

Bodies in Transit: The Plastic Subject of Alphonso Lingis

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Alphonso Lingis is the author of many books and renowned for his translations of Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, and Klossowski. By combining a rich philosophical training with an extensive travel itinerary, Lingis has developed a distinctive brand of phenomenology that is only now beginning to gain critical attention. Lingis inhabits a ready-made language and conceptuality, but cultivates a style of thinking which disrupts and transforms the work of his predecessors, setting him apart from the rest of his field. This essay sketches Lingis' phenomenology of sensation in order to give expression to some dimensions of Lingisian travel. As we see, Lingis deploys a theory of the subject which features the plasticity of the body, the materiality of affect, and the alimentary nature of sensation.

One is born with forces that one did not contrive. One lives by giving form to these forces. The forms one gets from the others.

— Alphonso Lingis, “We Mortals”

A Synthetic Phenomenologist

Alphonso Lingis is well-known in the Anglophone world for his translations. We continental philosophers have all read his renderings of Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* and Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*. He has also gained an admirable following with his philosophical travelogues, books like *Excesses*, *Abuses*, and *Trust*. In a way, even these texts offer us translations: of unfamiliar customs and peoples, of technical concepts and slippery philosophical jargon. In the travelogues, readers witness phenomenological descriptions of individuals and cultures which are laced with the thinking of alterity familiar to Levinas' readers, and the phenomenology of the lived body that Merleau-Ponty has handed down to the continental tradition. Set either between or beyond these two notions—alterity and the lived body—is Lingis himself, a philosopher who not only builds a bridge between American and continental thought, but who is the literal embodiment of a synthetic brand of American continental philosophy. As if William James and Emmanuel Levinas were co-opted to author *all* of the guide books in the *Lonely Planet* series,¹ many of Lingis' hybrid books read like reports from the field. His missives from Latin and North America, the

Far East, Antarctica, Africa, and Europe set Lingis apart from the rest of the American philosophers working in Husserl's wake. His (inter)continental approach spans the globe and reaches beyond the technical skirmishes of academic philosophy. Diane Ackerman gives us a splendidly caricature of Lingis' *modus operandi*:

Alphonso Lingis—whose unusual books, *Excesses* and *Libido*, consider the realms of human sensuality and kinkiness—travels the world sampling its exotic erotica. Often he primes the pump by writing letters to friends. I possess some extraordinary letters, half poetry, half anthropology, he sent me from a Thai jail (where he took time out from picking vermin to write), a convent in Ecuador, Africa (where he was scuba-diving along the coast with filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl), and Bali (where he was taking part in fertility rituals).²

The time is ripe for Lingisian studies to be extended and considered more closely.³

By examining the subjectivity of Alphonso Lingis as it is accounted for in his phenomenological writings, we can catch a glimpse of his philosophical perspective on embodied subjectivity and its relation to the sensible world. On the move, Lingis sets philosophy in motion—his travel is phenomenology at work. This essay is an attempt to articulate a few important dimensions of Lingisian travel.

Lingis is a wanderer and a cosmopolitan philosopher par excellence, perpetually in search of sensations and constantly giving expression, or the closest thing to it, to the sensualities he encounters. This sensuality is not only sought out in each of Lingis' travels, it operates as a condition of possibility in his philosophy. Speaking boldly, we might call him a transcendental phenomenologist of sensuality. A permanent itinerant, perhaps Lingis is one of the nomads that Deleuze and Guattari speak so fondly about. It is rumored that Deleuze was a secret admirer of Lingis, and it is not difficult to see why, whether true or not.⁴ He is a phenomenologist of the sensitive body, the materiality of subjectivity, and the disarming effects of travel. Focusing on a few of Lingis' properly philosophical texts, we will here examine the constitutive roles of sensation, affect, and sensuality⁵ in the Lingisian conception of embodiment.

Lingis has always operated from within the phenomenological movement, tarrying with Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas especially. Kant,

Nietzsche, Freud, Bataille, and Deleuze are likewise familiar company. He is very close to each one of these thinkers and his writing often moves into a region of indiscernibility when he is explicating their thought. But he is no mere commentator. Woven into his strictly philosophical fabric are the faces, desires, lusts, fetishes, drives, and emotions of the innumerable others in which he has immersed himself. Photographs of these others inaugurate his chapters, capturing in a glance what takes pages to describe. His original work flows from his affective immersions, and in this way we might also call him a radical empiricist, if we mean by this that his philosophy takes seriously the plurality constitutive of sensibility and refuses to sacrifice the infinity of sensuous relations embedded in the world of experience. If Lingis breaks with his phenomenological predecessors through a re-assertion of the indelible impact of sensation on our subjectivity, it is at the same time that he is energized by a labyrinth of unknown bodies and intelligences, and the claims they have made on his body's own intelligibility. His philosophy is invested with a kind of non-philosophy, and these two modes of thought circulate through one another, creating a feedback loop of theoretical and sensuous exploitation. In short, Lingis' travel testifies to the irreducibility and immanence of the sensuous, and its role in constituting and reconstituting ourselves. A system of sensation, sensuality, and sensibility abounds in his texts and mobilizes to contest the dominance of our rationality, the fluency of our affects, and our mastery over the carnal world.

Sensation and Perception: Some Phenomenological Explanations

What is a sensation? Some might classify sensation as a legend, a fabulous non-event or a dissimulation. Sensation is nothing more than a deficient mode of knowing, and thus encountered only negatively, as in Descartes. Sensation is said to be always already worked up through the perceptual or cognitive apparatus, as in Kant. Before we know it, the idealist revolution tells us, the data of sensation have already been commandeered by our unifying faculties. We have perceptions, but can lay no real claim to sensations: they are the noumenal and the unthinkable, merely inferred. The philosophy which begins with perception or, more precisely, which champions perception's primacy, seems to have already forsaken the reality of sensation. Must phenomenology abandon sensation? Lingis believes that this is precisely what is missing from phenomenology, and thus what aligns it with idealism. In *Sensation*, Lingis declares: "Phenomenology argues that

our sensations themselves are intentional; they are givens of sense, or give sense—orientation and meaning.”⁶ But a sensation can also be an interruption, a shift, an instigation and a disorientation. Sensations can announce the absence of sense or the onset of senselessness. A sensation can function as a kind of short-circuit of our habitual affects, our perceptual routines, our calculated taming of the environment.

