AESTHETICS AS FIRST PHILOSOPHY:
Levinas and the Non-Human

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Emmanuel Levinas is usually seen as an ethical and religious philosopher. This reading is understandable to the point of seeming obvious, and certainly matches the philosopher’s own self-interpretation. But on closer scrutiny, the narrowly ethical reception of his thought seems to be one-sided. For Levinas pushes beyond the oppressive totality of beings not just through ethics, but in three distinct ways.

The infinity of the Other is merely one means by which Levinas opposes totality. Here we find the sum of his ethical and religious teachings (which are neither surprising nor very detailed), and here too that the energy of his readers is focused. But in a second gesture, the system of objects is undercut from beneath no less than from above, through the notion of enjoyment. This gives us direct access to the contours of things, ignorant of any dark infinity lying beyond them; we do not just use hammers and chisels in selfish power games, but bask in the murmuring qualities that radiate from them. But finally, in a third step

guided by everyone but Alphonso Lingis, Levinas glimpses anew the key role of individual substance. Specific rocks, chairs, trees, and oceans are not infinitely other, since each is quite determinate as to what it can and cannot do. Yet by the same token, concrete things are also not just incoherent wind and sound, as Levinas wrongly suggests in his musings on the elemental. What best resists the sleek power struggle of totality is the identity of individual things. The world is filled with concrete realities never fully grasped by any handling, bathing, or birthing.

We should endorse the Levinasian complaint against any war of beings massed together in a seamless whole. Yet this grim totality should be replaced, not by a one-sided theory of gods and orphans drawing us beyond the world, nor even by drifting elemental mists, but rather by a global carnival of specific entities that partly hide from each other even while engaging in trials of strength. But this means that ethics cannot be first philosophy. All things reside in infinite depths, and all things erupt into enjoyment along the shallowest façades of the world. Both moments, in turn, derive from the life of discrete substances that never fully submit to the war of all against all. And this drama is best described by the familiar term “aesthetics.” Aesthetics is first philosophy. This phrase is meant not just as an improved reading of Levinas,
but as a research program for contemporary philosophy as a whole. Such an aesthetic approach to Levinas is easily convincing if tested on his early phenomenological works: *Existence and Existents, Time and the Other,* and especially "Reality and Its Shadow." It is more interesting to try it with his two major systematic books, where it is less immediately obvious. Since I have done this elsewhere for *Totality and Infinity,* the following pages will focus on *Otherwise Than Being.*

1. TOTALITY AND ITS BREAKDOWN

Every philosophy has a strategic enemy, a rival vision of reality that it constantly seeks to strike down or reverse. It need not find this rival among actual past doctrines, and may even be responsible for giving it a name. The depth of a philosophy can be judged by the importance of its enemy, just as the researcher fighting polio is esteemed more highly than the sadist crushing beetles on the pavement. Levinas chooses an important enemy whose most frequent name is "totality," but sometimes also "system" or "war." The title *Totality and Infinity* shows the importance of this foe for his first great work, but *Otherwise than Being* can be read as a rephrasing of the same words. For Levinas, being is a system, a totality that nothing could possibly escape. War is his code name for a philosophy of relations in which each thing gains reality only through mutual interplay or struggle with the others. The problem lies not with "war" in the limited sense of military operations, since even "peace" is guilty of totality: "rational peace,... is calculation, mediation, and politics. The struggle of each against all becomes... reciprocal limitation and determination, like that of matter."¹ The point is worth making, since this vision of holistic interactions in a reciprocal web, this interweaving of texts and contexts, this blurring of boundaries between one thing and another, has held the moral high ground in philosophy for too long. It is generally viewed as more open, diverse, tolerant, and pacific than the supposedly "reactionary" model of independent things. With Levinas, I hold the contrary view. The political reflexes associated with terms such as essence ("bad") and reciprocal interplay ("good") must be recalibrated, and the long relational festa of the philosophy of texts must be called to a close. There is no greater Imperialism than the philosophy of mutually determining things, stripped of all retreat from the system of the world.

