This electronic thesis or dissertation has been downloaded from the King's Research Portal at https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/

Subjectivity, Infinite ethical responsibility and Null- site exposure
A constructive exploration of Levinasian subjectivity through the lens the Levinasian concept of utopia

Mao, Xin

Awarding institution:
King's College London

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without proper acknowledgement.

END USER LICENCE AGREEMENT

Unless another licence is stated on the immediately following page this work is licensed

under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International

licence. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

You are free to copy, distribute and transmit the work

Under the following conditions:

- Attribution: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
- Non Commercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- No Derivative Works - You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

Any of these conditions can be waived if you receive permission from the author. Your fair dealings and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Download date: 08. Oct. 2023

Table of Contents

Abstract ..... **v**

Introduction **1**

Outline of Chapters 4

Chapter 1 Non-place and paradise—the pre-ethical subjectivity established by the utopian dwelling **9**

Introduction 9

1 The non-place characteristic of utopia of dwelling 15

1.1 Non-place of the dwelling characterized as movement 17

1.2 The relational characterization of non-place 26

1.2.1 An analysis of the concept of the 'I' in 'Interiority and Economy'. 27

1.2.2 An analysis of the concept of the elements in 'Interiority and Economy' 31

1.2.3 An analysis of the conception of the feminine in 'Interiority and Economy' 34

1.2.4 An analysis of the relationship between the 'I' and the elements 38

1.2.5 An analysis of the relationship between the 'I' and the feminine. 41

1.3 The characterization of non-place as interior time set against the historical time 44

2. The paradisal characteristic of the utopia of the dwelling 52

2.1 Enjoyment and happiness 54

2.2 The primacy of sensibility based upon enjoyment and happiness 57

Conclusion: The pre-ethical subjectivity established through utopian dwelling 59

Chapter 2 The Unfolding of Ethical Subjectivity in Levinas through the Utopia of the Null-site Movement 61

Introduction 61

1 The method of overbidding and Abensour's analysis of ethical utopia in Levinas 67

1.1 The method of overbidding 67

1.2 Levinas overbids Martin Buber 73

1.3 From the I-thou relation to the face-to-face encounter of the 'I'-other 77

1.4 Levinas overbids Ernst Bloch 85

1.5 From utopia as hope to utopia as disinterestedness 91

1.6 Developments of the conception on utopia and subjectivity in *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence* (OBBE) 96

2 Terminology of 'null-site' (*non-lieu*) 99

2.1 An analysis of the term 'place' and the issue of its translation 103

2.2 An analysis of the term *lieu* and its various translation 108

2.2.1 *Lieu* as 'site' 108

2.2.2 *Lieu* as 'Locus' 112

2.3 An analysis of the term 'null' 113

3 The null-site movement through proximity establishing the ethical subjectivity as substitution 117

Chapter 3 From null-site subjectivity to 'a member of society' in the place of togetherness: Levinasian Socio-political in TI and OBBE 132

Introduction 132

1 Levinas's social political thinking in TI 139

1.1 Politics and war in TI 142

1.2 Politics and Freedom 151

1.3 Sociality taking place of politics in TI 155

2 Politics in OBBE 162

2.1 The relationship between the said and the saying 163

2.2 The path from ethics to politics in OBBE seen through the perspective of said and saying 179

3 The development of Levinas's politics from TI to OBBE 185

3.1 The development of the conception of justice from TI to OBBE 185

3.2 The development of the role of the third party from TI to OBBE 189

3.3 Different perceptions on the relationship between ethics and politics 193

Summary 197

Chapter 4 The culmination of the development of subjectivity through the null-site movement of reduction: the utopian subjectivity of prophetic signifyingness 199

Introduction 199

1 The possible contra-diction within Levinas's signifyingness 208

2 The third way signifyingness as nonplace: before OBBE 215

2.1 The exceptional signifyingness of the trace 215

2.2 The enigma of illeity beyond revelation of the signified 222
2.3 The ethical signifyingness in the third way as nonplace 226
2.4 The problem: the nonplace ethical signifyingness and the risk of negative theology 233
3 Signifyingness understood through the lens of the null-site movement of reduction 238
3.1 The Levinasian reduction 238
3.2 Reduction seen as a null-site movement 242
4 Prophetic subjectivity as 'Here I am' 251
Conclusion: The inner logic from ethical subjectivity to prophetic subjectivity 263
Thesis Conclusion 266
Bibliography 278

Abstract

With a view to staking fresh vantage points from which to address the highly difficult and often fluid notion of subjectivity in Levinas, this thesis undertakes a comprehensive and critically constructive exploration of the Levinasian concept of utopia, a concept which, in any of its multifaceted and evolving designations and contexts throughout the Levinasian corpus, is integrally intertwined with subjectivity. While utopia understood in the more usual sense of 'good place' does occasionally feature to a secondary extent in some earlier discussions, the primary and decisive import of the Levinasian meaning is found first in its designation as 'non-place' (on the level of the subjectivity of sensibility, especially in relation to the 'dwelling') and then later, crucially and far-reachingly, as 'null-site' (on the level of ethical subjectivity, which will in turn have vital ramifications on problems of subjectivity at the political and also religious or 'prophetic' levels). The thesis thereby makes its constructive contributions not only in demonstratively bringing, via the utopian concept, the possibility of new levels of integration and coherence (organically and developmentally) to what in the secondary literature have often been seen as contradictory stances on Levinasian subjectivity in its various contexts (sensible, ethical, political and so on); but also in providing the first comprehensive and in-depth structured analysis of utopia as a strategic theme across the Levinasian corpus. Among the several specific accomplishments and outcomes will be the thesis's ability, via the concept of utopia, to shed new light on the pressing and widely discussed problem of how the integrity of

ethical subjectivity as infinite responsibility for the other can be preserved in the justice demanded on the political level.

Introduction

Through a strategic usage of Emmanuel Levinas's unique and multifaceted concept of *utopia*, this thesis undertakes a critical and constructive analysis of the equally multi-textured notion of *subjectivity* as it appears across his writings. A pivotal aim thereby will be to show that his varying and sometimes apparently contradictory treatments of subjectivity—especially given that the meanings and contexts of the term will be seen to change and evolve under the chronological assessment which we will be undertaking across the Levinasian corpus—can be brought to greater organic integration than hitherto recognized; and that this in turn can, through the utopian lens, illuminate other related Levinasian difficulties in new ways. One crucial such difficulty will be the persisting problem of how the integrity of ethical subjectivity as infinite responsibility for the other can not only remain intact in the justice demanded on the political level, but indeed serve as the ground for the political. With regard to the 'chronological' approach mentioned above, it should be noted that the particular chronology traced in this thesis begins from *Totality and Infinity* (1961, hereafter TI), which is the work in which Levinas first begins to constructively advance an affirmative or 'positive' meaning for utopia; it then moves through a series of essays which are crucial for present purposes, including importantly 'The Trace of the Other' (1963), and 'Enigma and Phenomenon' (1965), before arriving at the vital discussions in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974, hereafter OBBE). Admittedly, several earlier works such as *On Escape* (1935) and *Time and*

the Other (1948) also contain passing positive references to utopia, along with other writings such as 'Place and Utopia' (1950) which treat utopia pejoratively. But it is in TI that utopia begins to take on the thematic or strategic importance which links it to future writings, and so our own chronology begins from here.

The legitimacy of using the notion of utopia to illuminate the evolution of the idea of subjectivity will be demonstrated in various ways throughout the thesis. But at this juncture it can simply be noted that while an explicit linkage of the two does not appear with any great frequency throughout Levinas's works, the pervasively implicit linkages and interpenetrations between the two are supported by several strong and explicit statements.[1] Importantly, in whatever context they are brought into alignment (whether on the level of sensibility, the ethical, the political or the religious/prophetic), this association will be found to be driven by various forms of the non-ontological approach Levinas adopts to differentiate his concept of subjectivity from the more traditional ones—which, for Levinas, as we shall see, find their most representative ontological forms in the subject as *conatus essendi* and in Heidegger's *Dasein*.

