggest that the sexual encounter itself entails an anatomical dualism between a conquering male penis and a receptive female vagina, while De Beauvoir seems to suggest that it is entirely a social construction. According to the perspective of the event, penis and vagina are, however, not initially reified entities, but elements that can enter into many different events and become part of many different “territories” or “sites” which are not inherently centered around the dualism of passivity/ activity. Perhaps it would therefore be more congruent to view gender differences as a socio-historical production and a reification of an event within certain discourses of “the they,” practices of subjected selves, and theoretical-mathematical objectifications. The goal of an analysis of gender from the perspective of the event would thus not be one that starts from an understanding of male and female identities but looks at how a male/ female differential is produced through which we fall prey.

identification of gender based on biology, race based on skin color, class based on income, and so forth, and with each of these attributions I am claimed into an event of objectifications, quantifications and typifications that deprives me of relative power.

Nevertheless, in each of these examples, there is not an independent I that becomes subjected. Instead it is subjection to an event that first creates a place from which to say “I” (Butler, 1997). I first discover myself within a subjection and hence as a response to being called in some way. This means that power is not a mere deprivation or constraint imposed on me but a way of being produced as a subject in a positive sense (Foucault, 1978). But if power first produces a subject, this also means that power is not something a subject wields on another subject or something one person “has” and another person doesn’t. Power is what we are made of on the plane of linear time and space; it is the force that holds us together as subjects—the glue of the gathering. Even the scientist who conducts an experiment that will later become the source of another subjection, initially entered into the laboratory already subjected as “male,” “assistant professor,” “consumer” of scientific journals and “recipient” of grants. His subjectivity, understood as his ability to act, think and manipulate objects from some “free will,” is thus always the result of a misinterpretation of himself that ignores the fact that he has himself been instituted and gathered as a positive subject in and through an event. Power thus ultimately refers back to the impersonal and pre-individual site of the event that actualizes itself in our current socio-historical epoch through the existential drama of subject and object. In other words, it is the subject-object matrix as a mode of the event’s falling prey that introduces the play of master and slave and not the master or slave who, as individuals existing prior to this event, institute this dynamic.

The event continuously reproduces itself in and through subject-object divisions much like the cell-division of a stem cell, and as with cells, each subject-object division through which a subject wields power always refers back to a former subject-object division in which this subject was itself constituted as an object. The true subjective gaze of the master is thus not the gaze of an actual subject, but the gaze inherent to the subject-object split as a way of interpreting the event from within the world into which we have already *plunged*. As in the *Wizard of OZ* there is no actual wizard who acts as a despot, only a diffuse power differential that keeps reproducing itself in and through the very subject-object mode of receiving and interpreting events that brings us into being in a concrete existential way.

Conclusion: Necessary and Unnecessary Modes of Falling Prey

The event can actualize itself either from itself or from within reifications of past events that are taken for granted as the stock of knowledge of a particular society. In either case, the event is destined to give rise to identities and to cover itself over by these identities. Although it is thus built into lived experience that we lose ourselves to the identities of a particular world or gathering, it is not inevitable that we take the products of such gatherings as independently existing identities and that we come to experience subsequent events through such identities. We must thus distinguish between the inevitable tendency to fall prey to something as inherent to the ability to experience “something” as “something,” and the temptation to become stuck “like flies in honey” in the identities that the event has brought forth. In the one case, the “mystery” of the event

is retained and is actively cultivated as the source of ever new ways of falling prey, in the other, the event is forgotten underneath identities that seem to stand on their own.

The starting point of any phenomenological analysis is that we have already plunged into the world as reified and lost sight of the event. The task of phenomenology must therefore be to recover or unconceal what is concealed in such objectified, socially constructed and calculated ways of existing. Phenomenology, in other words, must return us to the experience of the event from which we continue to receive ourselves both in reified and creative ways. The phenomenological reduction to subjective experience or the experience of objects is thus itself nothing but an instance of a particular reification, or event of falling prey, and is not an adequate unconcealment of the event itself as the source of these reductions. It is for this reason that we have a need for a more radical phenomenological reduction.

Phenomenology as Existential-Phenomenology: The Event as Aletheia

The argument I will present in the following will be that the phenomenological and the existential dimensions of the event (the giving of the event and the falling prey of the event) belong inherently to the event understood as a difference or strife between earth and world. My claim will be that each and every lived experience contains both dimensions of the event and thus represents, in each case, an instance of the concealing *and* revealing that defines the phenomenal nature of the event.

The event actualizes itself (gives itself) now as a subjective experience, now as a social experience, now as private experience, now as an experience of objective reality, now as an experience of planning, measuring, and counting and, by doing so, manifests

itself as it is *not*. In other words, its function is to disappear so as to make something else appear, just like the spark must vanish beneath the flame that brings it to fruition.

However, we need to understand the *not* in the above statement as a positive rather than a negative phenomenon. Falling prey to the world does not rob the event of its reality but first allows it to manifest itself, that is, to appear to someone and manifest itself as something. To think that it would be possible to have a pure experience in which the event does not fall prey would thus be to fundamentally misunderstand the event. It would be tantamount to making the claim that one can have an experience that is not an experience “of something” or to make an interpretation that is *not* an interpretation of something *as* something. To be phenomenologically faithful to “the event” is thus to view “falling prey” as inherent to the event’s self-actualization and as its only way of passing into the world.

In *On the Essence of Truth* (1949/1993c), Heidegger is clear about this for as he writes, “the insistent turning toward what is readily available and the ek-sistent turning away from the mystery belong together” (p. 133). What Heidegger refers to as the mystery is that which conceals itself of the phenomenon in and through a particular completion that grasps it only within finite existential horizons. As he goes on to say, by falling prey to what is only partially revealed or “holding fast to what is offered by beings” (insisting) (p. 132), “man errs” (p. 133), but “Man does not merely stray into errancy. He is always astray in errancy, because as ek-sistent he in-sists and so already is caught in errancy” (p. 133). Insofar as “man” is therefore involved in the disclosure of the event, the event is bound to fall prey to the world, since “man’s” existence is precisely defined through falling prey to the world. By errancy, Heidegger does therefore not mean

error or falsehood in the traditional sense, for errancy is in his view a necessary condition for making the event present to humans. Errancy or inauthenticity thus belongs

authentically to the event's essence. Or as Heidegger also says, "truth is untruth."

Turning away from the event is thus ironically a way of revealing and producing the event, not simply an inauthentic masking of the event that could somehow be removed without thereby destroying the event. It is thus in and through the difference between the giving of the event and the showing of that to which it falls prey that the present moment of an experience comes to pass or *happens*. Heidegger (1927/1996) refers to this "making present" of something, which is not a mere representing of some pre-existing truth, but a tearing open of something that continues to withdraw itself from view, as *aletheia*.

Aletheia is an ancient Greek term for truth that means making something present from out of the concealed, or simply put, "unconcealment." Unconcealment is dependent upon concealment in the sense that every "sight" is also an "oversight." Errancy or oversight, is here the precondition for sight, since one must overlook something in order for something to become focal. Concealment and unconcealment thus belong together as an intimate strife that allows the earth to be opened up by the world and the world to set itself back into the earth. When translated into the terminology of lived experience this means that what appears is dependent upon a particular way in which the event grants subject to object (gives itself) and that what gives itself is dependent upon the subject and object through which it can first appear (show itself). Hence, although it is true that what gives itself (the event as earth) is not itself *given*, but is presupposed by what is given (what shows itself), it is also true that without what shows itself, the phenomenon could not give itself. The two aspects of the phenomenon, which we can identify as what withdraws

and what reveals itself, or the phenomenological and the existential, must therefore be said to belong together intrinsically in the moment of the strife of the same concealing-revealing event.

The phenomenological method thus always involves a duality between the existential and phenomenological levels of analysis; between faithfulness to what shows itself (existence) and interest in what conceals itself or “gives itself” in what shows itself (phenomenon). When considered through the concept of strife, these two movements must be said to be inextricably linked in a hermeneutic circle where the one presupposes the other: The insistence of the turning away makes it the case that the thing itself (the event), which the phenomenologist seeks to get back to, is not tantamount to what shows itself in experience (what appears), but to what “gives itself” as and in what “shows itself.” It is for this reason that Heidegger can proclaim that “it is precisely because phenomena are, at first sight and most of the time, *not* given (nicht gegeben sind), that there is a need for phenomenology” (quoted in Marion, 2002b, p. 110).

A quick simplified example will illustrate this: The ball, for example, is revealed as “a soccer ball to be kicked” for the soccer player, but in so revealing itself, it is also concealed, for the ball itself is a source of many other appearances such as the hand-ball, the juggling ball and so forth. It thus gives itself in only one of its aspects within the world of the soccer player, while withdrawing its other aspects from view. In this sense, the phenomenon cannot be said to be tantamount to what appears, but must be considered to be “the meaning and ground” of all of these existential appearances, a kind of virtual ball that gives itself in and provides the basis for multiple possible appearances. The ball as a “thing in itself” is thus always only there as a giving that covers itself over. It has no

nature outside of its happening in and as a specific event. It can only reveal itself by falling prey since it can only show itself as a concrete ball. It is thus dependent upon particular subjective completions and objective attunements to be brought together in order to have reality at all. The upshot of this is that phenomenology must always be an empirical or existential phenomenology. It must always proceed from the empirical in order to discover the phenomenon that conditions and shows itself in the empirical.

I prefer the term existential over the term empirical because the empirical has typically been equated with the positivist notion of sensory data that exist independently of the subject, whereas existential refers to an earth-world, experi-action or mode of being in the world that always already involves a subject who has fallen prey to the world and is absorbed in a practical engagement with things. Existence is thus a more encompassing term since it includes all the modes of falling prey discussed in the previous section, including but not limited to those modes of falling prey in which the thing confronts the subject as sensory data or object.

In the hybrid word *existential-phenomenology* (Von Eckartsberg, 1986), the term existence can thus be said to refer to the way life gets experienced by concrete individuals who are going about their daily goal-oriented lives, living in what Husserl (1936/1970) calls *the natural attitude*, while phenomenology can be understood as the attempt to go beyond such experiences by reflecting on what conceals itself in these everyday ways of experiencing the world. What is concealed in the natural attitude of living toward things is concealed because it is so lived or taken for granted that it has not yet been reflected on or shown itself in any thematic way (Von Eckartsberg, 1986). Lived experience, as Marion (2002b) therefore makes clear, is never something apparent, for as

he writes, “The lived experience does not show itself as such but remains invisible by default (a capital point that is often misunderstood)” (p. 49).

A particular kind of reflection is thus needed so as to lead the “as of yet dumb experience” of the everyday back to “the pure expression of its own meaning” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, p. xvii), and it is here that phenomenology receives its methodological essence as “logos” or “reflection upon” the phenomenon of a particular lived experience.

Chapter 7

The Method of Phenomenology as an Uncovering of What Gives Itself

How does phenomenology attempt to achieve the retrieval of what “withdraws” from what shows itself? How does it become a phenomeno-logic (logic or language of the phenomenon)? To answer this question is to give a rendition of phenomenology as a method. We have already presupposed this answer from the very outset as the means of unconcealing the event but now need to give a more explicit rendition of what we have presupposed. In the following I will first give a rendition of the traditional understanding of phenomenology as an archeology of essential forms of the thing or the human way of being. On the basis of this understanding I will then, in the next section, seek to tailor the method to the fundamental truth that lived experience has no essential ground that can be uncovered, but only a groundless ground or event-like essence.

A Traditional View of the Phenomenological Method

In the attempt to arrive at what *gives* itself in a concrete everyday experience that normally conceals this from view, the phenomenologist has first of all to enter into an everyday experience—her own or one reported by others. However, unlike the person concerned with simply accomplishing the practical tasks of living, the phenomenologist has to *bracket* such an end goal orientation, so as to attempt to comprehend what the

actors themselves do not comprehend when they simply fall prey to that of which they take care. To use the example of the apple that can be experienced now as something edible and now as something to give to my teacher to improve my standing in class, the phenomenologist will enter into this experience just like the hungry person or the teacher's pet, but instead of simply eating the apple or using it to get a better grade, the phenomenologist will seek to bring to view what is presupposed as a condition for experiencing the apple in these ways. Instead of simply being lured by the apple as something I can eat or give as a gift to my teacher, and thus simply *living* the experience, the phenomenologist asks the question: How is it that this apple can *give* itself (be given) as edible or *give* itself (be given) as gift in the first place?

To answer this question a number of methodological procedures must be introduced that define the phenomenological method. One such procedure is referred to as *bracketing* (epoché) (Husserl, 1927). Bracketing means placing the content pole of an experience in parenthesis so we do not simply fall prey to, take for granted or become absorbed by what appears or reveals itself. This allows us to view the content of an experience as an end-product of a *process of experiencing* (an event) rather than a self-subsisting fact that transcends this experiencing. If perception, as we have said, is always perception of "something," placing the something in parenthesis thus allows us to turn our gaze toward "the perception of" the something. This means that we turn our attention to how what shows itself is given. In Husserlian terms, "the thing" now becomes a "phenomenon:" a thing of and for a consciousness. It becomes an appearance whose appearing can be studied rather than an identity that exists independently of me. Bracketing, we can thus say, first helps us shift from a *natural attitude* of simply living to

a *phenomenological attitude* (ibid). The phenomenological attitude turns the thing into a phenomenon and makes a reflection on the thing's phenomenal nature possible.

A phenomenological reflection on laughter (Grant, 2008), for example, begins its inquiry from concrete situations in which laughter happens or in which something is laughed about. It starts from a natural attitude to life. However, instead of getting caught in the thing laughed about, say, a funny movie, the phenomenologist seeks to investigate what it is that makes this funny movie an occasion of my laughter—how it is that laughter gives itself. It now becomes possible to reflect on when, how, where, of what, and with whom I laugh when I laugh at a funny movie and thus to bring into focus the nature of the laughable as event or as phenomenon. By suspending the simple enjoyment of being caught in the funny movie of which I laugh, I am thus able to reveal something about the experience of laughter which remains concealed in the experience when I simply live it without reflecting on it.

To reflect on a phenomenon, however, requires another methodological step which we could refer to as the command to *remain descriptive* or to not to introduce categories of explanation that are not themselves given by the experience itself. Hence, the answers to the phenomenologist's questions, such as "*when, what, how, where, and with whom* do I laugh when I laugh?" are not to be found by means of pure speculation. The mantra "to the things themselves!" means precisely that I must let experience give its own answer. Experience must make its own secrets transparent to me without my introducing extra-experiential explanations, concepts or beliefs (end points of other experiences) in order to provide these answers. As Heidegger (1927/1996) says about this distinction, "The interpretation can draw the conceptuality belonging to the beings to be

interpreted from these themselves or else force them into concepts to which beings are opposed in accordance with their kind of being” (p. 141). Contrary to a natural scientific approach that seeks to *explain* phenomena by means of other phenomena, phenomenology thus remains a *descriptive science* that seeks to describe what is “there,” not to explain it away. The purpose of phenomenology as a method can thus be formulated as bringing what shows itself in everyday experience to a fuller givenness by making what gives itself in this experience apparent or explicit, perhaps for the first time. It is by means of this procedure that the phenomenologist can be said to uncover the “logos” or language of the phenomenon and to become a phenomeno-logic.

Staying descriptive, however, is not an easy command to stay faithful to, for in suspending the natural attitude of the goal orientation of the everyday, we encounter the obstacle that we ourselves are steeped in the everyday and depend on its taken for granted categories to make sense of our experience. Thus, even when we think we have bracketed the contents toward which we fall prey, we often find ourselves holding on to particular horizons of other completed experiences that we assume as the basis for describing the phenomenon in question. Laughter at a funny movie, for example, might first give itself to a phenomenological reflection as something “I” accomplish, but this merely raises the further question of how this I itself is given and whether or not it is a necessary condition to have an “I” for laughter to give itself.

Furthermore, the stock of knowledge through which we approach a phenomenon cannot be completely bracketed because it is also the very precondition for grasping a phenomenon and for a phenomenon to pass into existence. We must therefore make a distinction between approaching a phenomenon through necessary and unnecessary

presuppositions (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 32). We must ask ourselves of any phenomenological description: Are these presuppositions, which I am making about the phenomenon, necessary or unnecessary for the phenomenon to show itself as this particular phenomenon? This procedure of asking this question and eliminating unnecessary presuppositions from my phenomenological description is referred to as *the phenomenological reduction* (Husserl, 1913/1962).

In and through the phenomenological reduction, an experience of “something” can be reduced to further and further levels of givenness as the presupposed identities with which I seek to clarify the phenomenon I am studying, are themselves bracketed and reflected on. In other words, I must evaluate whether or not it is necessary for the experience of the laughable to presuppose an “I” who laughs. If not, then the phenomenon does not completely show itself within this horizon, and the horizon can now be said to be “incidental” rather than “necessary.” The phenomenon can thus be reduced even further. By removing inessential horizons we are thus in principle able to bring “the appearing, whose giving is at issue, all the way back to what appears absolutely” (Marion, 2002a, p. 15). This *negative* process of clearing away the obstacles to manifestation (ibid, p. 10) reminds me of the Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation through which it becomes possible to catch and remove all the ways we block awareness of what really *is*. As Buddhist teacher and scholar Shinzen Young (1994) metaphorically describes this process, “If the dirt is cleaned away from the window, the sun that was always there is able to shine through. The spiritual reality which is the nature of ordinary experience is able to shine forth” (p. 56). The “dirt” in phenomenological terms is here the “mere appearances, outlines, impressions, vague

intuitions, supposed facts, opinions, absurd theories, etc” (Marion, 2002a, p. 15) that cover over the phenomenon in ways that are “incidental” rather than strictly speaking demanded by what gives itself.

Nevertheless, as I have argued elsewhere, there is no such thing as a sun that shines by itself. The sun as earth needs some dirt to deflect its rays so that it can become the shining forth of something worldly. Nevertheless, what the reduction teaches us is that the sun can remain buried beneath essential or inessential ways of falling prey and that every revelation of the earth is thus not equal. There can be more or less essence in a statement about an experience. Jean-Luc Marion (2002a) therefore speaks of *levels of eventness*. As he says, “The level of eventness – if one can speak thus—is measured by the amount of the phenomenon’s excess over its antecedents” (p. 171). The antecedents are here the taken for granted categories which we use to talk about a phenomenon without first subjecting them to their own reduction. Hence, we can live farther and farther away from ourselves, the more we simply awaken within a world of reifications that have been handed down to us rather than examined. An experiential account of reading, swimming, walking, falling in love and so forth can thus be more or less receptive to what gives itself in those experiences, meaning that the person can give a rendition that is rich or poor, inclusive or exclusive, thick or thin, aware or unaware of what gives itself in the experience.

At this point phenomenology thus becomes an ethics, for if we did not make the assumption that unconcealment of the earth is better than living in forgetfulness of what has withdrawn, then phenomenology would be pointless. Implicit in the phenomenological project is thus contained a command to dig ourselves out of the mud

so that experience can continue to shine forth and we ourselves, can continue to come into being in new ways instead of misrecognizing ourselves as one or the other identity within a static world-view. This departure from the Husserlian belief that phenomenology is value-free becomes more obvious in the later works of Heidegger, where a distinction is made between different kinds of thinking. Heidegger (1954/1968) now begins to speak of a difference between thinking as representing and “thinking as thanking,” where the latter form of thinking seeks to retrieve what conceals itself, while the former remains captive within what has already been revealed and is taken for granted.

Accordingly, if the object of our investigation is lived experience, we must be willing to espouse the belief that while lived experience manifests itself only in and through a strife between what reveals itself and what conceals itself, it can do so by covering itself over to various degrees. This view is in accordance with that of Marion (2002a) who believes that different reductions can show more or less of a phenomenon and that we can construct a hierarchy of reductions depending on the level of eventness that each reduction allows for. Such a hierarchy can be based on the degree to which each horizon for the showing of a phenomenon takes other horizons for granted. According to such a hierarchy, which I have provided an argument for in the section on “falling prey,” we can consider the mathematical horizon (formal intuition) to be the strictest and most limiting horizon because it presupposes and builds upon other more essential completions. Next in line, we find the theoretical-rational horizon (categorical intuition) that only allows the event to give itself within preformed and free-floating theoretical ideas about what is. Mathematical and theoretical horizons are of course both modes of everyday activity guided by the wider horizon of a certain common sense that we have attributed to

the horizon of an anonymous social existence in which we live for the most part. This social existence itself seems to presuppose an existential mode of taking over “the there” in the form of “the they” (Das Man), an existence that we have ultimately revealed belongs not to the human being’s way of being but to the strife between earth and world.

In each of these “reductions,” the hermeneutic fore-structure of the phenomenological reduction becomes less and less restrictive and more and more inclusive of what gives itself. Lived experience reveals itself as not needing a completion rooted in the human being as ex-isting, in a social inter-subjectivity, or in a thinking, representing or calculating subject. These hermeneutic frameworks of understanding all presuppose too much, setting up a horizon for what can show itself that is not inclusive of all the ways experience can give itself and therefore insufficient as starting points for a phenomenology of experience.

The Construction of a Revised Phenomenological Method: From a Phenomenology of the Reduction to a Phenomenology of the Double Reduction

The ultimate reduction of experience to a strife between earth and world, which my entire phenomenological analysis has been an attempt to carry out, is a reduction to the very moment of concealment and revealment that characterizes the event. To make the event the starting point of phenomenology is to acknowledge that what gives itself originally is not some identity, be it human consciousness, the world, or the thing itself, but a “happening” (Linschoten, 1969, p. 157). This means that the phenomenological reduction can no longer be a reduction to something identical or to some absolute ground, for the event, “comes forward and accomplishes, arrives and pauses, advances and

withdraws, arises and sinks away. It does not subsist, persist, show itself, or make itself seen. It makes the event without itself making up an event” (Marion, 2002a, p. 61).

This makes a phenomenology of the event different from those phenomenologies that are based on a reduction of experience to something identical, be it subjective experience, the essential meaning of things as experienced, or the dialogue of a community of speakers.

In previous phenomenological reductions, the reduction was always accomplished from within a particular relation to the thing that set definite limits on how far what showed itself could be reduced. If you start from the experience of the world as perceived, as Husserl did, then the reduction leads via the perceiver (a concrete perception) to the structures of perception (a transcendental perception) understood as the “multifarious concatenations, syntheses, and systematic organizations [. . .] of acts and operations of consciousness” (Gurwitsch, 1974b, p. 13). If you start from the “intuition” of the Being of beings, as the early Heidegger did, then the reduction leads via human existence, as the mode of realizing the Being of beings, to the structures of this existence. In each of these reductions, however, a horizon of something identical is always already given as the basis from which the phenomenological reduction is carried out. Experience is in both cases thought of on the basis of a first principle whether this be the Being of beings or the “subjective” perceptions of the perceived. But did not Husserl and Heidegger themselves have to be claimed by these first principles before they could use them as the standard of their reduction? Were Husserl and Heidegger not themselves subject to being “reduced” by the thing that claimed them or invited them into particular subjectivities or modes of

existing? Were they therefore not part and parcel of an event that escaped their view and could not be encapsulated by their view?

A phenomenology of the event questions the very idea that there can be a first principle or pure intuition that is not itself part and parcel of an “event.” If the event is primary—if everything we experience must first happen—the first principle becomes that of a moment of transformation or creation and not that of something static that can be presupposed or said to be given in advance of the happening. As Strasser (1969) says:

Thus we see that the dialectic which flows from this most original, most general and necessary ontological situation is not an epistemological thought experiment. It is not an arbitrary change of attitude, not an act which I can, at will, accomplish or not accomplish. It has its roots in the things which I had to experience, perceive and undergo in order to become the one who at present I am (p. 21).

As Strasser here points out, I am always already an effect of my relationship with the thing which through its claim or invitation has constituted me in a particular subjectivity. I am thus not only the reducer, but also *the reducee*. Instead of starting from some pure phenomenological reduction that seeks to reduce an appearance to what gives itself in this appearance, we must therefore instead say that every reduction always already proceeds from a reduction into which I, the reducer, have been admitted in advance. I will call this principle by which I am not only reducing or interpreting a phenomenon, but also reduced or interpreted *by* the phenomenon, for the *double reduction*. The concept of a double reduction eliminates the idea that I can take my bearing from some pre-given empirical reality that has not already been interpreted by me, and also eliminates the idea that I have access to myself outside of my relation to things. The primacy of the double reduction entails that the reducer has always already been

claimed by the phenomenon he or she seeks to reduce, but also that this phenomenon has always already shown itself within a particular reduction or horizon.

The consequence of this claim is that both subject and object, the experiencer and the experienced, can no longer be said to have meaning outside of their events or encounters. This, in turn, means that subjective experience and the experience of objects can no longer be said to refer to something substantial, but rather must be said to refer to a “degree” of the double reduction of an “event.” Hence instead of defining reality based on a metaphysics of substance and identity, we are left with a reality of “degrees,” where self and thing are always the effects of “matter [the event] that occupies space to a given degree” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p.153). This *matter*, which Deleuze & Guattari are here speaking about, is not to be understood as matter in the traditional sense of pertaining to the extension of things, but is to be understood as the materialization of the event in its dual aspect of aion and gathering. The event materializes itself through subject and object who are now robbed of their nature as substances that support the event. Instead subject and object are appropriated by the event into the very gathering that constitutes their event-like materiality or their identity as a function of each other. If the event is metaphorically represented as the spark’s manifestation as flame, the degree would then designate the level of heat or energy (matter) that this particular spark-flame produces and of which it therefore consists.

According to this *phenomenology of degrees*, the subject thus loses its status as the measure of all things. Rather than consisting of some realm of constitutive powers, psychological life is now reinterpreted as a continuous process of the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the event. In one moment, the psychological subject comes into

being as the owner and initiator of the event (reterritorialization), while in the next, this same subject gets swept away by the event (deterritorialization) and reinstated as part of another “site.” Without firm support within itself, the psychological subject can thus only become conceptualized as a ‘bridge’ between two sites, “a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities [gatherings]” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 249).

Deterritorialization can be described as an experience where the Earth overflows the World, disallowing a world-view from establishing itself and thus a definite sense of self from being established. In such situations, Marion (2002a) says, “intuition sets forth a surplus which the concept cannot organize” and which “the I of intentionality can neither constitute nor synthesize [. . .] into an object” (p. 225). In such moments, a prior I, we, or “one,” which received itself from within a definite horizon, is “released” into a locale or gathering that belongs to no-one or rather belongs in that moment to the pre-personal and pre-individuated event.

Reterritorialization, in contrast, can be described as the reinterpretation of this “enigmatic,” paradoxical, transpersonal or saturated experience into an intention that surpasses it and reinstates it within a world-view of the heart, hand, eye, or flesh, the communicative order of the they, or the categories of reason and the formal operational concepts of mathematical science. The event now becomes reduced to something which I am initiating or which happens to me as a simple accident of nature.

What is primary here is not deterritorialization or reterritorialization, but the liminality between them, the way in which absolute deterritorialization and absolute reterritorialization is never possible but always unfolds in and through a “strife” or “happening.” It is this continuous strife or happening that it is the task of the

phenomenologist to reflect on and retrieve as the basis of each and every experience so it does not close itself up into absolute forgetfulness.

Consequently, the phenomenological reduction cannot be envisaged as a method by means of which we can arrive at some absolute givenness, but must be viewed as a phenomenon that is always already at play whenever an experience manifests itself. Instead of having a life that is completely concealed (lived) or unconcealed (reduced), we have a life that always takes place as a degree of concealment and revealment and thus by definition mixes or blurs the distinction between the two. Whenever there is an experience there is always to some extent a reduction at play, while whenever there is a reduction at play, there is always to some extent a degree of concealment of the lived at play. Marion (2002a) has phrased this as the fact that “There is no givenness that does not pass through the filter of a reduction; [and] there is no reduction that does not work towards a givenness” (p. 16). Furthermore, he has made it clear that “the correlation between reduction and givenness determines the essence of the phenomenon itself” (p. 21). The essence of the phenomenon is thus not something static, but resides precisely in the “degree” between givenness and reduction; between that from which I receive myself as interpreter or “reducer” (what gives itself), and the givenness which my own interpretation or reduction brings about.

Instead of being a science of the a priori ontological forms of reality, phenomenology now instead becomes a genetic science. It becomes a description of “the coming-to-be of consciousness and of the world of consciousness” (Strasser, 1969, p. 19). In other words, the purpose of phenomenology is not to clear away limiting horizons so as to be left with an absolute horizon in which the phenomenon can show itself fully, but

to hold firm to the principle that the ultimate horizon is a “horizoning” of the strife that gives itself and shows itself through a continuous process of concealing and revealing. Instead of having two realities – one authentic but unlivable, and one livable but always inauthentic – we thus instead have one reality that manifests itself from itself in and as a particular “degree” of earth and world.

Guided by faithfulness to the event, phenomenology directs us back to the accomplishment of the reality of the everyday, but now with a renewed sense of this accomplishment as neither the product of a subjective act or of an objective process, but of a gathering brought about as a temporal event. As Strasser says, “the mystery [the earth, what withdraws, what gives itself] lies no longer in a world behind the world; it does not hide behind the reality of bodies, sense data, or socio-historical processes,” instead, “the mystery occurs among us, near us and, to some extent, through us” (ibid, p. 69). To remain descriptive of what gives itself now means to follow the happening of an experience without absolute ground, without absolute beginning and without absolute end, and therefore to follow an experience that is always *liminal* or *in process*.

Methodological Principles of a Phenomenology of the Event

At this point, the philosophical argument for a phenomenology of the event and its methodological implications can be summarized as follows:

- The strife of lived experience takes place as a double reduction of subject and object.

- The double reduction transforms the subject in and through a transformation of the object, and transforms the object in and through a transformation of the subject, leaving both without a ground or identity in themselves.
- The result of the double reduction is the materialization of an “event,” an occurrence or happening of subject and object through which both come into being, each as a result of the other.
- The double reduction is always taking place. Whenever there “is” an experience, a double reduction has happened and an event is occurring or taking place.
- Every experience can therefore be led back to the originating moment of its own event, which it always covers over *to some degree*.
- Not grasping the event of our own coming into being is itself a result of a double reduction; it is the event of becoming claimed by the “thing” as a practical-existential, typological, theoretical or calculative subject who lives or has an experience rather than being claimed by an experience which has the capacity to transform oneself “from the ground up.”
- The more the event becomes a mutual appropriation of subject and object within a reified world of pre-existing identities, the less the event shows itself from itself and the more it shows itself from within a horizon that is presupposed in advance and sets limits on the degree to which experience can show itself as event. Although no experience is ever without some phenomenological truth, the eventing of a particular experience (the process by which something comes into being) can nevertheless be *more* or *less* concealed.

- Phenomenologists like Jean-Luc Marion, have argued that certain experiences have a higher degree of *eventness* (Marion, 2002a). The highest degree of eventness happens when one has an experience that brings one into being in a new way and thus transforms the very subject who is having the experience. Such experiences can be identified in many life situations such as falling in love, laughing and crying, therapeutic encounters, the experience of insight, and, as I will show next, flirting.
- Saturated experiences reveal the non-subjective origin of lived experience and provide us with phenomenological evidence for the validity of the phenomenological reduction to the event, just like anxiety and nausea became methodologically privileged experiences in Heidegger's and Sartre's phenomenologies, respectively.
- The event becomes important not as a phenomenon to be understood in itself, as if it were an independent "thing," but as an *explanans* or ground for the emergence of everyday experience in and through which it both manifests itself and holds itself back.
- The event is thus always the event of some concrete experience to which it falls prey and which actualizes it to some degree. It cannot be separated from what Strasser (1969) has called "the drama of everyday life," for it is in this drama that it shows itself and always only in relation to this drama that it can be understood. Phenomenology is thus always an *empirical* or *existential* phenomenology that proceeds from concrete instances of everyday experiences, while seeking to

understand these experiences as concealment-revealments of the event, and hence as “degrees of eventness” rather than acts of a subject or the causality of an object.

- In this sense, phenomenology does not lead us from the experience of the everyday to an underlying reality of fixed phenomenological essences (whether it be that of the essential structure of human subjectivity or perceived things), but leads us back to the continuous renewal of the falling prey of an event that never shows itself in itself but always shows itself as a degree of itself.
- Phenomenology thus essentially becomes a second order description of the double reduction at work in the everyday, which can be evaluated in terms of how much or how little gets disguised about its happening moment.
- A phenomenology of the event is thus rooted in the metaphysical eventing of difference (strife), which can never as such be captured in a final or comprehensive experience, but can only continue to show itself through ever new happenings of concealment-revelment.

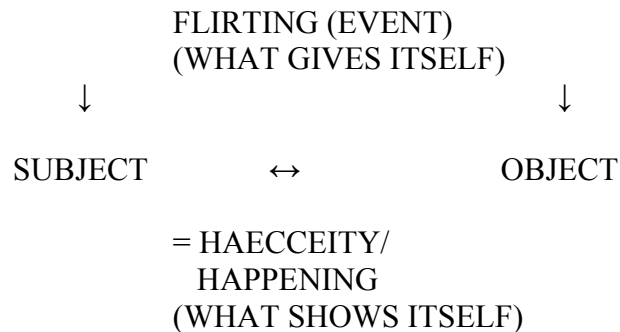
Chapter 8

Existential Analysis of Flirting as Event: Method

Studying Flirting as a Liminal Experience

The question “what *is* flirting?” which asks about the phenomenal nature or being of that lived experience that we designate by the name of flirting, does *not* aim at discovering the essence of an objective process or of a type of subjective experience. Such “presuppositions” about flirting are, as we have seen, still presupposing too much, trying to make flirting’s phenomenal nature show itself within an understanding of flirting as “act” or “behavior.” A phenomenologist following the understanding of lived experience as a liminal experience, instead seeks to study flirting as a process or strife between subject and object through which something “happens” that involves both subject and object but is irreducible to either. The *isness* of flirting does, in other words, not consist of a subjective intent that reveals its meaning for a subject or of certain biological or physiological causalities that reduce it to its objective determinants. Instead, as an event, the essence of flirting can only be said to consist of its happening. The happening itself is not merely a new “thing” to be studied, but is the process by which flirting shows itself in concrete subjectivities, objects and others that are gathered together into a flirtatious situation. Flirting thus designates a number of flirtatious situations or gatherings of private, public, subjective, intersubjective, objective, emotional, practical, typological, theoretical, and calculative experiences that hold

subject and object or subject and other together in particular event-like individuations (haecceities). These events or gatherings, which may display various degrees of eventness versus concealedness, can no longer be considered to be “subjective experiences.” They refer to “liminal experiences” through which the subject first becomes a subject at the same time as the object or the other first becomes this particular object or other. From this perspective, the lived experience of being a subject who thinks “how do I make that other person like me?” no longer refers to the subjective act of having a thought about an other. Instead it refers to an “event of thought” in which the other as an object of thought and the self as a thinker become gathered or appropriated to each other in and through a specific “site” that defines a haecceity or happening. We can depict this new phenomenological order of things as follows:



In this depiction, flirting as “what gives itself,” gives itself from a place exterior to the subject who flirts or the objective mechanisms presumed to cause it. Flirting now happens through an encounter that actualizes subject and object in and through a degree of belongingness that holds together a flirtatious situation, experience or haecceity. Haecceity, as you might recall, was Duns Scotus’ term for an individuation of an

impersonal and preindividual event, such as the weather, a season, or a party, which is irreducible to a sum total of objective elements and exceeds the confines of *a* subjective experience.

This definition of flirting contrasts, of course, with the traditional understanding of flirting as a subjective act or an objective behavior. Here the subject “has” a thought, feeling, or urge to flirt and is directing him or herself toward the other in a flirtatious way (subjective act), or the subject is being determined from without by objective processes or by the other as cause (objective behavior). Such a perspective can be depicted as follows:



Within this traditional view, flirting is not itself the event that brings subject and object or subject and other into being in a particular way. Instead an objective identity and causality or a subjective agent or subjectivity is said to preexist flirting and to cause or initiate it. The liminality, which we have defined flirting as having, is here a phenomenon that happens within an ontology of the subject or the object. It is thus misinterpreted as a period of uncertainty within the subject’s relation to itself or as a stage of indeterminacy belonging to a pre-defined course of natural events.

The purpose of my phenomenological analysis of flirting is to unconceal flirting in a way that does not hide its event-like character by starting from an a priori humanism or subjectivism, on the one hand, or an a priori materialism or objectivism, on the other hand. By presupposing less as a starting point, the idea is that my phenomenological vantage point will let the phenomenon of flirting be revealed more fully, that is, as less

clouded by the unwarranted metaphysical assumptions of a more traditional stock of knowledge that has previously covered it over.

Data

In my analysis of flirting as a liminal experience, I will proceed from concrete, everyday manifestations of flirting. In order to access these experiences, I will make use of three types of data: (a.) the descriptions of events of flirting by research participants recruited specifically for my project, (b.) my own autobiographical experience of flirting as documented by my own description of a time when I flirted, and (c.) phenomenological reflections on flirting and related phenomena retrieved from literary, philosophical and phenomenological sources, including but not limited to sources already used in my phenomenological analysis of intentionality. To provide a more in-depth description of each of these components of my study, I will address them each in turn.

The Collection of Third Party Descriptions

Following the recommendation of phenomenological researcher Amedeo Giorgi (2009), I attempted to study the phenomenal nature of flirting mainly on the basis of third party descriptions. These were gathered over a period of four years from research participants at both Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and University of West Georgia in Carrollton, Georgia.

Giorgi recommends that phenomenological researchers use 3rd party descriptions as the data source for phenomenological reflection in an effort to move the study's findings toward increased generality. If the phenomenon is studied only on the basis of

one's own experience, likelihood is that the researcher will be blind to those variations of the phenomenon of a particular lived experience that transcend the researcher's own experience. By introducing other people's experiential accounts into the mix, I can thus better be said to study the phenomenon of flirting within a more general human potential for actualizing the event, than if I were to simply understand the experience in reference to my own particular horizon exclusively.

Research participants for my study were recruited without pre-screening criteria. I initially wanted just to get as many different descriptions as I could and leave screening decisions to after I had collected the descriptions. Due to convenience, participants consisted of willing classmates as well as students from a colleague's introduction to psychology class.

In each case, research participants were asked to write a description based on the following instructions: *Please think back on a specific time when you flirted with someone. Help me experience this time exactly as you did by describing in as great detail as you can what you were thinking and feeling from the moment leading up to the experience to when it ended.*

Two descriptions were from classmates in a graduate course on phenomenological research methods that I took at University of West Georgia in the Spring of 2004; five were from four graduate students in the doctoral program of clinical psychology at Duquesne University (one of whom wrote two accounts), and eight were from students in an undergraduate course of introductory psychology at Duquesne University offered by a colleague of mine. By the end I was thus in possession of 15 descriptions of flirting from 14 research participants.

All but the two descriptions of flirting collected at University of West Georgia were followed up by a clarifying interview. During each interview, research participants were handed a new version of their description. This new version contained markings after each segment of the text where I would like to ask a question. The research participant was instructed to read the account out loud and to stop each time they saw a marking. The purpose of the interview was to have research participants elaborate on the taken for granted horizons of their experience, as well as to obtain further contextual information that would be useful for situating the account within a broader understanding of the person's life. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and an hour, depending on the length of the written account and the extent to which participants were able to elaborate their accounts. IRB approval was obtained to gather the descriptions and conduct the interviews.

After transcribing the interviews and reading through all of the accounts, I found that 2 were descriptions of events that happened in high school, 10 were descriptions that happened during college in a campus-related setting, and 4 were descriptions of events that happened in late college or early adulthood outside of a campus-related setting. Out of these, I found that the two events from high school seemed to differ the most from the rest. They described more immature ways of entering into the event of flirting and were furthermore not as depthful and nuanced as most of the others. In the interest of keeping my study focused, I thus decided to discard these two accounts and to focus solely on what could now be defined as "flirting during college and young adulthood." Within this sample an additional account was discarded because it described three events in very scant detail instead of one in great depth. In the end, the sample used as the basis of my

analysis thus consisted of 12 descriptions of flirting all of which were transcribed and have been included in the appendix. The characteristics of this final sample can be represented as follows (original names replaced to protect anonymity of participants):

Name	Gender	Age	School	Year	Sexuality	Setting
Adam	Male	24	DU	Grad	Hetero	Bar
Benjamin	Male	n/a	UWG	Grad	Homo	Bar
Daniel	Male	41	UWG	Grad	Hetero	Restaurant
Greg	Male	28	DU	Grad	Hetero	Wedding
Jason	Male	21	DU	Undergrad	Hetero	Campus/ classroom
Josie (1)	Female	24	DU	Grad	Hetero	Campus/ dance
Josie (2)					Hetero	Campus/ dorm
Kevin	Male	23	DU	Grad	Hetero	Campus/ dorm
Matthew	Male	19	DU	Undergrad	Hetero	Campus/ party
Nicole	Female	18	DU	Undergrad	Hetero	Campus/ dorm
Sabrina	Female	21	DU	Undergrad	Hetero	Campus/ frat party
Veronica	Female	n/a	DU	Undergrad	Hetero	Campus/ frat party

This revised sample consists of research participants who were between 18 and 41 at the time when they submitted their descriptions (two did not specify their age). The participant who was 41 is here an outlier, since if we were to exclude him, the age range would be 18-28. All of the participants described incidents of flirting that took place at an earlier time in their life, most within very recent history. Unfortunately participants' ages when they flirted were not recorded. However, it was possible to group the accounts into different stages of life according to setting and according to whether the flirting took place during the early college years or during the time of graduate studies. Out of the accounts, 8 took place in a campus-related setting and 4 in a noncampus-related setting. The accounts that described flirting in a noncampus-related setting all took place when research participants were in graduate school, while those that described campus-related flirting took place during the research participants' undergraduate studies. Out of the total

sample, 7 of the descriptions were submitted by males and 5 by females (with one female submitting 2). Of these, only one account described a homosexual flirtatious encounter (between two males) whereas the rest described a heterosexual encounter. Two of the accounts were from students at University of West Georgia whereas 10 were from students at Duquesne University. All participants were Caucasian/ white.

Due to the characteristics of the sample, it is clear that I cannot claim to speak about flirting as a general phenomenon, but must confine my study to flirting in early adulthood in a predominantly white, heterosexual college population. The homogeneity of the sample could be viewed both as a strength and as a weakness. It is a strength insofar as it allows me to study the phenomenon of flirting in a more situated way in which I do not attempt to encompass too varied of an experience base under the same umbrella. It is a weakness in so far as it limits the generality of the study and excludes or limits descriptions from marginalized populations such as non-Caucasians, homosexuals, and people from lower socio-economic strata (without college education). It also excludes people from other stages in the life-cycle than the college years. Finally, even within the college population, my sample is rather skewed in that the majority of the research participants (8/10) were studying at a private Catholic University (Duquesne University), and since people at both Duquesne University and University of West Georgia had a predominant affiliation to the discipline of psychology. Nevertheless, I deem there to be a good distribution in the sample between undergraduates and graduates, males and females, as well as different ages. Upon reflection, all of the accounts described a flirtatious event that emerged from within a context of a broader sexual or romantic event. They thus exemplified instances of what we could call “romantic flirting”

as opposed to what Schefflen (1965) has called quasi-courtship and has defined as a displacement of flirting into a nonromantic context.

My Autobiographical Experience

My autobiographical experience of flirting also served as a valuable source of information for my project. As I have argued earlier, a hermeneutic epistemology assumes that access to a phenomenon is not best achieved by means of bracketing one's understanding, since one's own pre-understanding is a necessary precondition for any inquiry into a phenomenon. I know to a certain extent what flirting is because as a human being I have lived it and it has lived me, and it is this fact that affords me access to it.

The way I will use myself as a source of data in the analysis that follows can be divided into two parts:

First, I have access to my own description of flirting, which I undertook to write at an early stage of my project without knowing what my analysis would yield. The ensuing description (included in the appendix) will serve as a source of empirical evidence for certain of the themes that have been developed on the basis of the descriptions collected from research participants. Reading the descriptions from the research participants retroactively brought out facets of my own description that I would not necessarily have paid attention to without them, while my own description in turn helped verify and clarify certain themes in the research participants' descriptions. In accordance with the format of the other descriptions, here are the characteristics of my own contribution to the sample:

Name	Gender	Age	School	Year	Sexuality	Setting
Rune	Male	30	DU	Grad	Hetero	Campus

Second, many of the themes from the descriptions by the research participants were developed through a dialogue between my own sensibility toward the phenomenon of flirting in general and the data of the research participants' reported experiences. I was thus using myself to make sense of the completions or horizons of the third party descriptions as well as using these to refine my own sensibilities about my own experience. We could therefore say that I participated in an event or double reduction that both transformed me and transformed the data of the research participants. The process of this dialogue was located neither in me nor in the participants but in the event between us, in the meeting of horizons, as Gadamer (1975/2004) would say.

Use of Literature

The flirtatious event is never a static thing, but is always a transformation of previous events soon to be transformed by events to follow. The flirtatious event can therefore not be considered in isolation, but must be studied within a larger contextual understanding of other events that both precede it as its condition and either transform it or become transformed by it. Flirting may for example be both an event within a larger event of seduction, or may itself be the context for the smaller event of the kiss. This makes it necessary to study a range of related or neighboring phenomena when studying flirting. As will become apparent from my analysis, an adequate understanding of flirting requires a more thorough understanding of phenomena such as "the look," "the other," "the sexual incarnation of the flesh," "love," "erotic desire" and a wide range of other phenomena. These phenomena, were not the object of my study per se, but helped give shape to the haecceity of flirting, that is, the elements which flirting brings together into a

unique constellation. Phenomenological reflections on other phenomena drawn from the human, cultural, artistic, and philosophical imaginary were therefore used to enhance the empiricism of my study of flirting. Van Manen (1990) has called the use of phenomenological literature to open up a phenomenon for an “exegetical” phenomenological approach. I refer to such varied phenomenological literary sources as another source of data, because they were taken into account alongside my own account of flirting and the 12 accounts from my research participants. Using such literature as data has helped me to go beyond the mere brute descriptiveness of specific life-worldly experiences toward the invisible or tacit horizons that help us to make sense of these experiences. As Van Manen has stated in defense of this position, “the researcher needs to bring to the reflective process his or her personal lived experience as well as other possible experiential sources and material...” (p. 172).

Method of Analysis

Objective of Analysis

The objective of my analysis of flirting is to make a phenomenological interpretation of flirting that proceeds from the evidence of concrete descriptions of flirtatious situations as told to me by research participants. Living as they do toward their own horizoning of self, world and other, research participants may or may not experience flirting as an event. Nevertheless the “lived” dimension of their varied experiences remains, as I have argued in the philosophical part of the dissertation, the event of a mutual appropriation of subject and object. It is the task of my analysis to bring this event-like nature of flirting to the forefront while articulating it always only in relation to

the empirical evidence at hand. Hence, my analysis will involve two steps: First, I will seek to *thematize* how the research participants experienced the events of flirting that they were engaged in. Second, I will seek to thematize these experiences with a view toward what is “lived” in these experiences but not necessarily consciously understood. This second step will introduce a more reflective and interpretive dimension into the descriptions and will involve both the use of my own research subjectivity (data source b) and the understandings afforded me by the phenomenological reflections of other authors (data source c). The guiding principle of this second, more radical phenomenological unconcealment, will be the liminal interpretation of flirting as an event. My analysis can thus be described as the outcome of a hermeneutic dialogue between the thematizations of flirting made by research participants themselves, and the phenomenological thematization of these personal experiences, which seeks to lead them back to their liminal genesis or “eventness.”

A Note on the Phenomenological Concept of Thematization

For the phenomenological researcher Max Van Manen (1990), a thematization is a way of fixing or ordering the disjunctive elements of an experience so it makes sense or can be understood. To order an experience is to identify elements of this experience and propose a way that they are related within a larger whole. This larger whole is what defines a horizon for the discrete elements and endows them with their overall meaning or sense. According to Heidegger, it is this horizoning that defines human participation in the manifestation of phenomena since the horizon is always defined by a human way of being related to things through practical, theoretical, emotional, and aesthetic possibilities.

Every thematization of self, other, and world thus includes a way of being human within it, that is, a particular way of projecting the meaning of something worldly in terms of the meaning it has for a subject. When viewed in this light, the novelty of my approach is that I do not assume, as some phenomenologists do, that the projection of meaning is the result of an exclusively human will, since as I have argued, every projection is already a response to a way of being claimed by the world and thus to the agency of things. It is this double reduction, by means of which I am called into a particular horizon that reveals me to myself at the same time as I provide a horizon for the thing that reveals me, that gives rise to the need for a further phenomenological reduction than the reduction to the meaning a thing has for *me*. The ultimate phenomenological horizon is thus that of a “liminal horizon” into which I am admitted at the same time as the thing is revealed. To truly understand human activity from its source is thus to view it from within the experience of the event through which I as projecting agent am first born. This is why my phenomenological analysis will seek to thematize flirting not just from the perspective of the subject who flirts and has reported an experience of flirting, but from the perspective of the very event to which this subject who wills, thinks, values, and feels owes its existence as “willing, thinking, valuing and feeling.”

Outline of Analysis

In the presentation of the results of my analysis, and in keeping with the principles stated above, I have made use of a division between stating an overarching phenomenological interpretation, which is then corroborated with evidence and exemplifications from my three data sources (existential thematizations of the

interpretation). I have come up with eleven phenomenological interpretations of flirting that find support in the empirical descriptions by the research participants. Whereas these eleven interpretations will be stated using jargon from the philosophical part of the dissertation, the empirical themes will be formulated in such a way as to stay faithful to the actual experiences of the research participants. This means that the empirical themes will retain the language of the “first person singular” and will remain faithful to the psychological reduction when this is the reduction through which research participants experienced the event. However, the thematizations will not just be based on what the research participants explicitly understood about their experiences, but will use a phenomenological sensibility as a means of excavating what is unstated but assumed in the descriptions. This will lead us toward a deeper understanding of what is “lived” in these experiences. At the end of my analysis, I will thus be able to provide both a phenomenological and an existential description of flirting considered as “a liminal experience.”

We can summarize these different levels of my analysis as follows:

- A. Phenomenological Interpretation
- B. Evidence and exemplification of phenomenological interpretation through life-world accounts (existential themes)
- C. General description of flirting as a liminal experience (phenomenological description and existential description)

Level A can here be said to be a more reduced level than level B, while level B can be said to retain a closer emphasis on the existential ways of actualizing flirting. Whereas level A is the phenomenological interpretation of level B, level B is the existential actualization of level A.

Results

The eleven phenomenological interpretations and their substantiation through concrete examples or “existential themes,” can be summarized as follows, with each interpretation represented by a heading that captures its focus, and each of the 55 themes presented under the headings they serve to elaborate:

1. Flirting as a Concealing and Revealing of Subjective Desire:

Flirting happens as a concealing-revealing event that shows the self as a non-identity between a sexualized subjective desire and a practical everyday intentionality that hides this desire.

Theme 1:

In flirting, I simultaneously or alternately express my subjective desire for the other and hide it beneath a practical everyday goal-oriented intention. I do so, by making use of ambiguous statements in which my desire can both be expressed and hide itself behind an innocuous content that veils it, or by going back and forth between unveiling my desire and seeming disinterested.

Theme 2:

Flirting requires that the space of desire be kept open and indeterminate for the encounter with the other to remain flirtatious. For flirting to remain flirtatious, a specific erotic or romantic intention must remain nonspecific or undeclared and thus remain irreducible to a clear subjective intent. This makes flirtatious desire something that is maintained in and through an “event” by which both I and the other can discover *if we want, what we want, and how strongly we want*, without committing to a definite desire in advance. In other words, we discover our desires in and through the event of flirting rather than use flirting as a way to achieve the objective of a known subjective intent. When flirting *does* generate a specific subjective intent that I commit to in an absolute way, flirting loses its flirtatiousness and turns into something else. It now becomes the subjective act of seduction or courtship, for example.

Theme 3:

As the event of an indeterminate desire, flirting reveals me to myself in the state of a desire that has not yet fallen prey to a practical intention. In flirting I am thus revealed as existing in an *exuberance* or *excess* beyond the practical projects and purposes through which I typically discover myself in the everyday. Through the suspension of a practical everyday intention and the discovery of myself as existing beyond a definite practical end goal of things, the world does not lose its meaningfulness, but becomes ever the more meaningful. The world is now revealed as a world that is *for us* and in which *we* are the central agents, unbound by any necessity to choose one course of action over any other.

Theme 4:

Because flirtatious desire always remains a desire that has not yet been expressed clearly and has thus not yet become a subjective intention, flirting reveals both self and other in a state of uncertainty. A clear desire is only intimated and not explicitly declared, or is hinted at and disavowed at the same time. As long as we are flirting, I thus never have certainty of what the other wants, but can only infer or interpret this by relying on incomplete evidence and my own “hunch,” “sense” or “intuition.”

Theme 5:

The elusiveness of the other’s desire gives rise to a natural tendency to want to pin it down by reducing it to a “subjective intent.” I desperately want to know to what extent the other is *really* interested in me. Since flirtatiousness by definition robs me of the possibility of being absolutely certain about this, I am left trying to calculate the probability that the other subjectively desires me. It is this aspect of flirting which is sometimes emphasized the most in those guides to flirting that want to turn it into a process that can be “mastered” (Mystery, 2007; Strauss, 2005), or which overemphasize the cognitive processing involved in flirting. From the perspective of the event, however, such a reduction to a subjective intention is considered a response to the uncertainty of flirting rather than its cause. It would thus be to misunderstand the phenomenal nature of flirting to reduce it to this subjective, rational, or calculative “degree” of its own manifestation. Nevertheless, the attentiveness to signs of the other’s attraction and the subsequent need for analysis of these signs was integral to all of the flirting accounts and thus plays an important part of flirting’s way of showing itself.

Theme 6:

In flirting, things lose the meanings they have in the practical everyday, where they serve as the practical end goals of our activity. Instead they now reveal themselves as *props* or mediums for communicating my desire and showing something about myself. What becomes important is now no longer the thing’s intrinsic value, but what I am able to convey about myself and my desire through the thing. Thus, it becomes unimportant what exactly we talk about as long as I come across as interested or interesting and make the right impression. This suspension of the intrinsic value of the thing gives flirting a manipulative quality, because I may now only feign interest in a topic of conversation or *appear* to be interested in what the other is interested in. Indeed, flirting *can* become a mere tactic to say and do the right things and thus turn into a subjective intent to manipulate or deceive. In most cases, however, it is simply the case that my interest in the other and my interest in being interesting to the other, overrides my interests in the object world. The loss of interest in the content world does therefore not have to be indicative of an intent to deceive, but can also be the mere expression of an interest in the other that makes the contents through which I encounter the other secondary to the actual encounter with the other.

2. The Discovery of Self and Other through Flesh:

Flirting takes place as an erotic event involving the aesthetic completion of self through other and other through self. It involves moments of a double reduction of the event as flesh.

Theme 7:

In flirting, I communicate erotic desire through an excess in my practical intention by means of which I am able to “touch” the other while receiving myself back as touched. Using a word from Deleuze & Guattari (1983, p. 492) I will ascribe the erotic quality of this excess to its *haptic* nature. Hapticity here designates that the erotic is communicated insofar as my sense organs linger sufficiently in relation to their objects so as to touch and be touched by them in return. Hapticity ascribes the capacity to touch and be touched to sense organs other than merely the hands. I can thus just as well touch an other in and through my eyes as I can touch the other through my hands. For example, whereas the theoretical look distances and the practical look “looks around” for things to do with the object (Heidegger), the desirous look touches the object, or makes eye *contact*. In relation to our hands, hapticity does not refer to a simple “grasping,” but to a transformation of the hand into the touch that “lingers” and wants to be touched in return. As Linschoten (1969) writes: “the sensitivity inherent in the hand is passed over in the manipulation; in touching and handling something we do not feel our own hand, only the touched and handled thing. It is only in the sexual revalidation of the body that the sensitivity proper to the hand is first materialized as erotic sensitivity” (p. 175). Words can also be haptic, such as when they are no longer intended to communicate a certain content but are used to touch or evoke a response in the other or used to bring us closer. In addition, space can become palpable to us as something other than just a distance that we traverse. By leaning into another’s personal space, this space becomes a space between *us* and allows me to touch and be touched by it. In all of these examples, the haptic excess over a practical intention that merely passes through and over the body, calls me into the tactile erotic event of the flesh.

Theme 8:

The haptic look is often interpreted as one of the first “sure tell” signs that the other is attracted to me and the absence of eye contact is often interpreted as a sign that an erotic intention is missing.

Theme 9:

In flirting, *the blush* is a particular way in which a haptic intent of the look is revealed. I blush because I have been caught touching the other with my look, without knowing if the other would want to be touched this way. I feel slightly embarrassed that I have looked too long, too much, too penetratingly or too intently and that my haptic intent has therefore been unmasked: My haptic look is looked at and exposed as a subjective desire. In many cases, the haptic intent that is thereby exposed is interpreted as a sign of my attraction to the other and is therefore often considered to be flattering to the other.

Theme 10:

It is only in relation to a real or perceived haptic desire from the other person that I can receive myself as sexually attractive. Sexual attraction is thus not a property that can exist outside of an event that can sustain me as sexually desirable to someone. For many people it is thus itself desirable to be sexually desired by someone and my desire for the other person often increases and decreases in relation to how desirable I feel to the other person. When I do feel sexually desired by an other person, a sense of myself as alluring and attractive is often affirmed, giving me a feeling that is often experienced as a delightful sense of my own sexual power over others.

Theme 11:

The sexual advance from an other can sometimes invoke an encounter of the flesh that produces repulsion or distaste in me rather than pleasure. In such moments, hapticity will lead to rejection and distancing rather than closeness.

Theme 12:

In the haptic encounter I relate to the other without distance since I receive the other through the immediacy of feeling rather than as object or tool. Physical attraction could be said to be the result of a haptic relationship with an other (whether entertained in imagination or enacted in actuality), in which I experience a relationship without distance to some valued aspect or idea of the other. I am touched by some aspect of the other, thereby eradicating the other's distance to me. This makes attraction an "immediate" phenomenon (love at first sight) and makes it describable as a "spark," a "vibe," an "instant," or something we are "struck" by.

Theme 13:

In the haptic encounter between two people, it can often be difficult to locate the "attraction" in me or in the other⁵, for my desire is often a response to a "seduction" by the other (or an aspect of the other) and the other's desire is often a response to a seduction by me (or an aspect of me.) As Linschoten (1969) therefore argues, "Desire and seduction belong together, motivate one another reciprocally, and are so interwoven that it is difficult to distinguish between them" (p. 192), and as he states elsewhere, "The sexual desire is an attraction between *the sexual landscape* and the person who is bodily related to it. Properly speaking one cannot say where the desire emerges perceptibly except in this desiring dialogue itself" (p. 155). If my haptic desire does not emanate from within me or from an object external to me, we must therefore say that it is produced in and through an event: I only discover what I desire in response to my reaction to the other and hence as a product of an encounter. This means that the flesh calls me into itself prior to any subjective will or objective causation. This can be said to be true in several ways:

A. I sometimes discover that I am attracted only when the other's attraction allows me to be open to and recognize my own attraction.

⁵ This finding is consonant with the research on "interaction units" in flirting as conducted by Grammer, Kruck & Magnusson (1998).

B. At other times I only discover that I am attracted because I catch myself having already responded haptically to the other prior to my conscious intention to do so.

C. Finally, in flirting I am not necessarily pursuing a particular outcome, but rather setting out to discover whether or not I want to pursue a particular outcome. In this sense, flirting is not only animated by a particular subjective desire, but is also a way to discover what my subjective desire is.

3. The Valued Uniqueness of the Other:

In flirting, one relates to the other as a valued future of being a self beyond what one can project, predict or control. What is attractive about the other is not merely what shows itself of the other, but also what remains to be seen and, ultimately, what remains beyond a future possibility that one can grasp.

Theme 14:

Attraction is always sustained in and through the valued uniqueness of the other person who presents him or herself as different in some remarkable way and therefore as not just an anonymous self who is part of a general crowd (the they). The other seems rare or positively unusual and, as with most things rare, this increases the other's value and makes me want to be near him or her.

Theme 15:

What is valuable about the other is not just a sum of the other's known characteristics. Initially we know the other only through very few characteristics or signifiers and have to complete these signifiers by filling in the gaps in our understanding by our own imagination. In many ways, our attraction is sustained in and through such an imaginative completion, for as Scheler (1923/2008) has commented, "love only occurs when, upon the values already acknowledged as 'real' there intervenes a movement, an intention, toward potential values still 'higher' than those already given and presented" (p. 153). Consequently, as he states, "seeing the goodness in someone, seeing beyond what is presented, we love a truth or reality which has yet to present itself—an 'idealized paradigm of value'" (p. 154). This last statement indicates that what we are really attracted to when we are attracted to others is something futural and not something actual. This future of the other is not a simple projection of a specific future on my part, but of a possibility that transcends my imagination.

Theme 16:

The imagined other allows me to relate myself to a future of uncertain but exciting possibilities that transcend my own being-in-the-world. Despite my attempt to imagine who the other person is, he or she remains an open-ended enigma yet to be unraveled and understood. In this sense, I am relating to the other as an absolute Other beyond my projections and predictions—a source of the completely unknown. This excess of the other by means of which the other remains unphenomenalizable or beyond my experience (what Levinas (1963/1986) calls "a face") can itself fuel my attraction. Hence, when we

flirt, part of what entices us may exactly be that we do not know where it may lead, or that the faith of what will be cannot be predicted but is itself what is at stake. Hence, as Simmel (1923/1987) writes, “We also experience chance as an allure, an enticing gamble for the favor of the incalculable powers” (p. 143). Furthermore, we could even say that it is what remains concealed about the other person that constitutes the other person as unique and therefore valuable, since what is offered in actuality can be offered by someone else as well, while what “remains to be offered” is a unique personal secret belonging only to this particular individual. Hence, as Linschoten (1969) has written, “Even in the most intimate relationship something belonging to the other keeps escaping me; and perhaps this is what is most essential: that which makes him or her this unique person, this ‘personal secret’” (p. 166).

Theme 17:

In and through the other as indeterminable possibility (enigma), or a possibility beyond any I can project, I can receive myself from a place beyond myself, making the other a source of self-transcendence. Through the other as enigma I become related to a future other than mine and, as a result, a potential for being a self beyond myself. Whereas Heidegger (1927/1996) says that it is my being toward death that individuates me the most since it makes every future one that I live out of my own finitude, flirting seems to offer a way of receiving myself from beyond my own finitude. Here, the other offers relief from myself and from the solitude of my own finite existence by puncturing my egological circle and putting me into a relationship with an infinity, an absolute beyond, or an excess. The other thus offers the possibility of discovering myself from a point beyond myself and of coming into being as someone who arrives at myself from elsewhere. In this sense, the other allows me to become myself from a future that is not my own.

Theme 18:

My attraction to the other often waxes and wanes in accordance with how real or perceived characteristics of the other modify my projected fantasy of the other and the possibilities of being a self sustained by it.

4. The Establishment of Commonalities:

Flirting is sustained only as long as the other puts one into an enticing relation to what is not yet known (the other as enigma) and as long as the value one places upon what is not known is not so high as to make one feel insignificant in comparison and therefore fearful of approaching the other. Both too much difference and too much sameness thus eradicates the flirtatiousness of the encounter.

