

"the critical activity" of vulnerability

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THE "APPROACH" MADE THROUGH THE UNCERTAINTY OF VULNERABILITY

Through a consideration of the way Levinas shapes vulnerability as a form of critique this essay will attempt to argue that contemporary art can be an important site for a Levinasian ethics. After defining Levinas's "reduction" as the *approach* that hears ethics through the giving of vulnerability, *Double Blind* (1992)—a video artwork made collaboratively by Greg Shephard and Sophie Calle— is offered as an example of an artwork that retains a trace of Levinas's ethics through its vulnerability. To conclude this essay will also argue that the uncertainty of vulnerability is not only an important act of critique for the artwork but is also a "critical activity" for art criticism. Sometimes an artwork calls you in a way that is completely unexpected, an unexpectedness that calls for a response. An important aspect of art criticism's critique is in the vulnerability of stepping forward and attempting to retain this calling—to keep this call active—within its final analysis.

In the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas "ethics" is where the otherness of the person resists thematisation, or resists being held down as a knowable thing. A driving force behind Levinas's philosophy is the need to keep the call of this otherness as other still, in defiance of the way this otherness can become all too

easily lost and absorbed into a thinking that orders and assembles for the clarity of comprehension. Levinas's ethics is in the way this irreducible call can disturb and disrupt the ordering and maintenance of meaning assembled. In *Totality and Infinity* ethics is present within our social encounter, ethics is active within social exchange, whilst in *Otherwise than Being* ethics is not so reliant on the "face to face" relation. Rather ethics is more an otherness within oneself, or an otherness as the base to the "oneself."

In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas shapes two levels, or two orders, of experience that do not fully synthesise but rather remain unstable. Levinas names these two orders "the said" and "the saying." "The said" is *assembled meaning*;¹ it is the way language can designate meaning into fixed terms for the *ordering of comprehension*.

For *Otherwise than Being* Levinas shapes "the said" as the "intelligible sphere to be explored." "The said" actively assembles and joins together experience for the clarity of understanding. The ordering of "the said" operates a "putting together," it synchronises experience and gives a structure for meaning. Opposed to this "putting together of structures" is the passivity of "the saying."² For Levinas "the saying" is an ethics where the otherness of the other person is always calling the self into question. This calling of "the saying" is one that can never be fully answered or resolved, a call as an otherness within oneself that precedes the world of action and choice. The ethics of "the saying" is always already there as part of subjectivity that does not fully join into assembled meaning.³ The *meaning in pieces* of "the saying" can be assembled by "the said": in "the said" otherness can be diminished within the ordering for comprehension.

It is important to make clear that in no way does Levinas want to sidestep around "the said." The said structure is not an external force, but is rather part of us in how we can express ideas and navigate our way through the world without getting lost and disorientated. Despite the dominance of the "intelligible sphere," the ethics of "the saying" is not completely "exhausted" in thematisation. Rather a trace of "the saying" remains, a trace as the "echo of the saying."⁴ For Levinas the major problem of "the said" is how it can override the vulnerability of being human; how the subjectivity of "the saying" can be lost to the ontology of "the said," how the touch of the human can get lost to the ordering of "the said." "The said" is part of us, part of our reasoning, but the vulnerability of being exposed to ethics can be drowned out in the assembling force of assembled meaning.

A problem that can arise in Levinas's philosophy, a problem that *Otherwise than Being* confronts head on, is how to voice a receptivity to otherness without diminishing this otherness? How to argue for an ethics without subsuming ethics under assembled meaning, without the argument made for ethics becoming the very thing that dissolves or smothers ethics? How to name that which is before thematisation: to bring the saying of subjectivity into the thematised, without designating it as another theme to be decoded? To name ethics: to be able to retain the trace of "the saying" to "the said," involves for Levinas a "phenomenological reduction," a reduction that takes place in an "approach."⁵ Levinas's "reduction" as the *approach* is a way of address where the primacy of ethics is protected. The *approach* allows for a trace of ethics to remain within assembled meaning—if only for a moment.⁶

Levinas's reduction as the *approach* hears ethics. It gives voice to ethics. To *approach* bears witness to the ethics of "the saying" before "the saying" is reabsorbed, or assembled, back into the thematisation of "the said." In *Otherwise than Being* this *approach* does not take its shape through the action of oneself searching out explanation within the "intelligible sphere to be explored," rather this *approach* works through the very physical uncertainty of vulnerability. To allow for the trace of "the saying" to pass within the said structure is to give vulnerability. In *Otherwise than Being* the giving of vulnerability from assembled meaning allows for the vulnerability of "the saying" to chip back at the ordering for comprehension. The saying of subjectivity calls for "the said" and "the said" can retain this call through the passivity and uncertainty of vulnerability.

For Levinas this *approach* is undertaken by a rigorous philosophy: it is the task for philosophy to *approach* ethics. In *Otherwise than Being* art does not make the *approach*: art is one step removed from ethics, or for Levinas, art removes itself from ethics.⁷ In "Reality and Its Shadow"—an essay where Levinas focuses his attention on art—Levinas's position against art can be thought of as one that is opposed broadly to art as representation: that art is cut off from the demands of the world trapped in a fixed time that has its own "rhythm."⁸ Whilst in *Otherwise than Being*, and also in Levinas's early book *Existence and Existents*, Levinas's theory on art can be thought of more specifically as a position against art that is too insular and too far removed from the world in its movement toward abstraction.⁹ Edith Wyschogrod was one writer who shaped Levinas's theory against art as being a critique against art for art's sake.¹⁰

To think of Levinas's critique against art as being against art that is for its own sake can mean thinking of Levinas's position as having similarity with the concerns of 1960s Conceptual art. This can mean thinking of Levinas's infamous line in "Reality and Its Shadow" where he describes artistic enjoyment as irresponsible and "cowardly" like "feasting during a plague,"¹¹ as a position that has real solidarity with a Conceptualism that saw the dominant discourses around abstract expressionism—discourses that were heavily focused on line, colour and composition, discourses that became founded on the authority of connoisseur judgment—as being far too removed and distant from the race riots, feminism and the Vietnam War protests that were raging outside the gallery's clean white walls.¹²