Some further basic or generally contextualizing details about what this means or involves will be given in the outline of chapters below. But I

[1] For example in TI: 'The primordial function of the home does not consist in orienting being by the architecture of the building and in discovering a site, but in breaking the plenum of the element, in opening in it the utopia in which the 'I' recollects itself in dwelling at home with itself.' Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 158. Or in OBBE: 'It is, in my bearing of myself, not to conduct myself well, but by my unicity as a unique being to expiate for the other. The openness of space as an openness of self without a world, without a place, utopia, the not being walled in, inspiration to the end, even to expiration, is proximity of the other which is possible only as responsibility for the other, as substitution for him.' Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 11.

preface this by reiterating and somewhat expanding on what I intend to be the unique constructive contributions of this thesis. By offering what will constitute the first comprehensive and in-depth structured analysis of utopia as a strategic theme across the Levinasian corpus, the thesis seeks to demonstrate the possibility of new levels of integration and coherence within what in the secondary literature have often been seen as contradictory stances on Levinasian subjectivity in its various contexts (sensible, ethical, political, prophetic/religious). But in so doing, the thesis also offers what is arguably the first attempt at a comprehensive, integrated, and in-depth interpretation of Levinasian subjectivity. There are obviously a great many discussions on subjectivity in Levinas,[2] yet the interlocking connections of the distinct aspects of Levinasian subjectivity have hitherto not been critically analysed in a comprehensive form. As to the uniqueness of the link between utopia and subjectivity here put forward, there are of course an array of discussions on the Levinasian utopia both in Levinas studies and in utopian studies;[3] however, little if any attention has been given to the significant link between Levinas's conception of subjectivity and his notion of utopia.

---

[2] Leora Batnitzky, 'Encounter the Modern Subject in Levinas, *Yale French Studies*, No. 104, Encounters with Levinas, 2004, 6-21, 6; Robert Bernasconi, "What is the Question to which 'Substitution' is the Answer?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 235. William Young, *Uncommon Friendships: An Amicable History of Modern Religious Thought* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 160.

[3] For example, the Levinasian scholars Miguel Abensour and Catherine Chalier have analyzed utopia in Levinas from ethical and religious perspectives. Ruth Levitas, in her book *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*, dedicates a section in the chapter 'Utopia and ontology' to the idea of utopia in Emmanuel Levinas. Miguel Abensour, 'Persistent Utopia', in Constellations, Volume 15, No. 3, 2008, 406-421; Miguel Abensour, 'To think Utopia Otherwise', translated by Bettina Bergo, in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Volume 20, No. 2-Volume 21, No. 1, 1998, 251-279. Catherine Chalier, 'The Messianic Utopia', translated by Andrew Slade, in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Volume 20, No. 2-Volume 21, No. 1, 1998, 281-296. Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 187-188.

In the process of laying out a comprehensive interpretation of the intertwined development of subjectivity and utopia in Levinas, we also try to tackle several related questions, importantly including the frequently debated question on the seeming contradiction between the significance of the Levinasian ethical infinite and the acknowledgement of the necessity of justice and politics. The impasse or contradiction invariably encountered with regards to this problem will be shown to be approachable in more mutually accommodating ways through the utopian lens, especially through particular applications of the Levinasian notion of the 'null-site', together with the new utopian way of 'signifyingness' which it offers.

Outline of Chapters

In chapter one, we focus on the initial phase of the association between utopia and the subjectivity of sensibility, as found in TI. We here discover that while Levinas retains the more usual designations of utopia as 'a good place' and 'non-place',[4] he also departs from their usual meanings by focusing these through the subjectivity of the 'dwelling', whose non-ontological features radically overturn the ontological presuppositions of subjectivity normally reflected in these two designations, as one individual taking a place within the totality of all-inclusive essence or being. Through

[4] Obviously, in the extensive corpus of utopian studies, there are many definitions of utopia that have descended from Thomas More's original definition as non-place and good-place. For example, in its more recent development, utopia has been associated with 'desire for better being' in works of Ruth Levitas; in Lucy Sargisson, 'utopia' is defined as a political transgression. It is beyond the scope of the present research to cover the very broad literature on utopia, so we choose to be faithful to the origin of the term in Thomas More. Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 2-3. Lucy Sargisson, *Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression* (London&New York: Routledge, 2000), 138-143.

a close textual analysis of the relevant discussions, we single out three salient features of the dwelling which characterize it as non-place within a constantly renewed sensibility: movement, relationality, and non-historical temporality. It is through these that the separation between interiority and totality can be clearly established. Because this sensibility of the dwelling as non-place is also a locus of the 'enjoyment' of its 'elements', it is also deemed to be utopian in the sense of 'good place'. In this way, we establish the sensible subjectivity as grounded within the utopian dwelling, which entails a radical deviation from subjectivity as grounded in consciousness or cognition.

Chapter two turns our attention to ethical subjectivity, for which the non-ontological features of the subjectivity of sensibility will be shown to have laid a particular kind of groundwork. On the ethical level, the previous utopia of 'non-place' will be found to give way to the utopia of *non-lieu*, which, as we shall demonstrate, finds its most accurate English denotation in Alphonso Lingis's translation of the term as 'null-site'. To explore this we begin with crucial insights offered by Miguel Abensour, who, via reading Levinas's engagement with Martin Buber and Ernst Bloch as an 'overbidding' of their projects, finds that the ethical utopia in Levinas can be defined most essentially by two fundamental features: as 'encounter' (with the other) and as 'disinterestedness'. We find, however, that Abensour's work can only take us so far, especially as his analysis is based primarily on TI, and cannot cover the overarching evolution of Levinas's conceptualization towards OBBE. But, crucially, we also find that the 'overbidding' methodology he uncovers in TI can be expanded to inform

Levinas's methodology more broadly, and, importantly in this regard, that what will be shown to be the key ethical utopian themes of 'proximity' and 'substitution' in OBBE can be found to be 'overbiddings' of the 'encounter' and 'disinterestedness' which Abensour detects in the utopia of TI. Through explorations of proximity and substitution, we underline the linkage of the null-site utopia with subjectivity, a linkage that conveys a subjectivity 'emptying' the pre-ethical site of the dwelling in the null-site movement of proximity, a movement which in turn is radicalized in substitution where the subject's responsibility becomes infinite, even to the extent of becoming responsible for the responsibility of the other for the others.

In chapter three we confront the possible challenge concerning its socio-political significance which the Levinasian ethical subjectivity, with its infinite signification, faces. We argue that, despite the infrequency of direct engagement with specific socio-political issues in Levinas's major philosophical works, these works are nevertheless highly socially motivated and contextualized. To explore the contextualization of ethical subjectivity within Levinas's socio-political thought, we follow the development of Levinas's explication of the relatedness of his ethics and its social consequences as reflected in TI and OBBE, and in intervening shorter works. We re-organize the major findings on Levinas's socio-political ideas chronologically, pointing out that in his later work, with the introduction of renewed concepts such as the third party and (socio-political) justice, Levinas finalizes his ideas on the relationship between ethics and politics by following a certain trajectory of development: from a relation of radical

opposition between the two, to one of seeing the subjectivity of ethical infinity as the intelligibility of politics, which, however, inevitably draws infinite subjectivity as 'saying' into the thematization of the political 'said'.

