

MICHAEL MARDER

## EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY ACCORDING TO CLARICE LISPECTOR

**Abstract.** Clarice Lispector's narrative in *The Passion According to G.H.* is a literary enactment of phenomenology at the limit, an attempt at reimagining the world from nonadult and other-than-human points of view. I interpret the term "passion," woven into Lispector's textual production, in terms of the existential intensity that accompanies the transformation of experience as it departs from its human modality. Offering a phenomenological description of such self-alienation, I pay particular attention to metamorphoses in the perception of time, space, and life.

Is love when you don't give a name to things' identity?

—Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*

*T*HE *PASSION ACCORDING TO G.H.*, like much of Clarice Lispector's writing, hovers on the razor-thin and fragile edge between description and the ineffable, between existence and nonexistence, between the world and its disappearance, between losing and finding oneself. It is no wonder, then, that a plethora of contradictions explode from the very first lines of the narrative that passionately wishes to share an obscure experience, of which the narrator herself is not certain—"I am not sure I even believe in what happened to me," she says (p. 3)<sup>1</sup>—and which she is unable to organize into clearly delineated forms or molds, without losing its singularly chaotic core. To abandon oneself to such disorganization is to let go of one's world, to witness the crumbling of the old structures of meaning, without as of yet anticipating anything that would take their place.

And passion is, among other things, the pathos of this undergoing that refuses the evidence, wherein phenomenology would find a confirmation of empty intentions. There is no surer way of losing oneself than by losing one's world. I no longer recognize who I am if the coordinates of my existence persistently slip away from my fingertips, if, that is, the time and place of my life are stripped of their familiarity. At issue in Lispector's work is this massive loss of world, which is neither entirely negative—a pure privation—nor the dawn of a new positivity—an assured promise of a new form, a quasi-messianic expectation of a transformation. Hers is a literary phenomenology at the limit: a description of the impossibility of description, an experience of the destruction of the life-world, a signification of potential meaninglessness.<sup>2</sup>

## I

Why, still, despite the massive register of all these rapidly accruing losses, are we talking about phenomenology? Let me glean a few indications for the tenacity of this way of thinking in Lispector's text, while speculating on the appropriateness of phenomenology to the liminal experience of *The Passion*.

1. *Mere looking*, "just looking," divorced from understanding. To just look, without any presuppositions and without expecting to see something as a determinate something, is a difficult task, requiring a tremendous undoing of one's world, which is to say, of the semantic structures that constitute it. Mere looking is also a sobering experience that does not reach into a higher sphere of meaning, proudly free of subjective presuppositions, but descends into terrifying meaninglessness, as things, being, and events come to foreclose elementary interpretations built into our perception itself, which tends to precomprehend them, to receive them as something determinate and, in any case, *as* something.

"Why is it that just looking is so greatly disorganizing?" (p. 5). Because, a phenomenologist will respond, it signals that we do not know how to actually engage with what we are looking at, how to interact with it, how to interpret or to act upon it. Like the broken thing in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, the "object" of the mere look is merely present-at-hand, or no-longer-ready-to-hand: staring at it takes the place of understanding (at a wholly nonconscious level) what to do with it. This is why mere looking is, in fact, blinding.<sup>3</sup>

2. *A meticulous reduction of reality, the bracketing of its positing as something really existent*: "And for me nothing exists unless I give it a form. And

... and what if the reality is precisely that nothing has existed?!" (p. 6). Wouldn't one then give a form to nothing and, in this pure formalism, pretend that this nothing is a something? More than a mere doubt, reduction involves setting aside the belief or the unbelief in reality as irrelevant, or, at the very least, as dependent on one's particular, habitual, human way of being. But the setting aside of the positings of reality is neither as neutral nor as indifferent as it is in the thought of Edmund Husserl; on the contrary, the premonition that all the work of formalization and organization might have busied itself with nothing terrifies G.H.