Theme 19:

The valued imagined characteristics of the other can make me feel inferior and insignificant in comparison. The contradiction here seems to be that the more unique and valuable the other person is perceived to be, the less he or she would have a need for someone like me. As the value attributed to the other increases, I may therefore become

increasingly unable to interact with the person who now seems to “be out of my league.” As a result, the other may now instead become the object of a painful longing that reminds me of what I am lacking in the face of the promise of another world whose possibilities can never become my own. I now receive myself as lacking or cut-off and not as a positive possibility for being a self. As Albertine says about his love for someone, in a novel by Proust, “her whole life... inspired me with desire; a painful desire, because I felt that it was unrealizable, although it was intoxicating” (quoted in Linschoten, 1969, p. 165).

Theme 20:

Perhaps to lessen the anxiety of approaching an other whose value has made them seem beyond my reach, it becomes important to establish commonalities between us that make us seem more like each other. If I myself am highly valued by the other, I might lessen the other’s approach anxiety by making self-disparaging remarks, showing my human side by blushing when the other looks at me, revealing something about myself that makes the other identify with me, or evoking the comfort of well-known elements from the other’s past relationships.

5. Flight into Performance and Calculation:

In response to one’s valuing of the other, it becomes important to be valued by this other in return. This gives rise both to a desire to show oneself as a unique individual who stands out from the crowd and to hide one’s uniqueness due to a fear that the other might reject or devalue one if one doesn’t. Consequently, one often takes flight into a performance self, into social act and character types, or into calculative considerations of how to be.

Theme 21:

Sometimes my desire to be liked by the other paralyzes me or makes me afraid of showing who I am because I am afraid that the other will judge me or devalue me in some way. Such fears of judgment can inhibit me greatly, meaning that instead of risking rejection, I shrink in the face of this possibility, stopping myself short of evoking a situation where the other could judge me. I may, as Stevens (2007) writes, impose limitations on my self-showing (become inhibited) so as “not to wake up the symptom of anxiety” (p. 148).

Theme 22:

In many cases, the fear of having my singular being devalued by the other person leads me to hide aspects of myself, arrogate qualities to myself that I do not have, accentuate positive aspects of myself or abandon myself completely to an image of myself that is defined by what I think the other wants instead of who I really am.

Theme 23:

Anxiety about the exposure of my uniqueness often leads me to take flight into a calculative way of being. Instead of showing who I am or acting as I naturally would, I

project a calculative or stereotypical horizon for what the other person is likely to appreciate or not appreciate about me, so I can act the part. This horizon may be projected in a more general way as the typical male or female characteristics “one” should demonstrate to be valued by a person of a specific gender or, in a more specific way, as what this type of person (sports fan, dark philosopher etc) is likely to value. By acting on the basis of such projected *act types* and *characterological types* (Schutz, 1932/1967), I start to relate to the other and to myself as *types* of people.

Theme 24:

Since flirting always involves the expression of erotic desire in some form, it would be natural that many of the characterological types and act types, through which one both hides oneself and shows oneself in flirting, pertain to gender stereotypes. Consequently, flirting tends to be a gendered event in which something about my masculinity or femininity gets decided.

Theme 25:

When we feel spurred by our need to impress to act the part of a self that seems incongruent with our customary self or who we normally think of ourselves as being, this introduces an underlying fear of being exposed or found out—of being seen as “pretending” to be what I am not or of having my perceived negative qualities exposed.

Theme 26:

Sometimes objectifications of myself from past encounters with others claim me as obstacles to my desire to become seen in a different way by new others.

6. Flirting as a Leap of Faith:

Flirting tends toward an absolute limit of having one’s faith decided from “elsewhere” or from a point beyond one’s control. Such moments happen when one offers oneself without any guarantee that one’s offering will be returned. In such moments, which I will describe as “leaps of faith,” one has to let go of one’s subjective control and await one’s destiny from the uncertain response of the other.

Theme 27:

A leap of faith can either occur naturally, when my doubt about the other’s response to the communication of my desires is almost completely eradicated and one thing just leads to another, but can also be a high stakes gamble in which I dare to declare my interest without certainty of what the other’s answer will be.

Theme 28:

When there is still doubt about whether or not the other person will return my interest in them, the leap is felt as a barrier of uncertainty that I must push myself through to avoid becoming paralyzed by it. To act despite uncertainty in the face of possible rejection requires *courage*.

Theme 29:

The ultimate “leap” is the leap of giving an unequivocal sign that I am interested in the other person beyond the present context. Unlike some “leaps” that can always be retracted, the ultimate leap communicates that I am serious about the other or committed to my desire for the other. It is thus a leap that turns the playful discovery of desire into a desire for a more serious commitment and in doing so ends the flirtation and turns it into something else, such as a committed relationship, a sexual encounter or an official date. The ultimate leap is the time of asking the other the question “will you?” without absolute certainty of how the other will respond.

Theme 30:

If I offer myself and am rejected, the feeling is often one of “shame” and “humiliation.” I might feel stupid, of diminished worth, or socially inadequate. However, I might also feel relief from the fact that at least now I know.

Theme 31:

A common way of ascertaining the certainty of the other’s desire for me is through what I will call a *test of free will* in which an opportunity for the other to show that they choose me over others is created. The purpose here is to discover the strength of the other’s interest in me in and through the other’s free choice to stay even when they could leave or to say yes even when they could say no. The other’s desire for me is believed more strongly the more the other’s free will to stay or say yes is maintained within situations that are unique to the two of us, for in such situations, the other’s choice is more likely to be a choice for me rather than to be attributable to happenstance. The fact that the other person sits next to me when she could choose not to is thus not nearly as specific to me as the fact that she stays even when I touch her knee.

Theme 32:

Wanting a commitment from the other in advance of showing my own can lead me to actively try to elicit the other’s desire without revealing much about my own. The paradox here is that I can adopt a seemingly passive role in which I let the other talk or show themselves to me while nevertheless remaining the active one or the one in control.

Theme 33:

The anxiety of being devalued or rejected by the other can also be lessened if one lowers the stakes of what is being ventured in and through flirting. If the possibility through which I discover the other is the possibility of getting married or of saving myself from myself, the stakes are obviously higher than if I am just looking for someone to talk to and seeing where things might go from there. Anxiety in the face of the leap can thus be diminished by not getting my hopes up too high and not thinking too far into the future. In other situations, already having a horizon with a different other can do the trick.

7. Flirting as an Individualizing Encounter:

The flirtatious encounter individualizes one beyond the average everyday way of being a self like everybody else and endows one with an individuality and uniqueness that only another's singular desire can call one into. Through the other's desire that singles one out and makes it impossible for another to answer in one's place, one becomes one's most unique self.

Theme 34:

A flirtatious encounter in which the other singles me out makes me feel valued for my uniqueness. The other's desire, which might as well have been directed at others around me, is directed exclusively at me and that makes me feel chosen and therefore special.

Theme 35:

The value of being picked increases with the sense that this person, who has picked me, has picked me *instead* of others. For this to happen the person must be able to pick others and not just pick me by default or because they cannot have anyone else. They must have exercised a choice, for it is the other's *choice* of me that makes me feel special.

Theme 36:

The erotic or haptic dimension of flirting may have special prominence in singularizing both participants of the flirtation, since a haptic desire seems more unique to the person who is touched than a more general interest in someone's conversation, for example. Linschoten (1969), for example, argues that "Sexual desire asks for the person and thus asks for expression, not for his activities" (p. 195). I interpret this to mean that haptic desires express interest in me as the desiring and expressive agent of my activities, and not simply in my activities. I thus feel wanted for who I am as a unique individual and not for my activities which could easily be substituted or replicated by someone else.

Theme 37:

To have had a flirtatious encounter, even if it is not pursued beyond its time specific context and result in a commitment, still gives us a feeling that something very special has happened between us. We met somebody in a way that seemed more personal, and individualized us more, than most other encounters in our everyday lives.

8. The Importance of Good Timing:

In flirting there is often a sense that what is emerging between oneself and the other has a time and course of its own and that both oneself and the other are participating in a temporal phenomenon or event of which neither is exclusively in charge. To keep the flirtatiousness of the encounter alive, one must therefore master the art of timing, which means being neither too fast nor too slow.

Theme 38:

In flirting there is a definite sense that one is participating in a temporal event between self and other that has its own progression. There is a limit to how long one can flirt without the flirtatious energy losing its momentum. Consequently, if one does not cease upon the readiness of the other person to move the relationship toward further intimacy and commitment, one eventually loses the opportunity to ever do so.

Theme 39:

The need to move the flirtation forward toward increasing intimacy and commitment in due time also invokes a concern to not move it forward too quickly, since doing so runs the risk of transgressing the other person's boundaries and, as a result, becoming perceived by the other as socially inappropriate. The concern with finding a way to relax the boundaries between self and other (move the flirtation forward) without imposing myself thus becomes a major focal point guiding my actions.

Theme 40:

Flirting is never an isolated event. It always takes place as a transformation of other events. Only when the conditions are right does the proper situation present itself for a flirtatious encounter to be able to take place. This means that the attempt to create the right conditions for a flirtatious event to take place may sometimes actively be pursued or, conversely, that conditions outside of one's control make the flirtatious event impossible.

9. Breaking Down Boundaries through Affective Resonance:

The sense of intimacy that is needed in order to break down the barriers between people who flirt is not accomplished by sharing information with each other, but by encountering oneself and the other in and through a shared world or intentionality (having a good experience together). Flirtatiousness either arises out of the comfort of such shared situations, which alleviates one's fear of rejection by the other, or involves the conscious attempt to create such shared situations, as part of a tactic to eradicate one's separateness from the other.

Theme 41:

One of the ways to loosen the boundaries between two initially separate individuals is to create moments of shared enjoyment or "affective resonance" in which both subjects can meet each other in and through some shared "intentionality" or mode of being directed toward a shared object or content.

Theme 42:

As affective resonance gets established, the ability to relax with another person increases and one starts to feel less afraid of showing oneself to the other and communicating one's desires more directly and less ambiguously. I feel more certain that the other will not judge me or reject me when I discover myself in and through an affective resonance with the other.

Theme 43:

Through affective resonance we get to know each other through our being-in-the-world together rather than through the transfer of information and intentions from one mind to another. Since we discover each other most intimately in and through being in a shared situation, intimacy is therefore in reality quite ex-timate, or quite worldly. As Merleau-Ponty (1964/2000) says, “It is from this lawn before me that I think I catch sight of the impact of the green on the vision of another, it is through the music that I enter into his musical emotion, it is the thing itself that opens me unto the access to the private world of another” (p. 11).

10. Dialogue between Passion and Reason:

Flirting calls one away from one’s average everyday existence and into an exploratory intentionality of possibilities that need not be committed to. As these playful possibilities gradually come to represent real courses of action that one can choose, practical concerns from one’s average everyday reenter the picture and ultimately bring the flirtatiousness to a close.

Theme 44:

Flirting brings both rational and imaginative horizons into play. I find myself responding to the call of the other and my attraction at the same time as I resist surrendering completely to it due to rational and practical concerns about what such a surrender might entail. Hence the dialogue between reason and passion, or between practical concerns and the excitement of a possibility beyond my own, is often an ongoing tension in me when I flirt.

Theme 45:

Flirting can only sustain itself as long as it is lived as nonserious, playful and exploratory. Seriousness kills flirtatiousness because it brings back rational everyday concerns too soon, before I have had a chance to discover what I want or if I want.

Theme 46:

A sense of reality/ practical concern also enters into flirting in the sense that the more time I invest in flirting, the more intimate of an encounter I will have had with this person, and increased intimacy with another person is generally considered to commit both parties more to each other. It becomes harder to pull away or end a connection, the closer one gets to another or the longer I have led the other person on in an effort to discover what I want. All of a sudden pulling away makes me feel bad, and I now feel more bound not to disappoint the other person’s expectations.

Theme 47:

When the possibilities I have flirted with become definite possibilities, this brings back concerns from the practical everyday that had not needed to be considered until then. My old commitments and longer standing everyday horizons, which the call into flirtation has interrupted, now reemerge as a sense of “reality” that sets itself over and against the other

horizon of the merely playful possibility of something romantic happening. I now begin to analyze whether or not pursuing a possibility with the other is opportune for me when considered from within my practical everyday horizon. When this everyday horizon clashes with the horizon opened up to me by the other, it is typically the practical horizon with its plans and rational deliberations about what I want that wins out.

11. Flirting as a Social Event Involving Others as well as the Other:

The discovery of one's desire in flirting is not just a matter of personal deliberation and self discovery. What one wants and what one likes is often mediated by standards of worth that one receives from others or measure in relation to others.

Theme 48:

In flirting, the other does not merely represent for us a concrete person, but also a person who receives his or her standards of worth from "others." Consequently, when we flirt, we are not just flirting with each other but also flirting within a general social horizon of what one *should* do of how one *should* act. We may, in other words, not just offer ourselves up to another person's judgments of us, but also stage ourselves to third parties, who either observe us flirting or serve as the imagined basis of the other's opinions of us in the sense that we imagine that the other values what "they" value.

Theme 49:

When we flirt we are often aware of how we measure up to others. Others are thus often present when we flirt as a standard of comparison that we can exceed or of which we can fall short. An example of this is that we sometimes wonder how our flirting skills measure up to those of others. We may thus be a bit shy of flirting in front of an audience because others might evaluate our skills or tact unfavorably.

Theme 50:

To the extent that we receive our identity through cultural evaluations, the rejection of our performance on the social stage could be felt as a rejection of a valued identity that we are trying to claim for ourselves. In other words, if the other (through Das Man) accepts me for the personal qualities I attempt to arrogate to myself, this not only means that I have been accepted on a false pretense, but actually allows me to become who I claim that I am. It is thus not entirely clear that there is a real self beneath my performance of a more ideal self, or if all selves, real as well as ideal, are really performances in need of social confirmation. Sartre (1943/1986), for example, says that my objectivity always passes through the look of the other such that I cannot continue to maintain a particular sense of self unless that self finds social confirmation. As he says, "For me the Other is first the being for whom I am an object; that is, the being *through whom* I gain my objectness" (p. 307).

Theme 51:

As we have already argued, flirting in front of third parties can make me feel more anxious and inhibited in my way of relating to the other because I now not only face

judgment by the other, but also by third parties who become representative of a wider social standard for how to act. Yet, just as well as third parties can judge me negatively, they can also be used as mirrors that reflect my positive characteristics back to me and make them seem more real or more public. I can thus want to flirt in front of others because I want others to see that I *am* a particular person.

Theme 52:

To some extent, my valuation of the other is mediated by cultural standards of evaluation that I receive from third parties or through “the look” of others. For this reason, I often seek the approval of others as a means to validate my own value judgment of the other.

Theme 53

Others can also be used to affirm my worth to the other. Being accepted and valued by friends or engaging in activities with others in which I am coming out on top confirms my social worth and generally increases my attractiveness to the other. Perhaps this is because by having already been selected by others my value has already received social confirmation.

Theme 54:

Others can also be experienced adversely as a source of competition and possible resentment, which might lead me to avoid flirting in their presence so as to avoid rubbing it in their face, or might lead me to up my game so as to prevent the other from stealing the person I am interested in.

Theme 55:

Finally, others can be used as aides who can convey information to me about the other I am interested in. It is often more discreet and less risky to gather information about the person I like from others than it is to ask for this information from this person directly.

Procedure Used to Develop Interpretations

Before going on to elaborate each of these phenomenological interpretations and existential themes through concrete examples from the life-world descriptions of concrete incidents of flirting, let me first describe the hermeneutic process by means of which they were developed.

First I started reading each flirting description one by one, noting how the first account could inform my reading of the next and how the next account could inform my reading of the former. As I entered into this circle multiple times with all of the accounts,

certain common themes and variations in the way the research participants experienced flirting began to stand out to me. These themes were then gathered into a written document where I sought to group related comments from the individual descriptions (*data source a*).

I then read my own description of flirting and marked off themes that seemed to be in accordance with the themes already discovered, or that pointed me toward new themes that I seemed to have missed in the other descriptions. I also used my own description as a way to gain imaginative access to what might have been presupposed by the research participants (*data source b*).

I then took a break from this inductive approach and began to pursue ways of developing the themes through the writings of authors whom I thought could help open up the themes further. Many of these writings consisted of writings I had already made use of in my philosophical analysis of liminality, but additional sources were added as needed. Common to these sources was that they helped shed further light on flirting, love, sexuality, the other, the event, and other such related phenomena through which I hoped I would gain some new realizations about the empirical themes at hand. As I collected more and more quotes and ideas from these texts, I began to incorporate them into the former document in the places where they seemed to have something in common with certain of the empirical themes (*data source c*).

Finally, I began the process of clustering themes into overarching interpretations that would say something about flirting as a liminal experience. Individual themes were then recouched in this light in so far as it made sense, leading me to the finished version

of my analysis of flirting, which will be presented in its entirety in the section that follows.

The step by step process presented here can of course only be an abstract representation of the interpretive process of bringing empirical data sources together with philosophical texts and one's personal subjectivity and sensibilities. The actual research process was "messier" than such a step-by-step approach would lead one to believe and involved going back and forth between each of the steps in an effort to achieve greater and greater "consistency" between the different sources. Part of the "method" was therefore to not follow a method, but to allow the research document to elicit thoughts and procedures of its own and let myself be called into the "work."

In this sense, like any other qualitative research, my analysis can best be described as an "event" and not as a subjective act. I did not act as a sole agent who controlled and willed the research, but was also invoked by the research into certain thoughts and attunements which constituted me in turn.

Chapter 9

Existential Analysis of Flirting as Event: Phenomenological Unconcealment of Themes

In the following I would like to corroborate each of the eleven phenomenological interpretations of flirting and illustrate them through examples from each of the existential themes. In order to differentiate interpretations and themes from supporting evidence and examples, phenomenological interpretations and existential themes will be single-spaced and supporting evidence and commentary will be double-spaced.

Phenomenological Interpretation #1: Flirting as a Concealing and Revealing of Subjective Desire

Flirting happens as a concealing-revealing event that shows the self as a non-identity between a sexualized subjective desire and a practical everyday intentionality that hides this desire.

Flirting involves an alternation or tension between revealing one's desire and concealing one's desire. When one flirts, one simultaneously wants to communicate interest in the other and avoid exposing oneself to the other's rejection. The result, as Simmel (1923/1987) has stated it, is that in flirting, "The subject stands behind his expressions in a semi-veiled fashion and gives us the feeling that he seems to offer himself and to slip through our hands at almost the same moment" (p. 138). We may, for example, make a disparaging remark at the level of content, but say it in such a way that it comes across as a compliment, at the level of intention. In this way an ambiguous

moment is created in which we are both making a compliment and putting someone down and thus slipping away from a precise moment of identification as someone who likes or dislikes the other. We can thus come into being in a space *between* intentions, or between a literal level of meaning and a contextual or meant level of meaning. This space in between two possible interpretations means that we can simultaneously express our subjective desire for someone and hide it underneath the guise of a more innocuous literal meaning. To flirt is precisely to play with such levels of meaning and thus to communicate a subjective desire that is always also hidden or subject to other interpretations by the other person. The flirtatious statement or gesture leaves something to be guessed. It intimates a meaning or intent rather than declares it openly. Consequently, the flirtatious subject slips away from a precise locus. It cannot be defined as the intention behind the statement or the gesture, since this intention is itself not known to the other or firmly committed to by the subject. The subject of flirting thus inhabits a space where one can both desire and not desire another person and in which one can exist beyond any given choice of a subjective possibility of being in the world.

Evidence and Exemplification through Life-World Accounts

Theme 1:

In flirting, I simultaneously or alternately express my subjective desire for the other and hide it beneath a practical everyday goal-oriented intention. I do so, by making use of ambiguous statements in which my desire can both be expressed and hide itself behind an innocuous content that veils it, or by going back and forth between unveiling my desire and seeming disinterested.

In the flirting accounts, many examples of such an ambiguous expression of desire can be found.

One example is the way a seemingly disparaging remark at the level of a practical intention can simultaneously be used to communicate affection. In Matthew's account, for example, he reports that there was something flirtatious about the way both he and the two girls he was flirting with were making disparaging comments about each other. While playing the social drinking game of "beer pong" in which the objective is to hit a ping pong ball into one of several plastic cups in order to avoid having to drink, Matthew said he was trying to destroy the confidence of one of the girls who was going to be his opponent. As he continues, "The girl who looked at me then started backing her friend up and telling us we were going to lose... So that's almost her topping me, but that's almost like flirting, because she was trying to make fun of me, but she also knew that we were dominating the table, so she knew that we were good players." Here we see the strife between two seemingly contradictory intentions, neither of which has emerged fully since the one intention is negated by the other. What, when interpreted literally, could be understood as a mean remark is at the same time a veiled compliment that communicates that I like you enough to joke with you. The statement the girl made communicated two meanings at the same time and could be interpreted at different levels: one having to do with what was actually said, another having to do with what was actually meant. She thus shows herself as an agent who exists somewhere in between two intentions. She is *both* mean *and* giving a compliment and is therefore *neither* just mean *nor* just giving a compliment. She thus emerges or shows herself in a space that eludes absolute comprehension and defies a traditional binary logic.

Another example from Greg's account demonstrates how a particular practical intention can be used to both veil and reveal a desire for the other. Greg describes how at

one point he used the knowledge that the person he was interested in was a nurse together with the fact that he had an injured knee, to make a joke about him needing her care. In this case, we again see the flirtatious person slip away as a person of uncertain intention. He is simultaneously expressing a practical intent (“I need your care”) and negating its meaning as a practical request through the playful way in which he is making the request. While we could argue that Greg here reveals himself as not *really* making a practical request but, in fact, expressing his liking for the other person, he is expressing his affection in a way that also conceals it and could potentially be responded to at a more literal level by the other person. He thus both shows his subjective affection and hides it underneath a practical intent.

In many of the flirting descriptions, the veiling and unveiling of subjective desire can be described through a particular happening, which I will call *the innocuous invitation*. Here a desire to hang out with someone is expressed in and through statements that are innocuous enough that the person is left doubting what intention exactly animates the invitation. In other words, does the person want to hang out with *me* or simply *hang out*? In one such instance, for example, Kevin asks the person he is attracted to if she wants to watch a movie with him. This was thought of as a pretext for “making something happen” between them, but also seemed like it could easily be taken as just a “friendly gesture,” and as he says, “there wasn’t anything flirtatious about that.” In this way, in and through a seemingly innocuous invitation, Kevin is able to both express and hide his subjective desire for the other person.

Matthew deployed a similar strategy. He got the phone number of the person he had been talking to all night under the innocuous pretext that “she should come out

partying with me sometime.” The other person is here left wondering if Matthew’s interest is in partying or is in partying with *her*. Matthew thus slips away underneath an ambiguous desire which the other is left to decipher.

Benjamin gives another good example of expressing one’s desire in a veiled way. When he is forced to leave the bar where he has been spending the evening flirting with another man, he wants to find an innocuous way to discover if the person is interested in him. As he explains his tactic, “I ask him ‘Are you here with anyone?’ (This is the question I ask instead of saying ‘are you single?’ It’s the same question; it just feels less threatening, and less intrusive into the other’s privacy. Asking a complete stranger about their relationship status seems a bit rude, perhaps, but asking if they are with anyone at the time opens up any number of doors—maybe I think he needs a ride home? Maybe I really want to meet one of his friends and not him? Maybe I’m the one who needs a ride home? Maybe I’m just being friendly or inquisitive? The options are endless here).”

Here we see one of the reasons why it becomes important in flirting to express one’s desire in a veiled way: I’m afraid that a direct expression of my desire will scare the other person away by being perceived as socially inappropriate (“rude”), “threatening,” or unwelcome (“intrusive”). We also see how a flirtatious desire is never a definite subjective desire, but a desire kept open to multiple interpretations, and therefore essentially enigmatic.

Another way to conceal my desire while revealing it is to *show* it through body language rather than to *declare* it through words. When Adam was told by an attractive woman sitting in his local bar that she was a chef, he made sure to show her that he found her occupation interesting: “I guess I was trying to show her that I thought that was cool

that she was a chef... I wanted to smile to let her know that I felt that without actually saying it... in body language I guess.” The flirtatious effect is here produced in and through the ambiguity of the bodily gesture which can almost always have multiple meanings. Adam’s smile shows interest, but the other person cannot be sure about whether his interest is in the topic or in her. The smile could thus be indicative of a practical intention (an interest in the conversation) and not a desire for the other person.

A final tactic deployed to veil one’s interest in the other, while at the same time expressing it, is to alternate between expressing sexual or romantic interest and negating it. After having communicated his interest to a man in the bar, both by letting him know he is looking at him and gently bumping up against him as he walks by him, Benjamin also wants to prove that he is not “desperate” and that he can have many other men as well. As he says, “After looking away I continue talking amongst my own friends present. It is as if I just said to him, through my actions, my body, ‘Yeah, I do find you attractive, but I’m clearly not desperate. Now watch me prove my lack of desperation to you by chatting amiably with my friends. I can even make them laugh—watch this.’”

As these examples show, flirting often takes place in between the pure expression of a desire for the other and the purely literal meaning of a practical goal that has nothing to do with an interest in the other as a person. I can thus express my desire for the other at the same time as I can hide myself behind the meanings of an everyday intention that conceal this desire: I can say something and mean something else, I can extend an innocuous invitation, I can use my body as a means of expressing my desire, and I can alternate between direct expression of my desire and expression of indifference.

Theme 2:

Flirting requires that the space of desire be kept open and indeterminate for the encounter with the other to remain flirtatious. For flirting to remain flirtatious, a specific erotic or romantic intention must remain nonspecific or undeclared and thus remain irreducible to a clear subjective intent. This makes flirtatious desire something that is maintained in and through an “event” by which both I and the other can discover *if we want, what we want, and how strongly we want*, without committing to a definite desire in advance. In other words, we discover our desires in and through the event of flirting rather than use flirting as a way to achieve the objective of a known subjective intent. When flirting *does* generate a specific subjective intent that I commit to in an absolute way, flirting loses its flirtatiousness and turns into something else. It now becomes the subjective act of seduction or courtship, for example.

Many examples can be given of this fine balance between the openness of a flirtatious desire and the clear intent that transforms it into something else.

In the case of Josie, the moment she declares her desire, the flirtatious event loses its flirtatiousness and now becomes a specific desire for something worldly: the specific desire to be with Frank. At this point, desire is no longer sustained as a desire for the discovery of what I desire, but is now a specific worldly desire that requires practical decision-making and commitment. The choice is now a forced one: either I want or don't want what the other has to offer. At this point the flirtation becomes a practical everyday intention in which definite outcomes are pursued and in which flirting is subordinated to a definite subjective intention that changes it into a different event.

As another example of this distinction, Daniel finds that when the possibility of being with the other person becomes a real practical possibility rather than just a playful fantasy, the flirtatiousness of the encounter ends. As he states it, “I would say, though, that by the time I wrote my number down, the flirting was pretty much over. Now, it was getting serious, and as the seriousness increased (i.e. thinking of an actual encounter) the playfulness decreased.”

Theme 3:

As the event of an indeterminate desire, flirting reveals me to myself in the state of a desire that has not yet fallen prey to a practical intention. In flirting I am thus revealed as existing in an *exuberance* or *excess* beyond the practical projects and purposes through which I typically discover myself in the everyday. Through the suspension of a practical everyday intention and the discovery of myself as existing beyond a definite practical end goal of things, the world does not lose its meaningfulness, but becomes ever the more meaningful. The world is now revealed as a world that is *for* us and in which *we* are the central agents, unbound by any necessity to choose one course of action over any other.

Several indications can be found in the flirting accounts that flirting brings about such a celebratory state of human freedom and exuberance beyond determinism. Daniel, for example, seems almost surprised to discover how free and improvisational he can be in and through the state of flirting. He talks about discovering himself in a way that resembles a peak experience where he becomes more himself or a greater self than in the everyday. “We were making each other feel desirable, sexual, casual, improvisational, free,” he said. He proceeded to describe this state as “an easy, sexual way of being.” Through the experience, he said, “I got to see just how easy I could be, in this role... and the truth was, I could be quite easy – and it was FUN...”

Here we see what I would call the celebratory effect of flirting. Daniel and the person he was flirting with discovered themselves in the flirtation; not by simply being revealed to each other as they already knew themselves, but as they could only come to know themselves in and through the flirtatious encounter. In and through the encounter they are revealed to themselves in their freedom beyond any concrete subjective desire. Daniel describes this sense of self as improvisational, casual, fun, and easy—attributes that are clearly positive. He admits a sense of surprise that he had it in him to be this way, indicating that he discovers himself in and through the encounter. It is as if the other person allows him to be himself in a new way—to become this freer self—and thus

allows him to become a self beyond his more practical everyday self that would otherwise cover over this other more indeterminable self.

An example of how the world becomes more – not less – meaningful when it is bracketed in and through the flirtatious event can be found in Matthew’s account of flirting. Matthew states that even though he was talking with the girl he was interested in about topics that seemed mundane and insignificant, the excess of intention over content, which was revealed in the encounter, made the conversation meaningful in a different way than it would be to someone who was simply directing their desire toward the contents being communicated. As he states, “we just really talked about nothing, but the conversation seemed very personal.” They talked about “simple student stuff” like “drugs, beer...,” but as he said, “at the same time it felt like we were talking about so much more.” The “more” could here be said to refer to the “excess” or “exuberance” through which we are given back to ourselves in flirting. No longer do we receive ourselves from a concrete horizon of things, but are claimed by the non-finality of the thing—its indeterminacy or eventness—which reveals us to ourselves in an excess or exuberance beyond the practical utility of the thing through which we normally discover ourselves.

Theme 4:

Because flirtatious desire always remains a desire that has not yet been expressed clearly and has thus not yet become a subjective intention, flirting reveals both self and other in a state of uncertainty. A clear desire is only intimated and not explicitly declared, or is hinted at and disavowed at the same time. As long as we are flirting, I thus never have certainty of what the other wants, but can only infer or interpret this by relying on incomplete evidence and my own “hunch,” “sense” or “intuition.”

In their flirting descriptions, many of the research participants described uncertainty about the other person's desires and talked about how difficult it is to know if one has interpreted the other's desire correctly.

Although Josie has been collecting evidence that the person she is interested in likes her and states that "there was definitely some clear intent there that neither of us are addressing explicitly," she discovers, to her dismay, that her interpretation is wrong. When she acts on her understanding and communicates her own desire, the other person gets frightened by it and pulls away from her.

In another moment in Kevin's account, Kevin says, "I was trying to read her, trying to figure out if she was interested and if she was being flirtatious at all or... and unfortunately that is something I am really fuzzy on. I think at that time I just got the sense that she was. I wasn't totally sure, but I sort of felt like."

As we can see from these two examples, Josie's "definite" certainty about the other's intent turns out to be wrong, and Kevin describes the other's desire as "fuzzy" and speaks of relying on a "sense" that does not provide him with absolute certainty.

Daniel also never felt completely sure about the other's attraction to him. Although he at times felt that she was drawn to him like "metal" to a "magnet," not everything supported this interpretation and he could thus not feel completely sure. As he states, "I also recall however, looking back, that there was just a slight absence of eye contact between us – mostly on her part, I am sure – but at the time I assumed that it was the job that was causing it (she was busy...)"

In all of these examples, flirting reveals itself as an experience that puts my certainty about the other's desire into question. Once subjective intentions have been

declared and we reach a definite understanding of the intentions of the other person, flirting is no longer flirtatious. A big part of the flirtatiousness of flirting thus resides in the fact that flirting frustrates my own subjective desire to know and understand and subjects me to the uncertainty of the other person's desire.

Theme 5:

The elusiveness of the other's desire gives rise to a natural tendency to want to pin it down by reducing it to a "subjective intent." I desperately want to know to what extent the other is *really* interested in me. Since flirtatiousness by definition robs me of the possibility of being absolutely certain about this, I am left trying to calculate the probability that the other subjectively desires me. It is this aspect of flirting which is sometimes emphasized the most in those guides to flirting that want to turn it into a process that can be "mastered" (Mystery, 2007; Strauss, 2005), or which overemphasize the cognitive processing involved in flirting. From the perspective of the event, however, such a reduction to a subjective intention is considered a response to the uncertainty of flirting rather than its cause. It would thus be to misunderstand the phenomenal nature of flirting to reduce it to this subjective, rational, or calculative "degree" of its own manifestation. Nevertheless, the attentiveness to signs of the other's attraction and the subsequent need for analysis of these signs was integral to all of the flirting accounts and thus plays an important part of flirting's way of showing itself.

As Kevin says, "I remember looking for signs that she liked me, too – she usually seemed happy to see me, and there was sort of a gleam in her eyes when she smiled at me." This need to pinpoint the other's desire was paralleled in my own account of flirting. Here I stated, "It was never quite clear to me that she liked me. I always wondered if she did and kept analyzing all her actions in light of this question." Benjamin also describes a highly analytical moment when it is time to decide whether or not to make his desire known. As he says, "What to do now? It's almost time to leave. I tell myself that he must surely be interested... he's made eye contact all evening, he's sort of followed me around, he's not paying much attention to any other guys, he appears to be single... thus, all signs are leading me to believe that I can safely approach him without fear of reproach."

Theme 6:

In flirting, things lose the meanings they have in the practical everyday, where they serve as the practical end goals of our activity. Instead they now reveal themselves as *props* or mediums for communicating my desire and showing something about myself. What becomes important is now no longer the thing's intrinsic value, but what I am able to convey about myself and my desire through the thing. Thus, it becomes unimportant what exactly we talk about as long as I come across as interested or interesting and make the right impression. This suspension of the intrinsic value of the thing gives flirting a manipulative quality, because I may now only feign interest in a topic of conversation or *appear* to be interested in what the other is interested in. Indeed, flirting *can* become a mere tactic to say and do the right things and thus turn into a subjective intent to manipulate or deceive. In most cases, however, it is simply the case that my interest in the other and my interest in being interesting to the other, overrides my interests in the object world. The loss of interest in the content world does therefore not have to be indicative of an intent to deceive, but can also be the mere expression of an interest in the other that makes the contents through which I encounter the other secondary to the actual encounter with the other.

That the content of what we say or do recedes in importance when we flirt was apparent in many of the flirting accounts. Daniel did not remember what he said at a particular point in his conversation with the waitress in the restaurant, but he did remember that it “had a certain human personal-type quality... I was not joking/ speaking of football, or some abstract idea – but of something human (I can't remember what).” Later on, he says they engage in “mindless banter about the food order,” indicating that the content of the banter is not important, since the banter is here only a pretext for the communication of desires.

Matthew gives a similar example when, in asking for a girl's phone number, he does not remember what he said, but only remembers “it being smooth.” Here again the mode of delivery of what is said seems to be what is important and not what is *actually* said. The thing or the content of the statement becomes a mere vehicle for the communication of an attitude or a way of being towards the thing, which tells the other person something about me.

A similar loss of interest in contents is revealed by Adam when he recounts that during a conversation with the other, “I’m listening to her talk, or appearing to do so, but the back of my mind is debating asking for her number.”

In Kevin’s account, the content of the world is also bracketed, for as he states, “I can’t remember what exactly we talked about, but I know that I tried to be funny and accentuate what I consider my positive traits: I tried to come across as intelligent and witty and to emphasize our common interests.”

In Veronica’s account, we are given an example of using things as props, when she states that she asked the person she was interested in a question to which she already knew the answer. As she states, “Once my conversation with Mike was over, I approached Eric. I asked him what his name was, even though I already knew, and also what his major was...” When asked about why she asked for his name when she already knew it, Veronica said, “I wanted him to know I was interested in him, but wanted to act nonchalantly like I didn’t just interrogate [my friend] about it.”

A similar strategy was deployed by Greg when he asked the mother of the person he was interested in if her daughter was single. He did not do this to find out the answer, however, since as he said, “I already knew the answer to this question, but I also knew asking such a question would be clearly expressing my interest in her [the daughter].” Greg goes on to say that revealing his interest in the mother’s daughter to the mother would likely trickle down to the daughter, thus making his interest known to her.

Finally, Benjamin gives an example of using his friends as props. As he states, “I suggest to my friends that we go out for some fresh air—honestly, though, I just want to get a closer look at the guy and walk by him” (Benjamin). At another point, he tries to

make his friends laugh, not in order to share an intimate moment with them but to prove to the person he is interested in that he is popular. As he states, “Now watch me prove my lack of desperation to you by chatting amiably with my friends. I can even make them laugh—watch this.”

Phenomenological Interpretation #2: The Discovery of Self and Other through Flesh

Flirting takes place as an erotic event involving an aesthetic completion of self through other and the other through self. It involves moments of a double reduction of the event as flesh.

A key element of flirting is the expression of desire through the body. It is this characteristic which gives flirting its nature as an erotic event with sexual or romantic connotations. The erotic is here emphasized as a broader term than the desire for sexual gratification. It is used in the sense of an auto-affectation or aesthetic completion (feeling oneself in and through the interaction with the other) that need not be sexual in the sense of referring to a subjective sexual aim or purpose. Instead, an aesthetic completion refers to every individuation of self and other or self and thing through which one derives pleasure or disgust from feeling oneself in and through the flesh of the thing or the other. Flesh must here be understood as a transformation of the body as it is presupposed by a practical intentionality. In and through practical intentionality, I pass through the body toward the objects or goals which it allows me to handle. However, when the body becomes flesh it becomes felt, enjoyed, or aroused and no longer just passed over as when I simply use my body as a means toward a practical end. As Linschoten (1969) writes, “sexual desire originates in an encounter in which the body is not passed over because it plays an essential part in the encounter” (p. 153). The flesh here is not so

much my flesh, your flesh, or the flesh of the object, as it is the tactile event of receiving oneself as a degree of the flesh of the other or the thing. It may refer to everything from receiving myself in the sweet tingling which your smile produces in me to receiving myself through a full blown sexual encounter. It is my claim that flirting that does not take place as an encounter in the flesh lacks an essential element and will not be experienced as flirtatious. An example of this was given by one of the research participants, who said she was often “accused” by her girlfriends of flirting with men. To her, however, she was often being friendly rather than flirtatious, since flirting to her meant having more of an erotic interest in the other which would have meant pursuing something “more than just talking to him.” This “something more” is what we can ascribe to the flesh and label as a key element of the physical attraction through which we receive our erotic and romantic desires. It is important to remember though that flesh produces subjective desire in tandem with subjective desire producing the flesh, such that we again presuppose the double reduction of an event, rather than the preexistence of a subjective desire or the preexistence of the flesh as cause.

Evidence and Exemplification through Life-World Accounts

Theme 7:

In flirting, I communicate erotic desire through an excess in my practical intention by means of which I am able to “touch” the other while receiving myself back as touched. Using a word from Deleuze & Guattari (1983, p. 492) I will ascribe the erotic quality of this excess to its *haptic* nature. Hapticity here designates that the erotic is communicated insofar as my sense organs linger sufficiently in relation to their objects so as to touch and be touched by them in return. Hapticity ascribes the capacity to touch and be touched to sense organs other than merely the hands. I can thus just as well touch an other in and through my eyes as I can touch the other through my hands. For example, whereas the theoretical look distances and the practical look “looks around” for things to do with the object (Heidegger), the desirous look touches the object, or makes eye *contact*. In relation

to our hands, hapticity does not refer to a simple “grasping,” but to a transformation of the hand into the touch that “lingers” and wants to be touched in return. As Linschoten (1969) writes: “the sensitivity inherent in the hand is passed over in the manipulation; in touching and handling something we do not feel our own hand, only the touched and handled thing. It is only in the sexual revalidation of the body that the sensitivity proper to the hand is first materialized as erotic sensitivity” (p. 175). Words can also be haptic, such as when they are no longer intended to communicate a certain content but are used to touch or evoke a response in the other or used to bring us closer. In addition, space can become palpable to us as something other than just a distance that we traverse. By leaning into another’s personal space, this space becomes a space between *us* and allows me to touch and be touched by it. In all of these examples, the haptic excess over a practical intention that merely passes through and over the body, calls me into the tactile erotic event of the flesh.

Plenty of examples of this haptic relation between self and other can be found in the flirting descriptions.

In Benjamin’s account it is clear that he eroticizes his touch when he lets his fingers linger longer than is required for the practical completion of a handshake. As he states, “I introduce myself and shake his hand, letting the handshake linger just a tad longer than necessary.”

Daniel notices the other person’s sexual attraction to him due to the fact that she breaks into his personal space, thus revealing her body in a haptic intent over and beyond a practical purpose. As he says, “Immediately she moved toward me, standing rather close, and almost leaning into me.” In another instance, Josie II deliberately uses this tactic to communicate her attraction to a man. As she says, “I am just a bit closer to him than I would be to someone I was just talking to.”

I believe one could argue that Josie II demonstrates haptic communication when she describes a conversation as a “meeting of souls,” which implies that words becomes a way of touching the other. Such a haptic intent may be conveyed, like Sabrina does it, by

tapping the other's shoulder and flashing him a smile when he talks, thus demonstrating a haptic excess over and beyond a mere practical intention to understand.

Touching an other through one's eyes is of course another way to demonstrate attraction, but due to its special significance, this topic will be dealt with next under a heading of its own.

Theme 8:

The haptic look is often interpreted as one of the first "sure tell" signs that the other is attracted to me and the absence of eye contact is often interpreted as a sign that an erotic intention is missing.

Eye contact as a sign of attraction was a recurrent theme in most of the flirting descriptions. In most of the accounts, it was considered the most important indicator of attraction.

As Veronica stated, "eye contact is a good thing... like that's where your spark begins almost."

Kevin also found the way the other looked at him to be an important sign of her desire for him. As he states, "I remember looking for signs that she liked me, too: She usually seemed happy to see me and there was a sort of gleam in her eyes when she smiled at me."

In Matthew's account it was also the look that made him feel a sense of mutual attraction. As he writes, "one girl looked at me and I looked back at her, we both smiled (it seemed like at this moment we already knew we both had some sort of desire for each other)... almost right away you get a feeling that there's a possibility that things could go farther between the two of you. Almost immediately you know, I would say, almost just from looking you can tell. You know there's attraction."

Greg also locates the first sign of attraction in the eye contact with the other. As he told me, “The glances are usually how I can tell. You know if she’s not really looking at me very much or very often, I’d kind of assume she wasn’t interested.”

The look is of course here a different look from “seeing” and “looking around” (circumspection). It has a haptic quality in the sense that it touches me or wants me.

Benjamin demonstrates this from both the receiving and emitting ends. At one point he says, “He looks at me, I look at him. His look makes me feel wanted; this is a nice feeling.” At another point he says, “I continue looking at him, hoping he will soon glance my way and make eye contact. After a few moments (or even minutes, it’s hard to tell), he finally does look in my direction. Our eyes meet, and I maintain the gaze for a second or two then look away.”

In Adam’s account, the other’s look is also not a mere “seeing” but an “invitation” to join her in the bar and talk to her. As he states, “I look at the mirror and notice she’s looking over at me... When she looked over, it was almost like an invitation to say something to her.” This look is here interpreted by Adam as a haptic intent, as evident from the fact that he understands it as an invitation rather than just a neutral or practically oriented look. It gives him permission to enter her personal space and thus reassurance, as he says, that “I wouldn’t be violating any of her privacy.”

Finally, for Daniel, as we have already indicated, the absence of eye contact was the most critical indicator that made him have some doubt about whether or not the other was interested in him. As he writes, “I also recall however, looking back, that there was just a slight absence of eye contact between us – mostly on her part, I am sure – but at the time I assumed that it was the job that was causing it (she was busy...)”

Theme 9:

In flirting, *the blush* is a particular way in which a haptic intent of the look is revealed. I blush because I have been caught touching the other with my look, without knowing if the other would want to be touched this way. I feel slightly embarrassed that I have looked too long, too much, too penetratingly or too intently and that my haptic intent has therefore been unmasked: My haptic look is looked at and exposed as a subjective desire. In many cases, the haptic intent that is thereby exposed is interpreted as a sign of my attraction to the other and is therefore often considered to be flattering to the other.

When Adam catches the other person fastening her look upon him a little too long and then averting abashedly as he catches her, he says, “for some reason I find this endearing.” When asked what he found endearing about it, he explains, “There was just something kind of cute about like ‘I caught her’ and she was aware that I caught her... I guess maybe that she was kind of interested and she was embarrassed that I caught her looking...” Adam could identify with this and felt that it made her more approachable by making her more “down to earth” or “more real.”

In another instance in Greg’s account, a looking game ensued as both parties were trying to catch the other’s look in order to show a haptic intent. Both were, however, also a little fearful of being caught too openly staring at each other. As Greg writes, “we shared a few awkwardly playful glances across the room.” When asked about these glances, Greg elaborated, “It’s playful, but it’s awkward because you don’t want to get caught staring at the other person. I mean, we will look at each other, but then as soon as they look at you, you will look away. That was what kind of makes it awkward...”

Theme 10:

It is only in relation to a real or perceived haptic desire from the other person that I can receive myself as sexually attractive. Sexual attraction is thus not a property that can exist outside of an event that can sustain me as sexually desirable to someone. For many people it is thus itself desirable to be sexually desired by someone and my desire for the

other person often increases and decreases in relation to how desirable I feel to the other person. When I do feel sexually desired by an other person, a sense of myself as alluring and attractive is often affirmed, giving me a feeling that is often experienced as a delightful sense of my own sexual power over others.

The rudimentary statement that we are often attracted to being attractive finds affirmation in a statement such as that by Jason who states that, “I feel excited to be noticed and thought of as attractive.”

Josie also demonstrates that part of her attraction to Frank was the fantasy that she could become the object and cause of his pent up passion: “It would be pretty amazing if I could cause someone who was so well controlled to lose control.” If she could accomplish this, this would be a testimony to her own allure and power, for as she states, “it is sort of like he can control and contain everything in his life except for me. I guess that would put me in a really strong, powerful position.”

For Daniel, as well, there was a definite sense of his enjoyment at the power he suddenly found himself having over the waitress who “oriented” to him amidst a group of friends, “some of them attractive smart young males.” He likened this experience to being like a “magnet.” As he stated, “It was as if I had just pulled a magnet out of my pocket and she was made of metal.” He also described the waitress as being more “in” the flirtation than he was, for as he says, “I seemed to be more aware of the flirting activity – meaning, I felt I was seeing it more objectively – than she seemed to be – she was IN it...” Elsewhere he describes her as a squirrel that has oriented to a bear, again pinpointing his own sense of power over the other’s desire, which his attractiveness to her has bequeathed him with.

Theme 11:

The sexual advance from an other can sometimes invoke an encounter of the flesh that produces repulsion or distaste in me rather than pleasure. In such moments, hapticity will lead to rejection and distancing rather than closeness.

One of Jason's great fears, for example, is that the expression of haptic desire would be perceived as a sign of him being "aggressive," "infatuated with" or "lustful," which would make the other pull away and embarrass him or make him the object of negative gossip.

Another example of invoking an encounter of the flesh prematurely, can be found in Josie's account, in which her haptic expression of desire ends up scaring the other away. As she states it, "After this, my friend backed off considerably. I had come on too strong and frightened him. His sexuality was sublimated, and by calling it to the surface, I had called him into a world he was not ready to enter. I had become a corrupting devil, both repulsive and desirable, and in any case frightening." Josie's example here shows that the haptic expression of desire can become repulsive to someone, not necessarily because the other doesn't find themselves aroused, but because arousal itself can sometimes be distasteful or frightening to someone.

Theme 12:

In the haptic encounter I relate to the other without distance since I receive the other through the immediacy of feeling rather than as object or tool. Physical attraction could be said to be the result of a haptic relationship with an other (whether entertained in imagination or enacted in actuality), in which I experience a relationship without distance to some valued aspect or idea of the other. I am touched by some aspect of the other, thereby eradicating the other's distance to me. This makes attraction an "immediate" phenomenon (love at first sight) and makes it describable as a "spark," a "vibe," an "instant," or something we are "struck" by.

Benjamin and Daniel both described their attraction as *immediate*. Benjamin writes, “I am immediately attracted to him for several reasons, purely on a physical level (at this point): Well-dressed, neat hair, nice-looking body—strong, good form,” while Daniel says, “I immediately felt sexual desire, a picturing and a physical imagining of what it would be like to have her in my bed, holding her in certain ways I enjoy.”

Greg describes his attraction as something that *strikes* him: He is struck by the other’s beauty. As he says, “As I hung out meeting some new people and catching up with old friends, I was struck as a beautiful young woman entered through the double doors in the back of the church.”

Finally, Adam uses words such as being “on the same wave length” and “getting a good vibe” to describe his initial attraction.

In all of these examples, it is evident that the phenomenon of attraction—and of the haptic in general—goes beyond the initiative and activity of a subject. It is experienced as something that happens to me at a pre-intentional level. I find myself claimed by the attractive other who constitutes me as attracted and hence as powerless not to respond to the call.

Theme 13:

In the haptic encounter between two people, it can often be difficult to locate the “attraction” in me or in the other⁶, for my desire is often a response to a “seduction” by the other (or an aspect of the other) and the other’s desire is often a response to a seduction by me (or an aspect of me.) As Linschoten (1969) therefore argues, “Desire and seduction belong together, motivate one another reciprocally, and are so interwoven that it is difficult to distinguish between them” (p. 192), and as he states elsewhere, “The sexual desire is an attraction between *the sexual landscape* and the person who is bodily related to it. Properly speaking one cannot say where the desire emerges perceptibly

⁶ This finding is consonant with the research on “interaction units” in flirting as conducted by Grammer, Kruck & Magnusson (1998).

except in this desiring dialogue itself” (p. 155). If my haptic desire does not emanate from within me or from an object external to me, we must therefore say that it is produced in and through an event: I only discover what I desire in response to my reaction to the other and hence as a product of an encounter. This means that the flesh calls me into itself prior to any subjective will or objective causation. This can be said to be true in several ways:

A. I sometimes discover that I am attracted only when the other’s attraction allows me to be open to and recognize my own attraction.

Kevin describes how he only really started to recognize his attraction to his co-worker in a real way once he felt attraction from *her*. Although he had been fantasizing about the possibility of asking her out for a while, it took the demonstration of *her* attraction to create a real desire in him to do so. As he states about what pushed him to make the decision to pursue her, “Maybe I was also getting some kind of signal from her... like I sort of felt more sure that the feeling was mutual in that conversation.”

An inverse example of this principle would be Adam who eventually decides that he feels “no real chemistry” or sexual attraction to the woman he has been flirting with, making him abandon his idea of asking for her phone number. However, as he talks about this during his interview with me, he starts to realize that his own desire only started to wane when he did not really sense a strong desire from the other person. “I wasn’t feeling anything that would push me to ask for her number... I didn’t get the feeling that she was really feeling anything either... maybe that kind of played into why I maybe wasn’t feeling anything, because I wasn’t really feeling anything strongly from her.”

B. At other times I only discover that I am attracted because I catch myself having already responded haptically to the other prior to my conscious intention to do so.

Veronica, for example, discovers retroactively (*nachträglich*) that she is attracted to a man she is instant messaging with over her cell phone. She discovers her attraction

from the fact that she finds herself acting around him as if she were attracted. As she states it, “Whenever he IMd [instant messaged] me with a new thing, I would immediately respond whereas with some of my friends I would let the conversation dwindle off... and at that point I knew that I wanted to continue to talk to him.” Veronica here discovers herself as already having responded to the call of the other, prior to her *knowing* it and thus prior to subjectively initiating an act. She discovers herself from her desire rather than acts as an initiator of this desire. In this sense she does not already possess her desires, but discovers what she desires in and through the way she finds herself responding to the other. As Marion (2007) states, “my desire speaks me to myself by showing me what arouses me” (p. 108).

Another example of such a retroactive self-discovery can be interpreted to take place in Greg’s account. Here the beauty of the other person is not discovered in and through his subjective act of looking at her. Instead his phrasing gives us the sense that he has already been “claimed” by the other the moment he discovers himself looking. “I would catch myself staring and try to stop,” he says. His phrasing here indicates that his staring is not as much a subjective act as it is the other’s beauty acting through him. He is claimed by the other to stare and his agency is relegated to stopping himself from staring or continuing to stare.

C. Finally, in flirting I am not necessarily pursuing a particular outcome, but rather setting out to discover whether or not I want to pursue a particular outcome. In this sense, flirting is not only animated by a particular subjective desire, but is also a way to discover what my subjective desire is.

Although Adam started out being “seduced” in some way by certain facets of the other person, he is never quite committed to a desire for her. As he comments, “I was

concerned with whether or not this was something that I even wanted to pursue. I guess that was part of it too. Did I have a will to do this or not? Was it there?"

In Josie's account, she starts out with a pretty definite subjective desire for the other, but discovers, to her dismay, that his real being cannot sustain her desire. He falls short of her image of him. His pent up passion, which was a source of admiration, now becomes a sign of his childlike repressed nature. This forces Josie to reevaluate her own values and to redirect her desires toward a different ideal. Josie thus comes out of the encounter with the other with changed desires. Her desires are not statically "in her" but are produced and maintained in and through encounters that show her what arouses her, as Marion (2007) says.

Matthew at first sees the other as a potential partner to have sex with, but in the end, he develops enough respect for her to know that she wouldn't be a girl who would want to agree to sex without further relational commitments: "She was not some girl that I wanted to have sex with and then just never talk to again. She would not be a girl who would let someone do that... She would probably want to do stuff, like, hang out a lot."

Similarly, in my own account, I describe how a seemingly definite desire suddenly gets reevaluated once the purely imaginary scenario of being with the other person becomes a real scenario. As I state, "At one point I remember sitting by the bench talking with some of the other students. When she came out to join the group, I remember feeling her breath on my hair as she stood behind me, interpreting her proximity to me as a sign that she liked me. 'Now, she is in the bag,' I thought, and for a moment when I thought I could have her at my whim, I started having doubts about whether or not I really wanted her."

As these examples illustrate, it is erroneous to reduce flirting to a simple subjective act, given that we do not necessarily know what we want when we find ourselves flirting. Instead it seems more in accordance with the experiential data to say that flirting sets up the preconditions for discovering what we want. Subjective desire can thus not be presupposed as the ground of flirting, for while such subjective desires certainly play a role, they can themselves be transformed in and through the encounter with the other. It is in this sense that we must speak of flirting as an event of discovering ourselves through discovering our desire rather than a product of a subjective desire or a completely determined response to an object that causes it.

Phenomenological Interpretation #3: The Valued Uniqueness of the Other

In flirting, one relates to the other as a valued future of being a self beyond what one can project, predict or control. What is attractive about the other is not merely what shows itself of the other, but also what remains to be seen and, ultimately, what remains beyond a future possibility that one can grasp.

The value I attribute to the other with whom I flirt is constituted somewhere in between the real qualities of the other and the imagined futures which I project for the other. Nevertheless, what characterizes the other is that the other's future is always a possibility beyond any which I can project or predict. By entering into a relation with this future I thus receive a chance to become myself from a future other than my own. Sometimes the allure of the other consists precisely in getting the opportunity to receive myself anew or be made into someone else in and through my encounter with this "other" future. When I am attracted to the other, I am thus not just attracted to what I see about the other, but also to what I can imagine about the other, and ultimately what I can neither see nor imagine about the other, but which can only reveal itself to me as a

surprise that changes me and allows me to receive my facticity in and through the “nachträglich” temporality of an event.

Evidence and Exemplification through Life-World Accounts

Theme 14:

Attraction is always sustained in and through the valued uniqueness of the other person who presents him or herself as different in some remarkable way and therefore as not just an anonymous self who is part of a general crowd (the they). The other seems rare or positively unusual and, as with most things rare, this increases the other’s value and makes me want to be near him or her.

The person who sparked Nicole’s interest, for example, attained value to her partly because he “wasn’t a jerk” unlike the “typical” college men who are into “these macho, like jerkish things...” As she commented, “he just seemed so different than that.”

Matthew also experienced the person who caught his interest as quite unique. Being from a top university she stood out as “smart and dedicated.” The fact that she played “water polo,” which is not “a sport that most people play,” also made her seem “really different and unique... so that really was interesting to me and definitely made me more interested in her.”

In other situations the other person may stand out by the way they dress (Sabrina, Adam), by their “very distinct eye color” (Veronica), by their ambitions (Josie, Sabrina), or as in Greg’s case, by being the only bride’s maid who did not wear her hair up like the others. In other words, when we become attracted we always become attracted to something about the other person that makes them stand out from the crowd in some positive way.

That this uniqueness sparks a desire to be near the other was evident from Josie's account. As she stated about the man whom she became attracted to: "He seems very interesting, there's something really impressive about him... He's something I wanna be or something I wanna be associated with."

Theme 15:

What is valuable about the other is not just a sum of the other's known characteristics. Initially we know the other only through very few characteristics or signifiers and have to complete these signifiers by filling in the gaps in our understanding by our own imagination. In many ways, our attraction is sustained in and through such an imaginative completion, for as Scheler (1923/2008) has commented, "love only occurs when, upon the values already acknowledged as 'real' there intervenes a movement, an intention, toward potential values still 'higher' than those already given and presented" (p. 153). Consequently, as he states, "seeing the goodness in someone, seeing beyond what is presented, we love a truth or reality which has yet to present itself—an 'idealized paradigm of value'" (p. 154). This last statement indicates that what we are really attracted to when we are attracted to others is something futural and not something actual. This future of the other is not a simple projection of a specific future on my part, but of a possibility that transcends my imagination.

Josie II illustrates this well. She first becomes attracted to the other person by "admiring" him "from afar." As she says, "I have collected a series of images, and I have this idea of what kind of person he is." From the fact that he seems to hang out with "the intelligentsia" of her university, from his "intense" "inward" look, his "dark coat," and his smoking habit, she constructs a fantasy of him "as a dark philosopher" who has discovered a dark truth about life and is more enlightened than her. He has found a different path in life than the one Josie has herself been on and has recently become disillusioned with. In this sense Josie relates herself to the other as he appears within an imagined horizon that transcends and completes his real and visible characteristics. She constructs an "idealized paradigm of value" and is related to an other that resides somewhere between his real characteristics and her imagined possibilities.

Daniel also completes his other. Real characteristics of his other inspire a sexual possibility: “I immediately felt sexual desire, a picturing and a physical imagining of what it would be like to have her in my bed, holding her in certain ways I enjoy.” Again, we could here say that the other becomes the other they are in and through an encounter with other people’s subjective completions. In a certain sense, therefore, it is true when we say that when we fall in love with someone else we also to some extent fall in love with ourselves (recall Merleau-Ponty’s comment that there is a narcissism in all vision), for it is at least partially through our own imagination that the other can become who they are to us. We might even go as far as to say that that other depends on us to become who they are, since one can be said never to exist outside of the imagined completions of others. In this sense, identity is always produced in and through events or encounters, and flirting is always the actualization of such an event and not a mere relating or discovery of some real identity or real other.

Theme 16:

The imagined other allows me to relate myself to a future of uncertain but exciting possibilities that transcend my own being-in-the-world. Despite my attempt to imagine who the other person is, he or she remains an open-ended enigma yet to be unraveled and understood. In this sense, I am relating to the other as an absolute Other beyond my projections and predictions—a source of the completely unknown. This excess of the other by means of which the other remains unphenomenalizable or beyond my experience (what Levinas (1963/1986) calls “a face”) can itself fuel my attraction. Hence, when we flirt, part of what entices us may exactly be that we do not know where it may lead, or that the faith of what will be cannot be predicted but is itself what is at stake. Hence, as Simmel (1923/1987) writes, “We also experience chance as an allure, an enticing gamble for the favor of the incalculable powers” (p. 143). Furthermore, we could even say that it is what remains concealed about the other person that constitutes the other person as unique and therefore valuable, since what is offered in actuality can be offered by someone else as well, while what “remains to be offered” is a unique personal secret belonging only to this particular individual. Hence, as Linschoten (1969) has written, “Even in the most intimate relationship something belonging to the other keeps escaping

me; and perhaps this is what is most essential: that which makes him or her this unique person, this ‘personal secret’” (p. 166).

Greg, I believe, finds this openness of outcome that the other represents enjoyable in itself. He describes flirting as “an exciting new endeavor” and likens it to “planning a trip.” He says it makes him feel like “a little kid again” who is just learning what attraction is. Later on he explains this excitement as a product of the combination of sexual attraction and getting to know someone new.

Benjamin also finds the opening of possibilities that flirting brings about exciting. When he experiences the other person as reciprocating his interest as their eyes meet in a mutual gaze, he says he feels “a tingling sensation, difficult to articulate, but it feels as if the night is suddenly full of possibility.” That our desire should be tied up with the mystery of the unknown that sustains it was also evident from Benjamin’s comment that “the first sexual encounter with someone new is always the most exciting for me. New territory. Exploration of the Other. After this initial encounter, that particular terrain is easily memorized and becomes increasingly less interesting. Monogamy be damned.”

In my own account of flirting, I also felt a rush of excitement at the prospect of what *might* be without knowing exactly what *would* be. I reported feeling a sense of freedom from the constraints of past ways of being and the sudden ability to *be* differently or having the chance to reinvent myself. As I stated about the mood I was in when I first met the girl that sparked my interest, I “remembered feeling freer than usual, as I was not held back by other people’s preconceptions of me as quiet, introverted and intellectual. It was as if these conditions had created a space for me to try something new, become different, find different sides of myself.” In these examples, we thus find another counter argument to the idea that flirting is a subjective act, for what it frequently

involves is a releasement to the event defined as that future that will arrive at me from beyond what can be predicted and projected.

Theme 17:

In and through the other as indeterminable possibility (enigma), or a possibility beyond any I can project, I can receive myself from a place beyond myself, making the other a source of self-transcendence. Through the other as enigma I become related to a future other than mine and, as a result, a potential for being a self beyond myself. Whereas Heidegger (1927/1996) says that it is my being toward death that individuates me the most since it makes every future one that I live out of my own finitude, flirting seems to offer a way of receiving myself from beyond my own finitude. Here, the other offers relief from myself and from the solitude of my own finite existence by puncturing my egological circle and putting me into a relationship with an infinity, an absolute beyond, or an excess. The other thus offers the possibility of discovering myself from a point beyond myself and of coming into being as someone who arrives at myself from elsewhere. In this sense, the other allows me to become myself from a future that is not my own.

The sense of discovering oneself through the other was present in both of Josie's accounts of flirting. Josie's sense of self is in each case intimately tied to whom she is for the other. The other has the power to complete her through a future that remains beyond herself and can change her facticity retroactively. Josie's identity is, in other words, a faith to be decided in and through the encounter with the other whose response alone shows her who she is. In her first account, the other has the power to save her from her sense of having fallen from moral and intellectual rigor. As she states, "I got the impression that he wouldn't accept the person or care for a person unless they met these very high standards. I think that part of my draw there was that if I was accepted it would kind of affirm that I had this thing that I was afraid of losing." Later she says that the other represents "one last chance to save the dreams of my youth" and "save my soul." In her second account, after having missed this opportunity to be saved, she meets a new

person who has found a different and wiser path in life and whom she assigns the power to “lift” her above “this hell of my own making,” which she experiences after having lost hope in her former fantasy. When the other proceeds to invite her out for coffee after a long evening of talking in the lobby of her dorms, she experiences this as validation that she is whom she is trying to be. As she writes, “this tentative person that I was putting out there was a hypothesis and he confirmed it, saying, ‘I believe that’s who you are, so we should go get coffee, because you are the person you want to be.’”

As Josie illustrates here, she discovers herself not by looking within herself or even through her own activity, but receives herself from a future beyond herself, which the other in each case can affirm or deny.