In chapter four, therefore, our task is to address more precisely the question we contextualized in the last chapter: how the integrity of ethical infinite significance can be preserved despite or beyond its necessary thematization in the said, in particular now that ethics is signified as the intelligibility of politics. In the process of addressing this problem, we undertake a constructive analysis of the 'way of signifyingness' in Levinas,[5] once again through the lens of utopia, through which we seek to arrive at a 'signifyingness' that can signify beyond thematization. We find an earlier establishment of such 'signifyingness' in the form of what Levinas calls a 'third way',[6] which, however, still relies on the narratives of equivocation and on indispensable references to God. This way of 'signifyingness', in other words, cannot yet circumvent the critique (through Derrida and others) that it arrives ultimately at a form of negative theology (a result which Levinas also wishes to avoid). Via the utopian focus, however, we are able in OBBE to uncover a renewed form of such 'signifyingness', beyond thematization, through a new form of 'reduction'. The null-site movement of reduction as the new 'signifyingness' will be shown to ground a subjectivity that both breaches the enclosedness of thematization in the said, and yet also preserves the ethical significance of the saying, ordained

[5] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Meaning and Sense', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1996), 33-64, 53.
[6] Ibid, 60.

by an infinite responsibility from 'who knows where'.[7] This leads to an underlying association of subjectivity with a 'calling beyond theory', which draws together theory and praxis, where Levinas himself, as writer, finds himself exposed to a 'prophetic subjectivity' which calls for 'a response with responsibility'.[8]

[7] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 13.
[8] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 151.

Chapter 1

Non-place and paradise—the pre-ethical subjectivity established by the utopian dwelling

The primordial function of the home does not consist in orienting being by the architecture of the building and in discovering a site, but in breaking the plenum of the element, in opening in it the utopia in which the "I" recollects itself in dwelling at home with itself.

Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), 156

The access to the world is produced in a movement that starts from the utopia of the dwelling and traverses a space to effect a primordial grasp, to seize and to take away.

Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), 158

Introduction

From his essay 'Utopia and Place' (1950) onward, Emmanuel Levinas endows the notion of 'utopia' with a unique meaning which opens up a possible space for an alternative understanding of the term. In an important essay, Miguel Abensour offers the insightful observation that utopia in Levinas takes the form of a 'persistent utopia' in contrast to the 'eternal utopia' which characterizes the

more usual usage of the term.[1] To be more specific, what falls under the name 'eternal utopia' is a utopian intention that leads to a certain stillness of an eternal picture that dominates all the other desires, a picture in which plurality is suppressed and where individual singularity further suffocates alterity.[2] However, Abensour points out that Levinas's 'persistent utopia' manifests itself very differently: in a constant rupture of any established system, as an 'always new upsurge' and as an 'ever reborn movement' that cannot be contained by any ontological category.[3] It will be the contention of this thesis that a thorough critical exploration of this notion of utopia will show its 'always new upsurge' not only to be linked integrally to the understanding and development of subjectivity in Levinas, but to also thereby to illuminate Levinasian subjectivity in uniquely important ways.

In this chapter we begin with a close analysis of utopia in Levinas's major work, *Totality and Infinity* (1961, hereafter TI), which as noted in the introduction is the first work in which utopia begins to take on a thematic or strategic importance. Here, Levinas establishes the 'interiority' of the subject through depicting a separated dwelling of the 'I', naming this 'dwelling' of the 'I' 'utopia'. This association between the subjectivity of interiority and utopia sheds a first light on their intertwined development, which especially in TI marks the initiation of the mutual evolvement of both conceptions. We begin our explorations with the 'utopia of dwelling' (especially as found in the section of TI entitled 'Interiority and Economy') not only because, chronologically speaking, this is where Levinas's major positive discussions of the term begin, but also for

[1] Miguel Abensour, 'Persistent Utopia', *Constellations*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2008, 406-421, 407.
[2] Miguel Abensour, 'Persistent Utopia', 407.
[3] Ibid., 407.

the philosophical and phenomenological reason that the utopia of interiority can be seen to act as the 'precondition' or presupposition of all subsequent discussions of utopia which are concerned with subjectivity.[4]

The two quotations cited at the beginning of this chapter make plain that the connotation of utopia in this context is closely related to the concept of the 'I' that 'recollects itself' in the 'dwelling', and to the event of 'separation' between this dwelling and the world. What then is the essential connection between utopia and this dwelling of the 'I' that makes the dwelling utopian, and what does this connection reveal of the salient features of the subjectivity of interiority that distinguishes this Levinasian subjectivity from other prominent treatments of it? These questions also challenge us to come to a specific understanding of terms such as 'I', 'recollection', and 'separation' in light of the unique and specific conception of 'utopia'. In order to address these questions, the present chapter will argue that the dwelling of the 'I' is utopian both for the reason that it is a 'non-place', and for the reason that it is a paradise (a 'good place') for the 'I'. We will therefore see that on a general semantic level, Levinas preserves the usual or standard denotations of 'utopia', even while developing these meanings in very different ways. The chapter will also explain why this dwelling as non-place and paradise functions pre-ethically for the further development of subjectivity in Levinas, initiating a subjectivity of sensibility that accomplishes a separation from the totality implicitly presupposed by ontological categories.

'Utopia' is not a randomly picked word for the description of subjectivity of interiority and dwelling in Levinas's corpus; neither is it directly associated

[4] Kathryn Bevis, 'Dwelling and the Maternal Body in Levinas', in *Literature & Theology*, Vol. 21, No. 3, September, 2007, 317-329, 320.

with the stereotype of utopia as 'an ideal society'.[5] Levinas approaches the concept of utopia on an etymological level, where utopia regains its original meaning as 'non-place' and 'good place', but in a non-ontological manner.[6] This original non-place is in need of exploration, rather than simply to be presumed. The usual presumptions concerning 'utopia' are often unrealistic or impractical in their representation of the idea of perfection.[7] In Levinas, however, especially when he uses the term positively, 'utopia' will be shown to be importantly different from these assumptions. Specifically, in 'Interiority and Economy', he goes back to the primal level of the word 'utopia' and attempts to redefine what an alternative reading of 'non-place' might be. As Elisabeth Thomas points out, the 'utopia of dwelling is non-place' in Levinas's TI, not in the sense that it is a negation of place but in the sense that it is established through a 'primary relation' and movement, rather than through any presupposition of a possibility of the existence of any sort of place.[8] At the same time, the 'good-place' denotation of utopia is also developed in a way that differs from the signification of a well-ordered polis, as found in many other utopian discussions, stressing rather the importance of a sensibility of enjoyment for subjectivity.[9]

Through our alternative way of interpreting utopia, we will depict a subjectivity of sensibility pre-ethically. 'Pre-ethical' is not the exact word used by Levinas himself; however, several Levinas scholars, for example Jacques Derrida

---

[5] From Plato's 'Republic' to Thomas More's 'Utopia', the 'ideal society' has always been the central focus of 'utopia'. Especially from a political point of view, people tend to equate 'utopia' with the 'ideal society'. See J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 7.
[6] Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: St. Queen Square, 1869), 117.
[7] J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society*, 13.
[8] Elisabeth Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics, Justice and the Human beyond Being* (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), 64.
[9] 'A good place to begin is Athens', Kenneth Royce Moore, *Plato, Politics, and a Practical Utopia* (London: Continuum, 2012), 14.

and Simon Critchley, use the concept of the 'pre-ethical' to indicate the phase of dwelling in Levinas (especially in a discussion on the role of the feminine in Levinas, which appears crucially in the elaboration of dwelling).[10] Derrida sees this pre-ethical phase as the 'origin of ethics' in Levinas,[11] which for our purposes will be shown to denote the status of the utopia of the dwelling as pre-ethical, or to lay out the ground for an interpretation of subjectivity at its pre-ethical phase. This point will be examined more fully as we proceed.