Equally terrifying is the clarity emanating from the operations of reduction (and, in this, reduction is dissimilar to doubt) that frees beings from their circumscribed positions in the humanized world: ". . . it is . . . natural clarity that terrifies me. Even though I know that the terror . . . the terror is only myself coming face to face with things" (p. 11), "the huge risk of coming face to face with reality" (p. 13). The postreductive encounter with the Real—and it is an encounter, for in G.H.'s universe, things, as we shall see, have a face—is far from being illuminated by the neutral *lumen naturalis* of the intellect. Rather, it is saturated with passion, passivity, pathos, and suffering. Lispector's liminal phenomenology is inconceivable without this existential intensity that shakes up the previously complacent subject, leading to what Hélène Cixous terms its "rapid suspension of the self," the reduction of the personal "I."<sup>4</sup>

3. *The insight that the constitution of what exists is only possible thanks to a particular self-constitution, a subject's construction of its own world.* Perspective matters: human experience is one that contorts, cuts, and delimits parts of what is there so that they would conform to the needs, forms, and categories of the human. On the other hand, the experience of an animal—say, a cockroach—is one that revolves around whatever matters to this animal in a nonformal, nonthematic, nonobjectifying fashion. It is not enough simply to switch perspectives, as though one were putting on a different set of clothes, empathetically imagining oneself (essentially, the same "self") in the shoes of another creature. A step back is required to what Lispector calls "an infinite flesh," *uma carne infinita* (p. 6 [11]), the breathing of life itself devoid of selfhood and of a human form, no longer humanized, no longer delimited in manageable chunks we know as "objects" or "events."<sup>5</sup>

Only after being overwhelmed by the unencompassable, infinite flesh—a term that is itself phenomenological and that plays a crucial

role in the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty—will we recognize, in retrospect, how we used to parse it out according to our own measure, i.e., how the subject's self-constitution affected the construction of her world. Admittedly, Lispector realizes that it may be too much to ask human beings to persevere in pure immanence, to linger with this sublime nonexperience of the impersonal breath of life. In this case, we may first have to learn to divide life and reality *otherwise*, "to frame that monstrous, infinite flesh and cut it into pieces that something the size of my mouth can take in, and the size of my eyes' vision . . ." (p. 7), letting it overflow us from within. In doing so, we would follow the didactic example of G.H., who finally merges with the Real by biting into the monstrous flesh of the cockroach.

4. A "reduced" vision—not to be conflated with mere looking—where the seeing and that which is seen belong together in strict correlations. Poetically retracing the fulfillment of the act of gazing in the evidence it receives from the seen, G.H. attains nothing less than pure vision. "I don't understand what I saw," she reports, "I don't even know if I saw it, since my eyes ended up not being separate from what I saw" (p. 7). She lives in the gaze—a state that did not leave any time for thinking about or interpreting what had happened, for digesting the happening into an experience. But, unlike in traditional phenomenology, the cobelonging of these optical elements does not culminate in ready-made perceptual evidence, nor in the perfect transparency of meaning or sense; on the contrary, it causes the one who sees "purely" to get lost in the act of vision, being unable to assess it from the outside.

Lispector does not retrace the circle of pure *theoreia*, of thought thinking itself, of a meta-understanding that would grasp itself as a snake biting its own tail, in the very moment of extending itself outward, so as to comprehend the world. Instead, G.H. makes an effort to keep herself separate from her understanding, "to continue not understanding it" (p. 8), while keeping alive the nonsense of sense and breaking the perfect correlation of meaning in the very moment of constituting it.