For Lingis, neither sensibility nor sensuality can flaunt the confident directedness of intentionality. These ambiguous passivities are basic modes of human being and enable a flexibility within the subject. Our bodies are displaced by sensations. Lingis theorizes the interruptive mode of sensation, sensation as immanently *directive*, yet without apparent meaning. By drawing a division between the representational and the affective dimensions of sensation, he allows us to distinguish between sensation as sense and sensation as affect.⁷ His phenomenology of sensation unfolds into an ontology of the sensible. This is accomplished through a subtle analysis of our sensibility, one that creates a tension within the phenomenological tradition and which we will have to define.

Sensation intervenes in our practice and lets slip our hold on things and on ourselves. To deny its interruptive power is to deny the subordination of consciousness to the world of corporeal experience, to assert the primacy of human access to the sensuous world which we live from. It is to pretend that the phenomenal world has never once collapsed its appearance and asserted its fantastic weight upon our bodies. Lingis’ phenomenology of sensation disrupts the flattening of the world which is achieved in Husserl’s eidetic reduction, the reduction of real objects to their phenomenal facades. It is true that the senses can be deceptive...but only to an epistemology bent on certainty. Sensation is not first and foremost an epistemological theme. From a phenomenological standpoint which has bracketed knowledge claims, can sensation as such really be doubted or reduced? Can we *live* without sensation?

Against the grain of the phenomenological tradition, Lingis maintains that we cannot fully recognize our being-in-the-world in descriptions of subjectivity that place nothingness or a hollowed-out ego at the center of our consciousness; or when the lived body is considered the vessel of an intentional consciousness that opens onto the world and moves about it with an undisturbed practical savvy (S ix). The lived body is not merely a diagrammatic entity; embodied perception is not reducible to a unified grip on the world, as though embodiment could guarantee that the world will always

be encountered as an intelligible whole as long as it maintains its familiar spatiotemporal coordinates. For Lingis, the notion of embodiment describes first and foremost a sensual event replete with amorous and deadly—in a word, impractical—drives. We are born with forces that strive to exceed our being, and we die when we are finally overcome by such forces. These are what Lingis calls the *excesses* of life. As we will see, these excesses can get caught up into circuits, or take on forms that keep them in check.

Lingis is constantly in dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, diverging ever-so-slightly from it to make room for sensation. Merleau-Ponty goes to great lengths to exclude raw sensation from his account of perceptual experience. Perception, as intentional, is always perception-of, always the apprehension of a transcendent figure against a meaningful background. Phenomenologically, this feature of perception is, in a technical sense, *given*. This background is projected by some human perceiver and ensures that the unity of things always precedes the multiplicity of their qualities. Perception structures sense-experience and wards off the immediacy of sensation with *Gestalten*. The "prejudice of sensation" gives way, in Merleau-Ponty's description, to the immediacy of the meaningful whole: "henceforth the immediate is no longer the impression, the object which is one with the subject, but the meaning, the structure, the spontaneous arrangement of parts."⁸ The *Phenomenology of Perception* is a work that traces the minutiae of perception, and above all champions the object/horizon structure of our intentional experience. In it, an always intelligible form stages our interaction with the world.

The critique of what William James would call atomistic sensationalism is carried out by Merleau-Ponty in his defense of a desubstantialized subject, a subject fundamentally "conceived as an intentionality, a self-transcending movement of *ex*-istence, and no longer as the place of inscription of impressions."⁹ Our most elementary experiences are always already meaning-laden, figural, given to us as a thing that we can get our hands around. Merleau-Ponty insists on the continuous, ordered, and horizontal structure of the stream of consciousness. What Merleau-Ponty calls the "horizon" of consciousness, James refers to as "fringe." The fringe is comprised of the sets of physical and phenomenal relations that surround any particular act of consciousness, any specific conscious state.¹⁰ It accompanies, but does not constitute, the form of sensory experience. For James, these relations are derived from the physiology of the body-brain schema; they constitute, in addition to the objects they involve, what Lingis would call one "level" of

the world. Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, has to consider relations from the standpoint of the non-physical and non-ideal structures of consciousness. Objects and relations are seen as real only insofar as they make sense, or appear within a subjective horizon. Thus, for him, relations remain at the phenomenal object/horizon level instead of opening up their own discrete sensuous dimension. Relations, for Merleau-Ponty and most other phenomenologists, are substantialized in the act of perception, but at the expense of their real substantiality. It is not the physiology of the body that apprehends objects and their relations, but the intentional structure of a desubstantialized sensory-motor schema. Here we glimpse Merleau-Ponty's idealism, but we also begin to see where Lingis situates himself, working out a middle way between the physiology of fringes and the phenomenology of perception. This will eventually bring him into proximity with Deleuze.

Is it possible to reconcile the phenomenological account of subjectivity, along with the critique of sensationalism carried out by James and Merleau-Ponty, with the reality of sensation? What if sensation could be shown to be the hinge upon which reality swings, but somehow outside, while at the same time essential to, experience? Kant made sensory input a transcendental condition of human experience by noting the emptiness of the categories in themselves, but at the end of the day he cognized sensation right out of the experiential world. At best, sensation, insofar as it is said to derive from the thing-in-itself, is put into a precarious position, and it behooves us to remain agnostic about its reality. Lingis, by contrast, reminds us that "to sense something is to be sensitive to something, to feel a contact with it, to be affected by it" (PE 59). He proceeds to provide *evidence* for sensation by highlighting our passivity vis-à-vis sensory input. Sensation is not simply a stimulus given to and understood by our sensory-nervous system. It is also an exterior force that reminds us that we are situated against our will in a sensible field that leaves us susceptible to the system of elements that make up that field. As subjects, we are not only cognizant beings, but incarnated in a sensuous, preformed, and sometimes hostile world. Vulnerable and exposed, the "level of sensation *would be* the original locus of openness upon things, or contact with them" (PE 59, italics added). Before it is contoured, before it is ordered and subjected to human cognition, the phenomenological field is a sensible material set to charge the sensuality of the subject via the body's sensitivity (PE passim).

