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THEORETICAL / PHILOSOPHICAL PAPER

Eros In-between and All-around

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Abstract

In this paper, I focus on the concept of embeddedness as the background against which eros is a force and a power in and through interactions. To go beyond an internalist account of eros, I engage in a dialogue with some philosophical accounts of desire from an enactive perspective.This enables me to shed light on the location of the embodied tension as "in-between" lovers and "all-around" them. Crucial to this tensional account of embedded eros is the intertwining between self and others' becomings in processes of participatory sense-making. Through participatory sense-making lovers make their worlds, creating new ways of being and knowing in the ensemble. I advance some steps towards an enactive ethics of eros where, I claim, the cultivation of the space in-between and all-around lovers is the key to avoid the traps of a degenerated form of eros.

Keywords Eros · Desire · Participatory sense-making · Loving world-making · Embeddedness · Tension · Enaction

You are in love. Your heart races at the mere thought of meeting the beloved. When you are in their presence, you sweat and your hands tremble. You may find yourself speechless, or a flood of words may overwhelm them and submerge you. You would like to know more and everything about them. You desire to caress them and to be embraced. You wish to immerse yourself in their gaze and thus finally to be seen. Poets, writers, philosophers, and artists of all ages and places have marvellously expressed the various forms in which eros can be experienced. They have captured its nuances and multiplicity, its tensions and vulnerabilities. One aspect, however, has often been overlooked in emphasising eros's personal and intimate character. This

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is its embedded character, that is, how eros is a force and a power that acts between lovers and makes their worlds.

In this paper, I will advance an embedded view of eros with the help of some enactive conceptual tools, i.e., participatory sense-making (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007) and ongoing becoming (Di Paolo, 2020). They will allow me to understand eros as a specific type of tension. I will argue that eros's tensional character is relational ("in-between") and immersive ("all-around"). As relational, I will argue that eros is a force in-between the lovers. As immersive, it is a generative power that contributes to self-making and world-making. This is because eros creates and shapes the space in-between and all-around the lovers by activating and supporting processes of participatory sense-making and ongoing becoming.

Plato's philosophy is an important source of inspiration for my work on eros. I will draw from his accounts of eros, but also from Luce Irigaray and Gilles Deleuze, in the first three sections of the paper. The aim is neither historical nor comparative. I do not argue for a unitary account of desire among these authors who come from different philosophical traditions. Instead, I will engage with some key features of their approaches for developing an enactive account of eros as in-between and all-around. This means that their approaches offer the context out of which my argument is developed.

It might be argued that there are more appropriate authors to consider for this topic. For instance, it might be stressed that a key reference to psychoanalysis is a must for any work on desire. Although I do agree that there is a lot of important contemporary research in the field, I would like to stress how much Plato's approach can be useful for thinking about the tensional dimension of eros in enactive terms. Also, this is not alien to psychoanalysis either. Just consider that Lacan delivered a seminar on Plato's *Symposium* (Lacan, 2015). Moreover, although this paper is not a paper about Irigaray or Deleuze, it is important to stress that Lacan is a crucial interlocutor for both Irigaray and Deleuze. All in all, I maintain that drawing from these traditions is not arbitrary and that, on the contrary, can offer important insights and enlarge the references to think about eros from an enactive perspective.

My aim is ameliorative. I put forth this enactive account of eros as a form of cultivated eros. I do not argue that eros is intrinsically beneficial. Domestic violence is inflicted by intimate partners. Sexual abuse, exploitation, and violence can be performed "in the name of love". So, I will advance some steps towards an enactive ethics of eros where, I claim, the cultivation of the space in-between and all-around lovers is the key to avoiding the traps of a degenerated form of eros. That is why I need to focus on the embeddedness of eros first and foremost.

In the section Eros as a Force and a Power, I will offer a conceptual analysis of eros as a force and a power. In the section The in-between, I will explore the "in-between" which is the location of eros as a force. In the section From within an Ensemble, I will dive into the "all-around" that is the location of eros as a power. In the section Towards an Enactive Ethics of Eros, I will conclude by pointing to the responsibility to cultivate the eros in-between and all-around.

Eros as a Force and a Power

Let us start with some terminological and conceptual clarifications. I employ the Greek term "eros" instead of the English "desire"[1] because, especially in its Platonic heritage, "eros" conveys the meaning of "force" (*rhome*)[2] and "power" (*dynamis*).[3] As a force and a power, eros is agentive and generative.[4] As Diotima said in Plato's *Symposium*, one "gives birth" when one is in the company of the beloved (*Symp.* 209c1–3).

The English word "desire" comes from the Latin verb *desiderare*, meaning "longing for" and "wishing for". A tension is constitutive of desire since *desiderare* comes from *de-sideo*, meaning "from the stars". But this etymology, instead of revealing the generative dimension of desire, mostly indicates the experience of nonfulfilment. The stars are far away. The lover needs to extend herself to go there—as the phrasal verb "longing for" implies. Since desire comes from the stars, the lover wants to extend herself to reach the stars as the object that provokes desire but cannot get there. The prefix "de" has different meanings. It does not only mean "from" but it has also a privative value. In this case, *desideo* would mean "absence of stars". So, although there might be a positive attitude of hoping to get to the stars, this is mostly experienced as an unfulfilled desire, since it seems quite unlikely that one will get there. *Desideo* is then an experience of lack and absence of the object of desire. It follows that the lover suffers both for not possessing the stars and for doubting the real possibility of future fulfilment. This is the tragic experience of a frustrated desire, which I will return to in the final section. I do not want to say that this experience is not acknowledged by the Greeks.[5] Just think about the suffering of love so passionately expressed by Sappho and Sophocles, for instance. However, by employing the Greek word "eros" instead of "desire," I signal my intention to focus more on the generative dimension of this tension and to explicitly support the Platonic understanding of "eros" as a cultivated form of desire.