Sabrina provides us with a different example of this phenomenon. Having just split-up with her boyfriend, she finds herself depressed and wondering if she is going to become a lonely “cat lady” who will never get married to anyone. However, after meeting a man at a house party she feels a huge sigh of relief and thinks, “ok, I can do this, I’m not doomed to be the cat lady across the street.” The other here boosted her confidence by making her feel that she was still capable of attracting someone and had worth. As she said, when she was asked what she had learned about herself from that evening, “it told me that I didn’t need to be dating someone that was failing out of high school and had no aspirations other than being a mechanic in a garage. It told me that... someone actually found my brains or my self, just plain ol’ my self, attractive or desirable in whatever sense.” Sabrina’s example illustrates how flirting can change how we feel about ourselves and that the other has the power to grant us a new interpretive light on our past and thus a new “facticity.”

For both Sabrina and Josie it seemed to be the case that the other can help them regain a lost part of themselves. Both examples illustrate the idea that our identity is retroactively determined in and through a new future. This, of course, is in accordance with the discussion of *nachträglichkeit* and our temporal nature as discussed in the philosophical part of the dissertation.

This phenomenon is also illustrated well in Nicole's account in which her encounter with the other provides her with a familiar comfort of her high school years, which she subsequently realized she had lost and had been missing. As she states, "I think that I didn't even recognize it until I met somebody... I was doing fine, I'm adjusting well and I'm excited... when I met this person I was like, 'this is even better, you know, because now I have somebody who reminds me of home, reminds me of the comforts of home'... and it almost made it clear to me that this was something I wanted." She later on described her burgeoning relation with the other as "a good way for me to have those things returned."

As Nicole's example illustrates, she discovers herself and her desires only retroactively as she has them returned to herself from the other who calls her into this layer of her personal past. We could therefore say that she changes in and through the encounter with the other and that her sense of the past changes from a future beyond herself. All of these examples thus put into question, Heidegger's (1927/1996) idea that we receive ourselves from a world of our own making and from a future that by necessity remains an individual future since it is always lived out of my own-most finitude (death) as my ultimate horizon. Flirting as an event, at least temporarily, promises an escape from my death, since it promises a leap into a future beyond my own or beyond my own

finite possibilities. Stated differently, as event *I* cannot die, for I am in that moment beyond my identity as a finite thing, completely swept up in the eventing of who I will have been, given what is going to happen. I exist not in a present, but discover myself from a future beyond the one that I can project.

Theme 18:

My attraction to the other often waxes and wanes in accordance with how real or perceived characteristics of the other modify my projected fantasy of the other and the possibilities of being a self sustained by it.

Kevin, for example, interpreted the other person's lack of interest in or knowledge of artsy movies as a sign that she wasn't an intellectual. This lessened her value to him and closed down the possibility that he could have as much in common with her as he did with his more intellectual long-distance girlfriend. This demotion of the other's value, he later recognized, was a way for him to prevent himself from becoming too attached. As he later stated it, "I needed to be interested in her or have enough in common with her to be attracted to her and wanting to date her, but also had at the same time to be sure that I wouldn't find someone that I would become more attached to than [my girlfriend]"

In Nicole's case, her initial anticipations about the other were not disappointed but actually strengthened in and through the process of getting to know the other. As she states, "When I first met him... it was just like an idea to me... like he'd be fun to hang out with... and then when you actually do start hanging out with him, he was that much more appealing... he was the guy that I first noticed... and as we were flirting and becoming interested in each other, I almost looked at his qualities as even more positive... so it changes... it became more apparent to me that he was what I thought he was"

Both of these examples confirm the idea that flirting is a chance to discover what I desire and is thus not a subjective act that is already motivated by a definite desire.

Phenomenological Interpretation #4: The Establishment of Commonalities

Flirting is sustained only as long as the other puts one into an enticing relation to what is not yet known (the other as enigma) and as long as the value one places upon what is not known is not so high as to make one feel insignificant in comparison and therefore fearful of approaching the other. Both too much difference and too much sameness thus eradicates the flirtatiousness of the encounter.

A key element of flirting is to balance valued uniqueness with perceived commonalities, such that one is neither unreachable to the other nor so reachable that one loses one's value. Gabbard (2004), for example, has made the argument that love for the other sustains itself in the balance between a "relatedness that is reassuringly familiar as well as abruptly fresh" (p. 27). "On one hand," he says, "there is familiarity with a certain quality of object relationship. On the other, there is a suspenseful meeting with what is yet unknown in two people facing each other" (p. 26).

Evidence and Exemplification through Life-World Accounts

Theme 19:

The valued imagined characteristics of the other can make me feel inferior and insignificant in comparison. The contradiction here seems to be that the more unique and valuable the other person is perceived to be, the less he or she would have a need for someone like me. As the value attributed to the other increases, I may therefore become increasingly unable to interact with the person who now seems to "be out of my league." As a result, the other may now instead become the object of a painful longing that reminds me of what I am lacking in the face of the promise of another world whose possibilities can never become my own. I now receive myself as lacking or cut-off and not as a positive possibility for being a self. As Albertine says about his love for someone, in a novel by Proust, "her whole life... inspired me with desire; a painful desire, because I felt that it was unrealizable, although it was intoxicating" (quoted in Linschoten, 1969, p. 165).

An example of this way of receiving myself from the other can be found in Nicole's description. Here she describes frequently feeling intimidated by the high valuation she places on certain others. As she states, "You look at a group of guys and you are like: 'ok, he is cuter than whoever', and it's funny because when I go to meet new people I'm outgoing and as soon as that one person stands out to me... around that one person I would clam up."

To Josie II, her own high regard for the other also makes him seem unreachable. As she states, "I sort of projected so much on to him, you know, made him such an important symbol that he really does feel like he is on another order of being." Consequently, as she continues, "I didn't even think of him as someone I could go talk to... the possibility of us ever getting together in real life was so impossible." Josie describes this scenario as "bittersweet" in the sense that the other represents "another world where I would like to be, so it is very motivating and great to think about, but also disappointing that I am not there. I never considered it a real possibility."

For Jason, the high esteem in which he places the other makes him feel that he can never really cross the boundary of asking her out. She in many ways becomes an "infatuation" that is built more on his imagination than on reciprocal interactions with the other. He never quite feels casual enough with her to take their talks beyond small talk so as to introduce a more haptic element into their interaction. He talks about building up courage to ask her out, but then, when thinking about it, immediately feels scared and backs down. Although the attraction to the other is intoxicating in the sense that it makes him come to school early hoping to bump into her, his hesitation, which keeps him separate from her, also reminds him of his "loneliness" and the "pain" of not feeling

special. As he says, it is “lonely to not be able to share yourself, your personality or who you are with the other and to receive that back.”

All of these examples could perhaps be said to illustrate what Iris Marion Young (1990) calls an “inhibited intentionality,” in the sense that the desirable other becomes a possibility that is not within my reach and thus a possibility for someone else and not for me. This reveals me to myself not as an “I can” but as an “other people can, but not me.”

Theme 20:

Perhaps to lessen the anxiety of approaching an other whose value has made them seem beyond my reach, it becomes important to establish commonalities between us that make us seem more like each other. If I myself am highly valued by the other, I might lessen the other’s approach anxiety by making self-disparaging remarks, showing my human side by blushing when the other looks at me, revealing something about myself that makes the other identify with me, or evoking the comfort of well-known elements from the other’s past relationships.

In many of the flirting accounts, the valued uniqueness of the other was combined in some way with perceived commonalities.

Veronica liked that her “other” was also a pharmacy major. It opened up a window for being able to study together.

Sabrina began feeling more comfortable around the other person once it became clear that he wasn’t like the other fraternity men at the party from whom she thought herself to be different. “I could tell that, while he was in the fraternity, he wasn’t really like them, and I felt a little bit okay... He wasn’t as abrasive, he was a little bit more laid-back, more like my personality... You find comfort with someone similar to you.”

Adam finds that the other’s blush makes her seem more “human” and makes it possible for him to identify with her since he remembers episodes where he himself has

blushed. He also finds it comforting that she is a chef, which invokes an image of well-known motherly care. In addition, he finds an immediate connection with the other from the fact that they shared the same situation of being two individuals sitting by themselves in the bar: “It was almost as if we were in the same situation too, maybe. We were both sitting there drinking by ourselves. It was kind of that connection too.”

Veronica makes a self-disparaging remark about herself on the other’s answering machine, which makes her seem more approachable. As she states, “I called him and left a message that said, ‘Hey you, its Veronica. I was just wondering if you would like to be my date for my sorority’s winter formal. I am currently a dateless loser, so hopefully you can change that for me.’”

Finally, the idea that comfort is connected with the familiar seems congruent with examples given both by Sabrina and Nicole.

I have already described how Nicole found the comforts of home in and through her interactions with the other, so I will here focus on Sabrina instead. As Sabrina states at one point in her account, “The more comfortable I got with him, the more I felt like, ‘ok, this isn’t really new’. I felt like, okay, I’ve known him... I seriously felt like I knew him for a long time.... In thinking that, I somehow subconsciously thought back to my previous relationship and was like ‘oh yeah, how would I be acting if I was with him’.”

Phenomenological Interpretation #5: Flight into Performance and Calculation

In response to one’s valuing of the other, it becomes important to be valued by this other in return. This gives rise both to a desire to show oneself as a unique individual who stands out from the crowd and to hide one’s uniqueness due to a fear that the other might reject or devalue one if one doesn’t. Consequently, one often takes flight into a

performance self, into social act and character types, or into calculative considerations of how to be.

Although flirting might create excitement in the face of the new possibilities opened up by the other who seems unique and valuable to me, it also necessitates that I strive to become unique and valuable to the other person in return. This entails showing myself in a way that distinguishes me from the general crowd and makes me stand out in some way. However, insofar as I stand out, I invite the uncertain judgment by an other of my unique being. I invite being looked at or noticed, and as Sartre (1943/1986) says, “To be looked at is to apprehend oneself as the unknown object of unknowable appraisals—in particular, of value judgments” (p. 304). It is this uncertain judgment that makes me fearful of showing myself in my uniqueness since I risk having it rejected. This tension between wanting to stand out and not wanting to stand out has the potential to make me highly calculative in my self-presentation as I try to figure out who the other wants me to be so I can become that or try to live up to certain cultural stereotypes of what is valuable to “everyone,” “to a woman,” “to a man” and so forth. In and through an attempt to control the event of my reception by the other, flirting thus frequently shows itself in a double reduction mediated by “Das man” (how *one* must or should act).

Evidence and Exemplification through Life-World Accounts

Theme 21:

Sometimes my desire to be liked by the other paralyzes me or makes me afraid of showing who I am because I am afraid that the other will judge me or devalue me in some way. Such fears of judgment can inhibit me greatly, meaning that instead of risking rejection, I shrink in the face of this possibility, stopping myself short of evoking a situation where the other could judge me. I may, as Stevens (2007) writes, impose limitations on my self-showing (become inhibited) so as “not to wake up the symptom of anxiety” (p. 148).

Nicole, for example, commented that, “I’m so afraid to put myself out there because if I look stupid or it doesn’t work, I’ll just feel dumb, and no one wants to feel dumb.” In another situation, Sabrina who was sitting in a loveseat next to the person she liked, said she was, “pretty much afraid to move” because “if I move and I do something stupid like knock over my drink, I’m going to feel like an idiot...” Finally, when Matthew’s friends began sharing personal information about him to the girl he was interested in during a college party, he “began to worry that she might think I was too crazy for her and irresponsible.” We can infer from this comment that he would rather hold back certain information about himself so as to not evoke the possibility of judgment.

Theme 22:

In many cases, the fear of having my singular being devalued by the other person leads me to hide aspects of myself, arrogate qualities to myself that I do not have, accentuate positive aspects of myself or abandon myself completely to an image of myself that is defined by what I think the other wants instead of who I really am.

Speaking about the meeting with her dark philosopher who was sitting on a bench in the common area of her dorm, Josie II feels she has to “put on a mask” and hide the less desirable aspects of herself, “I of course couldn’t let out how bad I needed affirmation or, you know, how inferior I felt. I had to, for the moment, pretend I belonged to that social circle [the intelligent people of the college], you know, I was pretending what should have been true or what everyone else probably perceived as true, but for me it was just pretense.”

Kevin also feared negative judgment by the other when he flirted. He was insecure about being two years younger than his date, insecure about his lack of

experience with other women, and insecure about the fact that he still lived in the dorms. He was afraid that the other would think of these facts as signs of his immaturity. As a result, he tried hard to convey the opposite impression. By taking charge of planning the date, he could act according to stereotypes of a confident male and thereby cover over his inner insecurity. As he says, “I wanted to come off as being confident. I wanted to come off as being mature for my age. I didn’t want her to think I was indecisive or wishy-washy, immature, and I was insecure about that because I had no experience with this whatsoever.”

In my own account, I also felt a need to exceed myself in order to impress the other person. As I wrote, “In general I found it very difficult to talk to Susan. I had become very self-aware and didn’t feel I could be spontaneous around her. I felt I needed to say the right things and appear the right way, for otherwise I would not be special enough for her to like me. My need to impress her made me feel inadequate and I took flight into a performance self to counter my inadequacy.”

As all of these examples show, the need to impress the other in the face of a fear of being judged, is likely to lead to a split self in which one holds something back about oneself while being calculative about how one show oneself.

Theme 23:

Anxiety about the exposure of my uniqueness often leads me to take flight into a calculative way of being. Instead of showing who I am or acting as I naturally would, I project a calculative or stereotypical horizon for what the other person is likely to appreciate or not appreciate about me, so I can act the part. This horizon may be projected in a more general way as the typical male or female characteristics “one” should demonstrate to be valued by a person of a specific gender or, in a more specific way, as what this type of person (sports fan, dark philosopher etc) is likely to value. By

acting on the basis of such projected *act types* and *characterological types* (Schutz, 1932/1967), I start to relate to the other and to myself as *types* of people.

Thinking that men in general are afraid of commitment and do not want a girl who is too needy, Sabrina tries to not come across as “serious” and to show that she is not “high maintenance.”

Through his initial conversation with the other, Matthew tries to figure out what she likes, which gives him a clue as to “what you can say to make her like you more. How you can act to make her like you more.” He said his interest in her “made me think a lot more about what I was saying and probably act a little more studious and try not just to be a drunk” He describes his strategy in flirting as “just trying to act like a typical male looking for a female.” When asked about the characteristics of such a typical flirtatious male, he describes him as a “wolf” who “chases” the woman “persistently.” To become this characterological type, he says, one must be “conniving,” “make sure you are perfect,” and “be pressing and charming” (i.e. engage in those sorts of act types).

Adam also invoked certain act types in order to guide him in his flirtatious endeavor. He described himself as following, “a common script that you would use when you meet a new person.” For one thing, he invokes the social script that the one who approaches the other should also be the one to take the lead in the conversation.

In my own account of flirting, it was clear that I too tried to live up to certain stereotypes of male worth to a woman. In my desire to be considered a suitable male by the girl I was interested in, I paid her tips, offered to carry her books, and acted as the protector who made sure she didn’t fall off the raft during a rafting trip. As I write, “At one point, when we were walking back [to the dorms], I offered to carry Susan’s books.

She accepted. I remembered that this made me feel manlike. I hoped she would look at me this way as well.”

As these examples show, the event of flirting can become actualized at the level of “Das Man” in which one acts like everyone does in this type of situation or acts like a “male” does or a “woman” does.

Theme 24:

Since flirting always involves the expression of erotic desire in some form, it would be natural that many of the characterological types and act types, through which one both hides oneself and shows oneself in flirting, pertain to gender stereotypes. Consequently, flirting tends to be a gendered event in which something about my masculinity or femininity gets decided.

One prominent cultural stereotype of gender roles in flirting seems to be that the feminine position involves “waiting” while the masculine position involves “taking charge.”

Kevin felt that his “date” would have clear expectations that he act the part of a man: “I think she would expect me to have some concrete plans in mind. Not necessarily have everything planned out, but that I would have some idea of what we would do, and that was like my responsibility.” If he didn’t take charge of the evenings events in this way, he felt he “wouldn’t be living up to the gender expectations that people have for men in this sort of context.”

For many of the women, however, taking charge would be to transgress the typical feminine act type. This would be in accord with Young’s (1990) idea of a feminine intentionality that is defined as an inhibited intentionality where possibilities are lived as possibilities for others and not for myself. In this context, this would mean

relegating the power to decide my faith to the man rather than actively going after what I want.

Examples abounded in the descriptions by female research participants of feeling inhibited in their ability to go after what they wanted in a direct way. For many of them, it was ultimately up to the “man” to choose *them* and not vice versa, leaving them in the more passive position of having to wait for the man’s initiative.

In Nicole’s account, for example, her more passive role is revealed through the fact that it is ultimately up to the man “to come back” and “find” her the next day to show that she “meant something to him.” After she had shown her interest, “the ball was in his court,” she said.

Sabrina, also took a more passive position in relation to the man she was interested in. As they walk out to her car after meeting each other at a party, she has a definite interest in continuing their acquaintance beyond the present context, but rather than letting him know, she instead awaits his initiative, which initially isn’t forthcoming. Sabrina’s focus shifts from what *she* can do to bring about the desired outcome to what *he* is or is not doing. As she writes, “He didn’t know whether or not to hug me. He didn’t know what to do.” She is now forced to await his initiative (“okay, you’ve been talking my ear off all night, how about just doing that again”). As no request for her phone number seems to be forthcoming, she gets into her car thinking that “all my hard work in flirting had gone right out the window.” Then, when he finally does find the courage to ask for her phone number, she is still hesitant to get her hopes up, since the initiative still falls on him to be the one to call her. As she states, “I was very excited and then, on the

second hand, okay he asked me out, what if he never calls me again, or what if it wouldn't work.”

Veronica seems to both challenge and abide by the dominant feminine act stereotype. On the one hand, she is the one asking for the other's phone number, which she comments on by saying, “for a girl to do that, I think he got the sense that I was immediately outgoing and stuff.” Yet this active position is later replaced with an inhibited intentionality, when she comments that “I think we definitely knew that we wanted to be friends and we had made arrangements to hang out... and so after that I kind of didn't know what he really wanted to do.” Here the focus again shifts back to what *he* wants and to awaiting her faith from a place outside of her own control.

According to Zerbe (1996), we can explain the passive position taken up by these women as the product of masculine standards of evaluation of feminine worth, for as she writes, “An unconscious, although precariously maintained, masculine prerogative has been a dread of women's development of self and voice. Women have concomitantly feared and avoided cultivating their own power” (p. 812). An example of what might be at stake if a woman transgresses this standard of “the they” is that she may be considered to be either too needy or too “loose,” a sharp contradistinction to a “man” who, like Matthew, affirms his desirability by “chasing a woman” or by being a “wolf” who actively pursues his prey.

These cultural standards, however, are not so fixed that there is no room to challenge them. In Greg's account, for example, he laments that women are not more active and finds it desirable when a woman goes after what she wants. However, such agency in a woman can at the same time be exercised too much in which case it would

make him weary. Here is what he said, “It does kind of bother me the stigma in society where guys are expected to be the ones to approach and take the initiative. But I’ve heard girls a lot of times say, ‘man, I was interested in this guy but he never came and talked to me. I see it as a big sign, it really stands out to me, when a girl can take the initiative and approach a guy. That always makes me think, ‘wow, she can do that!’” However, at the same time he says, “I guess sometimes they can turn out to just be loose, you know what I mean, someone who throws herself at guys. I mean, you don’t want one that does that too much, but at the same time it is impressive to me, it earns you extra points, if a girl can do that.”

Another gendered stereotype that would seem to find support in the writings of De Beauvoir (1949/1989), Simmel (1923/1987) and Linschoten (1969), is the idea that the typical woman comes to think of the other as a way to make her whole, whereas the typical man comes to think of the woman as a supplement or adjunct to an already whole existence.

A good example of this would be Matthew’s idea that he really just wants sex from the other, whereas the other might want a relationship that would require a larger piece of him. It was also a lot more common in the female accounts to see descriptions of the other as someone who could save them from a more depressed position and provide their life with meaning. I have already mentioned the example of Sabrina who wanted to be freed from her future as a “cat lady” and Josie’s desire to be picked by the other in order to become the person she wants to be.

Linschoten (1969) would explain this phenomenon as a function of the feminine in our society being defined as an otherness to a masculine practical goal-oriented

existence. It thereby becomes the case that the woman achieves her identity or place in a male dominated society only by means of subverting the man's goal-oriented activity. She can thus attain to her womanhood only in and through her allure, which leads to a departure from practical intentionality, whereas the man can feel whole with or without subverting the woman. For the typical woman, therefore, the stakes of flirting could thus be said to be higher, since their very sense of identity or "femininity" is what is being decided, whereas this is not the case for the man who is always already a "man" when living in the status quo of a practical existence. In and through a haptic encounter with a woman, Linschoten writes, "The body of a man *transforms* its meaning from instrument to expressive medium," whereas in and through the woman's encounter with the man, "the body of the woman *fulfills* its immanent meaning by revealing itself as expressive meaning" (p. 183). For Linschoten, the man's penis, as a useless instrument for "work," first introduces him into his feminine potential by carrying him beyond a practical being-in-the-world, whereas the woman's body is already defined by its sensuous and therefore impractical properties. "The woman as a person," he says, "fulfills the meaning which is predelineated in her body in its 'useless tenderness', in the relaxed movement of an arm, in the purposeless smile, in the superfluous diffidence, the shy blush, the waiting attitude, the unintentional showing and marking of her bodily forms in posture, walk, and way of dressing and thus in every expression which shows the openness of an existence without tension and effort" (p. 183). We need not consider this feminine stereotype a biological destiny rooted in anatomy, however. The alterity of the feminine can also be considered a "social construction" (De Beauvoir, 1949/1989). Nevertheless, living within the degree of

the event designated by “Das Man” makes it the case that many women find themselves living out such stereotypes when they flirt.

Theme 25:

When we feel spurred by our need to impress to act the part of a self that seems incongruent with our customary self or who we normally think of ourselves as being, this introduces an underlying fear of being exposed or found out—of being seen as “pretending” to be what I am not or of having my perceived negative qualities exposed.

Josie II, for example, describes her “semi-stunned terror” of being found out: “I’m barely containing something really ugly that could come out at any second.” This makes her “vigilant or on guard that someone could see through me.” In the face of the other, she feels as if she is being put to the test or evaluated and she is fearful that she will not pass the test. Once she feels accepted by the other, she experiences a sigh of relief, which reveals that she had been feeling a lot of anxiety. At this point, she says, “It seems like, somehow, I passed the trial because he hasn’t gotten up to leave, or like decided it wasn’t worth it anymore.”

Sabrina, too, is concerned with concealing how she really feels. She had to try “not to show how nervous” she is.

Theme 26:

Sometimes objectifications of myself from past encounters with others claim me as obstacles to my desire to become seen in a different way by new others.

Jason was hindered greatly by the way he had received himself in a past relationship that made him view himself as possibly arrogant and domineering. He also carried the weight of his past objectification as a dork, and looked at the possibility of failure in flirting as a possible confirmation of this identity. He imagined other people

judging his flirting skills when he flirted with someone in front of them. He imagined them thinking, “he’s a dork, he’s stupid, he’s dumb.”

Veronica carried a sense with her that she came “with more baggage than most girls” because her father died when she was 16.

Sabrina entered into a fraternity party with the sense that others judged her for being stuck-up. As she said, “I’m notorious for being called prude because people think I’m stuck up and I just sit there.”

In all of these examples it is as if we carry an objectivity with us in the face of “a generalized Other” that is unique to each of us. We all imagine who we are to others and have been to others in the past and every new encounter with someone always takes place within such a horizon of who I have been. This “being” that defines who I am is, however, always subject to modification through new encounters with others and must therefore be described as a “facticity” that gets determined retroactively rather than a brute fact about my personality. In this light, flirting as a new encounter with an other, represents an opportunity to receive my facticity in a different way.

Phenomenological Interpretation #6: Flirting as a Leap of Faith

Flirting tends toward an absolute limit of having one’s faith decided from “elsewhere” or from a point beyond one’s control. Such moments happen when one offers oneself without any guarantee that one’s offering will be returned. In such moments, which I will describe as “leaps of faith,” one has to let go of one’s subjective control and await one’s destiny from the uncertain response of the other.

Flirting, as an event through which I discover my desires, tends toward the moment of a clear communication to the other of what I want. Expressing this unequivocal desire in the face of uncertainty about how the other will respond can be

described as engaging in “a leap of faith” since it always involves a leap beyond what can be controlled and predicted. Flirting involves a leap of faith any time I communicate my desire in advance of knowing whether it will be returned. Flirting requires many moments of awaiting my destiny from a point beyond myself and thus many small “leaps of faith”: One person has to be the first to touch with their look, to initiate a conversation, to make bodily contact, to make felt attraction explicit, and to ask for a phone number. In such situations, I no longer control the faith of my destiny, but await it from an elsewhere over which I have no control. This awaiting of my future from a future beyond the one that I can project can consequently be extremely anxiety-provoking, since it makes my subjective facticity dependent upon an intention beyond my own.

Evidence and Exemplification through Life-World Accounts

Theme 27:

A leap of faith can either occur naturally, when my doubt about the other’s response to the communication of my desires is almost completely eradicated and one thing just leads to another, but can also be a high stakes gamble in which I dare to declare my interest without certainty of what the other’s answer will be.

Matthew, whose inhibitions and anxieties got diminished through his consumption of alcohol, described how he had no doubts about asking a girl for her number whom he had spent the evening flirting with. “It was almost like she wanted to give it to me,” he says. “I don’t remember what I said. I just remember it being smooth and not even really thinking about it, just getting it.”

Veronica also described her leap to kiss the other as something that “came out of nowhere”: “we were just hanging out and then all of a sudden I kissed him because I knew that we had been hanging out for long enough that he wasn’t going anywhere.”

In Sabrina's situation the comfort she felt with the other also made her leap happen naturally, yet she realized, after the fact, that there was risk involved in making such a bold move: "Without actually realizing I think, just out of comfort, I grabbed his hand and I thought 'oh, what did I do!'" In this last example, Sabrina's action seems to happen pre-intentionally in the sense that her body acted for her out of the call of comfort.

However, in other accounts, the uncertainty of whether or not the other will return my desire either makes me hesitate to communicate it at all or makes the leap much more anxiety provoking and a lot less natural.

When Josie makes her desire explicit in and through the way she touched her dance partner, she describes the waiting involved in the leap as follows: "Yeah it was scary because there was nothing else I could do ... I just kind of like put myself in that weak of a position and basically he was in the position to leave me there or take me back to the next place, so it *was* a kind of a leap. Yeah... it was kind of a Kierkegaardian moment. But it was an interesting moment. I was kind of hanging in the balance, I wasn't sure, which way I was going to be... you know... [I was] waiting for this momentous future event, you know: Would it happen? Would it not happen?"

Anxiety also showed through in Veronica's account. After she made the leap of leaving a message on a person's answering machine asking him to go with her to a formal in her sorority, she could not bring herself to pick up the phone when he called back. Instead she waited for him to leave a message. "I was just nervous because I didn't know if he was going to say yes or no... so I just let it go to voicemail and then figured that if he said yes then I could call him back and immediately talk to him about it and say that I was downstairs talking to my mom or something."

In the extreme case of anxiety displayed by Jason, a leap was never made. He did not feel the right kind of “casualness” had been established between him and the other, so she remained a fantasy and not a real possibility. As he says, “I would want to ask her out but I always hesitate (I do this a lot with girls. I get scared.)” When asked what scares him about asking the other out, he told me, “I guess it would be embarrassing if it came across as too bold,” and later on, “I feel that I should have more of a rapport with her before asking her for coffee or for dinner or whatever.”

Theme 28:

When there is still doubt about whether or not the other person will return my interest in them, the leap is felt as a barrier of uncertainty that I must push myself through to avoid becoming paralyzed by it. To act despite uncertainty in the face of possible rejection requires *courage*.

Deciding to approach the other person for the first time, Greg wonders if it “is the right time” and tries to take “so many considerations into account at the same time.” However, as he says, “the more you do it, the easier it becomes to just overcome that, just force yourself past that.”

Benjamin also speaks of the act of making his interest known to the other as an act of courage. As he says about making the leap to ask for the other’s number: “I then muster up some courage (helped, no doubt, by the alcohol in my system) and say ‘I was wondering if you’d like my number, so that maybe we could hang out some time? If you want’.”

Theme 29:

The ultimate “leap” is the leap of giving an unequivocal sign that I am interested in the other person beyond the present context. Unlike some “leaps” that can always be retracted, the ultimate leap communicates that I am serious about the other or committed

to my desire for the other. It is thus a leap that turns the playful discovery of desire into a desire for a more serious commitment and in doing so ends the flirtation and turns it into something else, such as a committed relationship, a sexual encounter or an official date. The ultimate leap is the time of asking the other the question “will you?” without absolute certainty of how the other will respond.

Josie describes her ultimate leap of faith as follows: “I think I wanted this thing that had been hinted at for so long in the dances and to an extent outside the dances, you know, for that to become stated, for it to become explicit. I guess even to move from flirting to something declared, you know, no longer toying with it, but declaring it, from promise to guarantees. I do this simply—when we dance, I change the sexual element from deep and implicit to a statement, or rather, a question: will you?”

The leap that Josie engages in here is still not one that declares her desire through an unambiguous statement, but her intention is made clear through a haptic intention that makes her desire known and ends what we could call the flirtatious or ambiguous part of the flirtation. The flirtation can now become the start of something else: be it a relationship, a sexual encounter, or an explicitly romantic date, but it can never go back to being what it was before. With her ultimate leap, Josie has changed the nature of the encounter forever: it will now either lead to rupture or change into something more durable. From being a playful game of open-ended possibilities (both/ and), flirting now becomes a forced choice between two desires (either/ or).

Adam also finds himself at the cross roads of an either/ or decision that confronts him with the moment of the ultimate leap: “I am kind of processing what is going on and I’m getting to the point where I’m “What am I gonna do from here?” Is this kind of just BS’ing with somebody at the bar or is this... [I’m] considering whether or not to pull through and make it something different.”

Theme 30:

If I offer myself and am rejected, the feeling is often one of “shame” and “humiliation.” I might feel stupid, of diminished worth, or socially inadequate. However, I might also feel relief from the fact that at least now I know.

Josie felt disappointed at the loss of possibilities that her being rejected entailed, but also felt relief that “at least now I know.” Being rejected by the other led her to ask questions of herself about her ability to perceive social cues, feeling like maybe something was wrong with her for not having perceived the situation correctly. She wondered if maybe she had done things differently or waited a little longer, would the outcome have been different? As she states it, “I was probably somewhat relieved and maybe a little bit surprised or ashamed. This was not the response I had expected and I was probably worried that I misunderstood something or that I hadn’t thought it through or there was something wrong with the way I was thinking, that I hadn’t realized something, probably mixed in with a lot of the self-doubt I had at the time. Maybe I hadn’t really assessed the situation. Maybe there is something wrong with me that I couldn’t understand what was going on here.” When asked what the relief was about, she answered, “I think just that I had declared this or brought this up to the open. There was some tension there that now was gone. You know a partly pleasurable tension, but it was nonetheless some question that was hanging in the air and I considered... So it’s like I finally conducted this experiment. You know, it was probably a mix of disappointment, but also ‘at least now I know.’ I might have been thinking, ‘this would have worked if I had tried later or done it differently,’ but on the other hand, I could have just been thinking, ‘okay, now I know it’s not gonna work.’”

Theme 31:

A common way of ascertaining the certainty of the other's desire for me is through what I will call a *test of free will* in which an opportunity for the other to show that they choose me over others is created. The purpose here is to discover the strength of the other's interest in me in and through the other's free choice to stay even when they could leave or to say yes even when they could say no. The other's desire for me is believed more strongly the more the other's free will to stay or say yes is maintained within situations that are unique to the two of us, for in such situations, the other's choice is more likely to be a choice for me rather than to be attributable to happenstance. The fact that the other person sits next to me when she could choose not to is thus not nearly as specific to me as the fact that she stays even when I touch her knee.

Such little tests of free will are deployed in many different ways. Nicole gives us one example when she says, "If I ask him questions I can test to see how into the situation the guy really is... like if he's responsive or if he starts asking questions to me... if he flips it back on me... I'll be like, oh, he is interested in what I have to say, it's not just me asking him." Later on, Nicole gives another example when she says, "After you spent hours with one person talking to them it seems as though it's almost common sense that they are going to be interested. He, at any moment, had the option to walk away, but he didn't, you know what I mean?"

Kevin took the other's willingness to buy alcohol for the two of them, which was to be consumed during the movie he had invited her to watch, to be a sign that her interest was not just in watching the movie, but in being social with Kevin. As he explains his logic: "It seemed like she was willing to go back to my dorm room, watch a movie with me and have some drinks, so she is obviously interested in something... Just watching a movie together could be a different thing, but sharing a drink together and watching a movie somehow was different, and so that to me really confirmed to me that something was going on."

Sabrina induced that the other was interested in her from the fact that when she got back from the rest room, the other person had saved her seat by putting a pillow down where she had been sitting. This indicated to her that he would like to sit next to *her* and not just any which person. When asked how she experienced this fact, she told me, “That took my sort of feeling good about the whole thing to feeling ‘holy cow, he really listens to me!’ I felt really flattered and I thought ‘okay this is alright!’.”

In a different situation, Greg tests the other’s free will by asking her for a drink. Her non-refusal of the request is then interpreted as a sign of her interest in him. As he explains, “You know if she is ‘oh no, I don’t want to come to the bar’ then alright, ‘I’ll leave you alone’. But if she does want to come, then, okay, she’s interested.”

Adam’s courage to strike up a conversation with the other is also spurred by the demonstration of the other’s free will to sit near him. As he says, “the bar was empty and she chooses to sit here for some reason.” This possible expression of free will on her part, as he says, “made me think that she might be more receptive to me talking to her... Maybe if she had sat four bar stools down I would have taken that as she didn’t want to talk to anybody.”

Benjamin describes the test of free will as something that can be used strategically to convey one’s own interest in the other. As he says, “Walking by someone at a bar, especially if done repeatedly, shows my interest in that person.” However, Benjamin also uses it to interpret the other’s interest in him: “After a few minutes on the patio, my special guy and his group of friends come outside as well. Aha! So, it’s working. Generally, if someone follows me wherever I go in the bar—well, clearly then they must be interested.”

Theme 32:

Wanting a commitment from the other in advance of showing my own can lead me to actively try to elicit the other's desire without revealing much about my own. The paradox here is that I can adopt a seemingly passive role in which I let the other talk or show themselves to me while nevertheless remaining the active one or the one in control.

As Nicole states, "Especially because of the fear of rejection ... I'll usually let the other person take the lead and I just sit back and sort of be goofy or whatever until I feel like I know that they are interested... so that can let me be more relaxed and willing to put myself out there."

This is also a tactic used by Greg: In order to show interest in the other and hide his own insecurities about sharing personal information, he takes the role of the one who asks interested questions, rather than the one who talks. As he says, "If I just start talking about myself, I don't know if I am boring her. I am more self-conscious about what I am saying. But if it is a topic that I know she is interested in then I don't feel that as much. If I know that it is something that she brought up then I can just kind of go with it, then I know that *she* is interested in it."

When Josie II gets into a conversation with her other, she lets him do the talking while sitting back and concentrating on making him feel understood: "I'm listening, kind of understanding more than I think I understand, but kind of just listening and trying to show him that I understand, that we're on the same page... I'm not really asserting anything, I'm just kind of showing that I understand, hoping he won't see through it or anything..."

In these examples, Nicole, Greg and Josie, although seemingly passive, are really in a position of control because an active conscious intention animates their passive role as listener.

Theme 33:

The anxiety of being devalued or rejected by the other can also be lessened if one lowers the stakes of what is being ventured in and through flirting. If the possibility through which I discover the other is the possibility of getting married or of saving myself from myself, the stakes are obviously higher than if I am just looking for someone to talk to and seeing where things might go from there. Anxiety in the face of the leap can thus be diminished by not getting my hopes up too high and not thinking too far into the future. In other situations, already having a horizon with a different other can do the trick.

A demonstration of lowering one's investment is given by Nicole when she reports her thought process regarding whether or not her group of women should join a group of men in her dorm. As she says, "let's just go say hi... it can't hurt... if they don't like us we'll go back upstairs, we don't care..."

Josie II also lowers her stakes by reasoning that she is already at a low point where things can only get better. As she says, "I have a hope that maybe I can talk to this person, or let's see what happens, or, you know, things can't get any worse so why not try."

Kevin's stakes were lowered by the fact that he was already in a long-distance relationship with someone in which they had nevertheless agreed that they were free to pursue sexual relations with others. As Kevin states, "I didn't feel I had a lot to lose. A lot of that had to do with the fact that I had a girlfriend."

Veronica also kept her horizon narrow. She did not initially flirt with the understanding that it could lead to a relationship, but thought it alright if she just made a new friend: "If our relationship would have stopped there, then it wouldn't have been a loss to me either because I knew that we would have been friends."

Adam also did not think the stakes of initiating contact with the other were incredibly high. As he says about his deliberations regarding whether or not to approach

the other: “I’m not feeling like WOW!, and it’s not a pull. It is almost out of like ‘Well, I’m not doing anything else’.” As he later states, his anxiety about rejection was assuaged by the fact that “I didn’t really care. I knew nothing really was going to happen, and I was really still in the back of my mind, thinking about my friends coming.”

Phenomenological Interpretation #7: Flirting as an Individualizing Encounter

The flirtatious encounter individualizes one beyond the average everyday way of being a self like everybody else and endows one with an individuality and uniqueness that only another’s singular desire can call one into. Through the other’s desire that singles one out and makes it impossible for another to answer in one’s place, one becomes one’s most unique self.

Flirting is an encounter that individualizes me in a way that interactions with others in the practical everyday do not. This is so because I obtain my unique and singular being in and through becoming singled out by another person whose desire addresses itself to me in such a way that “no one can answer in my place” (Levinas, 1963/1986, p. 353). This consequently means that our innermost center or individuality really comes from elsewhere than from ourselves, for “I become myself and recognize myself in my singularity when I discover and finally admit the one I desire; that one alone shows me my secret center – that which I lacked and still lack” (Marion, 2007, p. 46). This then is another sense in which I can be said to become my most singular self through flirting rather than be in possession of this self a priori. As Marion writes, “At this instant, in which it is precisely too late, in which it has already happened, in which I am made by the other and by my desire – I am no longer the same, and thus I am, at last, myself; individualized beyond the point of return” (p. 109)

Evidence and Exemplification through Life-World Accounts

Theme 34:

A flirtatious encounter in which the other singles me out makes me feel valued for my uniqueness. The other's desire, which might as well have been directed at others around me, is directed exclusively at me and that makes me feel chosen and therefore special.

The sense of flirting as a process of singling each other out was evident from Nicole's account. She initially met the other she became interested in as part of a larger group, where after she said, "we hung out with them two or three times and then we like... really singled each other out, we didn't even really hang out with the group." Later on she explains how she uses the tactic of singling the other out as a way to make him more interested in her. As she says, "By doing certain flirting things, like laughing, or touching him on his leg or something... I was just trying to make sure that he knew I was focused on him. Like even when there was the whole group in the room... I wasn't really talking to them... I almost wanted to make it seem like I didn't care what they were doing, that I was really happy just with him..."

The attempt to make the other feel special by singling him out is also used by Sabrina. In her account, she describes one of her flirtatious acts as "cracking a sarcastic joke and directing it toward the person in a way only they could understand."

The special feeling of being singled out by an other is also described in Josie's first account where she tells me, "Somehow out of the crowd I have become the person with the right qualities or someone who is the most interesting, and I feel like at that point I occupy a pretty singular position."

Daniel also felt very special when he felt he was drawing the waitress' undivided attention toward him. As he states, "She had oriented to ME, even though I was

surrounded by friends (some of them attractive smart young males). It was VERY strange... I felt highly surprised, but very pleasantly..."

As these examples demonstrate, the sense of being singled out and singling the other out plays a prominent role when we flirt.

Theme 35:

The value of being picked increases with the sense that this person, who has picked me, has picked me *instead* of others. For this to happen the person must be able to pick others and not just pick me by default or because they cannot have anyone else. They must have exercised a choice, for it is the other's *choice* of me that makes me feel special.

As Josie says, "It is not much fun to dance with somebody who is unconfident or is not a very good dancer or, you know, will dance with anybody in the room. I guess I am looking for people who have something to offer, who are in a position where they can be selective. I don't really get much pleasure from dancing with anyone who will have me [...] Yeah, you know, they have to be clearly worthy, and because they are they can choose me as someone who is worthy also."

Kevin's sense of being special by being picked by the other increased with the satisfaction of knowing that the woman who had picked him was also considered attractive by others. It made him feel more accomplished that he was able to get someone to like him who had other options available. Speaking about another man whom he knew desired her as well, he commented that "there was definitely satisfaction, you know, getting what he wasn't able to."

Sabrina also felt special by the fact that she had been picked by someone whom the other girls at the party had also shown an interest in. As she says, "everyone liked Joe. Joe was like a lovable guy and hadn't really had a girlfriend and everybody wanted to

date him, but he wouldn't date anyone." The fact that he had flirted with her and not the other girls meant that she had come "out on top" and her awareness of the competition made her become extra bold in communicating her interest. As she says, "After I knew about that, I'm 'okay', I really like this guy. He needs to know I like him."

Theme 36:

The erotic or haptic dimension of flirting may have special prominence in singularizing both participants of the flirtation, since a haptic desire seems more unique to the person who is touched than a more general interest in someone's conversation, for example. Linschoten (1969), for example, argues that "Sexual desire asks for the person and thus asks for expression, not for his activities" (p. 195). I interpret this to mean that haptic desires express interest in me as the desiring and expressive agent of my activities, and not simply in my activities. I thus feel wanted for who I am as a unique individual and not for my activities which could easily be substituted or replicated by someone else.

The special significance of touch as a way to single someone out was evident in Nicole's account. When she feels a bodily connection with the other, this makes her feel like he is "interested" in her "as a person," for as she says, "the body contact just made me think that... it showed me that it was more than friends... because he wasn't doing that to anybody else, you know what I mean?"

Theme 37:

To have had a flirtatious encounter, even if it is not pursued beyond its time specific context and result in a commitment, still gives us a feeling that something very special has happened between us. We met somebody in a way that seemed more personal, and individualized us more, than most other encounters in our everyday lives.

Although Adam never ended up pursuing the other beyond the present context of his flirtatious interaction with her, he nevertheless felt "touched" in a special way by the encounter. The interaction with the other had "mattered" in a way that most other interactions had not. As he said, "It is always nice to meet a stranger. You just kind of get

a pleased feeling, like a sense that you met somebody that you might never have met before, like you kind of interacted with a stranger. It is not usually something one does... this person in the crowd stood out for a moment. You kind of got to know somebody that has this completely different life that's in no way connected to yours and probably never will connect to yours again..."

Phenomenological Interpretation #8: The Importance of Good Timing

In flirting there is often a sense that what is emerging between oneself and the other has a time and course of its own and that both oneself and the other are participating in a temporal phenomenon or event of which neither is exclusively in charge. To keep the flirtatiousness of the encounter alive, one must therefore master the art of timing, which means being neither too fast nor too slow.

Flirting has a time of its own in the sense that if one goes too fast or too slow, the flirtatiousness of the encounter will dissipate and it will turn into something else. One cannot flirt forever but must maintain a certain progression for the flirtatiousness to keep its momentum. At the same time, one cannot rush it, for that would be to "come on too strong" and transgress the other's boundaries. In flirting, proper timing therefore becomes one of the most important components. One must be able to ascertain from the signals the other is sending whether or not to slow down or move forward. Waiting too little or waiting too long are both detrimental to the flirtatiousness of the encounter. In this sense the phenomenal nature of the flirtatiousness is really located "between" us in the "rhythm" that we both sustain but of which neither of us are fully in control.

Evidence and Exemplification through Life-World Accounts

Theme 38:

In flirting there is a definite sense that one is participating in a temporal event between self and other that has its own progression. There is a limit to how long one can flirt without the flirtatious energy losing its momentum. Consequently, if one does not cease upon the readiness of the other person to move the relationship toward further intimacy and commitment, one eventually loses the opportunity to ever do so.

This idea of having to cease the moment while it is still ripe was present in both Josie's and Veronica's accounts. As Josie explains, "I think it sort of felt like if we continued at this sort of high intensity game we had been playing for a long time, it would sort of just go away. It had reached its peak and either we do something or it just kind of like goes away and becomes a thing that's only for [formal dances] and probably something that would then gradually lose energy and drop away." Veronica also acknowledges there being a certain time limit to the flirtatious event. As she states, "I think that eventually you get to this line where you are either going to be friends or you are going to be more than friends and that line needed to be crossed or we were just going to be friends forever... It had been two weeks that we were hanging out with friends and then like watching movies every once in a while or whatever and if I didn't kiss him soon, then I think that we would have just been friends forever."

Theme 39:

The need to move the flirtation forward toward increasing intimacy and commitment in due time also invokes a concern to not move it forward too quickly, since doing so runs the risk of transgressing the other person's boundaries and, as a result, becoming perceived by the other as socially inappropriate. The concern with finding a way to relax the boundaries between self and other (move the flirtation forward) without imposing myself thus becomes a major focal point guiding my actions.

Finding a way to move closer to the other person without imposing oneself was evident in both Greg's and Nicole's accounts. Greg is concerned with finding a way to get to talk to the person he is interested in, but he doesn't want to "break in" or "interrupt" her conversations with other people, and Nicole talks about asking questions of the other as a way to "break in." These manners of speaking indicate the boundaries that are always initially there between two people and in need of being removed.

The preoccupation with trying to get closer to the other without transgressing the other's boundaries leads Adam to walk a fine line in his conversation with the other. He describes the conversation they have as "not too personal, just getting some information, but deep enough that it was intimate at some level, but not pushing it to the point where it was too much. Not touching anything sensitive." To not intrude too much, he tries to find "safe" topics to talk about "that wouldn't be offensive, that wouldn't be too personal." He also tries not to look at her too intently: "I think to relieve that tension of kind of looking a stranger in the face, we would both switch our gaze and so I guess that whole thing was about not making it too serious, not making it too intense, not making it too personal."

For Sabrina, the other person was both at times too fast and too slow in his interactions with her. As she was leaving the party, where she had been flirting with him all night, she was disappointed that he did not ask for her number, but when he finally did and at the same time kissed her on the cheek, she said it seemed like "he had kind of fast-forwarded through a couple of things."

Greg also explained how the fear of transgressing enters into his calculations about the right timing of asking for someone's phone number: "If it is too soon she may not feel that she knows you well enough to give you her number and then if it is too soon

you may ruin it. Like ‘man, he’s coming on strong. He’s only talked to me for 5 minutes’.”

As we can see from these examples, the flirtatiousness of an encounter is about maintaining just the right balance between speed and slowness; moving forward and backing off.

Theme 40:

Flirting is never an isolated event. It always takes place as a transformation of other events. Only when the conditions are right does the proper situation present itself for a flirtatious encounter to be able to take place. This means that the attempt to create the right conditions for a flirtatious event to take place may sometimes actively be pursued or, conversely, that conditions outside of one’s control make the flirtatious event impossible.

For Veronica, calendar time became a temporary obstacle to flirting with someone she liked because the ending of the semester and the ensuing break would provide too little time to build the momentum needed. As she stated, “So close to a break it was kind of pointless to ask him any other questions, or if he wanted to hang out with me more or anything like that.”

Greg, who flirted at a wedding, had to wait to for a moment when the woman he was attracted to was not caught up in conversations with others. He needed a situation to occur in which she was sitting by herself so he did not have to worry about “breaking” into her conversations with others, nor with the added pressure of flirting in front of others.

In my own flirting account as well, creating the opportunity to meet someone whom I had no spontaneous interactions with during the routines of my average day, made me focused on changing my daily patterns so as to create more run-ins. “To increase my chance of having a ‘random’ encounter with her, I started reading or talking

to people down by the bench in front of her dorm room.” I also signed up for a trip offered by the campus church because I knew she would be going as well.

As these examples show, the conditions must be right for flirting to take place. We are never flirting in a vacuum, but are always flirting within the event of clock and calendar time and certain other temporal phenomena such as the time of a party, a dinner, a wedding ceremony and so forth. We can try to create the right conditions for flirting to take place, but cannot be completely in control of those conditions.

Phenomenological Interpretation #9: Breaking Down Boundaries through Affective Resonance

The sense of intimacy that is needed in order to break down the barriers between people who flirt is not accomplished by sharing information with each other, but by encountering oneself and the other in and through a shared world or intentionality (having a good experience together). Flirtatiousness either arises out of the comfort of such shared situations, which alleviates one’s fear of rejection by the other, or involves the conscious attempt to create such shared situations, as part of a tactic to eradicate one’s separateness from the other.

In order to avoid transgressing the other’s boundaries and being perceived as “breaking in,” a casualness has to be established that loosens the boundaries and breaks down the distance between us in a natural way. We can achieve this by establishing interpersonal comfort or “affective resonance.” Establishing affective resonance with an other is not about getting to know their opinions about things or about asking questions in search of information, but about being able to relax with each other with reference to a shared landscape or world. Such a sharing makes us feel like we know each other at a deeper more personal level than would be the case if we were just exchanging information about each other. We get to know each other in and through a shared intentionality or the disclosure of a world we have in common and thus discover

ourselves not as separate psyches, but as part of one and the same gathering. We are “in it” together.

Evidence and Exemplification through Life-World Accounts

Theme 41:

One of the ways to loosen the boundaries between two initially separate individuals is to create moments of shared enjoyment or “affective resonance” in which both subjects can meet each other in and through some shared “intentionality” or mode of being directed toward a shared object or content.

In Adam’ account, he meets the other not only in and through a shared conversational topic, but in and through their shared humorous way of relating to the topic. As he says, “I try teasing her a bit about being from New Jersey, she retorts by teasing me about coming from Louisiana.” Here the connection established obviously goes beyond the disclosure of something worldly toward a disclosure of a shared way of relating to something worldly. This way of relating to the other in and through a shared intentionality of disclosing an object produces a relaxation of the boundaries between the participants of the flirtation, since both are now in an experience *together* and thus by definition part of one and the same event. This state of affective resonance produces knowledge of the other person that goes beyond the knowledge of a mere exchange of information. It gives rise to the feeling of intimate familiarity with the other. In Sabrina’s account, for example, once affective resonance has been established, she says, “I seriously felt like I knew him for a long time.”

Theme 42:

As affective resonance gets established, the ability to relax with another person increases and one starts to feel less afraid of showing oneself to the other and communicating one’s

desires more directly and less ambiguously. I feel more certain that the other will not judge me or reject me when I discover myself in and through an affective resonance with the other.

As Sabrina began to relax more in the company of the other person, with whom her friend had unexpectedly set her up, she became more bold in showing her interest: “Once I saw that my feeling of comfort and approval of the set up seemed to be a mutual thing, I began to get gutsy and actually flirt.” Here again, Sabrina’s sense of a mutual intentionality becomes the precondition for daring to engage with the other in a flirtatious way. She experiences them both as being related toward each other and the situation in the same way. They are ‘in it together.’

Veronica’s bold leap to kiss the other person seemed to spring out of the comfort of the shared intentionality expressed by the fact that he “wasn’t going anywhere.” When asked what brought her to the point where she felt it was okay to kiss the other, she said, “I think that we were comfortable enough and knew enough about each other’s lives outside of just school.”

Nicole also emphasizes both trying to create comfort for the other so they feel less nervous around her and feeling more at ease with flirting once the other has established comfort with her. As she says, “As I start to like the person my flirting usually gets less and less forced ... I feel like asking questions... that’s something that’s like useful... but that’s not something that’s necessarily like natural... do you know what I mean? The more I start to like someone the more I start to just like have a conversation... it’s not so much of a question and answer session, it’s more of a genuine conversation about anything... like I don’t know what it is, but... it’s just more of a comfortable flow or connection or something and I just feel more comfortable rather than asking all these

stupid things that probably don't mean anything." What Nicole here seems to be describing is the establishment of an affective resonance that replaces the separateness that gets reinforced through a question and answer session.

Theme 43:

Through affective resonance we get to know each other through our being-in-the-world together rather than through the transfer of information and intentions from one mind to another. Since we discover each other most intimately in and through being in a shared situation, intimacy is therefore in reality quite ex-timate, or quite worldly. As Merleau-Ponty (1964/2000) says, "It is from this lawn before me that I think I catch sight of the impact of the green on the vision of another, it is through the music that I enter into his musical emotion, it is the thing itself that opens me unto the access to the private world of another" (p. 11).

That the road to greater intimate knowledge of a person is not through the exchange of information but through the sense of being related to one and the same shared world is apparent from Nicole's account. Here, she specifically pinpoints the moment of feeling like she knows the other as the moment when a mere exchange of information stops. As she tells it, "We got rid of all this nervous like... almost like we stopped... not getting to know each other, but we stopped asking simple meaningless things... we didn't care so much about our favorite movies... we got to know each other more... we didn't worry so much about little, meaningless, get-to-know-each-other facts..."

In some situations, flirting is not initially an intention arising from a separate individual, but an intention arising out of a shared intentionality. Hence, Matthew met the girl he became interested in through playing the social game of beer pong and Josie met her man by going to formal dances where she would dance with him. In both of these situations, Matthew and Josie share "the life of another," by "rejoining it," "in its ends, its

exterior poles” (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, p. 11). They discover “the other” in the “things” together with themselves, and not in some interior realm.

In Greg’s account, his desire to create greater intimacy with the other, leads him to find ways to create affective resonance and thus to meet them at the content pole of a shared experience. As he says, “I usually try to come up with something a bit more witty and circumstantial to say in order to initiate a conversation in these situations... like sometimes if something funny has just happened, you know, I’ll make a comment on that or something. Or if we are sitting in the same proximity and observing something together, then make a comment on something circumstantial like that to just kind of like break the ice.”

In many other encounters, a movie, a drink, a trip, a mock wrestling match and so forth become the “things” through which one can meet the other in a shared world relation. Veronica describes how watching the movie, “Summer Pitch” serves as the perfect medium for getting to know the other. The movie is a love story involving sports as well as parties, and this gave them both a world to discover themselves through: They could both talk about going to parties, while Veronica could show the other person that she was interested in sports and that she “wasn’t completely girly.” As Veronica states, “We just started talking about the movie that I had rented and if he had seen it before... and he has a million movies... he is like a huge movie buff, so I think that was kind of like an interest that both of us had.” Stated differently, Veronica and the other discovered themselves in the shared interest of the movie rather than by picking each other’s brains. They were thus already together in a shared world and not disengaged from one another as two separate psyches.

Jason was also aware of the importance of creating shared situations with the other in order to increase the affective connection. He thought of it as establishing “the common ground to have something to talk about other than something so intellectual as what we were studying.” He accomplished creating such a common ground when he joined the other in a casual study group in which they not only talked about homework, but also reminisced about their childhoods and talked about Italy where they both had plans to travel. He described this encounter as a “fun relaxed situation” and later begrudged the fact that he did not know how to bring back that “casualness” through which he had then related to her. The consequence was that he did not know how to move the flirtation beyond conversations such as, “Hi, how are you?”, ‘what did you do this weekend?’ or ‘what do you think of the professor’, all that boring stuff.” Jason’ example thus demonstrates how flirting never gains much momentum if it does not help one to discover oneself in a shared world with the other, for then it remains too cognitive and too impersonal and each person remains separated from the other.

Phenomenological Interpretation #10: Dialogue between Passion and Reason

Flirting calls one away from one’ average everyday existence and into an exploratory intentionality of possibilities that need not be committed to. As these playful possibilities gradually come to represent real courses of action that one can choose, practical concerns from one’s average everyday reenter the picture and ultimately bring the flirtatiousness to a close.

In and through flirting, a space is opened up in between self and other in which one discovers possibilities of being that are simultaneously beyond the concrete possibilities of being my practical everyday self and the concrete possibilities of committing to a shared life with the other. Hence when I find myself flirting, I exist on

the border between two practical realities: that of my own habitual reality, which the other has called me away from, and that of the other's reality whose practical consequences I have not yet decided to wed myself to. Flirting is sustained precisely by the possibility to discover which of these options I ultimately want to pursue. Although flirting initially depends on suspending practical concerns, so as to call me away from my definite goal-oriented attitude and into the play, it ultimately also involves the moment of making a choice, which in turn reinstates my practical concerns. In this sense, flirting is defined by the paradox that it contains a natural progression toward increased commitment, which it is simultaneously intended to ward off.

Evidence and Exemplification through Life-World Accounts

Theme 44:

Flirting brings both rational and imaginative horizons into play. I find myself responding to the call of the other and my attraction at the same time as I resist surrendering completely to it due to rational and practical concerns about what such a surrender might entail. Hence the dialogue between reason and passion, or between practical concerns and the excitement of a possibility beyond my own, is often an ongoing tension in me when I flirt.

Adam, who was scheduled to meet his friends at a bar, experienced the call of the other as an interruption of his plans. He now had to balance two different horizons for the evening, and after toying with the idea of entering the world of possible romance, he ultimately decides to reenter "the friend world." He describes it as follows: "That whole idea I had about the evening was kind of conflicting with this other kind of fantasy of, you know, talking to this girl." In Adam's case, he nevertheless "flirts" with the possibility of another horizon, even though the horizon of the other never manages to call him completely away from his other commitments.

Practical concerns also enter into the picture when Sabrina flirts. When meeting a new man just after a break-up, Sabrina was both drawn to him as a chance to get out of the dark place she was in (“this could be my chance”) and apprehensive because the possibility was projected that he could put her through the same heart-break that she had just been through. When she discovered that she had made an “inadvertent” bold advance by touching the other, she said “it snapped me back to reality, and I went “oh, maybe he’s not quite ready for that, maybe I’m not ready.” Then later on as she finds herself excited by the fact that the man has asked her for her phone number and has expressed interest in hanging out with her, she needs to remind herself not to get overly excited, for as she says, “This is really good, I don’t want it to end, but I need to be realistic and I need to know that he may not be having the same thoughts that I am.”

What these examples show is that our attraction to the other has to be strong enough to pull us out of our calculative everyday plans, but also tentative or playful enough that pre-mature concerns about commitment are not evoked. Only the right balance will lead to the precondition for a flirtatious encounter.

Theme 45:

Flirting can only sustain itself as long as it is lived as nonserious, playful and exploratory. Seriousness kills flirtatiousness because it brings back rational everyday concerns too soon, before I have had a chance to discover what I want or if I want.

Daniel illustrates the importance of keeping the flirtation playful and imaginative rather than serious. As he states, “The thought of ACTUALLY having a (sexual) relationship with this woman was very firmly a fantasy, something nice to imagine, but wholly out of the realm of possibility. The flirting was definitely inspired/ powered by my sense that it really didn’t mean anything outside of this context.” He also attributed

the flirtatious mood to a departure from an average everyday seriousness. As he says, “there was something about the gathering such that I found it relatively easy to not take things too seriously – to allow myself to “act out,” so to speak – to take risks, be a little goofy with my language, my sense of self.”

In Adam’s account, he also attributes a certain nonseriousness to the flirtatious encounter. As he said about whether or not to approach the woman that has caught his attention, “I kind of debate in my head whether or not I should try to start a conversation. I’m not sure what to do, thoughts of rejection and thoughts of success run through my mind.” When asked about this debate he was having with himself, Adam elaborated, “it is more like images of what might happen, different scenarios running through my mind. It’s kind of playful – nothing serious.”

For both Daniel and Adam an essential element of flirting is thus the tentative exploration of possibilities that sustains their imagination and keeps them anchored to the sense of safety of a possible return to their pre-flirtatious worlds.

Theme 46:

A sense of reality/ practical concern also enters into flirting in the sense that the more time I invest in flirting, the more intimate of an encounter I will have had with this person, and increased intimacy with another person is generally considered to commit both parties more to each other. It becomes harder to pull away or end a connection, the closer one gets to another or the longer I have led the other person on in an effort to discover what I want. All of a sudden pulling away makes me feel bad, and I now feel more bound not to disappoint the other person’s expectations.

This theme was illustrated by both Adam and Josie. Adam feels bad that he has to end his conversation with the other person when he sees his friends enter the bar. “Maybe there was a feeling of guilt, like, I had been talking with her for a little bit and I kind of just flew out of there as soon as I saw my friends.” Josie felt that the length of the

conversation she had with the other required a special ending: “You can’t really end a two hour conversation just casually, you have to do something, like some relationship had developed by that point...”

Theme 47:

When the possibilities I have flirted with become definite possibilities, this brings back concerns from the practical everyday that had not needed to be considered until then. My old commitments and longer standing everyday horizons, which the call into flirtation has interrupted, now reemerge as a sense of “reality” that sets itself over and against the other horizon of the merely playful possibility of something romantic happening. I now begin to analyze whether or not pursuing a possibility with the other is opportune for me when considered from within my practical everyday horizon. When this everyday horizon clashes with the horizon opened up to me by the other, it is typically the practical horizon with its plans and rational deliberations about what I want that wins out.

When Nicole starts to feel that she and the other are no longer flirting but can begin to take each other’s desire for granted, a set of practical concerns reenters the picture. Nicole begins to feel that the relationship has very little future: The timing is inopportune, she will soon be going abroad for a semester and she is in a place in her life where she does not want the commitment to a boyfriend to tie her down and close down possibilities of exploring other options. As she states, “we still talk, but it definitely isn’t going to lead to something really serious... we both just don’t have the time for it because I live in Philadelphia, he lives here... I’m going to Italy for a semester in the Fall... it’s just not a good time...”

In Veronica’s case, after having kissed the man she flirted with and having visited his family with him, a more long-term horizon of planning and rational deliberation reenters the picture. When asked the question “What future do you see for the two of you?,” she answers, “I think that after going home with him and having a small peak into his life... we could definitely like get married and be together or whatever... but, also,

our futures are kind of conflicting because I think that he would like to move back to his home town, where I was never raised in the country and I could never be raised in the country and I have to be near a city, and he lives in Lancaster, so it's about an hour and a half outside Philly... but an hour and a half outside of the city is still in the middle of nowhere.”

In both of these examples we see a return of a practical everyday horizon within which the other becomes either a tool or obstacle for accomplishing my average everyday projects. The other who formerly represented an exciting future beyond my own has now become a more or less concrete future or definite possibility that may or may not fit with my own. When the other—as a possibility of other possibilities than my own—ceases to claim me, the flirtation, as a departure from my everyday horizon, thus comes to an end.

Phenomenological Interpretation #11: Flirting as a Social Event Involving Others as well as the Other

The discovery of one's desire in flirting is not just a matter of personal deliberation and self discovery. What one wants and what one likes is often mediated by standards of worth that one receives from others or measure in relation to others.

When flirting is actualized in and through the they, which it often is, it cannot only be said to take place as an event between two individuals, but must be said to take place between two individuals and their complex relationship to others. In many ways, it can be said to be a performance on a social scene where others cannot only be spectators to the event, but will likely hear about it, or be present in and through the invocation of social stereotypes and standards for evaluating appropriate behavior and worth. Who I flirt with, how I flirt, and what the outcome of my flirting is, makes a social statement about me and can have the power of making certain social attributions true of me while

taking others away from me: It can change who I am through changing who I am for the Other, understood as that ever present sense of myself as always existing in some objectified way for others. As Sartre (1943/1986) states, “the Other teaches me who I am,” and as he therefore also says with reference to this Other, “I cannot confer on myself any quality without the mediation of an objectifying power which is not my own power and which I can neither pretend nor forge” (p. 311).