The way in which Conceptual art replaced the general primacy of form with the more specific primacy of the concept meant a dismantling of arts hierarchy—a hierarchy where painting and sculpture were arts supreme modes of expression—and forcing a greater move toward art as performance, art as installation, art as text, video art, Happenings etc. Rather than thinking of art as removed from Levinas's ethics because of Levinas's "suspicions" of art as being cut off from real world demands,¹³ could it not be more productive and more accurate to think of how Levinas's "phenomenological reduction" could be a way for contemporary art—an art so heavily shaped by the impact of changes brought about by Conceptualism—to be an important site for a Levinasian ethics?¹⁴ Could we not think of art retaining ethics in terms of how Levinas thinks of philosophy retaining ethics: that art could also be in the *approach* formed through vulnerability, or that arts criticality activity could be in its vulnerability?¹⁵

THE "BREATHLESSNESS" OF THE APPROACH

One way that Levinas's shapes the vulnerability that allows for the *approach*—and a key way in which I think we can consider the *approach* as an authorship for art—is by defining the *approach* as one that is not made through the action of the "giving out of signs" or the "giving signs". Levinas writes:

To say is to approach a neighbour, "dealing him signifyingness." This is not exhausted in "ascriptions of meaning," which are inscribed, as tales, in the said. Saying taken strictly is a "signifyingness dealt the other," prior to all objectification; it does not consist in giving signs.

And a little later:

The plot of proximity and communication is not a modality of cognition. The unblocking of communication, irreducible to the circulation of information which presupposes it, is accomplished in saying. It is not due to the contents that are inscribed in the said and transmitted to the interpretation and decoding done by the other. It is in the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to trauma, vulnerability.¹⁶

Levinas shapes the “giving signs” as the attempt to transfer over a solid, well rounded, unified meaning from one “ego” over to another.¹⁷ In “giving signs” meaning can be easily transferable as a wholeness for “interpretation and decoding,” assembled meaning remains intact and maintained through an arrangement given in order to be assembled and decoded for understanding. For Levinas this transferral of fixed solid meaning, both transferred and assembled through “deciphering of the sign,” consolidates an insular individualism, it establishes and maintains a “first *for-oneseif*” that is “at *home with oneseif*,”¹⁸ covering over and absorbing the questioning of ethics.

This “giving signs” is what Levinas’s reduction needs to reduce, or unblock, in order to protect the saying of subjectivity. But this “unblocking” is not achieved through the arrangement of signs “transmitted” for the action of “decoding,” or from within the “shelter” of the said structure, but is rather achieved through the “risky” openness and “sincerity” of being exposed. A *meaning in pieces* unblocks, or breaks up, the fixed term and this “saying” is not heard through the action of “giving signs,” but rather through the passivity and the uncertainty of vulnerability. “The saying” that *is in the* “risky uncovering of oneself,” that *is in* “sincerity,” that *is in* “vulnerability,” is “the saying” that then chips back the ordering for comprehension. The “reduction” itself does not unblocks “communication;” rather this is achieved through “the saying” that “reduction” accommodates.

The *approach* holds back from the “giving signs,” but it does so in a way which does not mean a complete removal. Through the sensibility and corporality of vulnerability the *approach* speaks a different language to, or is on a different register from, the “giving signs” within the “intelligible sphere,” or to “modality of cognition.”¹⁹ Without the “shelter” of the action that assembles meaning, the “exposure” of the *approach* waits.²⁰ Withdrawing from the “giving signs” the *approach* waits in order to allow for “the saying” to pass unassembled: in the uncertain time of waiting the *approach* allows for the trace of “the saying” to

linger a little longer.²¹

On two separate occasions, under the subheading of “The Reduction,” Levinas uses the description of “breathless,” or “holding its breath,” to describe the moment when, in “reduction,” the “echo” of “the saying” is heard.²² Levinas also describes his own *approach*, his own writing, as retaining a sense of being out of breath: that in his writing there is a “breathlessness” in the *approach* toward ethics.²³ This shortness of breath in the attempt to *approach* can be thought of in two different ways. One way of thinking about Levinas’s “breathlessness” is that it designates “reduction” as a difficult task; that there is “a fine risk,” a “risk worth taking,”²⁴ in trying to reduce the all-embracing said structure for the “moment” of “the saying”—without abandoning the demands of a philosophical treatise—only for this “saying” to morph back into the *ordering for comprehension*, leaving the author well “out of breath.”²⁵ Ethics in Levinas’s philosophy is not within the comfort and confirmation of a knowing; rather it is within an uncertainty that must be constantly sought, constantly fought for.²⁶

Another way of thinking about being “breathless” is in the sense of the *approach* in the uncertain time of waiting. It is a passivity that allows for “the saying,” a passivity that involves some inaction, or a “holding back” from the action of assembling meaning within the “intelligible sphere.”²⁷ This passivity could be thought of in the sense that we bear witness to the trace of “the saying” by waiting for it to pass through an *approach* that is “out of breath,” or through the *approach* “retaining its breath.”²⁸ Once the ethics of “the saying” has passed, and still *in pieces*, we breathe back again into the action of assembled meaning.

On another occasion, this time in his concluding paragraph to the introductory note for *Otherwise than Being* Levinas writes of the “difficulties” of the task to name the ethics of “the saying” as being actually “marked” in his writing. In declaring his book as one that “names the beyond essence,” Levinas then describes his own *approach* when he writes: “The difficulties of the climb, as well as its failures and renewed attempts, are marked in the writing, which no doubt also shows the breathlessness of the author.”²⁹ There is a “sincerity” to *Otherwise than Being* where “the difficulties” of the tasks, “its failures and renewed attempts,” are not hidden or removed but are rather “marked in the writing.” However it is this “breathlessness,” these “failures and renewed attempts,” that allows for the *approach* to be made.

FORGET YOUR PERFECT OFFERING, THERE IS A CRACK IN EVERYTHING... THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN'.³⁰

Through the vulnerability of exposure that is not so reliant—or is not so sheltered—on the transparency and the transferability of the signs to be decoded, and within the uncertainty of vulnerability that waits and allows “the saying” to pass without being assembled, could the artwork be the expression of vulnerability that forms the *approach*, an expression where the artwork itself is vulnerable? Perhaps the artwork that can retain the trace of ethics is the artwork that is unsure, that hesitates or withdraws from the attempt to try and say everything. Perhaps the artwork that stumbles, that trips over and is forced to start all over again could be the vulnerability that accommodates the trace of “the saying” to pass without being assembled. While the artwork that attempt to say everything through an arrangement of signs to be decode, and also the artwork that is so abstract that it loses contact with the specificity of assembled meaning, are in danger of being removed and isolated from the demands of ethics.