Lingis credits Merleau-Ponty's later work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, for having evaded the idealist trappings of Kantianism and modern

epistemology. Actually, Lingis tells us, already in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty sought to extricate himself from idealism through the complementary notions of lived body, motility, and the corporeal schema (PE 62). Against the classical accounts, the subject is re-substantiated, re-sensitized¹¹ and given back to the sensuous medium by Merleau-Ponty's practical-corporeal concepts. With Merleau-Ponty, the synthesis of experience is enacted not by the incorporeal medium of pure reason, but by the mobile perceptual schema that is incarnate consciousness. Against the twin pillars of modern epistemology, intellectualism and empiricism, he writes in *The Primacy of Perception* that embodied perception carries out a "practical synthesis" and "reveals another modality which is neither the ideal and necessary being of geometry nor the simple sensory event."¹² He continues: "This subject, which takes a point of view, is my body as the field of perception and action [*pratique*]¹³—in so far as my gestures have a certain reach and circumscribe as my domain the whole group of objects familiar to me."¹³ Supplementing Merleau-Ponty slightly, Lingis identifies this medium and its population of things as a material nexus of sensuality and sensuous objects. It is the very materiality of beings—ourselves included—that enables sensuous interactions and allows Merleau-Ponty to move toward the notion of flesh and speak of it as the folding back on itself of being (PE 62-63).¹⁴

The folding of the subject into the sensuality of being is what Lingis, following Levinas, calls "involution." The substance of subjectivity is produced from out of the field of desires, pleasures, and affections accumulated within the sensual matrix. "Sensuality is a movement of involution in a medium."¹⁵ The ontogenesis of the subject is carried out by this non-intentional, non-objective, non-attributive movement. First-person talk of "my domain" and "familiar objects" (Merleau-Ponty) loses its stability when subjectivity is conceived in this way. The subject must now be thought in terms of its original affectivity, and sensation has to be seen as an immanent modification of being, an impression that moves or orders the flesh—mine, yours, ours together. Lingis shifts attention away from the invisibility attributed to the flesh by Merleau-Ponty and toward the more tangible flesh of the elemental. This has the effect of placing both the visible and the invisible on an equal plane, ontologically speaking. Lingis writes:

The sensible flesh can be a locus where all schemes and movements of things can be captured, not because it is a blank slate or hollow of nothingness and thus a pure receptivity, but because it already contains

all that the visible, the tangible, the audible is capable of, being visible, tangible, and audible itself. Itself a field where the sensible radiates and schematizes itself, it captures the patterns the exterior things emit on the variations or frequency modulations of its own body schema. (PE 63)

The subject in Merleau-Ponty finds itself caught up in the sensible world, the subject-object dialogue,¹⁶ and a kind of corporeal grammar that organizes the lived body and inscribes its corporeity with sense. This still leaves the subject in control of itself and with a certain degree of unimpeachable practical knowledge, what Lingis identifies as *praktognosis*. Despite the carnal metaphor and its connotation of the immanence of subject and world, Lingis feels that Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh tames sensation by mediating it with the intentional structure of perception. But perception, Lingis contends, is derivative of the sensible: "The continuity of the visible field of the world and the visible flesh itself is not itself something perceived or effected through perception, if it is what makes perception possible" (PE 69). It seems that sensation must remain subordinate to perception in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Just as with Kant, the phenomenology of perception relegates sensation to the imperceptible outside, thus setting it at a distance that remains irrecoverable. This is not to say that Lingis affirms our knowledge of raw sensation, but his phenomenology is willing to demonstrate our intimacy with the sensible.

What Lingis seeks to reintroduce into phenomenological description is the surplus of sensation that acts as the transcendental condition of perceptual life. This surplus is what he will sometimes identify as sensuality, and at other times, the voluptuous or affectivity. In turn, he asserts the disruptive, or what he calls the *imperative* force, of sensuous/sensual being. Here we catch sight of Lingis' debt to Levinasian metaphysics. The sensual, for Lingis, is not something about which we must remain silent, an underlying "I know not what." Our sensibility reveals the sensual to us through its affective character: the often unbearable weight of being, or the unsurpassed pleasure of existence is hoisted upon us as a condition of our remaining alive in the world. To live is to be affected by the material imposition of existence, to feel ourselves engulfed in the plenitude of the flesh of the world, which is nothing other than our own fleshy substance. As Lingis writes in *Phenomenological Explanations*, "to sense is to sense the substantial" (PE 67). Our subjection to sensuality is the original modality of our subjectivity (PE 69).

Material Subjects, Sensitive Bodies

Modern conceptions of the subject hover around the idea that subjectivity is that element of human being which gathers and unifies, masters and orders the continuous series of sensations, perceptions, thoughts, emotions, decisions, and actions that each one of us undergoes. This is the *cogito* of Descartes as well as its many variations, most of which tarry with a variation of idealism that puts a premium on human access to the world. (This does not seem to be the case with the Spinozan subject; Spinoza is a stark exception to this rule.)¹⁷ In Kant, the “I think” that denotes the purest form of the rational subject is both the transcendental and transcendent condition of any possible human experience. The multiplicity that is the sensuous world, which stands at an irreducible distance from the Kantian ego, is brought to its only manifestation by the synthesis effected by the apperceptual self. For Kant, the world as I know it is my world because it is synthesized by me; the power of this synthesis is the work of the understanding and of judgment. The manifold of sensation is always already understood by the self. If it were not so, experience would crumble and the self would lose its hold on the world. Indeed, the world would fall into oblivion.¹⁸

The embodied consciousness that we find in Lingis resists Kantian unity by remaining in contact with the multiplicity of sensuous material. Although Lingis never mentions it, his phenomenology follows in the footsteps of a fellow American, William James. It is instructive to read them together, as has already been suggested. James is rightly considered a forerunner of Husserl and a phenomenologist in his own right. He, like Lingis, fiercely resists the reduction of the sensuous and preserves its vivacity in a luscious prose that is rare in academic writing. James is a philosopher of immanent (which is not to say immediate) sensations, a radical empiricist whose work is very much in the Bergsonian vein. (James was more than a decade older than Bergson, but their work was mutually inspiring.) Lingis shares James’ flare for colorful prose, the plurality of experience, and the abundance of empirical life. Both of them could be considered “vitalists,” albeit of different species. Above all, both James and Lingis insist on the unfathomable *levels*—the edges, lines, angles, hues, and planes that partition the world into unexplored and perhaps impregnable enclaves and passages—of sensible experience.¹⁹ Together they form the seeds of an American philosophical tradition which has yet to be classified.