Evidence and Exemplification through Life-World Accounts

Theme 48:

In flirting, the other does not merely represent for us a concrete person, but also a person who receives his or her standards of worth from “others.” Consequently, when we flirt, we are not just flirting with each other but also flirting within a general social horizon of what one *should* do or how one *should* act. We may, in other words, not just offer ourselves up to another person’s judgments of us, but also stage ourselves to third parties, who either observe us flirting or serve as the imagined basis of the other’s opinions of us in the sense that we imagine that the other values what “they” value.

Several indications of flirting as a social event can be found in the flirting descriptions. Daniel, for example, writes about his flirtation with an other, that “it was a kind of show we were doing for one another (and maybe, just a little, for the other people at the table – in the sense that I was performing in front of them – that said, though, it was mostly between us, I felt).”

Theme 49:

When we flirt we are often aware of how we measure up to others. Others are thus often present when we flirt as a standard of comparison that we can exceed or of which we can fall short. An example of this is that we sometimes wonder how our flirting skills measure up to those of others. We may thus be a bit shy of flirting in front of an audience because others might evaluate our skills or tact unfavorably.

Jason, for example, ends his interview with me by concluding, “I guess there is a certain social formula, I guess the casualness of going about it, so I haven’t found that yet for myself.”

Nicole also doubts how she measures up in her flirting ability. She says, “I don’t really know what I’m doing”... “I feel like when I flirt it is almost a train wreck that I cannot believe actually works.”

Greg shies away from flirting in front of others because as he says, “a certain part of flirting is to not make a fool of yourself, and when you do it with other people around it makes you feel more awkward; it makes me feel more judged because I feel like it is not just this person who I am kind of presenting myself to, it’s her friends or everyone else around and I feel like that makes me less natural and less effective.”

For Sabrina, too, it was quite uncomfortable when everybody was staring at her and the other in anticipation that something was going to happen between them, “but before I knew it, no one was really paying attention to us. It was just us and so then when I was able to just talk with him and feel like everyone wasn’t looking at me, was kind of when everything turned” [ie. when she was able to flirt].

As these examples show, flirting is not just a private event between myself and the other, but is often also an event that invokes a feeling of being looked at by society at large, almost as if we are flirting within the structure of a ‘Pan-opticon’ (Foucault, 1975/1995), in which we feel “seen” by someone who cannot “be seen,” but whose look nevertheless appears to enter into our self-appraisals.

Another reason why we may feel shy about flirting is provided by Linschoten (1969) when he argues that the loss of our everyday goal orientation in flirting leaves us

uncertain about how to act: "that is why we do not complete any of our sentences, why we stutter, blush and smile. We do not know what to do, we become simultaneously warm and cold, experience emerging tension and at the same time a relaxation setting in. The body still doubts because it is used to meaningful, that is, goal-oriented activity" (p. 166).

Plessner (1941/1970) supports this intuition with his theory that liminal phenomena take place when we reach the limit of human goal-oriented activity. When this happens, our body has to answer for us, he says. This creates a liminal zone between conscious acting and simple determinism: Our body answers because we have an experience that transcends any conscious ability to respond, but the body's response is still meaningful and not completely mechanical because only we as human beings can get ourselves into such situations of not knowing how to respond. Examples of our body responding *for* us at the limit of meaning, include laughing and crying. These phenomena are, according to Plessner, both uniquely human responses and responses which are only invoked when we don't know what to do. I believe flirting too can be said to fall into this category of phenomena, since we here fall out of our practical goal-oriented activity and into a situation where our body has to respond without us knowing exactly how: We don't know exactly what to do or how to proceed, but have to rely on a knowledge of the body which acts *for* us. This then would be another way to explain the uncertainty and social awkwardness we often encounter when we flirt: We lose control over our bodies because they are no longer used in the service of getting things done, but emerge in an expressive realm of nonpurposeful activity beyond the reality of "ego mastery" and conscious control.

Theme 50:

To the extent that we receive our identity through cultural evaluations, the rejection of our performance on the social stage could be felt as a rejection of a valued identity that we are trying to claim for ourselves. In other words, if the other (through Das Man) accepts me for the personal qualities I attempt to arrogate to myself, this not only means that I have been accepted on a false pretense, but actually allows me to become who I claim that I am. It is thus not entirely clear that there is a real self beneath my performance of a more ideal self, or if all selves, real as well as ideal, are really performances in need of social confirmation. Sartre (1943/1986), for example, says that my objectivity always passes through the look of the other such that I cannot continue to maintain a particular sense of self unless that self finds social confirmation. As he says, “For me the Other is first the being for whom I am an object; that is, the being *through whom* I gain my objectness” (p. 307).

We have seen this blurring of real self and ideal self demonstrated already in Josie’s account of flirting. Who Josie strives to become in order to attract the other is here considered to be a tentative hypothesis that the other can either confirm or deny. Once who she is trying to become gets confirmed by the other, Josie is not simply accepted on false pretense, but is given a chance to become the person she wants to be.

This argument could be extended to many of the other accounts. Kevin, for example, can claim his masculinity in and through the encounter with the other through which it is confirmed that he is “attractive to women,” has “the power to seduce women” and will “gain respect in the eyes of other men.”

Adam, finds in the other’s approval of him, confirmation that he is “friendly.” As he says, “I guess, when I do have a conversation, especially with a strange person, I feel friendly, I feel like a person that people trust; it kind of pleases me that she was cool with talking to me.” Adam’s friendly qualities here arrive at him from the other.

In my own account, as well, it was clear that the allure of the other I was flirting with was predicated on the idea that she could help me become a different self than my old self. As I write, “I remember having a brief flight of fantasy about what it would

mean for me to be with a girl like that and feeling drawn to the possibility of being the different guy, which I felt she could make me.”

The distinction here between who one really is and who one is trying to become may simply be one of having a habitual identity versus a new identity confirmed by the other, since every identity can be said to arrive at me from elsewhere, even though I may identify more with one than another.

Theme 51:

As we have already argued, flirting in front of third parties can make me feel more anxious and inhibited in my way of relating to the other because I now not only face judgment by the other, but also by third parties who become representative of a wider social standard for how to act. Yet, just as well as third parties can judge me negatively, they can also be used as mirrors that reflect my positive characteristics back to me and make them seem more real or more public. I can thus want to flirt in front of others because I want others to see that I *am* a particular person.

Josie, for example, thinks that flirting at a formal dance that “takes place in front of the whole community,” says something about “the kind of standards I have,” “how easily I’ll say yes.” And as she said, “it really was a big deal, you know, you were stating who you were in a social context.”

Veronica also enjoyed all the attention she got from others once the person she liked had made his interest clear by publishing it on the social medium of Facebook. After this, she said, “I immediately got phone calls like, “who is this kid?,” “where did you meet him?”... everything like that, which makes me want to hang out with him more just so I can find out more about him.”

Kevin, too, found his ability to seduce an attractive woman who was desired by others to be a sign of social worth. As he said, “there was a certain status to be being with [name of girl], conferred to me.” When asked what it said about him, Kevin answered

that it signified “that I was attractive to women or had power to seduce women or... that I would gain respect in the eyes of other men as well.” To my question, “did you talk to other men about what had happened?” he went on to say, “Yes, there was definitely bragging.”

Theme 52:

To some extent, my valuation of the other is mediated by cultural standards of evaluation that I receive from third parties or through “the look” of others. For this reason, I often seek the approval of others as a means to validate my own value judgment of the other.

Veronica was very explicit about this. As she said, “I would never date a guy that my friends didn’t think was cute... my friends are my life, so if they wouldn’t have approved of him, then I definitely wouldn’t have continued talking to him”

In another instance, Matthew who had been drunk when he flirted and had formed his own high opinion of the girl he had flirted with, began doubting his own judgment the next day when his friends were not of the same opinion as he. As he states, “the next day my friends told me that they thought the girl was crazy and that they didn’t like her and that she was unattractive. So they kind of turned me off from her when I got talking to them the next day.”

These examples show how much our values are guided by “Das Man” (culture) and how what is valuable is often only valuable in so far as it is valuable to others as well. Whether or not this is something that changes with age and maturity has not been examined, but the invocation of a generalized Other is probably always part of the valuation process to some extent (For general theories that would corroborate this, see Horney (1945/1992) and Bourdieu (1984/2000)). In addition, what these examples show,

is that our opinions are not simply long-held values waiting to be expressed, but arrive at us from the other like so many other aspects of our identity,

Theme 53

Others can also be used to affirm my worth to the other. Being accepted and valued by friends or engaging in activities with others in which I am coming out on top confirms my social worth and generally increases my attractiveness to the other. Perhaps this is because by having already been selected by others my value has already received social confirmation.

Josie II who felt like she did not really fit in with the people on campus, felt bolstered in her ability to flirt by the companionship of a friend who made her seem less lonely and more socially popular than she felt. As she stated about the importance of this friend, “She helped me kind of like... keep up my dignity, or keep up this image that I was trying to project of myself.”

Another example of increasing one’s value through others was provided by Benjamin who seeks to demonstrate his popularity and prove his lack of desperation “by chatting amiably with my friends,” and showing that he can “make them laugh.”

Matthew’s value is also socially reinforced. The fact that he is dominating the “beer pong” table made him feel like he could “do anything, accomplish anything.”

Finally, in my own description of flirting, my self-worth and confidence was bolstered by the fact that I had made friends with my room mate whom I considered to be “cool” and who conferred coolness onto me by proxy. As I wrote, “I remembered feeling quite confident in myself that day, as I felt bolstered by having met a new room mate who seemed like a popular guy and with whom I had already established a relationship that was stronger than any relationship he had with any of the other students.”

In all of these examples, being valued or selected by others at large helps increase my sense of worth, which in turn makes me feel more self-confident in my interactions with the other.

Theme 54:

Others can also be experienced adversely as a source of competition and possible resentment, which might lead me to avoid flirting in their presence so as to avoid rubbing it in their face, or might lead me to up my game so as to prevent the other from stealing the person I am interested in.

Kevin felt he had to be more impressive to the person he was interested in because she was attractive enough to have many potential suitors. His awareness of her attractiveness to others made him feel like “there is sort of more to prove.” At the same time, however, he expressly tried to flirt with her outside the public eye because he did not want to make his boss, who also had a crush on her, jealous of him.

When Sabrina learned that other women at the party harbored resentment toward her for having become the object of interest of a man whom they liked as well, this made her become more intent to show her interest to him. “After I knew about that, I’m “okay” I really like this guy. He needs to know that I like him. I need to not be so reserved, maybe I just need to put myself out there and try a little harder.”

Theme 55:

Finally, others can be used as aides who can convey information to me about the other I am interested in. It is often more discreet and less risky to gather information about the person I like from others than it is to ask for this information from this person directly.

Veronica talked to other people to find out if the other person was attracted to her, had talked about her, been impressed by her, and so on. Based on talking to her friends

she found out that “he wasn’t a guy who was just giving me attention to hook up with me, but he was more of a nice guy...”

Greg sought out information about the person he was interested in from his friends as well: “I would ask my friend and other people: Do you know her? What do you know about her [?] interests and what she is doing with herself?”

Sabrina initially only knew about the person she was interested in from positive comments made about him by her friend. “From what I had heard about him, he was in grad school, very ambitious... so when I heard that Joe was a good dresser... wants to make something of himself, I really thought, ‘I can handle this’. So coming into it, looking at him, I knew what I was looking at, I kind of knew about him and thought... ‘well, this could turn out okay’.”

Conclusion: General Description of Flirting as a Liminal Event

My interpretation of flirting has been an attempt to unconceal the eventness of flirting’s phenomenal nature. I have sought to show that flirting is neither reducible to a subjective act or an objective behavior, but that it *happens* as a phenomena that exceeds both subjective agency and objective determinism. By the liminality of flirting, I mean the process by means of which flirting individuates itself as an event involving self, others, and things, and thus shows itself as a process of mutual appropriation of subject and object. In the following I would like to provide two summarizing descriptions of flirting as a liminal event. The first summary will describe the nature of flirting from the most reduced phenomenological level, based on the eleven phenomenological interpretations presented in the previous section. The next summary will put more “meat”

on this description by summarizing the nature of flirting through the existential perspective of the 55 themes that were used to corroborate the more abstract phenomenological interpretations.

Phenomenological Description

From a phenomenologically reduced understanding, we can say that the event of flirting shows itself in and through the uncertainty of the subjective desire that animates it and the enigmatic quality of what the other really wants (#1), the fleshly incarnation or sexualization of the encounter between self and other through the haptic transformation of bodily organs into organs of “touch” (#2), the phenomenalization of the other as a valued enigma and excess that allows one to receive oneself from a future beyond one’s own (#3), the reception of oneself as either lacking value or possessing sufficient value in relation to this other (#4), the fear of being judged in and through the uncertain appraisals of the other, and the subsequent constitution of oneself in and through inhibited, calculative and stereotypical ways of being a self (#5), the ultimate need to let go of one’s need for control and engage in the leap into a time and space where the other can decide one’s faith (#6), the coming into being of oneself as one’s most unique and singular self in and through being chosen by an other who values something about one that is exclusive to one (#7), the experience of self and other as participating in a temporal event that requires that one neither be too early nor too late but submit to flirting’s own temporality (#8), the discovery of oneself in and through a shared intentionality of self and other that loosens the participants’ boundaries and reveals both as part of a shared experience (#9), the suspension of one’s average everyday practical self and the renewed

emergence of this self as the flirtatious encounter increasingly commits one to a definite subjective possibility of being a self (#10), and the reception of one's most personal likes and dislikes and one's identity proper from the look and affirmations of third parties and the cultural self-awareness they represent, rather than from a place within oneself (#11).

It is difficult to say which of these horizons are needed for a lived experience to show itself as a flirtatious encounter. What we can say is that all of these modes of being claimed by flirting as event and constituting flirting as event seem to constitute possible double reductions through which flirting frequently gives itself. This claim, of course, only pertains to the particular socio-historical, age-related, class-related, and gender related characteristics pertaining to the research participants that made up my sample. In a different sample, in a different culture, in a different social stratus, and so forth, flirting might show itself differently by giving rise to different flirtatious subjectivities and objectifications.

That I cannot proclaim that my findings have disclosed the universal essence of flirting is not a limitation of my study, but a necessary consequence of the view that the true essence of flirting is an essence that reveals itself always only in relation to the particular drama of the everyday through which it gets covered over in specific ways. The true essence of flirting is thus not to be found by separating the phenomenon of flirting from the concrete life situations of particular flirtatious subjects and objects. Flirting's true essence resides in a continuous strife between concealment and revealment that makes it impossible for us to ever grasp "it" as some static "thing in itself." Its essence resides in the middle of the difference that grants subject to object and lets there be something rather than nothing.

Despite being relative to the way the event of flirting shows itself in a specific socio-historical context, the eleven phenomenological horizons that have resulted from my analysis, can all be said to reveal something about flirting's nature as an event and thus as a liminal rather than a subjective experience. What that means is that the horizons of flirting are not subjective or objective horizons, but "double reductions" by means of which both subject and object are transformed in and through the experience of flirting. Sometimes such double reductions do indeed produce me as a subjective agent who works, thinks, and calculates and therefore actively flirts. Yet, what my analysis has also revealed is that such moments of subjective control, are always responses to events that claim me from a point prior to or outside of this moment of subjective will. My actions, thoughts and feelings do therefore not originate from within, but are always responses to a claim that originates from without and calls me into such particular modes of being a subject.

Existential Description

If we take the 11 phenomenological interpretations of flirting and fill them in by means of the 55 existential themes that describe the flirtatious experiences of the research participants, we arrive at what I will call an existential description of flirting. This description stays closer to the life-world of research participants than did the former more reduced description. At the existential level, flirting is "situated" in concrete time and space and thus becomes a specific event involving specific subjects. To help link individual assertions of the existential description back to the analysis of the previous chapter, I have elected to provide references to both phenomenological interpretations

and existential themes in parentheses following each assertion. Phenomenological interpretations will be referred to as #1-#11 while existential themes will be referred to as 1:-55: Each of the existential themes will also receive a short heading that summarizes the theme and refreshes the reader's memory of the theme. Providing these references will make it possible to link each assertion of the description back to the parts of the analysis on which it is based and will help the reader ascertain the adequacy and validity of the existential description I am providing.

Existential description: Flirting is an event that sustains itself in a space in which I am just as much an agent as I am acted on. I do not go into it as somebody who pursues a definite goal or objective (#1; 2: *open ended desire*, 12c: *Flirting is a way to discover my desire*), as if flirting was simply another mode of living in my practical goal-oriented attitude. In flirting, on the contrary, I am called away from this attitude by the lure of the other's attractiveness (#11; 44: *dialogue between reason and passion*), value (#3, 14: *valued uniqueness*, 15: *imaginary completion of the other*), uniqueness (#3; 14: *valued uniqueness*, #7; 34: *the other's desire individualizes me*), potential (#3; 16: *enticement of a future beyond prediction*,) or arousal of my senses (#2; 7: *hapticity*, 8: *haptic look*,) which opens up an exciting, although indefinite, possibility of existing beyond my own finite being-in-the-world (#3; 17: *discovering myself beyond my own finitude*). In flirting, I thus find myself acting in response to a seduction by the other, or a seduction by some real or imagined aspect of the other. This seduction arouses me and directs me away from the goal-specific activity of the everyday toward the possibility of a future beyond my practical goal-orientation (#2; 10: *sexual attraction coming from the other*, 13: *attraction as response to a seduction*). The desire animating the flirtation is thus not initially owned

by me as a desire to flirt, but is a desire I am called into and which arrives at me from the other. I am, for example, attracted to being attractive, making it the case that my desire for the other is dependent to some extent on their desire for me (#2; 13a: *I am attracted to being attractive*). I also often discover my attraction because I find myself having responded or reacted to the other in a way that has given me pleasure. I will for example “catch myself looking” at the other and only then know that I must be attracted. My body has thus responded for me without my conscious awareness (#2; 13b: *I discover my attraction as having happened*). Furthermore, the flirtatious desire that I am *called* into assuming, does not necessarily become a desire to obtain some specific goal through flirting that would make it possible for me to discover myself as the finality of things. Instead, the flirtatious desire into which I am called remains a call to discover whether or not I desire, what I desire and how strongly I desire (#1; 2: *open ended desire*, #2; 13c: *flirting is a way to discover my desire*, #3; 18: *attraction waxes and wanes through process of mutual discovery*, #10; 45: *flirting must remain non-committal and exploratory*). The flirtation claims me into a desire that has not yet fallen prey, but remains indeterminate, revealing me to myself in a freedom or excess beyond finite choice. Flirting is thus not as much a subjective intention as it is a chance for me to discover my subjective intention. I may, for example, initially be claimed by a fantasy or desire for something specific (sex, marriage, friendship, romance etc.), but this desire remains flirtatious only in so far as it is still a possibility that I can discover that I don’t want this anyway or that I want something different (#10; 45: *flirting must be non-committal and exploratory*). Hence, in flirting, my self as a determinable being-in-the-

world is itself up for grabs since I myself will have my faith decided through the flirtation which will help me discover what I want.

By preventing me from falling prey, flirting discloses me to myself in my freest subjectivity, over and above any concrete possibility of being a self (#1; 3: *flirting as excess/ celebration*). It discloses me to myself in the very possibility of possibilities from out of which a subjective mode of being has yet to be instated in and through a commitment or choice (#3; 17: *discovering myself beyond my own finitude*, #10; 45: *flirting must be non-committal and exploratory*, 47: *practical concerns return as need to commit becomes more pertinent*). Hence, flirting itself has the potential to redefine who I am by reorganizing or reemphasizing my past in light of a future commitment that has yet to be made (#11; 50: *flirting as event through which I can claim an identity for myself*). In this sense, flirting is a pre-subjective phenomenon, since my desire is here not yet technically mine in the egoic sense, but has yet to be assumed from a place beyond myself and from a faith to be determined in and through my encounter with the other (#6; 39: *the ultimate leap of faith*).

Although subjective ownership of the event of flirting may at times be instated, as when I strategically try to manage my impression or try to predict and control the outcome of the flirtation (#1; 5: *desire for mastery/ knowledge*, #5; 23: *flight into calculative self*), flirting is inevitably an event beyond my complete control. It always involves a releasement to a drama or faith beyond me (#6; 29: *the ultimate leap*).

This undecided faith, through which something about my very facticity will be determined retroactively, can both be a source of excitement (#3; 16: *the enticement of a future beyond prediction*) and of anxiety (#4; 19: *the other as out of my league*, #5; 21:

inhibition due to fear of judgment, #11; 49: uncertainty about measuring up). It has the power to relieve me of loneliness, to make me what I want to be and to affirm my value in the eyes of others (*#3; 17: discovering myself beyond my own finitude, #11; 51: wanting others to bear witness to affirm event*), but it also has the power to challenge cherished attributions of me and confirm negative ideas about myself (*#4; 19: the other as out of my league, #5; 25: fear of being exposed as fraud, #6; 30: the other's rejection as humiliating*).

My relationship with the uncertain future that will determine my faith, and arrives at me from the other, is made concrete in my experience of the enigma of the other (*#3; 16: enticement of a future beyond prediction*) and the uncertainty of the other's desire (*#1; 4: reliance on hunches and intuitions*), which both reveal the presence of a future beyond one I can predict or project. This encounter with an absolute otherness from which I can receive myself, is experienced most intensely every time I venture to express my desire without a guarantee that it will be returned, thereby making a "leap of faith" (*#6; 29: the ultimate leap*). Leaps of faith are moments of relating myself to a future beyond my control and thus of releasing myself from myself as agent to a future event that can determine me retroactively as who I will have been. Through leaps of faith I cease to exist as an agent or identity in chronological time (Chronos), and give myself over to the time of the event understood as the time of coming into being as who I will have been (Aion).

In flirting, fearfulness of this encounter with the faith or future of my having been, gives me a desire to want to control and manage this faith so I can remain or become the person I want to be (*#5; 22: flight into performance self, 23: flight into calculation and*

typology). This then gives rise to the characteristic strategic or game-like element of flirting that is so often emphasized in the literature to the exclusion of the event-like nature of flirting (#1; 5: *desire for mastery/ knowledge, 6: world of props*).

Most often I will try to manage my anxiety by making small retractable leaps and doing so only on the basis of eliciting confirmation of the other's interest in me first (#1; 1: *revealing and concealing my intent; #6; 31: test of free will, 32: being active through passivity*). I may, for example, express my subjective interest in an ambiguous way that is open to multiple interpretations (#1; 1: *revealing and concealing my intent*). One example of this is what I have called *the innocuous invitation*, which involves extending an invitation to spend more time together in a way that packages the expression of a romantic or sexual interest in the guise of a harmless friendly request (#1; 1: *revealing and concealing my intent*).

As part of minimizing the risk of rejection, I become very attuned to the other's actions as possible signs of attraction or disinterest (#1; 4: *reliance on hunches and intuitions, 5: desire for mastery/ knowledge*). One way to ascertain the other's interest in me is what I have called *the test of free will* (#6; 31: *test of free will*) by which a situation is created that allows me to judge whether a person chooses to be around me or spend time with me, by choosing me in a way that cannot be explained as mere happenstance. An affirmative result in this experiment is then taken as evidence of the other's interest in me: the other *chose* to stay or *chose* not to leave and thereby revealed their desire for me.

My own interest in the other, which in flirting is always only tentative and subject to revision, makes me want to be interesting to the other as well (#4, 20: *desire to establish commonality, #5; 22: flight into performance self*). Just like the other initially

called me into flirting by virtue of standing out from the crowd and appearing unique and valuable in some way, I too must now want to become valuable and unique to the other. Achieving this goal requires that I reveal something about my own singular being so I can stand out from the crowd, but this in turn makes me vulnerable to being judged by the other person who can now ascertain something about me and can judge me favorably or unfavorably: I become the object of the other's unknowable appraisals (#5; 21: *inhibition due to fear of judgment*). To shield myself from rejection, I sometimes inhibit myself from pursuing any real relationship with the other person because the other's value to me makes me feel too inferior in comparison and makes me anticipate rejection (#4; 19: *the other as out of my league*). At other times, I may try to arrogate qualities to myself that I do not normally think I possess, try to act according to cultural stereotypes of what "they" consider valuable and not valuable, or try to become what I think the other wants me to be (#5; 22: *flight into performance self*).

In this regard, culture or, more concretely, "third parties," intervene in my interactions with the other (#5; 23: *flight into calculation and typology*, 24: *flirting as gendered*, #11; 48: *culture as mediator of valuation process*, 49: *uncertainty about measuring up*). My value to the other and the other's value to me can often only be maintained within a wider social sphere of valuations, for what is valuable is often only valuable if it is also desired by others (#11; 48: *culture as mediator of valuation process*, 52: *seeking approval of my intuitions from others*). When I perform for or try to impress the other, I thus often also find myself performing as if I were performing for others. These others can either be concretely present as spectators or there in absentia through that general social mirror or "look" in relation to which I evaluate myself and the other

from a social perspective. I may, for example, try to align myself with act types and characterological types of what the other, via others, may find attractive (#5; 23: *flight into calculation and typologies*) or use others to prop up my own value (#11; 53: *using others to prop myself up*).

Furthermore, as I attempt to make myself likeable to the other, I lose my preoccupation with average everyday ways of acting in which I am directed toward the thing-world as the practical endpoint of my activity (#1; 6: *world of props*). Things now lose their customary functions and meanings and instead become props or intermediaries for meeting and communicating my desire to the other person: A conversation becomes a means for communicating interest and is not an end-goal in itself; a movie becomes a way to get to know someone and not an object of my viewing pleasure, etc (#1; 6: *world of props*). This can sometimes give flirting an air of artificiality and manipulation, because the customary meanings and activities of my everyday attitude now seem to only be feigned or to be used in the service of an ulterior motive (#1; 6: *world of props*).

In order to breach the gap between myself and the other, whose attractive glow raises their value in relation to me, it becomes important to also foster commonalities between us so the other can become approachable or see me as approachable (#4; 20: *desire to establish commonality*). Commonalities are not simply ideas or character traits we share, but at a much more experiential level, an ability to relax around each other, to laugh at the same things, and to be in synch with one another. I describe this kind of a commonality as an “affective resonance” or “shared intentionality” (#9; 41: *affective resonance*, 42: *affective resonance creates comfort*). In and through affective resonance we meet each other by being directed toward the same situation or object and thus as

having that object or situation in common (#9; 41: *affective resonance*). Through this kind of experience, boundaries between us dissolve, as we get to know each other not by means of exchanging information between two separate minds, but in and through a shared world (#9; 42: *affective resonance creates comfort*).

In so far as flirting takes place in the sphere of affective resonance there may not be much of a barrier separating me from the other and the leap may in such cases not be much of a leap but merely a natural progression where the movement toward increased intimacy happens naturally and spontaneously (#6; 27: *leap of faith can be part of smooth natural progression*). In such cases it also become difficult to separate who exactly is acting and who exactly is acted on. I discover that I like you because we are having fun and enjoying each other's company, which makes me want to continue to have fun with you. It is thus difficult to separate my will from the shared situation that fuels my will. However, even though we might have fun together, it is still not necessarily evident what that means in terms of the other's desire or interest in me, and so uncertainty is not necessarily eliminated by the fact of affective resonance (#1; 4: *reliance on hunches and intuition*). I may therefore still have to venture naming what is going on between us by making my desire more directly known (#6; 29: *the ultimate leap of faith*).

In flirting, achieving closeness too fast can also be to the detriment of the flirtatiousness of the relationship (#8; 38: *flirting has its own temporality*). Increased intimacy with the other commits me more to the other and thus has the potential to make what was formerly playful into something serious and committal too soon (#10; 46: *the more I am in deep, the more I feel obligated to commit*). Flirting only remains flirtatious

in so far it creates a free space in between commitment to the old (my former everyday self) and commitment to the new (the new sort of obligations that follow if I make a choice for the future represented by the other) (#10; 44: *dialogue between reason and passion*). Hence in some paradoxical way, although flirting has a natural progression toward increased intimacy and a moment of decision, it is initially intended to ward this possibility off so as not to make flirting serious too soon and not make me commit to the other before I have discovered if I want to (#10; 44: *dialogue between reason and passion*, 45: *flirting must be non-committal and exploratory*). Flirting is thus neither purely playful, nor purely serious: It is a play with possibilities that *could* become serious by exceeding the confines of the purely imagined.

However, if I ignore the leap and keep playing with possibilities without committing, or am unwilling to move the flirtation toward a serious possibility in due time, the flirtatious energy between us will dissipate. Our relationship will now either turn into a permanent friendship without future romantic or sexual potential or a loss of interest in me by the other (#8; 38: *flirting has its own temporality*).

A key element in flirting is the leap from showing friendly interest and feeling comfortable with each other to showing romantic or sexual interest (#2, 7: *hapticity*, #6; 29: *the ultimate leap*). This leap changes the relationship into a sexualized one, where I discover myself and what I want in and through a bodily arousal of the flesh (#2; 7: *hapticity*, 13: *my attraction is a response to seduction*). This bodily arousal is not a sexual intention, if by that we mean a desire to seduce or procreate, but a way of discovering myself in my flesh in and through touching the other and being touched in return (feeling myself). I have referred to this change of intentionality as *hapticity*, a

process by which bodily organs lose their goal directedness and become sentient organs for touching and being touched. In flirting, a haptic relation to the other can manifest itself in many small ways from the lingering hand shake to the eyes that fasten themselves on the other a little too intently or a little too long, or the way I lean into your space such that you feel it as a space between you and me (#2; 7: *hapticity*, 8: *the haptic look*). All of these modifications of the everyday use of the bodily organs and of bodily space, makes the body present to itself as *flesh* for the first time, understood as a sensible medium for touching and being touched (#2, 7: *hapticity*). Hapticity consequently allows me to discover myself as a sexual or aroused being either in relation to an other with whom I am physically interacting, or in relation to a sensible aspect of the other that I either imagine or look at from afar. Sexual attraction thus never arises from me alone, as a simple arousal in my body, but always takes place as an event of arousal between me and the landscape (#2; 10: *sexual attraction as coming from the other*, 13: *my attraction is a response to seduction*).

In and through the haptic expression of desire, by which I can touch and be touched, I discover myself as a singular being over and beyond the daily individuations of myself in a mere social space where somebody else could potentially take my place (#7; 36: *hapticity individualizes me*). Arousal gives me back to myself from the world as *this* unique individual in *this* concrete moment of time and space. When my eyes meet that of a specific other, whose eyes touch mine, we are in that moment singular for each other. We become participants of a unique event that cannot be repeated exactly like this again and has the quality of a “special moment” shared only by us (#7; 37: *flirting as special encounter*). As I am chosen by a unique other who desires me in return and thus

gives my attraction back to me, I become for the first time my unique self since I can only be unique *for an other*. My uniqueness, in other words, arrives at me from the fact that in having the other address their desire to me, no one can answer in my place, making me therefore “unsubstitutable” (#7; 34: *the other’s desire individualizes me*). It is for this reason that Marion can state that the erotic encounter is the phenomenological reduction needed to reveal me in my utmost individuality. My identity resides not in some interiority that was there a priori, just waiting to be acknowledged or discovered by someone. Rather, I attain my identity as I discover who I am through someone else and thus receive myself, not from my own being-toward death, but from the other as a future beyond me (#3; 17: *discovering myself beyond my own finitude*; #7; 34: *the other’s desire individualizes me*).

Whether or not I will ultimately choose the other or the other will choose me, only gets determined at the very precise moment when flirting itself ceases to be flirting and instead turns into a concrete desire for someone or something (#6; 29: *the ultimate leap*). This moment is the moment when desires that were only played with or tentatively expressed become either firm commitments or lost opportunities. This moment is the climax I have called “the ultimate leap”: the moment in which I ask or am asked the question “will you?” (#6; 29: *the ultimate leap*). At this precise moment, the relationship can never again be the same. It will either perish under the answer “no” or live on to become something else if the answer is “yes.” The ultimate leap thus changes flirting from a liminal state of both/ and or neither/ nor into a forced choice between “either/ or,” and it is this that brings flirting to an end.

We now see why flirting, in order to remain flirtatious, must remain a liminal event, for the moment it becomes a specific subjective desire or commits me to one or the other specific outcome, it loses its flirtatiousness (#10; 45: *flirting must be non-committal and exploratory*). The moment flirting individuates me as the agent of a specific outcome that I am committed to pursuing, I am no longer flirting, but have discovered what I want and who I am *through* flirting (#1; 2: *open-ended desire*, #10; 45: *flirting must remain non-committal and exploratory*). In this sense, flirting has the temporality of an event, for as long as it *is*, it leaves the question of who I will have been (my facticity) to a future that has yet to be decided.

Practically speaking, however, flirting includes an alternation between moments of event-like transformation and moments of subjective identification. At one point I may discover myself and take ownership of a specific desire that I have been called into by making it my own (#11; 50: *flirting as event through which I can claim an identity for myself*), but this identification never becomes mine to “have” or to “be.” It can soon enough be taken away from me through another transformation by the event that denies me this identification. An identity remains mine to “have” only as long as there are others who will support it in and through the way they respond to me. In this sense *aion* and *chronos*, *event* and *subjective agency*, always go hand in hand. In the one moment I myself am decided in and through the retroactive determination of my past (self as event); in the next I live myself out of the future that I as agent project from this past (self as subject).

This dialectic makes it the case that flirting is in each individual case a unique encounter or *strife*. Flirtatiousness resides in this strife, but since the strife is not a place,

flirting takes place always only as an event of self and other or subject and object that both reveals it and covers it over. From a psychological perspective, the flirtatious subject thus either comes into being a posteriori as having been transformed by the event (“Ah! This is who I am/ what I want”) or as arising out of an event as someone who seeks to control it and manage it (“I am x or want y”). As a phenomenon that has the phenomenal nature of an event, flirting’s essence can thus be said to consist in the fact that it sweeps me off my feet and transforms me, one moment, and becomes the object of subjective management and projection, the next. The phenomenal nature of flirting thus resides neither on the side of the thing nor on the side of the subject, but in the liminality that continues to weave these two moments together into an experience that escapes absolute determination. As a liminal phenomenon the essence of flirting therefore resides “nowhere” but in its own happening.

The strife of flirting can be lived in ways that either prioritize the side of flirting’s falling prey (reterritorialization) or the side of flirting’s eventness (deterritorialization). Some research participants seemed to mostly live out flirting from the side of having fallen prey to their desire as a subjective act of which they were in control, while others seemed to genuinely come into being as subjects who received themselves as “someone” in and through flirting. At one end of the spectrum we have Matthew who seemingly very strategically pursues the other as an opportunity for sex, while at the other, we have Josie whose very self appears to be at stake in flirting. For everyone, however, it was possible to trace a back and forth movement between both of these positions. Only because of this did the accounts represent instances of the revelation of flirting. In flirting, what is

primary is thus not subjective experience, nor the event understood as some objective causality, but the event of appropriation that is at work in between the two.

Chapter 10

Toward New Horizons in Phenomenological Research

Final Summary and Discussion of the Contributions of the Dissertation as a Whole

At this point we need to address what has come out of the analysis of flirting as a liminal event and, more broadly, what has come out of the overall philosophical deconstruction and reconstruction of concepts such as the psychological, lived experience, liminality, and phenomenology. These various concepts and strands of thought have all been woven together in new ways in and through my philosophical effort to redefine their relationship. The psychological has become redefined within a phenomenology of the event, phenomenology has become reinterpreted as a science or logos of liminality rather than a science or logos of the subject or the object, and flirting has been analyzed as a liminal event rather than a subjective act or an objective behavior. What this has allowed is a new unconcealment of reality as having a phenomenal nature or mode of showing itself that is irreducible to identity and which can therefore be said to arise out of and return to an original liminality.

In this final section of my dissertation, I would like to summarize what I believe to be the main contribution of my dissertation: the development of a new phenomenological research paradigm rooted in an understanding of liminality and its demonstrated validity in the case of flirting, which it has helped us unveil as a liminal

phenomenon. First I would like to summarize what it means to transition from a phenomenology of subjective experience to a phenomenology of the event. Then I would like to draw out the implications of studying phenomena from the perspective of the temporality and spatiality of the event, respectively. Finally, I would like to draw out what it means to study phenomena as liminal rather than identical. I will follow this discussion with a small post-script about the event of writing this dissertation.

Throughout the sections that follow I will attempt to integrate both my philosophical understanding of phenomenology and the empirical study of flirting as an event and thus hopefully help facilitate the integration of both the philosophical and empirical parts of the dissertation.

From a Phenomenology of the Subject to a Phenomenology of the Event

My dissertation has been an attempt to reconceptualize an understanding of lived experience as no longer being the property of a subject or of an object, but as arising from out of a time and space of the in-between. This starting point, which privileges liminality rather than identity, has allowed us to think of the identity of both subject and object as being the result of an encounter or happening by which both become what they are in and through each other.

This insight is not my own. It has been recognized by many different phenomenologists, including Martin Heidegger, Jean-Luc Marion, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It has also been the focus of the work of Deleuze & Guattari as well as that of many other authors in both the Western and Eastern philosophical traditions.

Nevertheless, in actual research practice, this insight has often been covered over by the

more popular assumption that phenomenology is simply reducible to a phenomenology of subjective experience or an existential-phenomenology of “the person.” For psychology, this assumption is of course quite logical, for shouldn’t psychologists limit themselves to the psychological? And doesn’t the psychological quite naturally seem to find its limit in a concept of subjective experience or the existing person?

In this dissertation, my argument has been that reducing experience to the construct of the psychological misses the full range of ways of being human. We can summarize this idea by simply saying that there are many experiences which we as human beings do not ‘have,’ since many of the most meaningful experiences which we as human beings can ‘have,’ are really experiences in which the experience ‘has us.’ We can even make the claim that it is in such moments of ‘being had’ by an experience that we attain to our highest humanity and individuation.

Examples of these kinds of experiences, which I refer to as events rather than subjective experiences, include the ethical encounter with the face of the other (Levinas), the sublime (Kant), being amazed (Descartes), nausea (Sartre), ontological anxiety (Heidegger), laughing and crying (Plessner), loving (Marion), and peak experiences (Maslow). As I hope to have proven by now, we can also add flirting to this list, just as I am sure we can add many other experiences, including very mundane ones that have yet to be elucidated through this new frame of reference. The only condition that has to be met for an experience to show itself as an event is that it takes place as a *double reduction* of both subject and object rather than as a unilateral reduction by the subject. When this is the case, we encounter the phenomenon of a lived experience that not only happens to

or for a psychological subject, but also transform this subject in the process of happening to it.

If we start from the assumption that every phenomenon ultimately refers back to a way that we as subjects experience it, we end up treating subjectivity as a constant in the equation of what makes up an experience. Yet, what I have sought to demonstrate in my dissertation is that when experience happens as an event, the subject is no longer a constant. In my literature review of the phenomenological understanding of the object, I demonstrated how the phenomenological object has agency in the sense that it can act on us, invite us into new possibilities of being human, affect us, attune us, call us and so forth. In this sense, we can go as far as to say that the object can constitute us as subjects. This is why I have argued that the equation of experience must treat the human being as a variable and not a constant. The human being, while different from things, now no longer becomes the master of things, but becomes part and parcel of a symmetrical event. The idea of the double reduction, instead of the standard idea of the reduction, is an attempt to give expression to the thought that the object reduces or interprets me, at the same time as I reduce or interpret it. This means that the starting point of the phenomenology of lived experience that I am proposing is no longer the subject who lives it or the object that is lived. Instead, it is the happening or event through which subject and object become fused into this or that concrete experience, forming a *haecceity*, understood as the identity of a *gathering* or a situation.

In my understanding of lived experience, it is impossible to make a clear-cut separation between what is objective and what is subjective. The materiality of the experience seems to reside not in subjective projections or in an objective world, but in a

“middle realm” where subject and object have not yet emerged as separate. Instead, subject and object participate in the individuation of a “thirdness” which sustains them both. To illustrate this, we can take the example of a painting, and ask: what is the painting as an event? As an event, its essence resides neither in the artist nor in the artwork, neither in the spectator nor in the visible spectacle. As an event, the painting requires both subject and object to be what it is, but it is not simply defined by them, for the painting also happens to subject and object, draws them together and individuates them as these particular subjects and objects. The reality of the painting is thus essentially that of a happening in which both subject and object partake and without which they could not be the subjects and objects they are. Subject and object are thus much like the colors of a painting. They need the canvas of the painting as the “middle” that allows the blueness of the subject to become the blueness of an ocean and the redness of the object to become the redness of a rose. Only through the amalgam of the painting does subject and object become individuated and cease to be abstract and empty concepts. Something had to come to pass *between* them that provided them with an opportunity to achieve their individuation. This is also what Merleau-Ponty talks about when he says that we partake in the elemental, for the element, as we have seen, is half-way between subject and object: It is the very flesh or canvas of the world which never shows itself in its purity, but always only shows itself in the individuation of particular subjects and objects.

In a presentation I gave at the University of Dallas, I tried to bring this point home through an example from the television series *Frasier*. In one particular episode of this show (Keenan, J. & MacKenzie, P.C., 1996), Frasier agrees to use his psychiatric understanding of the mind to help his “manager,” Bebe, break her smoking addiction. At

one point, as Frasier and Bebe are sitting at the dinner table, Frasier asks her “What do you like so much about smoking?” In response to this question, Bebe does not give a natural scientific account of the causes of her addiction. She does not mention smoking as a “positive reinforcement” and does not talk about “the reinforcement enhancing effect” of the secondary environmental enjoyments that come from smoking. She does, however, provide a description of the lived experience of smoking. As she says:

I like the way a fresh firm pack feels in my hand. I like peeling away that little piece of cellophane and seeing it twinkle in the light. I like coaxing that first sweet round cylinder out of its hiding place and bringing it slowly up to my lips, striking a match, watching it burst into a perfect little flame and knowing that soon that flame will be inside me. I love the first puff, bringing it into my lungs. Little fingers of smoke filling me, caressing me, feeling that warmth penetrate me deeper and deeper till I think I’m going to burst. Then whoosh!... watching it flow out of me in a lovely sinuous cloud, no two ever quite the same.

This description brings out a reality that is irreducible to the objects that cause it or make it up, yet is it simply a subjective experience? It is true that Bebe is the one recounting the story and the one who remembers how it has felt to smoke in the past. But is Bebe simply recounting her experience or is she becoming someone in and through the experience and the recounting of the experience? Does she exist first, in order to have or recount an experience, or does she partake in an event that expresses itself through her? We can say that this is simply an insignificant question about semantics, but it makes a whole lot of difference in terms of how we study lived experience. Do we want to simply define experience through a reference to what it meant to a subject, or do we want to also trace how the subject who is “having” the experience first comes into being as a future for the thing by being invited by the thing?

In the case of Bebe, we can say that Bebe receives herself as who she is in the experience of smoking. Smoking represents the otherness through which she can become herself by being called into one or the other horizon of the cigarette. The cigarette and Bebe here form a unique event. One without the other would not this particular experience make. The cigarette is not an object until it grabs a hold of a way that Bebe can be herself in relation to it. It shows itself only as what it allows Bebe to become. Yet Bebe cannot become this particular subject without the twinkling cellophane, the match that lights the cigarette and the sinuous clouds of the smoke. The experience itself, we can therefore say, exists only in the inter-action: in the way subject and object mutually appropriate each and cohere in and through a specific event or gathering.

Instead of starting from the closed circuit of subjective experience, a phenomenology of the event starts from the idea that to be a subject is always to receive oneself from elsewhere or from outside oneself. This outside, in relation to which I can first have an inside, always arrives at me from a future that is not exclusively my own. This is the idea that is contained in the double reduction: I do not simply project a future for things and others, but also receive my possible projects, and thus myself, *from* things and others. Hence, the thing and the other, which together represent an otherness, make impossible the attempt to recapture an experience with reference to the subject exclusively. Experience itself does not belong to the subject, for while I am instrumental in bringing it about and necessary for its actualization, I am also in it and of it. I always already owe a debt to it and can thus no longer serve as its ground. Essentially this means that who I am or who I become is always to some extent a product of certain serendipities with others and things which I do not control, but which I can, to some extent, invite.

Deleuze (1969/1990), for example, says that my highest ethical call is to become “worthy of the event,” and Heidegger speaks of a way that I can turn my thinking toward the event rather than away from it. In his book *What is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger (1954/1968) traces “thinking” back to the etymological connection to “thanking,” which puts emphasis on recollecting our indebtedness to the “giving of the gift,” and in his book *Discourse on Thinking* (Heidegger, 1959/1966), he speaks of the possibility of a “releasement” (Gelassenheit) to the event, which he distinguishes from the attempt to master and control the event.

As I have argued in my dissertation, flirting is an example of our subjective experience being confronted with an otherness that cannot simply be encompassed by this experience. In flirting, the other represents a purpose or future that is beyond any I can predict, plan or project. The other therefore allows me to receive myself from a future that is not my own, that is, as pure event or transformation. When I flirt, for example, based on how the other responds or acts, the other can make me into a “man” or a “woman”, into a “victor” or a “loser.” This attribution arrives at me from a future beyond one I can master or predict. I can also have a past self returned to me by meeting someone who is able to bring me into the memory of who I used to be. Similarly, the other can confirm that I am friendly, that I am not destined to be a “cat lady,” that I measure up to a standard of intellectual rigor or that I am “cool.” Finally, it is the case that through the other’s desire for me I am called into my most unique self in the sense that no one can answer in my place.

In these and other happenings of flirting, flirting is not simply a subjective experience, for that would be to miss the fullness of the phenomenon. To flirt is not only

to strategize, plan, calculate, express myself, and so forth, but is also to have my facticity constituted through an otherness which I open myself up to and thus to receive myself from an elsewhere. In these situations I thus do not “have” an experience of flirting as much as I take part in it, emerge from it, and discover myself through it. The phenomenon of “exuberance,” which I have described as one of the existential themes of flirting, is a concrete example of the joy of discovering myself beyond my everyday self and of experiencing myself as part of an event that shows me how freely I can be. To flirt is here to receive myself in a playfulness, desirousness and freedom that liberates me from being this or that definite self. I here instead encounter myself as someone who can be many things and who enjoys the openness of the unpredictable futures through which I can become someone or something definite.

The event, however, must not be raised to the status of its own objective order that can be thought of outside of a relation to the subject who wills, feels, thinks, and acts. It depends on a subject in order to become itself and it can therefore not be confused with a causality that acts on me from without or simply happens to me as an accident of nature. While causalities are mechanistic and predictable, the event is always a subjective transformation that is unpredictable or unforeseeable, but which always involves me to some extent. I am thus not completely subjugated to the event. I find myself within it as an agent who acts. My actions, however, become possible only from the fact that I have already been acted on and have thus been called into a situation that requires a response. The image that comes to mind here is of the action of a soccer player who is passed the ball from one of his team mates. The soccer player is not here some independent agent who acts on the world, but is called into action by the other who has made it imperative

that he act. Several actions are possible to the soccer player, but they remain bound by the situation into which the soccer player has been called. While the soccer player *will* act, we can say that he did not act completely autonomously but responded to an action chain which he did not initiate and to a situation he could not have created of his own. His action was already an inter-action. He was made into an agent by virtue of an event arriving at him and calling him into action from elsewhere.

We can see here how the event always involves an element of “surprise,” which I think we could even go as far as to include as one of its defining characteristics. The surprise is not mere happenstance, as we might define it if we were to simply presuppose an ontology of the natural world. It is not a mere accident of nature that comes completely unbidden and can be explained without reference to subjective experience and the meanings things have for a subject. The surprise is *the aion* that brings me into being from a future I could not predict. The surprise, however, is always defined in relation to a past from which I direct myself and into which I have already been re-collected, invited or claimed. I do therefore not receive the event in a completely passive way. It does not simply happen to me, I am involved in it, it calls me into action—through it, I become myself, able to think new thoughts and do new things. The surprise has the phenomenal nature of an event because no subject who is ever surprised is not also changed by the surprise, that is, either granted new horizons for being a self or bestowed a new facticity. The surprise does not happen to me as much as it happens through me, requiring as part of its ability to show itself, a change in my very subjectivity.

Toward a Phenomenology of a New Temporality of the Subject

To study phenomena as events is to study phenomena within a new understanding of temporality that is irreducible to either subjective or objective time.

The event transforms me from the ground up just as we have seen in the temporal phenomenon of *nachträglichkeit*. It takes places within the time of the *aion*, or the time of the surprise, and thus outside of the chronological time of prediction and control.

My ownmost temporality is thus not the final horizon of the phenomenological ontology I am proposing, for I ultimately receive myself not from myself, but from the temporality of the event, which shows me who I have been in and through my encounter with an otherness. I have discussed this temporality as the time of many movies where we learn certain crucial information later on that makes it possible to view earlier events of the movie in a new light. In fact, this temporality seems to almost be needed in order to make a movie suspenseful and interesting rather than boring and predictable. Life too avails itself of this temporality. It is not simply a journey in chronological time, which would make it uninteresting and robotic. What makes our lives “lively” is that they are suspenseful and that they have the power to change us through encounters with others and things.

The *aion* is a description *not* of a time that I “have,” that “I take for something,” or “in which” my activities take place. Instead, we can describe it as the time of subjective transformation. In therapy, for example, we can represent it by means of the phenomenon of insight. In the “aha-experience,” something is not merely experienced in a new way, but I myself am transformed by the experience, or, I myself, as the experiencer, am experienced in a new way. The experience of insight thus requires as its

presupposition a temporality that does emanate from the subject, since it is that by means of which the subject can become a different subject or by virtue of which the self itself is changed.

In flirting, the temporality of the aion is always presupposed as the ultimate horizon toward which flirting tends. The other represents this unpredictable future through their enigmatic quality, their concealed intentions, and what I do not yet know about them. This future, which the other represents, is both enticing and filled with risk. It puts me into a relationship with a future beyond myself from which I can achieve my facticity as what I will have been in a new and unpredictable way. There is thus always a leap of faith involved in flirting in which I must open myself up to the aion and receive myself from a point beyond my own control. I must ultimately release myself to the temporality of the event.

My identity in the event is always the identity of finding myself anew, of encountering myself from others and things and thus of coming into being as who I am from a temporality and spatiality that does not belong to me. I *receive* myself from a point outside myself. This idea is already contained in Heidegger's and Van den Berg's existential phenomenological descriptions of human beingness. Here it is said that I arrive at myself from the future and that my identity is thus always out-standing or unfinished until no other future can arrive at me. For Heidegger this makes my own death the unstated horizon of all my projections. It is because I will die that I have my boundedness and identity, for my death provides an end point for the future which cannot simply continue to arrive at me indefinitely. To Heidegger, however, I am not simply defined by my death, for my death is not an attribute of me as a thing, but is a quality

belonging to my “arrivedness-at-my-selfness.” It turns every horizon from which I receive myself into a finite and decisive moment of my life or of the story of who I *will have been*. In this sense, the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, ultimately reinstates the mortal subject as the ultimate horizon for everything that is experienced.

What the experience of flirting has shown, however, is that when I flirt, I cannot only arrive at myself from my own mortal or finite future, but I can arrive at myself from a future that is not my own. Through the phenomenology that I am proposing, we can thus study a new temporal dimension of what it means to be human, which has hitherto been excluded from a more existential or humanistic interpretation of phenomenology.

Toward a Phenomenology of a New Spatiality of the Subject

The event also challenges the concept of my spatiality. No longer am I defined a priori as a soul encased in my own separate body. Instead, when I enter into the experience of an event, my body is no longer really my own, for my organs now become part of the haecceity or individuation of a situation. For Bebe, her body is no longer defined by the autonomous functioning of her arm and hand that “coax” the cigarette “out of its hiding place.” Her arm and hand only become her arm and hand through the lure of the cigarette that hides itself and invites a subjective grasping. The cigarette here constitutes the arm and hand by providing them with a reason and sensuality that define them in that moment. At the same time, this particular arm and hand, through which Bebe discovers herself in her flesh, first bring the cigarette into appearance as a sensual object. In other words, both bodily organs and objects here merge in the “gathering” of a specific

event: the event of a body that belongs both to the subject and to the object or, rather, acts as the medium of their encounter.

In flirting, for example, I often discover my attraction from the fact that the other is attracted to me, or because I receive my body back from the other as flesh. To become flesh is to have my bodily organs returned to themselves from the way the other or the environment responds. To have my look caught by the look of the other, throws the look back upon itself in its sensuousness by preventing it from simply becoming a medium for seeing. The body of flirting is thus often a body that belongs to an interaction between two people and needs to be produced through an encounter. In the phenomenon I have described as *shared intentionality* or as *affective resonance*, we witness an individuation of self and other in the shared body of a situation we have in common or an attitude we share. The body here ceases to become my body or your body and instead becomes the embodiment of an event that belongs to neither or to both. We cease to be individual minds communicating and instead become part of the same *haecceity*.

In the spatiality of the event, I am released from my containment within a body that keeps me separate from the world. Instead I find myself embodied by the world. The action potentials of my bodily organs are sustained by affectations of the environment that elicit these action potentials. The outer skin of my body is thus no longer a barrier that keeps inside and outside apart. My body “happens” in the interstice of multiple agencies that each appropriate each other. In such moments, I have the individuation of an event, or the individuation of something that comes to pass in a specific, unique and historic moment.

My individuality is thus not given a priori by the self-certainty of an “I think” or by a true self of authentic feelings, for I *am* like the wind or the weather, like the river or the dance, like the party or the phone call. My being resides not within me but in the situations through which I become myself. We could call this identity of my perpetually becoming self for “my life,” for life is not a process of being a subject who ventures into a world and “has” experiences, but is a perpetual process of partaking in events with others and things that show me who I am always only after the fact. This understanding is actually quite liberating, for it frees us from being this or that type of person and views our psychological identity as an outcome of the events in which we partake.

The identity belonging to me is not that of a stream of thought that is identical with itself. It is the continuity of a series of transformations that keep changing who I have been from a future that cannot be predicted. My life precedes my “mineness” or self-hood. It breathes life into me and helps me discover who I am from the events through which I become myself. My life, we could therefore say, is like a work in progress. It is never finished being written until the day the final experience has determined who I will have been. The question of our identity or particularity is thus a question of the events in which we have partaken and not a question of who we *are* separate from such events. As Stephen Mitchell (2002) argues in light of his commentary on Homer’s *Odyssey*:

In romance, as in life in general, there is perhaps no better way to determine one’s identity, to symbolize one’s uniqueness, than to catalogue the scars that serve as the remains and reminders of past injuries. Homer understood this. Part of what keeps Homer’s *Odyssey* fresh and relevant to contemporary readers is its rich reflection on the theme of identity, the question of what makes a person the particular person he is. Who is Odysseus, the hero of Troy, in each new adventure, with its different set of circumstances and its different set of characters? (p. 146)

Instead of defining who we are a priori and living our lives as a definite identity, what we encounter through the event, is an aliveness within us that is more powerful and creative than any quality or attribute could ever pin down. This creative potential is more me than me; it precedes my identification as this or that person. It is my own eventness which is perpetually triggered by others and things, although often condemned to repeat itself within the narrow confines of strongly held identification that keeps it in check and puts limits on my ability to become someone or something new. Holding on to an image of oneself as being someone who is separate from the event, is to impose the temporality of the chronos on the temporality of the aion. It involves approaching life from the perspective of the unilateral reduction that limits us in who we can become. This illusion never lasts, however, and we are ultimately always jolted into the event and shown it to be true through an experience of losing control or suddenly finding ourselves in a different state.

Often such experiences of becoming different through an event are much more meaningful to us than the experiences of the everyday in which we live the event as a product of our own making or as something we passively endure. While we can say that we lose ourselves in the event, this is only true from the perspective of our rigidly held identification as this or that person. When we let go of this restrictive psychological viewpoint, we realize that the experience of the event—or rather of being evented—admits us into a power or vitality of living that transcends our egological mastery and can be experienced as quite celebratory, exuberant, and delightful, as the experience of flirting demonstrates. Levinas' (1963/1986) quote here bears repeating: “The relationship

with another puts me into question, empties me of myself, and does not let off emptying me—uncovering for me ever new resources. I did not know myself so rich...” (p. 351).

Toward a Phenomenology of Liminality

By defining the subject matter of phenomenology as that of the event, we have opened up a new understanding of what needs to be studied or brought into view by the phenomenological method. To study the event is not to catalogue a series of human phenomena such as the subjective experience of jealousy, learning, insight, or what have you. By refusing to privilege only one side of the equation of lived experience, phenomenology frees itself from being an essentialist science of different types of experiences that can ultimately be referred back to the same invariant and generalizable “human experience.”

If we locate the phenomenon in the event, we avoid the essentialist bias of a phenomenology of subjective experience, because we now view the phenomenon as “the element” or the “haecceity” that cannot be captured in itself but must be studied in the unique happenings of subjects and objects that first discover themselves through it or “in” it. The phenomenon is, in other words, not a thing for a subject or a subjective structure of the thing, but an arising of an indefinable middle that keeps bringing subjects and objects together in unique combinations, forms and shapes. The phenomenal world now becomes that of life as the happening of events: a perpetual creative process of becoming. This is what I mean by talking of lived experiences as liminal rather than subjective or objective.

Liminality is not something that can be pinpointed and explained by means of some higher order of ontological concepts. It is a designation of the fact that experience has no ground, but is a perpetual grounding and ungrounding. Only through this *deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization*, do subjects and objects come into being: They partake in phenomena—phenomena allow them to be who or what they are. This understanding of the liminality of lived experience is not that different from Van Genep's original understanding of liminality as a state of being "betwixt and between." The difference, as I see it, is that I have reversed the priority between identity and liminality. In the new phenomenological understanding of liminality, it is not someone or something identical that is betwixt and between or in transition. Instead, it is from out of this middle time and space (aion and gathering) that identities emerge and continue to be reconstituted. Liminality is thus not a simple adjective to be attributed to an identity. This would make it into a type of experience which we can undergo or "have" and which can therefore be subsumed by a phenomenology of the subject as another type of subjective experience. Instead, liminality belongs intimately to the possibility of coming into being as a subject with a will, an idea, and a purpose. The moment in which I take ownership of an experience as my own, I am disavowing my own coming into being as this or that person within an event. The subject "forgets" that its own origin does not have its beginning within itself, but that its every action is a response to a happening that has made this action possible.

The new vantage point of liminality does not prevent us from studying the ways phenomena fall prey and conceal themselves as something other than events. In fact, as my study of flirting has shown, it is just as crucial to understand how the eventing of the

subject becomes taken over by the subject who thinks of itself as planning, willing, or initiating the event, as it is to uncover how this subject has itself become possible through the event.

To stay faithful to the event is thus to stay faithful to the way it manifests itself always within a particular degree of concealment. Yet it is also to not just turn a blind eye to the origin of this concealment/ revealment in an original liminality or strife.

What my revised phenomenological ontology has brought about is thus a greater degree of expansiveness regarding how phenomena can be made to show themselves. It does not preclude setting limits on the phenomenological reduction in accordance with one or the other professional interest, such as Giorgi (2009) has done with his “psychological reduction.” It merely reconceptualizes such a “perspective,” interest or horizon, as a particular concealment-revealment (double reduction) that is not itself free of the event that speaks through it.

Post-Script: On the Event of Writing My Dissertation

I want to end this dissertation, by reminding the reader that there is a certain paradox involved in writing a dissertation about the event, since as I have repeatedly stated, the event does not allow itself to be pinned down, for the event does not exist—it happens. In this light we must think of this dissertation as its own happening. It requires a reader in order to achieve its unpredictable consequences and yet it also involved the eventing of a writer who had to enter into an event with a keyboard, the thoughts of other thinkers, the institutional structures of a university and a whole series of other subjects and objects. In fact, we can say that this dissertation never in fact existed as a definite

thing, for its only way to “be” is through an encounter that transforms it. Like any other event, it exists somewhere in between reader and writer, objectivity and subjectivity, facticity and what is to come. It can become itself only through encounters.

In a certain sense, we can say that it didn’t have a definite starting point, since it owes its beginning as a response to yet other events that preceded it. The dissertation did not begin with the first letter being written on paper or the first book being read about flirting, but owes its beginning to many other events that came before. The voice that has carried me through this project emerged out of a conversation with the voices of other authors, as well as readings and experiences by which I myself was claimed and could become a writer.

At the same time, we can also say that the dissertation has never actually come to its completion, for the outcome of my research can always only feel incomplete and subject to further revisions in light of new evidence or new subjective engagements by other researchers. It thus remains subject to another future that can change its meaning retroactively and make it part of a new event. Even from the fact that it has by now been read by someone, it already lives on through the new horizons of the reader whose reading of it has inserted it into a new event involving the reader’s own assumptions and projects. Its final truth value is thus always to be measured only in response to what new events it helps give rise to. Its finality is always deferred to a future that has yet to arrive.

I therefore offer my contribution not as a final word on the understanding of phenomenology or flirting, but as my own input to an event that neither originated with me nor ends with me.

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APPENDIX:
PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTION OF A FLIRTING INCIDENT

The following appendix includes the transcriptions of the full descriptions and interviews that have served as the basis of my analysis of flirting. All names of the participants have been altered to disguise their identities and some identifying terms in each description have been replaced with fictitious substitutes and placed in brackets [] to indicate that they were not part of the original account. The order of the transcriptions in the appendix is alphabetical as listed in the following table:

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3 of the descriptions (including my own) did not involve a follow-up interview. For the rest of the accounts, the following transcription guidelines apply:

The written description is rendered in standard font
The interview questions and answers are rendered in italics

R: indicates the researcher's questions

S: indicates the subject's or research participant's responses

[?] is inserted at points in the text when parts of the interview recording were inaudible

Each interview followed the same format. The participant was in each instance told about the research I was doing and the purpose of the interview. They were then handed an edited version of their initial written account in which I had put “//” after each segment of the text which I would like to ask questions about. Research participants were then instructed to read their accounts out loud and stop every time they saw “//”. The introductory segment of the interview has been omitted from each transcription in this appendix in order to save space and avoid repetition.