[1] I use "eros" for my thesis but not for reporting other authors' views. In these cases, I retain their terminology.

[2] "ἀπ᾽ αὐτῆς τῆς ῥώμης ἐπωνυμίαν λαβοῦσα", Plato, *Phdr.* 238c4.

[3] As we will see in the following section, the *dynamis* of eros should be understood as a potentiality for generation in a process of ongoing becoming, and not as the power of a ruler that enslaves the lovers. Plato was very aware of this latter meaning, which has been depicted in Greek tragedy and lyric poetry. His conceptualisation of eros is an alternative to it and, as in other cases, his philosophical method is a resemantisation of traditional concepts, a transformation of ordinary experience. For eros's enslaving and destructive power, see Belfiore, 2012, p. 121.

[4] Eros as a force and a power is at work in natural events, in the living processes of all beings, and in the embodied dynamics of erotic interactions. In this regard, Eryximachus's discourse in the *Symposium* is exemplary, where eros is seen as the power that creates harmony between dynamic tensions in the weather, seasons, and bodily illnesses (Candiotto, 2015). For a contemporary investigation into it, see Weber (2017).

[5] By Plato too. In the *Symposium*, before providing the new characterisation of eros as a generative power, he presents other common views of eros, as the very famous one of desire as the search for one's middle half. In the *Phaedrus*, eros is also presented as a desire (ἐπιθυμία, 237d4), but Plato is careful to differentiate it from other desires and, in consonance with the *Symposium*, to signal its generative power as what can transform a man into a philosopher, namely, a lover of wisdom.

It might be objected that taking Plato as one prominent source for thinking about the embeddedness of eros is problematic because, also in our ordinary language when we say "platonic love" we refer to a kind of love that is disembodied—an ideal love that does not include, or even deny, the lovers' erotic experience. However, this is due to a highly dualistic interpretation of Plato's metaphysics that, unfortunately, does not speak for the inherently relational account of platonic love. Although it is not the aim of this paper to tackle the dualistic interpretation of Plato's philosophy, I will shed light on some key features of Platonic eros that should at least make readers question this assumption and appreciate how fruitful Plato's conceptualisation of eros can be for our discussion of its embeddedness.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato carefully describes the phenomenology of the erotic encounter as an ambivalent experience in which one feels a tension between pleasure and pain, lack and abundance. Eros is felt when beauty is first recognised in bodies. So, a beautiful boy is worshipped as a god since he is seen as a god's statue (*Phaedr.* 251a6).[6] As is also made explicit in the *Symposium*, this implies a widening of focus, from the narrow desire for a single body to the love for all bodies, and from there to souls, human activities, laws, and knowledge (*Symp.* 210a4–c7). Only in the great sea of beauty (*Symp.* 210d4), free from the attachment to the beloved and the need to possess them, can the lover generate wisdom. This is the cultivated form of eros[7] that, although is not given to the individual,[8] still is active "in-between" the lovers:

> When someone has been pregnant with these in his soul from early youth (…) desires to beget and give birth, he too will certainly go about seeking the beauty in which he would beget; for he will never beget in anything ugly. Since he is pregnant, then, he is much more drawn to bodies that are beautiful than to those that are ugly; and if he also has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed, he is even more drawn to this combination; such a man makes him instantly teem with ideas and arguments about virtue (…) when he makes contact with someone beautiful and keeps company with him, he conceives and gives birth to what he has been carrying inside him for ages. And whether they are together or apart, he remembers that beauty. And in common with him he nurtures the newborn; such people, therefore, have much more to share than do the parents of human children, and have a firmer bond of friendship, because the children in whom they have a share are more beautiful and more immortal. (Plato, *Symp.* 209 b–d, trans. Nehamas and Woodruff, in Cooper, 1997)

There are many important aspects to analyse in these lines that are beyond the scope of this paper. Let me just stress the crucial one: Plato says that the lover can give birth to virtue by eventually finding and being in communion with a beautiful soul.

[6] There is an important aesthetic element in play here that, in Plato's philosophy, enables the recollection of the ideas, also with the support of eros. See on this Morgan, 2015 and Pfefferkorn & Spinelli, 2021. On the traditional image of the beloved as a god, see Lear & Cantarella, 2008.

[7] For an ethics of desire in Plato's *Symposium*, see Sheffield, 2009.

[8] There is a clear extension beyond the individual in Plato's eros. This view has been challenged in the contemporary debate, especially by Vlastos (1973) and Nussbaum (2001).

Beauty plays a central role here. The reason is that beauty is "the most clearly visible and the most loved" (*Phaedr.* 250e1) among the ideas. Its appearance is tangible and acts as the springboard to the realm of ideas. The sensible world is not at all denied by Plato as something necessarily misleading and dangerous. But this does not mean that all sense experiences are beneficial: the lover needs to find a beautiful soul. Only by immersing herself in the great sea of beauty[9] can the soul remember its immortal nature and beget its offspring.[10]

In reading these lines, the reader might think that there is some truth in the common understanding of platonic love as disembodied. It might be argued that Plato acknowledges the value of beautiful appearances but that their value is only functional in going beyond them. It follows that the outcome of the erotic encounter does not lie in this world but in the ideal realm. Proof of this is that what is generated in the encounter is not a physical offspring but wisdom. The aim of the erotic encounter indeed lies beyond the encounter itself since it serves an epistemic and ethical value. But this does not mean that Plato underestimates the erotic experience. On the contrary, the erotic encounter is highly valued as something that can generate virtue and lead to wisdom. The practice of virtue does not lie in another world: the effects of the erotic encounter are visible in the lover herself, in the transformation that occurs in her style of life through the generation of wisdom. Wisdom is more than propositional knowledge: it leads to the good life since it implies moral improvement and self-betterment.[11]

I will deepen the analysis of the processes of transformation activated by eros in the second section through a discussion of the enactive concept of becoming. Also, I will highlight the ethical meaning of a cultivated form of eros in the final section of this paper. For now, let us understand better why eros is in-between lovers in Plato's account.