If Levinasian ethics is discussed in isolation from the global system of beings that it was designed to counter, its philosophical precision is lost. It becomes an abstract piety—a vague appeal to known historical disasters. Ethics is important in daily life for many reasons, but in Levinasian metaphysics its importance stems from its break with the totality of beings in reciprocal determination. What is otherwise than being delivers the human subject "more passively than any passivity from links in a causal chain."² To go beyond being means to go beyond relationality altogether. One name Levinas gives to this beyond is "the Good," a mainsray of metaphysics since Plato. The Good must lie beyond any possible configuration of being and beings. It is not "some new, unheard-of quiddity,"³ but is entirely "uncontaminated by being."⁴

² *ibid.,* p. 79.
³ *ibid.,* p. 112.
⁴ *ibid.,* p. 341.
It is tempting to endorse this view that something must lie beyond the links of a causal chain. Yet we should reject Levinas's tendency to convert the beyond into a formless monolith of Goodness. His assertion that the Good has no quiddity (i.e., no specific essence) is one alarming sign of this tendency. It becomes explicit when he seems to identify the Good with the One of Plotinus—which lies beyond all specific beings, and even beyond being itself. Even worse, Levinas identifies the Good with infinity.8 And for Levinas, unlike for Georg Cantor, infinity is always one infinite. Here we find the central difficulty of Levinasian metaphysics, since he subverts the global system by way of an unjustified alternative. His Good is not just beyond being, but is also infinite, unified, and beyond all quiddity. I hold that Levinas is right to take reciprocal determination as his enemy, but wrong to assume that finitude, multiplicity, and essence must always belong to the warlike duel of the world. The alternative is to say that the world is packed with individual substances that are limited, plural, have an inner core that endures despite changes on the surface, but also that substances withdraw from the "war" of mutual contact. Withdrawn in this way, they still manage to confront each other through proximity, an ingenious Levinasian concept that he wrongly confines to human experience alone. More will be said of proximity below.

Additional problems plague Levinas's account of the surface of the world. His theory of elemental enjoyment is designed as a strike against Heidegger's tool-analysis. In the tool-system, one object is plugged into another, and that one plugged into yet another, individual beings vanish in favor of the end they serve, which is ultimately Dasein's potentiality for being. This model is clearly one-sided, as Heidegger himself partly recognized, since the world is always riddled with local finalities. We do not encounter the world as a system, but are always surrounded by countless specific things. Enjoyment is "irreducible to a taking in one's hands, for it is already an absorption..."9 not in the sense of being devoured, but in the sense of being fascinated.

It is a "respiration" prior to any intentional relation.10 The sensible realm amounts to an "exposure to wounding and to enjoyment." It is the "nonsense" preceding all sense, the babbling of waters and hissing of vapors as they trickle over the stable ideal objects that Husserl finds inhabiting our various perceptions.11 In enjoyment, our experience has no ulterior meaning beyond what we encounter; enjoyment is entirely non-signifying, and this forces Levinas to break with Heidegger. He says that for his great German forerunner, "being's appearing cannot be separated from a certain conjunction of elements in a structure, a lining up of structures in which being carries on..."12 By contrast, Levinas calls for the assembling of nonsignifying elements into a structure" that would involve "chances or delays."13

Just as Levinas exaggerates the infinite Other into a single rumbling mass of Goodness, he exaggerates the realm of enjoyment into a flickering chaos of nonsense. For it is not true that enjoyment is purely non-signifying. When eating an apple or stroking a kitten, we bask in a murmuring surface that exceeds all meaning. Yet meaning cannot be absent, or all forms of enjoyment would be alike; all would be shapeless elemental wind. But the piercing tartness of the apple has a definite structure, as does the tactile pleasure of the animal's fur. In short, Levinas pays too high a price for his assault on the global system of beings. His ethical doctrine counters the mutual presence of things with inaccessible goodness,
but at the price of turning the Good into a One. His theory of the senses opposes the way that references devour singularities and render them invisible, but at the price of stripping the elemental realm of all definite structure. But such costs are unnecessary. We can liberate things from full reciprocal presence while preserving a plurality of concealed beings and a sensual realm filled with distinct individuals. The root of Levinasian philosophy is individual substance, rather than a unified Good or shapeless ghostly mist. A substance is that which withdraws from all relation with its neighbors, even while emitting surfaces that somehow refer to the depths from which they emanate. We never fully encounter the Other, but also never pure surface. Instead, we find ourselves in a state of sincerity.