Adam

I'm sitting in a bar waiting for friends to arrive

R: *Can you tell me more about what had transpired before coming to the bar and what expectations you had?*

S: *I had made plans earlier that night to meet some friends in the bar. I am usually pretty anal about being on time and so I was actually there a little but early. So I kinda walked in and I didn't see them there. I didn't want to bug them by calling them and so I just went ahead and had a seat. I was just gonna wait and was just kinda looking around to see what was going on*

R: *What were you imagining was going to happen that night?*

S: *Just hanging out. I remember it being a Thursday and so what we do is just kinda take a break from school . I wasn't planning on staying out late. Just kinda like to talk. We hadn't seen each other for a couple of days.*

I am actually sitting on a stool in the bar itself and I order a beer from the bartender

R: *Here I am wondering something more about picking a stool in the bar: What had made you pick a stool in the bar?*

S: *There was no one kind sitting around and typically if I'm just kinda waiting, I like to just sit next to other people in the bar, so I can just kinda sit. I just walked in, looked over... this is like a typical way I would do it... saw that there was a bunch of empty seats kind of one side.*

No one is sitting at the bar yet, save myself

R: *What was that like?*

S: *It was pretty early. In the bar section there was no one sitting there. I mean I guess I was kinda looking forward to maybe people being there. I guess I was just: Oh, I guess I will just have to sit by myself for a minute. But also I was happy that the bar wasn't crowded, because I was looking forward to just relaxing. Something about it being really packed on a nigh when I just really wanna relax is not conducive to that kind of experience.*

And I look into a mirror behind the bar to see who is in the room behind me

R: *Can you tell me a little bit about what may be going on here as you look into the mirror?*

S: *There is kind of like a mirror behind all the bottles and the cash register and so while you are sitting in the bar you can kinda look and see. And I was just kinda looking into the mirror to see what was going on behind me [. . .] just kinda checking out what was going on. Getting the kinda feel for the place to see how it's going to be. The beginning of the whole night—that first kind of walking in and getting a feel for it is really important in setting the tone for the night.*

R: *Can you say more about that “setting the tone”?*

S: *Like for a relaxed evening, like I said before, I prefer it to be empty. That way we can talk, we don't have to shout at each other. Typically the music won't be very loud [...] because the people are just kinda hanging out. That just kind of all add to it being more relaxed and just kind of having a couple of beers and then heading home.*

R: *So you can sort of gauge how the evening might go from how the bar felt or...?*

S: *If there is too much activity it feels like there is too much energy. And that might be good in a certain mood, but that particular night I just wanted to hang out.*

I check my watch and figure I have a bit before my friends arrive.

R: *What did it mean for you that they were going to be arriving?*

S: *I was anticipating, you know what we were going to talk about, what they had been doing. Like I said, we hadn't seen each other for a few days, so I was kinda looking forward to catching up. I guess there's just always also that kind of feeling of being unsure when you are there by yourself. Typically if I am there with another person I would feel a lot more comfortable. But being there by myself and thinking about where my friends were, I guess I felt a lot more aware that I was sitting there alone, kind of like considering, you know, are people looking, you know, what's gonna be happening and kinda not focusing as much on what is going on outside but kind of like going a little bit into the interior and just through that becoming a little bit more self-aware and self-conscious of sitting there by myself, drinking by myself [laughs].*

R: *So there is something uncomfortable about that... sitting there?*

S: *Yeah, it didn't bother me, but there was not the level of comfort I would have had if I had a friend with me sitting next to me, 'cause I would have focused on that conversation, kind of focus on what was going on with my friend, rather than thinking about myself, thinking about what the other people are thinking. A low level of uncomfortability.*

A blond girl wearing a white button down shirt and black slacks walks in and sits down at the bar

R: *What was the initial impression or impact that this had on you?*

S: *I think I mentioned it later but I thought it was kinda odd that she was wearing a white buttoned-down shirt and black slacks [...] it was just unusual. I think that was the first thing I noticed. And then, you know, she was cute, so I looked at her.*

R: *So she was cute and she was odd at the same time?*

S: *I think the first thing I notice was black slacks and white buttoned down kind of shit. It looked kind of out of place. Then I looked at who was wearing it and then it kind of held my attention a little bit more. And so there weren't a whole lot of girls my age that were attractive in the bar at the time. I just kind of saw guys drinking with their friends and some girls which didn't really catch my attention when I first walked in. So, she definitely caught my attention when she walked in. For those reasons.*

A single barstool separates us. I look into the mirror behind the bar to look at her

R: *What is your interest in her at this point?*

S: *Just, as I said before, she's kinda dressed unusually for this bar. I guess nothing was really going on, so I am kind of looking for a focus to kinda put my attention onto something. And as I said, she was cute so I wanted to look at her.*

She's fumbling through her purse; I think she may be looking for money as she pulls out her wallet. She calls the bartender over and orders a beer. She sits and drinks from her bottle. I'm thinking about talking to her

R: *Can you say more about what you were thinking here? What would be involved if you did talk to her...? What stopped you from talking to her...?*

S: *I guess I thought... Well, she chose to sit like right... I mean the bar was empty and she chooses to sit here... For some reason – I kinda say something about it later – I'm not feeling like WOW!, and it's not like a pull. It's almost out of like "Well, I'm not doing anything else"... It's just kinda passing through my mind, but I'm not sure what to do about it. I consider it. I'm considering talking to her*

R: *But there was something about her sitting close to you that made you think something...?*

S: *It made me think that she might be more receptive to me talking to her. She chose to sit closer rather than sit further away. Maybe if she had sat four bar stools down I would have taken that as she didn't want to talk to anybody, she just came to have a drink and sit by herself. If she had gotten a drink and kinda like not sat down on the stool I would have thought she was with friends. Or just the way she kinda sat – like plumped herself down and got a drink... It was almost as if we were in the same situation too, maybe. We were both sitting there drinking by ourselves. It was that kind of connection too.*

I kind of debate in my head whether or not I should try to start a conversation. I'm not sure what to do, thoughts of rejection and thoughts of success run through my mind

R: *Can you tell me more about this conversation you are having with yourself?*

S: *I mean it was more like images of what might happen, different scenarios running through my mind. It's kind of playful – nothing serious. Kind of like going back and forth. What might happen if I do talk to her. And the rejection would be that she would obviously be not interested in talking and I guess the success would be that she was interested in talking.*

I think about my friends who will be arriving soon

R: *How does this enter into your considerations at this point?*

S: *I guess I was considering, well, if they get here soon there is really no point in trying to start a conversation [. . .] I didn't want to get something started and then have to break away [. . .] It was two kinds of worlds that I didn't want to go back and forth with. I was really looking forward to seeing them so I didn't want to divert my attention to somewhere else and be like "hey, I will be with you in a minute"*

R: *Can you say more about "two different worlds"?*

S: *Yeah, I had planned the night to just kind of hang out and relax. I wasn't really interested in meeting just kind of strange people. That whole idea I had about the evening was kind of conflicting with this other kind of fantasy of, you know, talking to this girl. I guess two worlds is kind of a poor way to explain it. But two different modes of kind of like being at the bar.*

R: *Almost like two different nights...?*

S: *Yeah, I hadn't planned for it and I hadn't kind of expected this situation to come out. My plan was just to show up and my friends would be there. So it was a different project for the evening.*

I look at the mirror and notice she's looking over at me.

R: *What was that like?*

S: *I kind of look up and see that she's kinda looking. She sat next to me, she's looking over, what the heck, she might be interested. I guess at that point the chances of the success scenario kind of increase and I was willing to take a risk at that point.*

What the hell, I turn.

R: *So something had shifted at this point that makes you turn. Can you say more about what was now different than it was from the get go when you saw her?*

S: *When she looked over, it was almost like an invitation to say something to her. I guess that was kind of how I interpreted it. She might have been just casually looking out to see who was there, but just the fact that I looked up when she was looking at me with kind of knowing I wasn't looking at her. There was a good chance, if anything, she wants somebody to talk to her, to start a conversation.*

She is looking at me and when she turns she sees me turn my head she averts her eyes and looks straight at the bar for a moment. For some reason I find this endearing and say "Hey."

R: *What did you find endearing about her looking away?*

S: *There was just something kind of cute about like "I caught her" and she was aware that I caught her. It was almost like Sartre's story about the person looking through the keyhole and then something becomes the object of my perception. Where she was the subject and I was the object, it suddenly switched, and there was just something kind of cute about it, something attractive about it. Especially the way she reacted, it was almost as if she was ashamed, the shame of being kind of caught, looking at me while I was looking at her.*

R: *What did you take that as an indication of at this point, you think?*

S: *I guess, maybe that she was kind of interested and she was embarrassed that I caught her looking? Or maybe she was curious and embarrassed that I caught her looking. I found it endearing because it made her more like a kind of down to earth kind of person, because that was something that maybe I would have done if she had seen me looking at her. So I guess, maybe it made her look a little bit more real and I was more attracted I guess. It gave me like a sense that this is like a real person, that I might as well talk to her, I mean, she might have something interesting to say.*

She smiles and says the same in return. I feel confident enough now to scoot over to the next seat

R: *So now you scoot over to the next seat. Can you tell me what was going on here?*

S: *Yeah, I guess I took this also as an indication that she kind of reciprocated. She smiled and she looked at me and said "hey" back. And I kind of took that as an invitation that it would be OK for me to scoot over. If she had just kind of looked at me and then turned away I would have just... I probably would have left the bar and go sat in the back. Just 'cause I would have been kind of embarrassed. That gave me the confidence to feel almost like I was, as I said, invited and I wouldn't be violating any of her privacy. It was almost as if she wanted somebody to talk to and that kind of pushed me, Ok, let's do it, let's go sit next to her.*

R: *But maybe then the possibility of embarrassment was something that was also present?*

S: *Yeah, it was still there. Even at this point I was still not really sure and I mean, the whole thing, there was really this whole element that I didn't really care. I knew nothing really was gonna happen, and I was really still in the back of mind, thinking about my friends coming. So there was still like an element of maybe being embarrassed, but I think because she kind of like mirrored my look I think that the chances of me being embarrassed were a lot less. That's definitely a part of giving me a lot more confidence.*

I mention that she's dressed unusual for this type of bar, to which she responds that she just got off of work and wanted to drink on the way home. Apparently she is a chef/ cook at a local restaurant. I feel immediately comfortable when she shares this information

R: *What about this makes you feel more comfortable?*

S: *Something about her being a chef/ cook. There's just something maybe about that that seems safe, that seems kind of normal. Fantasies maybe of her cooking a dinner. And the fact that she came and grabbed a beer after work, I found that kind of endearing too. She must have had a hard day. It almost increased a feeling that she wanted me to talk to her. I just felt better about it.*

R: *Was this a surprise to you? Did you have a different kind of expectation of what profession she might have had?*

S: *Yeah, I just thought it was odd, but yeah, I guess I was kind of surprised. It wasn't like a chef coat, it was a white buttoned down shirt and black pants. I guess like an outfit you would wear in a nice restaurant. But I was kind of surprised, yeah, that she was a chef.*

R: *Positively surprised or...?*

S: *Yeah, I liked it, I liked it. Maybe if she had said she was a waitress or hostess, maybe it wouldn't have been as appealing. Like something about the cook. Maybe even something motherly about that, like a home-maker kind of a thing. Like that just came to me. But at the time I really didn't... I had no idea of what she was doing...*

I smile.

R: *What was the smile about?*

S: *I guess just kind of the element of surprise. Like I guess I was trying to show her that I thought that was cool that she was a chef [...] I wanted to smile to let her know that I felt that without actually saying it, in body language, I guess.*

We talk for a bit about where we're from and what we're doing in Pittsburgh, how we like the city, what we plan to do in the next few years here. We talk a bit about family, the weather.

R: *What was that like?*

S: *It was kind of like a common script that you would use when you meet a new person. Especially, you know, when we were both coming here from different places. Not too personal, just getting some information, but deep enough that it was intimate at some level, but not pushing it to the point that it was too much. Not touching anything sensitive. I would be kind of like shifting the subjects more than she was. I just kind of felt that these were safe topics that we could talk about that wouldn't be offensive, that wouldn't be too personal.*

R: *So what do you mean when you say that you were trying to move the conversation?*

S: *By that I kind of mean that I think it was more my initiative to switch subjects. I was asking more questions and maybe even offering more information that she hadn't specifically asked me about. You know, if I asked her where she was from, I would be like, you know I'm coming up here from New Orleans. And I also felt that since I was the one who came and sat next to her, that I should be the one to kind of shape the conversation and keep it going, and since I was the aggressor, kind of, in the game we were playing, that I was the one who should be making the effort to make sure the conversation was [...] I guess I took the initiative.*

The whole time we shift our gaze from each other to looking at the bar

R: *What is this about?*

S: *I guess there was still some kind of uneasiness. Sitting in the bar is kind of an awkward way to sit. I think to relieve that tension of kind of like looking a stranger in the face, we would both switch our gaze and so I guess that whole thing was about not making it too serious, not making it too intense, not making it too personal.*

When we start talking about family, both of us lean closer

R: *What happens here that makes you lean closer?*

S: *I think that family as the topic we were talking about was probably the most personal [...] I just remember being aware that in that moment we were a little bit closer. Because it was a little bit more personal than the other stuff we were talking about I felt more of a connection with her. She was less of a stranger all of a sudden. And we weren't talking... you know just: "where are your brothers and your sisters...?", "Where are your parents from...?", but at the same time those are the kind of questions you would ask someone you've never met before. They are not really personal, but more so than the stuff we were talking about before. And this is all over a short period.*

R: *How long?*

S: *15 minutes. Not too long.*

I feel a better connection at this point

R: *Hadn't you felt a connection before?*

S: *Not much of one. Later, I still don't really feel it, but better, in the sense that we both had shared with each other something a little bit more personal, than really I would with somebody I wasn't interested in. I don't know if I would have shared something about where my sister lived or where my dad was from if it was somebody I didn't feel I had some kind of a connection with. I kind of assume that she must have felt, at some level, similar and that was why she was willing to share with me. I guess there was a connection in that.*

I try teasing her a bit about being from New Jersey, she retorts by teasing me about coming from Louisiana. I like her, she's an interesting, attractive woman

R: *Tell me more about the attraction you are feeling here?*

S: *I guess the teasing, is something kind of playful and is something you would do more with someone you are kind of friendly with. It also gave me the kind of feeling that she was enjoying my company as much as I was kind of enjoying hers. I guess at this point something, just because we had shared that, and then we were kind of teasing each other, I realize that this person is pretty cool, she's interesting. I mean I noticed she was attractive when she first walked in.*

R: *Physically attractive or...?*

S: *Both. I mean I guess I saw her physically attractive before, but a little more attractive in that I thought maybe we were on the same kind of wave length. I was getting a good kind of vibe from her and from the conversation. But like I said in the next part, from the beginning I didn't really feel any drive to get to know her better. There wasn't – I mean it was fine, I was having a good time – but there wasn't any kind of WOW! I have to go talk to that girl kind of feeling - like a real kind of unconscious pull to the person. It was.. I guess that was what I was trying to get at up there.*

R: *What sorts of fantasies do you think you had at this point? The sorts of possibilities of what might come out of this interaction?*

S: *I was thinking maybe, get her number, meeting up for a drink or go out for dinner at some point, coffee, maybe something to get to know each other better at some point or continue the conversation. I'm still kind of thinking that the purpose of the night is still to*

hang out with my friends, so the fantasy wouldn't have something to do with that night, but maybe meeting up at some other point.

R: And maybe then more ahead of that... ?

S: I don't know if I really... there wasn't really that... the fantasies weren't going that far... because it just wasn't like that...

R: But maybe some interesting conversation... ?

S: And possibly something could... I guess the end of the fantasy might be, there might be a relationship coming out of this, but nothing like real intense, you know, like really sexual... and that was probably part of it too... There wasn't that real intense

R: Sexual attraction?

S: Yeah. I guess that was kind of what I was getting at with drive.

,but from the beginning I really didn't feel any need, drive, to really try to get to know her better. I wanted to talk with someone as I waited for friends and she's providing good conversation, but I just don't feel any real "chemistry"

R: Ok, so at this point, you don't feel any real chemistry, can you say more about that?

S: Yeah, kind of like what I said before, no, like, spark. There was nothing there... like I wasn't feeling anything that would push me to, like, ask for her number or to be really interested in kind of like pursuing her... she was cool, she was cute, she was interesting, but she wasn't... like, if maybe the project for the night had been something different I might have gone further with it, but because I didn't really see the goal of the night to meet people, I... Because the goal of the night was to hang out with friends and just kind of relax, the lack of chemistry, the lack of kind of like a spark, I guess, had a much greater effect than it might have if I went out with the purpose of meeting somebody.

R: What was your understanding of the chemistry she might have felt at this point?

S: I think at this point.. I don't know if I was really paying attention enough... It seemed to me that she was just kind of like wanting to talk to someone for a minute .. I didn't get the feeling that she was really feeling anything either... but I am not sure because I wasn't really paying attention to what was happening or... maybe that kind of played into why I maybe wasn't feeling anything, 'cause I wasn't really feeling anything strongly from her. You know, sometimes that feeds off each other.

R: So maybe if she had reacted a little bit more strongly then you might have felt more chemistry... ?

S: Yeah, I'm considering that know as we are talking about it. That might have been a possibility. If I had felt that she... a pull from her... attraction toward me from her it might have made me say well... to the point where I would have like seriously considered asking for her number.

I'm listening to her talk, or appearing to do so, but the back of my mind is debating asking for her number

R: At this point you are appearing to listen to her talk, can you say more about that?

S: I think, I am kind of processing what is going on, and I'm getting to the point where I'm "what am I gonna do from here?" Is this kind of just BS'ing with somebody at the bar or is this.. considering whether or not to pull through and make it something different.

R: Can you tell me a little bit about the debate you were having about whether or not to ask for her number?

S: I guess it would be real similar to the thoughts of rejection or success in my mind before. It was really just like thinking of the scenario of asking for her number. Like getting her number, what I would say and what I would do. And then the other side kind of thinking of, not doing it, just finishing the conversation. And kind of paying attention to see if my friends were coming. I was beginning to kind of... my focus was shifting away from what was going on. I was concerned with whether or not this was something that I even wanted to pursue, I guess that was part of it too. Did I have a will to do this or not. Was it there?

I see my friends enter the bar behind me, but they don't see me and walk toward a table in the back of the bar. I decide it's time to cut this short.

S: I saw my friends and that ended it, because that was the purpose of the night, to hang out with my friends. So when I saw them, whatever kind of debate was going on, ended, and I said it's time for me to cut it short. Although, I guess "cutting it short" kind of implies that it could have continued and it probably could if they hadn't walked in then, but I don't really think for a whole lot longer.

R: So there was a possibility of having continued that was disrupted in a sense, and a new possibility now...?

S: Yes, I think this had almost kind of diverted me from what I saw as the purpose of the night, but as soon as I saw my friends walk behind me I went back.

I touch her arm and tell her my friends have arrived, but it was a pleasure talking with her, maybe we'll see each other again. Even as I say this I realize we won't

R: Can you tell me about this realization?

S: *I guess like I wanted to touch her, to kind of like, maybe I was kind of feeling bad, but I wanted to make, you know, at least like touch. I guess why I realized that we wouldn't see each other again was that I think it was just a random encounter. I guess by putting I like that I was just kind of saying that I was Okay with that, that that was fine with me.*

R: *But then you said about touching her, that it was something you did because you felt kind of bad...?*

S: *Maybe there was like a feeling of guilt, like, I had been talking with her for a little bit, and I kind of just flew out of there as soon as I saw my friends. And I'm sure she saw me look over and watch them sit, turn my head away from the conversation and I'm sure she kind of felt... I guess I just wanted to say, like, "hey, I'm gonna take off," maybe it made me feel more sincere by kind of like touching her arm... maybe I felt kind of like fake saying after that, "hey it was great to talk to you, we'll see each other again," I was a bit feeling guilty about that, 'cause after I'm saying it, I know we are never gonna like you know...*

,shake her hand, and head to the table at the back of the bar with my beer.

R: *Ok so at this point as you are walking away what did you think had come out of your interaction? Or what's the significance of what had happened?*

S: *I guess at the end I was just kind of happy to have had someone to talk to while I was waiting for my friends to arrive... Even though we didn't know each other, kind of alleviating that sense of loneliness at the bar... While I was talking to her I wasn't as aware of being by myself in the bar... I kind of thought about it later, the whole episode, how it was to see someone dressed like that in the bar... and that is why I chose to write about... "That's crazy, a girl dressed like that"... It also was significant in that that was another kind of memory about the bar too... A bunch of other stuff had happened in this bar... It was just sort of an experience that I associate with the place... I guess, I do kind of look to see if I'll see this girl again... I don't really remember her name and I'm not positive I could really tell you if it was her or not, but if I saw a blond girl walking in dressed like that I would know it was her*

R: *So you look when you are in the bar, when you come back to that bar...?*

S: *I mean, there people which you always kind of see in the bar, and you always look around to see if they are there... At some level I am sort of looking to see if she is there too. That's more part of being in that bar than looking at that person... It was kind of a piece of the puzzle that was the bar... It was becoming the bar... One more experience to kind of add to it.*

R: *You say you sometimes think back on her. It stuck with you this particular memory?*

S: *Yeah, especially since I wrote this... I haven't even spoken to my friends about it... So in that moment I kind of left what was going on and went back to this other world with my*

friends. Maybe it kind of became a different person, in a sense, like switched personas. [. . .] You know I have only talked to a few other people in that bar before, you know, like strangers... Usually that is just a place I associate with being with friends, so maybe that is why she in particular stood out, because all the other girls I talked to there were just kind of people you would expect there. This girl was different, and I guess that was why she stood out.

R: So as you walk away from her, did you find yourself in a different place than when you had started out?

S: I think in the end I was beginning to kind of fade into being with my friend, whereas when it started I was really into being there, seeing who this girl was, acting a lot differently than I would if it was just a friend or even like a girl I knew. I think I just left that and entered the friend world after that. There wasn't really much of a connection, I didn't feel anything. I didn't really feel like I carried it with me into the conversation with my friends. I don't really feel like I carried it through the night. It was just kind of a piece of the night. It just happened to be at the beginning.

R: How would you characterize that piece?

S: It was pleasant. It is always nice to kind of meet a stranger. You just kind of get a pleased feeling, like a sense that you met somebody that might never have met before, like you kind of interacted with a stranger. It is not usually something one does. I mean, maybe in the bar [. . .] Just a sense of this person in the crowd stood out for a moment. You kind of got to know somebody that has this completely different life that's in no way connected to yours and probably never will connect to yours again. You know, we say at the bar for a moment and kind of just talked.

R: There was definitely something about it that was different or unusual, something out of the extra-ordinary..?

S: Yeah, as I said, normally it's just kind of me and my friends hanging out. Sometimes I might talk to somebody when I'm down there, but more often than not I just would have sat there and waited and finished my drink and watched some TV. If there was something to read, maybe read something while I was waiting. Thinking about it has made it so much bigger in my mind right now than it really was. It is actually really interesting. I guess now when I go back there I will kind of be looking for her.

R: After you have participated in this interview, what stands out for you as different from what you had thought about before. Does it have a new meaning for you?

S: I guess, for some reason, while I am reading his, I am wondering why I didn't just get her number. I mean I know that there was no like really strong pull, but I do remember her being interesting. I wonder why I didn't just get her number. Especially, thinking about it so much now, I am actually kind of curious like what happened to her. I would

say that has kind of changed by doing this project. So we will see what happens, in the future [laughs].

R: I just have one last question: What do you think this experience which you had with her means or how do you think you have taken it up as part of an understanding of who you are as a person? What does it say about you or your life? Does it have larger implications for the way you understand yourself?

S: I guess, when I do have a conversation, especially with a strange person, I feel friendly, I feel like a person that people trust, it kind of pleases me that she was cool with talking to me. I'm not a type that hits on girls a lot, so to have that kind of success is always pleasing, affirming in some way. Maybe in the moment I was just happy that I wasn't rejected. I was happy that she wasn't rude. I was kind of pleased with myself that I was able to meet a strange girl and keep a conversation going for that long. And there was kind of that possibility that I probably could have gotten her number too.

R: A sense of accomplishment or..?

S: Yeah, definitely, not like a really satisfying sense, but the sense that something was accomplished, that I had stepped up, like it was something I didn't have to do, but I did, and it went well.

Benjamin

This experience occurs at a gay bar/dance club here in Georgia. I am at the bar one night with some friends of mine ordering a drink when I see a guy roughly my own age standing in the corner talking with some of his friends. He's not completely unfamiliar; maybe I have seen him around campus? I am immediately attracted to him for several reasons, purely on a physical level (at this point): well-dressed, neat hair, nice-looking body---strong, good form. Within the group of friends around him, I notice that he is not particularly close to any one of them (no holding hands, arms around someone, nothing of that sort) over the others, leading me to believe that he must (maybe? hopefully?) be single. Thus, I decide that he shall be my potential "target" for the night---provided nothing better comes along, of course.

I continue looking at him, hoping he will soon glance my way and make eye contact. After a few moments (or even minutes, it's hard to tell), he finally does look in my direction. Our eyes meet, and I maintain the gaze for a second or two then look away. In such cases, it is generally good (in my opinion) not to be too direct or too obvious. I would not want to scare anyone away nor would I desire to seem desperate. Good steady eye contact followed by the resuming of my normal social activities is usually an effective technique. So, after looking away I continue talking amongst my own friends present. It is as if I just said to him, through my actions, my body, "Yeah, I do find you

attractive, but I'm clearly not desperate. Now watch me prove my lack of desperation to you by chatting amiably with my friends. I can even make them laugh—watch this.”

Now at this particular bar, there is an outside patio area. It just so happens that my object of interest happens to be standing along the wall of the passageway leading outside. I suggest to my friends that we go out for some fresh air—honestly, though, I just want to get a closer look at the guy and walk by him. Walking by someone at a bar, especially if done repeatedly, shows my interest in that person. It is especially nice if I can somehow bump into that person, or if it's crowded enough, brush up against him while walking past. At any rate, my friends and I head for the door and sure enough I glance at the guy as I'm coming toward him. He meets my gaze. I feel a tingling sensation, difficult to articulate, but it feels as if the night is suddenly full of possibility. I then refocus my eyes on the door ahead and walk closely beside him as I pass. Closer than necessary, to be sure.

After a few minutes on the patio, my special guy and his group of friends come outside as well. Aha! So, it's working. Generally, if someone follows me wherever I go in the bar—well, clearly then they must be interested. At this point, I keep glancing in his direction while talking amongst my friends, a smile planted firmly upon my face. I feel quite confident that this particular seduction is succeeding admirably. I decide to go back inside to the bar for another drink—and also because retreating within would allow me to walk past him again. So, in I go, walking directly by him... he looks at me, I look at him. His look makes me feel wanted; this is a nice feeling. I keep walking. No need to be forward just yet!

By this time, however, the bar is getting ready to close down for the night. I know I must make a more direct move soon. So, I order my final drink and wait for him and his friends to come back inside. After a few minutes, they do indeed enter the bar area. I see the boy that I like glancing around as if looking for someone—is it me? I hope he's looking for me... his eyes finally turn toward the bar and land upon my eyes, which are staring back at his. I smile, nod, and turn to the bartender to pay my bill. What to do now? It's almost time to leave. I tell myself that he must surely be interested... he's made eye contact all evening, he's sort of followed me around, he's not paying much attention to any other guys, he appears to be single... thus, all signs are leading me to believe that I can safely approach him without fear of reproach. (Fear of rejection is, ultimately, the one thing that keeps me from approaching others. In this case, that fear is likely unfounded.)

After carefully considering the evidence and deciding in favor of the possibility that this guy is, indeed, interested, I walk toward the area in which he is located. There just so happens to be some magazines on the counter behind where he is standing. I reach for a magazine, and, in doing so, glance at him. He's looking at me. I tell him hello and he reciprocates the greeting. I then say that he looks familiar and that maybe I have seen him before. He then says that, yes indeed, he saw me a few weeks ago at some school function. Now this is a really good sign! Not only do I seem familiar to him, but he actually remembered me *and* the specific place in which he had seen me weeks earlier. This means I made an impression. He must have liked me to single me out and remember me like that. I introduce myself and shake his hand, letting the handshake linger just a tad longer than necessary. I ask him “Are you here with anyone?” (This is the question I ask instead of saying “are you single?” It's the same question; it just feels less threatening, and less intrusive into the other's privacy. Asking a complete stranger about their

relationship status seems a bit rude, perhaps, but asking if they are with anyone at the time opens up any number of doors—maybe I think he needs a ride home? Maybe I really want to meet one of his friends and not him? Maybe I’m the one who needs a ride home? Maybe I’m just being friendly or inquisitive? The options are endless here).

He tells me that he is “just” there with some friends. I take this to mean that he’s single and internally feel relief. I then muster up some courage (helped, no doubt, by the alcohol in my system) and say “I was wondering if you’d like my number, so that maybe we could hang out sometime? If you want.” Without hesitating, he pulls out his phone and reads his number to me. He gives me *his* number—always a good sign. I store it in my phone and then give him my number. By this time, the bar really is closing—we are practically being pushed out the door by the employees. Outside, his friends are ready to go, so he and I have no time for further chatting. We shake hands (I might even hug him; memory fails me here). I tell him that I’ll call him tomorrow. He replies “Please do.” I walk toward my car with a smile upon my face. What a successful night! Indeed, in conclusion to this story, I do call him the next day, and he invites me over to his place. We “hook-up” (is that what they call “fooling around” these days?) and all is great fun for the time being. {The first sexual encounter with someone new is always the most exciting for me. New territory. Exploration of the Other. After this initial encounter, that particular terrain is easily memorized and becomes increasingly less interesting. Monogamy be damned.} Of course, not all attempts at flirtation end as happily as this one, but—hey—I chose to focus on the positive here. After *much* drama, I actually ended up dating the guy in this narrative for a little while. We are currently *not* on speaking terms. C’est la vie.

Daniel

I entered a restaurant to meet some friends; I was in a good mood, having just gotten some education, then some vigorous exercise. I was with friends, I was hungry and anticipating food, all was well in the world. Plus, these friends – to a certain extent – inspired my playful side; there was something about the gathering such that I found it relatively easy to not take things too seriously – to allow myself to “act out,” so to speak – to take risks, be a little goofy with my language, my sense of self.

When the waitress arrived, I noted things about her – her little upturned nose, the dark little eyes, her small, lithe body. I immediately felt sexual desire, a picturing and a physical imagining of what it would be like to have her in my bed, holding her in certain ways I enjoy. I said something to her – what, I can’t remember – but it was some kind of joke about my own late presence, and how she was to handle me, although the joke wasn’t narcissistic, or cynical, or sarcastic. Well, her response was immediate – it was as if I had just pulled a magnet out of my pocket and she was made of metal. Immediately, she moved toward me, standing rather close, and almost leaning into me. I cannot remember details, but we exchanged some sort of rather mindless banter about the food order (or some such part of the process we were engaged in) and at one point, she put her

hand over mine (her palm over the back of my hand). Now, the thing is, she looked about 20, and I'm 41. I NEVER get this kind of attention, and when I do, it is not to this degree, and I can usually smell the falseness in it. But this woman was acting rather animal-ish (like a squirrel to a bear); she had oriented to ME, even though I was surrounded by friends (some of them attractive smart young males). It was VERY strange... I felt highly surprised, but very pleasantly, although I certainly wasn't taking any of it seriously. The thought of ACTUALLY having a (sexual) relationship with this woman was very firmly a fantasy, something nice to imagine, but wholly out of the realm of possibility. The flirting was definitely inspired/powerful by my sense that it really didn't mean anything outside of this context – it was a kind of show we were doing for one another (and maybe, just a little, for the other people at the table – in the sense that I was performing in front of them – that said, it was mostly between us, I felt). We were making one another feel desirable, sexual, casual, improvisational, free. Having written this, it was even more a show for OURSELVES – a playing of a role, an easy, sexual way of being. I got to see just how easy I could be, in this role... and the truth was, I could be quite easy – and it was FUN...

What then, to do about it? As I say, I really wasn't taking anything seriously that night. So, my relationship with the waitress was also not serious. Almost instantly – with my first joke – a flirting had begun, although with her response back to me, it had intensified, to the degree that I actually began to wonder whether – if I played my cards right – I might not end up bedding this young thing. That said, I should note that I generally am not a person who engages in casual sex (well, I have, but that's a whole other story) and so the ACTUAL idea of “sleeping” with her was something that I think I was kind of putting away into the backroom of my imagination. What was happening in the restaurant was a game, a jousting of sorts, played with words, the body, and the smell of sex (and connection).

As the meal went on, the waitress – Marie – clearly showed each time she came to the table that she was orienting around me. She would approach my seat, address me first, and tend to wait for my answer (which was always somewhat jestful). I also think too that my answers – or comments – had a certain human personal-type quality... I was not joking/speaking of football, or some abstract idea – but of something human (I can't remember what). I will also note that as the meal went on and her behavior continued, I started to ACTUALLY think about attempting to make a REAL connection, and at one point after the food was cleared, I wrote my name and number down on a piece of paper, anticipating that I might actually give it to her. I also recall however, looking back, that there was just a slight absence of eye contact between us – mostly on her part, I am sure – but that at the time I assumed that it was the job that was causing it (she was busy); besides, we were flirting at a fair pitch in front of about 5 of my friends – pretty risky on both our parts (however, I seemed to be more aware of the flirting activity – meaning, I felt I was seeing it more objectively – that she seemed to be – she was IN it...)

I would say, though, that by the time I wrote my number down, the flirting was pretty much over. Now, it was getting serious, and as the seriousness increased (ie. Thinking of an actual encounter) the playfulness decreased. Although I could tell the end of the story – that toward then end of our meal she revealed things about herself that made it highly clear to me that this was not a woman I would want to be with, even casually – the actual flirting activity had ended even earlier, as I wrote above.

Greg

R: *What are your immediate thoughts after reading through it? [his description]*

S: *Most types of experiences like this are anxiety provoking, but it is usually a good kind of anxiety. It doesn't always end up that way, but it is an exciting kind of anxiety.*

R: *I would like to go through your story part by part and ask you some more questions. Please read through it aloud and stop every time I tell you to.*

A good friend of mine who I have known since grade school got married this past Labor Day and asked me to be one of the groomsmen.

R: *Where were you in your life at this point? What was going on? How did you find yourself?*

S: *I was living at home with my mom. I was working a full time job in community mental health. Enjoying it, but having dissertation and internships in the back of my mind. Applying for internship stuff. This is a friend of mine who I was really close with in middle school but in high school not as close, and I hadn't talked to him very much over the years and I was really kind of surprised I was one of his groomsmen. But we talk more now since then. The main thing that was going on with me was my back. I had to kind of get surgery for it. And this was September so in November I was going to get surgery for it. That was probably the biggest thing going on.*

R: *How did that back problem affect how you were feeling?*

S: *Oh man, I mean I was in constant pain, it was a nag. Everything I was doing, it was a constant focus of my life all the time. I didn't know how it was going to be at the wedding; sometimes it's bad and sometimes it is not as bad. I was kind of at a point where I could manage it, but at the actual day of the wedding I was concerned with having to stand there. At the wedding I could sit down and stand up as I wanted, but during the ceremony it was particularly tough. I had to stand there for the entire time.*

A month or so prior to the actual ceremony, the other groomsmen and I accompanied my friend to an African clothing store owned by his soon to be mother-in-law to be fitted for matching vests to wear to the wedding. During this process I met his mother-in-law and got the opportunity to converse with her for some time.

R: *What was your impression of her?*

S: She was nice, but she came across as a bit overbearing I would say, as a bit kind of like a control freak and the authoritative one who wants to tell you how things are, but pleasant and nice besides that.

The day before the wedding, the bridal party met at the church he grew up in (where the ceremony would be held) for the wedding rehearsal. I was a bit early for the rehearsal and people trickled into the church waiting for my friend to arrive about an hour and a half late. As I hung out meeting some new people and catching up with old friends, I was struck as a beautiful young woman entered through the double doors in the back of the church. She had kind, beautiful eyes and a warm smile.

R: So this is kind of the first time when you see the woman right?

S: Yeah.

R: Do you remember what things went through your mind or what was happening at this point?

S: Yeah, just physical attraction. She was hot, she was wow stunning. A big thing was I would catch myself staring and try to stop. I had to consciously make an effort to not look at her

R: So you think already there, a spark was ignited?

S: Yeah, the glances that usually how I can tel. You know if she's not really looking at me very much or very often, I'd kind of assume she wasn't interested.

R: So you already at this point had some kind of an intention for something...?

S: Sure, there was a chance

R: Did you have a sense of a chance for what?

S: Obviously I was attracted, so I was thinking I would like to do like sexual things, but thinking of her attractive in that way, but at the same time I was wondering what her personality was like. Was she intelligent, did she have a sense of humor

R: So already you are wondering if there is a possibility for something sexual going on?

S: Yeah

R: Did you think beyond that or was that kind of the immediate horizon?

S: I mean that's the first thing. She is physically attractive, I would probably have sex with her. But then immediately it was like I wonder if she is funny and good to talk to and all that kind of stuff

R: *And if she were what would that mean?*

S: *It would be more likely that we could maybe pursue something like a relationship, if not then likely not*

R: *So you could pursue a sexual relationship with someone who wasn't necessarily intelligent?*

S: *I don't know, I don't think I said that... It would decrease the likelihood that we could... I mean maybe I might kiss her, but it would depend on what's going on with me. It would be a possibility that I would have sex with someone who wasn't intellectually stimulating, but it would decrease the likelihood of something like that happening. It would definitely make it highly improbable that I would try to develop a relationship, as far as an exclusive relationship*

During the rehearsal, we shared a few awkwardly playful glances across the room as we were told how to walk and where to stand.

R: *Awkwardly playful glances?*

S: *It's playful but it's awkward because you don't want to get caught staring at the other person. I mean we'll look at each other but then as soon as they look at you, you will look away. That's what kind of makes it awkward, but it is also playful at the same time*

It was clear there was a mutual attraction between us because we both smiled, looked away, sometimes chuckled after a few of the times we caught eyes with each other.

R: *What do you feel in that moment?*

S: *You kind of feel like a little kid again almost. It's exciting*

R: *In what way do you feel like a kid?*

S: *possibilities, more possibilities. A kid gets excited over small or kind of little things. It just reminds me of those times when you are learning what attraction is. What it means to be attracted to someone, how that whole thing works, it takes you back to that*

R: *It reminds you of more possibilities?*

S: *Like an exciting new endeavor, you know what I mean, like planning a trip*

Unfortunately, the time did not present itself during the rehearsal when it seemed right to try to talk to her, but I did ask around about her.

R: *So here you say, it didn't seem right?*

S: Yeah, she was talking to a lot of her friends. I felt like I would have had to break in – interrupt her conversations with other people. There was a lot more people she knew there, and didn't want to be like "oh, excuse me." It just didn't really present itself where she was kind of alone, where I could start a conversation between me and her.

R: Then you say you asked around about her, can you say more about that?

S: I would ask my friend and other people: Do you know her? What do you know about her? Interests, and what is she doing with herself

R: What do you think you were trying to do by getting more information?

S: Oh, it helped me make a decision about whether I wanted to approach her or not. If I found out that she was a crazy bitch [chuckles] I probably wouldn't even try to talk to her, because I trust my friend's opinions on things like that. But just to get a better sense if it would be worth approaching her or not

My friend who was getting married told me she was the maid of honor and the sister of his bride-to-be. He told me her name is Gwendolyn, she is easy to talk to, and just broke up with her boyfriend who lives overseas.

R: What did that specific information do?

S: It would decrease my anxiety with approaching her and, she just broke up with her boyfriend, she's single, so I wouldn't get in some awkward situation

R: And you talk about some anxiety that's evolved here, can you say more about that?

S: There is always anxiety about the rejection aspect, but if she is easy to talk to it is more likely that you can hold up a conversation. Even if there is an attraction there can be difficulties with the communication styles or something like that. Some people are just difficult to talk to. It just increased the likelihood that that wouldn't happen

I spoke with her mother on the way out of the church and asked her if her daughter is dating anyone. I already knew the answer to this question, but I also knew asking such a question would be clearly expressing my interest in her. I sensed that I had a good rapport with her mother after meeting her in her clothing shop a month ago and hoped she had developed a good opinion of me and might it pass along to her daughter while letting her know about my expressed interest in her – which she did.

R: You are asking the mother even though you already know what the answer is...?

S: Yeah, it's somewhat manipulative, I don't know, but it was a way of indirectly expressing my interest in her without walking up to her and having her know that. I felt

like her mom and I got along the month before. I did just kind of by asking that question play dumb, expressing my interest in her daughter which I assumed she would pass on

R: *Was there any sense that you wanted to be on the mom's good side or..?*

S: *Oh yeah, I mean I already felt like I kind of was... and to see what mom thought about that idea. I have found in the past that if you can get a recommendation through the parents, it's always easier, because then the other individual know "oh my parents already kind of approve of him" so it kind of takes that question mark out of the way for them at least.*

I did not see Gwendolyn, or Gwen as I came to know her, again until the ceremony the next day.

R: *What role do you think she occupied in this time in between?*

S: *I was thinking about the possibilities and what it would be like, you know, a certain kind of anxiousness about when I might have a chance to approach her the next day might have been one of the scenarios in my head. We actually had a bachelor party that night and I found out later that one of her friends were trying to come down to my room to see what was going on. They said I wasn't there, but I don't remember not being there, but she had come looking for me and I didn't know.*

R: *What kinds of scenarios played in your mind?*

S: *I know that I did, but I don't remember exactly what scenarios I played out*

R: *But you were imagining different things that might come out of it?*

S: *Yeah, ways to approach her*

R: *What to do, what should be your next move?*

S: *Aha, yeah, and kind of knowing I would be vigilant the next day, and also being mindful of not wanting to come off too strong, being careful about that, but at the same time keeping an eye out for when would be a good time to approach her*

I was certainly aware of her presence as we prepared for the ceremony and after it was underway. She wore the elegant gold bride's maid's dress well, carried herself gracefully, and was the only bride's maid allowed to wear her hair up.

R: *She kind of stands out here, is unique and special in what is going on, is that how you perceived it or...?*

S: *Yeah, I definitely did, she was the most attractive of the brides maids, and remember she told me later that she got special permission to wear her hair up*

I wanted to exchange some more looks like we had the day before, but I was rather distracted by the fact that I was having back problems at the time and it was incredibly painful for me to stand for an extended period of time, which is exactly what I had to do.

R: *Being in back pain, and being interested in flirting, how did that play out?*

S: *I wasn't thinking about her much at all. I was just trying to hold a stable look on my face with this almost unbearable pain. There were so many scenarios, like what would happen if I just stepped out of this line and sat down for a second?*

R: *Did that go away later on?*

S: *It was more manageable when I could stand up and sit down, like at dinner.*

Most of my efforts during the ceremony were put toward keeping a blank expression on my face, not wincing, and ignoring the pain I felt because they were videotaping the ceremony and I didn't want to be remembered as the guy making a strange face during the ceremony. She later told me that she looked at me several times during the ceremony and was disappointed that I was not looking at her and did not seem interested anymore.

R: *Was the awareness that she was looking at you something that was present?*

S: *It would pop in and out of my head, but I didn't have much time to think about it because the pain was so distracting. Later when she said that I just explained to her how much pain I was in. I remember making a joke about it later, 'cause she's a nurse and it kind of fit into her area of caring for or taking care of*

R: *Do you remember if you had a sense of whether or not she liked you?*

S: *At the ceremony I really didn't think about it much, it was just about getting through this. It wasn't until after when we were done at the reception, when I started to get back into that focus. It was my job to just try to hold it together*

I was able to relax more at the reception because I was not forced to stand as much. I listened in delight as Gwen told an intimately funny story in front of everyone during the reception, as is customary for the maid of honor and best man to do. She talked about how her sister glowingly described her first date with my friend, and how she sat and listened to her sister tell her this story as her sister went to the bathroom.

R: *What impression did that give you?*

S: *It made me like her more because she had a sense of humor. She was kind of spontaneous. I thought it was great. It's playful. I thought it was fun and I was "man, that was really cool"*

R: *It reflected well on her that she could do that?*

S: *Yeah, it made me want to approach her more, made her more attractive to me*

After dinner, people got up from their seats in order to go to the bar, the bathroom, to dance or to mingle. I noticed Gwen sitting by herself and decided to approach her.

R: *There is a moment of decision here. Do you remember what kinds of things went into that moment: were there hopes, were there fears...?*

S: *Both, that's the moment where it is like do I do it or do I not. That's what I was thinking about the night before: when is this moment going to come. I was like: I hope this is the right time, taking so many considerations into account at the same time, but then just really being able to overcome that. And I think the more you do it, the easier it becomes to just overcome that, just force yourself past that. I remember when we were little and going to the skating rink with some of my friends. One of my friend's moms she was driving us and she was like "are you going to talk to some girls tonight?" And we said [makes sound of indecisive mumbling] and she said, "well the worst they are going to do is say no." "Yeah, what's the big deal." I remember making it a bigger deal than it is. That always kind of stuck with me.*

R: *So you decided to just go for it here...?*

S: *... And it was kind of odd the setting 'cause they had two tables. There was a big dance floor and then there were two tables with the bridal party, but there were two of them. There was one table that was higher up and one that was lower down. I was on the lower part and she was on this other one. She was just a few seats behind me on the right, so I just kind of got up and just walked down and said "Hi, how's it going?" She was by herself*

R: *What significance do you think it had that she was by herself?*

S: *Not to like interrupt her. I've done that before, it makes it seem... a certain part of flirting is to not make a fool of yourself and when you do it with other people around it makes you feel more awkward, it makes me feel more judged because I feel like it is not just this person who I am kind of presenting myself to, it's her friends or everyone else around and I feel like that makes me less natural and less effective.*

I usually try to come up with something a bit more witty and circumstantial to say in order to initiate a conversation in these situations, but I simply asked her how she was doing, if she was enjoying herself, and introduced myself.

R: *So you did something different?*

S: *Um, I couldn't really think of something. Like sometimes if something funny has just happened, you know, I'll make a comment on that or something. Or if we are sitting in*

the same proximity and observing something together, then make a comment on something circumstantial like that to just kind of like break the ice But nothing like that stood out so I just introduced myself

R: *Do you remember what that was like to say that?*

S: *Um... I mean, it is always anxiety provoking, but it is also exciting at the time. It des kind of bother me the stigma in society where guys are expected to be the ones to approach and take the initiative. But I've heard girls a lot of times say, man, I you know I was interested in this guy but he just never came and talked to me. I see it as a big sign, it really stands out to me when a girl can take the initiative and approach the guy. That always makes me think, "wow, she can do that!". I guess sometimes they can turn out to just be loose, you know what I mean, someone who throws herself at guys. I mean, you don't want one that does that too much, but at the same time it is impressive to me, it earns you extra points, if a girl can do that.*

R: *You said before that to you anxiety and excitement is kind of related?*

S: *Yeah, in this particular instance it is. It is really kind of a back and forth with it, like the anxiety just mixed with the excitement. They are just so closely tied in this situation in particular.*

R: *So what is the excitement about?*

S: *The excitement is that yeah like something new and you get to know somebody and the physical kind of excitement and arousal. But there is fear alongside with the anxiety and it could be embarrassing.*

We began talking and I asked her if she would accompany me to the bar for a drink, and she did.

R: *Can you say more about suggesting to go to the bar?*

S: *Yeah, so that we could get out into the open. She is sitting down at a table and I am standing there and it just seemed like it would be more comfortable. It's also a sign that she is interested. You know if she is "Oh no, I don't want to come to the bar" then "alright, I'll leave you alone." But if she does want to come then, okay, she's interested.*

R: *Kind of a small test?*

S: *A small test, yeah, definitely.*

My friend was right, she was easy to talk to and I was pleased to find out that she was rather bright and had a good sense of humor as well.

R: *What did that mean to you?*

S: It meant that there was potential for me to consider her as a girlfriend

R: So that was a scenario that was with you, that possibly this could be a girlfriend?

S: Yes, I mean probably from the very beginning that was there

She pointed out that she heard I was asking around about her, particularly from her mom, and admitted that she had been asking around about me as well. As we had a few drinks, I asked her an assortment of general, open-ended, questions regarding her interests. I usually do this for several reasons: to engage her (I find that others are often more comfortable talking about themselves than I am initially), find out if we have any shared interests, and temporarily put off my anxiety about sharing personal information about myself with people I know little about.

R: Can you say more about the anxiety of putting yourself out there and sharing things?

S: If I just start talking about myself I don't know if I am boring her. I am more self-conscious about what I am saying. But if it is a topic that I know she is interested in then I don't feel that as much, if I know that it is something that she brought up then I can just kind of go with it, then I know that she is interested in it

She was working on her degree in nursing, is artistic, and loves to travel. I then told her about me, what I do, and some of my interests. I find this much easier to do after already having similar information about her because it helps me know which directions to go in, or highlight, more in order to keep the conversation more fluid and fruitful.

R: More fruitful?

S: Um... fruitful in the sense of getting to know each other rather than just kind of being this chit chat

We spent some time discussing our travels, art, our career plans, my recent back pain, and what I was doing about it. I remember making an insinuation later, when I felt we knew each other better and it was more appropriate, about my possibly needing her to use some of her nursing skills to help me remedy my back pain at some point. She quipped back that she would be more than happy to.

R: What do you think is going on here between you?

S: Making it more serious, just kind of putting it out there – our attraction – is there a physical attraction? Putting it out there that I am attracted to her and seeing if she would reciprocate, and she did

I wanted to ask her to dance because I enjoy dancing and have found it also provides a good means of gaining more of a felt sense regarding our attraction for one another. I can

also see if we share similar ‘rhythms’ and are compatible in more physical ways. But unfortunately, my back pain prevented me from doing so.

R: *Can you say a little bit more about the felt sense?*

S: *Yeah, I’ve noticed that with dancing. I love to dance. I enjoy it and first of all that the thing for me: whether or not a girl is a good dancer. If she is, she is more attractive to me, if she’s not, it’s more awkward. If we try to dance and we are stepping on each other’s toes it’s like we just have different rhythms when it comes to that. And a lot of times it relates sexually: When we dance well together usually we have good sex and that’s just how it is a lot of times, but if we don’t the sex is njahh... We are on a different page or different wave length, so that is a way that I kind of test that aspect a little bit. And when you are that close you can pay attention to the smaller gestures, you know where you put your hands and where she puts her hands, you can pay attention to the level of attractedness and stuff like that. More cues to go off of.*

We continued talking throughout the evening. During this time, I made subtle physical gestures, such as gently touching her back to guide her through a door I had opened for her or playfully brushing her knee as I laughed if she made a joke. Throughout this entire time, I was also very attuned to her responses to my comments and caresses in order to gauge whether they seemed to be invited or not.

R: *Can you tell me about this process of gauging? How did you gauge her in this instance?*

S: *Yeah, to see if... we are sitting at the bar and she be facing me and so if I brushed hr knee and I noticed she pulled her knee away, yeah okay, I’m not going to do that again, back off. But if she is okay with it then she is okay with it.*

I waited until the end of the night to ask her for her phone number. I may have asked for her number sooner if the situation had been different in that I sensed there was a chance we may have our conversation cut short or might not get a chance to see each other again otherwise. But in this case, I knew there was a strong chance I would run into her again and there were also other ways I could contact her if for some reason I missed the opportunity to exchange numbers with her. She gave me her number and we made plans to see each other again the next night.

R: *Can you say more about getting her number?*

S: *At that point I waited until the end of night, but at other times say if I’m at a bar and I have know idea about who she is or where I might see her again... but I had met her mom, I am good friends with her one brother in law, you know, there is a good chance that we could see each other, so I didn’t feel pressed to like establish a potential of contacting her again. I’ve had situations in the past where I was very frustrated, where I was talking to a girl in a bar and we are talking all night and things are going along great, but I didn’t get her number and then something came up where one of her friends came along*

and was like: we gotta go now, and I was like “damn it!” and I never saw her again and from that I have kind of tried to be mindful of that and avoid that happening.

R: So getting the number becomes the goal at one point?

S: It is more to establish that now there is continuity beyond this meeting, that there is potential to develop the relationship. I had a sense at that point that it was pretty much a given. The timing of it is another thing too. If it is too soon she may not feel she knows you well enough to give you her number and then if it is too soon you may ruin it. Like, “man, he’s coming on strong. He’s only talked to me for 5 minutes,” or something like that.

R: How did you feel when she gave it to you?

S: Happy, successful, confident...

R: What kinds of thoughts were now going through your mind?

S: Just looking forward to seeing her again, thinking about things that I want to ask her more about. What parts stood out to me that I would want to know more about...

I may have also waited a few days to call her in other instances, depending on what seemed appropriate to the level of mutual interest I picked up on, but that did not seem to be necessary in this case. We had some wonderful phone conversations, dates, and dated exclusively for a few months, but we both have very busy schedules, live a considerable distance from one another, and it ended up not working out.

R: What significance does this event have now for you? Do you ever think back on it?

S: Occasionally, when I talk to my friend and there is just certain things we share like some kind of nursing stuff, the area where she lived if I am in that area and maybe just kind of jokes we shared...

R: And it kind of ended in a way that wasn’t nice?

S: No, one thing I didn’t put in there, she really did get a little... I noticed that her mom was a little overbearing, and she became a little overbearing herself. She had a constant need for attention and she would get upset if she called me and I didn’t call her back until the next day. But I would call her and she wouldn’t call me back and I would be fine with it and I was like, alright, we just have different expectations with that. And it really got to the point where enough was enough, where she was expecting too much. We were dating exclusively, but it was too much. I needed my own time, I the expectation I had for how much time I wanted to put into the relationship was different from hers. She ended up getting on my nerves in the end, so that is what I think of when I think back, that annoying sense comes back to me.

R: *So it's become kind of tainted? It is not the same as it was when you were living through it at the time...*

S: *Yes. It would be an example of what I would not want... It gave me some sense of what I am looking for and what I am not looking for*

R: *Now that we have talked about the experience, has aspects of it changed for you?*

S: *Now that we are talking about it, the annoyance isn't there as much, has kind of dissipated I would say, helping me kind of view it...just the way it ended has kind of left me with a sour taste in my mouth... that's what stays with me the most, like hart "ugh." But the more I thought back on there were really good aspects of it, good parts of it, so that part stood out to me more.*

Jason

The last time I flirted with someone was this past Tuesday with a girl in my history class. The girl in question, I have always considered to be attractive.

R: *When was the first time you saw her; was it in the history class?*

S: *Yes, at the beginning of the semester.*

R: *What did you consider to be attractive about her?*

S: *First of all what attracted me was her intellect. Just her knowledge of the particular subject we were studying. And the way she looked, especially her eyes.*

She sits next to me but two rows over. What really attracts me about her is her personality. She seems very intelligent and classy.

R: *Can you say more about how she is intelligent and classy?*

S: *She seems not to be like an airhead. She seems to have common sense. To have a certain dignity or grace about her that isn't open and cheap. She has some sort of self-worth about her self. She would be a challenge to get to.*

R: *What would it mean to get to her for you?*

S: *Just to form a nice relationship, get to know each other better and then wherever it goes*

I'm always glad to see her.

R: *Can you say more about that?*

S: *When we see each other it's like both of our eyes light up. She blushes, I blush. We don't know what to talk about next. It's so tense. Maybe it breeds a little bit of tension, that just try to become more familiar in terms of conversation. It is always nice to see if there is attraction and if she responds back.*

Her and I studied with a group of friends once and had a blast

R: *Can you say more about that?*

S: *We had to study for a mid-term and I heard her and a group of friends were going to be studying together. Of course I offered my interest to go. It was just a fun relaxed situation where we all were just remembering child stuff, literature... reminiscing, talking about ethnicity and where everybody is from, about how I'm going to Italy to travel and how they are going to Italy. It was a lot of fun, and it was a real relaxing and... just a fun spirited conversation. And we did get to study too, but it was just fun, it was a lot of fun*

R: *Can you say more about the importance of you going to Italy?*

S: *No she was going to Italy for the Fall semester and I was going for Spring break , and we were just talking about that, certainly the excitement. We both found out that we had a common bond with something. But it's kind of sad, at one point we just didn't know what to jump to next about it.*

R: *You didn't know what to talk about next?*

S: *Well, we kept going back to the course, but just to continue something more. What do I mean by more...? I guess just to have the common ground to have something to talk about other than something so intellectual like what we were studying, 'cause that could be dorkish too*

R: *So it seemed like you wanted to move it somehow beyond the conversation you were having about Italy?*

S: *Uhum, maybe develop a good friendship, to get to know the person and to be known and vice versa.*

One thing I notice about her is her eyes. I know from psych classes that a person's eyes will dilate when they are with someone or doing something they enjoy. Her pupils are very large.

S: *And I did my internship at [x] Hospital. My supervisor told me about that, and she sort of did something like, she was showing how girls flirt and we were all having a conversation about that and she said, notice how this girl likes you and this girl doesn't.*

So I guess her pupils are always dilated very large when she sees me and I guess mine are too

R: So that means something too you that they are dilated when you see her?

S: Um, I guess a person's eyes are always the window into their soul, to what they are thinking and what they are feeling, and so I always try to pay attention to people's eyes and what they are doing, and... so I guess looking at her eyes, seeing the reaction, the physical reaction, the comfortableness and then the blushing...

Lately, she comes to class early and tries to strike up an enthusiastic conversation.

R: Can you tell me about that?

S: Well, usually, I am always early to all my classes, either a half hour early, I am a commuter so I always like to be early for everything, read, go to the library or sit outside if it is nice. So I always get there early and one she came early and you know we talked and everything else and then consistently now she keeps coming early. So I keep coming early, and sometimes I'm 45 minutes early and you know just trying to keep this conversations, get it to go past "Hi how are you?", "What did you do this weekend?" or "what do you think of the professor," all that boring stuff. Just trying to go past some of that.

R: So what do you find yourself doing in order to do that?

S: Bullshitting a lot... I've been struggling with that, just trying to think of what to go past with

R: What do you mean when you say bullshitting a lot?

S: Um... having mundane, superficial conversation, you know, "hi, how are you?", you know. I am just trying to look for something that would possibly go some place more.

R: So when you go there early, have you come to expect her to be there?

S: Uhum

R: So you look forward to it?

S: Uhum, and I think she does too

R: So, what importance does she have when you are not in class?

S: She is usually there for every class. I guess I would feel really down if she wasn't there. There were times when I missed a class, when I was real sick, and I missed it, I missed

her. We ended up bumping into each other walking on campus. We talked as long as we could, but we were both walking in different direction

Our conversations are awkward. We either run out of things to talk about or they are too mundane.

S: *So like I say, neither of us know how to keep it going*

Usually I (sometimes desperately) bring up anything to keep her attention on me

S: *So just kind of trying to find out anything or to keep the conversation going*

R: *So you say sometimes “desperately”?*

S: *Just trying to keep the attention going and she’ll respond doing the same thing too*

R: *What do you mean by the attention?*

S: *Her attention*

R: *Ah, to keep her attention on you... Okay. So attention on your conversation...*

S: *Conversation, always trying to dress for class well, in general, but specifically just to make sure my hair is combed and thing like that*

R: *So you try to look good in general. Does it play a role that you know she is going to be seeing you?*

S: *I think so, I mean, it reflect on how you view yourself inside; it’s expressed outwardly that you have self-confidence, that you have a certain image about yourself, and that you are knowledgeable, that you come from an educated family*

She too will do the same thing.

S: *I always try to complement her too, how she looks nice; her hair, her jewelry, just kind of pay attention to details*

What I love the most is during class. She for the most part will pay attention to the lecture. Ever so subtly she will flirt with me.

R: *Can you tell me something about that?*

S: *Well, I always like to sit against the wall. I always stretch out and everything else. She is two rows over. I will look back and forth and she catches it out of the corner of her eye, and then we’ll ignore it. So it is sort of like a cart and mouse sort of thing going on, and then she will look at me or flirt with me during the movie or something like that. She will*

try to stare at me when the lights are off. Then I will try to pay attention to the movie. Then I'll look at her and she will turn away.

When I notice her, she blushes and re-positions herself.

S: When I stare at her during class (I can do so because where I sit nobody is behind me to see

R: Can you tell me more about this staring that you do?

S: Well, she's cute-looking, I mean, you know, her hair, her eyes, her figure, you know when she takes notes, and I don't know. I guess it's an infatuation

R: So you notice things about her that you are attracted to?

S: Uhum.

I usually try to think of a way to get her screen name for aim.

S: For instant messenger, but I guess it would be awkward to go up and say, "hey, what's your screen name." It seems to me inappropriate because I don't know her, that casualness hasn't been established

R: So what would be awkward about it, you think?

S: Too brazen, too bold.

R: What would be at stake for you in asking?

S: Um... I guess it would be embarrassing if it came across as too bold.

I would want to ask her out but I always hesitate (I do this a lot with girls. I get scared.). /

S: Partially too, I was just in a relationship. I was almost engaged, and I am still trying to get over that. I was with her or 5 years and it ended a year and a half ago and it is still difficult for me to go out, to have the confidence, to not to be afraid of being rejected or hurt again

R: What did you take from that other experience that made you feel a little scared and hesitant?

[long silence]

S: I've been thinking about that a lot. I really don't know, and I don't mean that as to put up a defense. Maybe I keep thinking about it too much and I just don't know. Uhm... I

guess being open again... with my feelings, my emotions, my experiences, and to just to sort of have it dismissed

R: *So when you came out of the other relationship, then you felt your feelings had been hurt or...?*

S: *Misunderstood...*

R: *Do you mind saying a little bit about that?*

S: *Sure, I was in a relationship for 4 and a half years. I met this girl. We were at a conference in NYC and we both presented our papers that got published, and after that. This was still in high school. She lived in Columbus, Ohio, and we kept contact constantly [...] It was the first love for both of us, we had a lot in common, stories, intellect, culture, the church (we met at a seminary presenting our theological papers) [...] [goes on to say that families have a lot in common, she was Slovak and he could speak her language]. But she would always run hot and cold. You know, "I feel comfortable with this" and then all of a sudden the world is upside down [...] My mother is an alcoholic and I was having a real hard time accepting that and just going through all of the abuse and all of that, and I told Juliana about all of this and she got stressed out [. . .] She said, you got to go to counseling, you've got to do that, we've got t get married and if we don't do that then there is no sense of us being together. And then all of a sudden the whole thing exploded [. . .] She said to me that she was in a car accident, that she had fallen asleep in front of the wheel, and she almost went through the overpass [. . .] A week later she blamed me for the car accident, the stress about me... She would start hammering and hammering at me to the point where I said "this isn't obviously going to work" [...]*

R: *How do you think that has predisposed you in this new situation? What do you think you are carrying with you from that old relationship that is making this, perhaps more difficult?*

S: *She said to me, one thing she accused me of was being arrogant and being domineering [...] I do a lot of self-analyzing and mutilation and then trying to think back [...] I just keep mulling it over, and mulling it over and mulling it over [...]*

I feel that I should have more of a rapport with her before asking her for coffee or for dinner or whatever.

R: *Can you say something about that?*

S: *I always thought all this would have been perceived as aggressive or infatuated with, lustful with [...]*

I really want to though. But I feel like it would be awkward.

S: *So I think she would perceive it as like what I just said*

I am too fearful of being rejected...

S: *I guess it's still the rawness of that long term relationship [...] not wanting to make mistakes again*

R: *So maybe sensitive to making mistakes?*

S: *Uhum, and you know, if I've done something, which probably I have done, then it's just trying to understand it more, just so I don't do that again to someone else and it couldn't be corrected*

not so much of her saying no just the fact that I know all of her friends and I hate to be the subject of gossip.

R: *What does it mean to be the subject of gossip?*

S: *"Oh, he has a crush on you." "he's stupid," "he's dumb" or "what a dork" or something.*

When we do flirt, I feel excited to be noticed and thought of as being attractive.

S: *I guess the whole idea of just being noticed and feeling a sense of machoness... Not machoness, just somebody that is sexually appealing, I guess, who is physically attractive.*

R: *You said machoness first, is there something particular about that?*

S: *I take that back, something strong, confident, not so much masculine, but somebody who can withstand a lot*

My heart races the whole day till my 1:40 class.

S: *so in other words, I look forward to it*

I get there early and so does she. The entire class is a subtle situation back and forth. Afterwards I feel like I'm on cloud 9.

S: *After the class I start my self-analyzation about this or that*

R: *What do you think about or analyze?*

S: *Maybe I am reading into it, maybe I am being arrogant in thinking this way, and it's my own perception and maybe she doesn't feel that way, and to downplay the situation. I mean in one sense I do know it is, but in another sense I keep trying not to get carried away*

Then when I start to think of trying to ask her out later that day, I immediately feel scared... I usually ground myself by telling myself not to get carried away in the moment and ask her out or something.