Plato describes the in-betweenness of eros as a force, iconographically depicted as a stream that "draws the soul" (*Crat.* 419e–420a).[12] He says that this force flows with a rush that draws the soul on the impulse of its flowing. Here Plato is mythologically describing the two sides of the force that creates erotic tension. He refers to two brothers, *himeros* and *eros*: the first speaks for the abundance and impetus of the force, and the second reminds us that it is a flowing "from without" (*Crat.* 420a). It is important to focus on the entanglement of these two brothers because only through it can eros be a tension towards the beloved. It is precisely the lack and absence that kindles the desire to fiercely go searching for the beloved. There cannot simply be

[9] I will analyse the notion of "immersion" in more detail in section From within an Ensemble.

[10] I cannot explain the epistemological role of eros in *anamnesis* (recollection) and how this type of erotic wisdom is triggered by sensible experience here. For the relevant literature and my take on this, see Candiotto (2021). In this regard, it is also important to mention the role of the lover as a midwife who helps the beloved to generate knowledge. See Burnyeat, 1992 and Edmonds, 2000.

[11] This signals the important entanglement of epistemology and ethics that virtue epistemologists inherited from Plato and Aristotle. For more on this, see Zagzebski (1996), Chappell (2014) and, specifically about wisdom, Grimm (2015).

[12] On the fluxes of the soul and eros as psychic energy, see Sassi (2011).

an abundance of the flow of pleasure[13] because there would be no impetus to keep the flow in motion. This is why Plato calls the second brother "the flowing from without".[14] Still, there is also the abundance that comes from the first brother and motivates and supports the lover in the process.

The tension of eros as a force is therefore made by both abundance and lack. This tension is described here as a river current. This tension can lead the river to the great sea of beauty (*Symp.* 210a–212b). It is here that Eros will be not simply a force but a power to beget.

To sum up: eros is both a force *and* a power in Plato's account. My main interest here is about the embeddedness of these force and power. As a force, eros is "in-between". As a power, eros generates from within the "great sea of Beauty". In the following sections, by drawing on Luce Irigaray and Gilles Deleuze, I will use some enactive conceptual tools to deepen the investigation into the location of eros and thus advance an enactive ethics of desire.

The In-between

The space in-between lovers is the space where eros can flow. In this section, I will explore more deeply the in-betweenness of eros for uncovering the generative tensions of lovers' encounters. In this manner, I will further explain why eros is a force located in-between lovers.

My reference in this regard is the enactive exploration of Luce Irigaray's philosophical work on love (Candiotto & De Jaegher, 2021). For Irigaray, the in-between is the space of non-appropriation of the beloved, the space where the beloved is not a prey. The space in-between is what allows the lover to walk the path towards the beloved and, at the same time, to come back to herself. Irigaray has marked this space with the dative form "I love *to* you" (Irigaray, 1996). There is tension in this "to" that takes the shape of a direction and an offering. Instead of taking and possessing the object without any residue, as in "I love you," the tensional "to" is what allows the encounter between the lovers, since it moves the lover towards the beloved and preserves the space necessary for the construction of new meanings.

Although Irigaray refuses to understand this tension in a dialectical manner, mostly because she understands dialectics from within the master–slave paradigm (Irigaray, 1996: 19–33),[15] enactive thinkers have shown that the transformations induced by

[13] The pleasure is felt when the effusion of beauty causes the lover to get hot (*Phaedr.* 251b1–2). This effusion is also the means of irrigating his wings (*Phaedr.* 251b2–c1) that will enable him to fly back to the contemplation of the truth. So, when the desire flows and the soul is watered and heated by the contemplation of the boy's beauty, the soul recovers from pain and is happy (*Phaedr.* 251c6–d2).

[14] This tension is also exemplified in the genealogical myth of eros as the child of *Poros* (resourcefulness) and *Penia* (poverty) (*Symp.* 203b1–204a1). The tensional aspect of eros can also be found in Diotima's denial of considering eros a god and of ascribing to it only positive attributes, as done by the previous speakers.

[15] For an analysis of Irigaray's criticism of Hegel's dialectic, see Roberts (2017).

dialectical tensions arise precisely in this space in-between.[16] As Sebastian Vörös has argued (Vörös, 2018), the dialectics in place here is existential. This means that the tensions work in the pre-reflective intentionality of the living body.[17] In the enactive approach, sense-making takes place precisely at this level of dialectical embodied encounter with the natural and social environments. It follows that the in-between is the tensional place where lovers are motivated and pushed to build new meanings with the beloved. Eros as a force in-between is not the hunter's grip on the prey, or the possessive act of male domination over women, as Irigaray strenuously denounces (Irigaray, 1985). It is a generative force.