Lingis and James share a common critique of the Kantian subject. James distinguishes between two selves, one corporeal (the “me”) and the other immaterial (the “I”).²⁰ These two selves correspond roughly to the empirical and transcendental subjects in Kant, respectively. In his *Psychology*, James gives a shorthand account of the pure Kantian ego and calls it simply the “combining medium.” To apperceive and synthesize is the “chief function” of the immaterial I, says James. The function of the I is to organize into a neat totality the multiplicity that is sense-experience. James writes: “Without this feature of a medium or vehicle, the notion of combination has no sense.”²¹ For James, it is the fluid stream of consciousness that gives unity to the successive states of consciousness. Rationally organized states of consciousness are produced as convergences at the end of the stream with the help of physiological and unconscious processes, but the stream remains primary. This is why James cannot be said to follow in the wake of Kant, who must subordinate the influx of sensory data to the categories of the understanding.

Where James breaks with Kant is also where Lingis departs from the idealist strain in Merleau-Ponty. What allows James’ empiricism to evade the Kantian critique of ordinary empiricism (Hume’s empiricism) is precisely what Deleuze will find, ironically, so valuable about Hume—his attribution of an *immanent* transcendental (“radical”) character to objective sensation. For James, this amounts to the rejection of a psychologized associationism, and a positing of the objective reality of relations between material things, the pure plurality of sensuous experience, and an uncompromising resistance to the holistic tendencies of rationalism.²² Similarly in Lingis, the immanence of sensation is shown to condition the practical, competent organization of the world, which is mistakenly believed to be the product of the transcendent structure of perception (Merleau-Ponty) or cognition (Kant). Whatever empiricism is alive in Kant and Merleau-Ponty, it is not radical enough for James and Lingis.

It is not just the substantive states that build up consciousness, according to James. The transitive states are equally constitutive of subjective experience.²³ What’s more, he says that the conjunctive relations entered into by the conscious subject are affective in character, grounded in “a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* or a feeling of *cold*.”²⁴ These feelings, for the most part, are harbored in the “material me,” or the body and its corporeal relations.²⁵ James advances a theory of corporeal grammar, or embodied significance, that

is not without its analogues in the diacritical systems of twentieth-century structuralism. But his is not a theory of the subject as sociocultural function, but as materially modified or produced by bodily relations. Lingis, following James, will call the ungraspable, sensuous elements in which we move “free-floating adjectives,” (I 14) so as to express the “grammatical” nature of our embodiment. None of this reduces human subjects to articulations within a discursive chain. It testifies to the fact that our bodies are sensitive to other bodies, that the conjunction and disjunction of bodies is *felt*, as well as perceived and enunciated.

As Lingis sees it, the combinatory function is not the basic function of the ego. At least, he sees the combinatory function as conditioned, not as spontaneous. James’ stream seems to be equally contingent and unruly. This is partly because both thinkers are so close to the phenomenology of perception, and the specifically corporeal form given to it by Merleau-Ponty. As Renaud Barbaras has argued recently, any philosophy of perception worth its salt is going to have to begin its analysis of subjectivity with perception, and resist the temptation to subsume this capacity under the categories of rational thought. What we call a sensible intuition—which is nothing less than a perceptual encounter with the world—is the first revelation of an ego or self. This means, for the philosophy of perception, that apperception must conform to perception, not the other way around.²⁶

The ego is not first and foremost an imprisoned and untouchable abstraction under which all experience is indexed. Nor is it merely a discursive construct, a placeholder “in the grammar of kinship, economic, and political codes.” It is a naked, exposed sensuality. It is a material body invested with energy and pleasure and lust and bliss. Vulnerably exposed, it is true; but writhing with joy beneath its bare flesh (I 18). Immersed in the elements, the ego is fundamentally a sensuous element itself, wrapped in sensuality, “a movement of involution that intensifies and releases its energies into the elements in which the sensual body is immersed.” The elements comprise the vague, ungraspable sensuous medium of nascent life—sonority, luminosity, terrestriality. As Lingis exclaims: “How calm the dawn is! How fresh it feels! How pungent it smells!—the zest and the savor vitalizing one’s spiraling sensuality are cast forth again indefinitely into the depths of the dawn” (I 19). The subject stripped down is a bare enjoyment of the depths, of the countless levels of unfounded sensations.

Like James and Deleuze, Lingis advocates a form of transcendental empiricism that gives ontological priority to the role of pre-personal sensi-

bility and corporeality in the constitution of our experience, thus making bodily sensation a condition of possibility of rationality, rational discourse, and epistemology generally. This follows Erwin Straus' *The Primary World of the Senses*, in which he writes:

Sensing is not ruled by the 'I think' which, according to Kant, must accompany all apperception. In sensing, nothing is apperceived. The sensing being, the animal, does not confront its world as a thinking being, but is, rather, related to it simply in uniting and separating.²⁷

There is a type of intelligibility nascent in sensibility, an intelligibility that is affective before it is intelligible and vital before it is rational. We might call this, following Straus, an alingual animal intelligibility. It is a pre-rational intelligence that we humans share with the other fleshy beings. We, as human-animal subjects, are already subjected to a sensuous medium that preempts the judgments and rational discourses we have either invented or acquired in order to master this medium and attempt to break off from the animal kingdom.

The circuit of rational discourse which is developed and deployed, the technological and sociocultural manufacture that we toil over to wrest ourselves free from the demands of our biological composition, and the community of modern individuals that each one of us is born into—all of this is preempted by our encounter with other bodies, intruder or seducer bodies, and the appeals they make on our own. This singular community of sustenance and separation is a community which is marked by the exposure of oneself to another in the sensuous medium. My flesh is nothing other than your flesh. But my body is at the same time *exposed* to your body, the body of some animal, and the totality of objects which are folded into the levels of the world. These levels allow Lingis' phenomenology of sensation to avoid the kind of holism that would eliminate separation and freeze every entity in an undifferentiated plenum. Phenomenologically, we know this is not our state of affairs. Our discrete, sensitive bodies commune through a labyrinthine carnality that holds us apart at the same time that we impress ourselves upon one another, modifying the totality of the sensuous substance. Lingis writes:

The exposed surfaces of the other do not position themselves before one as so much data for one's interpretation or as so much amorphous mat-

ter for one to give form and significance to. The carnal breaks through, collapsing the distances across which its presence can be represented. Carnal surfaces expose themselves without offering possibilities to one's powers. [...] In the immediacy of their presence, they are irremediably exterior: the surface of a sensibility, a susceptibility, a pleasure, and a torment that is irremediably alien to one and exposes a vulnerability and an alien mortality that summons one.²⁸

The difference between you and I is not negligible because it is immanent, because our carnality unites us. Something of *you* always exceeds my representation of you. Alterity, however, must operate within the immanence of the sensuous element; a pure immanence traverses the *perceived* gap between I and other (S 80). Lingis has replaced Levinas' radical otherness with a radical immanence, but without giving up the exigencies of responsibility. The problem of the ethical meaning of immanent alterity emerges in Lingis' reconfiguration of the imperative.