We will therefore begin our discussion by looking at the two aspects of the utopia of the dwelling: as non-place and as good place. Within the scope of TI, especially in the section 'Interiority and Economy', where the non-place is related to the dwelling, the non-place can be tentatively interpreted via three salient features of the dwelling. The examination of the first feature will start with an interpretation of non-place as *movement*. In order to form a habitation for the 'I', two movements—separation and recollection—will be shown to be intrinsic to the character of the dwelling. The non-place characteristics of these movements are further supported by terms such as 'breaking', 'opening' and 'recollecting' which Levinas uses to describe dwelling.[12]

The second feature will be articulated through the perspective of seeing dwelling as inherently *relational*. The relations comprising the utopia of dwelling are the focus of intense discussion by Levinas, including importantly the relation between the 'I' and the 'elements', and the relation between the 'I' and the 'feminine'. Far from its status as an isolated subject, as it is often viewed, the 'I'

[10] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999), 44; Simon Critchley, 'The Other's Decision in me', *European Journal of Social Theor*y, 1998, February, Vol. 1, No. 2, 259-279, 270.
[11] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 44.
[12] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 156.

itself is therefore shown through the utopia of the dwelling to be formed by its relatedness with the elements and the feminine. In Levinas's own words, the 'I' is not an 'absolute subjectivity, independent of the non-I'; it is 'crystallized' in the sensibility of enjoyment of the elements and the 'gentleness of the feminine face'.[13]

The third feature of non-place dwelling concerns the *temporality of dwelling as non-historical*. The time of interiority is unique in Levinas, especially in view of its relationship to history, through which the non-place is opened up in a way that separates it ultimately from any event of taking a place in the presentation of historiography (or so we will argue). This non-place temporality will be a key factor in resisting any subsumption into ontological totality, which has been seen as a danger of utopianism in its usual treatments.

The central meaning of utopia is of course its denotation as 'good place'. From the time of Thomas More, utopia as 'good place' has been a topic that has inspired human imagination for the possible betterment of human existence, in aspirations toward the ideal of the 'perfect society'. The Levinasian utopia of the dwelling also preserves this 'good-place' feature of the common definition, although developed in radically different terms as a 'paradise' provided, for example, through the enjoyment of the elements on the level of Levinasian sensibility. The paradisal characteristic of the utopia of dwelling is important in the sense that only as 'a citizen of paradise' can the 'I' build its sense of 'joy of satisfaction', which leads to its independence within the dwelling from the totality of reasoning, and which will be crucial for the utopia of dwelling to ground the future ethical development of subjectivity upon sensibility.

[13] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 144, 150.

1 The non-place characteristic of utopia of dwelling

In his novel *Utopia,* Thomas More depicts both the dark reality of England in 1516 and the ideal society on an island called 'Utopia'. More creates the neologism 'utopia' by ingeniously combining two Greek words, 'eutopia', which means a good place, and 'outopia', which means non-place, as a pun.[14] If we focus on the meaning of utopia as non-place, we can see that it initially bears connotations such as 'unreal', 'exists nowhere', and 'never existed as such or at least not yet'.[15] Due to the fictional nature of More's description, the island Utopia definitely does not exist, but the non-existence connotation of utopia is reinforced through other observations. The actual meaning of non-place in the story refers to the fact that the island does not exist in the historical geographical map any human being has ever drawn, at least until the day when the protagonist, Raphael Hythloday, visits it. Thus, in one sense, non-place can also be understood as an unknown place. In addition, non-place in More's tradition can also be perceived as a place opposed to present-day reality, or more exactly a means of critiquing that reality. As pointed out by Martin Bodden, the ambiguity of living on this utopian island, conceived of as living on the border between fantasy and reality, shows 'man's problematic relation to ideal societies'.[16] The darkness of reality can be disclosed by being contrasted with the utopian island, which, due only to the fact that it is remote from reality with all its defects,

[14] Martin Bodden, *Thomas More: Utopia and the Vision of Ideal Life* (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2007), 7.
[15] Maria Avelina Lecilia Lafuente, 'Social imagination in Paul Ricoeur', in *Logos of Phenomenology and Phenomenology of the Logos: Logos of History, Logos of life: Historicity, Time, Nature, Communication, Consciousness, Alterity, Culture*, edited by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 211.
[16] Martin Bodden, *Thomas More: Utopia and the Vision of Ideal Life*, 7.

becomes an ideal place. Furthermore, some science fiction depicts utopia as an ideal place in the future, which also offers an approach via which non-place is understood as the coming future. In summary, then, we can propose that 'non-place' in the common usage initiated by More basically means a place beyond human recognition, a place opposed to the reality of the here and now.

However, the non-place of Levinas's utopia is very different to the common usage initiated by More. The understandings of non-place in the tradition from More all make reference to a place, whether directly or indirectly, even though the place is within an imaginary history or geography. No matter whether an unknown island, unknown country, far away continent, or a society in the future, it refers to a place, and more exactly serves to designate a negation of the existence of such place. By contrast, Levinas does not set his utopia of dwelling on the basis of a geological or historical place, howsoever imagined. The non-place of Levinas not only negates the place of here and now; rather, it is fundamentally opposed to the very concept of a physical or ontological place. It is non-place in the sense that it can never be put in the category of an essentialized place, imaginary or otherwise, not even the category of negating this place—since, for Levinas, the function of negativity in ontology is only another category of ontology.[17]

As reflected in TI, this novel approach to the non-ontological characteristic of utopia is embedded in the three distinctive features mentioned above, which we return to now for a more detailed investigation. First, we will explore the non-place characteristic of movement: the movement of breaking the 'plenum of elements' to form the dwelling and the movement from home toward

[17] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 40.

the world which is conditioned by the dwelling. Secondly, we will explore the relational aspects of 'non-place' in the utopia of the dwelling, which are established upon the relationship of the 'I' with the 'elements' and the 'feminine'. The third feature to be discussed is the understanding of time as non-historical time in the non-place of dwelling, which enables Levinas's utopia to avoid the totalitarian dangers of the more common utopian understandings.

1.1 Non-place of the dwelling characterized as movement

To come to a fuller understanding of the non-place character of the dwelling, we need review the main signification of the notion of 'dwelling' in TI. It can be assumed that Levinas intentionally contrasts his concept of the dwelling to the Heideggerian dwelling; as Alison Alinley points out, Levinas's philosophy on dwelling in TI 'clearly refers back to Heidegger.'[18] For the purpose of the present discussion, it will be helpful to look briefly at Heidegger's notion of dwelling, which signifies exactly what Levinas opposes.

The *dwelling* is a very important concept in Heidegger's philosophy of being. Heidegger analyzes the old German and English word *bauen* and finds that the word *bin* belongs to it: 'The old word *bauen*, to which the *bin* belongs, answers: *ich bin, du bist* mean: I dwell, you dwell.'[19] Dwelling is the way that human beings who are mortals under the sky, on the earth, and before the divinities, exist. 'The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we

[18] Alison Ainley, The Feminine, Otherness, Dewlling: Feminist Perspectives on Levinas, in *Facing the Other: The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Sean Hand (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), 7-20, 11

[19] Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofsadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 221.

humans are on the earth, is *Bauen*, dwelling.'[20] For Heidegger, dwelling is building, maintaining and orienting being in the world, which is the mode of being for *Dasein*. In this mode, *Dasein* finds its place in the world, which prepares for 'some heroic labor' [21] in solitude, which, according to Sean Hand, is a philosophical approach of 'anonymous reality' and 'possession'.[22]

Heidegger poetically designates the essential characteristics of the dwelling of human beings as 'on the earth', 'under the sky', and 'before the divinities', which clearly locates the subject in relation to the world.[23] It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to expand on Heidegger's conceptions, but it can be evidently inferred that this dwelling is an ontological description of the positioning as status rather than a becoming that constantly breaches the 'plastic image'[24] of representation: the represented vision of the enclosedness expressed through 'on', 'under' and 'before' defines a strong sense of essentializing a status of a location and remaining one's place within the totality of the world.

For Levinas, the Heideggerian dwelling, which signifies 'staying in a place' and preserving one's being,[25] loses sight of the fact that the features of movement and relationality of dwelling presupposes any ontological positioning or consciousness of being. The Heideggerian dwelling is only an 'orienting being by the architecture of the building' and 'discovering a site'.[26] But Levinas is searching for what is prior to these sorts of focuses in his concept of the dwelling.

---

[20] Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', 222.
[21] Sean Hand, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 41
[22] Ibid., 41.
[23] Ibid.,143.
[24] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 66.
[25] Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', 143.
[26] Ibid., 156.