In enactive terms, this means that lovers feel a need to create new meanings and new worlds[18] together. There is an existential pressure and concern in action here. More technically, we can say that loving is participatory sense-making (Candiotto & De Jaegher, 2021). The key word here is "participatory": in loving each other, lovers take part in the other life. For enaction, life is an autopoietic process. Living beings are constantly remaking themselves in interaction with others and the environment (Thompson, 2007). What is specific about loving is that a lover desires to take part in the beloved's process of ongoing becoming. In doing so, they build new meanings and new worlds together. They can do it in better and worse ways— that is why an ethics of desire is required. I will return to this in the final section. For now, let me go deeper into the beneficial role that this tension can play as a need to take part in others' sense-making.

In this case, the tension takes the shape of an existential concern for the life of the other (Weber, 2017). Andreas Weber has described it as a gift to the beloved. When this tension is active on both sides of the relationship, the loving relationship becomes a mutual giving of gifts (Weber, 2020). A traditional distinction between eros as egocentric and agape as heterocentric is often depicted in the history of the idea of love. However, I would like to stress that, from an enactive point of view, this distinction is too rigid because it overshadows the mutual transformation that can emerge out of a loving relationship. A heterocentric tension (desire as a gift to the beloved, caring for her flourishing) does not imply that a loving act of giving has no impact on the lover. On the contrary, in moving forward to the other and contributing to the beloved's living processes, the lover is also remaking herself and their relationship. This is a crucial tenet of enaction: a mutual constitution of self and other is implied by sense-making processes (Varela, 1991). What is new here is to stress that there is a specific kind of self-making done by loving. So, an egocentric outcome, in terms of self-transformation, is in place in this erotic tension, but it is not the motive of loving the beloved. It is a bonus, a gift back, not the main motivation. This is why

[16] See Vörös and Bitbol (2017) and Di Paolo et al. (2018), Chap. 6, on the role of dialectics in the enactive thinking. See Candiotto and De Jaegher (2021) on the generative tensions in participatory sense-making.

[17] The key reference here is Merleau-Ponty and not Hegel. See Pollard, 2016 for an interpretation of the lived aspect of the existence in Merleau-Ponty as a dialectics of existence.

[18] I will go deeper into world-making in the section From within an Ensemble while focusing here on sense-making. However, it is important to bear in mind that sense-making is always world-making, in enactive terms.

it is crucial to focus on the "to" of the "I love to you" as the tensional force that creates the space in-between.[19]

This is another way of saying that eros is in-between. The motivational power of eros is an existential need to take part in sense-making and, so, to contribute to the beloved's becoming. The need to take part in the other's life lies in the space in-between the lovers, as a force that activates the creation of new meanings together, the opening of new possibilities for action, and the creation of new worlds. So, properly speaking, the tension is "mesocentric," in-between. It is a force that establishes the space in-between and settles the ongoing processes of self and other mutual transformations. Stressing that this tension is inherently affective, as a desire to contribute to the beloved's life, is a non-reductionist view of life that points to the entanglement of living and loving.[20] In contributing to the beloved's life, the lover desires to make their life meaningful and worthy of being lived. Eros as a desire for participatory sense-making is then an existential concern, namely, a wish to create shared meanings, values, and worlds.

Understanding this existential need from an embodied perspective is important because it allows us to appreciate that the space in-between lovers—the embeddedness of eros as a force to create meanings—is made of their embodied encounters. An objection that can immediately arise here is that a space in-between lovers cannot be "embodied" since there are no bodies in-between and the body is the locus of desire.[21]

By saying that eros is "in-between," I am not refuting that eros is an embodied power. But this meaning of "embodiment" is not reductionist, especially in that specific form of reductionism that considers the body as a property of a single individual. The body, instead, is intrinsically dependent on other bodies and the environment. Just think about the continuous exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the living process of breathing.[22] This example is not out of context. For Irigaray (1996), the space in-between is the space of breathing, of the embodied rhythm of moving forward to the beloved and coming back to oneself. As breathing, eros flows through the space in-between, in and through our living bodies. This is due to the inherently embodied nature of loving as participatory sense-making. Participatory sense-making is made of embodied *encounters*. The embodiment of the in-between is where the bodies meet each other: the space in-between is then made of these embodied encounters. This means that embodiment is not only about proprioception but also about feeling

[19] Although I cannot explore the dynamics of unrequited love here, and more should be said especially in its ethical practice, I would like to stress that the "to" is also what allows the lover to not intrude into the beloved's life if they do not reciprocate. The reason is that the "to" points to the beloved's flourishing and this also implies letting them be. See Maclaren (2002) and De Jaegher (2019).

[20] So, human animals are not simply moved by basic needs of survival, reproduction, and shelter (the famous "physiological needs" in Maslow's hierarchy of needs [1943]).

[21] Among the enactive thinkers, Maiese (2011) has strongly advocated for locating desire in the body. See, for instance, p. 110.

[22] See Weber (2020: 66) for details.

the other body through one's body[23] and, so, feeling the ongoing relationship from within—the "intertwining," in Merleau-Ponty's words,[24] the space in-between.

In loving as participatory sense-making, one can feel the other's body from within, and through the other's body can feel the space that is created, shaped, and inhabited together, in a full range of sensations and embodied shared activities.[25] It follows that the embodiment of eros in-between is agentive. Eros is of a performative body: a body that goes towards the beloved and then comes back to itself, exploring the tensions and rhythms of the space in-between. The enactive feeling body is therefore tensional, a body of becoming.