My Body As Material Other: Sustenance and Fatigue

The always antecedent presence of the material other, along with the desire or disgust that it inspires in the constitution of my subjectivity, structures the ethical content of Levinas' philosophy. Lingis takes up Levinas' project, the phenomenology of the face/other, under the banner of a Kantian notion: the *imperative*. The imperative is a responsibility laid upon us by our very existence, our simple being-in-the-world. Not because we are situated among other rational beings which demand our respect, but because we could not coordinate ourselves without the stimulation of others (rational and non-rational), we are bound to an imperative. For Lingis, the imperative denotes our inability to fend off sensations, our defenselessness in the face of things, other persons and animals, and the assault their earnest reality aims at us. The imperative lays claim to us as responsible agents because we are composed of the substance—the elements—of the material world. No naturalistic fallacy is committed here. Lingis shows how the *is* of existence is derived from its *ought*; that is, we exist because our bodies must respond to a barrage of directives which offer to sustain and/or diminish our vitality. Either way, we must respond to these directives which we call sensations. Straus puts it in the following terms: "Although sensations do not resemble the things which touch us, although they are only signs of the existence of

external objects, they can, nevertheless, be directional signs—that is, signs by which the other, the world, discloses itself.”²⁹

As world-disclosing sensations, pain and pleasure indicate the presence of danger or the absence of need. What we call our freedom, our independence, our autonomy is not a brute fact or a given. It is gained. It is a significant mode of being, a course prescribed to us by our senses and by the sensations upon which we feed. The singularity of our lives is delineated, says Levinas, by the nourishment we enjoy in living from the offerings of life. “Enjoyment,” he says, “is a withdrawal into oneself, an involution. What is termed an affective state does not have the dull monotony of a state, but is a vibrant exaltation in which dawns the self.”³⁰ The alterity that we find ourselves thrown into, energized by, worn out by, is what gives us life and sustains us in our striving. It individuates us from the rest of our corporeal community, makes us the subjects we are. Before we can become weak, tired, or wounded we must thrive or suffer at the hands of being-alive in the light, the earth, the air.

For both Levinas and Lingis, the elemental world provides a transcendental condition for our sustenance, and thus for our selfhood. The elements are our freedom (I 22). “Life lives on sensation; the elements are a nourishing medium” (I 17). The phenomenology of sensuous existence becomes here an ontology³¹ of corporeal, elemental, sensual subjectivity. Lingis writes:

Levinas’s phenomenological exposition shows that prior to the anxious taking hold on things which for Heidegger makes our sensibility practical from the first, there is the contact with the sensuous medium, there is sensuality. We find things, we find ourselves, in the light, in air, on terra firma, in color, in a resonant zone. Through sensuality we find ourselves steeped in a depth before we confront surfaces and envision the profiles of objects. Sensibility opens us not upon empty space, but upon an extension without determinate frontiers, a plenum of free-floating qualities without substrates and enclosures, upon luminosity, elasticity, vibrancy, savor. (S 80)

Against Merleau-Ponty, Lingis asserts that the perception of objects always occurs from out of a sensual state. Sensuality becomes the fertile ground of being-in-the-world. If Lingis breaks with Levinas, it is over the issue of the reality of objects. Although he affirms the primacy of sensuality, and, in a sense, considers contours and edges to be derivative, Lingis is not willing

to efface the reality of defined and determinate objects. This would land him in a modified Kantianism that he wants to avoid. Graham Harman has shown recently, in his *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, that Lingis toes the line between himself and the whole phenomenological tradition by affirming the autonomy of objects. Where for Levinas the reality of things is overshadowed by the “human hypostatization” of them, Lingis wields a realism that treats objects—and, by consequence, their sensible emissions—as the individual substances that they are. Harman writes: “The autonomy of stars and coral reefs is *real* for Lingis, no less than the independence of electric eels, cinemas, sunflower fields, snowflakes, and molten ores buried deep in the moon.”³² The countless objects and levels of the world are not dependent on us for their sensual energy, they offer themselves as so many avenues of pleasure that go about their business even when humanity is nowhere in sight.

The elements that give life to each one of us by offering themselves as the very stuff of our existence are sensuous material—luminosity, tactility, and sonority bathe our sensitive bodies. As the real source of our nourishment, they *lend us* sensibility and illuminate our world. Through the elements, the affective quality of sensuality—the unbearable or ethereal modes of bare life—is able to condition our “spontaneity.” No one can spontaneously wrest their psyche from a depressive state or truly induce a rapturous joy within themselves without the influence of some external power. Sensibility is not formal in its pure state, as Kant thinks. It does not come from inside and project itself outward; it does not derive from some transcendent location, over and beyond the sensuous manifold. The perceived sensuous manifold is always immersed within a sensuality which generates a creature whose sensibility emerges with its ripening.

Lingis sees sensibility as consubstantial with death. “In savoring the materiality of things sensibility has the taste of its own mortality” (S 81). Here, sensibility is not just a nutritive faculty, but is also a conduit for degeneration, precisely because it is contingent. In old age, sensibility yields to impairment and senility. “It is the clay of our own body, dust that shall return to dust, that knows the earth and knows itself as terrestrial. It is the liquid crystals of our eyes that are turned to the stars as to eyes of the night” (I 63). It is the liquidity of our eyes that becomes murky and prevents us from fixing upon the stars, even when they continue to shimmer. We are mortal subjects, not inviolable egos. We move our bodies throughout the world, initiating movement and automatically expending the energy we accumulate from the substance of existence. This is our burden; the source

of our fatigue is living as such. Corporeity weighs upon us as the obligation to continue living.³³