According to Levinas, the establishment of the dwelling goes through a process in which the 'I' 'breaks the plenum of the element' and at the same time opens in it 'the utopia in which the "I" recollects itself',[27] where the dwelling is a becoming that resists being enclosed into a site and being positioned. Levinas's notion of dwelling intends to show the dynamics and relationality of the process where the interiority of the subject is established.[28]

This is to say, for Levinas, the utopian dwelling is nowise an 'architecture of building' which orients being; nor is it a site that waits to be discovered. It instead is a process of formation of a home for the 'I' to enjoy the elements, and establishes an intimate relationship with the feminine.[29] This dwelling in Levinas is not an abstract 'being' as in the etymological interpretation given by Heidegger (*bauen*); it is a concrete series of relationships and activities of the 'I'. Or more accurately, the 'I' is not 'I' without its movements of separation and recollection, and relationships with the elements and the feminine in the dwelling; these interactions are the concrete processes essential for the formation of the subjectivity of the dwelling.

We have suggested that within the scope of TI, the non-place of the utopia of dwelling can be firstly understood from the perspective of non-ontological movement. Movement that goes beyond any ontological category is a notion that needs to be explained for the current discussion. Movement, for Levinas, is understood through his understanding of the notion 'becoming', which is opposite to 'the idea of being'.[30] This is to say, movement, as being distinguished from the sedentary, ontological status of 'being', is an activity of moving toward,

[27] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 156.
[28] Ibid., 156.
[29] Ibid., 156.
[30] Ibid., 53.

which cannot be captured by any essentialized concept of being. A detailed analysis of 'being' and 'becoming' is beyond the scope of the current chapter. Nevertheless, as far as utopia is concerned, the difference between being and becoming shows the different attitude toward the utopia of dwelling in differentiating it from the ontological tradition that centres on the essence of being. This can be seen as, the category of 'being' implies a utopia that depicts another place in order to alter the existing one. However, in contrast, understanding utopia as 'becoming' associates utopia with a non-ontological movement that breaches any attempt to include subjective interiority within the system of being and essence. In 'Interiority and Economy' we can observe that the formation of the dwelling is described by Levinas with terms such as 'breaking', 'opening', 'traversing', 'seizing', that can be further classified into different phases of the non-place movement, and which can be specified as separation and recollection, and their extended phases of possession and labour.

To understand the non-place characteristic of utopia of the Levinasian dwelling through its feature as movement, we first need to examine what he conveys through the notion of separation, which is the initial phase of its characteristic as movement. In TI, one can observe that the notion of separation more exactly signifies two different stages of movement: one is the separation between the elements and the 'I' (whose signification will be explained in detail shortly); the other is the separation between home and the world (which, in its ethical significance, will become that between home and infinity). To be more exact, the separation between home and the world is referred to by Levinas as recollection, which will be explained soon as a recollection with intimacy in the dwelling.

The two stages of the movement of separation can be seen more exactly to be, the first stage of separation as 'breaking the plenum of the elements'[31], and the second stage, the opening a utopia for the 'I' to recollect itself.[32] Firstly, the separation between the elements and the 'I' is depicted through what Levinas calls 'enjoyment' (*Jouissance*): ' enjoyment separates by engaging in the contents from which it lives'.[33] Separation as enjoyment marks an ultimate difference from separation as a simple split 'like a spatial removal', since enjoyment is rather a constant movement of living.[34] We begin to understand the unique notion of enjoyment in Levinas, which is not a description of a certain feeling; rather, as its French origin *jouissance* indicates, it is more exactly a continuous movement of playing with the elements, which is claimed by Levinas as the very act of living of the 'I'.

Looking at the conception of enjoyment closely, it is first of all stressed as happening on the level of sensibility. The 'I' enjoys the elements through its sensible qualities, which are defined as non-ontological. This is to say, the sensible qualities cannot be assimilated into knowledge or become part of logic. They are rather the qualities to be lived. Levinas stresses: '[O]ne does not know, one lives sensible qualities: the green of these leaves, the red of this sunset.'[35] To argue for the non-ontological, non-theoretical feature of sensibility of enjoyment, Levinas designates further the intentional structure of enjoyment to be ultimately different from the intentionality of consciousness in Husserl. To be brief, the Husserlian intentionality of consciousness marks the process of objects

[31] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 156.
[32] Ibid., 156.
[33] Ibid., 147.
[34] Ibid., 147.
[35] Ibid., 135.

being assimilated within the consciousness of the 'I'. Intentionality of enjoyment rather begins with a body 'indigent and naked', and is initiated via a movement of reverting representation to life, which is an 'event of separation in itself'.[36]

In this enjoyment, the 'I' gains its egoistic character: 'enjoyment throbs egoistic being', which separates it from the content of its enjoyment in 'a movement toward itself'.[37] Separation between the 'I' and the elements is described by Levinas vividly as an interruption effects on the continuum of the elements as an individuation from the 'overflowing immensity' of the elements where the 'I' is sinking inside.[38] The inward movement leads to the next phase where the subjectivity of the 'I' finally established, that is, the process of recollection, which is more exact a process of the separation between the home of the 'I' and the world.

If separation between the 'I' and the elements is a movement of breaking, recollection is a movement of gathering. The original French word for recollection is '*se recueillir*', which means to collect and gather itself. To look briefly at the function of recollection within dwelling, Diane Perpich summarizes that recollection is a capacity to 'take a distance from oneself and from the pressing material need' for the present.[39] With this ability, recollection moves inward to the dwelling, where the 'I' retires.[40] But recollection needs to be distinguished clearly from possession or preservation of being. Possession is already a result of the representation of objects, and the process of

[36] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 127, 122.
[37] Ibid., 147, 118.
[38] Bertina Bergo, *Levinas between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth* (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 60.
[39] Diane Perpich, 'A Singular Justice: Ethics and Justice between Levinas and Derrida', in *Emmanuel Levinas*: *Critical Assessment of Leading Philosophers*, Volume IV, *Beyond Levinas*, edited by Claire Katz with Lara Trout (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), 325-342, 337.
[40] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 152.

representation belongs to the ontological category. Instead, recollection belongs not to a category but to the movement of becoming, a constant retreating that preconditions any possession.[41] This is why Levinas claims that the 'I' recollects in a 'utopia', since recollection does not lead to the occupation of a 'place' in the world, and utopia as non-place signifies pure movement.

Furthermore, Levinas claims, 'recollection refers to welcome',[42] and 'the woman is the condition for recollection'.[43] The controversies on the role of the woman in the dwelling will be discussed later, but for now we can see that Levinas emphasizes that interiority begins with an 'intimate familiarity'[44], which arises from the feminine. The feminine brings the movement of recollection a certain 'affection', with which the elements are spread over with gentleness. Levinas claims that the feminine transforms the gathering of objects into living: 'they ground the corn and spin the flax'.[45] The relationship between the 'I' and the 'feminine' will be discussed more fully below, but the importance of the feminine in recollection can be seen already, since it is through the gentleness of the woman that the material enjoyment obtains its meaning of real habitation, not a bare 'living from…': 'the simple living from… the spontaneous agreeableness of the elements is not yet habitation,'[46] but the intimate of the woman makes habitation possible. With the significance of the feminine in the process of recollection, Levinas concludes that 'recollection refers to a welcome'

[41] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 224.
[42] Ibid., 157.
[43] Ibid., 155.
[44] Ibid., 154.
[45] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Judaism and Feminine', in *Difficult Freedom*, translated by Séan Hand (Baltimore: Johns
Hopkins University Press, 1990), 30-37, 32.
[46] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 155.

where the feminine expresses its hospitable 'welcome' for the 'I' in its dwelling,[47] which holds the potentiality for the future welcome for the ethical other.