R: *Can you describe this grounding?*

S: *The self-analyzation, you know, "this is my own self-perception," thinking myself too much attractive, intellectual this that or the other thing*

R: *What would you hope might come out of asking her out?*

S: *Just a mutual, good, maybe deep, friendship. It doesn't have to go intimate, but just a good friendship. First of all just to know who she is, her life-story, which I'm sure is very fascinating, everybody's is. And for her to see mine as well and to both be enamored with it*

R: *You talk about always getting scared in the description...*

S: *Again this is coming after my break-up. I flirted with other girls and everything else and it seems to be common, I guess I always try to look for it, but then I sort of keep myself from getting to carried away, I guess not to be hurt or making the same mistakes again and then I keep self-analyzing myself constantly over and over*

R: *What is that like?*

S: *Painful. Lonely. Lonely to not be able to share yourself, your personality or who you are with the other and to receive that back*

R: *So is that what you are hoping to overcome?*

S: *uhum, very much so*

R: *After you have been talking about this experience, is there something that stands out a little bit differently?*

S: *Maybe now it seems more non-sense to be scared, that it not necessary, that there is no reason to keep doing the self-mutilation and all of that. With that set aside, it's "now what to do?" I mean, obviously not at this particular moment, but I've been thinking lately that this self-mutilation and self-analysis is sort of non-sense, to stop, because it is really what is causing this fear and everything else [...] I guess there is a certain social formula, I guess the casualness of going about it, so I haven't found that yet for myself, how to do it.*

Josie I

I am a sophomore in college.

R: *Could you give me a better understanding of what that was like for you to be a sophomore in college?*

S: *I'm 20-21 years old. I've been to college for a year. My first year of college was kind of an intense experience. It's a small college. It is kind of a unique program with only a 100 people in my class. I've come to this college in the pursuit of excellence, looking for some challenge beyond the challenges I have had in my life up till then. I'm really extremely dedicated to it, but then what happens by the end of my freshman year is I start to lose a little bit of confidence in my abilities as a student and as someone who can really achieve all these high goals I have set for myself, so I am kind of in a transitional place where I still want to achieve these things but I am also starting to doubt myself so I am pulled two directions at once. So I guess mostly I am just having a conflict of confidence at that point.*

My college is small (about 400 people altogether) and in many ways quite traditional. One of the traditions the college has preserved throughout the years are [formal dances]. These take place about every month on Saturday nights in the Great Hall. The [dance] committee serves champagne and plays music, most of which is swing, but still with an occasional waltz or polka.

R: *How did you experience these parties?*

S: *They were a lot of fun. They were one of the college's main social events. They weren't parties that were just in someone's room on campus, they were really a place for everyone to gather. A lot of the people there really prided themselves of their dancing abilities, a lot of the men especially. You know, went to dance lessons every week and got really good at those. So it was always fun to dance. I felt like I got a lot of attention. You know, the experience of dancing... for as long as the song is playing someone's attention is totally devoted to you, which I really enjoyed. I guess it was also an opportunity to communicate without talking. I think part of my lack of confidence was whether the things that I said in class were articulated well enough, whether it was coming across as intelligent enough. This was a way to just be with my peers without worrying about that at all. I never really worried about whether they liked me or not, because we were just sort of caught up in the moment.*

R: *So you felt more confident at this point about your dancing abilities than about your intellectual abilities..?*

S: *I think so, it wasn't something that I worried about as much. It was easy. I guess it wasn't very reflective. Yeah, maybe I was kind of in my zone during those parties.*

I have begun to attend these parties more frequently because my friend (and crush) Frank is a regular.

R: *So it seems like Frank is now becoming a draw or pull on you or something like that?*

S: *Yeah I went to these parties before, but I was never wedded to them. I didn't know a lot of the dancers that well, they were just class mates, they weren't really friends. But Frank became really involved in these parties. In large part because there wasn't really much else on campus for him to do. Yeah, so I started going a lot more often because I knew I could always find him there, I could always form this connection through dancing there. He is religious, strict and stoic. He is a devoted, passionate student and a person of rigid values-- he does not drink (ever)*

R: *(Ever), what is that about?*

S: *Yeah, he really prided himself of being pure. Not only did he not drink, but that was sort of a defining aspect of his personality, not a casual non-drinker.*

and has made it clear that he is virgin, devoted to higher things

R: *higher things?*

S: *He had been raised Catholic. I think he was still pretty devoted to Catholicism, you know, at least in principle if not in the actual tenets of the religion. Yeah, he is pretty idealistic. Like a little bit judgmental and condemning of his peers. Like, he is the one doing the right thing, everyone else has kind of let themselves fall, which was sort of what I was experiencing internally, so.*

and love that isn't cheap

R: *Love that isn't cheap? Can you say more about that?*

S: *I got the impression that he wouldn't accept the person or care for a person unless they met these very high standards. I think that part of my draw there was that if I was accepted it would kind of affirm that I had this thing that I was afraid of losing.*

At that point in my life, I am emerging from a phase of rigidity and devotion to uncompromising, rigorous excellence

R: *Can you tell me more about this phase you are emerging from and this new phase you are entering into?*

S: *The phase I am emerging from in my freshman year of college... I am very hard worker and sort of feel like everything I do is raising me in some way or I'm getting some where. I almost remember at the time having endless energy, because everything there*

felt like the right thing to do. It is really converging on this whole becoming, I guess just a better person. I looked like a body builder, I was lifting very heavy weights. I was studying ancient Greek. I prided myself on knowing Ancient Greek better than my classmates. You know, things like that. But then the phase I am moving toward... I think at this point, it feels more like a failure to me than anything else. You know, there was a certain moment where I caught myself, you know, having to look up more words than I should for a Greek translation, which sounds really petty right now, but it was a big deal at that point, it was kind of like, "I'm not doing what I thought I could do. Maybe I won't be this person I wanna be," and I just was kind of lost. But I think I am also feeling some freedom and some possibility in there too, but I'm not sure what to make of it. So it's not just despair and misery, but it's kind of like maybe more confusion.

I am feeling pulled in two directions. I want to remain devoted, but I have gone too far and set impossible, godlike standards for myself, and I feel that I am failing to live up to them.

R: *Can you say more about going too far?*

S: *I think the going too far and impossible might be reflective statements. I think that at that time it felt like, "I know what excellence means. There it is and I'm not getting there."*

R: *so what does excellence mean at this point?*

S: *I think at that point it meant not having any weaknesses, being able to answer some of the most difficult challenges. Surprising and impressing people. I kind of wanted to be in a different plane of being. There wasn't a lot of space. I think I felt like my options at the time were really, throw myself into it and see if I can make it, you know, find some extra energy beyond what I already have. Try to find some other way to live.*

This way of life is beginning to feel empty, too black and white, not livable

R: *Can you tell me about the way you experienced that?*

S: *Mostly it feels like something is going wrong. But I'm also starting to get a glimpse of how that is not the best way of life. I'm starting to get in touch with something more humanistic where I'm not, you know, it's not necessarily about some goal that I want to reach, but how I move through life and how I feel about what I'm doing, you know, the pleasure and pain I experience in living, instead of things that I achieve. So I think that was the sense of emptiness. I could see that it was empty because it didn't really involve me that much. I was also starting to see the impossibility of it and maybe, just maybe that's not my fault.*

Frank, however, seems to represent the possibility of continuing, one last chance to save the dreams of my youth

R: *Can you say more about that?*

S: *I think Frank is kind of aiming for the same thing. I think he was really going for the same dedication too. Maybe if somehow I could combine energies with Frank or if he decided I was one of those people, it would be kind of a final affirmation that I was gonna make it or be okay.*

R: *So in a sense you would then become the kind of person you were also moving a little bit away from? It would be a chance to go back to where you were coming from...*

S: *Yeah, it would be a chance to move back. I'm not quite sure why I gave so much authority to him. I guess because I was starting to feel that I was slipping and couldn't do that for myself, so I needed someone else who seemed pretty great to tell me that I was.*

There is one more thing about Frank: when he dances, he becomes a different person. He enters a Bacchic trance, dancing beautifully and wildly. All that is suppressed emerges; eros emerges here (as it does too, perhaps, in his intellectual drive). He becomes irresistible

R: *Can you say something about that irresistibility?*

S: *Seeing someone where everything is bottled up all the time and everything comes out at once. It's amazing to see how much is there. I guess I have had – this is kind of a digression – similar moments in therapy sessions, someone will be blocked up for a long time and then they will speak and suddenly everything will come rushing out. So it seemed like those were the moments where everything just kind of came out. It was in a very specific way too. You know, the circumstances were kind of controlled, you know, someone who's very devoted and working all the time and here is the one time where they get to enjoy themselves so it is sort of something to behold.*

R: *There is something very likeable about it...?*

S: *Yeah, you know it wasn't just a passionless person, but someone who knew – I guess manage is not quite the right word – but do something with his passions. I think what that meant was, it made him all the more impressive, because he was containing a lot of passion, not just destroying all the passion.*

R: *So that was like more will-power: he had passion and he was managing to keep that somewhat restrained...?*

S: *Yeah, I think another way to work with that is just kind of slowly to destroy your passion, so I guess when I said Stoic above that wasn't really a very good expression, because stoic might be trying to slowly overcome your passion so you don't have any, I think I just really contained it.*

R: *So what did you find irresistible about that?*

S: I think that was kind of an image of that excellence of character. Someone who had cultivated himself so well that that you really have this force. It was great to see such a willful, passionate force. I guess it was sort of like seeing through to what was driving him. It maybe seemed like he was this kind of person essentially.

R: Something more real about it, or I don't know..., you were seeing his essence?

S: I'm not sure if other people recognized it as much. I think others and then myself later kind of saw it as like just kind of like silliness really. But at the time it seemed really beautiful. You know what it was, I think it was, I was hoping I could inspire the same kind of letting go. It would be really pretty amazing if I could cause someone who was so ell controlled to lose control. I think this kind of an image of that possibility. This is someone who really has something.

R: But there was a role you were playing in it?

S: Yeah, I guess I wanted to see if I could redirect that energy toward me.

R: What would that mean if you could?

S: I guess it would put me in a position of great power. Like, suddenly this hierarchy I set up would be reversed. It is sort of like he can control and contain everything in his life except for me. I guess that would put me in a really strong, powerful position.

R: It is kind of funny, because you are having, really, a dance with the two sides you are also struggling with outside of that party: the stoic side and the more different side, letting go, becoming more human. He shows that duality or that split in this dance it seems like...

S: Yeah, there is still that humanness underneath. Yeah, it is funny, in talking about it, it sounds like my intentions were fairly aggressive and violent. I wanna take away that rigid outer core and kind of access that human side and pull it to the surface, so maybe as much as wanting him to raise me I wanna pull him down too.

R: So you were also a little bit ambivalent about your own relationship to these two possibilities...?

S: Yeah, either wanting to be affirmed that I was going on one direction or just to somehow know that it was okay to go the other way. So I guess one or the other could have resulted from my encounter with Frank. Hmm...

This particular night, I arrive at the party fairly late, as usual. I enjoy dancing, but there are only a few dance partners I seek out

R: Can you tell me about this selection process or seeking out...?

S: *So I look around for the people who basically can dance well. It is not much fun to dance with somebody who is unconfident or is not a very good dancer or, you know, will dance with anybody in the room. I guess I am looking for people who have something to offer, who are in a position where they can be selective. I don't really get much pleasure from dancing with anyone who will have me.*

R: *So there is soothing about you being selected, that you are not just any girl...?*

S: *Yeah, you know, they have to be clearly worthy, and because they are they can choose me as someone who is worthy also. I'm not sure which comes first.*

R: *But there is something maybe about affirming each other's worth...?*

S: *Yeah, I guess it's sort of like, I'm making a signal to them, you know, you are one of the better, so I'll allow you to dance with me, and they are saying the same thing back to me.*

R: *So you are being selective as well and turn somebody down if they were not worthy...?*

S: *I'd either be nice and dance any way or kind of have to with varying degrees of bluntness say no. But yeah, I definitely think the selectivity there is definitely the main factor.*

and don't like standing around as bait or waiting for a dance with my partners.

R: *Can you tell me about this, not wanting to stand around as bait?*

S: *Yeah, not wanting to wait around, you know, either waiting around looking desperately like "someone needs to ask me to dance, and I'll take anyone"*

R: *You don't want to seem desperate...?*

S: *Yeah, I don't want to seem like I am there, I guess to put it strongly, prostituting myself. So it felt like there was a large crowd, and the 2-3 people I wanted to dance with were busy, and I was kind of standing there as a target.*

So, after the less devoted crowd (the perusers) have gone home, I arrive

R: *Can you say more about this?*

S: *By perusers I mean those men who come to the party and really don't have that selective attitude at all. Another way to look at it, that I didn't recognize at the time, is that this doesn't have to be seen as a very serious activity, you know, it's fun and all, dance with anybody. I guess I was most sensitive about the partner aspect of it, you now,*

you've chosen somebody and somebody's chosen you even if it's only for a 2 or 3 minute dance. It still seems to be making kind of a statement about yourself.

R: Like who you choose or who chooses you...?

S: Yeah, who I'll connect with, the kind of standards I have for partners. Even, how easily I'll say yes. How seriously I take forming connection with another person.

R: So it seems like it is making a statement about yourself: a way to become or demarcate who you are, it says something about you...?

S: Yeah, it was a very small college, it could be regarded as something that takes place before the whole community, and it is also a fairly isolated community so... this may well be your social contacts for four years. So it does make a pretty significant statement to your group of people.

R: What role do you think that played: that awareness...?

S: I guess it adds to the significance of the whole event. Maybe I misspoke earlier when I said that it could be regarded as just something fun, I mean, maybe it was for some people, but now, thinking about it in terms of that context, it really was a big deal, you know, you were stating who you were in a social context. I mean, you can even think about it hierarchically, like where you are positioning yourself. And of course, part of this dedication to excellence I was speaking about had to be up there.

As usual, I stand nearby and wait for my dance with Frank

R: Here there is again a waiting. A different kind of waiting. Can you say a little bit about what was different about this waiting or how you experienced waiting for Frank?

S: Yeah, usually I would arrive at these parties and there wouldn't be that many people left. I would dance with a couple of other people, just one or two dances. And then – Frank might very well have been the best dancer, at least he had the most energy, you know, staid at the party the longest, so he usually had a crowd around him still wanting to dance and have fun. So I would usually stand somewhere nearby and make my presence known – it wasn't a very big room, it was kind of a large rectangular room with white chairs along the side – you know so it was pretty easy to spot me... Usually when he was noticing that I was waiting, he would dance with me for the next song, or at least the next fast swing song, you know, which were the most fun. It wasn't a sort of waiting for anything to happen, like before where I'd be more inclined to hide myself or avoid people. This was waiting for something that was definitely gonna happen, like waiting with an intention, wanting to make myself visible. It was almost like the first step of the dance.

We dance the fast swing songs-- I am light, I can spin fast, and Frank goes most deeply into his trance.

R: *What did that feel like when you were dancing?*

S: *It was sort of a pre-viewing of some sort of possibility. For the dance he was focused entirely on me. A lot of that energy was just kind of given to me, you know, in a strange way. [. . .] To be the passive partner of a swing dance, you don't have much control over what you are doing. The person raises their arm and you spin, without, against your will, you know, so you are sort of just incorporated into the dance. It was fast, it was fun. It was in a strange way kind of flattering. I think the lead partner can also kind of flatter the passive partner by doing things to show off that person's agility. If you are dancing with somebody, you don't have to spin a lot of times, but we would do a lot of show-off kind of stuff, which was kind of fun, which I think I found flattering too.*

R: *So I imagine, you are placing him high on the hierarchy, there's a lot of people that want to dance with him and he selects you and you are almost incorporated into his world, his way of doing things, so I imagine that is a powerful experience for you... The way you describe it, it is almost like you become him or you become his world...?*

S: *Yeah, it's really exciting to get sort of like taken in. It sort of seems like a prom king prom queen kind of feeling sometimes. Being like the center of everything. Not only being the center, but being like great too. I as for a moment fully incorporated into his world, and I guess that kind of sparked the hope to be there all the time.*

I feel that something has been developing between the two of us over time, and intensified recently

R: *Can you describe how you experienced that?*

S: *I felt like in the case with Frank, as with, you know, a lot of my early crushes, it sort of began by this admiration from afar and in his case, just because the school is so small, we ended up being in class together, getting conversation, and I think as he learned more about me, he started to admire me more or to see more that particular worthiness in me. So I think, just recently he has found out that I have some of those same ideals that he does, so, you know, his interest in me, whatever that might entail, has increased.*

R: *So there is something about him selecting you maybe or wanting to dance with you, that also reflects your worthiness...?*

S: *Especially being selected over others is important. There all these sort of anonymous others that play a role. Somehow out of the crowd I have become the person with the right qualities or someone who is the most interesting, and I feel like at that point I occupy a pretty singular position. I don't see the other dances as the same thing. Somehow this feels different.*

He has learned more about my drive for excellence and moral rigor, and seems to have become drawn to it

R: *He seems to have become drawn to your excellence: how does that feel to have him affirm that?*

S: *Well, I don't think he knows about these doubts, or this other side, I think I probably even made efforts to conceal that from him. I think it felt like just a slightly bit deceptive." There is something I am not telling you," but at the same time... So having him acknowledge that in me was wonderful, it felt like I was being taken back to that place, but I was also sort of wondering, would it still be the same if I reveal this other thing. Maybe there is something I have to conceal nonetheless.*

There seems to be something special in our dances, as well. I feel that I have become the object of special attention that is as yet undeclared, but felt powerfully. Something unspoken and strong has developed between us. I decide that tonight is the night to push beyond some of the subtlety and "name the game" that we've been playing

R: *Can you describe what makes it possible or you to make this shit all of a sudden?*

S: *I have sense that I have come to occupy the top place in this hierarchy. If you ere to choose anyone it would be me. I feel like maybe he is waiting for a signal, or I'm supposed to make the first move. It seems to me it's become so clear that it's time for the next thing to happen.*

R: *How did you experience it at the time: were there any feelings or fears or any kind of debate that you were having: should I should I not or?*

S: *Actually, I think I felt pretty much of one mind because I think it sort of felt like if we continued at this ort of high intensity game we had been playing for a long time, it would sort of just go away. It had reached it's peak and either we do something or it just kind of like goes away and becomes a thing that's only for [formal dances] and probably something that would then gradually lose energy and drop away.*

R: *So you wanted to take it further here, you wanted it to become more than a [formal dance] thing?*

S: *Yeah, I think I wanted this thing that had been hinted at for so long in the dances and to extend outside the dances, you know for that to become stated, for it to become explicit. I guess even to move from flirting to something declared, you know, no longer toying with it, but declaring it, you know, from promise to guarantees.*

I do this simply-- when we dance, I change the sexual element

R: *Can you describe this?*

S: *I think there was this hidden erotic something. Sort of like sublimated into dance or into looks and things like that and I guess at this point, I'm saying let's call that what it is, let's call that, you know, this real draw to one another. It was just like demonstrating*

sexual attraction in all these different ways we could do it, that aren't explicit, that aren't overtly sexual.

from deep and implicit to a statement, or rather, a question: will you?

R: *What do you think this question "will you?" is hinting at, what fantasy, or course of events...?*

S: *Will you direct that passion toward me instead of just showing that you could or you might or you are thinking about it, you know, will you actually do it. Will you... you know, show that same dedication that you show to excellence generally, will you show that same dedication to me or to an interest in me or to my character.*

R: *What would it mean if he had said yes?*

S: *I think that would be the beginning of a dedicated relationship, you know, if this were a Victorian era, it would mean marriage.*

R: *So that was not maybe what you were thinking about, but that was maybe implicit, or some vague expectation of a relationship. That this could be a possible marriage or a possible life time relationship...?*

S: *Yeah, that's what was so exciting about the seriousness too, you know, it could become something really intense like that instead of just something fun. At this point in my life I didn't have much interest in something fun.*

R: *What do you mean by seriousness?*

S: *You know, being able to show that really dedicated, hard-work, principle attitude means, you know, taking other things seriously means you can take a relationship seriously, and I thought that was great.*

R: *So commitment in one area would also mean commitment in another area?*

S: *Yeah, you know, you are the kind of person that can do something for real. You know what you are doing, you know yourself.*

I look at him with desire and, if this is not clear enough, I allow my hands to stay on him

R: *So what was going on at that point?*

S: *There is a swing dance move where the active partner kind of lifts their arm and the woman kind of dances around the person, but you leave their hand on their stomach, you kind of move around the person, which you can do in different ways, you know, which you can do in different ways, you can do finger tips or like rip touch. In the touch I was being very clear, you know, this is more than a playful touch.*

R: *So it also seems like you are being a little conscious or calculative, I mean, you “let” it stay, so you have some intention or will...*

S: *Yeah, and you know it was definitely a plan that I’d be pretty clear in this dance. I didn’t know exactly, how I’d do it*

R: *When do you remember formulating the idea that you wanted to be clear?*

S: *I think like when I got to the dance that night*

R: *So when you got to the [dance] altogether?*

S: *Yeah, and I think I saw him and maybe something seemed different. Maybe we even like had a conversation earlier that day where I kind of like got a sense of his respect or regard for me. So it seemed like, you know, “now is appropriate.” I’m not sure how clear I was or how conscious I was but I was definitely intending this for a long time. Just now, it seemed like it was appropriate.*

R: *So you had been interested for a long time?*

S: *Yeah, at least it felt like a long time, it was maybe only a couple of months.*

When he spins me around him (I forget the name of this classic swing move), I run my fingers across his midsection. By the end of the dance, I have made myself clear. The game has ended and now action must be taken.

R: *Can you describe this experience...?*

S: *I guess I kind of made myself vulnerable. Basically the ball is no longer in my court. I had said, “I will take this further, will you?” “I will happily move beyond flirtation, you have to decide if you are still going to regard me as worthy in the same way or if, you know, that feeling which you have for me is a real thing or if it was just something that belonged to this game.”*

R: *What did that feel like after you had declared yourself, that waiting, do you remember what that was like? The vulnerability you described...?*

S: *Yeah, it was scary because there was nothing else that I could do. That same like internal struggle I was talking about, I just kind of like put myself in that weak of a position and basically he was in the position to leave me there or take me back to the next place, so it was kind of a leap. Yeah, it was kind of a Kierkegaardian moment. But it was an interesting moment. I was kind of hanging in the balance, I wasn’t sure, which way I was going to be you know waiting for this momentous future event, you know: would it happen would it not happen? Of course I thought it would, or I wouldn’t have taken the risk, but, so, anticipation.*

R: *What happened after that?*

S: *He seemed kind of nervous or I sensed him kind of pulled away from that... and then I think we became a little more distant after that and a while later after I and become involved with someone else we started talking more and began to develop a different kind of friendship. And I ended up taking a very different view of him. I think it was because I changed so much at that point [. . .] He didn't occupy the same symbolic space, because I wasn't there anymore.*

Frank and I are still friends, and have discussed this event since

R: *In what situations? What is its significance for the two of you?*

S: *After this, my friend backed off considerably. I had come on too strong and frightened him. His sexuality was sublimated, and by calling it to the surface, I had called him into a world he was not ready to enter. I had become a corrupting devil, both repulsive and desirable, and in any case frightening.*

R: *So when he pulled away when that was happening, what went on with you, how did you experience that?*

S: *Let's see, I'm trying to recall it... It's hard to remember... I think how I imagined I would have responded would be to be kind of back of a little bit.. I wonder if I was even that aware of him pulling away while we were dancing... I remember something about, maybe his expression seemed kind of surprised or not ready or even a little bit frightened, which I didn't expect... I kind of figured it out later... Immediately when it happened, I might have had a sense, but maybe I was also still waiting for a response, it was still kind of in an indefinite stage... From that image of him looking kind of scared, it doesn't seem like an attractive potential partner in that picture, but more like a child who'd seen something he shouldn't...*

R: *So you changed your perception because of the way he responded?*

S: *Yeah... I realized there was this other aspect of him too that maybe some of his behavior was more defensive than a sign of virtue. Maybe that led me to examine in my soul to see what my perfectionism was all about.*

R: *So what happened after that particular dance was over?*

S: *Again I'm imagining that the end of the dance was more polite and more structured than usual. You know, "thank you for the dance." I probably left after that.*

R: *Do you remember what state you were in when you left?*

S: *I was probably somewhat relieved and maybe a little bit surprised or ashamed. This was not the response I had expected and I was probably worried that I misunderstood something or that I hadn't thought it through or there was something wrong with the way I was thinking, that I hadn't realized something. Probably mixed in with a lot of the self-doubt I had at the time. Maybe I hadn't really assessed the situation. Maybe there is even something wrong with me that I couldn't understand what was going on here.*

R: *What was the relief about?*

S: *I think just that I had declared this or brought this up to the open. There was some tension there that now was gone. You know a partly pleasurable tension, but it was nonetheless some question that was hanging in the air and I considered... So it's like I finally conducted this experiment. You know, it was probably a mix of disappointment, but also "at least now I know." I might have been thinking, "this would have worked if I had tried later or done it differently," but on the other hand, I could have just been thinking, "okay, now I know it's not gonna work." So I'm not sure if I attributed that more to him or more to myself. There was probably an oscillation between the two.*

I changed after that, too. A while later I looked at Frank and saw someone who seemed much younger than I and I could no longer conjure the desire I'd felt.

R: *So, you've been talking throughout the account about these two sides of him and the two sides of you and how it was very important for you in the beginning at least to dance with him because he was at the top of the hierarchy and it would make a statement about you if you could be the one he would choose. And so I'm wondering what is going on with that understanding after he sort of ran away...?*

S: *Yeah, you know, it's either that I've been devalued somehow or .. I was thinking about where I was then, it was probably where I was for a while, feeling like I had done a wrong thing or there was something wrong with me or, you know, now there is no going back. But that probably also contributed to a reshaping of the way I thought, kind of setting up a different hierarchy or doing away with these hierarchies altogether, even. I think probably as much as I felt it showed something was wrong with myself, a flaw that I had, it also showed that maybe there wasn't as much to this other person as I thought there was. So it could have contributed to a whole shift in what I used to think about this. [...] I think that was definitely something that developed from this event.*

I liked my friend and admired him, but suddenly I began to see limitations. In classes, I began to argue with his strict reasoning. He became a confidante, a dear friend who had known me in my prior phase and experienced it with me.

R: *So you came to understand him differently: he didn't hold that position anymore, this desirable person?*

S: *Yeah, somehow we both sort of were de-elevated after this event. I guess there wasn't that divine force anymore. 'Cause our friendship definitely had a much different character than our brief flirtation.*

R: *So a friendship developed after this episode?*

S: *The air kind of cleared and we were involved with different things and we were actually able to go back and talk about this event, what had happened. He just had a different character to me at that time, he was just an ordinary person with vulnerabilities, perhaps more vulnerabilities than most people I knew, you know, it was pretty clear that I had done a lot of idealizing and projection. Or at least that I overlooked a lot of flaws or that I reframed things a lot.*

R: *You speak about him as someone who had know you in your prior phase, so looking back at it, it was like you were different at that time than you are now*

S: *Yeah, I think he had seen me go through that development hat he had also gone trough to some extent, of having to kind of give up these idealized images, but try to adapt and reconcile and like, have a sense of self-worth in spite of that that comes from somewhere else. You know, so he can se me in reference to this previous state. So he can see how some things in my life have developed out of that, in our adaptations. Yeah, so this event becomes very reflective, or it becomes useful for reflection.*

R: *In what way?*

S: *Just because it helps illustrate how I was then or like, what my ideals were then and what I was thinking about. I think it is helpful to look at the way I've become after that in reference to this previous date, to see how I respond to it and have developed out of it. So our friendship has become really valuable because we've gone through similar stages and have kind of come out it differently, but we can both go back and talk about it and see what happened. It's just become interesting how much our relationship has changed over time, since we knew each other during this period of really rapid change and development and figuring out who we were.*

R: *After talking to me, this whole experience is probably different for you. Are there things that you have become aware of that you weren't aware of then?*

S: *It's been interesting to explore what some of my motivations were and what some of his motivations were and I think in our conversation last time and in writing about it I've tried to go more to what I was thinking or what I was trying to do and maybe what had happened with him. I hadn't really thought through the second section. What he might have been feeling? Or what his response meant. You know from this different perspective of what I know now. You know I can see how my actions have been integrated or called forth something scary for him.*

R: *Which you couldn't see at the time, or?*

S: I don't think so, I mean, maybe I had a sense of it, but I think probably I would have just felt disappointed with him but wouldn't really have understood exactly what my disappointment entailed or even what he might have been feeling. It might have just been kind of a devaluing of him without looking at it in different way or looking at what his experience might have been.

R: So there was really a loss of the fantasy, this possibility of excellence or rigor...?

S: Yeah, I think this was an event that contributed to moving in another direction, maybe sped things along.

Josie II

I have been admiring Steven from afar for a long time

R: How would you describe this admiration?

S: I don't know him very well. I just have kind of an image of him, like, I see him you know at school, walking to school, past my apartment, and he seems very interesting, or he seems, you know, there is something again [reference to account Josie I] really impressive about him. You know, in some ways it's a lot like my other story, like, he's still [. . .] something I wanna be or something I wanna be associated with, but know the definition of "object x" has changed.

R: At which point is this in relation to the other story?

S: This is at the beginning of my Junior year and that was the end of my sophomore year so there is a summer in between

He walks past my apartment on his way to class, wearing a dark coat, looking intense and turned inward

R: Can you say something about the allure of this, maybe?

S: Yeah, uhm, whereas before I was going for something very virtuous and light he seems to kind of represent this darker side, like he has learned something or realized something that... takes away that optimism and possibility for perfection. You know, he's been kind of burdened with intelligence or with the truth, so it's this kind of new evolution.

I see him smoking outside of the Great Hall and talking to the group I consider, still from afar, the intelligentsia of St. Greg's-- a group of iconic students, those who have understood.

R: *What would it mean for you to be part of that group or get closer to the people of that group?*

S: *Yeah, well something else I should mention, this whole group, see I'm a junior, these guys are seniors, so I've been kinda looking up to them and in my whole St. Greg's career I hadn't really known them but they had been kind of representational for me, so I think to be part of that group would again be a great affirmation... maybe I'm framing it like I couldn't achieve this other goal but that's because it was the wrong goal so now here's the right one, here's where I really wanna go, and to really succeed or understand or be worthy or whatever I need to be part of this group, I need to be accepted by this group, uhm, which now kind of like ranked above this higher goal, like it would kind of lift me past that...*

R: *Lift you past what?*

S: *Past this other goal I wanted to achieve, you know, being pure and virtuous, you know, now that one has been devalued and it seems false. There is this other move after that to, that contains the realization that that kind of purity or virtue isn't possible because there is some like dark truth that makes that too naïve or too innocent or something like that... yeah so maybe it is just like a reframing of my whole wish in these different terms*

R: *Is this then what you would call your second phase? [refers back to first interview]*

S: *Probably... Yeah I hope I am in my third or fourth phase now [we laugh]...*

I develop an image of him as a dark philosopher

R: *Ok, tell me about this "developing"?*

S: *Uhm... I have kind of been watching him for awhile, or I have seen him enough that I, you know I have collected a series of images, uhm, and I have this idea of what kind of person he is, uhm, yeah, he wears a lot of dark clothes [...] and smokes a lot, so I maybe even conflated it with images of Albert Camus and things like that.*

He is the new way of being, the despair that accompanies learning the truth, from staring too deeply into the void (as Nietzsche says, it begins to stare back).

R: *Can you say more about this "way of being"?*

S: *Yeah, he's the next step, you know, on this previous way of what I was trying to be... you know, kind of incorporates the dark side of philosophy or truth or whatever it is. So he's kind of the next step.*

R: *So in a sense he is above Frank, he is wiser than him...?*

S: *Yeah, he's older, I have an image of him being smarter, knowing more, having realized more, maybe even in away making Frank and my other goals kind of silly or kind of childish, you know, this is instead someone who instead of revering what I revered before has realized something that shows that those things aren't even worth revering and has kind of, has conquered those things, maybe even conquered those things which have just recently conquered me, so it would be a way to beat that.*

He seems way too smart for me, far too sophisticated and wise, another kind of person altogether. I am just a child, an unenlightened fool.

R: *Ok, so can you say some more about the difference here, the perceived difference between you and him...?*

S: *Yeah, it was interesting. Now that I think of that in the context of that other account [Josie I], this definitely seems like a protective fantasy, you know, a way to kind of resolve that [. . .] because by putting him that far it seemed like it would never become something actual and seemed like I could just kind of use that fantasy to not have to address that recent loss.. uhm... and you know kind of hold on to that hope... yeah, because at this point I sort of projected so much on to him, you know, made him such an important symbol that he really does feel like he is on another order of being, uhm... you know, so in comparison I just feel kid of silly, or you know, if someone actually was as wise as I was imagining this person to be I, uhm, in comparison I really would be much less*

R: *How did that influence the way you could relate to him at this point?*

S: *Well, at this point I hadn't spoken to him... It is sort of strange like I didn't even think of him as someone I could go talk to, like he was jut kind of like part of the scenery, the symbols that kind of populated my imagination. Of course I would see him on campus in real life, but I wouldn't... it would be crossing some weird boundary to actually go and talk to him.*

R: *Can you say more about what it would entail to cross the boundary?*

S: *Yeah, I was a little bit weird then, you know, I had these, like this is probably the best example of these really intense pursuits where, you know, where the person was just kind of so idealized and like represented a possibility for me to become better, but also because I thought these were such unrealistic scenarios, like the possibilities of us ever getting together in real life was so impossible. Having the image there kind of represented hope, but was also a way of devaluing myself, you know, so it seemed, yeah it seemed impossible to go and meet this person in real life, to be with this person. And somehow even though there was devaluing, it was also protective... The beginning of something to work toward or at least I know what the answer s even though I can't get to it.*

R: *Some direction or something to believe in?*

S: *Yeah. I guess that's the meaning of the next sentence...*

I hold my fantasy dear as fuel for pining -- a bittersweet, motivating desire— but never consider it a real possibility.

R: *Can you say more about the bitter-sweetness of it?*

S: *uhum, you know like if I just keep it in the fantasy realm it's really interesting and exciting but then when I start seeing how t is just fantasy or start holding out my image of myself up next to that I kind of see how far I have to go and wonder if I will ever really get there. You know, I'll probably never be like these people or be worthy of thee people. So it kind of represents, you know, another world where I'd like to be, so it's very motivating and like great to think about but also disappointing that I'm not there. So I never considered it a real possibility.*

It is the beginning of the school year and I have just returned from a summer at my parents' house.

R: *I didn't quite know if this was something that happened like later in the account or... I mean has a break happened here between this and what you were describing before?*

S: *Well, I think this previous story, this might have been like a month before the end of school, so I kind of tried to forget about it, maybe started noticing that I was noticing Steven. So it does sound like a long stretch of time but I think this was how rapidly things were happening then. It's just that the experience was intense so it seems like it took longer. So those were kind of my thoughts before [part I of this account]. I guess I had kind of been thinking about him over the summer, maybe not as much since I had been in a different place.*

R: *So you had been admiring Steven before you went on this summer break?*

S: *Yeah and maybe it's not accurate to say for a long time, but it felt like a long time.*

I am bored, depressed, feeling like I have failed in some inexplicable way.

R: *Ok, so can you something more about that period?*

S: *Yeah... so I am back to school. I'm not really sure why I'm back to school. It is more because I don't really know what else to do and because I don't wanna fail quite openly by leaving school. You know, so I just kind of like suspended. Like Kierkegaard says, kind of a period of "tentative living." Going on with what I should be doing, what I thought I could do but something has happened, maybe I am not actually capable of it or can't do it as well as I want to so now I am jus kind of tentatively going along with it as if I was still the same person, but, somehow I am like bound to failure, it's not gonna work out or*

like, you know, someday college is gonna end and I'm gonna have to live with myself, maybe I can solve it in this tentative sphere before I get there.

R: *So is that related to your experience with Frank...*

S: *Yeah, 'cause that was an attempt to save my soul or like, you know maybe I was already starting to like do things tentatively, like tentatively going along the same thread that I had developed but knowing that I was changing. Maybe Frank would pull me back into that and make it real but, you know, that didn't work, I didn't really have anything else up my sleeve so...*

R: *So maybe that would explain the kind of boredom or...? [S:Yeah].. Tentative living... There was not something to fill the place of that fantasy.*

S: *Yeah, just kind of going along, feeling like I don't know what I'm doing, I'm not feeling personally very worthwhile or my fantasies have kind of failed.*

R: *Did that relate specifically to the experience with Frank or was it broader than just that experience?*

S: *I think it was broader, but the experience with Frank definitely contributed, because that was... I wanted that to be a possibility for me to go on the same path... and it didn't work and I think, and part of how I interpreted that was you know, because I wasn't worthy or proved that I couldn't do this thing.*

I feel unworthy of the college, of my martial arts school (where I had just spent the summer training but feeling pained at every moment for the loss I had suffered for being away),

R: *What do you mean here about "the loss" you had suffered : "from being way"?*

S: *Just that I hadn't been there. I was only there during summers and sometimes during winter breaks, so I wasn't raining with the group everyday, like I had been the year before I went to College. And it had become a really important part of my life before I went to College. It had almost become like a second family, they were really supportive people and I really felt challenged and like I was getting somewhere. I sort of felt like I was living up to my fantasy, but then having to leave and then going back during the summer and like confronting that I had lost a lot of – losing skills didn't bother me as much as losing my position in the school and maybe like some of the respect that I had gotten from other there.*

R: *What do you mean by position?*

S: *Just someone who was an important, well-known person in the school, you know, was kind of like known and liked by everyone, like part of the family. When I went back I felt like a visitor instead of a family member. So it was painful to experience that loss. I*

felt like that was yet more proof that I wasn't living up to what I should be, 'cause there's another loss, another place where I've been devalued. So probably even adding a sense of desperation to that boredom – that boredom and unworthiness – 'cause there's not really, there's not a whole lot in the other direction at this point.

, and generally alone and unpresentable

S: *So I don't really know what I am.*

It's Saturday night, and my friend Nicole pulls me from my dorm out to the quad (outdoor common area).

R: *How did you feel being pulled out at that point? What was your mood?*

S: *Yeah, I think it was a weekend of the school year, I think it was actually the first weekend of the school year, and... Oh, I think since it was the beginning of the year, it was probably, yeah, I was actually kind of appreciative of Nicole at that point, since, you know, she was encouraging me to like give it another shot or come out and have a good time and see what happens... She's also, at that time, he's an interesting friend for me because I wasn't... I didn't hold her in incredibly high regard or worry very much about her opinion of me, so I felt pretty free to share, you know, more like painful feelings I was going through and like some of the more, you know, I was also kind of ashamed of them at the same time. It was okay to tell them to her since her judgment wasn't condemning. You know, so I was probably pretty willing to follow her and accept her help.*

R: *So you had been pulling away from people... in the beginning of the school year...?*

S: *Yeah. I didn't really want to go out, not being sure... not feeling very confident in class... so it was nice to have this friend whose opinions I didn't really worry about. She was kind of saying, you know, maybe you shouldn't worry about people's opinions, on this occasion. So she is giving me permission to kind of set all that behind or aside for awhile.*

R: *So as you entered into the commons area, what do you think your approach was?*

S: *I was pretty much just planning to just kind of like shadow Nicole. I mean, at that time I was a junior, so I knew everyone who was out there... but just to kind of like stay with her, just kind of having casual conversation, maybe being kind of a shadow, like instead of leading any conversations, just kind of being involved in groups where there was no pressure to, to present myself a lot. So just kind of to hang in the background.*

I see Steven sitting on one of the benches and feel a surge of hope, and perhaps desperation to change my life

R: *Can you describe this feeling or experience?*

S: *Yeah... I see him, he's sitting by himself... I don't think I've ever been maybe in a common social situation with him, like I've seen him talking to other people, but I haven't really been in a circle of people that contained him before that.... So, yeah, I guess I have hope that maybe, that maybe I can talk to this person, or let's see what happens, or, you know, things can't get any worse so why not try... you know, I think that's the desperation, and perhaps desperation to change my life, you know, so it's hope, but also like, this is my last shot, you know, like there was probably a lot resting on... there was definitely a lot resting on him in terms of my own fantasy and I was sort of like given to this hell of my own making or be lifted by this person*

R: *So threw was an idea that he could "lift" you?*

S: *Uhm, yeah, that otherwise I would just be kind of tentatively working along, you know, which gets hard to do like every minute because you're getting further and further from the point where things were okay. You know, so I'm definitely feeling a lot of desperation to do something or make this work somehow.*

R: *But then at the same time you also described him as someone who was out of your league, so I wonder how did that influence you as you saw him in that area....?*

S: *I think that before that interaction, I had to kind of put on a mask, like I couldn't, you know, I of course couldn't let out how bad I needed affirmation or, you know, how inferior I felt. I had to, for the moment, pretend I belonged to that social circle. You know, I was pretending what should have been true or what everyone else probably perceived as true, but for me it was just pretense.*

R: *So it was almost as if you were pulled out of yourself into a role...?*

S: *Yeah, uhm, yeah, [. . .] I kind of had to set aside dwelling in my misery for awhile, put on a mask, or show pretense, or do this kind of tentative thing. [. . .]. Yeah, so I'm pretty guarded while I'm out there and kind of doing a lot like pretending or trying to hide what I think is wrong with me.*

I ask Nicole, a social node of St. Greg's who knows everyone, to introduce me.

R: *How did you feel while asking to be introduced?*

S: *Yeah, I was pretty impulsive. It was kind of a leap to do this. I guess I was thinking, "If I didn't do this, what would I do?" or "If not know, will I ever do this?".... and, I had a lot of faith in Nicole to. She was... she did a really good job making it like very casual and, like, sticking around for long enough that it wasn't awkward and then like leaving, and she even came back and checked on me once without making it look like she was checking on me.*

R: *How did that matter?*

S: *I think she helped me relax a little bit in the situation or not like, you know, just lose it, like I had a break down or had to leave or something. She helped me kind of like... you know, keep up my dignity, or keep up this image that I was trying to project of myself.*

R: *How so?*

S: *Well you now, just this... I was pretty messed up then, but just this image that I was okay, or, uhm, you know, not going through this great internal crisis of self-value.*

R: *How did she do that?*

S: *She just did it very simply by just coming over or like kind of giving me a breather or... saying something that reinforced that I was okay, just like, any kind of light chit chat... so like the burden wasn't on me to like keep up this image... you know, I think even, he just came over once and said like, "just came over to tell you that I'm going home." There wasn't any sense that she was checking to make sure that I was okay or, you know, so it was just very subtle.*

R: *There wasn't any sense that she was thinking that you weren't okay... ?*

S: *There wasn't any sense that she was overtly checking on me, like I don't think Steven would have picked up that that was what was going on... Well, actually, she wasn't even... no I think she was probably trying to check on me [laugh]... Maybe she was really was just really coming to tell me she was going to bed, but I think she wanted to make sure that I was okay 'cause she had a sense of like how big of a deal his was.*

R: *There was something comforting about it... ?*

S: *Yeah... [thinks]... yeah, she seemed very supportive the whole time.*

Steven and I sit on the bench and talk for a long time-- rather, he talks, and I listen intently, in semi-stunned terror.

R: *Can you tell me more about this experience, listening intently?*

S: *Yeah, it's kind of funny in retrospect. So it is just he and I sitting in this concrete bench kind of in the corner of the quad. So we are more or less alone. There are people milling around, but... we, yeah, we kind of get into this conversation where he is like telling me something or asserting some philosophical thesis that I'm... you know, listening, kind of understanding more than I think I understand, but kind of just listening and like trying to show him that I understand, that we're on the same page, I'm one of his kind... you know, so I'm not really asserting anything, I'm just kind showing that I understand, hoping he won't see through it or anything, so that's the semi-stunned terror.*

R: *So you are hoping to prove to him that you are on the same level, you said...*

S: Yeah.... Yeah... that I understand or I'm okay or I'm not like, you know, I'm not trying to show the desperation or the feelings of unworthiness, like I know enough to not do that... Yeah, you know, which kind of precludes me actually speaking, 'cause I would, I'm afraid I would get myself away somehow... you know, so I have to say like enough to show that I am comprehending and listening, but not so much that I present my inferiority. I'm still worried about coming out, you know, especially now that Nicole has gone home and can't come over and like take the burden for a minute.

R: So it almost feels like a burden to you...?

S: Yeah, to have to like keep up the, the image of understanding, which, you know, kind of like... you know.... I am more or less terrified in my daily life, but I'm gonna have to like keep up that image all the time.... So I have developed this idea of myself that I'm not, I'm not who I wanna be and therefore, just have to kind of pretend what I wanna be... there is no.. at that point there's no question of like trying to figure out what, in act I am accepting that, but just that if I'm not who I pretend to be, I'm gonna have to pretend or convince people.

R: You speak of a semi-stunned terror: how would you describe that?

S: I think anxiety is a good word for it because... you know, I'm anxious about revealing something about myself that I don't want to be seen, you know, I kind of like feel like I'm barely containing something really ugly that could come out at any second and I was kind of a hyper-vigilant narcissist thing.

R: What do you mean by that?

S: Oh, it's because we just did it in class [refers to class on psychopathology she was taking at time of interview]. Uhm... the idea that... it's really easy to interpret anything... it's like a [. . .] or like a devaluation, because I'm so concerned with my own, my own sense of myself, so, like, afraid someone's gonna realize like how actually unworthy I am, so kind of like constantly vigilant or on guard that someone could see through me. So I have to work really hard to keep up that image all the time. I mean that was probably why I was just hanging out in my dorm room, 'cause I was exhausted. I just wanted to spend some time feeling unworthy, instead of like, trying to make other people think I wasn't. So the terror is that that's just gonna collapse and I am just gonna like lose that...

He speaks over my head, referring to books I have not read yet since he is a year ahead of me in the program (as I later learned, with some awareness that he was doing so and this was a kind of defense).

S: Yeah, he's a senior, I'm a junior. He knows a lot of things that I don't know... that I kind of feel like I should know or some reason... You know, that if I was smarter I would be able to respond with other things based on what I did know. [coughs]. And you know, again I'm just kind of reinforcing like how impressive and high up he was... 'cause he

knows all this stuff... and I guess I wasn't even really in position to like judge what that said about him since I hadn't formed my own idea about these books, I didn't know if he was right or not... but it sounded really good.

R: *And so you say, as you learned later, he might be doing it as a defense...*

S: *Uhuh... Yeah.... That was a while later that we talked about this... you know a long time later, he admitted that he kind of liked how impressed I was by him, you know that certainly it was a burden, but it was also like, you know, kind of nice to have someone... think he was that great... especially 'cause he had some of the same issues that I had, so...*

I suppose the flirting here consisted of clues, quite subtle as compared to my first story, that I like him. I listen interestedly, show that this is a meeting of souls who are meant to be, that I understand. I sit very slightly nearer to him than I would normally.

R: *What is going on here?*

S: *I mean on the one hand, I wanted to be... I'm here listening to him because I too am wise and I too am interested in hearing what he has to say. But I think I don't want to lose the other meaning of the situation, which is that I actually, like, am interested in him as a partner, so maybe like to preserve, to preserve that, you know, I keep talking to him till it's pretty late. There are no many people around, so we are more or less alone, and I am just a little bit closer to him than I would be to someone I was just talking to... you know, we are on a bench, so we are kind of, we are not facing each other. I am listening to him and kind nodding or sitting next to each other, you know, so it's not really the same as like a... a conversation you would have with just another philosophy major. Yeah, there was definitely some clear intent there that neither of us are addressing explicitly, but I feel like what I've set up is a situation where he can test whether I am acceptable or not. [...]*

[we move to a different room]

R: *Ok, so you were talking about not wanting to be found out or something like that...*

S: *Yeah, uhm, it was weird to read this about that time of my life. I guess it wasn't that long ago, but it feels... I don't know... I wasn't in a great place... But yeah, during this meeting I'm just trying to not show myself, not show anything that would make him change his mind. So it's not really a contest where I [...] I'm just trying to not screw up. You know, just more or less the stance I had toward the rest of my life, just don't let anyone see through to the problems...*

It gets late and the quad clears; we are almost alone.

R: *How did you experience that: people clearing and all of a sudden you are sitting there alone...?*

S: *Yeah, we were still up and talking beyond all the casual conversations people were having... People were getting tired and going home, but he was still interested in talking to me, we were still, I guess having a good time being together... You know, it seemed significant, it seemed like it was a good sign that we were still there. You know, you can't really end it. I don't know how long it was, I'll say 2 hrs. and you can't really end a 2 hour conversation just casually, you have to do something, like some relationship had developed by that point...*

R: *Can you say more about that "something had developed"?*

S: *Yeah... I mean, you know, it's been, like even just some kind of rapport, I mean we've been sitting there talking for a long time, and it's the first time we met, so it's kind of an intense start to have such a long interaction with somebody alone, you know, so all these small signifiers that point to it being significant... Yeah, it's been a long time, it's dark out, we're by ourselves... It seems like, somehow I passed the trial, because he hasn't gotten up to leave, or like decided it wasn't worth it anymore... It's been an intense conversation, it hasn't been light, it's been important, it's his ideas, you know, assuming that I can understand them, you know.*

We come to a pause.

R: *What is it that comes to a pause?*

S: *You know, I think like, we've been sort of like in our own small world, it's kind of been like a – I don't want to say like a trance, but something like that. So I guess, he kind of, he realizes that it's late... You know, I think at that point we are both feeling kind of tired 'cause we've been there for such a long time. So I think we've just kind of run out of fuel, or he's just kind of run out of fuel to talk... We've decided it's time to end this thing and do something.*

He asks me if I'd like to get coffee with him the next day. [S: 'cause it's a Saturday night]

R: *So, I'm assuming you said yes? [S: yes] How did you feel now?*

S: *Oh, it was awesome... You know it was probably the best I could have hoped for... Yeah I think at that moment I feel really pleased and reaffirmed and feel this new possibility... Which of course, I invested a lot of hope in this event, I think, maybe someone else or if this was me now I would have been like "that's nice, let's see what happens." This event in itself wasn't like great and meaningful and like a new beginning, but at that period I was still kind of like desperate for some change that like this was incredibly significant...*

R: *What were you hoping for?*

S: *I was hoping that this would be the beginning of a relationship and that I would like, and that would mean that I would be initiated into this other group of people, that they would teach me what I didn't know or... When they saw that I had been accepted by this group that would mean something about me, that would be a sign that I was worthy or intelligent or whatever... You know, maybe I wouldn't have to keep up that effort to make that scene true 'cause I thought that maybe my façade would kind of... I couldn't keep it up forever, it would break down at some point, you know, so again, it's a great relieve even though it's a much different ending than the other one [the first of her descriptions, Josie I]*

R: *I imagine not being able to keep a façade and having to eventually show more of yourself might also have made you feel anxious about getting closer to him...?*

S: *Well, the way I was thinking was really strange then, 'cause it almost seemed like he validated the façade of the real me because I had been kind of juggling between this tentative "who I wanna be but am not" and this other side that I hoped to develop until I could join it with this tentative life that I was carrying along as the life I really wanna be living.*

R: *You could become this person...?*

S: *Yeah, that's what I was thinking then [chuckle]. Yeah, so it's almost like he just like – like this tentative person that I was putting out there was a hypothesis and he confirmed it, saying like, I believe that's who you are so we should go get coffee 'cause you're the person you wanna be.*

R: *So earlier on you had described yourself as unworthy, as lonely, as depressed... what happened to that after this encounter?*

S: *Uhm... Well, immediately after I went back to my dorm – actually it was kind of awkward 'cause we lived in the same dorm on the same floor, so we kind of had to go upstairs together and say good-bye again. It was kind of weird. But I was, I was really relieved and happy and hopeful, but then I was also definitely worried that it wouldn't work out or that I wouldn't pass like the next test... uhm... you know he still at some point might see through me so it was sort of relief because it was this new possibility but there was still the chance that everything would fall apart. Yeah, so I remember after that like first few weeks or months of our relationship I was just really like very scared the whole time and trying to really keep something up, afraid that if he saw through then things wouldn't work out. You know, so there was a very long, like rocky period.... I guess that was like three years ago... yeah, and even that first day it was destined to not last very long just because of like the very tense conditions imposed on it.*

R: *What do you mean by tense conditions?*

S: *Uhm.. he was in the role of having to make m life worth living basically... and I was in a position of having to convince him that there was nothing wrong with me when I felt*

like this great void. You know, so it meant like I really needed a lot from him and was afraid and ashamed of showing how much I needed him. So when things would happen, I would get really angry at him for no apparent reason, you know, if he would get a little bit frustrated with me, it would cause a melt-down. So that was like... I think that only went on for a few months and there was kind of an off and on period and a break for a long time and then like into like phase four or whatever.

R: *What do you mean an on and off period?*

S: *You know, where we would be together and he would say, you know, "I can't take it anymore" and I would say "but I need you" and that was kind off the dialogue. So we'd be kind of together, kind of not together [...] broken up for a week or a month, then back together for a week or a month...*

R: *And you are together now...?*

S: *Yeah*

R: *I'm still trying to figure out what happened to the bored, lonely, depressed kind of side of you? If this just magically sort of transformed it or if you were still feeling that way at times?*

S: *[. . .] I think that sort of depressed kind of phase continued throughout the rest of my junior year of college. You know, I was kid of dreading graduation 'cause I didn't know what I was gonna do... I wouldn't have a framework for my tentative self after that, I would kind of like be a failure. You know, so after college I like, I worked for awhile and felt depressed, then did some more interesting and impressive things that made me feel better for awhile, decided to apply to graduate school, went to therapy for awhile. I think a lot of it was just kind of growing up and thinking about these things and just coming to terms with myself. [. . .]*

[. . .] *That story took place about four years ago. Many evolutions since...*

Kevin

The experience of flirting I'm thinking of occurred in the Fall of 2003. I was an R.A. when I was a sophomore in college, and we were required to work at the front desk of the dorm at various times during the week. I had a bit of a crush on one of the receptionists who worked at the desk before me (she was an undergrad as well, a senior named Amanda).

R: *Can you tell me a little bit about your crush?*

S: Well, he he, I don't know if I talked about... yes, I did talk about whether I had a girlfriend at the time... ok, so maybe I should say a bit about that... It was a rather unconventional arrangement we had. We were long-distance. I ended up being with her 5 years. For probably the majority of that relationship we were long-distance. We were in an open relationship where we were allowed to see other people. So, Amanda was probably the first person, other than Bridget I was ever involved with... sexually, Bridget was my first serious girlfriend who I lost my virginity to and everything, so like, Amanda was the, was the, uhh... so anyway, let me back up... it was actually the summer before this thing happened with Amanda that Bridget and I, my ex-girlfriend and I, decided that we would have an open relationship. We also had a lot of problems by the end of the summer, so when I got back to school, I was sort of like looking to date someone else, because this was like a new option that I had and it was sort of not going well with Bridget at the time, and so I was sort of on the look out for someone to sort of date, and uhm... I guess what attracted me to Amanda, other than she was really attractive physically... and we got along, we had good conversations. She is really smart. She was like an English major. We we're both interested in art. The way that this actually happened was that, you know, we were talking about movies and that was how I ultimately like asked her out basically... like "oh, that sounds like a god movie, why don't we watch it?" So, yeah, I don't know, I guess that was what attracted me to Amanda. She is really intelligent. She was really beautiful. She was pretty warm, a sort of caring person.

R: So I wonder when you kind of changed your status with your girlfriend, during that summer, and you said you were now actively looking for something... can you describe the kind of looking... what were you looking for, what did you think that you needed?

S: I think I was looking for primarily a sexual relationship. Because the relationship I had with Bridget was serious, so it wasn't that I was looking for another girlfriend or... And at this point we were sort of not open to the possibility of falling in love with someone else or actually sort of going out with someone else. It was always "our relationship will be the primary one and whoever else we saw it would be primarily like a friend with benefits sort of mainly sexual thing. It wouldn't be meaningless, but it wouldn't be... reach the level of things with Bridget. So, that was actually sort of a constraint we had imposed on things and that sort of limited... Ultimately, because Amanda and I ended up dating for about 3 months and I really don't think I ever let myself get attached to her and I think I was really defended against the fact that I was. In retrospect I really liked her, and it wasn't just a sexual thing, but I think I was looking for at that time... because I was in college and I had no other sexual experience other than with Bridget, so I was just looking for someone to have sex with, basically.

I used to talk to her often because I lived in the building, but there was one night that I remember especially vividly because it ultimately led us to dating for about three months.

R: So can you say a little but about what made this shift possible. You had seen her for a while but somehow this evening something was different?

S: Yeah, I don't know... Like why I never made a move before then... It really wasn't that long... I had only known her for... I think all of this happened in October. So the semester started late August, so I had only really known her or seen her around for like a month or so, and we would only periodically talk. She didn't work there every night and I wasn't always around. So I think I just felt like I finally, like this was probably one of the first fairly long conversations we had. Yeah, so I don't think anything could have happened before then because we just didn't know each other well enough, or maybe I just didn't feel confident enough... and I think I felt like sort of... maybe I was also getting some kind of signal from her... like I sort of felt more sure that she, that the feeling was mutual in that conversation.

I can't remember much about the content of our conversation. I know that I was asking her about what movies she liked, and ultimately asked her if she wanted to watch a movie with me.

R: Do you remember as you had this conversation if you had intent to begin with, if you wanted it to go somewhere?

S: I don't think I did actually, I think I sort of knew at some point that I wanted to, and I think that... no I take that back... I think I was trying to... I think the conversation was started with that intent. I think I may have even brought up movies, precisely because I thought that the best context for anything to happen between us was watching a movie, and so by asking her about movies I could just sort of use that to lead into asking her to actually watch a movie with me. So actually I think it was intentional.

R: Do you remember for how long you had kind of seen that as a possibility or had thought about, "that would be nice" or...?

S: I think it was probably not that great a time before this happened, because like I said it was early in the semester and I didn't really know her that well... Maybe I had only been actively thinking about the possibility of hooking up with her, maybe like a couple of weeks before this, or something. But it wasn't... that was actually something I remembered about it... I am usually pretty nervous in situations like this, but with her I don't remember there being a big built-up. I did unfold fairly casually and I didn't feel like I had a lot to lose. A lot of that had to do with the fact that I had a girlfriend, so I felt like if she didn't want to watch a movie with me... there wasn't even anything inherently flirtatious about that. It could have just been a friendly gesture and either way I have a girlfriend so who cares.... So I felt like there wasn't really anything to lose. So it wasn't that I was sort of obsessing about her and was sort of waiting for the right moment. That's how I usually am, but that's not how this happened.

I was looking for an excuse to spend time with her someplace besides the front desk.

R: Can you say more about that?

S: Well, that's sort of a euphoristic way of saying that I wanted to sleep with her I guess [laughs]. I don't know if there is anything more to say about that.

R: But was there something restrictive about being just in that area?

S: Well, it's funny because you sort of... actually the front desk became a rather erotically charged place. I mean, we never had sex at the front desk, but it was like, she was a little exhibitionistic about... There was always a little bit more at stake for me because I was the R.A. Like she would try and make out with me behind the desk. I would only let that go on for so long [laughs]... But originally though, the front desk seemed like an inappropriate place for anything to happen... and I think like I say later on in the text, one of my residents, at least one of my residents, had a crush on her and I know my boss actually asked her out at one point, so I didn't really want there to be anyone else to see. And ultimately people, my boss did ask me later on, and I just denied it.

R: So you had this understanding that you wanted to move it toward a sexual relationship or something like that, do you remember if there indicated that she would be okay with that: what do you think she wanted?

S: I think I had some sense that she was interested in me, but I didn't... I can't remember.... Yeah, I think I deliberately not mentioned the fact that I had a girlfriend. I think I just got the sense that she was interested in me. I didn't really know if she was interested in having a relationship, dating me, or just having sex with me. I was actually sort of surprised that she was willing to have sex with me that night. It wasn't really expected. I thought we would maybe make out or something and that maybe that would happen later.

I remember feeling nervous because I liked her, she was quite attractive, and she was older than I was.

R: Can you tell me more about what made you nervous about that? She was attractive and she was older...?

S: I guess, the fact that she was attractive makes it a little bit more important how you are interacting because I feel like you sort of have to impress her more because she has a lot of other options, and I knew for a fact that other people were interested in her. When you are dealing with someone who are more attractive than she was then there is like sort of more pressure, whereas my ex-girlfriend, I was very attracted to her but she wasn't sort of as conventionally attractive as Amanda was and so there was a little bit more security there, knowing that I didn't think people were going to turn their heads necessarily at her. Like Amanda, I sort of felt there was more of a competitive aspect because she was more attractive. And as far as the older thing goes, I guess I was sort of nervous because I wasn't sure how that would affect her actions toward me, like if she would just sort of dismiss me because I was younger, and I mean that did actually become an issue in my relationship, like she had a little brother that was my age. That was sort of in the way. One of the other issues too was that I was under age. She was over 21 and I remember thinking that I

wanted us to have a drink, like I wanted us to like watch a movie and have some drinks while we were watching the movie. So I was sort of nervous about how I was going to... like would it be incredibly lame if I asked her to stop and pick up alcohol, because I couldn't, you know [laughs]... which is what happened, you know, she ended up buying beer for us. It was sort of embarrassing, but I don't think it was a big deal.

R: How much older was she?

S: Just 2 years older. I was 20, she was 22.

Also, I think my boss had a crush on her, and so did one of my residents.

R: I would like to know a little bit more about what role that played in your awareness?

S: Maybe somehow that made it more desirable. I think it made me a little nervous, because I was sort of afraid that someone would catch on. I didn't want my boss to know, I mean, not that it was any of his business [...] I think it would have made him jealous. I didn't want that to be an issue with my relationship with him. Then again, if one of my, if my resident had found out it wouldn't have been a big deal, but that particular resident was a real ass hole. He also had this huge sense of entitlement and presumptuousness and he was actually the president of the resident's association, and his dad... he was just unbelievably wealthy, unfathomably wealthy... his dad actually was one of the... his dad basically owned the city of Miami [laugh]. This kid was just unbelievably wealthy, and he was really cocky, and really arrogant, and no one really liked him. So maybe there was on some level... there was definitely satisfaction, you know, getting what he wasn't able to [laugh]. So whereas my boss that wasn't really as much a factor because she was way out of my boss' league and my boss was pretty lame. I didn't feel like it was really an accomplishment [laughs] to beat him at this.

I remember looking for signs that she liked me, too – she usually seemed happy to see me, and there was a sort of gleam in her eyes when she smiled at me.

R: Can you say more about looking for signs...?

S: Yeah, you know I was trying to read her, trying to figure out if she was interested and if she was being flirtatious at all or... and unfortunately that's something I am really fuzzy on. I think by that time I just got the sense that she was. I wasn't totally sure, but I sort of felt like... that was actually something that I figured out during the course of the night, not just when I was flirting with her, but like... cause I wasn't even totally sure that she was interested in anything more than just being a friend and seeing a movie... Then we went out to dinner and I think during the course of that conversation I got the sense that she was interested in me. And then when she agreed to, like, pick up beer. It seems like she was willing to go back to my dorm room, watch a movie with me and have some drinks, so she is obviously interested in something [laughs]. I think that somehow picking up drinks was somehow a sign to me that it was... I think that was part of what it as about for me... Just watching a movie together could be a different thing, but sharing a

drink together and watching a movie somehow was different. And so that to me really confirmed to me that something was going on.