The word "sincerity" is generally loathed by the Derridean generation of Levinas commentators, who find this word offensive to their endless restaging of the death of God and morals. Yet sincerity is the most important concept that Levinas ever forged, since it refers to the finalities that obstruct any supposed system from the start. Indeed, sincerity is nothing less than his name for any reality at all: everything is what it is, and does not pass elsewhere by means of relations; each point of reality stands in itself, candidly being just what it is. This is true for all three moments of his philosophy: ethics, the elemental, and substance. In confronting other humans, I do not reduce them to a use-value, but take them seriously. This is the ethical version of sincerity: "The neighbor excludes himself from the thought that seeks him... The obligation aroused by the proximity of the neighbor is not to the measure of the images he gives me..." 14, Ibid., p. 89.

We look beyond the favors and injuries done by the man now drowning before us, and make efforts to save him. Our life is sincerely absorbed in this obligation. But we are equally sincere when sensual enjoyment is considered. That is the very meaning of enjoyment: a surface never eaten up or siphoned away by the exterior functions of what it confronts. "To bite on the bread is the very meaning of tasting... There is an enjoying of enjoyment before any reflection..." 17, Ibid., p. 77. And finally, sincerity is also the proper title for the reality of substances. Nails, screwdrivers, cages, and drums are not merely devices enslaved to a wider system of tools; each reposes in itself, busy being itself and not just passing into relation with the others. In this third shape, sincerity is the Levinasian version of the classical principle of identity. A thing simply is what it is. The current fashion in philosophy is to scorn identity as a fossil and regard all things as "differing from themselves," but this view requires that we privilege the war of beings in reciprocal interaction, which is precisely what Levinas opposes. A more technical name for sincerity is illeity, which "indicates a way of concerning me without entering into conjunction with me." 11 This is what sincerity means: to be different from something even while taking it seriously. It is to touch a thing without fusing into it.

2. THE SINCERITY OF LANGUAGE

This sincerity, this proximity without fusion, is the central insight of Levinas's career. He soon brings it into the sphere of language. Recent philosophy has been excessively dominated by the theme of the linguistic turn—not just with analytic philosophers, but among the heirs of phenomenology as well. The trend is regrettable for two reasons. First, there is often an anti-realist prejudice connected with the philosophy of
language. Rather than direct discussion of the world in itself, we are asked to retreat into an investigation of language as the condition of access to the world. With this robotic post-Kantian gesture, metaphysics gives way to the theory of knowledge, though in new linguistic form. Levinas remedies this frequent defect of the philosophy of language, holding that language points beyond whatever surface of the world may be directly accessible to us, toward something real that exceeds language itself. And second, even if we accept that language has a special power to point beyond the world of visible surfaces (as Levinas does), this still seems to be a power belonging to humans alone. Even a staunchly pro-animal Levinasian—if such a person exists—might argue that dolphins and snakes have means of communication, but would still be unwilling to extend this ability to trees or grains of sand. In this sense, language remains a localized power belonging to humans, or at most to sentient creatures more generally.

The most famous Levinasian point about language is his distinction between "the said" and "the saying," both of which occur together at all times. Whereas the said is a literal message inscribed in plain view, the saying points beyond this literal surface; it retracts what is said at the same moment as affirming it. Although "saying states and thematizes the said," it "signifies it to the other... with a signification that has to be distinguished from that borne by words in the said. This signification to the other occurs in proximity. Proximity is quite distinct from every other relationship..." Proximity is another name for sincerity or illeity. Whereas the literal use of language (i.e., the said) immediately draws our attention to the presence of what it designates, the saying brings us into sincere relationship with what lies beyond the surface of the world. But it should be noted that even our relation to the said must also display a kind of sincerity. For even if I were purely occupied with the most superficial literality of a poem, devoid of deeper resonance, I would in fact be occupied with this surface rather than with motorcycles or the waning moon. My life would consist in taking the said seriously. Sincerity is everywhere: in surface, in depth, and in the substance that straddles them both.

3. THE FISSION OF THE PSYCHE

We have seen that sincerity takes three forms. Both our ethical relation to the Other and our enjoyment of bread or wind sincerely absorb our attention, providing a terminus for our lives. We do not fuse together with the world as a whole in a blinding flash, but rest wherever we stand, remaining content with what lies before us. What unifies the moments of infinite depth and elemental surface are individual substances, and with these too I am sincerely engaged—bewitched by the hidden power in the forest, or the soul of the beloved beneath her numerous masks. Yet for Levinas, sincerity belongs solely to what we know as human consciousness. As he puts it, "the subject is... too tight for its skin. Cutting across every relation, it is an individual unlike an entity that can be designated as tade it." In other words, individual things with their essences remain trapped in the system of relations and quiddities, and humans alone are able to outstrip this system. "The ego is an incomparable unity... The history of philosophy, during some flashes, has known this subjectivity that... breaks with essence."