In a very concrete sense *Otherwise than Being* offers us ways for both the artwork to either bear witness to the trace of “the saying” or cover over this trace. The dynamic of the *approach* is one that is not “deaf” to “the said:” it is not completely cut off from the demands of the said structure in the attempt to hear the call of ethics. Rather the *approach* protects “the saying” to “the said,” a protection that lasts but for a “moment.” The protection of “the saying” through the *approach* could be arts critical activity where the artwork is an *open work* because it is vulnerable. The open artwork as critique is one that is made in the dynamic of the *approach*.

In the ethical *approach* the artwork is an *open work* because it accommodates a crack, a crack where the artwork crumbles a little, a crack as a moment where the artwork fails in its original goal, where the artwork falls short of any symmetry, a crack that threatens the very framework that holds it.³¹ The artwork that accommodates a crack through the *approach* is not the *open work* because it is simply open for interpretation: open and free to be interpreted by the individual through decoding the signs given.³² Rather the artwork is an *open work* through its ability to call us into question, because of the way it accommodates a crack through the uncertainty of vulnerability. The *approach* allows room for a crack to form and from this disruption we “catch sight” of “the saying.” The crack from the *approach* is where the “indescribable is described,” where the unnameable *meaning*

in pieces is glimpsed.³³ As an *approach* the open artwork makes its statement, the artwork has a frame, has a parameter, it has a set down structure, and yet, “with as much right,” uncertainty, vulnerability and the sincerity of exposure circulates within it.³⁴

The *meaning in pieces*—“the saying” as the *mess of life*—is not heard through the clarity and transparency of meaning well assembled.³⁵ Rather the *in pieces* is received by the messy uncertainty of vulnerability, by the artwork that starts trips over itself and is forced to begin all over again. The “perfect offering”—the artwork as the well-rounded and assembled address—that directs and arranges signs to be decoded, can all too easily cover over the crack that is there in the correlation of the said/saying: the crack that is there “in everything,” whilst the *approach* through the mess of vulnerability allows for this crack where the light of “the saying” can be glimpsed.

Rather than naming a variety of different artworks as being this *open work*, I would now like to consider the film work *Double Blind* (1992)—made collaboratively by Sophie Calle and Greg Shephard—as an example of an artwork that accommodates Levinas’s ethics. If my analysis is successful, if there is an *approach* in *Double Blind*, then the ethics of *Double Blind* is *Double Blind’s* alone: it is *Double Blind’s* own calling.

DOUBLE BLIND

In 1992 French artist Sophie Calle embarked on a road trip across America from New York City to California. Accompanying Calle on this journey was her American friend Greg Shephard. The adventure of a road trip becomes for both Calle and Shephard the opportunity to make a video together: the opportunity for an artwork collaboration. The final result of this collaboration is a video titled *Double Blind*, and like all of Sophie Calle’s artworks *Double Blind* starts with a specific plan, or rather, an outlined structure. For this artwork the plan is that both Sophie and Greg will each have their own video cameras and what each camera records will be composed in the editing suite as the document of a road trip: the one journey recorded from two different perspectives. It is a simple plan, but a plan none the less: a starting point, a way to begin.

There is something equally knowable and unknowable about this artwork. What I mean by this is that within a set structure—or within a set frame—the difference

of otherness is able to circulate and interrupt. The set down structure for *Double Blind* is the road trip as a linear narrative shaped through the binary of his perspective vs her perspective. As a road trip *Double Blind* begins in New York City, stumbles and trips its way toward a central scene where the couple get married whilst in their car at a Las Vegas drive-through chapel, and then—on reaching their final destination—ends with a messy relationship breakdown that acts as the film's finale. Within this edited story line, and between the interiority of each author treating their camera like their own private diary entry, there circulates continual false starts, re-beginnings, missed turn offs, and fragmented scenes of chance moments or random encounters with strangers, which neither author has any control over.

In its *approach* *Double Blind* is an artwork that has its duration, it has the structure of a road movie—it tells a story— but in its telling a relational space remains as an undetermined territory. Chance encounters with others interrupt and the relation between Shephard and Calle is not pinned down as a theme to be decoded, set aside to be understood through the unfolding of a drama. Rather their relationship—that which is not as clear and calculable as a linear narrative—is given space to flicker in and out of the artworks parameter: the unclaimed space of the relation itself interrupts the constructed narrative that holds it. What I wish to argue here is that this flickering—this trace of what cannot be fully assembled, or what refuses to be full controlled—is held to this artwork through vulnerability. It is held through the vulnerability of allowing for unpredictable moments to interrupt, by the uncertainty of being exposed, or through being unsure. It is the “exposure” and “sincerity” of vulnerability expressed by both authors that then allows space for the call of otherness to interrupt. In an *approach* *Double Blind* itself is vulnerable: it is a moment in vulnerability rather than a representation of vulnerability.

VULNERABILITY AND “EXPOSURE”

In *Double Blind* the relationship between Calle and Shephard is a difficult one. The two bump up against each other, and there is a continual open friction and restlessness between the two of them as the relationship deteriorates the further the journey continues. Through an open and honest intimacy Shephard confides to his camera and speaks of the depression he is suffering; a depression that means he feels no sexual desire for Calle. For Calle this means she feels very much alone and unwanted. One of the recurring motifs of the artwork is the still image of the

different motel beds the couple share. Through a voice over accompanying the image of an unmade bed Calle factually reports on each day—as if in a diary to record the events— that there was “no sex last night.”³⁶ Another recurring theme in the artwork is the unreliability of their car. Throughout the trip Shepard’s old Cadillac convertible continuously breaks down, and the car that won’t start becomes emblematic of a relationship stuck in a bind that grows in bitterness and distrust.

In *Double Blind* both Calle and Shepard expose themselves to the uncertainty of vulnerability. This exposure could not only be thought of in terms of personal openness, of pain and disappointment, but also through their authorship that allows room for the unpredictable to interrupt. What I mean by this is that whilst for Calle and Shepard there is the vulnerability of being personally exposed, their shared authorship is also one that does not completely rely on the direct signifier or specific metaphor, or seek the transparency of codes arranged to be decoded. In their authorship— in their telling of *Double Blind*—there is a speaking through vulnerability that is not so heavily reliant on the codes to be interpreted.