After the establishment of the dwelling through separation and recollection, the 'I' is described as 'at home' (*chez Soi*), and as having retreated from the world. At the same time, the boundary between the home and the outside world becomes manifest. The movements of possession and labour thus take on significance, depicted by Levinas as a movement starting 'from the utopia of the dwelling' and traversing 'a space to grasp and seize'.[48] First, labour seen from the perspective of the utopia of the dwelling is different from the 'heroic labour' located in the fourfoldness of the world as in the Heideggerian dwelling.[49]

Levinas emphasizes that labour is a movement of the hands, which cannot be directly equal to the consequence in the mechanism of cause and effect. He argues the hand traverses the space but the 'I' still stays in 'its interstices' that are hollowed out from 'the continuity of earth', which prevents the subjective hand from being part of the cause-effect connections of the world.[50] Thus, the movement of labouring is nowise a moving along within the chain of pre-determined causes and effects. Rather, Levinas stresses that the movement of the hand takes place 'with all the contingencies', which is to say that that the movement of the hand may achieve its goal but it may also fail to do so. The name Levinas gives to this primal movement of the hand is 'groping', which can be understood as a movement into the unknown. This movement of traversing demonstrates clearly that the utopia of dwelling cannot be associated with any

[47] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 155.
[48] Ibid., 158.
[49] Seah Hand, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 41.
[50] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 170.

place with boundaries, as this traversing to the unknown cannot be represented, which rather opens up the 'fathomless' space of the elements.[51]

The uncertain elements threaten the immediate enjoyment, and hence the movement of possession is necessary to fix the elements 'between the four walls of the home'. And more importantly, in the movement of possession, the 'I' takes away from the elements, separates them from the 'endless' continuity they belong to, which can only happen based upon dwelling. Procession changes the unknown future of the elements, where the object obtained through groping is preserved for 'future enjoyment'.[52] In the movement of possession, the elements start to take shape, which supports 'qualities' and in the end becomes substantiated into being.[53] The movements of labour and possession, even though beginning from the dwelling, lead towards an order that is not anymore an 'order of sensibility', which is rather the order of substance: 'possession alone touches substance.'[54] The substantiation of objects in these movements leads to postponement of the expiration of the elements, which for Levinas opens a void between the home and the world where the line between interiority and exteriority is drawn.[55]

After examining these two sets of movement related to the utopia of dwelling—separation and recollection which form the dwelling, and labour and possession which start from the dwelling, breaching its borders with the world—it can be concluded that a central aspect of the non-place character of the Levinasian dwelling must be understood as a movement of becoming rather

[51] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 159.
[52] Ibid., 161.
[53] Ibid., 161.
[54] Ibid., 163.
[55] Ibid., 165.

than a place of being. The dwelling itself is always in formation, a formation that never ceases, where the main parts within, the 'I', the feminine, and the elements, are in constant interaction. Next, we move on to examine the non-place feature from the aspect of these interactions.

1.2 The relational characterization of non-place

Having summarized the non-place characteristic as movements of becoming, we move on to the second salient feature of the dwelling as non-place: its relational character. To examine the relational characteristic of the non-place of the utopian dwelling requires a brief look at the components or features that interact with each other in the dwelling. We begin by examining the subject 'I'. As a corporeal existence, the 'I' has its needs for air, water, light, and food. Levinas introduces a new concept, 'elements', to replace the traditional concepts of materials such as things or tools, in order to convey that these elements become part of the living of the 'I', and are not just objects for representation. Furthermore, for Levinas, a human world cannot be made solely of a cold relation between the subject and the elements of material. The 'I' in the dwelling needs 'intimate familiarity' through which a human inhabitation with intimacy can be formed.[56] The feminine offers the 'I' this necessary intimacy and takes the role of welcoming, as we will show shortly. Therefore the components that complete the relations forming the habitation are to be seen as the 'I', the 'elements', and the 'feminine', which we will first explore in the context of the dwelling, before examining the relations between them.

[56] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 154.

1.2.1 An analysis of the concept of the 'I' in 'Interiority and Economy'

Adriaan Peperzak claims that the attitude Levinas holds toward human subjectivity and autonomy differs from many other French philosophers (for example the structuralists) of the 80s who were contemporary to him.[57] The latter seek to abolish the traditional understanding of human subjectivity and autonomy without considering the value this tradition can bear. Levinas, however, while himself heavily critical of traditional approaches to the subject, tries to show that the human 'self' is worth preserving and he seeks to endow it with 'a structure other than the one that was presupposed by the tradition'.[58] This 'I' as a separated subject is one of the main themes in Levinas's phenomenology in TI. He seeks to show that there can be a term of subjectivity with respect to which the radical alterity of his ethics is possible. This term of subjectivity must enable the relation between the same and the other to be actualized without making way for the same to assimilate the other. In its identification, the same will be found to be absolutely the same without any need to refer to a bigger totality to locate it: an 'I' which identifies itself by its own content, which is more exactly its dwelling. It is not an individual which derives its meaning from the system to which it belongs:[59] the 'I' as such will be able to resist becoming an ontological part of the totality of the same, and the 'autonomy' of the subject of interiority prepares the subject for its irreplaceable response to the other during the ethical encountering.

---

[57] Even though Peperzak has not indicated who these French philosophers are here, from Levinas's own commentary on contemporary French philosophers, we can discern that the French philosophers who 'resolutely abolished human subjectivity' are the structuralists of whom Levinas is critical in his essay 'Ideology and Idealism'. See Emmanuel Levinas, 'Ideology and Idealism' in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 3-14, 6.
[58] Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993), 25.
[59] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 36.

As we shall see, in Levinas's later philosophy, especially in OBBE, the 'I' takes a more radical presence as a self in the sense of a 'being for the other', which Levinas takes so far as to signify a 'substitution' for the other.[60] Even though the later development marks a shift from the separated 'I', for his philosophical project in TI to establish his ethics, Levinas emphasizes that these two aspects—'satisfied, autonomous', and 'for the other'—must be realized simultaneously for the subject.[61]

Levinas is critical of both what he sees as the traditional Western 'universal' subject since 'universality presents… inhumanity'[62] and the Heideggerian particular subject whose particularity stems from comprehension, which still belongs to the epistemological tradition. The Levinasian 'I' is very different from the traditional Western individual who embodies the universality of being, or the Heideggerian *Dasein* who questions his/her being, both of which place the subject on an ontological plane.[63] Levinas's argument against the traditional individual as a theoretical result is fairly straightforward, but Levinas admits that Heidegger, in his articulation of *Dasein*, shows he is endeavouring to catch the particularity of *Dasein*. Nevertheless, the particularity is gained from comprehension, which for Levinas 'only exists through knowledge, which is

[60] 'Substitution' is an important concept in OBBE, where the discussion of 'being for the other' is unfolded. The subject closed in its world in TI is addressed ethically in OBBE, the subject is exposed and the distance it reserved for itself now changes to the 'proximity' of the other. The responsibility of the 'I' for the other is conceived as substitution: 'to give to the other the bread from one's own month.' Substitution will be subject to a lengthy discussion in the later chapter about Levinas' idea on ethical subjectivity in OBBE. Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xxviii.
[61] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 62.
[62] Ibid., 46.
[63] Corey Beals, *Levinas and the Wisdom of Love: The Question of Invisibility* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 20.

always knowledge of the universal.'[64] Knowledge, comprehension, and conception turn particularity into 'middle and neutral' terms, which reduce the other to the same.[65] But if it is not by reflecting on itself that the 'I' can gain its non-universal identity, then how, by what other means, can the proper identity of the 'I' be established?

In his phenomenology of the dwelling, Levinas gives a detailed description of how the 'I' establishes its identity in the dwelling, which we have already partially understood through our discussion above on separation. The self-identification of the 'I' is a concrete process where I 'establish myself as inhabitant' of dwelling, which denotes the 'I' as its own content separated from any system of reference. [66] In its home, the 'I' enjoys the elements and develops a relationship of intimacy with the feminine; through this enjoyment and intimacy the 'I' finds its content and identifies itself. The process of establishing the 'I' can be seen more precisely as the activity of 'living from…'. Levinas stresses that we live not for a bare abstract concept of living, but the concrete content of enjoyment, as we mentioned in our discussion above. This enjoyment forms the initial stage of the egoism of the 'I' in the sense that 'what I do and what I am is at the same time that from which I live.'[67] By saying this, Levinas clarifies that the 'I' is not a subject which 'supports' the activities, but is the activity of living, which is described as 'vibrant exaltation'.[68] Through describing subjectivity as

[64] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan T Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 5.
[65] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 42.
[66] Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 136
[67] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 113.
[68] Ibid., 118.