Like every phenomenologist, Levinas wavers between an assertion of subjec-
tivity and a denial that humans are all-important. He spins the two sides of the vinyl as craftily as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. As Levinas puts it, with the forked tongue of his school, "the implication of the subject in signification... is equivalent neither to the shifting of signification over to the objective side... nor to its reduction to a subjective lived experience." In one sense, "the appearing of being belongs to its very movement of being, [and] its phenomenality is essential, and... being cannot do without consciousness, to which manifestation is made." Yet in a contrary sense, "objectivity... somehow protects the unfolding of being against the projection of subjective phantasms... Objectivity concerns the being of entities that bears it; it signifies the indifference of what appears to its own appearing." He adds that "anthropology cannot lay claim to the role of a scientific or privileged philosophical discipline, with the pretext... that the whole of the thinkable passes through human consciousness." This double game of subjectivity and objectivity is the false sophistication of present-day philosophy. Recently, Quentin Meillassoux has pinned it down with the marvelous name "correlationism," a pejorative term deserving of widespread use.

For correlationists, it makes no sense to think of the world apart from humans, nor humans apart from the world, but only of their mutually dependent interplay. In an obvious sense, Levinas upholds the dogmatic correlationism found throughout phenomenology. But correlation is, after all, a kind of relation or mutual dependence. In this respect, it runs counter to Levinas's own aspiration to discuss reality apart from the relations that mark the war of the world. We can ignore this problem for now. The important thing is to focus on sincerity, which confronts the world without fusing into it.

Along with sincerity and ilenity, proximity is a key term for contact without fusion. Proximity "forgets reciprocity, as in a love that does not expect to be shared." Hence, proximity is not just contact without fusion, but an asymmetrical contact. My fascination with the other does not entail the other's fascination with me; if this does happen, it should be thought of as a separate but parallel sincerity. Nor does proximity merely touch a surface: "an approach is not a representation, no matter how decontextualized its intentionality would be." But this theory of proximity pertains not just to human perception. Instead, it brushes up against one of the forgotten central problems of modern philosophy: communication. In a world where things are more than any access we might have to them, the question arises of how we gain access without it being direct access. This evokes the traditional problem of occasionalist philosophy, to which Levinas is elsewhere sympathetic (namely, in his theory of time as an escape from hypostasis). For occasionalism, no two substances touch directly, but must interact through God. Despite the overwhelming presence of God in Levinas's philosophy, communication is not the task of his deity. Instead, Levinas finds that proximity is the site of communication. It is a kind of pre-contact or pre-relation from which all relation must emerge. The problem of communication is clearly visible in Levinas. Echoing an older German forerunner, Levinas asks: "Can openness have another sense than that of the accessibility of entities through open doors or windows?"

Sincerity, ilenity, proximity is designed to enable communication without doors or windows: communication without full contact. And for Levinas this communication is always asymmetrical, since the things are proximate to me without my being proximate to them.

Levinas uses the term "'ission" for this asymmetrical communication, in which I am sincerely fasci-
nated by the other without the reverse being true. Consciousness splits from itself in such a way that we ought to speak of a "nuclear metaphysics." The passivity of the saying, in which the other is there but not fully there, "is a fissure of the nucleus opening the bottom of its punctual nuclearity... The nucleus does not open this depth as long as it remains protected by its solid crust, by a form..." If the nucleus of the world is the intentional relation between me and the phenomena, this nucleus is not a hermetically sealed vacuum, since it is penetrated by rays from elsewhere. This "inspiration," this "fissure of the mysterious nucleus of inwardness of the subject," entails that the intentional relation has two separate elements. I do not fuse with the things I see, but exist side by side with them in the nuclear core of intentionality, sincerely absorbed with them even though they do not return the favor. I am contiguous or adjacent to the phenomena. This "adjacency in proximity is an absolute exteri- ority," but not "the indifference of spatial contiguity." In sincerity, we have something that is neither fusion nor side-by-side indifference. It is proximity. And only proximity gives us hope of communication between one portion of the world and another, since only proximity lets the things be themselves while also transmitting messages to one another from afar. Without it, "no language, as a transmission of messages, would be possible."  