5. *The temporal structure of experience as the present extended into the past and the future by means of retention and protention, a memory of the present that has already elapsed and the foresight of the present yet to come.* The narrator, in effect, rebels against this hermetically sealed time of experience, though, in rebelling against it, she presupposes it as something typically human. As soon as she vaguely intuits a secret, she immediately forgets it, severing the link between the present and the past that is not qualitatively different from it (p. 8). Almost immediately, she also banishes

the foresight that “preconditioned what I would see” (p. 9), cutting the tie with the future, which is indistinguishable from another, albeit deferred, present. Here, the absence of prevision, Cixous notes, liberates vision.<sup>6</sup> The point of departure remains phenomenological—inner time consciousness as the framework of any possible experience—and essentially human; reframing the world from an other-than-human perspective involves discarding the temporal parameters of the narrator’s previous life.<sup>7</sup>

6. *The dispossession of the world.* Everything I have mentioned thus far, from the deformation of subjectivity to the rebellion against the phenomenology of inner time consciousness, points toward the loss of the world as something that could be claimed as “my own,” familiar and open to manipulation. The “world was neither me nor mine [*não era nem eu nem meu*]” (p. 23 [25]): this statement leaves no chance for the workings of Husserl’s transcendental idealism. Still less does it respect Heidegger’s definition of the human as one who “has his world,” and, instead, matches the state of the animal “poor in the world” (*Weltarm*) and of the thing that is worldless (*Weltlos*).<sup>8</sup>

Everything is a little more complicated than this formal resemblance would intimate, however. G.H. neither has nor does not have the world. The attitude of possession no longer governs her relation to it, unless we conclude that she is possessed by the world, obsessed by it, abandons herself to it and thus, in this *ecstasis*, is finally able to “take pleasure in it” (p. 23). Or, again, “I was leaving *my* world and going into *the* world” (p. 55). This is the logic of her *becoming-animal*.<sup>9</sup>

7. *The striatedness of life, its division into various levels that are often at odds with one another.* What Husserl refers to as “living in the natural attitude,” taking for granted my own existence and that of the world around me, is the kind of living against which G.H. rebels—a life that, as she relates, “I have tamed and made familiar” (p. 10). A defamiliarized, depersonalized, dehumanized life awaits her, one that is wholly “supernatural” (p. 10), the embodied equivalent of the Husserlian transcendental life of consciousness. This life is, at once, superhuman and subhuman, animal-like and divine, a living that “isn’t tellable” and, hence, is not livable for the one who would feel the need not only to tell or to signify it (p. 13), but also to live in the acts of telling and signifying.

And just as life is not homogeneous, so passion is not a coherent whole, shattered as it is into many passions (akin to those of Christ) and serving as stepping stones on the path of becoming more *and* less than human. Lispector’s supernatural life is not transcendently metaphysical. It is

not placed above nature (*phusis*), for it engulfs the entire world, without, at the same time, amounting to the absolute immanence one finds, for instance, in Spinozan thought. The torture of living is that, in us, life is set against life; the horrific vivacity of the world permeates us, while our “consciousness of life,” in the movement of false transcendence, is opposed to our “personal” lives themselves. G.H. acknowledges this striatedness, also reflected in Husserlian phenomenology but, in the same stroke, repudiates the preference given to transcendental consciousness, to the life of the mind abstracted from that of the world.

These seven remnants or wreckagees of phenomenology, perceptible from the very threshold of Lispector’s text, constitute what I have referred to as “phenomenology at the limit.” At the limit of what? First and foremost, of *logos*: word, speech, reason. But also, crucially, of life, or better yet, of lives. On the multifaceted edges of phenomenology, G.H.’s being and thinking (if thought is what there is in this text) are suspended between the different strata of life—the animal and the human (not to mention the divine), the immanent and the transcendent, of consciousness and of the world, the inner and the outer—suspended, but not, therefore, already dead. To the contrary, such suspension energizes her narrative, animates it to the brink, to the point of excess, which, in its nonidentity, is identical to the titular “passion” of the book.

