

David Maruzzella (New York University)

### The Uncertainty of the Other: Levinas and the Problem of Metaphor

In this paper I investigate the role that metaphor plays in the work of Emmanuel Levinas and its relationship to the idea of uncertainty that I take to be central to his philosophy. In order for Levinas to break with what he identifies as Western philosophy's imperialistic egology of the Same, it is necessary that he investigate moments where the traditional subject of philosophy falters and the "I" is "no longer able to be able" (*ne pouvoir plus pouvoir*). To accomplish this, Levinas must employ metaphoric language in order to give a proper account of the transcendence of the Other, whose primordial alterity resists assimilation into the category of the Same. However, if Levinas does not treat his discussion of the Other through metaphor, it would seem that he is guilty of "conceptualizing" the Other by reducing it to a mere object of discourse, and that he ultimately fails to inscribe uncertainty into the very heart of his philosophy.

Applying Lacan's statement in Seminar IV that metaphor is "a substitution that simultaneously maintains what it takes the place of," I argue that metaphor is at the bottom of Levinas' project and integral to the intersection between ethics and language that frames the face-to-face encounter with the Other. Metaphor is the modality of language *par excellence* by which the experience of the Other can be formulated while simultaneously marking its inadequacy, recognizing the impossibility of laying a direct and fixed claim to the Other. By making use of Lacan's discussion of metaphor, it can be shown that Levinas' work not only develops an ethics, but is also the presence of that ethics in an event of language that preserves the fundamental uncertainty of the Other.