Over time, we catch sight of our own degeneration. The substance that we are begins to give way, to return to the elements that gave it movement. Heidegger says that we exist ecstatically, always bursting forth in our temporality. Lingis reminds us that it is this same temporality, and our inability to master our own passing, that both rejuvenates and enervates our material substance. This failure is no merely ontic contingency, as Heidegger would say. In *Deathbound Subjectivity*, Lingis clarifies the ontological value of our mortal substance: “The inability to put oneself back at one’s beginning, to find oneself once again at the commencement of one’s initiatives, to recuperate and re-present again what one had begun, which is the inner diagram of the fatigue in effort, is, across time, the condition of a subject that forms by aging.”³⁴ That my body deteriorates against my will; that play can only be sustained for so long; because I imagine my dead body and it is as such unrecognizable as my body: my self is an other, a foreign body, for me. This other is disclosed in the world of sensation. As I grow tired and old, the possibility of my death is simultaneously the actual deterioration of my subjectivity, the dissolution of what I have managed to bring into order or to undergo. In pain or exhaustion, the world infiltrates my systems and *overwhelms* me.³⁵ All sensitive bodies undergo a process of disorientation and desensitization as death unravels their competences.

Plasticity: Affective Circuits, Automatism, and Travel

The roots of identity can be found in the *affective circuits* and sensitive habits that constitute the substratum of our everyday lives. These are the generic or routine practices that we induce in ourselves by force of habit or catch on to, through a kind of behavioral citation, via popular culture, tradition, and ritual. Affective circuits are survival equipment. As children, we are especially susceptible to the influence of societal forms. The *plasticity* of our physiological systems makes us pliable, malleable in the face of external forces.³⁶ Even perception, says Merleau-Ponty, is physiognomic³⁷ and, therefore, plastic. To be composed of a plastic substance is to be susceptible to influence from the outside, but resistant enough that the integrity of subjectivity cannot be consumed by the affective excesses of existence. Of course, we are threatened with destruction by forces we cannot control. But for the most part, our bodies subsist in a fluctuating material existence

whose various forms prevent the total collapse of subjectivity into brute matter. This is what it means to be a plastic subject.

Affective circuits economize our actions, as well as relieve a good portion of the weight of our existence and the pain of our immanence to the material world. Following James, we can locate the basis of our behavioral habits in our sensations. An affective circuit, or what James calls a habitual chain, is a series of muscular contractions that are correlated point by point with a series of sensations. The series is set off by some sensuous stimulus or other, a muscular contraction results and gives rise to a second sensation (and contraction), a third sensation (and contraction), and so on.³⁸ Affective circuits aid us in walking, eating, getting dressed, socializing, communicating, etc.—all the behaviors that are ritualized into the mundane and effortless. These rituals and routines find themselves recorded in the musculature of the body and propelled along by the banal sensations that organize our typical days. These circuits coalesce into a system that subtracts from the abundance of incoming sensations and outgoing efforts required by life. They make up the constitution of our “body’s attitude”³⁹ and, by extension, the attitudes of culture. The body is laced with an implicit knowledge that enables our escape from brute being. In Lingis’ terms:

Feelings contracted from others, passed on to others, perceptions equivalent to and interchangeable with those of any other, thoughts which conceive but the general format of the layout about one, sentences formulated such that they can be passed on to anyone—make up the rigorous and consistent enterprise of evasiveness in the face of the being that is one’s own to be. (S 82)

Our bodies are adapted to the excessive content of our corporeal existence and streamline themselves with an habitual form that relieves them of the overwhelming scenery of life. Our prefabricated and stylized life forms prevent us from imploding in the life of our senses or becoming slaves to our libidos. For economic purposes, our sensory-motor schema adopts shortcuts that allow it to run on autopilot. As Bergson has aptly shown, habits link us into the mechanisms of nature as responses to the directives laid out by those mechanisms.⁴⁰ There is no ghostly ego orchestrating the machinery of the body, but rather a gamut of rites, rituals, ceremonies, secret passwords and slang, a whole social circuitry which invests the body with an identity and regulates its sensitivity. This gives the *appearance of automation* and total

integration into nature or culture.

Our automatic movements, our affective regularities, our corporeal identity—these forms are imparted to our bodies, so many of which await us at birth. We are sculpted, pre-sensitized creatures. The corporeal grammar of our culture seizes us and inscribes our bodies as soon as we emerge from the bodies of our mothers. A natal trauma invests the child's subjectivity with a communal form, a form—a structure, a language—that initiates the body into the stratified world and removes for good the possibility of raw sensation. This is the price paid for becoming master of one's own field of forces, for giving form to the surplus of sensation that inundates us upon entry into the world. These are our birth rites. Our bodies grow more competent as we mature. We achieve an advanced level of *praktognosis* as we become more familiar with the world, its offerings, and our capacity to get along within it. (Eventually this competence begins to unravel.) In a parallel formulation, Deleuze and Guattari will say of social "strata" that "they consist of giving form to matters, of imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems of resonance and redundancy..."⁴¹

Our cultures impart a form to our bodies that minimizes the dangers of our plasticity. Culture lends to us its affective circuits so as to keep us from straying too far toward the extremes of our sensuality or our sensitivity—these are malleable traits, debilitating at the same time that they are protective. Our plasticity composes a significant portion of our vulnerability. It is because our bodies are made up of an organic material whose substantiality yields to external forces that we are sensitive, and thus susceptible beings. Because we yield, we can encounter. If it were not so, our flesh would sense nothing. We are vulnerable not only to hostile forces, but to the mundane, habitual forms imposed on us by our everyday environment. As Lingis says, "one instinctually arranges one's life so that the tasks and the tools and the problems and the encounters will recur the same each day, one avoids the limits" (S 3). Can we, should we, ward off the excesses? Is this even our decision to make? Is the excess—*pure* sensuous material—not the necessary condition of our formal constitution?