Human beings cannot feel this passion, because they cannot feel or live in the present. Instead, they throw or project their past expectations onto future experiences, turning these into a pale shadow of themselves, an ideality with which they desperately and futilely wish to catch up. To feel is always to experience beyond one’s experiential capacity (hence, to experience that which cannot be experienced), to be hypersensitive, even to (and within) the indifference of anonymous existence. Lispector’s writing is existentialist only in this very specific sense of an exorbitant experience of a possibility so malleable that it lacks an identifiable form, that encompasses everything, and that is paradoxically condensed in its totality into the smallest bit of reality, be it as insignificant as a dying cockroach. A passionate, nonhuman, or inhuman existentialism awaits us from the outset of this incredible book, intended, as the exordium states, for those “people whose outlook is fully formed” and is, therefore, ripe for a painstaking deformation and deformalization.

## II

What is it exactly that G.H. invites us to experience in excess of our experiential capacity? Nothing less than the way everything, including the seemingly inanimate world, experiences, or will have experienced, everything else.<sup>10</sup> With a flare for animism, the text unravels the reduced, depersonalized act of looking by extending it to the look not only of the animal (the cockroach) but also of the things themselves: “The world looks at itself in me. Everything looks at everything, everything experiences the other; in this desert things know things [*Tudo olha para tudo, tudo vive o outro; neste deserto as coisas sabem as coisas*]” (p. 58 [53]). From an empty shell, or an ordering form that surrounds and organizes nothing, the “I” grows into a medium for the world’s relation to itself, a passageway for its looking at itself.<sup>11</sup>

G.H.’s passion is this pathos and passivity of mediating between the world and itself, between things and other things. It is an intensity that has become extensive and extended, embodied as the channel for the self-relation of the world. The challenge—perhaps impossible but, in any case, one that necessarily underlies existential possibility—is to see or imagine the world seeing itself, from its “own” impersonal standpoint, from a veritable infinity of standpoints, or in the absence of any standpoint whatsoever. Not as the self-subsistent and independent objectivity, but as something situated on the hither side of the subject/object divide, at once knowing and known (by itself as other), suffused with the virtually unlimited experiential capacity and, therefore, wholly alive.

Although the task sounds difficult indeed, I need not do anything but exercise mere looking, so as to retribute to things their own look. This is what the *logos* of phenomena, in its muteness, looks like—the silent stares we usually consider to be “only” the surfaces of things facing other things. Like Lispector, Merleau-Ponty knew, in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, how to interpret such facing in terms of the experience of—which is to say, *proper to*—the things themselves.<sup>12</sup> To accentuate the look of things, their *eidos*, referring both to their gaze and appearance, is to graft the Platonic Ideas right onto the skin of reality.<sup>13</sup> The undoing of the human form, which, in and of itself, mutilates this look, affords us access to this secret without depth, one that is not hidden but phenomenal, inscribed on the surface of things, always available to view. This secret must be forgotten—“my new ignorance, which is forgetting, has become sacred” (p. 8)—over and over again, since those who do remember project an alien, human temporality onto the look of things, ipso facto violating it.

What is worth remembering, nevertheless, is that the thingly surface is not only on the outside, in a sort of objective world somehow separate from us, but also, and especially, within the human, undercutting all claims to transcendence: “the inhuman is our better part, is the thing, the thing part of people [*o inhumano é o melhor nosso, é a coisa, a parte coisa da gente*]” (p. 61 [56]). Despite all its striatedness, the concept of life is not opposed to that of the thing, as classical theories of reification would make us believe. The thingliness of life is unsurpassable: this, I would claim, is the most important insight of Lispector’s existential phenomenology, with its resistance to idealisms of all stripes, no matter how subtle they may be.

The animal, with its distinct experiential capacity, comes close to the self-experience of the world. In the animal’s hyperattention to life, G.H. detects traces of vigilance built into reality itself, condensed in the *figure* or *figuration* of living. The animal’s “attentiveness to living [is] inseparable from its body” (p. 43), even if its “entire life” is that of “aloof attentiveness” (p. 45), of which the narrator partakes on the verge of a certain death, when she is about to smash the cockroach with the door. If at all possible, the embodied hyperattention to life will, for humans, spell out distraction from the consciousness of this life, a mental state G.H. craves from the very inception of her narrative.