R: *Can you say more about what was different about that?*

S: *It just seems like a more romantic/ erotic context... I mean, maybe I wouldn't even think that now [...] but at that time I guess I felt like if she is willing to share a drink with me and watch a movie that was probably [. . .]*

The whole situation was complicated by the fact that I had a long-distance girlfriend at the time, but we had agreed to see other people. So, I was somewhat conflicted about my feelings for Amanda, I felt kind of guilty for flirting with her, and I wasn't sure how she would react to finding out that I had a girlfriend.

R: *I don't know if you can say more about this?*

S: *I mean, I would say that guilt sort of colored my entire relationship with her and sort of prevented it from ever going anywhere ultimately. Maybe there was actually something erotic about that transgressive quality to this whole situation at the same time. Like there was guilt about it, but also the fact that I was like, you know, getting away with cheating on my girlfriend or something. And also, it really had to be examined in the context of... I mean pretty much everything, and this is sort of the problem that everything that happened with her had to be looked at in the context of my relationship with Bridget and a lot of what it was about was kind of proving to Bridget that I didn't need her or trying to make her jealous or trying to like make her more interested in me or something like that, which worked.*

R: *So somehow that was one of the motivations...?*

S: *I mean, consciously I don't think I was thinking, but yeah*

R: *When you look back on it sees like it was...?*

S: *Aha, yeah.*

I remember thinking ahead to the rest of the evening after she agreed to watch a movie with me; I tried to anticipate the logistics – would we go out to dinner? If so, where? Would it be awkward to ask her to buy some beer (I was under 21).

R: *Ok, so can you tell me more about this thinking process, the logistics, the kinds of questions you were asking yourself?*

S: *I think that's a sort of gender thing. I think she would expect me to have some concrete plans in mind. Not necessarily have everything planned out, but that I would have some idea of what we would do. And that was like my responsibility. And thought that she*

might find it lame if I sort of like, "I don't know, what do you wanna do?" So I felt like I had to have some ideas about what we were going to do.

R: So there is this possibility that you might appear lame, or that she might think that you are lame for something you did do or didn't do or whatever? What would that mean if you were lame?

S: I mean, that I wouldn't be living up to the gender expectations that people have for men in this sort of context. And then also just sort of age factor. I wanted to come off as being confident. I wanted to come off as being mature for my age. I didn't want her to think I was indecisive or wishy-washy, immature, and uhhm... and I was insecure about that because I had no experience with this whatsoever. I guess this was the first person I was ever involved with other than Bridget, and with Bridget it was like we were 17 and it was sort of like awkward, sweaty, hand-holding. It was sort of this teenage thing where finally, after like months, I initiated something with her. So this was my first time I was trying to, like, pick up a girl I didn't really know all that well for something other than a relationship, so I was pretty insecure about it, and I even asked her later: "How I did?" You know, "did it seem awkward?" And she said that the whole thing was really just sort of unfolded naturally.

R: How much later did you ask her?

S: I actually asked her that night [laughs]. Yeah, after we had sex. [laughs].

I asked about her taste in movies in the first place because I wanted to see what we had in common, and I figured that watching a movie would be a good opportunity to try to make out with her, and we ultimately had sex that night.

R: Can you say something about watching a movie... What about that struck you as a good opportunity...

S: Yeah, that's always been sort of my fall back [laughs] sort of thing. 'Cause I just feel like.... Well that was something I sort of had experience with because both Bridget and the only girlfriend I had before Bridget.. uhm... anytime anything started... I mean, the way both of those relationships started was watching movies.... And, ehh, it just... it seemed like a ay to get the woman in my room [laughs]. Because I didn't feel like, uhm, I mean I didn't know what else, I mean, would work out... Or what other reason there was to invite someone to my room. [. . .] I guess like as adult you would invite someone up for a drink but I was underage. I could have somebody up for dinner, but I didn't have a table [laughs]. Like I don't know what else you could possibly do in a dorm room [laughs], you know what I mean?

R: Do you remember what kind of role dorm culture or your conversations with other people about what goes on in dorms and so on influenced this as a possibility or made that a possibility?

S: *I mean, I felt a little pathetic about the fact that she was older and had an apartment. She didn't live in the dorms. I mean, I didn't feel that pathetic, because I was an R.A. It is not like I was the oldest student in the dorm, you know, I had a reason to be there, I was getting paid. [...] and in some sense I was sort of higher up on the totem pole than she was [...]. If anything I was almost like her boss or something. So I didn't feel as insecure because of the reason I was in the dorm room, but you know, girls are not exactly impressed by dorm rooms, so [laughs], especially when you are already, there is already an age difference, so...*

R: *So it was one the things you thought might be lame...?*

S: *Yeah. I just think that movies are... I would still say that movies are one of my... I would still say that movies are one of my fall backs [...]. 'Cause it's like a good... like I really like movies so it's a good way to sort of gauge a person's taste in movies first of all, so it's like a way to start a conversation with them that naturally leads to an activity that I can do with them that involves us sitting together [laughs], so it just seems like a pretty ideal...*

R: *When you say gauge, what do you mean in this context?*

S: *Well, especially at this time I was pretty hardcore snob about movies. I like wouldn't want to go out with her if like she didn't like my taste in movies... That was like a big thing with my ex-girlfriend and I. We watched a lot of movies together. So at this time especially – this is not as much the case – if I was going to be involved with a girl we would probably be watching a lot of movies so I wanted to make sure that I wouldn't be stuck watching movies I didn't like.*

R: *So how did that go that gauging?*

S: *Yeah, I think at the time I probably considered her taste of movies to be middle-brow or something, but like... With my girlfriend we were watching "Battleship Potemkin" together in high school, so like... The movie we actually watched that night was "High Fidelity," you know, which is like, better than average, you know, more intelligent than average movie, but not like high art or anything. And I think that was actually a way that I had of dismissing Amanda throughout our relationship was that at that time the number one thing about the girl that I was into was that she be really fucking smart and like, my ex-girlfriend was just a genius ... so that was sort of a way I had of allowing myself never to get attached to Amanda was sort of saying like, she was really bright but she wasn't an intellectual. In retrospect though, I didn't think I gave her enough credit. She is actually quite intelligent. I was comparing her to an impossible standard, 'cause my ex-girlfriend, she's probably to this day, one of the smartest people I've ever met. So it's like, yeah, it's not really fair to compare her to her...*

R: *But you were comparing her to your girlfriend...?*

S: *Yeah, yeah.*

R: *And she fell short in certain areas...?*

S: *That was the way I had... I needed to be interested in her or have enough in common with her to be attracted to her and wanting to date her, but also had at the same time to be sure that I wouldn't find someone that would become more attached to than Bridget. So there was a way in which I... I was trying to find someone who fit somewhere between those two. I think that was sort of a way I had of holding her at arm's length a little bit and making sure that I didn't get too attached because I could say to myself, "I like her, but she's not Bridget."*

R: *Did your gauging mean that you weren't necessarily committed to going all the way that evening?*

S: *No, I think by the time we had the conversation that led up to this, I was sure enough that I liked her...*

Even though that was my intention, I was somewhat surprised by how naturally and easily the whole night unfolded.

R: *Can you say more about the surprise or that you were surprised by how things went?*

S: *Well, I mean, I was very insecure about myself at this point of my life and I just had very little experience with girls and... there was a way in which there was a certain status... and this was definitely part of Amanda's appeal is like the fact that she was sort of stereotypically attractive, a lot of men desired her, it as a sort of, like an accomplishment, to sort of like date her, which is like, that was the first time I had ever experienced it. Because Bridget was, you know, really shy. Just like brilliant, but really shy, really socially awkward and attractive but not head-turningly so. And I was really nervous about that, 'cause I really, really liked her when I first started going out with her. But the point is like, there was a certain status to being with Amanda, conferred to me, that was a feeling, and I think that there was sort of a big confidence boost to sort of gamble on her and have a pay-off and I think that I was surprised by that because I was not secure at all about my ability to attract or seduce women. I didn't have any experience doing that. So I was sort if surprised of the power I had....*

R: *What did it mean to you that you had been able to do it. What would it say about you?*

S: *That I was like... you know... that I was like attractive to women or had power to seduce women or... that I would gain respect in the eyes of other men as well.*

R: *Did you talk to other men about what had happened?*

S: *Yes, there was definitely bragging.*

R: *Do you remember how you experienced the way people looked at you after that, how they reacted?*

S: *Yeah, I definitely had to clear that up because it was the sort of like affair with the receptionist who was really attractive... It was also a confidence boost because my – this ultimately ended up being a major issue in my relationship with Bridget – we were really not very compatible sexually. Bridget didn't really have a strong sexual drive and was really that responsive and I sort of realized – I didn't even really know until Amanda – what I was missing, and so it also ultimately, the thing with Amanda was a big confidence boost sexually, because it made me realize that the problems that I was experiencing with Bridget, sexually, were actually her, and I was capable of pleasing someone in bed and she was really satisfied sexually and I was satisfied sexually, and she still, she was really good in bed, so that was a big confidence boost.*

She told me later that she had indeed liked me for some time. I can't remember what exactly we talked about, but I know that I tried to be funny and accentuate what I consider my positive traits: I tried to come across as intelligent and witty and to emphasize our common interests.

R: *Can you tell me about that process?*

S: *Yeah, I sort of wanted to impress her. And I felt like, she seemed to like to be intelligent, she seemed to respect that [. . .] so I played that up and tried to like make some obscure reference or something.*

R: *Can you tell me a little bit about what happened with the relationship after that, after you had had sex? What had changed? How did you relate to her the next time you saw her?*

S: *Huh, that's a good question, 'cause I really have no recollection of how we got to see each other over a period of time. I can't remember how we set up another date. But, yeah, we ultimately dated, I would describe it as dated, for three months... I mean I guess it wasn't really dating because it was almost entirely about sex. Like we almost never did anything else in terms of like going out doing something... And I think after 3 months she just, she sort of ended things, and I was sort of losing interest at that point, and she, she never really gave me a clear reason, and it wasn't like a big break-up, and at the time I was sort of, it was sort of upsetting, but I was pretty closed off about it. Like I just didn't really, I was pretty indifferent about the whole thing because I was with Bridget, you know, so it wasn't like a break-up really, and I just sort of assumed that any sort of self-respecting woman would actually not tolerate being in a certain relationship for an extended period of time, so I always sort of assumed it would come to an end because she would start to feel second best or she should meet someone else who was actually willing to be in a relationship with her. And that was actually a big discovery that became more and more clear as the relationship went on is that it was actually more unfair to the people I was seeing on the side than it was to Bridget [laughs] in that it ended just not really ok for most people to be sort of second best like that. So, yeah, it was a relatively*

amicable break-up I guess. We still saw each other around, but I don't know if we ever hung out after that. It's funny because we sort of staid in touch – not really – maybe just once a year or something and when I first went here [Duquesne Ph.D. program] I went through sort of a crisis. Well actually toward the end of my relationship with Bridget last year I really thought a lot about Amanda and I missed her, I really felt like I missed an opportunity with her, I think because things were sot of ending with Bridget, and I was sort of thinking about... Amanda is the only other person I've been with, who I had been with up to that point, I could actually see myself being with, and over time I really just sort of felt I missed an opportunity with her, I sort of felt I didn't allow myself to feel the way that I talked about her, and she really became sort of a model for what I wanted, like, she and Bridget were so different, and I think that... and it's funny because, and I've talked to Lauren about this, that she is actually the only sort of precedent of my life... she's not exactly like Amanda, but she's more like Amanda than anyone I've ever dated. And Amanda was somewhat of an anomaly, so I think it actually was a pretty important relationship for me. I feel like she was really good to me and I didn't really appreciate it at the time. I sort of would like to be with people more like her.

R: *So it sounds like she has a lot of importance in your life still...?*

S: *Yeah [...] 'cause really during the time I was with Bridget, this was the most significant relationship. Fist of all, there wasn't that many relationships that I had with other women during that time, and there was only one other relationship, other than Amanda, that was any more than a one or two night stand. Well... that's not true actually, but anyway, but I mean, so other than Bridget [. . .] Amanda is probably the other most significant relationship I had, even though f was only a 3 month long relationship. I just don't have that many serious relationships.*

R: *You say that there were differences between Amanda and Bridget, so right now you are gravitating more toward the Amanda kind of girl as opposed to the Bridget kind of girl or what they stand for?*

S: *Do you want me to say more about what they stand for? [R: Yeah, sure] I would say that Bridget is sort of [. . .] type that I fell for. I have really been interested in Eastern European, people who are sort of nerdy and sort of like average to like slightly large size, like sort of, voluptuous, perky, pale Eastern European... that's my type [laughs]. And so there have been very few exceptions to that... probably 50 % of the women I have dated would fit that profile... and Bridget's defining characteristics was her intelligence, but I wasn't really getting my needs met in many other ways, like we had a lot in common, we had good conversations, we could watch movies together, we could talk about music, and that sort of thing, but it wasn't like... sex was really disappointing, she was really cold emotionally, not nurturing at all, really sort of stoic... Amanda was sort if thin, and the thin side, and she was really sort if warm, caring, nurturing. She was a little bit more down to earth. She was really smart, but it wasn't like her defining characteristic was her intelligence, like, she had a lot of other things about her that were desirable, and that's sort of the way in which I compare her to Lauren in some ways...*

Matthew

R: *How old are you now?*

S: *I just turned 19 on Friday.*

R: *And how long ago was this experience that you are describing?*

S: *At the beginning of this year, I would say probably first month...August or something like that.*

I was at a party in Oakland early in my first semester freshman year of college.

R: *OK. So you're a freshman in college and this party took place in Oakland..?*

S: *Yes.*

R: *Do you live in Pittsburgh, or?*

S: *I go to school at Duquesne and we took the bus over to Oakland and walked over to Oakland just looking for something to do*

R: *Is that something you do once in a while?*

S: *At the beginning of the year we did it more so, but now we know where to go and where not to go, but we were just kind of exploring really, if anything, trying to find something fun to do and we did.*

R: *So you went with some friends?*

S: *Yeah... a bunch of my friends. A bunch of guys and girls. A bunch of people from my floor in my building.*

R: *So you went there and found the party. How did you find the party?*

S: *Uhm...one of the girls I was with actually knew one of the guys that was standing outside of the house and they got to talking and it turns out they were having a party and we all were looking for something to do and so we popped right in.*

The party was huge; I'd never been to a party that big before, there were probably 200 people standing in a small back yard

R: *Ok. Can you say more about this party? What did you think of it? How did it strike you?*

S: *Uhm, at first when I got there I was a little uh confused because a lot of the kids there weren't interactional per say, but it turns out it was mostly people from CMU so there was a lot of kids from CMU there, so I was a little bit not sure how to react at first, but after five minutes it was just a good time. Everyone was having a good time and uh, it wasn't as big as I said it as originally. At first when we got there it was real small we thought it was like a smaller, chill party or whatever, but like after we were there for an hour it got ridiculously big.*

R: *How did you feel about that?*

S: *Uhm...I was excited and a little scared because [?] it was a little out of control, but definitely a good feeling to be enjoying that kind of thing.*

R: *So you thought it might be raided?*

S: *Well, yeah, because there was so many people in a small area because it was so loud and it was right near downtown, so I figured there was a high chance that the cops might come, but I wasn't worried about it at the time.*

R: *So, overall you were kind of pleased, being there?*

S: *Yeah, I was definitely very happy, excited, like, it was one of the....very beginning of the year...so it was probably one of the first few parties, college party scene, so I was really amped up, really excited.*

R: *What was your expectation of the college party scene?*

S: *I don't know what my expectation was, but I know where I come from it would be similar, but now the same, parties back home would be more close knit, but [?] whereas the college scene is about meeting new people and experiencing new things...stuff like that.*

R: *And this was the beginning of the year. You didn't probably know many people really?*

S: *Not many, but uh, I made friends fast this year, mostly because the people in my dorm on my floor are very close....we all get along really well. I met people quickly, but at the same time, I didn't know that many people. We were just starting to meet each other and get to know each other....it was a good experience.*

I was obviously drinking and decided to play a game of beer pong with some friends

R: *What is beer pong?*

S: Beer pong is a ping pong table and a table and you have six cups on each side, so you have a shot of beer almost I would say and you throw a ping pong ball across the table and if you sink the cup then they have to drink it, if they sink it on you, then you have to drink it.

We won a few games and I was feeling great. I felt really good about myself because we were dominating the game so my ego was probably pretty big (especially with all the beer)

R: Ok, so what's going on here? You are playing this game and you are....

S: Winning multiple games, which is considered like dominating the table---to use the terminology, but pretty much like me and my friends were doing really well.

R: What does it mean to do well in this game?

S: It just means that, I guess, that you partied before and you've done this before and you're experienced and all that. That you have good hand eye coordination haha.

R: Haha. But it means to land the ping pong ball in the beer or what?

S: Yeah, you throw it and land it in there?

R: [?]

S: The other person. The goal is to make the other team drink, but if you can score you can drink too. The more you play the more you have to drink when the other team is off the table. They only have to drink their six or whatever, but you have to keep going so you are gradually drinking more, but winning games.

R: So, it's kind of an odd game. So it's like drinking other people under the table?

S: It's really just for fun. It's just a fun thing to do, something that will keep you energized while you are drinking, something to pay attention to or whatever and it's just like the more you win the better you feel about yourself.

R: [?]

S: Uhm, well all of my friends were with me at the table so whenever a shot was made or anything like that like there was cheering and all that kind of stuff. Then we got to this one game where we like started talking back and stuff across the table, but having fun at the same time, it was just friendly like "you're gonna miss this cup" It was friendly, but it was fun, but like we were talking.

R: What do you mean when you say you had a big ego?

S: Well, like your ego, your self-respect for yourself, like you feel good about yourself, like you can do anything, accomplish anything... that kind of thing.

After a little, I noticed two girls standing next to the table watching the game

R: What about these girls did you notice, or can you say anything about what made you notice them?

S: Well, I think the real reason I noticed them was that they were trying to play the next game or something...we ended up playing one of them and uh, I think after that we started talking because they were talking about the table and we were winning and we started talking about that.

The one girl looked at me and I looked back at her, we both smiled (it seemed like at this moment we already knew we both had some sort of desire for each other).

R: Can you say more about that?

S: Yeah...that's, I thought it was interesting about flirting that like I think whenever you like, not necessarily the first time you talk to someone, but almost right away you get a feeling that like there's a possibility that things could go farther between the two of you...so....at that moment, I felt like this girl might like me, want to do stuff...blah, blah, blah, blah, blah....

R: Was there something in particular that made you feel that way, or just a general feeling, or?

S: Just uhm the look in her eyes, the way she said something, the way she was saying things....all of that. Almost immediately you know, I would say almost just from looking you can tell. You know there's attraction. Yeah.

It turned out the girl was up next to play and the one who looked at me was a good friend of hers who she went to the party with

R: Ok...So, we're just going to skip....

When we started playing we started getting cocky and yelling at the girl playing next, talking about how good we were.

R: Can you describe this for me in greater detail?

S: Yeah, so we were talking just for fun, but talking them down.

R: It's the kind of thing where you say something to boost yourself, or, I don't know....

S: Yeah

R: *Like you say, I'm gonna kick your ass...*

S: *Yeah, it makes you feel real good. You try to psych people out so they don't make shots or whatever too. You do stuff like that. You know, you're just [?]*

The girl who looked at me then started backing her friend up and telling us we were going to lose.

R: *Ok, how did you experience that?*

S: *Uhm, we like...*

R: *So, she looks, Ok. The girl who you are interested in, or were interested in, started backing her friend...?*

S: *Yeah...saying we were going to lose. So that's almost her topping me, but that's almost like flirting, because she was trying to make fun of me, but she also knew that we were dominating the table, so she knew that we were good players. But this game is just for fun, so it's not true competition. But she knew we were good players, or at least that I was. But she backed her friend up, but at the same time it was almost like flirting with me because...I don't know...I would have to back myself up, prove myself to her.*

R: *So there was something that was flattering about her doing this? Or how would you describe it?*

S: *Not necessarily like flattering, but like, uhm almost like leading me into...making you prove yourself for her. She's saying you can't do it, so you go and do it. You know, like, proving her wrong, to make her want you.*

R: *So something about proving that you could do it made you feel like you were more desirable...*

S: *Yeah something like that. Or at least just made me feel better about myself....made me feel like at least I could get her to desire me.*

I started to argue with her, but it wasn't arguing, just friendly competition. After we got playing again, I started talking to the girl again. Whenever we started talking again it seemed as if immediately we both knew we were interested in each other.

S: *This is like almost like when I think I got almost [?] knocked off the table. I think I was done playing when we started talking again. We started talking about each other like just stuff. My friends were telling her some crazy stories about stuff I had done and I was worried that she was going to be thrown off or drawn away by that, but she actually was really interested in me. We started talking to each, trying to find out more about*

each other. She plays water polo at CMU and all kinds of stuff, but just like more talking about each other. But at the same time you could tell....

R: What did you imagine this could lead to at the time? Or what sort of possibility?

S: Uhm... I really wasn't sure what it could lead to. I wasn't sure it could lead to anything right then, like that night, but a possibility in the future that it might lead to something, or at least you know, someone...at least meeting someone. But at the same time there was definitely a sexual interest. Yeah.

R: So...would you say your interest in her was somewhat sexual?

S: It was like 100% sexual but at the same time there was other benefits to meeting new people. It would be good to know someone from CMU or whatever, but at the same time I definitely wanted to get to know her better and do stuff.

R: Like do sexual stuff?

S: haha. Yeah.

I found out she went to CMU and she liked playing water polo, and we just really talked about nothing, but the conversation seemed very personal.

R: Ok, so this is interesting. What, I mean, you had had a lot of conversation, but somehow what stuck out to you is that she is from CMU and she liked playing water polo. Why did that stick out to you?

S: Ok, well the CMU thing....obviously she is smart and dedicated, which like, to me I like that because it's like me, I can't deal with dumb or unintelligent people. I hate that. The water polo thing, I thought that was interesting because uhm, it's not a sport that most people play...it's unique. So she seemed like really different and unique and I don't like every normal sport, I do all kinds of things too. So that really was like interesting to me and definitely made me more interested in her. Yeah.

R: And then you say you just really talked about nothing, but the conversation seemed very personal. Can you say more about that?

S: We just talked about almost things that are going on around us...like we're getting to know each other, but not deep conversation, you know, but more simple student stuff. Drugs, beer. Talking about things that normal college kids would talk about, but at the same time it felt like we were talking about so much more. We both knew we were interested in each other...it was obvious...so like, it was like finding out, at the same time, the conversation was like finding more out about each other....but we weren't really talking about each other or anything.

R: So there was something else that you were trying to do through the talk?

S: *Yeah...the talk was like, it wasn't really what either of us were thinking about, but we were just talking to like try to see what she felt about something or how I felt about something, or learn more about it.*

R: *So you say that there was no doubt whatsoever that she liked you?*

S: *Uhm...I definitely had a strong, strong, strong feeling that there was a definite connection, a definitely desire between the both of us.*

R: *What do you think that understanding of the situation...how that influenced you?*

S: *Uhm... it made me think a lot more about what I was saying and probably act a little more studious and try to not just be a drunk...just trying to act like a typical male looking for a female. Haha... try to act like that very much [?]*

R: *How would you describe that role of a typical male looking for a female?*

S: *Almost like a wolf...haha...it's very you know. You gotta be pressing and charming, but it's a chase almost. It's...it's like a connection that you have to make sure is always perfect...you have to make sure you're perfect.*

R: *You said wolf?*

S: *Like...as in, we are very clear about...we're very clear about what we want and we chase it very persistent, like we're conniving almost thinking about it. You know. We're very persistent in our ways...*

R: *When you say we...*

S: *Like, men to women...so...yeah*

R: *So you had an idea of what you needed to be..?.*

S: *Yeah...and that's also what you want to try to figure out when you're talking...what she likes...what you can say to like make her like you more. How you can act to make her like you more. Through the talking, that's one of the things you're thinking about whole you're talking to her.*

R: *For you it meant appearing studious, or...?*

S: *I wouldn't say studious...studious, but like... you make it clear what your intentions are....*

R: *Well what were your intentions?*

S: *Well, to whatever...*

R: *Have sex with her..?*

S: *Yeah, whatever could come out of it was what I was looking for. So...whatever, uhm, let's see. I would say like she knew I was interested and whatever she could put out...yeah. but, yeah.*

R: *Alright...*

After talking with her for awhile, my friends came over and started talking to us as well.

R: *Ok, so in light of what you were doing, the flirtation that was going on, how did you experience, or what role did your friends play, or how did you experience the role that your friends played in the situation?*

S: *How did I experience the role that my friends played or...?*

R: *Yeah, like what significance did your friends have at this point*

S: *Uhm, well like I said...she found out more about me through them. But, they changed the conversation to not so...you know...back and forth like, flirting. Not so much back and forth flirting to a three-way, you know like conversation, but at the same time there was still obvious desire between the two of us...that there was another party there.*

R: *So how did you experience that third party?*

S: *Uhm...I think one of my friends was probably yelling something at me, like come drink more, who knows what, but I was just like pulled out of the initial conversation.*

R: *What was that like to be pulled out of the conversation?*

S: *Uhm...It was, it made me pay attention to what was going on before I think more. Like uh, looking to see where she was, to see if she was still there if I was away, or if uh, she was with me and I was talking with other people, I would maybe say not exactly say what I would usually say....be more, uh, studious as I said before and you know, try to be a certain way...*

R: *So when you were pulled away sometimes, when your friends came over, you were still sort of focused on what she was doing or where she was now?*

S: *Yeah...I was...in the back of my mind I was thinking about her presence at the party. Yeah.*

R: *So...did you...was it ok that you were being pulled away?*

S: *Yeah...it was ok for a little bit, but I didn't want to like...lose that. So at the same time I was always cautious not to go too far away or be pulled out of the situation...*

R: *So it seems like you were conscious of not losing something....*

S: *Yes*

R: *At the party. I would say her...*

S: *Yes...her attention, her possibilities, whatever it may be...definitely. I was definitely conscious of that.*

They decided it would be a good idea to mention some of my crazy stories

R: *Uhm, can you say more about crazy stories?*

S: *Uh...haha...ummmm. I would rather....it mostly.... alright, it mostly...just some drug use. Not extreme or bad drug use, but just some hallucinogenic experiences. Yeah. And some other things...but just smoking weed and that kind of thing. Ok.*

so I began to worry that she might think I was too crazy for her and irresponsible.

R: *Ok so can you say more about that?*

S: *Well...haha. some of the stories where there are....crazy stories, normal people I don't think would really choose to do that. I didn't want her to think that I was like bad because of that, or associate me with those things...you know what I mean. I wanted to make sure she knew that wasn't what I was all about...I just like to have fun sometimes.*

R: *But you worried that she might now have a negative...*

S: *Yeah, like negative aspects to me that she might see....she might associate me with some bad things that she might not agree with.*

R: *Do you remember how you experienced it when they were telling her things?*

S: *Haha... I just remember thinking like "uhhhh shut up" you know, like wishing my friends would not be telling her that. But....*

R: *And then worrying about how that would influence your situations?*

S: *Yeah, I was worried that she might be less interested because of it, but uh, after we talked it seemed like she wasn't really bothered by it.*

R: *Let me just say... Interestingly, she seemed unbothered by the craziness, and we continued to talk for almost the entire time I was there. Umm...so how did that make you feel, that she wasn't bothered by that?*

S: *It made me feel good. I mean, it uhm...I was like happy about her open-mindedness, so by her accepting like one of my bad traits, I would think that's almost like a positive thing that I saw out of her which was interesting how that worked, but after that like, I definitely liked her style. But yeah.*

R: *So you liked her more after that...*

S: *Yeah, not necessarily...liked her more after that, but I respected her not being bothered by that a lot. Yeah. I did like her more after that I would say.*

I got her number and talked to her a few times but nothing really happened.

R: *So...can you tell me about getting her number? What happened from...what pushed you to that point?*

S: *I think we were leaving soon, or something like that, but I was telling her that she should come out partying with me sometime and uhh...I said something like...something stupid and corny and charming, something like, you know, if there was some way I could get a hold of you, maybe we could go to a party again. I think it was smoother than that...I was drunk. She was like, "well you can have my number" and she gave me her number.*

R: *How did you experience that process of asking her?*

S: *Surprisingly it was really smooth after like talking to her for a while. It was almost like she wanted to give it to me...that's how I felt about it.*

R: *So there wasn't much doubt in your mind*

S: *No... there was almost none. Super....ego. Yeah. Haha....I was very, I knew, at least I thought she wanted to give me her number and she did...so.*

R: *So that was pretty easy for you to ask?*

S: *Yeah, pretty easy. I remember it being smooth, but I don't remember what I said. I just remember it being smooth and not even really thinking about it, but just getting it.*

R: *What role do you think the alcohol played in the situation?*

S: *Uhm, well, I can definitely handle alcohol fine. I don't think I was belligerently drunk or anything like that, but like, I think it just kind of helped me relax more than anything*

and not worry so much about what I was saying to her and kind of making me relax and be more smooth...that kind of thing.

R: *Do you feel different when you drink as opposed to when you're not?*

S: *Uhm, yeah, I would say definitely, I'm interested in sex when I'm drinking. I mean, not that I'm not when I'm not drinking, but I'm saying like...it's definitely prominent when I'm drinking. Definitely.*

R: *So when you're asking her for her number, umm...what were your expectations of...what did you imagine at that point?*

S: *Uhm... at that point, I um, imagined anything could happen, really. I was going to call her the next day to go to a party, who knows where that would go on. I was more thinking about what my next move should be...when to call her...yeah.*

R: *Was your definite goal to sometime have sex with her or?*

S: *Yeah...the definitely goal was sexual. 100%. Yeah.*

R: *Yeah, I guess you could tell the story, how...you know, it sort of fizzled out then...*

S: *Yeah, well...the next day my friends told me that they...that they thought the girl was uh, that they didn't think the girl...they thought the girl was crazy and that they didn't like her and that she was unattractive. So they kind of turned me off from her when I got talking to them the next day because I guess I didn't pick up on some things whenever I was at the party, but at the same time I was still interested. I did call her, but nothing really happened out of it.*

R: *So what changed?*

S: *Uhm....I think I just lost my desire for her...really...to be honest. Because uh, there was like some other girls at school...closer...easier...that I was thinking about the next morning when I wasn't just looking for sex. But, uhm....I kind of lost my desire for her.*

R: *It just was gone, after you heard all those other people talking about her....*

S: *It may be thinking about it and remembering the situation and thinking what I wanted and if I even wanted to deal with that...and I didn't...I just sort of lost my desire, especially the next night I was out doing the same thing...*

R: *With another girl?*

S: *I don't know if I was flirting with another girl. Who knows, I could have been. But I'm saying, like, there would be other opportunities for that. I just lost my desire for that...I don't know.*

R: *So it seems like it was not so much her as a person that you were interested in, but sex as such, or...*

S: *I was interested in her, but at the same time, I was mostly interested in sex, yeah...I would say that.*

R: *And, uhm, so...how did you, when you woke up the next morning and so on....remember things...how did that change things? What about the situation had changed?*

S: *Uhm....I think. I'm having trouble remembering, but uh, I just think that some of the things she said to me...like...made her seem...too....prude for me. I don't know if that's the word. That kind of thing...too...I think that she was someone that I actually liked as a person a lot and probably liked a lot and almost like...relationship...and could, but like she wasn't what I wanted then...she wasn't going to give me what I wanted then...so, I didn't really follow up with her.*

R: *What do you mean when you say prude?*

S: *Ha! Like, like, she was not some girl that I wanted to have sex with and then just never talk to her again. [?] she would be a girl who would let someone do that. So...like, not that that's not the reason I didn't want to talk to her, but I mean, it was at the time. So...like, I think that knowing that she wasn't going to...or at least thinking that she wasn't gonna provide what I wanted.*

R: *Like without any kind of commitment or, relationship...?*

S: *Commitment and like...yeah. Commitment mostly. She would probably want to do stuff, like, hang out a lot. And like I was busy doing a thousand things starting my freshman year of college, so yeah...*

R: *So something about that pulled you back...?*

S: *Yeah...something. It probably was a little bit my friends and then after thinking about it, like, you know...they have some good points and then thinking about what she said to me and what I wanted and thought back to the situation and then after that I kind of lost desire.*

R: *So...now that you have gone through that, what significance does it play in your understanding of who you are...what do you look back on that and say...I mean, what does it tell you about yourself?*

S: *Uhm...*

R: *How do you carry it with you? Good or bad? Or?*

S: I think that....uhm...you know, it taught me some lessons from like the college party scene and meeting girls...and how to do that the right way. It taught me lessons like that...and...you know, to... What other things...?

R: *Like, what did you think would come out of it now that...what was the significance of that evening for you?*

S: *I think that...significance of it....well, I think I was like very good. It helped my...I would say...ego....how I thought about myself, probably. After that I was doing normal college party life, meeting girls, going to parties, having a good time, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah...and so it helped my like ego a lot. It helped me feel good about myself and get experience and keep the view and know how to act in those situations.*

R: *So how did it make you feel good about yourself?*

S: *You know it just made me feel desirable...like...good to know that like I have things to look forward to throughout college. Meeting more people, more girls or whatever.*

R: *So in terms of looking at future flirting events... what light do you think that one event will shed?*

S: *I think it will, you know, flirting...I don't think that changed so much, my flirting or whatever, but I think like that...it might have taught me some lessons on how to flirt better or how to act those situations. But I've been through those situations before, not necessarily so big or at such a huge party, but like I've been in that [?] before, so it's like added on to that flirting process or desire and...*

R: *I just want to add one last question. Now that you've done thisyou've got back into the experience...is there something that stands out differently for you or is there something that you've now become aware of that you weren't aware of when you wrote the description?*

S: *Uhm...not really, but, it mostly made me just think about the girl again. Her...she was a really cool girl, actually, like it's too bad it didn't work out, but it wasn't what I wanted and still isn't what I want.*

R: *The memory of her...what role does that play?*

S: *Well, it's kind of blurry, but, haha.... uhm...it makes you feel good thinking about and thinking about a good experience you had flirting with a girl, like I think it would make any guy feel good about him, feel more desirable. Yeah...I think that's probably what I gained...*

R: *It's not, or is it something that you sometimes think back on? Obviously when you wrote this you did, but is it something that you think back on at other times? "That time when I was at the party..."*

S: *Maybe if I'm randomly reminded somehow...like if I saw people playing water polo or something like that I would think about her or whatever or you know...I would say it triggers almost. There would be triggers I see to make me think about that experience. So...*

R: *And in those situations it's something good to think back on?*

S: *Yeah...it is, it's something good. It makes you feel good.*

R: *Well, that's pretty much all I have. Do you have any questions?*

S: *Not really...I'm interested in your work.....*

R: *I imagine it's going to take half a year or so....*

Nicole

It seems as though I will never master the art of flirting. I feel like when I flirt it is almost a train wreck that I can not believe actually works.

R: *Ok, so can you say a little bit more about that?*

S: *I just feel that I sometimes cant believe how I interact with people...and what I say or what I do that's actually considered flirting...or...I cant believe that anybody would almost...take me seriously...but actually believe that I was flirting because I don't really know what I'm doing...soo..*

R: *So you're sort of surprised?*

S: *Yeah, you could say that...that's probably a good word for it. Yeah. Definitely.*

R: *Ok you can go on...*

I know that when I flirt I can feel myself getting hot and my palms start sweating instantly

R: *Can you describe how you feel or how you experience it?*

S: I almost want to say like anxious...I just get like very nervous and I sort of feel out of place, I guess you could say...yeah...I just feel like...yeah, anxious, and maybe nervous...uncomfortable...yeah

Something about flirting makes me very nervous. Flirting is scary for me because I know that if flirting does not work it will lead right to rejection

R: Ok, can you say more about that possibility...of being rejected...

S: Yeah...it's definitely like a fear...like I try to flirt and try to put myself out there...you know what you're trying to do, but the person doesn't accept it or doesn't understand it, I definitely feel like...disappointed and upset and it's definitely not a good feeling...especially because if you know what you're trying to do and if it doesn't work...if the guy doesn't respond back...you just feel like...ok...definitely rejection.

R: So that's a fear that you have when you flirt?

S: Yeah...I would say so...I think that's one of the reasons why I don't think I'm very good at it...because I'm so afraid to put myself out there because...like if I look stupid or he or it doesn't work...I'll just feel dumb...and no one wants to feel dumb...

R: It's not a pleasant feeling..?

S: Haha. No...

Most of the time when I flirt I try to just relax and almost let the other person lead the conversation, allowing me to just sit back and giggle.

R: Can you say more about that process?

S: Especially because of the fear of the rejection...I'll usually let the other person take the lead and I just sort of sit back and sort of be goofy or whatever and until I feel like I know that they're interested... so that can let me be more relaxed and willing to put myself out there.

R: So, somehow you like to get some feedback...?

S: Yeah...definitely...once I see the other person starting...initiating the whole thing I feel better...and I feel like...it gives me a sense of like...ok, now I feel accepted and...ok, I can do this now...yeah

Usually flirting for me starts off by me asking the guy a lot of questions.

R: Can you tell me some more about that?

S: I just feel that's a way to like break the ice and see like...like I can like...if I ask him questions I can test to see how into the situation the guy really is...like if he's responsive or if he starts asking questions to me...if he flips it back on me...I'll be like, oh he is interested in what I have to say, it's not just me asking him..

R: So him showing an interest in you by asking some questions about you...?

S: Yeah, then that makes me feel more comfortable...because I sort of know that he might be a little interested...even if it's just like [?] like not even romantic...just as like a friend or something like that...

I like to try and show him that I am interested in him. After I try and get to know him better I will sort of let him take the lead.

R: Ok, can you say more about that?

S: Umm...yeah...I mean, just pretty much like I just said...like if he's asking me things or you know...as soon as I [?] that I am interested in you...he becomes more interested in me and it just makes me feel better

R: Ok...

S: As I start to like the person my flirting usually gets less and less forced.

R: What do you mean by that...less forced?

S: Like I feel like asking questions...that's something that's like useful...but that's not something that's necessarily like natural...do you know what I mean? The more I start to like someone the more I start to just like have a conversation...it's not as much of a question and answer session it's more of a genuine conversation about anything...like I don't know what it is, but...it's just like more of a comfortable flow or connection or something and I just feel more comfortable rather than asking all these stupid things that probably don't mean anything..

R: So that asking of the questions seems a little forced sometimes?

S: Uhum... yeah...sometimes like it's just something you have to do to like...break in...but once you're in and you form some sort of bond...and then you can just back and forth...just talk about whatever...it's not like...so how's the weather or all sorts of like stupid little questions...

My nerves tend to make me shy and nervous.

R: Ok, so how do is it feel to be shy and nervous in a flirting situation?

S: *Sometimes, honestly it's very frustrating because like with my friends and girls that I hang out with...I'm very outgoing...like very in your face and like...I like to have friends and have fun...but it's frustrating because when I get into a situation where I like somebody and want to flirt or something like that...it's like all of a sudden I like clam up and like go into this shell and I almost wish that I could close my eyes and pretend that this person is one of my girlfriends back at the dorm...or I just get frustrated because...why am I getting so shy...why...and I just want to be able to be natural and sometimes I feel like it hinders the situation because I'm not myself and I can't show who I am because I get so nervous...it's frustrating...that's probably the best word.*

R: *So you feel different sometimes...?*

S: *Oh yeah, definitely...I can almost see myself not like changed as a person but like I can definitely see that other parts of my personality completely outshine who I really am...yeah...*

However, if the guy is talking to me and we are hanging out I try to laugh at the things he says and keep everything very lighthearted.

R: *Lighthearted? Can you say more about that?*

S: *Yeah...I just feel like if you're just joking around and like being laid back...really chill...and I try not to act like serious...not talk about important things...I just like to show the person that I can just like relax and I'm not really high maintenance and the more relaxed it is...just have fun...I want to show someone that I am a fun person...that I love to have fun and I just like keeping it lighthearted...just sort of like, you know...goofy and fun...I think that shows a good quality..*

R: *So what do you imagine would happen if you succeed in showing that?*

S: *I think that that would make the guy like...pretty much want to flirt with me... like want to be with me because...he's not going to worry about me being upset about anything...because I don't get upset that easily...I want him to feel comfortable around me...so, you know, if it's lighthearted if we're just joking and having a good time...then they can probably feel like themselves...you know... then he can relax and then it just can lead to a better relationship...more communication...*

R: *So part of it is also making feel the other person feel comfortable?*

S: *Yeah...because they're just like me...I mean, I get nervous and shy and I want to feel comfortable...they might have the same feelings too...so when they feel comfortable maybe I'll see a more true sense of who they are...'cause I know what happens to me...*

R: *So, kind of knowing what you like...and being able to [?] that for another person?*

S: *Yeah...definitely...you know, I want to make them comfortable...as well as me be comfortable...so my own personal feelings...I try to like respect that in them also...yeah...*

I flirt I also try and gently touch the shoulder or the leg. I suppose a little body contact is always good.

R: *Can you say something about that?*

S: *It's just like...I just think that it's almost like a comforting thing...like you know what I mean...you get a hug and you just like feel good and that like closeness...it's just a comforting feeling...like I don't know—reach out and shows them that you're like interested in them and just like focused on them...and it never hurts to like you know touch their leg or you know just be flirty and like tap them on the shoulder or something*

I can remember the most recent time I was flirting with someone.

R: *Ok, can you tell me more about that situation? What led up to it and when it was?*

S: *Well, I know like a lot of times me and my friends we'll just walk around dorms and different floors and like hang out with people...and we randomly met these people and we just started hanging out more and more with them and...it was just like the first time we met and we were just like getting to know each other a bit and then I...me and this one person were like definitely like talked more then...so like as the weeks went by we'd hang out every weekend and...more and more...it's like at first when we all first met we tried to get to know everybody...but then it was like very obvious that him and I were like singling each other out...just to like get to know each other more...instead of the whole group*

R: *So these were boys that were living in the dorms?*

S: *Yeah... uhum. They were just living on the floor...a few floors below...and we were going down to talk to somebody else and then we met them and just started hanging out with them.*

R: *How did you meet them?*

S: *It's a funny story actually...we were just walking around...we [?] coming from this one room and we like peeked around and we were just like hey...like how are you...we just randomly, like literally, just literally ran into each other...we just completely, we like heard people that sounded like they were having fun so we just knocked on the door like hey, how are you doing? It was toward the beginning of the year...not like the beginning but like...maybe like closer to Christmas...so we were still trying to meet guys, get to know them*

R: *How long have you been here?*

S: *I'm just a freshman... so...*

R: *So like half a year or..?*

S: *Yeah, it was just like...after like two months...three months maybe*

R: *So you feel like you--I don't know where you are right now, but--you had to make new friends or [?]?*

S: *Yeah, definitely...and that's why when we heard people that sounded fun...like someone we would want to hang out with...me and my friends were like, well lets just go say hi...it cant hurt...if they don't like us we'll go back upstairs, we don't care...so we just wanted to make new friends...maybe a new environment or something for us to do*

R: *Do you remember what you thought about it at the time...I mean, you went to this room with these guys...do you remember if any of them at that moment stood at to you or..?*

S: *Yeah, I kind of remember like...you look at a group of guys and you're like...ok, he's cuter than whoever and it's funny because like... when I go to meet new people I'm like outgoing and like as soon as like that one person like stands out to me...around that one person I would clam up...so, yeah I definitely could tell, like ok this is someone who I might like...I'm almost like...I'll just get shy and nervous again...just like all this so...they definitely like...one or two stood like initially...then after we talked...one more than the other*

R: *So what happened after you had met them this first time?*

S: *We just...we hung around and they asked us...the day or two later they asked us if we wanted to come down like on the weekend and so we came down...and we started to get each other's numbers and then we just started hanging out...we met their friends, they met our friends...and it just became like a really big clique...it was really good because we all met each other, we met new people from them...so it just like developed...*

R: *So this situation...that you're describing...when does that happen? That time...*

S: *Uhm, we met them and then...I would say it was like three...two and half weeks afterwards...then him and I started like really...like one on one talking...so I would say...we hung out with them two or three times and then we like...really singled each other out, we didn't even really hang out with the group*

I was in a room with him, some of his friends and some of my friends.

R: *Ok, so in this particular situation...can you try to evoke that for me?*

S: *Yeah, well...I mean, we were in...we were downstairs in one of the guy's dorms and there was like three or four guys and two or three of my girlfriends were there...and everyone was just like sitting together and like...the whole group was in one part of the room and him and I were like separated, so...it was just like a group setting, but we were just sort of singled out*

R: *Do you remember how that happened...you sort of separating from the group?*

S: *I almost want to say it was like natural...because we just like started talking and everyone else was doing something else and we didn't really care...we just like...we went, we got back to the room...I sat down, he sat down next to me and then the whole group started doing something and we just didn't join...yeah, it was just like ok...we sat down and they started sitting... I think they were playing a game or something...and we just didn't play...we just said, we didn't really want to do that right now...*

However, we had somehow secluded ourselves and sat on the floor talking to each other.

R: *Ok, so...yeah...you can go on...*

S: *I tried to remain focused on him at all times. I wanted to make sure he knew that I was flirting with him*

R: *Ok, so...here you showed an attempt to make it known to him that you liked him, it seems, or something like that?*

S: *Yeah...I don't know... 'cause like I guess we just like...more so than anything, I wanted him to know that like...as a person I liked him and I thought he was really cool...and I just wanted him to know that like I'm not like hanging out with him for no reason...you know...I wanted him to know that I thought he was cool and then maybe by showing him that, he could, he would know that I was like interested in him...by doing like certain like flirting things, like laughing, or touching him on his leg or something...I was just like trying to make sure that he knew I was focused on him. Like even when there was the whole group in the room...I wasn't really talking to them, and just...I almost wanted to make it seem like I didn't care what they were doing, that I was really happy just with him...*

R: *What do you find...to be cool about him?*

S: *I don't really remember like what the first thing was...he just seemed like really relaxed...he just seemed like he enjoyed like simple things in life...do you know what I mean? Like he wasn't really like...he wasn't a jerk and he just seemed like to enjoy a lot of different, simple things...he just seemed like someone who was just looking to have a good time...it was just really like genuine...and I found that, because a lot of times I cant find that here...like in College a lot of guys are like into like all these macho, like jerkish things...he just like seemed so different than that. He didn't really care what everyone else was doing...he just wanted to do what he was doing.*

R: *So it sounds like you have had experience or seen other guys that you didn't really...like that much*

S: *Yeah...and he was the opposite of them...and that's what drew him to me initially, like... 'cause, I was just like, Ok...he's a nice guy...haha...yeah, that's when his genuine just like personality was like what drew him to me first...*

R: *What did you, at the time, imagine could come out of your interactions with him?*

S: *I mean, 'cause like...I'm a freshman...like I'm never really looking for like a boyfriend per se, but he could definitely be somebody who I could just like hang out with a lot and who could be there for me...who I could call to talk to and who could understand me...which is very helpful sometimes when I have pressure...there's a lot of things I haven't seen...sometimes I need just like a good friend to talk to...and just someone who could be there for me*

R: *So, and at the time there was not really much of a romantic interest, it was more sort of a friendship interest?*

S: *I mean, it was a romantic thing...it definitely wanted to be like more than friends...maybe just like dating casually or something like that or just going out...having a good time, but I don't know if I wanted a commitment...maybe like after a few more weeks a commitment could have happened, but at that like specific time...it was just like a little romance...just fun...casual...*

R: *Did you end up going out with him or something?*

S: *We like dated for a few weeks, but like...we just got so busy that we literally didn't have time...we like still talk and we still hang out every now and then...but it never really became like serious dating. It was just fun.*

R: *Ok...*

S: *We talked about a wide variety of things, topics picked mostly by him*

R: *So you let him pick the topics?*

S: *Yeah...just because like...if we talked about things he was interested in the conversation would flow easier because I could just talk about those things and he obviously enjoyed them, so...he would be interested and I would just go along with that...and like, you know, even if they weren't my favorite things, I could just tell him that—oh, I don't like that—but at least I knew then that he would be interested and the conversation would continue...*

While having this conversation I remained very flirty. I laughed, played with my hair, touched his leg and even teased him a little bit

R: *Can you say more about this process?*

S: *Uhm...I just like...like I was saying before...I just tried to keep it lighthearted...you know, which means like tease him a little bit...make him feel like he could be comfortable with me or whatever...just, you know, messing around, just joking...stuff that's fun...*

R: *Ok...*

S: *I feel as though when I flirt I try to create a comfort level for the guy and myself*

R: *I guess that's what we've talked about already...*

S: *Uhum...*

Somehow our conversation led to the topic of wrestling. My flirtation led me to ask him if he wanted to wrestle

R: *So you asked him to wrestle?*

S: *Just like jokingly...just like messing around...like, ok let's go wrestle then, if you think you're so good....*

R: *So it sounds like you were in kind of in a light...light mood like funny or teasing or...?*

S: *Exactly...exactly...just a fun, teasing each other, going back and forth, yeah...*

In the most innocent, flirtatious way we decided to go into the hallway and wrestle

R: *What do you mean by innocent here?*

S: *Like it wasn't anything like we were going to hit each other...like, we were just like...pretty much like physical contact...like fighting...play fighting, not even at all like...nothing was actually hurtful*

R: *So it was not really about wrestling?*

S: *Yeah...it was just about like flirting and just being like silly with each other...*

I think it was something about the body to body contact that just increased the flirtation

R: *Can you say a little bit more about that?*

S: *Yeah...I just think that like...we had already talked...we had been talking for a while so we had really gotten to know each other...like personally, what we like and what we don't like...and I mean it was just almost like the next step...but we weren't kissing...we were just being physical...physically attached...I just think that grew the flirtation...we were like literally like touching and we were both just like laughing and playing and it made it a more intense situation*

R: *Do you remember what it felt like to be touched?*

S: *That was...usually like whenever I feel like I start to get really shy and embarrassed and nervous...but like after you get to know someone, after you have that physical contact...it felt just more relaxed...it made me feel like better about myself...like, ok he actually probably likes me or wants to hang out...I just felt good about myself...it made me feel ok, this guy wants to at least be my friend if nothing more*

R: *So you felt like you were friendship material or something like that?*

S: *Yeah, if nothing else...but he was at least interested in me as a person...and like used the body, the body contact just made me think that...it showed to me that it was more than friends.... 'cause he wasn't doing that to anybody else, you know what I mean...the rest of the group wasn't even paying attention to us...it was just us like touching each other and being...a lot more contact...*

We continued to talk the whole night.

R: *Can you describe the rest of that night for me? What happened?*

S: *Well, I remember the group like put on a movie and it was one of those like bunk beds and there was like other places you could sit...and we were sitting on the top bunk...usually...I couldn't even tell you what the movie was...the rest of the group was like doing their own thing and we just talked the whole time...we just spent it with each other...we just, you know, something to talk about...the movie when it was on and after we just talked about music...we just stayed focused on each other for the rest of the night...and that's pretty much how it went...I mean, we just hung out*

R: *So what...how do you break up that night?*

S: *I think we all wound up sleeping over...so like, I don't think that we even...like left all the girls...I just think we were up all night and I think eventually we were like...ok, I have to go back to my room...to like change or do something for that day...I had something to do...*

R: *Do you remember when you left then what you were thinking...?*

S: *I remember being like hopeful...I was like, ok...this might turn into something. After you spent like hours with one person talking to them...it seems as though it's almost*

common sense that they're going to be interested...he, at any moment he had the option to walk away, but he didn't...you know what I mean...for both of us...we could have just joined the group, but we didn't...so I was like, ok I'll see him tomorrow. And I did...like he came up to my room the next day and then...he was really just like nice and...I just remember feeling much more relaxed and like hopeful and pretty good about it...

R: *And then what, what were you thinking...that he...how did you feel like his interest...what sense did you make out of what he might see in you?*

S: *Uhm, I was hoping that because he didn't join the group that he did have the same feelings that I did...that sort of...the way he interacted with me, he would say certain things to me about like my personality or like...I remember he would like say to me—you're really cool—you know what I mean...I'm really glad we met...and so then I was like, ok... it made me pretty sure that he was interested and then I pretty much thought like the ball was in his court...he knew I was interested, like I made it pretty clear...I sort of knew that he was interested, so he pretty much...I just sort of knew that he would come back today...he would come hang out with me or whatever*

R: *Ok, so when you left you were hopeful?*

S: *Uhum*

R: *Hopeful of what?*

S: *Hopeful that he would come back, you know, a lot of things come from that fear of rejection...like, you know even if you do have this awesome night, there's a chance that like, that was just one night, I know I wasn't looking for a commitment, but I mean, I do look for like closure, or even just a sense of comfort that it wasn't just one stupid night, so I just like, was hopeful that he was genuinely interested in me and he was the genuine guy that I thought he was.*

R: *What would that mean if he did come back? As he did, what would that mean?*

S: *I think that it would the night some sort of worth...like it wasn't some sort of worthless, stupid, any other night, it was almost like it was special...it made me feel good, it made me feel like I still have, I don't know, someone who is interested in me, some sort of fun, I mean, yeah...it just like, it meant tot me that he...that I meant something to him....which, is good to know...haha...*

R: *Like you matter to someone...?*

S: *Exactly...even if it's just innocent...and even if it's just like...you know a fun thing, I still matter enough to him for him to come back and find me...*

R: *In that period—when was this, which month was it?*

S: *I would say like...February...January-ish*

R: *Ok, so...you just moved...are you from Pittsburgh?*

S: *No, I'm from Philadelphia*

R: *Ok, so you moved far away from your family and your friends back there and started in a new school and new people around you...*

S: *Uhum*

R: *Can you say a little bit about how that experience has been for you and what kind of place you were kind of in...?*

S: *I came from a high school where I had been with the same kids for eight years... 'cause I had known them through middle school...and I have a very close relationship with my family...you come to a new setting and you also, you know, lose that closeness...I really didn't have anyone here that I was that close with...everybody was new...so it's like, when it comes to situations like this...to find someone who you can see that closeness in...I mean like, I have a best friend who I've known my whole life...and you know, when you come to a new situation, you just don't have that same kind of relationship...it was almost like I saw that opportunity again...I saw someone who I could invest my time in...to find that closeness with...somebody who like maybe actually I could have a relationship with...become that close with...so it was like, the fact that I had lost those relationships...not lost them, but just like...didn't have them in my life at that moment...the fact that those relationships, those bonds that I had for years and years and years...you come to a new situation and see that that might develop into something like that...you almost jump at the chance to have that back in your life...*

R: *Was that kind of the first time that you had experienced that?*

S: *Yeah...especially here, he was one of the first people who I met and I saw something of somebody from home...you know what I mean...I saw that comfort that I recognized from home...so that was different for me*

R: *So it seems like you had lost some comfort when you moved?*

S: *Yeah, I definitely think so...yeah...especially because like I did have a relationship at home and like, you have a high school relationship and you leave that person, you look for something almost to replace it...you get so used to those relationships that when they're not there, you jump at the chance to feel that comfort again*

R: *Can you describe what kind of comfort you feel being in a relationship?*

S: *Uhm...*

R: *The comfort you have felt...*

S: *It's almost like a support I would want to say, but like just comfort like we were saying...somebody cares about you...you know what I mean, his day isn't going to be completely based around me, but like he's going to leave some time like for me...just like the comfort of knowing you're a part of somebody's day...just like to know that to one of two people you matter enough that they're going to set aside time to worry about you...you know what I mean...to make sure you're ok, to see how you're doing, just to see how your day is...give you a phone call or you know...something like that just to see how you're doing... yeah*

R: *So how did you experience it when you moved and you didn't have that comfort...what was that like for you?*

S: *I think that I didn't even recognize it until I met somebody... you know... I was doing fine...I'm adFrankg well and I'm excited...when I met this person I was like, this is even better, you know because like now I have somebody who reminds me of home, reminds me of the comforts of home...and it was like, almost like made it clear to me that this was something that I wanted*

R: *So that experience of not having comfort was something that was really only apart to you once you...*

S: *I had been meeting a lot of friends, I was almost so busy to think that I...I wasn't even worried about missing anything...and then it was like when you see something so apparent to you...oh, maybe I do miss that a little bit...and this was a good way for me to have those things returned...yeah...*

R: *So what happened after that night?*

S: *Like I said, we just hung out a few more times...he would like, drop into my room and I would go downstairs and see if he was around, you know it was just like back and forth...try to like make time for each other*

R: *Was there a time when you noticed a shift...I mean...the first time you were flirting and you had a lot of uncertainty about what was going to happen, but was there at time when you noticed the relationship had shifted from flirtation to something else?*

S: *I would have said the next time we hung out...it was really just us...it was just like us in my room and then I sort of knew like he was interested in me...he made the effort to come back and we hung out for another two hours... it was just like us...and he didn't leave, he didn't make any attempt...it wasn't until I had to go to class that he left...so that's when it made it apparent to me that this might be something more*

R: *Did that make a difference in the way you related to each other?*

S: *Yeah...definitely 'cause like...we got rid of all of this nervous like...almost like we stopped...not getting to know each other, but we stopped asking like simple meaningless things...we didn't care so much about our favorite movies as what did you like to do...we got to know each other more...we didn't worry so much about little, meaningless, get-to-know-each-other facts...*

R: *So...you're saying...well, what's the status of your relationship now?*

S: *Well, right now, we talk...we still talk...he'll still come up every now and then but it definitely isn't going to lead to something really serious...we both just like don't have time for it...'cause I live in Philadelphia, he lives here...I'm going to Italy for a semester in the Fall...it's just like not a good time...we're definitely not looking for something like very...we're both putting enough effort into it to maintain a friendship, but not really like a serious relationship...*

R: *So, from that first night did you notice that something changed about the way you saw him or the kind of possibilities that...*

S: *Yeah, 'cause like when I first met him...it was just like an idea to me...like he'd be fun to hang out with...and then when you actually do start hanging out with him, he was that much more appealing...he was the guy that I first noticed as like [?] and as we were flirting and becoming interested in each other, I almost looked at his qualities as even more positive...so it changes...it became more apparent to me that he was what I thought he was...*

R: *So your fondness for him grew?*

S: *Yeah... definitely...*

R: *But now something has shifted in the sense that you have both come to the conclusion that you're not going to be...*

S: *Yeah...just because like...we're both compatible...we both...like to hang out...just like right now it cant be anything more than it is simply because we just won't see each other...you know it's almost like wrong place, wrong time...maybe if we had met each other three years from now it would have become more serious, but it just couldn't right now...we're also in two different places in our lives...which sort of sucks, but...*

R: *But you seem ok with it, or..?*

S: *Yeah... uhum... we're still good friends...we still talk, we still hang out...*

R: *Do you imagine that you'll continue to be friends?*

S: *I think we'll definitely keep in touch...I would hope so...haha...but um, who knows...*

R: *But, would you say that it's different from that one evening...? I don't know what you were imagining might come out of that...or, do you remember when you said he left and you were hopeful...I wonder if those hopes...*

S: *I wasn't disappointed...I hadn't yet been disappointed...I was hopeful that him and I would keep in touch...just the fact that he didn't...he hadn't abandoned me...you know, not like...whatever...the fact that he's at least maintaining a friendship...I'm just hopeful that it wasn't just a one night, like, forgettable event...and I don't think that's what it was...so I'm definitely not disappointed in the outcome...I still think that we're interested in each other...I just think that it was the wrong time...*

R: *So when you look back on it, what do you think was the outcome of the flirting? Or what*

S: *I think it was positive in this situation. I do. I think that like, by him...by me letting him know I was interested in him returning...I was comfortable enough to really make a great friend at this point...it was a little bit more romantic at one point, but now we're just like really great friends...and that's like...it almost like helps me become less shy, less nervous because like things like this can happen...you know, you can make a good friend or something...*

R: *So it's helped you become less shy...so it has some value to you...some significance to you...it tells you something about who you are...*

S: *It gives me more confidence that like the things that I say to people aren't just going to be rejected...you know what I mean...even if it doesn't turn out to be true love...it can turn out to be something that I cherish...you know...friendship is almost just as important as you know...whatever...so...I guess...it makes me value myself more because I'm so afraid of rejection, but then sometimes I think, well why should I be? It definitely helps me value...it allows me to help myself grow...which is important...*

R: *And you said that at one point it had more of a romantic...it had some romantic feel to it but then that shifted somehow... it is no longer the case and now you're just friends...so, do you remember what shifted that, or how that shifted...?*

S: *It's funny...I actually think it was like Spring Break...like the fact like we sort of like realized that when we are so far away from each other it's very hard for us to keep in touch...he has this life here in Pittsburgh, I have this life in Philly...we sort of realized that the time apart...and you know especially because you know it's nearing the end of the semester...we're going to have months 'til I can come back to Duquesne...because like I said, I am going abroad for a semester...so it's not going to be until this time next year that I'll even be back...and we just sort of realized that maybe this isn't the time to be investing all of his time into a relationship that just quite simply cant work right now...I think it was just a very realistic look at it...*

R: *So, have you, since then flirted with other people or felt flirtatious?*

S: *Oh yeah...I mean... [?] it was usually just like us, but as we sort of became more and more just friends...I [?] well maybe it will work with somebody else. So yeah I definitely have been attracted and flirted with other guys*

R: *So, what significance do you think this experience had for how you flirt in the future or how?*

S: *Uhm, I think that I took that this formula sort of worked...so maybe it will like make me competent in my ways...by like...it will give me confidence to keep doing what I'm doing...stick to this method and hopefully it will work again*

R: *It seems like...yeah...like, you say, "Even though I do not consider myself a pro at flirting, I somehow manage to successfully flirt. The most recent time was a success and I will just try to continue that pattern of keeping the conversation fun and lighthearted while I flirt..."*

S: *Yeah...I found that that atmosphere just really works...many guys just like feel better when it's not so intense and so obvious...if you just like actually get to know them first and not be like in their face intense...*

R: *You sounded sort of surprised that it had worked or not really knowing why it worked but somehow it worked...*

S: *In high school a lot of my guy...a lot of the guys I interacted with were just friends...I didn't have a lot of experience with flirting in high school so it's like I get to college and I sort of have to discover how to do it...it was a surprise...like, ok this worked! You know what I mean...like trial and error...I don't know what I was doing...I found something that worked...and I was like, is this really what you have to do? Yeah...*

R: *Uhm...so...now that you've talked about the experience...are there things that you've become aware of that you weren't aware of when you wrote the description? Or that somehow stand out to you a little differently maybe?*

S: *Uhm... I guess now that looking back on it just has like...helped my confidence...helped discover like what I want to be...how I want to show myself to other people...I think... yeah...looking back on this one particular—because this was one of my first times like really trying this out...and it just shows to me that it works and it will help me interact in the future with everyone else I meet...until I decide that I want to do something different*

R: *So it's helped you discover something about yourself?*

S: *Yeah...I would say so...definitely...it just helped me discover, in a flirting situation, how I want people to perceive me...and this is definitely the way...just like fun, lighthearted...just...fun, pretty much...*

R: *Can you say a little bit about what the meaning is for you of being fun...? or what does it...*

S: *I guess like...almost like I'm afraid...I just don't want people to think that I'm like...I'm not like stuck up, I'm not high maintenance...I'm not really into like I don't know very like girly things...I'm just like fun...I just want to like be...I just want to hang out,....you know, it is just like important for me to have guys see that I'm not like going to be annoying and in your face and intense and serious about the relationship...I'm not going to be like clingy or like...I just want to have fun...relax, hang out, watch a movie...it's no big deal what we do...he doesn't need to impress me because this is who I am, like I'm just whatever...yeah...*

R: *So you don't want to appear in certain ways...*

S: *Yeah...*

R: *Like you don't want to appear clingy, serious, those kinds of things...*

S: *Yeah, 'cause especially like...I'm still a freshman...I'm not looking for marriage...you know what I mean... almost like a companion...just someone to hang out with who's not a girl and give me some of that comfort we talked about earlier... I just don't want the guy to think that they're going to have to worry about buying me things or like marriage...just fun...just [?]*

R: *So you're not looking for something that's serious at this point...?*

S: *No...I have my whole life to be serious...right now I'd rather like flirt with a lot of people and hang out than like have this one commitment where like who knows what you're missing out on...*

R: *So it's also about keeping your options open...not missing out..?*

S: *Yeah... 'cause I am so young...I'm only 18, I'm not really looking for...especially since I still have to get my career together, I still have to finish college...it's just going to be fun to have someone else there...even if it is going to be one person that's just...like a one on one thing...still not a huge commitment...*

Sabrina

There have been several occasions where I have found myself flirting with different individuals all in very different settings. The situation that sticks out the most in my mind as when I met my current boyfriend

R: *Can you tell me a little bit about what sticks out about that experience?*

S: *I had just gotten out of a really long relationship and I was really sad and the whole situation when I met him I just remembered being very positive and happy...*

R: *So it stood out because it was something worth remembering or something that made you feel good?*

S: *Yes something positive and it really made me think – okay there's nothing really wrong with me*

R: *Can you tell me a little bit about what mood or attitude you were in when you met your current boyfriend?*

S: *Before [anyone said hello] I had the invisible wall up – I didn't really want to be there at all – didn't really want to meet him but as soon as he said hello and just the way he acted – looking me in the eye and not being a jerk I guess, the wall just kind of disappeared within the first five minutes, it was okay*

R: *It was kind of a strange situation you found yourself in, where you didn't really know what was going on at first...*

S: *I remember my friend calling me and telling me: you should stop by my apartment or whatever, and you know she never told me [there was someone she wanted me to meet. I walked in and there he was – I thought arghhh!!! – my first instinct was to actually turn around and [?]. But I didn't. Obviously it worked out fine.*

R: *How long ago was it?*

S: *It was actually two years ago this happened. And we recently started dating one year ago. I mean we stayed good, good friends [in the meantime?]*

R: *You said you had just gotten out of a relationship, was that just before you went to this place?*

S: *I had been a three year relationship. Very, very serious, too serious. We had broken up literally two days before and had been going to see this friend a lot because I was just like a wreck and I guess she was just trying to say “hey I found this really nice guy, why don't you talk to him and feel better?” It was kind of how it all started.*

R: *How would you describe the mood you were in general at that stage of your life when you had just come out of a serious relationship?*

S: *I thought the kid I was with, I mean, had told me, “oh, I will marry you.” I fell very easily into that because I am a very deep and sensitive person, so I felt for it and felt hard, and I lost a lot of friends, because he was very, very controlling and I felt you know my*

world is over, I have to start all over again and start like remaking all the old friends I had. The girl that I went to see was the only one who actually stayed my friend. She was kind of reintroducing me to life [chuckle]

R: *So I imagine you were... can you say more about how you were feeling?*

S: *I felt really sad. I was nervous. I felt like – I felt kind of panic because I felt like everything I had planned had disappeared, so I was very apprehensive.*

R: *It was a big loss. You were banking on marriage...*

S: *...and it just disappeared*

I had gone to see my friend, **Veronica**, at her apartment just to hang out and was not expecting to see anyone else there except maybe her roommate, **Paul**.