At its beginning *Double Blind* opens with a voice-over where Calle informs the audience that the trip is in jeopardy before it even begins because Shepard was not ready as planned. At this moment Calle also informs us that part of the reasoning for the trip is that she feels the need to commemorate the death of her friend Herve Guibert, who had died just a few days earlier while she was in transit to the New York. If the original trip is in danger of not going ahead at all because of a late falling out with Shepard, then, at the very least, Calle wants to drive as far as the sea shore where she can mark her friend’s death with her own ceremony. In her opening address to the audience Calle tells us that: “even if this is going to be a disaster, we’ll go. At least far enough to bury Herve by the sea.”

In the scene where Calle commemorates the death of a friend there is an authorship that resists trying to fully capture a moment of personal grief, that resists representation, that resists speaking on the other person’s behalf, that hesitates and only allows for so much information. This resistance—this holding back or “retaining its breath”—is shaped through chance occurrences, random mishaps and stumbling’s. For example the site for the ceremony, despite its importance, is not decided by Calle. Rather it is left to Shepard to choose the location.³⁷ The location chosen seems random, it is quite non-descript. It plays the role of a lone pier by the endless sea but it is not a direct reference to either Calle, Guibert or

their relationship. There is also the element of chance in the ceremony itself. Whilst Calle places her dedication of flowers and a picture of Saint Sarah into the ocean at roughly the same time as the burial in France, Calle informs us that she could not find the right flowers that Guibert would have liked and that the picture of Saint Sarah is included for no specific reason. Placing the dedication into the water Calle calls to her friend saying: “You like peonies, I could not find them. And I don’t know why this picture of Saint Sarah?”

Accompanying an image of Calle standing alone on the pier, we hear a brief recording of Guibert’s voice from a telephone answering machine and from here Calle recalls a distant memory she has of him. The memory recalled and the sound of Guibert’s voice are both details; but only fragments of a detail. This way of withdrawing that allows fragments of a detail gives space to Calle’s grief so that it can remain unassembled: it allows her relation to Herve to remain other still.

Much later in the artwork— much later into this journey; without warning; as if the memory called her rather than she calling it— Calle, as part of her diary entry to camera, speaks again of Guibert. This time she recalls a simple memory of how she would cook for him on Sunday nights. This snippet of information is our glimpse— our detailed fragment—of the life that was once shared between them. In retelling to us this memory Calle quickly retracts. She immediately acknowledges the danger of assembling the past; of thematising and memorialising the past for the clarity of a present.³⁸ She withdraws so that the relation between her and Guibert remains a detailed fragment: so that the memory remains as an interruption.³⁹ Calle holds back in order to keep Guibert as other to her in his absence by saying: “I mustn’t let my memory betray him. I’ll keep his number in my address book, his picture on the wall and one of his books always open by my bed. I’ll carry the African beads and the bad luck piece he gave me. And on every Sunday” Then Calle’s voice—her voice to us the audience— fades away under the voice of her travel companion: her memory remains as a fragment folding back into the narrative drama of a road trip. In *Double Blind* the memory of the other person calls to Calle, and this calling interrupts, “if only for a moment.”

FORCED TO WAIT

The vulnerability of *Double Blind* is also in the time of waiting and hesitation. As an artwork *Double Blind* moves from one scene of having to wait through to another scene of waiting. The main cause for having to wait: the main cause for

the artwork itself to be a waiting, is the old Cadillac. So many of the scenes in this artwork involve Calle and Shephard forced to wait whilst the car is being repaired—waiting in road side diners, waiting in motels, waiting at the auto mechanics. Along with the frustrations of the car there is also the time of waiting within the tension of their own relationship: a tension where we as the audience can feel we are stuck between the two of them; waiting for them to get on with it; waiting for them to talk to each other rather than confine through their camera to us the audience.

Calle herself is always waiting for Shephard's affection; waiting for his depression to release its hold; waiting for intimacy. Whilst Shephard feels desperately trapped within this road trip, his movements limited because he is all out of money and dependant on Calle. This time of waiting—a time of not being in control, a time where the unplanned completely disrupts all plans, a waiting as a time *in pieces*, a time of the *mess of life*— is a time that is amplified in the artwork's penultimate scene where Shephard and Calle decide to get married. In the lead up to this performed drive-in chapel wedding, a prolonged waiting is instigated by Shephard's own hesitation. For Calle the marriage in the car seems a fitting way to mark their journey across America. However Shephard is not so sure. He is not so sure he really wants to get this involved in a Sophie Calle artwork: he is not sure if he really wants to get married, and his hesitation drags out to the extent that we the audience find ourselves being pulled along into a waiting. The unexpectedness of having to wait—the way in which waiting is forced upon Calle and Shephard— makes waiting a fragmented time that disrupts. Through Greg's uncertainty— at this moment of waiting—the narrative program of *Double Blind* is pulled up, put on an extended hold, and the narrative structure of the artwork waits.

For the ending of this artwork it is Shephard who tells us his version of how the relationship fell apart. In a personal acknowledgement of his own failings, Shephard tells us that his attempt at making this film with Calle was an attempt “to try and tell an honest story.” The narrative of *Double Blind* is bookended with her beginning as the account of how the journey/relation began and ends with his perspective of how the journey/relation ended. What occurs between these two accounts are fragments of details: an experience in itself.

Double Blind holds to it the otherness of a relational space without this otherness being diminished, suffocated or fully assembled. It does not achieve this through the ambiguity of abstraction. Rather it maintains its constructed linear narrative,

it tells the specificity of its own story. Through its telling *Double Blind* gives vulnerability, and it is this giving of vulnerability that then allows for the mess, the unpredictability, the chance, the otherness that can be part of our relations with each other. This is *Double Blinds* critical activity: its ethics. Through the vulnerability of failing, from the vulnerability of tripping over and getting up and having to start all over again, through the vulnerability of withdrawing into the time of waiting, *Double Blind* allows for the trace of a Levinasian ethics—it allows for the calling of the other person, a calling that cannot be fully answered and represented as a theme—to flicker in and out of frame. *Double Blind* is in itself an otherness that calls for a response.

To continue the hypothesis that contemporary art is an important site for a Levinasian ethics, the conclusion to this essay will attempt to define a way for art criticism to also speak in the *approach*.