The well of phenomenological imagination runs dry at the point where we try to conceive of attention to something as nonthematic and nonobjectifiable as life, while refusing to distinguish between this attentive intensity of existence and the “life process itself” (p. 43). Attention to a nonobject certainly exceeds our experiential capacity, in that it precludes the cognitive work of chopping the world into manageable chunks we may mentally digest and process in the form of experiences, memories, or representations. And the passion of this attitude, in all its aloofness, is that it subjects us to everything, so that the thing and the animal in us *exist us*, convert us into their objects. The activity of existence spells out the passivity of existents: “its [the cockroach’s] existence existed me [*a existência dela me existia*]” (p. 68 [61]). Existence, devoid of specifications and differentiations, becomes the subject, grammatical and otherwise, that determines everything else.

Still, as G.H. attests, there is no admittance into everything, no access to supersentient reality through everything at once. The entry point must be delimited and the shape of this delimitation is the dying animal: “This room had only one way in, and it was a narrow one: through the cockroach” (p. 52). Here, then, is both the promise and the problem:

the promise of shedding one's human countenance and the problem of needing a determinate form to do so. The animal is a figure of life and, therefore, life's circumscription, the accentuation of one of its modalities. Moreover, the animal is a figure, onto which humans project themselves by analogy as morphological as it is ontological. In the animal's eye, we recognize the human eye, recovering ourselves.

G.H. indulges in the excesses of this recognition: "Cockroaches don't have noses. I looked at it, with that mouth of its, and its eyes: it looked like a dying mulatto woman. But its eyes were black and radiant. The eyes of a girl about to be married" (p. 48). Although its was "a shapeless face" (p. 47), it was a face nonetheless—a chance for G.H. to experience empathy, to smuggle bits of herself across the threshold of pure life. Were it a plant, or a bacterium, or any other nonanimal figuration of life that pointed the way into the "room" of absolute immanence, would it not have been more difficult to succumb to the anthropomorphizing temptation of recovering oneself in the other?<sup>14</sup>

### III

Recall, however, that G.H. does not deliver herself entirely to pure immanence; she does not melt into the world, in spite of all the radical passivity and pleasure of self-abandon she experiences well in excess of her experiential capacity. To the extent that narration winds on, with all the hesitations, not to mention graphic and narrative ruptures, something of the past *logos* (thus, memory and time itself) remains irreducible. Until, that is to say, the final lines of the text, where G.H. merges with the world, passes into it as it passes into her, when she swallows "cockroach matter" and thereafter finds herself bereft not only of understanding but also of speech. She incorporates life itself into herself and, powerless either to contain or to organize this impersonal existence, expires the final "I adore . . .," "*eu adoro*," in synchrony with the world's own breathing, the "continual breathing . . . we hear and call silence" (p. 90).

The true end of the book is not the word "*adoro*." And it is not even the unsayable three dots of the ellipsis, but this silence that demands to be heard after we flip the last page. "The world interdependent with me . . . [H]ow will I be able to speak except timidly, like this: life is itself for me. Life is itself for me, and I don't understand what I am saying. And, therefore, I adore . . ." (p. 173). The full coincidence of life and the "I," not to mention of life with itself, means that there is zero distance

between the narrator and anything that could still be expressed. *Logos* bleeds into life, and life into *logos*, producing the silence of fulfillment, the unspeakable fullness bordering on sheer immanence.<sup>15</sup> Instead of the phenomenological hearing-oneself-speak in the intimacy of inner discourse productive of subjectivity, we are left, at best, with something like hearing-oneself-hear, “like a blind man listening to his own listening” (pp. 44–45).