Deleuze and Guattari will exhort us to destratify, to make of ourselves a "body without organs"—to oppose our own organized existence and open ourselves to experimentation, to whatever desires may come, to a nomadic movement that cuts across the circuits of our society.⁴² The body without organs is a body that is free to approach the limits, to seek out what Lingis calls those "situations and adventures in which one might be swept away

with a total and totally new joy” and realize “that one could never know such joy again” (S 3). The body without organs sloughs off its economizing forms and perceptual clichés. It travels outward and into the sensuous world, forsaking its affective circuits and the efficiency of its practical competence. “A cliché,” Deleuze tells us, “is a sensory-motor image of a thing.”⁴³ Clichés keep us at an ideal distance from the thing itself, always mediating and reducing our sensuous experience to the familiar, the comfortable, the safe and sound. Clichés inhibit our fantasy space. Affective circuits, corporeal forms, habits, and clichés—each of these devices perform a subtraction from sensuality and give us the impression that we are masters of our sensitive bodies. But our bodies are fundamentally enticed, engulfed, invested, and commanded by sensations that come from outside. Our sensations are not properly our own, even if they singularize us and make specific appeals to our senses. This is the meaning of Lingis’ imperative. This is what it means to live from sensation, to *be* a sensitive body traversing the earth. Travel is the means by which sensation is co-opted to contest the affective circuits that form our identity; travel unleashes our bodies’ capacity to affect and be affected (Spinoza).

The concept of *travel*, taken in an extended sense, can be considered central to Lingis’ phenomenology. Lingis intends travel as a destratifying practice, a practice which bursts our world wide-open. Lingis’ major theoretical book, *The Imperative*, is a text which develops the thesis that our sensuality, by its very nature, commands our bodies to travel, to open themselves up to foreign sensations and respond to the enticement of affects we are not equipped to assimilate into our typical circuits. Lingis’ primary claim in *The Imperative* is that we are not automatons, precisely because our perceptual and sensual schemata are not hardwired into our physiology or transcendental subjectivity, but nourish themselves on the sensuous elementality that we live from. Indeed, the excesses of desire are the body’s own vital form of destratification, the force which combats affective and perceptual automatism. To be caught in an affective circuit is to take on a contingent corporeal form that can be resisted with the kind of exposure that comes through travel and encounters with alien forms of life. It is the kind of contingency that an affect can reconfigure in an instant, as with the death of a friend or some other unbearable trauma. What is not contingent—but also not formal—is the excessiveness of affectivity itself: it is precisely our affectivity *as genesis*, the desire for/of travel, which exceeds our formal corporeal constitution.⁴⁴ The psychogenesis of the subject is nothing

other than the sensitive body in transit. This process is no less necessary for lacking formality. Weakness, discomfort, delight, and decay are necessary constituents of our material incarnation, but constitutive features which are generated as we are nurtured by the elements and enjoy our sensual/sensuous existence. This is the meaning of Lingisian travel.

The Imperative “shows sensibility, sensuality, and perception to be not reactions to physical causality nor adjustments to physical pressures, nor free and spontaneous impositions of order on amorphous data, but responses to directives” (I 3). These directives come from sensation itself, indeed they are sensation in all of its material manifestations—the humidity of the air, the scent of an other’s perfume, a tap on the shoulder, the hungry glance of a dog under our care. All of these phenomena make material claims on my body and my material self, even if the messages they communicate to me bear no literal resemblance to the physico-physiological basis of sensation itself, or if my cognitive machinery fails to comprehend their plea. My embodied consciousness, insofar as it is plastic perception, remains sensitive to innumerable demands and signals.

If there is anything that Lingis asks us to take from his travels, it is a recognition of the reality of sensations and the contingent constitution of sensibility. At bottom, the sensuous is a perpetual invitation and disruption of our practical movements and sensorial mastery, with all of their habitual investments. Sensations we have, but they are never purely our own. They belong to a transcendental flesh—a coded, affective elementality—which unites and separates us while inducing us to movement with appeals to our sensitivity. The sensory world performs our identities for us. One day the surplus of sensation rushes in and drenches us with its strange reality. When we are seized by a debilitating pain, “we feel the world attacking and invading us,” says Straus.⁴⁵ Our own bodies give out and fail us where they once carried us along effortlessly. Other bodies collide with our own and penetrate through our automatism, intruding on our intentions and short-circuiting our body-systems. These are the perils and promises of travel. “The traveler feels anxiety about his personal safety,” writes Lingis. “He has little confidence in a personal or institutional ethics to hold back the impulses of mass desperation. The trip there has something of the feel of an act of recklessness and bravado.”⁴⁶ We are met with affects, emotions, and sensations that we are unequipped to accommodate—because we are of the same substance, the same flesh, the same carnal community. For Lingis, this is a community of trust, but a trust which is built between those we trust without knowing or choosing.

In the end, Lingis tells us, we are a community that ultimately “has nothing in common:” the sustenance which circulates between bodies does not come from heaven, but from nowhere, from the nothing that sustains the earth, the elements, and the other. Unlike Levinas, who triangulates the face to face relation with God, Lingis locates the source of the imperative and the alimentary within the substantial economy. “In the substance of our competence other bodies emerge, ethereal and phantasmal—bodies that materialize forces and powers that are other than those of praktognostic competence.”⁴⁷ The singular matrix of forces and passions that organize our bodies comes from elsewhere, from beyond the world of equipment that we manipulate together. It is simply anarchic, but it seizes us and sends us reeling nonetheless. When these forces materialize, it is already too late for us to have prepared for their coming. When these forces dissipate, our bodies return to the anonymity of the elements—our common community. To say that we have nothing in common is not to say that we cannot respond to the unexpected sensation, but rather it is to say that we cannot hope to assimilate it before it makes claims upon our being. It is not ours to assimilate, for it is what nurtures assimilation in the first place. Sensation is the alimentary.

Notes

¹ A popular, budget-friendly travel guide series geared towards backpackers and hostellers.

² Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses* (New York: Vintage, 1990).

³ Lingis’ original writings have recently prompted the publication of a book of essays and interviews, *Encounters with Alphonso Lingis*, eds. Alexander E. Hooke and Walter W. Fuchs (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003). A few other articles on Lingis are in print in various journals, including: Simone Fullager, “Encountering Otherness: Embodied Affect in Alphonso Lingis’ Travel Writing,” *Tourist Studies* 1, no. 2 (2001): 171-183; Alexander E. Hooke, “Alphonso Lingis’s We—A Collage, Not a Collective,” *diacritics* 31, no. 4 (2001): 11-21.

⁴ This unconfirmed, yet delicious bit of academic folklore was related to me by one of Lingis’ former students at Penn State, Graham Harman, via e-mail on July 20, 2006. I must thank Graham for his generous correspondence.

⁵ Because sensation is for Lingis always charged with an affective and/or erotic component, whether pleasurable or painful, I will often employ the term “sensuality” in places where “sensuousness,” “sensitivity,” or “sensibility” could work just as well.