Along with "embodiment," "becoming" is the other key concept that helps in understanding loving as participatory sense-making. The in-between is, in enactive terms, an intertwining of self and others' becomings. For Ezequiel Di Paolo, "becoming" means an existential structure of being human (Di Paolo, 2020). He conceives this structure in a purely dynamic manner, as a constant process of transformation of human bodies through the entanglement with other bodies and the environment. Importantly, he takes the processes of transformation as a tension, namely, the tendency towards socially mediated forms of potentiality. This is crucial for my thesis because, in drawing from it, I can detail the specific tension to the participatory sense-making of eros. This is the deeper meaning of eros as a tension: thanks to the desire for participatory sense-making, the lover takes part in the beloved's processes of becoming—to her life here and now, not abstractly, as we will see in a moment.[26]

Becoming is a temporal structure. As in the biological process of insemination, foetal development, and childbirth, so the generation and development of subjectivities take place within a temporal process. This temporality, however, is not of the individual only. In a loving relationship, it develops through a dialectic of participation in mutual developments and transformations. For enaction, there are no fixed and already made subjectivities. Selves are never finished: they are in an ongoing process of transformation in and through relationships. When these processes of becoming are instigated and supported by eros, then a specific kind of mutual transformation takes place. We can find intimacy, care, togetherness, and vulnerability there. And all the other features that the philosophy of love has rightly stressed by focusing on the personal dimension of love.[27] My point here is that these features take shape in the

[23] Touch is the key example here. Merleau-Ponty (1968; 2002) is the main reference point about it for enactive thinkers. On intersubjective intercorporeality, see Fuchs and De Jaegher (2009); on touch as participatory sense-making, see Hermans (2022).

[24] Merleau-Ponty (1968, Chap. 4).

[25] It is not necessary to go into the details here, but the phenomenology of sexual intercourse, not necessarily in terms of penetration only, can be profitably employed as an example of the embodiment of loving from a participatory perspective.

[26] Deleuze is crystalline in this regard: the potentialities intrinsic to processes of becoming (in Deleuze's words, the "virtual") do not lead to transcendence. The processes of becoming are embedded in the plan of immanence that is life (Deleuze 1995). See section From within an Ensemble for a deeper engagement with Deleuze's thought.

[27] Interestingly, Berlant (1998) has conceptualised intimacy as world-making since it transects the public and the private.

space in-between lovers, in this generative space where the force of eros works as a dynamic embodied tension.

So embodiment and becoming should be taken together in the in-between of eros, as embodied becomings are never of the individual only. In the loving relationships that go well, the self's ongoing becoming takes a specific participatory shape, as an interest in the other's flourishing that is made possible by the constitution of new meanings together. By building new meanings together, the lovers contribute to the other's ongoing becoming and, in so doing, can also create a shared world.

In the following section, I will explain in more detail why this loving sense-making is embedded within an ensemble. This will allow me to provide a clarification about the "togetherness" of lovers in participatory sense-making. In the final section, I will explain what happens to participatory sense-making in those loving relationships that do not go well.

From within an Ensemble

In section Eros as a Force and a Power, I introduced the generative power of eros through the Platonic image of the immersion in the great sea of beauty. What is this immersion outside of the metaphor?

Gilles Deleuze's account of desire is helpful in this regard. In its *abécédaire*,[28] under the letter D (for Desire), he says that desire comes from within an ensemble: "I never desire something on its own. I do not desire an ensemble either, I desire within an ensemble"[29] (Deleuze, 1988–1989). He claims that this view is quite simple and ordinary. Humans desire things in contexts, not abstractly. To understand desire abstractly is to extract an object from its context. Actually, this conceptualisation of desire is quite common in the philosophy of love, when desire and/or love are simply understood in terms of their intentional objects. By contrast, Deleuze stresses that we do not simply desire a woman; what we desire is the entire "landscape that is wrapped up in this woman"[30] (Deleuze, 1988–1989). This means that we desire not just her but her "world". Her "world" is where we find her, in her ways of being and behaving, in her occupations, concerns, and entourage,[31] the places she inhabits and shapes with her care and interest.[32]

[28] *L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* is a French TV programme in which Deleuze is interviewed by Claire Parnet.

[29] (my translation): "Je ne désire jamais quelque chose de tout seul. Je ne désire pas un ensemble non plus, je désire dans un ensemble".

[30] (my translation): "paysage qui est enveloppé dans cette femme".

[31] "[E]lle le désire dans tout un contexte de vie à elle qu'elle va organiser, elle le désire non seulement en rapport avec un paysage mais avec des gens qui sont ses amis, ou avec des gens qui ne sont pas ses amis, ou avec sa profession, etc." (Deleuze, 1988–1989).

[32] An evocative real-life story that helps us understand how and why humans do not desire abstractly can be found in Weber (2016: 33–48). Weber describes how his desire for a former classmate, whom he encountered unexpectedly at a school reunion, totally vanished when the small pond where they had gone on a bike trip years before was no longer there.

Deleuze is careful to not make her world a new intentional object, simply bigger. He claims that we do not simply desire her world, but we desire her *from within* an ensemble. This is a crucial point for me. To desire a woman from within an ensemble means that we desire to be part of her world, to take part in it, to contribute to it. This focus on the "from within" resembles the platonic immersion in the great sea of beauty I introduced in the first section. Plato also claimed that this erotic immersion is generative. Why is this the case?