Until then, until the closure of the space, or spacing, around which we constitute ourselves, in the narrativized deferral of the end, we receive a testimony regarding the mutation of lived space and time in the aftermath of their dehumanization. Similar to the metamorphosis of Kafka’s Gregor Samsa, the events surrounding the passions of G.H. unfold in a room that gradually comes to encompass the entire world, standing in a metonymic relation to the Real and to life itself. All of space, infinite as it is, fits into this room, which is first detached from the rest of the apartment by being isolated from the environment of habitual living—“as though this minaret of a room were not attached to either the apartment or the building” (p. 30).

Further, the room becomes uninhabitable for the one who is trapped in it, with the effect of shattering the narrator’s previous identity. It becomes uninhabitable not because the conditions of possibility for life itself are withdrawn from it but, on the contrary, because it turns into the epicenter of these conditions, challenging G.H. to dwell in the possible *as possible*. This is the sense in which Lispector appropriates Platonic heliocentrism: the room is not the cave sheltered from sunlight, but the sublime place of the sun itself, the possible as such which proves to be impossible to inhabit. “In the rest of the apartment, the sun filtered in from the outside . . . But here the sun didn’t seem to come from the outside to inside: this seems to be the place where the sun itself was, fixed and unmoving, with a harsh light, as though the room didn’t close its eyes, even at night” (pp. 34–35).

The anonymous vigilance of the room transmits the subjectless attention of things and the living attention of the animal to life. Existential spatiality, even and especially in its absolute emptiness—which is the same as oversaturation and excessive fullness—becomes inhospitable to human existence that melts away or dries up and breaks into smithereens in the room’s “harsh light,” *dureza de luz*. A fatal shift in the experience of space cannot help but affect the rest of the categories, through which perceptions are sifted. The breakdown of G.H.’s subjectivity commences with her being expelled from the room she had known before, within this very room itself.

Old schemas of spatiality cease to function, impotent to orient the narrator in the world, where a “web of spaces” confounds the familiar modes of organizing one’s experience (p. 37). The master distinction of metaphysics is similarly not exempt from the remolding of spatiality: it simply does not apply to the room where the inside passes into the outside, contaminating the opposition between the two: “Even inside it [the room], I somehow kept staying outside” (p. 37). Such being-outside of the inside is an accurate depiction of the existential excess of spatiality, housing something or someone other than human within the human. It betokens the expansion of the room beyond its actual physical proportions, all the way to a “limitless vastness” (p. 51) of that which is sheerly possible.

But it is this sheer possibility, or, better, the attempt to dwell in it without mediations, that induces the most unbearable of passions in G.H., whose psychic interiority is exteriorized to the extent that she retreats into herself—to the point where she discovers that her “soul had flattened itself against the wall [*minha alma se encostara até a parede*]” (p. 56 [51]), presumably recognizing herself in a photograph. The flattening of the soul, its extension and spatialization allowing it to lean (*encostar-se*) against the wall, signals that what the narrator explores is the materiality of possible space, indifferently enveloping *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, the extended thing and the thinking thing.<sup>16</sup> Thinghood, taken in the quasi-animist sense full of possibilities and subjectless vision, is the principle of spatiality: more important than the fact that things are in space is the observation that space, as a possibility, is in the things themselves. The birth or rebirth of space, experience, and passion from the standpoint of living thinghood is, thus, one of the most persistent leitmotifs of *The Passion According to G.H.*

The possible is neither contemplated, nor imagined, nor represented, nor projected into the future. It is undergone, suffered through, until the pathetic, pathos-laden being of the sufferer gives in, turning inside out. The pain of existence is concentrated in this becoming-possible, in the aporetic living-through of possibility qua possibility that does not tolerate any actual confines, edges, borders, or limits of places, bodies, and identities. It matters little that the objectivity of physical space stays untouched by the prevarications of the possible, that “the dimensions, the dimensions remained the same” (p. 56).

