

Basic Instinct

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Eros is an issue of boundaries. He exists because certain boundaries do. In the interval between reach and grasp, between glance and counter glance, between 'I love you' and 'I love you too', the absent presence of desire comes alive. But the boundaries of time and glance and I love you are only aftershocks of the main, inevitable boundaries between you and me. And it is only, suddenly, at the moment when I would dissolve that boundary, I realise I never can.

Infants begin to see by noticing the edges of things. How do they know an edge is an edge? By passionately wanting it not to be. The experience of eros as lack alerts a person to the boundaries of himself, of other people, of things in general. It is the edge separating my tongue from the taste for which it longs that teaches me what an edge is. Like Sappho's adjective *glukupikron*, the moment of desire is one that defies proper edge, being a compound of opposites forced together at pressure. Pleasure and pain at once register upon the lover, in as much as the desirability of the love object derives, in part, from its lack. To whom is it lacking? To the lover. If we follow the trajectory of eros we consistently find it tracing out this same route: it moves out from the lover toward the beloved, then ricochets back to the lover himself and the hole in him, unnoticed before. Who is the real subject of most love poems? Not the beloved. It is that hole.

Anne Carson, *Eros The Bittersweet*, Princeton University Press, 1986

[Catherine Tramell uncrosses her legs and it can be seen she's wearing no underwear]

Nick: You like playing games don't you?

Catherine: I have a degree in psychology.

Basic Instinct, 1992, Dir. Paul Verhoeven, Writ. Joe Eszterhas

With thanks to Rebecca Sharp.