The enactive approach can help in this regard. Embedded eros is not simply a synonym for situatedness. As I stressed in the previous section, there is a tension in the space in-between that can become generative. As Deleuze claims, desire is the wish to "build an ensemble"[33] (Deleuze, 1988–1989).[34] This means that desire is not simply to be in the ensemble but to contribute to it. How can a lover contribute to the beloved world? I suggest that this happens through the embodied and intersubjective construction of meaning, i.e., participatory sense-making. Sense-making (Di Paolo, 2005; Thompson, 2007) is the creation of a perspective. This perspective is jointly created by the lovers in participatory sense-making, for instance when they perceive themselves as a couple or when they unlock new possibilities of being together, for instance as parents. However, it is here important to stress how much this meaning-making activity can reshape the ensemble as a tension towards novelty. It is a matter of creating new worlds to inhabit. Becoming parents would imply changing the material conditions of the interactions, for instance establishing a common home or relocating to a better neighborhood for schools. This is important to stress in an embedded account of eros. However, the enactive take on this would stress that this new way of living is a new world of meaning triggered by the dialectics of eros. This should not be taken as an imposition of meaning over a given reality: meanings are embodied and embedded in the real interactions among the agents. But these interactions are tensional, i.e., constitutive of ongoing becomings and, thus, generative.

Although the idea that agents bring forth a world is there already in the early enactive works,[35] and it might even be argued that it is the core idea of the enactive approach (Di Paolo, 2023), world-making as a concept is only now explicitly discussed among the enactivists (Weichold & Candiotto, 2023; Di Paolo, 2023).[36] By world-making I mean that agents bring forth a world through meaningful engagements. Sense-making is not just adding a layer to a pre-given reality, imposing a new meaning over an old one, or establishing a subjective projection of our inner world.[37] Instead, a new world springs forth from sense-making, both in an epistemic and ontological sense.[38]

[33] (my translation): "construire un ensemble".

[34] This is what Deleuze calls "agencement".

[35] See, for instance, Varela 1991.

[36] "Among the enactivists" should be stressed because world-making is a concept that has been explored by other philosophical traditions as well, especially pragmatism and feminism. See, for instance, Goodman (1978), Barad (2007), Haraway (2016).

[37] This means that the enactive approach is neither realist nor idealist. For a discussion, see Rolla & Figueiredo, 2021.

[38] See Di Paolo, 2023 for a full-fledged analysis of the ontological argument.

Let us go a bit deeper into the meaning of embeddedness in world-making. Varela distinguishes "world" from "environment" and claims that the interaction with an environment is made of macrophysical encounters and that nothing is surprising about it. But these encounters are possible only if "embraced from the perspective of the system itself" (Varela, 1991: 56).[39] This means that it is only from within an ensemble that the agent can create a "surplus signification" (Varela, 1991: 56) based on her perspective. This surplus signification is the origin of the agent's world. As we have seen in discussing Colombetti's view on affectivity in the previous section, the agent is moved by affective concerns and commitments in her engagement with others and the environment. A world of what matters and is valued by the subject comes out of these engagements. This is the subjective constitution of a world of meaning. Notably, Robert Solomon has argued that it is through the passions that humans constitute a personal perspective and values. This is, in his words, a "reality plus" (Solomon, 1976/1993: 47). Varela, in a similar but not subjectivist vein, claimed that "such encounters give rise to *intentions* (I am tempted to say 'desires')" (Varela, 1991: 56). This quotation is very important because it shows that from an enactive perspective, eros (or desire, to retain Varela's terminology) is a tension that emerges out of embodied encounters. This means that the tension is placed in the relational context of life that is meaningful to the subject: the ensemble. But, again, why is this immersion into an ensemble generative?

The reason is that through participatory sense-making lovers make their worlds, creating new ways of being and knowing in the ensemble. Loving sense-making is not simply interactionism, that is, direct involvement with the beloved.[40] It is the desire for "world-making," to create and shape a new world with the beloved, and in so doing to also change oneself (self-making). The world is my world in the sense that it is who I am and become, what matters to me, my values. In a loving relationship, new worlds are created with the beloved—in certain cases also in terms of commonality, of *our* world.[41] This is *loving world-making.*

Drawing from this enactive view of loving world-making, I suggest understanding the ensemble in a relational and agentive manner, as the space *in-between and all-around* lovers. This is the relational space of ongoing and mutual transformation. It is important to add the "all-around" (as suggested by Di Paolo, 2022) to the "in-between" because the interaction between lovers should be understood from within an ensemble, namely, from the generative place of creation of new worlds of meaning.

It might be argued that if an ensemble should be built, then it is not possible to immerse oneself there as a precondition for creating it. But this is not a circular argument because the ensemble is never fixed; it is not an already established place in which one simply immerses oneself. It is a relational place that is constantly reshaped

[39] On the distinction between world and environment, see von Uexküll, 2010: 42. See Feiten (2020) for a discussion about this distinction informed by the enactive approach in dialogue with ecological psychology.

[40] For a detailed explanation of why participatory sense-making is not interactionism, see Di Paolo & De Jaegher (2017).

[41] The philosophical account of love as sharedness/shared identity and union of concerns has been prominently advanced by Solomon (1988; 2002) and Scruton (1986).

in the encounter. The ensemble is the dynamic place of the loving encounter, where the lovers remake themselves by shaping their togetherness. In the entanglement of feelings, ongoing communication, and aspirations for the future, the lovers create their commonality. But the communion of souls, as Plato called it in the lines quoted in section Eros as a Force and a Power, is tensional, that is, it is ongoing and part of the processes of mutual becoming.

This tensional aspect of eros is clear in the enactive concept of world-making. A new world of significance comes out of an encounter, in our case a loving encounter. It is through loving sense-making that a new world is created. The tension is provoked by the lovers' *difference*. This is important to stress because, without differences in potentials, nothing is produced in the processes of becoming.[42] So it is in inhabiting the tensional space in-between and all-around lovers, immersing oneself in the dynamics of an ongoing loving relationship, that loving world-making is enacted. The space in-between lovers is dynamic, fluid, and alive. When eros is there, this space is generative, that is, there are meanings to create and new worlds to explore and shape together. This means that the generative character of eros connotates the living space of the creation of new meanings and worlds together.