The existential primacy of possibility over actuality means that everything alters, beyond recognition, even where nothing “really” changes. The same space is, at the same time and without contradiction, wholly

other. The room is the room itself, the entire world, life, and the promise of pure immanence. Such redoubling is, of course, symptomatic of the rise of signification, the novel regime of the sign that manages to “speak” the possible within the Real, not as its negation but as its opening unto itself. But the “speaking out” of the possible is mute, for it has no actual words to its avail, which is why it may be confused with silence, the mere possibility of *logos*, of speech, and of the word.

The same may be said apropos of G.H.’s existential temporality, which issues from her inability to remember the past and her refusal to anticipate the future. All that remains is the present, the entire “empire of the present . . . opening gigantic perspectives on another present” (pp. 97, 99). This temporal empire, encompassing the vastness of the possible, extends past the human scale, on which it initially depends and which is measured by the time of life and its so-called experiential contents. Hence, the gigantism of those perspectives, where the present passes into another present ad infinitum, deferring representation as much as repetition and furnishing, in what without a doubt is a paraphrase of the sixteenth-century Brazilian author Father Antônio Vieira, “the prehistory of the future” (p. 99).<sup>17</sup> The pure now of G.H. is neither a point nor a line. Neither a disruption nor a moment of transition, the instant of impersonal or depersonalized life is “unimaginable” because “between the right now and the I there is no space” (p. 70). This erasure of distance produces the time of *The Passion*, if not passion itself, as the quasi-unmediated incorporation of the now into the “I,” causing this “I” to expand to the point of exploding its confines.

The empire of the present, with the gigantic vistas it opens, demands a different experience of time and, therefore, a wholly other subjectivity in excess of the human—a subjectivity as “swollen” (*inchada*, pregnant) or “ripe” (*madura*), with the present as the shadows in the rest of G.H.’s apartment and as the moment of the “now” itself (p. 72 [64]). Only in Hegel’s hyperhuman dialectic will this now-moment signify an empty, barren, abstract point of time interchangeable with any other point. Lispector, on the other hand, seems to take the other phenomenology—that of Husserl—to heart, albeit with a twist: rather than augur the intuitional fulfillment of empty intentions, the fullness of the now overflows the subject’s experience of inner time consciousness and turns flat, brining to the exterior the very kernel of this swollen interiority. What is full, in the end, is superficiality—“ripe superficiality” (p. 72)—where nothing is subtracted from the phenomenal order of surfaces or appearances, not even subjectivity itself. Time passes into space.

A critic influenced by deconstruction would surely say that, in her clamoring for pure immanence, however impossible it might be to attain, Lispector disrespects nothing less than *différance*, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space in a process than never reaches its final destination. More grist for the mill of deconstruction will be drawn from the special privilege accorded to pure present in a narrative, which seems to eschew a qualitatively different future—the one that is to come, *a-venir*, dissimilar to another anticipatable present.

Such criticism, however, is too precipitous. The pure present of G.H. is, precisely, not identical to itself, in that it leaves enough time and space for “the thing itself” to escape, rather than to be captured by a more accurate name: “Maybe I’ll find another name, so much crueller right from the outset, so much more the thing itself. Or maybe I won’t find one. Is love when you don’t give a name to the things’ identity?” (p. 79).<sup>18</sup> Another passion flourishes on the edge of signification, of space, and of time here—love, interpreted as the refusal to name the thing and, thus, to seal and confirm its identity.

Perhaps, then, one must go through the passions to G.H. so as to learn how to experience this singular passion of love, well beyond the limits of human temporality and spatiality. This is why the work ends with “I adore . . .”: *logos* passes into life and on into silence under the sign of love that, in all its ostensibly mystical plenitude, harbors a seed of negativity and refusal, when it comes to naming the thing and conferring identity onto it. Lispector’s existential phenomenology lets beings be, while taking care not to thematize them “as such.” This is *its* passion, one that should become inspirational for contemporary philosophy.

UNIVERSITY OF THE BASQUE COUNTRY

1. Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. Ronald W. Sousa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), referred to in text by page number. Occasionally, I will indicate the Portuguese original page numbers in brackets. These references are derived from Clarice Lispector, *A Paixão Segundo G.H.* (Lisboa: Relógio D’Água, 2000).