THE ARTWORK THAT CALLS FOR A RESPONSE AND A RESPONSE THAT RETAINS THE ARTWORK'S CALL

In recent years there has been a continuing debate around whether or not art criticism is in some form of crisis. This debate has intensified and receded in attention, only to re-intensify again.⁴⁰ The “crisis of art criticism” is thought of as a loss of criticality: that art criticism has lost its critical edge because it withdraws from playing the role of handing down authoritative value judgements and designating meaning through interpretation, becoming instead a weak relativism that is reluctant to take up a specific position.⁴¹ From considering the terms of this debate through a talk given by art critic Tom Morton, I would like to offer a Levinasian *approach* for art criticism as one that makes its statement through judgement, undertakes a specific analysis, has agency in declaring its position, declares its own critical response to an artwork, but at the same time retains a sense of the uncertainty and vulnerability in stepping forward and making such a response.⁴² That judgement itself can be a vulnerability: that judgement can be the critical *approach*.

The vulnerability of art criticism could be thought of here as being within the difficulties of retaining the spark of an artwork, or within the difficulties and risk of responding to a moment where the artworks call puts oneself *in question*, without the responds being the very action that assembles and smothers over this call. A vulnerability in art criticism could also be understood as generated from being

part of a plurality of community involved in critical debate. What this would mean is that art criticism as an *approach* —a dynamic *approach* that is not “deaf” to either “the said” or “the saying”— does not avoid the agency of declaring a critical position, nor does it abandon subjective judgement. Rather it is the vulnerability of stepping forward and declaring a response that can help retain this moment of being *in question*.

In art criticism to speak through the *approach* would be to allow space for a crack to form in the analysis. A crack in the form of doubt and hesitation that puts the analysis itself under question. A questioning that comes from both the artwork and from the reader. Sometimes facing an artwork can involve the vulnerability of having to wait, waiting for the artwork to call, to call your name, to call you forward, to call when least expected. As an *approach* art criticism can keep this call active by retaining a sense of this initial doubt and hesitation within the criticism’s final analysis.

THE MESSY INVOLVEMENT OF ART CRITICISM

Tom Morton is one art critic who defines art criticism in terms of this vulnerability. In Morton’s contribution to a forum on the crisis of art criticism, a forum titled *Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism* held in Canada in 2010, he spoke of this vulnerability as a series of “intimacies.” For Morton, art criticism is based on a “set of intimacies” that are “between the writer and the work, the writer and the art, the writer and the reader, and the writer and him or herself.”⁴³ These “between” spaces of intimacies are present within the act of responding.⁴⁴ To respond to the artwork means for Morton the intimacy of being unsure: the uncertainty of the critic’s own involvement with the artwork. Such “intimacy” can mean exposing oneself to a community that is in critical debate and the intimacy of being exposed to the risk of failure. In Morton’s definition of art criticism, intimacy does not replace judgement, rather intimacy is what precedes judgement.⁴⁵ This pre-judgement is an intimacy that falls in an undetermined *between* space, an intimacy as an exposure that is of greater importance than the judgement that follows. To be able to retain this intimacy is of great importance for Morton: to be able to hold this initial intimacy *is a critique*. A key aspect of this critique is not to diminish the subjective role. As a Levinasian *approach* this would mean that the doubt and hesitation that can be experienced within the initial encounter with an artwork can be retained within the final objective analysis.

The intimacy of art criticism for Morton is the vulnerability of responding through one's own commitment and involvement.⁴⁶ For Morton there is "human frailty" in all art criticism; a "frailty" that gets lost and forgotten when it is absorbed by privileging objectivity over the subjective.⁴⁷ By shaping objectivity as a falsity Morton favours instead the mess of uncertainty, the messiness of personal involvement as the possible site for the subjective response as a "*critical activity*" (my emphasis). Morton writes:

To get down and dirty with art, to feel its grain and let it feel yours, is subjective sure, but it is also the most meaningful critical activity I can imagine. To refuse this is to refuse the fact that all of us cast a shadow and that it will sometimes fall across a work of art, not only obscuring it but also, and paradoxically, making it in a strange way whole. Only vampires, after all, possess no shadow, and a vampire is something a critic should never aspire to be.⁴⁸

The mess, "to get down and dirty," is a shared intimacy where one's own involvement in an artwork through the act of responding— an involvement that allows a shadow to "fall across a work of art"— can make the artwork speak again, not on its own but rather now in the community of critical debate; "making it in a strange way whole."⁴⁹

The intimacy and uncertainty of personal involvement involves here for Morton the risk of failure. Intimacy opens the possibility of failing to respond to the artwork's call, of failing to retain the artwork's calling, of assembling its *meaning in pieces*;⁵⁰ a failure of not retaining the original "heat and intimacy of a first encounter," of diminishing that intimacy through interpretation.⁵¹ To retain the intimacy of the "first encounter" means to retain the chance of failure; to retain the question of failure; to retain a doubt and hesitation that always questions one's own authority, a hesitation that holds back from the "giving signs," a doubt and hesitation that allows space for the call of the artwork to interrupt. To retain the intimacy and hesitation that is prior to judgement—to retain this intimacy within the judgement itself—means to retain the intimacy of the artwork's call. For Morton this also means retaining the uncertainty, the diversity, the complexity of a readership or a community in "critical debate."⁵² To accommodate this complexity—rather than sucking the life out of an artwork by designating it with meaning—is, for Morton, a "critical authority" as a "mode of address that is true to their subject matter, their readership, and themselves."⁵³

The intimacy of the between space for Morton is not just between artwork and critic, critic and reader, but is also between “the writer and him or herself.” This indicates a bind between the objective critique and the subjective voice: that “critical activity” allows for the subjective response to circulate within the objective analysis. Through the vulnerability of hesitation the *approach* retains the initially “intimacy” of the artworks call. As a “critical activity” the mess of vulnerability allows for the artwork “to be in a strange way whole:” allows for the initially “intimacy” to remain active.

The crack in the artwork calls me forward. For art criticism to retain this initial calling it needs its own vulnerability—the vulnerability of stepping forward and making a specific response. In the dynamic of the Levinasian *approach*, art criticism can make its judgement, declare meaning, and yet, in its final analysis, retain the initial “exposure” to the artworks call. Through the crack formed by the uncertainty of vulnerability a glimpse of the initial exposure remains: through the vulnerability of hesitation a subjective response circulates within the objective analysis. In the consideration of Morton’s talk, the vulnerability in art criticisms *approach* was defined as both the uncertainty of trying to retain the artworks initial calling without diminishing this call as designated meaning, and the vulnerability that is within the very act of contributing to the diversity of a community in debate. In a Levinasian sense, the importance of art criticism, the important task of responding to an artwork and giving it life in a community of critical debate, is a “fine risk,” a “risk worth taking.”