"Togetherness" does not necessarily mean that the new meanings and worlds created should be always shared and endorsed by each lover. The togetherness is mostly about the generation of meaning in terms of participation. We can imagine a situation in which it is through the love of her lover that a beloved can create a new world that is relevant to her only. For example, I am now writing this paper as a single author. It might be argued that this writing activity has nothing to do with the people I love and who love me: it is an activity I pursue on my own. But this objection overshadows the fact that I can create this new world of significance thanks to the support of other people. This "support" has a specific character, that of taking part in my thinking process, of caring for me and what I am doing. To be concerned with my flourishing, in this case as a philosopher. Arguably, this is what participation is about in loving sense-making. This desire to contribute to my flourishing can take different shapes and intensities among romantic partners, friends, or colleagues. But the common ground is that there is a certain kind of desire to actively take part (*participate*) in my world. On the other side, I offer this piece of work to the readers to make new mean-

[42] Irigaray (1996) strongly stresses the need for preserving difference in loving relationships. Candiotto and De Jaegher (2021) and Di Paolo & De Jaegher (2022) then show how much participatory sense-making is built on difference, as a prominent motor of processes of mutual becomings. Interestingly, this is remarked on by Deleuze too by saying that "un agencement" needs at least two people. He uses the example of writing *L'Anti-Œdipe* with Félix Guattari as "un agencement à deux": "Félix and I created a two-person arrangement where something passed between the two. These are physical phenomena. For something to happen, there has to be a difference in potential, for there to be a difference in potential, there have to be two levels, there have to be two. In that moment something happens, a flash of lightning passes or not, or a little stream, and this is the realm of desire every time someone says: I desire this, it means that they are in the process of constructing an arrangement, and desire is nothing other than this" (my translation): "Avec Félix, on a fait un agencement à deux, où quelque chose passait entre les deux. Ce sont des phénomènes physiques. Pour qu'un événement se passe, il faut une différence de potentiel, pour qu'il y ait une différence de potentiel, il faut qu'il y ait deux niveaux, il faut qu'il y ait deux. À ce moment-là quelque chose se passe, un éclair passe ou pas un éclair ou un petit ruisseau et c'est du domaine du désir chaque fois que quelqu'un dit: je désire ceci, ça veut dire qu'il est en train de construire un agencement et le désir ce n'est rien d'autre" (Deleuze 1988–1989).

ings together. In certain cases, participatory world-making can get to a shared world, of course. But sharedness is not a necessary condition for it.

Another important point to stress is that the tensional character of eros I argued for in the previous section and the creative one I discuss in this section are strictly entangled. The type of entanglement is quite specific: the tensional character of eros is what leads to the creation of new meanings together. But the creation of new meanings is not a given. Many things can go wrong. I am thinking about bad ways of loving sense-making, such as when the lover imposes her meanings on the beloved and does not allow the beloved to express her meanings. This is a case in which there is a failure in the participatory process. In the next and final section, I will tackle this issue by introducing some key features for an enactive ethics of eros.

Towards an Enactive Ethics of Eros

In this final section, I want to highlight the ethical significance of my proposal. Although I cannot fully develop an enactive ethics of eros here, I need to stress that my position is normative and, thus, ameliorative, not descriptive. Many times, eros, instead of working for the beloved's flourishing, can bring misery. For example, just think about domestic violence, where sexual abuse, exploitation, and violence are performed "in the name of love". At the same time, I want to stress that these cases do not simply rule out eros from ethics. The reason is that being aware of these problems can motivate us to *cultivate* eros, to put its force and power to the service of establishing good relationships and shared worlds to inhabit.[43] Simply claiming that since desire can be detrimental then it should be avoided would mean missing all the potentialities that are inherent to it, as I hope I have stressed enough in this paper.

I will first differentiate a cultivated form of eros from other experiences of passionate desire in loving relationships. Instead of describing specific and concrete situations in which desire is detrimental to both the lovers and the relationship, I will analyse its moral psychology, focusing on the different types of tensions and the implications for participatory sense-making.[44] Then, by introducing some elements of an "ethics of sense-making" (Weichold & Candiotto, 2023), I will depict some characteristics of a cultivated form of eros. Finally, I will show how the key features of embedded eros—the in-between and the all-around—are crucial for cultivating eros. This does not mean that eros is always good if it is embedded. Eros can be embedded in very toxic ensembles and thus can be very poisonous. On the contrary, it means that by cultivating the in-between and the all-around we can possibly get to a better kind of eros. This is the constructive side of my proposal. An enactive ethics of

[43] This is an ameliorative aim that I share with other thinkers, mostly feminists, who are working on love and desire. Among them is Lorde (1978), who strenuously defends the erotic as a power, despite the suppression of the erotic that has been endorsed by women as the root of their oppression. Interestingly, the subtitle of Luce Irigaray's *I love to you* (Irigaray, 1996) is "Sketch for a possible felicity in history". So I take "I love to you" as a motto, an aspiration, and a practice for making better relationships and worlds through eros.

[44] Arguably, this is the best choice for a general overview of an enactive ethics of eros. I hope to go deeper into concrete examples in another paper dedicated to it.

eros does not only consist of avoiding the degenerated forms of desire. It also implies reshaping, building and supporting better ensembles where eros can be a positive tension for the generation of new meanings in processes of ongoing becoming.