2. This essential ambiguity is, according to Nelson Vieira, the openness of meaning, “reminiscent of Hebraic hermeneutics.” Lispector, Vieira continues, “welcomes the unreliability of meaning, structure, and representations” (*Jewish Voices in Brazilian Literature: A Prophetic Discourse of Alterity* [Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995], p. 149).

3. For more on the importance of gazing in Lispector's texts, see Regina Pontieri, *Clarice Lispector: Uma Poética do Olhar* (São Paulo: Ateliê Editorial, 1999).
4. Hélène Cixous, *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*, trans. Verena Andermatt Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 83.
5. It is problematic, to say the least, to assert, as Earl Fitz does, that G.H. is "a deeply human poststructuralist hero, a radical, acutely self-conscious and self-questioning skeptic," *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector: The Différance of Desire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), p. 100. This characterization applies only on the condition that the human is defined by the radical excess and by its capacity, embodied in G.H., to become other-than-human.
6. Cixous, *Readings*, p. 88: "Where there is no more prevision, there can be vision."
7. This, too, may be classified under the heading of phenomenological reduction. See José Américo Motta Pessanha, "Clarice Lispector: O Itinerário da Paixão," in *A Paixão Segundo G.H.: Edição Crítica*, ed. Benedito Nunes (Paris: ALLCA XX / EDUSP, 1996), p. 315.
8. On the worldlessness of the thing and the paucity of the animal "having" the world, see Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 197–226.
9. The resonances with Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* are more than obvious here (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987]). But the "method" or the path toward such a mode of becoming remains, nevertheless, phenomenological.
10. Without possibility, however, everything, including passion, is not quite everything. As Lispector's narrator notes in *The Hour of the Star* (trans. Giovanni Pontiero [New York: New Directions, 1992]), "I have experienced almost everything, even passion and despair. Now I wish to possess what might have been but never was" (p. 21).
11. Therefore, much more is at stake here than a mere repugnance with the world, a classical sense of existential nausea, to which Benedito Nunes reduces Lispector's narrative in *O Mundo de Clarice Lispector* (Manaus: Edições do Governo do Estado, 1966), p. 20.
12. Among others, Maurice Merleau-Ponty articulates the sense of the "experience of the thing," imaginable from its own standpoint. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. Colin Smith [London: Routledge, 2004]) things not only "display themselves" to me but also "see" and guarantee the permanence of those dimensions of other things that are hidden from my view (p. 79).
13. John Sallis, *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996).
14. On the other hand, even plants may be humanized when we detect traces of "sadness" in flowers, as Lispector does in *The Stream of Life* (trans. Elizabeth Lowe and Earl Fritz [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988], p. 45). And then, conversely, it is possible to transfigure the face into a nonhuman feature, belonging, for instance, to things: "And there are things so much more delicate that they are not visible. But

they all have a delicacy equivalent to what it means for our body to have a face: that sensitization of the body that is the human face. The thing has a sensitization about itself that is like a face" (*The Passion*, p. 147).

15. The silence of fulfillment has and will be often taken as a symptom of Lispector's mysticism. See Renata Mautner Wasserman, *Central at the Margin: Five Brazilian Women Writers* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2007), pp. 125.

16. This productive conflation between extension and thought is accentuated in Cixous's *Reading with Clarice Lispector* (trans. Verena Andermatt Conley [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990]): "What can happen, by chance, is the moment of encounter between oneself, a space capable of thought and something else" (pp. 162–63).

17. The title of Vieira's most famous book is, precisely, *History of the Future* (*História do Futuro* [Lisboa, 1718]).

18. It is, thus, a gross mistake to assert that "Lispector... seems to express a desire for the restoration of the absent referent to the text" (Josephine Donovan, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Reading the Orange," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy [Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998] p. 84).