Sometimes an artwork calls you forward,⁵⁴ it calls you to respond, it calls to you when you least expect it. This call is not the artwork as a subjectivity of the saying. Rather the artwork can retain a trace of ethics. My hope is that this essay has given a sense of the importance of a Levinasian ethics to art: that contemporary art is an important site for a Levinasian ethics. Through Levinas’s definition of “the saying” and “the said” art can determine the danger of assembled meaning that ignores the uncertainty of vulnerability. Through a passivity and a vulnerability the dynamic *approach* is a “critical activity” that allows the irreducibility of “the saying” to chip back the assembling forces of assembled meaning, if “only for a moment.”

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NOTES

1. The way Levinas terms “the said” as “synthesis of apprehension” is the reason why I have named “the said” as *assembled meaning* and the *ordering for comprehension*. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006, 38.
2. This “putting together” is also why I use terms like *ordering for comprehension* and *assembled meaning* to define ‘the said’. Levinas writes: “Our task is to show that the plot proper to saying does indeed lead it to the said, to the *putting together* (my emphasis) of structures which make possible justice and the “I think””. See Levinas, 46.
3. In terms of an ethics as *always already there*, John Drabinski writes: “I come to myself as already called by the other, already interrupted, already [...] traumatised and obsessed. [...] My traumatic awakening initiates an account of what comes to be called ethical subjectivity.” See John E Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity: The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas*. New York: State University of New York, 2001, 8.
4. Levinas writes: “In this said, we nonetheless surprise the echo of the saying, whose signification cannot be assembled.” A saying as an echo perhaps because of the way that ‘the saying’ circulates within “the said,” “the saying” as heard, or perhaps because of the way “the saying” despite being absorbed by “the said,” always returns again, like the person who just passed by. See Levinas, 27.
5. Levinas speaks of the “reduction” as the *approach* when he writes that whilst the “echo of the saying” gets absorbed into the noun that designates, the “apophansis is still a modality of saying. The predicative statement [...] stands on the frontier of a dethematisation of the said, and can be understood as a modality of approach and contact” (Levinas, 47). In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas terms language as an “apophansis.” The apophansis is a noun/verb combination where the actual word itself is the noun/verb entwined. The “noun” in Levinas’s apophansis is the said structure of language: the way language names and designates meaning. Whilst the “verb” is existence: it is the verb “to be,” or the verb to exist (Levinas, 35). Through Levinas’s “apophansis” the time of existence, the anonymity of the “there is,” resides unassembled within the noun that designates meaning. Despite the noun that retains the verb the dominance of the “noun system” can, all too easily, cover over and absorb the “rustle” of existence. However the loss of the “verb” to the “system of nouns” is not Levinas’s main concern. Rather Levinas’s key concern is that the assembling force of assembled meaning absorbs the saying of subjectivity. By stating an “apophansis,” by arguing that the noun that designates meaning can do so without smoothing over the “murmur of silence,” Levinas is laying the ground work for his main thesis that the thematised said does not completely absorb the saying of subjectivity. If the “apophansis” is a noun/verb correlation then this allows space for Levinas to think of a said/saying correlation where “the said” is not given priority over “the saying”—that within “the said” there is always the trace of “the saying:” within experience there is this always already there “the saying” as a *meaning in pieces*.
6. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas will refer to the way “the saying” can be witnessed through reduction— but *for a moment*—and Derrida picks up on this in his response to *Otherwise than Being* which is tilted “At this moment in this work here I am.” That in the “work” the saying of subjectivity that raises up and says “here I am” is witnessed, if only for a moment. See Jacques Derrida, “At This Moment in This Work Here I Am” *Re-Reading Levinas*. Ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianapolis Press, 1991, 24.
7. In *Otherwise than Being* art acts as the window to the anonymity of existence. For Levinas existence has a cold fact-ness to it that is impersonal. Levinas terms the anonymity and the bare fact of

existence as the “there is.” In both *Existence and Existents*, and in *Otherwise than being*, art provides us access to existence time, or to the “there is.” Art purely speaks of the anonymity of existence. In *Otherwise than Being* this is predominantly a negative for Levinas because of the way this access to the “there is” can be separate from “the said,” distancing us from justice and politics in assembled meaning, and isolating us from ethics. Whilst art exposes Being, or whilst the artwork hears the “murmur of silence,” it does so in complete “isolation.” Art for Levinas goes too far: it fails “to recognise the said,” it loses touch with assembled meaning. Without “the said,” art for Levinas has its own capacity to square itself off from the world and become “exotic.” See Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 41; Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans., Aiphonso Lingis (1947; repr., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2011), 53.

8. See Emmanuel Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow” *The Continental Aesthetics*. London: Routledge, 2000, 119.

9. In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas’s descriptions of art as the window to the time of existence sounds very much like painting within the language of abstraction when he talks about art as “[T]he *palette of colours* (my emphasis), the [...] *meandering of forms* (my emphasis) [...] all these modal notions—there is resonance of essence.” (Levinas, 40). A secondary source of evidence that Levinas is discussing the language of painting moving toward abstraction comes not from *Otherwise than Being* but rather from *Existence and Existents*. In *Existence and Existents* Levinas makes very specific references to Cubism as the art that exposes us to the “there is”: that the Cubist style functions as the window into the “there is.” Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 46.

10. Wyschogrod writes “For Levinas art for art’s sake is simply wrong.” See Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000, 77.

11. See Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow”, 126.

12. In terms of the impact of Conceptualism and the role of politics see Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972: a Cross-reference Book of Information on Some Esthetic Boundaries*. California and London: University of California Press, 1973, vii-xxii.

13. One place to find an analysis of Levinas’s position toward art before *Otherwise than Being* is in Robert Eaglestone, “‘Cold splendour’: Levinas’s Suspicion of Art” *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997, 98.