Communication, for Levinas, is responsibility, and "responsibility... goes one way, from me to the
other. In the saying of responsibility, which is an exposure to an obligation for which no one could re-
place me, I am unique. This leads to the key notion of "substitution," which Levinas claims is the motivating concept of the entire book. In being open to the other in my own unique and irreplaceable way, I somehow "substitute" myself for what is other by taking responsibility for it. For
Levinas, this is the very basis of subjectivity: "through substitution for the others, the self escapes relations." Unfortunately, he always wishes to grant responsibility, proximity, illeity, or sincerity to human subjects alone. When he speaks of "the self," he seems to have in mind a narrowly human kind of self: "I said in the first person— I, unique in my genus." And this apparent focus on the human self opens the door to Levinas's impossible glorification of ethics as first philosophy: "...it is necessary to ask if... there is not heard a voice coming from horizons at least as vast as those in which ontology is situated." This greater horizon is supposedly ethics, and since one has never demanded "ethics" even of monkeys and dogs, let alone rocks and trees, we remain stranded in the parochial human kingdom. What Levinas has demonstrated is the importance of a proximate contact without fusion. But what he merely assumes is that humans alone are able to spy into the distance, while inanimate matter, and perhaps even animals, are but blind links in a warlike causal chain. For Levinas, rocks and animals belong only to the totality of being. The infinity of the "otherwise" is found only in humans, and even then only in their ethical and linguistic dealings.

In this predicament, it is our own responsibility to save diamonds and reptiles for philosophy, since Levinas has no interest in helping us. Ethics cannot be first philosophy, since ethics unjustly divides the world between full-fledged humans and robotic causal pawns, in a manner little different from Descartes. First philosophy needs a more general theory of individual substances and their sincere proximity to one another, for only in proximity does communication occur. This must be true for all forms of communication, including the inanimate kind. The gears in a machine do not fully dissolve into one another any more than humans fully dissolve into an army. If one gear affects another, this can occur only through form of sincerity or proximity. The fission of substance that Levinas regards as a uniquely human phenomenon is a general characteristic of reality as a whole. Thus first philosophy is to be found, not in ethics, but in a general theory of substance and causation. I will now propose that "aesthetics" is a better name for such a discipline than "ethics" could ever be.

4. AESTHETICS

Heidegger used the term "world" for the system of mutually referring entities. In this sense, the whole of Otherwise than Being is an attempt to escape the world, to allow for extraworldly communication between different segments of reality. For Levinas, another escape route besides ethics is art: "every work of art is... exotic, without a world." Yet there is a problem here. Works of art appear in our lives only from time to time. If art is a kind of proximity, a fission of the human subject, it is still only an intermittent kind. The explicit use of language is a more frequent sort of fission than art, and sincerity itself is such a common form that we ought to call it constant. We are sincere merely by existing, but it
would be sheer affectation to say that we are artists merely by existing. This same ambiguity is found in
the term "sincerity" itself. In one respect, sincerity refers to any consciousness whatsoever, and in this
sense it is found even in cynical technocrats or "critical" academics who enslave us for villainous ends. But
there is another sense of the term "sincere," used only as an infrequent compliment for what is charming
or adorable. In other words, philosophy must recognize two distinct forms of sincerity, proximity, illeity,
or fission: one of them constant, the other intermittent.

Lévinas works explicitly within the idiom of phenomenology, as established by Husserl and de
veloped by Heidegger. Husserl's initial gesture is to bracket the real existence of the world and focus solely
on how it appears to consciousness. The convoluted defenses claiming that Husserl is not an idealist sim-
ply amount to tacit forms of Melanism's "correlationism." Though insisting that human and world always
come as a pair may save Husserl from the absolute idealism of Berkeley, it grants no independent reality
to the things in the absence of every human witness. Yet Husserl's view that philosophy must focus only
on phenomena does not confine him to sense data; his greatest contribution to philosophy is his notion of
intentional objects, despite his bracketing of real objects from view. Against empiricism, we do not per-
ceive splotches of green and triangular shapes, but trees; we do not hear sound waves or even a series of
isolated tones, but songs. What is first given to us are not sense data, but intentional objects. Yet naturally
such objects never appear as pure essences, but only in highly specific incarnations. As I circle the tree, or
simply wait for its appearance to change in the fading dusk, I see new versions of one and the same tree.
The intentional object "tree" remains the same for me amidst all these changes, for as long as I continue
to recognize it as the same thing. But we always sense that the intentional tree is more than its appear-
ance in any given moment—some deeper unifying principle to which the entire series of appearances is
subordinate. In this respect, there is always a kind of fission between the surface qualities of the tree and
its unified ideal depth.