⁶ Alphonso Lingis, *Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility* (New York: Humanities Press, 1996), ix. (Hereafter cited parenthetically as S.)

⁷ In one of his earliest essays, “Sensation and Sentiment: On the Meaning of Immanence,” Lingis begins to excavate the “equivocality” of the notion of sensation. This paper

acknowledges the intentional side of sensation, which he links to the transcendence of the object sensed, before unpacking the immanence of sensation, which is correlated with the affective capacity of the body. Lingis here aligns himself with a form of radical empiricism which is derived from the Levinasian conception of existence as enjoyment and Michel Henry's understanding of immanence. It is this empiricism that allows us to bring Lingis together with Bergson and James. For Lingis' paper, see *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 41 (1967): 69-75.

⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 58.

⁹ Alphonso Lingis, *Phenomenological Explanations*, (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 60. (Hereafter cited as PE.)

¹⁰ William James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001), Chapter 2.

¹¹ Consider the following passage from *Phenomenology of Perception*, 236: "In short, my body is not only an object among all other objects, a nexus of sensible qualities among others, but an object which is *sensitive to* all the rest, which reverberates to all sounds, vibrates to all colours, and provides words with their primordial significance through the way in which it receives them."

¹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 14.

¹³ Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy of Perception*, 16.

¹⁴ There is a whole series of points of contact that obtain between Lingis and Merleau-Ponty which, of course, cannot be treated here. I am presently attempting to work out their convergences and divergences in another project. What I have tried to do here is give some sense of the tension introduced by Lingis into Merleau-Ponty's theory of corporeity, even though I feel that the similarities between these two thinkers far outstrip the differences.

¹⁵ Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 15. (Hereafter cited as I.)

¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 132. "The subject-object dialogue, this drawing together, by the subject, of the meaning diffused through the object, and, by the object, of the subject's intentions—a process which is physiognomic perception—arranges round the subject a world which speaks to him of himself, and gives his own thoughts their place in the world."

¹⁷ The question of the unifying rational subject is difficult to locate in Spinoza because his conception of the mind (in Book II of the *Ethics*) understands the mind as the idea of the body. This problematizes our understanding of the mind as a unifying faculty. I am reluctant to make any definitive judgments about Spinoza's relation to the sensuous world. What does seem to be the case is that, in many ways, Lingis' (and Levinas') treatment of affectivity is derived from Spinoza. Lingis might be seen as reaching back beyond Kant, and pulling Spinoza to the forefront of the continental discussion. I am tempted to say that Lingis is *extremely* close to Spinoza, and it is precisely on the problem of affection that they converge.

¹⁸ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), §16, especially note 202, B134.

¹⁹ The "levels" are what Lingis calls, in *The Imperative*, the plurality of dimensions of the world. In addition to the natural objects, manufactured things, humans and other

creatures typically recognized by phenomenologists, Lingis recognizes the elements, lusts, and habitats that impress upon and shelter us. The night itself is as fundamental as the figure and the horizon in Lingis' phenomenology; the night is one level upon which the world rests, a dimension that beckons us into its depths.

²⁰ Cf. James, *Psychology*, Chapter 3.

²¹ James, *Psychology*, 67.

²² William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 41-44. To draw this point out, it is useful to compare James' position with the remarks that Deleuze makes about Hume and "transcendental empiricism" in *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone, 2001).

²³ James, *Psychology*, 27.

²⁴ James, *Psychology*, 29.

²⁵ James, *Psychology*, 44.

²⁶ For a concise statement of this basically ontological problem, see the first chapter of Renaud Barbaras, *Desire and Distance: Introduction to a Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Paul B. Milan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

²⁷ Erwin Straus, *The Primary World of Senses: A Vindication of Sensory Experience*, trans. Jacob Needleman (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 197.

²⁸ Alphonso Lingis, *The Community Of Those Who Have Nothing In Common* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 177.

²⁹ Straus, *The Primary World of Senses*, 208.

³⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 118.

³¹ Graham Harman has written recently that, "The imperative actually has an ontological character even more than an ethical one. Its target is the dreary tendency to split the world into two mutually incompatible zones, one of them a mechanistic causal chain of objects blindly assaulting one another, and the other an arbitrary space of human freedom that imposes subjective values on a mindless grid of neutral materials." *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005), 62.

³² Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, 60.

³³ Alphonso Lingis, *Deathbound Subjectivity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 154.

³⁴ Lingis, *Deathbound Subjectivity*, 154.

³⁵ Straus, *The Primary World of Senses*, 208.

³⁶ Cf. James discussion of habit and plasticity in *Psychology*, 2. We might consider the recent attempt to synthesize neuroscience and phenomenology in the work of Bernard Andrieu as an updated version of James notion of plasticity. Brought into contact with Lingis, Andrieu's neurophenomenology accentuates the realist/materialist line of research at play in much of Lingis' texts. See, for instance, the program outlined in Bernard Andrieu, "Brains in the Flesh: Prospects for a Neurophenomenology," *Janus Head* 9 (1), 2006: 135-155.

³⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 132.

³⁸ James, *Psychology*, 7-8.

³⁹ James, *Psychology*, 9.

⁴⁰ Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Citadel, 1974), 231.

⁴¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 40.

⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 159.

⁴³ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 20. Our clichéd perception precisely cuts out the surplus of sensation which is harbored in every perceptual experience. This is for practical purposes, of course. “As Bergson says, we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what it is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands.”

⁴⁴ To understand more fully the import of this ontology of affect, which is fundamental to both Levinas and Lingis, it is helpful to contrast it with the potency/act ontology of Aristotle. Edith Wyschogrod carries out this contrast in a discussion of Levinas’ notions of “enjoyment” and “living from...” in her *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 55. Affect is shown here to break with the *telos* of (human) action, which for Aristotle is basic to the very being of activity. The affect of enjoyment, by contrast, is without purpose; it is simultaneously its own potentiality and accomplishment, an active passivity which nourishes itself and produces an excess of itself. What Aristotle lacks is the lived quality of the act itself, the excess that is not comprehended by the potency/act model. “It is precisely ‘life’,” says Wyschogrod, “which is absent from this picture.”

⁴⁵ Straus, *The Primary World of Senses*, 208.

⁴⁶ Alphonso Lingis, *Trust* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 60.

⁴⁷ Alphonso Lingis, *Foreign Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 24-25.