14. In Levinas’s theory of the artwork as purely the window to the anonymity of existence, Levinas is very broad and general in his discussion on what art is. There is not given to us any attempt to consider contemporary attitudes, styles and theories around art at the time of his writing. Rather art is defined as if it is just one thing. The reason why Levinas gives such a broad definition of art is because he is trying to define a core foundation—that fundamentally art speaks the “verb.” What Levinas is trying to do here is make use of art as an example in order for him to display an aesthetics that speaks the “verb” without the “noun”; to show an opposite to the “noun system.” Art is used in *Otherwise than Being* to display, or give an example of, his theory that a language can be all “verb.” If there is a noun that dominates over the “verb,” and there is a “verb” that is distant from the “noun,” then Levinas can ask: Is there not also an “apophansis” that can be a noun/verb correlation?

15. In *Otherwise than Being* art is denied ethics: art cannot be in the method of the *approach* simply because its language speaks “the verb.” By determining art as “the verb” Levinas misses an opportunity for the artwork to be a site for ethics.

16. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 46.

17. Levinas, 48.

18. Levinas, 48.
19. Levinas writes that “exposure has a sense radically different from thematisation” (Levinas, 49). A vulnerability of exposure does not fit into an assembled signified. The vulnerability of Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1964) speaks a different language to assembled meaning, and yet its exposure and uncertainty of vulnerability is not deaf to “the said.” *Cut Piece* has a structure, it has a duration, a limitation, and within the boundaries of her performance the vulnerability circulates uncontrolled. Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, single-channel digital video transferred from 16mm, 1964, Performed by the artist, Carnegie Recital Hall. In terms of feminist art Rozika Parker and Griselda Pollock speak of a feminism intervention where “there has to be a struggle not only about the content of representation but about the signifying systems which are points for the production of definitions, meanings and positions for subjects.” Does the uncertainty of vulnerability speak a different language to these systems? See Rozika Parker and Griselda Pollock, “Introduction: Art, Politics and Women” *Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-85*. London: Pandora Press, 1992, 92.
20. Levinas defines the reduction in the time of waiting when he writes: “The subject then cannot be described on the basis of intentionality, representational activity, objectification, freedom and will; it has to be described on the basis of the passivity of time” (Levinas, 53). If the *approach* holds with it “patience” or the “passivity of time”— if the approach is one that waits, that hesitates— then the subjectivity of the saying can then be *described*.
21. Under the sub-heading “The Reduction” Levinas writes that “[T]he reduction of this said unfolds in stated propositions, using copulas, and virtually written, united anew into structures; it will let the destructing it will have operated *be*” (Levinas, 44). What I take Levinas to mean by this is that there is a passivity needed in order to accommodate the passivity of “the saying.” Reduction allows for “the saying” to “be” and it is then “the saying” itself that chips away at “the said.”
22. “The said, contesting the abdication of the saying that everywhere occurs in this said, thus maintains the diachrony in which, holding its breath, the spirit hears the echo of the otherwise.” And “[T]he unsayable saying lends its self to the said, to the ancillary indiscretion of the abusive language that divulges or profanes the unsayable. But it lets itself be reduced, without effacing the unsaying in the ambiguity or the enigma of the transcendent, in which the breathless spirit retains a fading echo” (Levinas, 44).
23. Levinas, xviii.
24. “But a fine risk is always something to be taken in philosophy” (Levinas, 20).
25. In chapter one, under the subheading “Sensibility,” Levinas writes: “Signification, prior to being, breaks up the assembling [...] On the hither side of or beyond essence, signification is the breathlessness of the spirit expiring without inspiring, disinterestedness [...] the breakup of essence is ethics. This beyond is said, and is conveyed in discourse, by a saying out of breath or retaining its breath” (Levinas, 14).
26. In terms of this risk that needs to be undertaken Paul Davies writes: ‘We have seen that *Otherwise than Being* is a book under a sort of threat. It is always about to be fragmented, always about to come undone. It handles that threat not simply by warding it off, but by continually transforming it into an obligation, the obligation to continue.’ See Paul Davies, “A Fine Risk: Reading Blanchot Reading Levinas” *Re-Reading Levinas*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, 223.
27. Levinas writes of breathlessness as a “holding back” when he writes: “And ask if this breathlessness or holding back is not the extreme possibility of the spirit, bearing a sense of what is beyond the essence?” See Levinas, 5.
28. As with the above quote in footnote 19, ethics can be “conveyed in discourse” through “a saying

out of breath or retaining its breath.”

29. Levinas, xviii.

30. Leonard Cohen, “Anthem” *The Future*. Columbia Records, 1992.

31. It is Levinas’s son Michael who refers to his father as a “philosopher of cracks.” In a biography on his father Michael says that in his father’s philosophy there is a “kind of instability in the elaboration of a concept [...] in the conceptualisation that really expresses the crack in the concept. This goes well beyond something dialectical, it belongs to the order of the fissure. The concept is in the process of being born and it is put back into question at the very moment in which it is formulated.” See Salomon Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas: His Life and Legacy*. Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2006, 262-264. As a personal note Michael recalls his father’s advice as: “Sometimes the thing suffices in its incompleteness.” For Michael the incompleteness is our own incompleteness; the crack for Michael is the vulnerability of being human. For Michael the crack is “essentially the humanity, or the body, or the shame of the body. He calls this the face [...] The crack—that’s the face.” See Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 265. Hagi Kenaan also speaks of this crack when he writes: “The presence of the face creates a crack or a breach in the frontal order of the things that appear.” See Hagi Kenaan, *The Ethics of Visuality: Levinas and The Contemporary Gaze*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013, xx.

32. My interest here is that art can be in danger of misunderstanding Barthes “birth of the reader” to mean that the artwork is free and *open* for an individual’s interpretation. Rather than understanding Barthes “Death of the Author” to be arguing for a type of authorship where the readers ideologies or maintained position can be called into question. See Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana, 1977, 142-148.

33. Levinas, 53.

34. Levinas, 40.

35. I define “the saying” as *meaning in pieces* because of the way that Levinas defines “the saying” as the “signifyingness cannot be assembled” (Levinas, 27).

36. *No Sex Last Night* was the title for the artwork when it was shown in public cinemas.

37. Waiting by the pier Calle says “Greg promised to have me by the water at 9am. It is the first promise he’s kept.” But then on leaving Calle comments “Of all the places to bury him, why here?”

38. Of assembling Levinas’s “past that was never present” (Levinas, 24).

39. An interruption so the relation remains “other still.” I get this “other still” in part from Derrida’s essay “The Deaths of Roland Barthes,” where Derrida is mourning the death of his friend. In the essay Derrida expresses the dangers of reducing the difference that is within a relation by attempting to describe and re-present it; especially when the other person can no longer respond. See Jacques Derrida, “The Deaths of Roland Barthes” *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Merleau-Ponty*. Ed. Hugh J. Silverman. New York; London: Routledge, 1988.