The first type of desire I would like to mark as detrimental is *longing*. Longing is an unfulfilled and frustrated desire. The tension here is between the lack of a meaningful relationship and the need for it. This tension often induces states of yearning desire in which one anxiously waits for something that does not come, nostalgia for past and lost fulfilling relationships, and a feeling of desperation at not seeing any real possibility to have them again. This feeling can also be experienced within a relationship, especially if the relationship no longer answers to the lover(s)'s needs. This can create closure and avoidance on both sides of the relationship and so block any new process of participatory sense-making.[45] It is true that some of the emotions and affective dispositions related to longing also express the value and salience of the intentional object to the lover. This can be experienced, for example, in long-distance relationships in which the lover deeply misses the beloved. However, most of the time the value of the object of longing is appreciated in a manner that does not allow the constitution of new meanings with the beloved, since she is felt as unreachable and is brought closer in an idealised manner. In both cases, desire is experienced "abstractly" and so lacks the embedded condition that I analysed as crucial for loving sense-making.

The second type is *craving*. This is a strong attachment to the beloved as a desire to possess what one is not. The tension here is the typical one of the hunter who wants to catch and possess the prey. This type of desire is often depicted in novels, movies, and TV shows. Unfortunately, it grounds the objectification of women, domination, and sexual violence, as Irigaray (1985) and many other feminist thinkers have rightly stressed. Desire as craving carries an egocentric conception of love: the lover only cares about possessing the beloved. The lover might want to take part in the life of the beloved, as in participatory sense-making, but in a possessive, obsessive, and oppressive manner—just think about stalking as a prime example. Here, the limits of the ensemble are too narrow and rigid: the space in-between lovers is destroyed. Without the space in-between, only one-sided meanings will be imposed on the other and no freedom to co-create will be allowed.

The third type of desire is *sexual drive* as the discharge of accumulated tensions. The philosophical problem that I see in this, and that I want to signal here, is that if desire aims to discharge tensions, then the transformations that are induced by the tensions will no longer be available. This is the contradictory structure inherent to sexual drive: in releasing tensions, sexual drive wants to remove itself. But this would also imply the end of loving sense-making and of all the processes of ongoing becoming that come with it since participatory sense-making is nourished by these tensions. From an embodied perspective, it is not by chance that the orgasm is called the "petite mort": love-making ends in the pleasure produced by the discharge of

[45] By using the Platonic conceptual tools I introduced in section Eros as a Force and a Power, this can be also expressed by saying that the two brothers are disjunct and so there is only the "flowing from without". But I want also to stress that what is blocked here is a process of *participatory* sense-making: in fact, I do not want to deny the transformative power of longing for the individual. For instance, a longing lover can understand that the relationship has ended or that she needs to change something in her life.

tensions. This end could indeed be seen as a phase for new life and new processes to begin.[46] But if desire is simply experienced as a need to discharge, then the possibility of experiencing desire from a perspective of continuous transformation is removed.[47]

Much more space is needed for a deeper analysis of the dynamics of these three types of desire and to avoid a stereotypical account of them. However, as I have already said, what I want to convey in this final section is that we can work towards steering clear of these traps of desire without dismissing desire *tout court*. The eros in-between and all-around I have described in this paper is a powerful alternative to these three forms of poisonous desire in loving relationships. In Deleuze's terms, the embedded eros I describe is the "otherwise" (Stark, 2012). I do not think that since emotions are desire-based they are always egocentric (Maiese 2009: 110). On the contrary, I would argue that we can cultivate our emotions, affective bonds, and desires to get to a selfless kind of eros. This eros would be offered as a gift to the beloved and would enable processes of transformation for the lovers, their relationship, and the worlds they inhabit. But to do so, an ethics of sense-making is needed.

An ethics of sense-making claims that we human beings could and should not be passive bystanders to how we make sense of ourselves, others, our relationships, and the worlds we inhabit. It focuses on the responsibility to become mindful of how we are continuously making sense and the many different ways in which we can improve this process.Regarding eros, this means that by becoming aware of the poisonous types of desire, we can take care of our loving sense-making activities and cultivate better forms of eros.

Focusing on the embeddedness of eros can be a powerful resource here. Cultivating the in-between and the all-around of eros can disclose practical ways to improve our loving sense-making and world-making. For example, this might imply focusing on how much space one allows for a beloved, questioning whether one listens to them enough, if one gives them the space to bring and develop their meanings, to actively contribute to the ensemble. Also, it means focusing on the quality of the context of the relationship, and from a very material point of view. This could imply creating a good and safe atmosphere for the encounters, being aware that one does not love abstractly but from within an ensemble. Also, it focuses on the magnitude of the ensemble: too narrow borders might lead to possessive craving, and too wide borders might lead to longing. There is a multitude of forms of loving sense-making, and their assessment should be contextual. However, my point here is that we can make the embeddedness of eros a resource. If eros is embedded in a poisonous relationship, it will bring misery and suffering to all. But by taking care of the space in-between and all-around the lovers, we will enable eros to be a gift to the beloved, since it will disclose its force and generative power.

[46] Also from a physiological perspective, when the male orgasm is associated with ejaculation inside the vagina.

[47] It is important to stress that Deleuze and Guattari (1983) came to a similar conclusion.

Conclusion

I have here advanced an embedded view of eros that focuses on eros' tensional character as in-between and all-around lovers. The result is that eros is a force and a power in and through interactions from within an ensemble. I have argued that the embodied tension in-between lovers plays a fundamental motivational role in creating new meanings together. Crucial to this tensional account of embeddedness is the desire to actively take part in their life and their ongoing processes of becoming from within an ensemble. This is what I call loving world-making. I would like to conclude by saying that it is exactly by focusing on this desire to contribute to others' flourishing that we can take responsibility for our processes of loving sense-making. This means that if we really want to love them well, we need to cultivate our eros.

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