R: *Do you remember what your expectations were when you were going there?*

S: *Well, I had just gotten off working. It was 9.30. I was dressed up and everything and I thought, oh you know, any other time I had gone over after work, either we'd sit on the couch and you know watch TV and then we would talk through the evening, that's what I thought I was going for...*

When I walked into her apartment I could hear several voices, most of which I did not recognize, so I cautiously proceeded to her room.

R: *Ok, so as you hear these voices what goes through your mind?*

S: *Normally she would be with fraternity guys, not her boyfriend. Well, you know they have people over all the time, it's no big deal and I thought ok I really don't want to see a crowd of people but whatever, I'm going*

R: *Can you say more about not wanting to see a crowd?*

S: *Everything was so fresh, I was still trying to convince myself I was "fine." Instead of crying I said "I'm fine" and I was still trying to get myself there and the last thing I wanted to be in was a crowd of guys. I just wanted to be around girls, or my girlfriends, because I didn't have to worry, "oh, someone like you broke my heart."*

R: *So there was something about seeing a guy that reminded you of guys who break your heart? [uhum, next one?] Yeah.*

When I walked into her room I saw **Veronica**, **Paul**, a few of their mutual friends, and my future boyfriend, **Joe**.

R: *How did that change your mind set or your expectations, seeing them there?*

S: *I knew most of them. When I walked in the door he was sitting in a chair where I, it wasn't the first thing I saw. I turned around to sit where he was sitting, and I almost jumped back, I was like "ohhh!" Of course there was no where else to sit for me but on the floor and everyone said, "Why don't you sit by Joe?" [in wink, wink manner of speech] "he's really nice."*

R: *How did you perceive those comments?*

S: *You mean positive or negative? [R: no I'm thinking: did you feel like they had an interest in you sitting there at that point? You sort of knew what was going on at this point?]*

S: *Well, as soon as I walked in and I [?] Everybody was looking at me like they were thinking "oh my go she's gonna run out of here." I was like, "I see what you guys are doing, this is funny..." I don't know, I thought it was just kind of a cruel joke. I wasn't very happy with it at all.*

R: *Can you say more about that?*

S: *I don't know, just walking in and seeing a strange guy sitting there. I had heard very good things about him. She had told me about him. She had told me, you know, "I want to set you up with some of the people I know, it might be for you just to date for fun"... As soon as I went in I thought, ok I agreed to that, I didn't agree to it two days later when I wasn't ready for it. And I sat in the chair and kind of just went "ahhhhhhh" [mimicking nervous feeling] [chuckles]*

R: *So you didn't feel comfortable about it at first?*

S: *Not at all*

R: *But you had heard about him two days earlier, was that the first time you had heard about him?*

S: *Uhm... the break-up process went on for two weeks. It was absolutely brutal and I had gone over to her house just about every single day and like the first day she thought of him, you know, and her room mate even talked to me about it, so he wasn't like totally foreign....*

R: *Do you remember what you had thought about it when they brought that up?*

S: *Oh, I though, I thought oh, that's really cool. I was never really happy in the relationship I was in. I always wanted to kind of get out while I was in it, you know, but I thought "you know, this could be my chance." I thought that was good and then I thought, well, if I go along with this, then that's just another chance for me to go through what I've just been through and I don't really wanna do that, so mixed feelings I guess.*

R: *So you were somewhat apprehensive about starting something new, 'cause you had just gotten out of something that you didn't like...*

S: *I was wanting just to ride my horse and get ready for school. I just didn't want to think about it...*

Little did I know that this was one of the strangest blind date set ups I had ever experienced, only in this scenario, I actually like the person I was set up with.

R: *Can you say more about what was likeable about **Joe**?*

S: *From what I had heard about him, he was in grad school, very ambitious, uhm, I like to study all the time and school is like my life, and the person I dated before was like the polar opposite and it was always a cause for whatever... so when I heard that Joe was a good dresser, he was hot, he likes to, you know, he wants to make something of himself, I really thought, "I can handle this." So coming into it, looking at him, I knew what I was looking at, I kid of knew about him and I thought "I really don't like this whole situation," the only thing that made me sit there and handle it was thinking, "well, this could turn out ok."*

R: *Do you remember at what point things started to shift? You came in with different expectations of what was supposed to happen and you weren't really in the mood, but then somehow something happened that soften you up or made you agree to the new conditions...*

S: *I think just sitting there. At first I was even more apprehensive 'cause everyone was staring at me and he was staring at me too. I had no room to like do anything and I was like, oh my god, I can't handle this, but then, you know, my friends started taking and making jokes and I started laughing and before I knew it, no one was really paying attention to us. It was just us and so then when I was able to just talk with him and feel like everyone wasn't looking at me, was kind of when everything turned.*

R: *Can you say more about not having any space?*

S: *By no space I mean he was sitting on the couch, they put him on like a love seat. There's hardly room for two people on those things, and it was old and you'd sink back in it and I spent the first 10 minutes sitting on the very edge like this and I just felt, you know, with all the people in the room that was smaller than this, there was like 10 people in the room and I felt kind of claustrophobic. I'm just like, I'm really shy, I really don't want to deal with this right now.*

So, of course, the only place for me to sit was right beside Joe. I tried not to show how nervous I was and cautiously took a seat next to him and sat rather stiffly for quite awhile.

R: *Can you say anything more about what that was like?*

S: *I was pretty much afraid to move [chuckles]. And I'm like, "Well, I do kind of like him, if I move and I do something stupid like knock over my drink, I'm gonna feel like an idiot, but, you know... I'm notorious for being called prude because people think I'm stuck up and I just sit there, and I thought, ? I'm a little scared of a lot my own, I don't know..."*

R: *So a lot of concerns were going through your mind: Am I gonna make a mistake? Am I gonna appear crude?*

S: *The people that were there were fraternity and sorority people. I'm not in many of those groups. I'm in a more quiet and laid-back study group. I mean like to have fun but I am not a partier by any means. They were. And that a lone is intimidating, not only having a guy sitting right next to me.*

R: *Can you say more about what was intimidating about that in particular?*

S: *About the people that were there? [no, about having fraternity people there and people who like to party] They were just very loud. They don't sugar coat anything. They say what they're thinking. I mean they called me on it a couple of times: "oh, we're nervous, we're not talking" and I'm going "oh my god, I don't know who you are" [chuckles]. And that was very intimidating. And the girls that were there were very rough girls, I guess you could say. [. . .] They were just teasing me. Everyone called me "baby" because I am, I consider myself very much "baby," I am very naïve, and they were just cracking weird off the wall jokes. They were all "inside jokes" in the fraternity and stuff, and I had no clue, and they were trying to make me feel like I was part of the group, it just wasn't really working. We weren't talking about any of the things that I really know, 'cause what I know is school, music and horses. They didn't talk about any of that.*

R: *So you said it before, you felt out of your element...?*

S: *Very much*

As the evening progressed, we talked and laughed at everyone else's jokes and I felt myself sitting a little closer and more comfortably with him.

R: *What happens here?*

S: *Like I said, after the spotlight was off me and him, everyone else just kind of, people started to get up and walk to the kitchen or go outside, so, it feels a little bit more relaxed. I remember him looking at me and just kind of grabbing my arm and saying, "so, we can breathe now, so talk to me." And then it was okay, cause I could tell that he, while he was in the fraternity, he wasn't really like them, and I felt a little bit, "ok."*

R: *Can you say more about what made you feel like he wasn't like them?*

S: *Well, he laughed at their jokes and he liked to do the things they did, he wasn't as abrasive. He was a little bit more laid back. More like my personality. And I could tell, I mean, he even told me, "they're freaking me out. They're embarrassing me." He was just more like me, you find comfort with someone similar to you.*

Once I saw that my feeling of comfort and approval of the set up seemed to be a mutual thing I began to get gutsy and actually flirt.

R: *So you now become gutsy and you start to flirt. Can you say a little bit about what kind of pushed you to that place?*

S: *The more comfortable I got with him, I felt like I knew him a little better. My [?] of gutsy is like cracking a sarcastic joke and directing it toward the person in a [?] only they could understand. And the more that I can see that I can joke openly with a person and that we are on the same playing field, I guess, that's my gutsy flirting, and he seemed to pick up on that and by the end of the night people were calling us two peas in a pot, which is kind of plain but...*

R: *Was that how you felt?*

S: *I kind of did. I thought "holy cow, this is great." I still was apprehensive about it, but...*

R: *Were you still comparing him to what you had just come out of?*

S: *I still compared him [chuckles]. I can't help it.*

R: *What role did that play?*

S: *I guess it just puts my defense up. Whenever he acts a little funny or whenever he isn't himself, instead of thinking oh maybe something is wrong with him I think, "what is he doing he's not telling me," or "is he mad at me," "is he gonna leave me." It's better now, but, you know, but early on, definitely.*

R: *Do you think you brought some of that vigilance with you or suspiciousness in this incident?*

S: *Yes, I just have a very hard time trusting anyone, and so to trust a complete stranger right of the bat is... [?]*

When I would laugh I would tap his shoulder or flash him a quick smile when he said something that I liked, and to my surprise he seemed to take to his course of action as well.

R: *Here you talk about being surprised, can you say something about that?*

S: *Not a lot of people, I mean, I know a lot of people use sarcasm and stuff, but not a lot of people, especially guys, can deal with my sense of humor or what I think is funny, 'cause I'm not a party girl, I'm reserved, I say stupid things and I didn't know how he would react to that, but because he was older I thought you know, maybe, and I was surprised that being a fraternity guy with all of those people around him, he actually was like "okay, it's alright." That surprised me.*

R: *You say that you would smile at him when he said something that you liked. Can you say more about that?*

S: *Just when he would say something that made me feel more at ease or making a joke at someone else in the room or you know, whatever, say something that was funny, instead of just laughing casually about it, I looked right at him and smiled, so as to say "oh, I liked that, that was funny, I'm like you."*

R: *So there was a conscious intention to show him something...? [S: yeah]*

After having a few non-alcoholic drinks I noticed that I needed to use the restroom. I had gotten so comfortable in my spot with Joe and did not want someone else to take my seat so before I left I told him I would be back shortly and not go anywhere, which I followed up by squeezing his knee just in case he forgot that I really liked him.

R: *Can you say more about that?*

S: *After sitting there for a couple of hours having couple of drinks, I was like, I need to move now, I don't wanna move, and I thought that if I moved that the other girls would go and say, "oh, what do you think, what do you think?", and I didn't want to deal with walking into that and... I don't know... it just seemed that if I let him know that I didn't really want him and not to let him sit there stupid...*

R: *Can you say more about not wanting the girls to come over and say "what do you think? What do you think?"?*

S: *I guess selfishly, since I was still kind of the new girl in the group, I didn't really want to deal with that direct confrontation yet... I don't know, and I really liked him and I still thought. He's a fraternity guy with sorority girls, I don't have a shot. And so I guess... [?]*

R: *Can you say more about not wanting a direct confrontation?*

S: *I didn't want to be the quiet and shy, prissy girl walking in and saying, "Ok, I'm just having a great time with this guy" and now that this scary, alcohol-drinking, smoking, swearing girl is sitting next to him, I'm not gonna be able to say, "Oh, let me sit down now" [. . .] And I didn't want any competition at all.*

R: *And you were aware of competing, it seemed, with the sorority girls?*

S: *'Cause everyone liked Joe. Joe was like a loveable guy in the fraternity, he was a good guy and hadn't really had a girlfriend and everybody wanted to date him, but he wouldn't date anyone. And I could tell, even my friend went out and told me that I was making people angry because he seemed to like me and so that made me worry a little bit more about the competition was gonna like...*

R: *So you made them angry...?*

S: *In a sense, 'cause there were 2 or 3 girls that came up to me afterwards, and were like "well, I guess we lost." I really wasn't sure that I was winning, but okay. I wasn't trying to, I was just being myself.*

R: *Did that surprise you?*

S: *Very much. I'm thinking, there's a kid in grad school, he's 24. I am not even close to being 21 yet and it's just weird and I was just, I'm still out of my element, but yet I came out on top I guess and all the girls are mad at me now...*

R: *Do you remember, did that awareness play a role in how you acted?*

S: *After I knew about it, it did. After I knew about that, I'm, ok, I really like this guy. He needs to know I like him. I need to not be so reserved, maybe I just need to put myself out there and try a little harder*

R: *So it made you be more direct out urgency?*

S: *Yeah*

R: *Do you remember when you left to go to the bathroom and you wanted to return to sit with him, do you remember what sorts of hopes or expectations you might have had? This was the beginning of something, but what...*

S: *I was hoping that he would do something to let me know, 'oh I will be here, and if I'm not here, you know, I will still wanna talk to you" and I was kind of hoping after I talked with him, I was hoping that there would be some kind of a relationship out of it. The more I talked to him, the more I liked him and I liked everything he's about.*

When I returned from the restroom he was there and had put a pillow where I sat and moved it when I came back so I could sit beside him.

R: *So how was that to come back and see that he had reserved your seat?*

S: *That took my sort of feeling good about the whole thing to feeling like "holy cow, he really listens to me! Oh my gosh!" I felt really flattered and I thought oh ok this is alright*

I stayed and talked with him for about an hour, during which time my flirting became more obvious. Now, instead of brushing his shoulder at a comment I found pleasing I brushed his hand and smiled at him, which elicited more positive responses from him.

R: *So at this point you brushed his shoulder, can you say more about that?*

S: *I guess that instead of just smiling when something I liked happened, or you know just tapping someone like people do when the conversation is casual, I, without actually realizing I think just because out of comfort I grabbed his hand and I thought “oohh, what did I do” and I just from the way he acted I could see he was ok and I thought “uhh, ok, it’s alright” [sigh of relief and surprise] That just, I guess, it allowed me to be even more gutsy than my original ?*

R: *But you were aware it seems that there was a risk involved?*

S: *Well I touched his hand and thought “oh crap” [giggles] “I’m just the new girl, I’ve known him for three hours, oh, my god, what did I do.”*

R: *What did you think that might mean?*

S: *I don’t know. When you meet someone for the first time, you don’t know how they are going to react and I don’t know if I was still used to being in the kind of relationship that was so serious, but to the point where it was just like casually, we were just comfortable. I don’t know if I maybe carried some of that over once I established comfort with him and, you know, just thought for a minute, okay this is a new relationship... I don’t know...*

R: *Can you say a little bit about how you may have carried that over?*

S: *The more comfortable I got with him, the more I felt like, “ok, this isn’t really new.” I felt like, okay, I’ve known him... I seriously felt like I knew him for a long time. We had been sitting there for awhile. In thinking that, I somehow subconsciously thought back to my previous relationship and was like “oh yeah, how would I be acting if I was with him” and you know, you grab someone’s hand, you hold someone’s hand and say, “oh yeah ?” And I think that’s just what I inadvertently did and as soon as I did it, it snapped me back to reality, and I went “oohh, maybe he’s not quite ready for that, maybe I’m not” [ready]*

When it was time for me to leave, I got up and told him I had had a good time.

R: *Can you say more about your decision to leave?*

S: *Well, I think I’m the only 21 year old with a ten o’clock curfew [chuckle]. By that time, it was time for me to leave. I had actually called my parents when I had gone to the bathroom and said, “Can I stay a little bit longer?” and it was my Cinderella time, it was really time for me to go. And I didn’t really want him to think I was a party-pooper, so I thought, basically I’m going to say, “I have to go,” you know, I was just making up that my parents needed me or something. “I had fun.”*

R: *Can you say more about “making something up”?*

S: *Uhm... my friend Veronica was really the only one who knew how overprotective my parents were. I mean, she called me Cinderella, “Oh, time to go Cinderella” and I didn’t want him to know that.*

R: *Was it something that you thought a lot about, you know, how to leave?*

S: *It kind of was ‘cause I was enjoying the night, I was enjoying his company and I thought, you know, maybe if I leave there’s a 50/50 shot he’ll call me, that he wants to see me again or that you’ll be successful or you won’t, and I wasn’t quite ready to deal with that “he won’t.”*

R: *So at this point you really wanted this to turn into more than just an evening...?*

S: *I wanted to at least see him again and actually have like a real date*

R: *What would come out of that, if he wanted to see you?*

S: *I would probably feel a huge sigh of relief and think “ok, I can do this, I’m not doomed to be the cat lady across the street” or whatever.*

R: *What do you mean by the cat lady?*

S: *I didn’t want to end up alone.*

R: *So that was a fear you had, that having broken up with your former boyfriend, might mean that you had to be alone for life or for a long time...*

S: *A long time... I thought I’d never... I thought I’d wind up just like my cousin and never find anyone, just be alone, be miserable. I was afraid of that.*

R: *So maybe here there was something that you could hold onto, that that undesirable future was not necessarily what was gonna happen [S: exactly]*

He walked me to my car and it seemed like we were back to the awkward stage from only a few hours ago and stood kicking the dirt and talking senseless talk about the evening.

R: *Can you tell me about how you experienced that?*

S: *Well, when I got up to go, he just said “ok, fine,” and I didn’t expect him to walk me to my car or anything, but one of his fraternity brothers kind of like gave him a kick in the butt and said, “if you don’t say goodbye to her, you are never gonna see her again.” So, he came out, and it was just kind of awkward. Ok, we were standing, there was no one around us [. . .] It was like witnessing the end to a really awkward blind date. He didn’t*

know whether or not to hug me. He didn't know what to do. I remember him actually opening my car door and saying "oh, nice leather seats you have there" [imitates voices]. It was just kind of awkward.

R: *What did you think of that when he said that?*

S: *I thought it was cute, I thought, this is kind of funny, he feels just like I do, you know, it's no big deal.*

R: *Did you think it expressed some anxiety or some awkwardness?*

S: *Yeah, it was kind of like, Okay you've been talking my ear off all night, how about just doing that again [chuckle]...*

It seemed that all my hard work in flirting had gone right out the window, so I said goodnight and turned to get in my car.

R: *Can you say more about that?*

S: *So after him... in making those things about my seat and me thinking that was good, then it was just kind of "okay, see you, bye" and I was like "what the heck," you know, I didn't think this was the way it was supposed to go, so I thought, "okay well that was strike one" or whatever. I thought I guess I will just have to wait a little while...*

R: *Can you say something about what you were hoping would happen?*

S: *I was hoping he would ask to see me again or say, "uhm, can I have your phone number?" or would you like to talk, or something, anything*

Instead of turning around and walking away, he grabbed my arm and turned me around and looked at me right in the eyes and then kissed me and asked me out for real.

R: *What was that like?*

S: *Definitely surprising. Uhm, I was – I was not – I was kind of half-expecting for him to tap me on the shoulder and say "uh, oh wait" or something. I didn't think that he would, you know, do that. It was just like on the cheek, it was very casual, but it was still something to hold onto to let me know that, you know, not every guy is like willing to stake it...*

R: *Can you say more about what you thought of that, you know, as you were leaving and now this had happened, he had kissed you on the cheek: what was your experience as you left? What did you take it to mean?*

S: *Like on my way home?*

R: *Yeah, when you were thinking about what had happened...*

S: *Uhm... I mean, it made me smile, maybe kind of irritated that my best friend would set me up on something as uncomfortable as that, but it made me happy because she obviously knew that he was a good person and that I would probably get the result I got out of it and, I mean, I was very excited and then on the second hand I thought, okay he asked me out, what if he never calls me again, or what if it wouldn't work...*

R: *So some relief that he had kissed you and shown some interest in you, some hope. Can you say more about what you were hoping at that point?*

S: *Well at that point, I'm kind of hoping, okay he had kind of fast-forwarded through a couple of things and kissed me, so I was like, maybe I will get a relationship out of this. Maybe not something serious, maybe something that is just kind of hit or miss, but maybe...*

R: *What would it mean for you at that point to be in a relationship? What meaning did you give to that?*

S: *It would have probably mostly meant that, you know, you don't need that other person, you can do things by yourself and then there is always having a like a friend or companion, but you're not alone, you are always going to have a chance to meet someone.*

R: *And then you say you were thinking about how he might not call. Can you say more about that?*

S: *As soon as I got happy, I don't think I could let myself be fully happy, because I had just gone through misery for two weeks, you know, where you don't eat, don't sleep, where you are miserable and you don't know what's was wrong with you... and I thought, you know, as happy as I am right now, it only takes a second for it to all go away and bring me right back where I was. So I was like, I think I'm just gonna keep it on the side somewhere, and if he shows up fine...*

Apparently, my nerves, which, developed into flirtatious energy, had proven to be successful.

R: *So... you are now experiencing a success it seems like, it was a success... Is there more you want to say about that?*

S: *It just showed me, like I said before, that you know, I'm still young, but I felt a lot older and felt like "okay, I can still do this."*

R: *"I can attract a guy"...*

I went from feeling like I wanted to leave, to sort of wanting to stay,

R: To sort of wanting to stay...?

S: *That's that whole, you know: this is really good, I don't want it to end, but I mean to be realistic and I need to know that he may not be having the same thoughts that I am, and I need to be realistic about that...*

to flirting and liking someone, feeling like I had been rejected, all to finally learn that my flirting had worked well enough to earn me a date and later on a boyfriend.

R: So, can you tell me a little bit about what happened after this night?

S: *[Chuckles] It was actually... He never called, I mean, he did call, but I went on vacation for three weeks with my family and... he never called and that was that and when school started up, we started talking everyday, pretty much, on the computer. It was nice. It good to he point where I had started dating someone else, 'cause I thought in the back of my head, "I can't wait around forever"... We actually had some serious fights on the computer and he would make me so mad, no one has ever made me that mad, and it all finally settled when I got back and that relationship with the other person...I was like "nahhh..." and I was at a friends apartment and I saw him across the parking lot and she kicked me out on the street and was like, "go say hi." And I said "hi" and three days later we went out on a date and that was that...*

R: So when you went on vacation and he didn't call, how did you experience that?

S: *[chuckles] I... It was kind of what I had expected, but on the other hand, I guess I guess I thought ahead, and I had had two other people that were asking me out: one was an old friend that said, "oh, you are finally free," so I had had that to distract me, I actually thought, "Joe, that's a practice round." I thought maybe there is something there, If there is something, he will find me, whatever, I just swept it up to that.*

R: So it seemed like you still held onto it as something positive, even though he didn't call?

S: *'Cause even, I remember the first time he sent me an IM on the computer: At first I thought, [startling sound] he actually talked to me, and then I thought, ooh, he didn't call, I'm not happy about that. I let him know and he said, yeah, well, "what was I supposed to do, I just met you and then you left for three weeks, what was I supposed to do?" So it was kind of like... [?]*

R: Can you say a little but more about the meaning that evening had for you in terms of what it told you about yourself? What was it an example of? How did it help you move on?

S: *Well, it told me that I didn't need to be dating someone that was like failing out of high school and had no aspirations other than being a mechanic in a garage... It told me that I actually, that someone actually, found my brains or my self, just plain ol' myself, attractive and desirable in whatever sense... it made me feel like I could be myself and*

not worry, not trying to pretend that I did not care about school or that “oh, I care too much” or whatever...

R: So you say it made you, it made it easier for you then to flirt next time?

S: Yes. ‘Cause then it came around to when I got back from my vacation, there was these two other people waiting there... It was no big deal, it was just like, all my nerves were calm... and whatever outcome, I was like, “yeah, whatever, I don’t care.”

R: Okay, so I just have one last question: After talking to me, this whole experience is probably different for you. Are there things that you have become aware of that you weren’t aware of then?

S: I think now I can definitely see why maybe I am the way I am with all this stuff. I can see why I still have hesitations about things... I can definitely see how I was trying to definitely put out.... It was a learning experience. I can still, if I think about it hard enough, I can feel the same emotions I was feeling then: pitiful, whatever, but then feeling like “oh, there’s hope.” That’s what carries the most out of it, and I think I can almost apply this flirtatious experience to other things, when I feel like I have no hope at all, sometimes I actually do think, it’s best to think “I’ll be fine.”

R: You could kind of actively do something to change the feeling of not being desirable or feeling empty? Creating some hope...?

S: It actually... it helped in all areas... with the other person - I constantly compared with the other person - but with other boyfriend I had gotten used to... he was very big and strong football player, I got used to him doing absolutely everything for me: I never drove a car, I never [chuckle] even went to the store and got things. He went and did everything. But through this, was when I, like right before this, I had gone out and got a job and then through all of this there was so many changes happening and I started to realize that, “maybe I can do things on my own.” It gave me the... the flirting and the positive result gave me the confidence and it gave me enough of an upper that I was like “I can take on the world. I can do whatever I need to do”

Veronica

The first time I met my current boyfriend, **Eric**, I actually didn’t even notice him. My friend **Marc** came over to talk to me while he was on his way out of the library. **Eric** just happened to be with him because they were both pledging the same fraternity and were on their way to dinner hours. I only talked to **Marc** for about five minutes while **Eric** stood in the background.

R: Can you say more about that first experience?

S: *Um, I noticed someone was standing there, but it just so happened that I didn't know him, I'm a pharmacy major... so I knew that he was in Organic Chemistry, but I had no idea he was a pharmacy major. I really had no idea about him. **Marc** and I were just standing there, we were studying for a test and he um, asked me a couple of questions in the library.*

R: *Do you remember what your initial impression was?*

S: *Oh, I thought he was cute, but it was kind of like, I didn't really even know his name or anything like that.*

R: *But it was...*

S: *[?] I knew Marc was kind of seeing one of my friends, so it was just a casual, "hi," how are you? And then they left.*

R: *Alright...*

Once **Eric** and I started dating, he admitted to me that as soon as **Marc** and **Eric** walked away, that **Eric** asked my name and commented on how attractive I was. The next time I came in contact with **Eric**, I was at a fraternity party.

R: *Ok, so how much later was this party?*

S: *Um, well the test was on...lets see...I probably was studying on a Tuesday for a test on Thursday...so it was a Thursday night.*

R: *So, two days later?*

S: *Yeah... He had been pledging the fraternity for a couple of weeks, and I was already an initiated member of a sorority. I had been talking to my friend **Mike**, who is the president of the fraternity, when **Eric** came up to get something else to drink. I made eye contact with him and immediately noticed how cute he was.*

R: *Ok, so can you say more about the cuteness?*

S: *Well, um, **Eric** has like a very distinct eye color—like a bluish with a greenish—so when I immediately saw him, that's what I immediately noticed. Just how he was dressed and everything was appealing to me.*

R: *So, as you saw him there, um, you just remembered that you had seen him?*

S: *Yeah...I knew that he was friends with Marc...I knew that he was pledging the fraternity and um, my friend Mike actually went to high school with him and then we came to college together and I knew that Mike knew him too...soo..it kind of like, we all*

had mutual friends. I knew of him, kind of. He was just like that guy in O Chem and right now I thought he was cute. haha.

R: *What um, possibilities opened up as he struck you as cute?*

S: *Well, my typical like flirting situation usually doesn't turn out to be any type of relationship. It usually just like starts there, maybe we'll hang out a couple of times and then it's like over. I was never really a relationship type before **Eric** and I started dating, so I really didn't know if I was ever going to see him again, or anything like that. I think mostly the fact why we started hanging out more was because we had so many mutual friends.*

R: *Can you say more about, at this particular time, what significance did it have for you or what did it prompt you to do or whatever, that he was cute?*

S: *Well, I don't know, well afterwards when I asked like his name and like asked if he was a nice kid and he immediately said yes, so after that I didn't see like a huge doorway opening to have a relationship with him just by seeing him for the first time and actually noticing him. I mean, I was pretty impartial to that.*

R: *Ok...*

I asked **Mike** what his name was and he told me **Eric**.

R: *Um, do you remember what was going on when you asked **Mike** for his name?*

S: *Um, he—Eric—we were playing drinking games upstairs and downstairs and we were just kind of hanging out in the middle of everything and um, 'cause people were wandering right next to us and upstairs there were a lot of other people. So there were maybe like ten people in the room with me. And I didn't have to like, [?] And Eric used to swim and Mike swims now, so they knew a lot about each other and had hung out a lot.*

R: *Ok.*

Then I decided to continue talking to Mike, but at the same time, be able to have eye contact with Eric.

R: *Can you say more about that?*

S: *Um, well I was standing in the one room and then Eric was in the other room—and I just wanted to—'cause Mike has had a crush on me for like a long time—so I kind of wanted Eric to know that at that time I wasn't really interested in Mike, that I still like, like I had noticed him and that I wanted to go and talk to him, but I didn't want to be rude and leave Mike.*

R: *So at this point you also have an interest in him knowing that you are interested in him?*

S: *Yeah. Every time we would make eye contact, I would immediately put my eyes to the floor because he had caught me staring at him.*

R: *Can you say something about that?*

S: *Um, I think that like, for myself eye contact is a good thing...like that's where your spark begins almost. So, I was kind of embarrassed 'cause I had been like making conversation with Mike and then starting at Eric at the same time. So every time we would make eye contact I would like immediately look toward the floor because I was embarrassed.*

R: *What were you imagining at this point would come out of it? I mean, you were showing interest in him and you wanted eye contact with him. Do you remember what you were thinking what you wanted to come out of your [?] ?*

S: *I mean, I was there with a bunch of girlfriends...so it wasn't like I wanted to like go and hook up with him or anything like that...but because all of my guy friends are in this fraternity, I figured that I was going to be friends with him afterwards, then if nothing else we were going to be friends and I mean, a lot of my guy friends are attractive...I mean, but that's like a lot of the reason we are friends because we like each other...so I think that would have been the outcome of the situation if we hadn't contacted each other afterwards*

R: *So you were physically attracted to him?*

S: *Yeah.*

R: *And you had an interest in...*

S: *At least being friends with him..*

R: *In being friends with him...?*

S: *Yeah*

R: *Ok...continue...*

Once my conversation with Mike was over, I approached Eric. I asked him what his name was, even though I already knew, and also what his major was.

R: *Ok, so you approach Eric and ask him what his name is even though you know it already?*

S: *Yeah*

R: *Can you say something about that?*

S: *I just, I mean...I guess it's more like the chase kind of thing. I wanted him to know that I was interested in him, but wanted to act nonchalantly like I didn't just interrogate Mike about it. So, that's pretty much why I asked him his name again. And then, I mean, I think it was just kind of standard because I've seen him in one of my classes because there are pre-meds and PTs, and so I wanted to know what his actual area of interest was.*

R: *Ok*

His major happened to be pharmacy, just like mine.

R: *What difference do you think that made?*

S: *I think that when I find out that someone else is a pharmacy major, or just as taxing and time consuming as mine is, it also like sparks an interest because then it's not only...because I see from my friends who have relationships that are pharmacy majors and their significant other is an education major, so, while they're in the library studying these like intense subjects their significant other is like sitting across from them doing crossword puzzles or something like that just to spend time together... and so, it was kind of like, we would be able to spend time with each other if we were just studying together or something like that.*

R: *So would you say at that point it opened up some possibilities?*

S: *Yeah, once again, if nothing else then I would have another friend who was in pharmacy school with me to like hang out with and study with. So, that was pretty much it. After our little conversation I continued to talk and mingle with other people, but I made sure that Eric could see me and every once in a while I made sure that I made eye contact with him.*

R: *Ok, so can you say more about um...what came out of this then? Then you jump to the next stage. Can you like, wrap things up for me...?*

S: *Well, actually I went to talk with other people—a lot of the other fraternity guys and they said that Eric is really cool and we were talking about him and they said, “oh he's cool—you should go hook up with him---blah, blah, blah” And I said, well I'm not really like that, um, but then I just, every once in awhile acknowledge that he was there and acknowledge that I was still interested in him and um...so close to a break it was kind of like pointless to ask him any other questions or like if he wanted to hang out with me more or anything like that... and then I was just talking to other people and then I got a call from one of my ex-boyfriends and he asked me if I wanted to come over and hang out with some of his friends that I had been friends with but lost contact with because we broke up. And so, actually after that I left the party to go and hang out with my ex-boyfriend and his friend, which, was like nothing and then after that night I just came back to campus. haha.*

R: *So, um, what was your impression of him, I mean, did he respond to any of these moves or...?*

S: *Well, I think that, just from the time that he... 'cause Eric is more of like a shy person and he has a more shy personality than I do, I'm more outgoing, so I talked to a bunch of people and, um, I knew that he thought...just from first impression...I knew that he thought that I was attractive and um, from what guy friends had told me, I kinda knew that he knew who I was as well and just...Greek life is so small here anyway...you're like, oh, that's that pledge from this fraternity and you kind of get to know them like that, but I just...I don't like know if he was impressed with me or what, but...if our relationship would have stopped there, then it wouldn't have been a loss to me either because I knew that we would have been friends.*

The next day was Thanksgiving break and therefore I went home. When I got home, I logged on to Facebook because of the pure boredom I had. I "friended" Eric, just to see if he would respond.

R: *Ok, so now you're going home and you're feeling bored...?*

S: *Yeah, because I am from Fox Chapel which is like twenty minutes from here, and, none of my other friends...we got out of school on a Friday and so...none of my friends were coming home until after Tuesday and so I had nothing to do...I was hanging out with my little brother and um...that's about it. And, so I just went on Facebook and looked him up because I knew the name and I friended him...*

R: *What were you hoping or expecting...?*

S: *Well, with most guys that I meet just like accept your friend response and maybe write on your wall, but other than that...and I looked at his Facebook wall and some of my really close girlfriends had written on it and so I thought, we could be friends, definitely, if he's going to start hanging out with my group of friends.*

R: *So that's something that's not a big deal for you...it's something that you've done before...*

S: *Yeah, no big deal.*

R: *Ok...*

He accepted my friend request and immediately wrote on my wall. He wrote, "what's up cutie." After his post, I knew that he found me attractive enough to take his time to do this.

R: *Ok, so what was your uh, how did you experience that?*

S: *Um, well, I...when a guy takes the time to do something like that...because most of the guys I hang out with are like purely lazy...um, when he takes the time to acknowledge you on Facebook, where everyone can read it, it's like oh—he's actually like...will think about hanging out with me another time*

R: *What difference did it make that other people could read it?*

S: *Um, I think that it well...it just makes everything more public where all my girlfriends knew that I had never known him before and that we had never hung out before or anything like that...and the fact that he wrote back...I immediately got phone calls like, who is this kid? Where did you meet him?... everything like that, which makes me want to hang out with him more just because so that I can find out more about him.*

R: *So how was it to be called by your friends and asking questions about him like that?*

S: *Um, I don't know...my girlfriends...they know everything about me...every minute detail...and so, I told them about the party and they were like, yeah—go talk to him, he's cute...and so to get my friends' approval of a guy we don't even know is pretty huge because they're pretty judgmental*

R: *So what difference did that make...getting approval?*

S: *That they had approved of what he looked like?*

R: *Yeah, that he's cute or whatever...*

S: *Um, I would never date a guy that my friends didn't think was cute, so...I was pretty much like eager to go ahead and continue on talking to him because if they were like, "ewh, I don't know about him" I definitely wouldn't have continued talking to him.*

R: *So it really matters what they...*

S: *Yeah, my friends are like my life...so, if they wouldn't have approved of him, then I definitely wouldn't have continued talking to him...I mean, in more than just a friendly manner, so...*

R: *Can you say more about that...what makes that so important?*

S: *Um, my girlfriends? Just 'cause, um...after we all join a sorority together and our pledging was from...from 5-6 and then we went to the library from 6-9 and then we pledged from 9-midnight for 9 weeks...and so if you're together with people for that long...they just know everything about you and, at the time when we pledged, only one of the girls had a boyfriend and so...we all had enough time to devote to what each other were like and becoming each others best friends. And a lot of my friends from home are not...they have went to school and made their own friends too...and so when we go out we*

hang out, but I don't talk to them outside of school...so my friends that are here are absolutely my life.

Later that night I went to rent a movie with my little brother and when I returned to my computer Eric had IMed me.

R: *What does it mean to IM somebody, I'm not sure...*

S: *Oh, instant message*

R: *Instant message, oh ok...*

S: *Yeah, like on AIM*

R: *Ok...*

I proceeded to have an online conversation with him, basically making small talk about movies, etc.

R: *Can you say more about that conversation..?.*

S: *Well, I had an away message up, which is like when you're not there, you put what you're doing, or people put quotes or whatever, and I just said that I was going to Blockbuster with my little brother and when I came back he was like—I had a message from him that said hey...and I didn't know what his screen name was...so I went back on Facebook and made sure it was him...and then we just started talking about the movie that I had rented and if he had seen it before and...and he has a million movies...he is like a huge movie buff, so I think that was kind of like an interest that both of us had...and so, it kind of...I mean, you could go on for days about movies you've seen or whatever...so I think it was a good first conversation to have because there was a lot of interest on both ends and whenever he would IM me with a new thing, I would immediately whereas like with some of my friends I would like let the conversation dwindle off...and at that point I knew that I wanted to continue to talk to him.*

R: *Um, ok...*

I asked him for his number, which he gave me almost immediately, because I gave him my number at the party.

R: *Ok, do you remember what that was like, asking him for his number?*

S: *Um, well he...I gave him my phone number at the party and was just like...hey, if you ever want to hang out or study together or whatever...it was more of a friendly, like...he's my number...and then when I asked him for his number, umm..I just said, hey...I probably asked him what he was doing over break or something like that and just probably nonchalantly asked him for his number and I think for a girl to do that...it's for...not to*

have a guy say, here's my phone number give me a call sometime...I think he kind of got the sense that I was immediately like outward and outgoing and stuff...

R: How do you feel about him at that point?

S: Um, I don't know...I think at this point he kind of...we both thought it could go more than friends..but, I kind of asked him for it more with the intention of being friends, so I think that he was more willing to give it to me...but it was kind of like...well we can be friends and talk to each other kind of thing...

One of the days during break, I had to think of who I was going to ask to my sorority's winter formal. I thought that Eric would be a perfect date,

R: Ok, um, so can you say more about that?

S: Um, well actually I had asked my friend Mike that night at the party if he would go to the formal with me and he said he had to check his date book...and so he checked his agenda and it ended up that he was going to be at a swim meet so he couldn't go with me, but he knew that I thought that Eric was cute that night, so it was—he was joking around with me like why don't you just ask Eric, blah, blah, blah, blah...so...we...I kind of took it with a grain of salt that I was going to ask him or anything, but then as the date was approaching and Thanksgiving break was coming to an end I kind of knew that like if I was going to ask him, then I better ask him while I was home because he lives um, like 4 hours away, so I knew he was going to have to bring back like a suit or something like that...which only girls think about...so he wouldn't think about that...haha...and I thought that he would be a good date just because if we were friends at that point in time then it would be great because we could become better friends, but if not, then it would be a good first...like starting a relationship with him

R: Did you have any preference for either at this point?

S: Um, I think that...I mean, at this point in time I had had my best friend from home Alisha, look at him on Facebook...and she was like, oh he's cute I think he has lots of potential...and she was like, how's his personality? And I said, well he's really funny...I talked to him a couple of times online and I talked to him that night, so...I kind of had a feel for how he was and I'm a person who...um, I'm really good at first impressions and so...he rubbed me the right way...haha...and I knew that...he had the potential of being a good boyfriend, but...it's hard 'cause...I mean, after we started dating a little bit I found out that he had this ex-girlfriend of a couple years and I didn't...it's just hard to know if they're still talking...and you cant ask him that at first...and so, I had no idea what stage in his life he was and if he wanted to have a relationship or anything like that, but I was open to the possibility.

R: Continue...

So I called him and left a message that said, "Hey you, it's Veronica. I was just wondering if you would like to be my date for my sorority's winter formal. I am currently a dateless loser, so hopefully you can change that for me."

R: *Ok, so can you say a little more about leaving that message?*

S: *Um, I wanted to think of something that was kind of witty so he would definitely respond to it and at this point in time almost all of my friends had dates and I was the last one...which is unusual because I have a bunch of guy friends so I just could have asked one of them, but...after I asked Mike, and he said no...I didn't really know who I was going to ask after that and so I thought that if I left him kind of a witty message he would respond and he ended up responding. when he called me back I actually didn't pick up the phone because I was too nervous to pick it up haha and so...*

R: *Can you tell me more about that?*

S: *Well, I thought 'cause maybe [?] I was just nervous because I didn't know if he was going to say yes or no or what...and so I just let it go to voicemail and then I figured that if he said yes then I could call him back and immediately talk to him about it and say that I was like downstairs talking to my mom or something...but if he would have said no, I don't really know what I would have done...I was kind of prepared for the fact that he was going to say yes.*

R: *What would have happened if um, I mean, what was at stake here for you?*

S: *Um, at this point in time I knew that we would probably be friends and I mean...a date was kind of safer because I would have had no other ideas of people that I was going to ask because all my friends were taking our other mutual friends...so, there was a lot of guys from his fraternity going and so I figured it would...he had nothing to lose because if I was a bad date or if he wasn't having fun...then at least he would be having fun with his fraternity brothers too, so...*

When he called me back, he said that he would be honored to be my date and save me from being a dateless loser. For the rest of Thanksgiving break we would text, or call each other to see how everything was going.

R: *Can you talk more about the rest of that break?*

S: *Um, well, Thanksgiving my whole family comes over to my house and so my cousin that I'm really close with was there and I showed her his pictures on Facebook and everything and she thought that he was cute and so...just the whole day I was talking to him to see how it was going...and he was literally in the middle of nowhere, he was with his family all day long and just throughout break...I mean, I don't think...I ended up babysitting half the time and so...he just said to me what was I doing during the day and I knew he was working and um...he worked at a pharmacy at the time...and I would ask him if his day was slow, or what was going on or whatnot... so... I mean, it wasn't really*

a big deal at that point... I think that we definitely knew that we wanted to be friends and um...we had made arrangements to hang out...and so, after that...I kind of didn't know what he really wanted to do... but...

R: It would have been ok with you if he just wanted to be a friend?

S: Yeah...definitely...

R: Do you think you would get disappointed...or...?

S: Um...

R: I'm trying to get at like what your hopes were...

S: I think that it was kind of...I think that I would have been a little disappointed if he just wanted to be friends, but um...it would have been fine too. I think that I would have gotten over it, it wouldn't have been some like huge catastrophic event that he didn't want to be my boyfriend...and I mean, we dated for about a month before we even decided that we were going to be boyfriend and girlfriend...so...I mean, throughout the entire dating period we knew that we liked each other and we knew that we wanted it to go further, but we didn't know how far we wanted it to go or anything like that....

R: Ok...

S: Once we returned to school on that Sunday night, I was really excited to hang out with Eric one-on-one.

R: Can you say more about that excitement that you felt?

S: Well, we....I came back to school and unpacked all my stuff and then immediately my girlfriends were like, what's going on...what are you doing tonight...blah, blah, blah...and so we had just been talking to each other about what were going to do that night and I was like, well actually I'm going to hang out with that kid Eric...and they were all shocked because I mean, I had hung out with a lot of guys one-on-one and it's never really gotten any farther...and they were like...he seems like not the...from knowing him from our other friends...he wasn't like a guy who was just giving me attention to hook up with me, but he was more of like a nice guy...and so, I was excited to know that this could potentially go somewhere after tonight because that was going to be like the first night of like, us talking one-on-one and not like being in a huge environment of other people

R: When he says he was not the kind of guy who would just hook-up with you, what do you mean by that?

S: Um, I knew that he was not the guy who was just in it to have sex or like anything like that...I knew that he was more of a genuine guy who wanted to hang out and see what I was like more and that...

R: *What difference did that make for you?*

S: *Um, I'm not the type to just like go and sleep around with people, so...knowing that he was more of my type and whatnot...it was kind of reassuring.*

R: *Ok...*

We watched "Summer Pitch" which definitely was an appropriate first date movie.

R: *How so?*

S: *Um, have you ever seen the movie before?*

R: *No.*

S: *Ok, well it has Drew Barrymore in it and it's a love story about um this girl who is...she has like some high ranking job in a firm and then she meets this guy who is a teacher and he's kind of goofy and he's obsessed with the Red Socks...and this is after they won the World Series and it's kind of like...it's a movie about like falling in love and everything but it also has sports in it...and the fact that he owned the movie...you knew that he was kind of like the sports buff or whatever...I think that it was just an appropriate movie to...it would spark conversation because they go to parties together in the movie and stuff like that...I have two brothers, so I know a lot about sports...and so it kind of like gave me a time to say that I wasn't like completely girly and that I liked sports and whatever...which was important to him because he loves sports.*

R: *Ok.*

We didn't kiss until about two weeks later when we were studying together and the kiss came out of nowhere.

R: *Can you describe that for me? How that was?*

S: *Well...I was studying for a physics test and he was just kind of like hanging out with friends and then he came up to do like a little last minute review session and we were just hanging out and then all of a sudden I kissed him because I knew that we had been hanging out for long enough that he wasn't going anywhere and...after the first kiss...I was kind of like...I asked him, you're not interested in anyone else are you? And he was like, no there's no one really else here that I've met that I would like a long term relationship with. So then after that, that just kind of sealed the deal that we knew that we would start more seriously dating and whatnot.*

R: *So, what brought you to the point where you felt like it was ok to kiss him?*

S: *Um, we were just...I think that we were comfortable enough and knew enough about like each other's lives outside of just school...I knew about his family and he knew about my family...and um, I think that just the fact that at that point in time I knew that it was right enough that I wanted to like kiss him and show him that I...that it was more than just friends...'cause I think that eventually you get to this line where you're either going to be friends or you're going to be more than friends and...that line needed to be crossed or we were just going to be friends forever...so, and I think that because I'm more of an outgoing person than he is, I think that he was a little bit more nervous and didn't want to seem like he was just in it to have sex or hook up or whatever...that he...didn't want to kiss me first...and so I think that he was pleasantly surprised when I kissed him, but...and he...I'm sure that he wanted to kiss, but he didn't want to do it first.*

R: *It seems like there was some urgency then as well, that you felt, that you needed to seize the moment or otherwise it would become just friendship...?*

S: *Yeah, and I think...I just think that there's always and line and if the line didn't...I mean, it had been two weeks that we were hanging out with friends and then like watching movies every once in a while or whatever and if I didn't kiss him soon...then I think that we would have just been friends forever.*

We have now been dating for about four and a half months and things are going great.

R: *Ok, so how have you noticed things change from your first meeting with him at the party...I mean, how would you describe the progression from then to now?*

S: *Um, well when I first met him like I didn't...I hardly knew anything about him and now I know pretty much everything about him and I've met his parents and it's not just like a...tell me everything...because I've experienced it. I just recently went home with him over Easter break and like stayed with him in his house with his family and everything and so...I think that was a big test for us because if his family wouldn't have liked me then I think...I mean, it would have been over right then. And um my...my dad passed away when I was 16 and so he kind of had to come to that and come to the realization that I guess I come with more baggage than most girls...I mean, I'm fine about everything that's happened with us...but..er, that's like happened with my family and I had accepted that it's for the best, but...it's just like on holidays when I think about my dad it's always more depressing and he kind of had to deal with that and 'cause...my dad died on December 28th so we were on break and he was here and he was at home when it was the anniversary of my dad dying so ...he called me all that day and we just really...will support each other now and ready to face more things together now as a couple instead of just one on one.*

R: *So when you look back on all this, how do you, or I guess first...what future do you see for the two of you...?*

S: *Um, I like to guess like to not look so far to the future...but I think as we get older I'm not dating outrageously inappropriate people more and so...I mean, when I was in high*

school it didn't matter and I mean I came from a more well off place, so people weren't completely outrageous but just guys if I would date them and have nothing in common with them then we would just break up, whereas with Eric, since I'm with him all the time, it's more of like...a) I can be myself begin with him for a long period of time and I think it would be hard if we broke up because we were never friends and so I think it's a lot different when you're friends with a person first and then you have a relationship with them because then I think that always leaves you to be open to having more friendship...but, I think if we would broke up then I would probably have to pretend like he didn't exist just because I would probably be devastated.

R: How, I mean, what do you think the possibility is of that...is that something you ever wonder about?

S: Um...I mean, we get into little fights every once in a while, but I don't think that breaking up definitely isn't in our future...or near future for that matter...I think after going home with him and having like a small peak into his life...we could definitely like get married and be together or whatever...but, also, our futures are kind of conflicting because I think that he would like to move back to his home town, where I was never raised in the country and I could never be raised in the country and I have to be near a city and he lives in Lancaster, so it's about an hour and a half outside of Philly...but an hour and a half outside of the city is still in the middle of nowhere. Um, I think that that would be the main conflicting thing that would have us break up as of right now, but we still have four years of school left and I think the more he becomes acquainted with Pittsburgh, the more people like Pittsburgh, so...

R: You said that it would be hard...I don't remember what you said...it would be hard to break up with somebody if you had first become friends or what

*S: I think that if **Eric** and I broke up now we could never become friends.*

R: Ahh, ok.

*S: Just because I don't know **Eric** as a friend. I know him only as...I mean, at first we were more like flirty friends and we knew that there was a potential of being something more, but now that we are together, I don't think that I could ever just be friends with him because like I know too much about him and he knows too much about me...and we have...we have become boyfriend and girlfriend on a more intimate level and so...it's more like if you're friends with your boyfriend before you actually start dating then I think that you can almost like rekindle that friendship again eventually and so I mean that's pretty much my experience of my past relationships. I mean, I'm friends with boyfriends where we had been friends and then broken up and then I have been with guys that we had just been boyfriend and girlfriend and we had broken up and I don't even talk to them anymore because we wouldn't know what to say to each other almost.*

R: So when you think back on this whole course of events, what do you think it tells you about yourself?

S: *Um, well, my friends never probably would have believed the fact that I was ready to have a relationship just because ever since I came to college I had never seriously dated a boyfriend where usually like a lot of friends came to college and immediately met a guy they were interested in or whatever and...just here that didn't happen for me and I think that they thought that it was going to take me a lot longer to find someone that I had a lot of things in common with and that I had the potential to date...and I think that now after they um have seen my relationship with Eric unfold I think that they would probably...they would probably say that I'm the most happy now...than before...I mean, I had all of them before...we were so close that we would do everything together, but I think now that I'm with Eric they would say that I'm a lot happier and um...just, I think that the potential of having a future with someone for a long period just tends to make me happier because I know that he's going to be there and we have like more of a scheduled routine now where we hang out and study or whatever.*

R: *So, um, when you think back on how you met and how you went about it, what do you think...what do you take from that about you...about you...the kind of person that you are and what kind of...?*

S: *I think the fact that I'm an outgoing person has...I mean, I don't think that I've demonstrated many changes in our relationship, but after talking to Mike, my really good friend who swam with Eric last year...Eric...he said last year Eric didn't go out a lot and he would more like stay in and he was really worried about school and he was almost more of like a dork and this year since he has joined a fraternity and gotten me as a girlfriend he kind of is more laid back about school...but he still gets really good grades, but he's more laid back about school and...just really had more fun...and um, definitely has changed...which I haven't necessarily seen the changes because I didn't know him before, but Mike had said that he's more outgoing and definitely seems happier...I mean, he stopped smoking so he has more time to do other things...so I think that he has changed more than I have...*

R: *Um, so as you talk about this experience, is there something that stands out differently than before?*

S: *Um...I think just the fact that...the reason this relationship is working rather than other relationships that I've had is because he is here...I see him all the time...I know that next year I'm going to see him all the time too...um, because all pharmacy majors have the same classes at the same time...and I know that he is really focused on what he wants to do in his future, so that's an important quality to me because I'm more of a planner than somebody who just spontaneously does things...so I think that...and the fact that he was...that we were both ready for a relationship at the same time was something that doesn't happen very often. And there are a lot of great guys here, but the fact that either I just...after we hung out a couple of times I immediately knew that it wasn't going to work...or, I've heard different lines like "it's just not the right time right now." So I think that the fact that we were both ready to have a relationship right then was...um, pretty uncommon.*

Rune

I was in a new place, studying far away from home and just in the process of getting to know a whole set of new people. During our three days of attending a formal introduction program at the University where I would be studying, I remember seeing this beautiful dark-skinned international student with a petit figure and the sweetest, most heart-melting, brown puppy dog eyes. I remember having a brief flight of fantasy about what it would mean for me to be with a girl like that and feeling drawn to the possibility of being the different guy, which I felt she could make me.

She represented the girl that only popular or attractive guys could ever manage to get close to and she represented the possibility that I too could be such a guy, contrary to my belief about myself, but consonant with a potential I wanted to actualize in myself.

I remembered feeling quite confident in myself that day, as I felt bolstered by having met a new room mate, who seemed like a popular guy and with whom I had already established a relationship that was stronger than any relationship he had with any of the other students. I also remembered feeling freer than usual, as I was not held back by other people's preconceptions of me as quiet, introverted and intellectual. It was as if these conditions had created a space for me to try something new, become different, find different sides of myself.

Not feeling as inhibited by my personal past as I usually would, I therefore made what for me was a bold move. I asked the girl a question, and upon discovering that she was not going to be in any of my classes, I turned around and uttered to my room mate: "What a shame!", a statement which communicated to him that I really liked the girl and which made my attraction to her public and thus more real.

I then remember just letting the fantasy of her recede into the background for awhile as days went by without me having any contact with her. At this point, a relationship with her remained a vague possibility, not something I was actually taking steps to bring about.

During the intro days, I remember going with a bunch of the students to the bookstore, where I once again encountered Susan at a distance. As it began to rain and Susan did not want to walk in the rain, I faked that I too disliked to walk in the rain, giving me an excuse to walk home with her without making it known that I was interested in her. Walking home with her, I didn't want her to know that I was interested in her in any explicit way, but took great care to appear sympathetic to her, asking questions that were more meant to prove something about me (make me appear interested) than directed at a need for information. At one point, when we were walking back, I offered to carry Susan's books. She accepted. I remembered that this made me feel manlike. I hoped she would look at me this way as well. Upon coming back to the dorms, where we both lived, I made a brief comment like "see you around."

In the dorm room I talked with my room mate about how she made my heart melt and how I just really wanted her to like me.

Early into the semester a trip was offered for international students by a local Church to a creek where we would be doing white water rafting. I remembered thinking

to myself that I would really like it if Susan would go on this trip and this was one of my main motivations for signing up. I remembered feeling extremely excited when I discovered that only me and her had actually signed up for the trip. The conditions for making something happen could not be any better, I thought.

We drove up to the creek in the mountains together with – Becky – a girl my own age from the Church who had been assigned to accompany us. On our way up there, I sat in the front seat next to Becky and remembered talking a lot to Becky – feeling unusually extraverted. I hoped and believed Susan would like my extraverted self. I remembered being somewhat aware of how my interaction with Becky might possible impact Susan, wondering if and hoping that she liked the gregarious and smiling person I felt I was in that situation. My interest in Becky was really to an extent a communication to Susan via Becky, more so than an interest in Becky for her own sake.

At one point we stopped for lunch. I don't remember having much conversation with Susan, but I do remember being intensely interested in appearing like a charming person to her. I tried to only make empathic comments in response to what she said and made sure to smile a lot. When we left the diner and Susan was in need of some change to pay her tab, I quickly offered her my coins, feeling gentle-man like in the process.

In general, I found it very difficult to talk to Susan. I had become very self-aware and didn't feel I could be spontaneous around her. I felt I needed to say the right things and appear the right way, for otherwise I would not be special enough for her to like me. My need to impress her made me feel inadequate and I took flight into a performance self to counter my inadequacy.

A problem I have always had is that I feel humiliated by letting someone know directly that I like them because that to me signifies that they can take me or leave me and that they are superior to me. Every move I made in relation to Susan was therefore carefully disguised so as not to communicate my interest in her directly. I didn't want her to know directly that I liked her. I wanted *her* to gradually grow attached to *me*. I wanted her to need me, not her to know that I needed her.

When we arrived at the hotel where we were staying I decided against going down to Susan's room, fearing that that would make me appear as if I was interested in her. Despite my desire I therefore waited in my room. When she came to my room, after a while, I remembered feeling delighted that she had come to me and not vice versa. I started to speculate about whether or not she liked me, interpreting every little sign she emitted as a sign that she did. When I thought she did, it made me feel wanted and powerful.

Most of the signs I emitted to show that I liked her were never straightforward, but disguised. I attempted to appear understanding, show interest in her, smile and so on. I was deeply scared to be more direct with her.

Later on when we went to the rafting station, I made sure to be extra helpful with her vest and when we were on the river and the raft got out of control, I made a decision to hold on to her arm, as if to convey "you can be safe with me" or convey to her that I was a "man." I also remembered using the word "sweetie" once or twice when I talked to her, which to me was a risky move, yet could be taken by her in a way that was not too obviously me communicating interest in her. I could not bear the humiliation of her possible rejection.

When we came home from the trip, I was adamant about finding new excuses to meet her that would not involve me asking her out for a date, which I felt would be too risky a move. I persuaded her to come with me to have lunch at the church one day under the pretense that we could meet Becky.

To increase my chance of having a “random” encounter with her, I started reading or talking to people down by the bench in front of her dorm room. From time to time, she would, and when she did, I felt so happy. “Yes!”, I thought to myself.

Sometimes, if I saw her walking outside, I would ask if she wanted to go with me and my roommate to the campus diner to have lunch. I was always looking for ways to get close to her and spend time with her, without explicitly asking her out or coming to her room. It seemed a lot safer this way. At times I would opportunely wait to leave the diner so I could walk back to the dorms with her.

I don’t remember when, but at some point, I would consciously make a move to touch her back, to show her, rather than tell her that I liked her. I was perplexed that at times she seemed to ward off my touch, but I was unwilling to interpret it as a sign that she didn’t like me, given the other signs I had held on to which I thought indicated the contrary. Perhaps she was just shy, I thought. On the other hand, it was never quite clear to me that she liked me. I always wondered if she did and kept analyzing all her actions in light of this question.

At one point I remembered sitting by the bench talking with some of the other students. When she came out to join the group, I remembered feeling her breath on my hair as she stood behind me, interpreting her proximity to me as a sign that she liked me. “Now, she is in the bag,” I thought, and for a moment when I thought I could have her at my whim, I started having doubts about whether or not I really wanted her. However, I quickly started doubting whether she in fact *did* like me, because she didn’t really subsequently act according to my hopes and expectations (she might have refused going to lunch or might have pulled away when I tried to touch her).

At one occasion, I had gotten her and another student sitting on the bench to join me to go to the student theater. On our way there I made a special effort to appear sympathetic to her by interacting playfully with her friend, hoping she might realize that I was a good catch and was popular. When on the way back, I playfully chased her friend and her friend spontaneously held my hand, Susan too grabbed my hand. “She likes me, she likes me!”, I thought to myself. “Yes!!!”

As the flirting went on, I would do many other things in the hope that she would like me, always making sure to mask a straightforward communication that I liked her and wanted to be with her. I would spend hours picking out cards for her birthday or before I departed for Christmas break at home. Here again, I wanted the card to say I want to be with you, without saying so explicitly. I wanted the message to be ambiguous, so I wouldn’t feel I had completely surrendered myself to her. She took the cards to be signs of friendship, but I always hoped and speculated as to whether I now had her on my hook. One time, on Susan’s birthday, I set the alarm clock to wake me up before she had to go to school so I could go down and paste a big “happy birthday” sign on her door and leave a card from me. She was extremely happy and surprised, called me up like the happiest girl and gave both me and my room mate a hug.

Later on as I gave her my most direct card yet, where I had written something that seemed more than friendly (I don’t remember what), I finally stood confronted with her

rejection of me. I had come and knocked on her door several times, wanting to hang out with her, and one time she finally came out to me by the bench and told me she had met a wonderful guy. This guy had called her up, invited her on a Valentine's date. He had been much more direct about his interest in her than me. She told me she had never really been interested in me *that way*. I remembered feeling disappointed. My dream of being with her, of becoming the person only she could make me, had burst. The whole promise of another more exciting world and another more exciting self was no longer. I broke down and cried a couple of times, at my job, in class and in my room. My actual life now seemed dull and lacking.