'exaltation', Levinas emphasizes that the subject 'I' is an upsurge from enjoyment which does not participate in the totality of being.

Levinas emphasizes that the subject is excluded from the world, breaching the totality, which is an independent 'I'; but at the same time, the 'I' is also importantly dependent to the world. He acknowledges the importance of the corporeality of the 'I' which simultaneously denotes the 'I' as having a feature of dependence. To be precise, seeing the subject 'I' as a body is to say it has a distance from the world, which makes the body need the world—'a needy being'.[69] But this need does not lead to a negative perception of the subject as in 'poverty' or 'sickness'; instead the subject, separated from the world, is happily nourished by the world. The dependence of the 'I' for Levinas is important, since, first of all, it makes labour and possession possible. The subject has an ability to ensure 'the satisfaction of its needs', and succeeds in its searching and yielding in order to fulfil its need. Second, to see the 'I' of dwelling as an dependent subject with need also clears the space for the conception of desire in relation to the ethical other. To be concise, the desire of the ethical other does not involve any state of lack, but is rather signified by the height of the other and its absoluteness in relation to the interiority. It is beyond the aim of the present discussion to provide an extensive account of the difference between need and desire, but in brief we can conclude that the subject 'I' is both dependent and independent of the world, that is to say, both a subject separated from the world and one which needs the world in a positive way.

[69] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 116.

1.2.2 An analysis of the concept of the elements in 'Interiority and Economy'

The concepts of the elements in TI cannot be grasped by following the traditional conception of objects, understood in accordance with subjective consciousness, as in the Western philosophical tradition. The elements appear with significance from the process of enjoyment and it is hard to separate the elements from the enjoyment itself. The elements are enjoyed by the senses in a manner which is pre-representational and pre-theoretical: this enjoyment is not a '*vis-à-vis* with regard to objects'.[70]

In TI, in order to distinguish things that we enjoy from an object in representation, Levinas gives a close analysis of 'the way the things we enjoy come to us.'[71] He claims that the things in enjoyment 'take form within a medium'.[72] This medium is both non-possessable and non-definable, in the same way as 'earth, sea, light' which are nobody's and around which cannot be drawn definite boundary.[73] Things of enjoyment that come to us from this medium have a special relationship with this medium, which is not the ontological relation as between parts and system, since there is no way for the things to be referred back to this medium. We cannot procure things from this medium by making a reasonable choice or reflecting on it. These things are named the elements, which are 'indeterminate', in the sense that it cannot be represented as an object or become knowledge of an object with reference to a system.[74]

---

[70] Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993), 155.
[71] Ibid., 131
[72] Ibid., 131.
[73] Ibid., 131.
[74] Ibid., 141.

Furthermore, one can observe that the elements in the context of the dwelling are not tools in a utilitarian sense. Levinas opposes his notion of the elements to the Heideggerian notion of 'ready at hand'.[75] There is no goal for enjoyment other than the enjoyment itself, therefore in enjoyment the elements are both means and ends. The instrumental view which separates means from ends is based on representation, since what function the elements can have needs a calculation in a rational system. Comparatively, 'enjoyment is completely careless';[76] it is without any plan or project to begin with.

After distinguishing the concept of the elements in Levinas from the concept of objects and tools in the Western philosophical tradition, we examine the special features Levinas gives to the elements in TI. The first feature is that the elements have no form. What are the elements? Are they air, water, earth, or light? Levinas has not given a specific definition, although at times he mentions air, earth, sea and light as examples of the elements. What is the similarity that air, water, earth, and light share? We can see that they are all without form, which can help us define elements as content without form. Nevertheless, according to Levinas, having no form does not equate to being 'formless', in that the concept 'formless' already conveys a connotation of 'matter that lacks and calls for form'.[77] This feature of 'not having form' is more primary than the division of matter and form. Furthermore, this feature of the elements is closely related to the senses through which the 'I' enjoys the elements. Since, in enjoyment, the 'I' has no care about what it is enjoying, the elements have no

[75] Jeremy Wisviewski, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Lanham: Rowman& Littlefield, 2012), 42.
[76] Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 156.
[77] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 140.

presentation to the subject. Thus there is no contour or silhouette in one's view of the elements during the process of enjoyment.

One needs to note Levinas indicates at some occasions in TI that although the elements do not have form, they are yet able show 'one side' to the 'I'. However, this showing one side does not lead to an identification of the elements. To see one side of the elements can be understood as in the meeting with the elements, a surface of the elements is singled out. But this surface is only singled out to introduce the depth of the elemental abyss. The elemental abyss under the surface is never obtainable therefore the elements cannot be identified. In this way, Levinas marks out the importance of depth for the elements which dimension the identification of objects never grasp. To cite an example given by Levinas, we look at an object, such as a table, we confirm that we see the same table despite that for each moment we can only see one side of it. For the elements, depth is ultimately different from any side of the breadth or length.[78] We cannot see the depth and cannot assimilate the dimension of depth into the vision of breadth and length. On some other occasions, Levinas claims that the elements have no side at all, which clearly shows the ungraspable elements: we are totally inside the elements, bathing in them, thus one can see no side of them, and one 'does not (even) approach it.'[79] In this sense, the elements should be seen as qualities rather than subsistence of the objects. Describing our relationship with the elements as 'bathing' in qualities reinforces their feature of having no form and having no side at all. This relationship will be discussed further later.

[78] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 131.
[79] Ibid., 131.

Another important character of the elements is that they are from nowhere. By confronting the ubiquity of the signification of rationality and logic in modern philosophy, Levinas points out that in order to separate the subject to prepare for the ethical encounter with the other, we need to maintain the secrecy of the subject. The secrecy of the subject is defined through the secrecy of the dwelling, which is accomplished partially by the elements whose origin one cannot define. The opaqueness of secrecy of the elements, which cannot be traced to an origin resists the totality of logic which has been seen as an obtainable origin for knowledge.

Thus the elements which seem always to be there for us to bathe in, yet with no possibility for us to find their sources are mysterious to human subject, a mystery which Levinas calls 'the mythical divinity of the elements'.[80] Extending his mystic reading of the elements, he claims further that the divinity of the elements can be assumed as a feature of the paganistic phase of human religion, which is a necessary phase since only the recognition of these pagan divinities can lead to the death of these divinities with the recognition of the absolute other (which we will not give an expanded explanation as it is beyond the scope of our present discussion).[81]

1.2.3 An analysis of the conception of the feminine in 'Interiority and Economy'

We turn now to the third important feature that characterizes relations within the dwelling: the feminine. There are many discussions among Levinasian

[80] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 142.
[81] Ibid., 142.

scholars concerning the concept of feminine in Levinas. Many important contributions come from feminist scholars who either criticize Levinas for sexism in his usage of the term, or worry about whether the gender difference is neutralized by his narrative.[82] The former maintain that Levinas has written from a patriarchal or masculine-centred perspective. They accuse Levinas of excluding the feminine from an ethical relationship and sacrificing the independence of the feminine to a condition of the independence of men.[83] The latter group tends to pay more attention to how radical the gender difference is in Levinas and the role of the feminine in Levinas.[84] It is beyond the aim of the present thesis to engage with these discussions in full, but concerning a better understanding of the relationship between the 'I' and the feminine, we will focus on the questions, first, of whether the concept of the feminine in the dwelling refers to an empirical notion of 'feminine sex', and second, in what sense the feminine is an alterity (though not an ethical alterity) to the 'I'.[85]

The concept of the feminine appears during Levinas's introduction of the notion of habitation, which for him is not simply an 'instantaneous' enjoyment of the elements but a 'postponement' of enjoyment that leads to labour and possession.[86] This postponement of the immediate enjoyment in habitation has a

[82] In the essay 'Reinhabiting the House of Ruth: Exceeding the Limits of the Feminine in Levinas', Claire Elise Katz analyzes these two kinds of reactions by the feminists towards Levinas. Claire Elise Katz, 'Reinhabiting the House of Ruth: Exceeding the Limits of the Feminine in Levinas', in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Tina Chanter (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 145-170, 145, 146.
[83] One representative in this group is Simone de Beauvoir, who criticizes Levinas for giving a masculine representation of woman. See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated by H.M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1957), xvi.
[84] For example, Luce Irigaray is concerned with the concept of the other in Levinas, and questions whether the appearance of neutrality of Levinas's writing actually misses gender difference and that his concept of the other has not taken 'sexual difference into account'. Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 133.
[85] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 158.
[86] Ibid., 150.