But this type of fission is relatively weak. For the most part, we identify the tree with its various
qualities, even if we notice these qualities changing slightly from moment to moment and from different
angles of observation. This is because the tree seems fully present in my mind. It does not seem with-
drawn or absent in any way, since I have already recognized it as present just by taking it seriously. The
various "adumbrations" of the tree are not perceived as if they covered some infinite depth of absence,
but are more like an encrustation of gratuitous data on something that is fully present. The fission of ev-
everyday perception is a feeble sort of rift, noticed only through the painstaking work of description. This
is the usual state of things in our lives. But matters are different if we consider a deeper sort of fission. In
this enhanced type of split, we become openly aware that the thing to which we refer resides in absent
depths, and is not directly present before us. If our perception of a tree brings the tree directly before
us, there are other cases in which our sincerity does no more than allude to a tree that is more than
what our minds can directly present. There are numerous ways for such allusion or allure to take place,
even in the humble case of the tree. Following Heidegger, we can cite poetic language as one such instance.
Consider the following lines of a possible poem by Georg Trakl that Trakl never wrote:
The ruined city devours an ebbing gulf.
The monk-girl mourns a tree.

The silence, or a wall,
silences the poppy.

Upturn.
Oh melt!

Now, if we witnessed an actual monk-girl in mourning before an actual tree, it is quite possible (though unlikely) that we would have no aesthetic experience at all. We might remain in the standpoint of a Husserlian analyst, circling the girl and the tree and describing their various adumbrations so as to reach an intuition of the ideal essence of both entities. But when reading the poem, unless we are highly prosaic or distracted readers, something more will happen. The word "tree" in the fourth line will bring about what Heidegger terms a "calling" or "summoning" of the tree. It comes to presence in our minds as some sort of hazy image, even while suggesting or hinting into shadowy depths that exceed our intentional relation with it. In this case, there is a more ominous and explicit sort of fissure than the one described above. There is an allusion to the tree, not a presence of it as a Husserlian ideal principle of unity for a series of appearances. The tree becomes alluring."

If our perception in each moment is termed by Levinas a "nucleus," what we have in cases of allure is a rare penetration of the nucleus by forces from beyond, even though these forces merely take the form of allusions.

As Levinas teaches us, the real problem of metaphysics is not how beings interact in a system; instead, the problem is how they withdraw from that system as independent realities while somehow communicating through the proximity, the touching without touching that has been termed allusion or allure. If we identify this event with "aesthetics" in the broadest sense of the term, it becomes clear why first philosophy is aesthetics, not ethics. The ethical relation to other humans is merely a special case of substances communicating without touching. Aesthetics is first philosophy, because the key problem of metaphysics has turned out to be as follows: how do individual substances interact in their proximity to one another? Yet aesthetics is generally regarded as belonging solely to humans, or at most to certain favored animals such as beautiful songbirds and mournful humpback whales. If we follow Levinas, inanimate objects would be excluded from the kingdom of allure, with rocks and milkweed merely used up as links in a blind causal chain. But this is impossible. If it is true that other humans signal to me without being fully present, and equally true that I never exhaust the depths of non-sentient beings such as apples and sandpaper, this is not some special pathos of human finitude. Instead, I do not grasp things in their depths because communication is not a matter of depth. Communication occurs only through proximity, not through nonexistent doors or windows. When avalanches slam into abandoned cars, or snowflakes rustle the needles of the quivering pine, even these objects cannot touch the full reality of one another. Yet they affect one another nonetheless. The only way for this to happen is for one object to allude to the reality of the other even while brushing against its surface. Allure is not just a theory of art, but a theory of causal relations in general. Levinas is the accidental mentor of a new metaphysics of causation.