40. Writing in the “afterword” for the book that recorded a forum on art criticism titled *Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism*, held in Canada in 2010, James Elkins writes: “In the last year there were at least five international conferences on art criticism. On the weekend the *Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism* I was at another conference on art criticism in Copenhagen. A few months before, in October 2008, there had been yet another conference on art criticism in Bogota, Colombia, and in summer of 2010 there was a large, four-day conference on the subject in Beijing.” See James Elkins, “Afterword” *Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism*. Ed. Jeff Khonsary and Melanie O’Brien. Vancouver: Artspeak and Fillip, 2010, 155.

41. A loss of critical debate is thought of as not just within art criticism but also within art more broadly. What this means is that galleries and art institutions favour values such as entertain-

ment, beauty, wonder, participation and inclusivity ahead of critique. For art theorist Hal Foster a withdrawing from critical debate—a reluctance to take a critical position—is a weak relativism, a relativism that permeates through art as a “post critical” condition. Hal Foster, “Post-Critical” *October* 139 (2012, 3-8).

42. Whilst art as the verb is *not* the “apophansis” because it hears only the “verb,” for Levinas the study of art, the responding to art in the form of the exegesis, *is* the “apophansis.” After defining art as the language that attempts to separate itself from “the said,” Levinas argues that writing on art, or a response to art, brings the artwork out of its “isolation.” The “exegesis” can be a study on the artwork and also not lose what Levinas sees as art’s main function. The artwork calls for the extension made by exegesis, the extension back into “the said,” and in answering this call, the written response can take the shape of an “apophansis,” the shape that both designates meaning and also retains within it the “resonance of the essence,” or the “there is.” See Levinas, 40-41.

43. Tom Morton, “Three or Four Types of Intimacy” *Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism*. Ed. Jeff Khonsary and Melanie O’Bien. Vancouver: Artspeak and Phillip, 2010, 33-34.

44. For Morton “even established critics are always auditioning, stepping nervously onto the stage.” Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 38-39.

45. Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 33.

46. In terms of having one’s own voice Morton speaks of a distrust in the argument against value judgement that says that the critic is in danger of merely speaking about themselves, that this not speaking about oneself suggests some mythical super critic. Morton writes: “it’s hard to think how this might be avoided—we have nothing but our better or worse selves through which to process the world. There is, after all, no possibility of a super critic, producing super text or super writing. Discontented as some of us may be with human frailty, we cannot transform the shambling journalist Clark Kent into superman.” In terms of intimacy Morton seems to be favouring here the messy Kent ahead of the clean and always right super critic. See Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 35.

47. Against the criticism that the art magazine that he writes for (*frieze*) is “belletrist” and always in the affirmative, Morton defines objectivity as fake unnatural response when he writes: “the appearance of objectivity is, in the end, precisely and only that.” Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 35.

48. Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 38.

49. Morton seems to suggest toward *the mess of life* when he writes: “If the critic is willing to ask where is freedom and adventure, and what does it mean to be awake, there remain messy, plural answers to be found.” Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 36-37.

50. Morton speaks of this vulnerability when he writes that: “the most wakeful of them are always aware of the beautiful, maddening failure of their project, which is to say the failure of language in the face of anything but itself.” And when Morton writes: “As with all writing, what matters here is honesty, along with the hope that one might communicate against the odds.” See Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 40.

51. Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 42.

52. In his essay “Criticism v Critique”— an essay that responded to the debates around the “crisis in art criticism”— and also specifically as a response to the forum *Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism*, JJ Charlesworth agrees with Morton’s analysis. A key point for Charlesworth is that judgement does not need to be purely understood as a positioning of objective authority, but rather that judgement can be the site of subjective experience and the participating in dialogue. Charlesworth also shares this sense of intimacy in the response that is part of a community in critical debate. In a radio interview that discussed his essay Charlesworth talks about a desire to speak of criticism and the possibility of judgment as “a space of evaluation which forms community

around a particular work, that judgements are not objective but form through [...] discursive practice.” And again this time separating judgement from an authoritative voice Charlesworth says: “Obviously it is true if you have a division of power between people who make judgements and people who receive them then there is something authoritative (about) judgement, but if judgement is some form of practice that occurs between people then that gives it a different shape.” For both Charlesworth and Morton the agency in taking a critical position can be the expression of an intersubjectivity. See J. J. Charlesworth, “Criticism V Critique” *British Art Monthly* 346 (2011, 7-10). And for the radio interview see: www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/category/talk-show.

53. “Most writers who have visited an exhibition with the purpose of reviewing it will have felt the flickering presence of the future reader at their elbow, chiding them not only to look and think harder, but to do so with an eye and mind that are not quite their own. This is more difficult than the dubious notion of critical objectivity assumes. While it’s clear that the reviewer cannot approach a show as *a viewer* [...] neither can he or she approach it as *the viewer* [...] Caught up in the wobbly magnetic field generated by these two poles, they must develop a mode of address that is true to their subject matter, their readership, and themselves—one that evokes the absent exhibition rather than merely describe it, and one that evaluates it in terms broader than those provided by personal preference [...] If anything still signals critical authority [...] it may be the ability to do this.” See Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 39-40.

54. For Levinas it is from this formation of an “exegesis” as an “apophansis,” from this response to art, that we rise out of the anonymity of “essence” to become the “Here I am” of individual subjectivity. The responding to the artwork is, for Levinas, the movement towards the “I” in “Here I am:” toward the saying as subjectivity that raises from the “there is,” not to be separate from existence but rather to be “*otherwise than being or beyond essence*.” Levinas’s definition of the art “exegesis” in *Otherwise than Being* becomes the “hypostasis” of *Existence and Existents*. The project of *Existence and Existents* was to move away from the anonymity of the “there is” to an “instant” where the individual subject, despite being bound to existence, rises out from this anonymity, from this “silence that resounds,” to be an individual subject. The same project in *Existence and Existents* is played out in *Otherwise than Being*, the project that looks for a movement away from the “murmur of silence,” toward a saying of subjectivity. The “exegesis” on art as an “apophansis” makes such a movement. In terms of this link between *Existence and Existents* with *Otherwise than Being* see Robert Bernasconi, “Forward,” in Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, xiv-xv.