'positive side', that is, a dimension of intimacy, of warmth which accomplishes this habitation with a structure of gentleness, and which prepares the habitation for the future welcoming of the ethical other. From this it can be seen that it is because the gentleness accomplished the dwelling, that the subject of dwelling does not encounter the other as 'shock negating of the "I"', but as a 'primordial phenomenon of gentleness'.[87] Importantly, this dimension of intimacy, the welcome with gentleness, is designated as from the feminine.

We may ask, however, whether the notion of the feminine in 'Interiority and Economy' refers to empirical women in any sense, or is rather a metaphor for a supposed feminine?[88] Adriaan Peperzak maintains that the feminine in TI is a metaphor that associates 'the discrete and silent presence of human being for one another' which gives rise to intimacy in the dwelling, to the feminine.[89] However, Stella Sandford considers that viewing the feminine in Levinas as a metaphor is only a 'damage limitation exercise',[90] which is only a possible defence for Levinas from the accusations of the feminists. Levinas's description of the feminine as a 'cardinal point of the horizon in which the inner life takes place' is regarded by Sandford as a 'weak definition' of the empirical feminine,[91] and remarks that if his feminine has nothing to do with the empirical woman, it can be referred to by other names. However, to treat the issue in a way that confines us to the discussion in TI, one can observe Levinas's own claim:

[87] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 150.
[88] Due to the fact that the present investigation is mainly on the utopia of dwelling, we limit our discussion of the 'feminine' in 'Interiority and Economy' in TI, although later in the book there are also important discussion on the feminine in 'Phenomenology of Eros'.
[89] Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas,* 158.
[90] Stella Sandford, 'Levinas, Feminism and Feminine', 148.
[91] Ibid., 148.

> Need one add that there is no question here of defying ridicule by maintaining the empirical truth or counter truth that every home in face presupposes a woman?… the empirical absence… of "feminine sex" nowise affects the dimension of femininity…[92]

From this we can see that Levinas does not intend to associate the dimension of femininity to the empirical female gender, at least not in his discussion in 'Interiority and Economy', where the dimension of femininity is intended to go beyond the gender division. He does not consider that an empirical woman is needed for the dwelling, and for him what is needed is the dimension of welcoming which is represented by femininity. The word is referential only pertaining to the gesture of welcoming, not the empirical woman. Thus, to follow Peperzak's perspective, the conclusion for our purposes might be that the feminine in the dwelling is not of an empirical character, but is rather a metaphor, which is *par excellence* welcoming itself.[93]

One can also observe, in TI, that Levinas problematically designates the elements, the feminine, and the ethical other, with terms such as *alterity* or the *other*, without clear differentiation,[94] which results in debates on whether there is a continuity between the feminine and the ethical other that is introduced later with height as a dimension of transcendence (we refer to the other with height as the ethical other to differentiate from the feminine other in our current discussion). Diane Perpich traces the alteration of the role of feminine from *Time and Other* to TI, arguing that in *Time and Other* the 'feminine other is the primary

[92] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 158.
[93] Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas,* 158.
[94] 'The other in which it jubilates—the elements—is initially neither for nor against it'. TI. 164; 'This event is the relation with the Other who welcomes me in the Home, the discreet presence of the Feminine.' Thus here the feminine is even asscociated with the Other. TI, 170.

figure of alterity', but in TI the feminine other is rather 'on the margins' of the face-to-face ethical relation to the transcendental other and has an 'equivocal position'.[95] Indeed, the feminine in TI, which accomplishes the dwelling, is said to have 'all the possibility of the transcendent relationship with the Other'.[96] Yet he also admits that the relationship with the feminine does not belong to the 'transcendence of language', which does not involve a dimension of height.[97] From this we can agree with Diane Perpich that in order to accomplish the separation between the habitation and the world and sustain the possible encountering with the Other, the feminine other involves an equivocation which accommodates the equivocation of the very status of the dwelling as both separated from exteriority and having the potential to be opened up to welcome the ethical Other. The feminine is to be seen both as the potential for the ethical other and not *par excellence* an ethical other.

1.2.4 An analysis of the relationship between the 'I' and the elements

After examining the concepts 'I', 'elements' and 'feminine' respectively, we now turn to explore the relationships among them. We have already mentioned some features of these relationships, which we will now seek to expand on in a more detailed way by comparing them to the other subject-object relationships, which Levinas criticizes.

First of all, the relationship between the 'I' and elements needs to be distinguished from the Husserlian way of thematization and objectification. As

[95] Diane Perpich, 'From Caress to the Word: Transcendence and the Feminine in Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas,' in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, Edited by Tina Chanter (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 28-52, 37.
[96] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 155.
[97] Ibid., 155.

we mentioned in the analysis of the features of the elements, they have no form in our perception, since the subject can only bathe in them without any knowledge of them. The 'I' finds itself inside the elements, where the relationship is a 'total contact'.[98] As a result there is no distance by means of which the subject can reflect on the elements or represent them. The relationship between the 'I' and the elements is a relationship of sensibility: different from a gaze from the outside, 'to sense is to be within'.[99] This relationship of sensibility (in TI) is designated as enjoyment and happiness: we enjoy the food and sink our teeth into it, wrapping ourselves in the feeling of the eating (we will explore the notion of happiness in depth later). This feeling in its initial stage is claimed to be naïve, in the sense that there is never a sense of insufficiency in this relationship of sensibility. Only from an exterior calculation can the rational 'I' feel insufficient. However, from within, the feeling of 'bathing in' obscures the limitation of the sensibility, thus the 'I' in this primal state always feels sufficient.

Second, according to Levinas, the relationship between the 'I' and the elements needs to be distinguished from the instrumental relationship, in Heidegger, between the subject and the ready-to-hand. In Heidegger, things are represented in order to be 'worksuitable', predetermined by the aim of the work.[100] Levinas criticizes this instrumental view of objects for the reasons that, first of all, the instrumental relationship begins 'in view of oneself', which leads to 'a world of exploitation.'[101] This instrumental view is not only immanently egoistic but also thoroughly ontological, such that it has no possibility to open to

[98] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 135.
[99] Ibid., 135.
[100] Julian Young, *Heidegger's later Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 48.
[101] "Food can be interpreted as an implement only in a world of exploitation". Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 134.

transcendence. The rationality bound up with the utility of tools to the subject establishes a system wherein everything that enters is calculated, and the primacy of this calculation does not recognize anything that cannot be represented by this system.

Levinas stresses that the relationship between the 'I' and the elements is nowise exhausted in the instrumental relation. Levinas admits that, unlike a theoretical relationship, the instrumental relationship reveals the corporeality of the body. Concerning the handling of tools in the process of working, 'the structure of *Zeug* as *Zeug* and the system of references in which it has its place do indeed manifest themselves'.[102] But the elements do not disappear in the shape of tools: they cannot be limited to a 'technical finality';[103] rather, 'tools themselves… become objects of enjoyment,'[104] which is to say, the 'handling and utilization of tools' are subordinated to enjoyment.[105] From the above discussion, we can see that the relation between the 'I' and the elements is fundamentally one of enjoyment, which cannot be framed within certain goals, and it is 'to enjoy without utility'.[106]

Therefore, from the above analysis, the relationship between the 'I' and the elements is to be seen as an enjoyment that encompasses any other subject-object relationship: it 'embraces all relations with things'.[107] All the theoretical activities between 'I' and things are in fact 'enjoyment of theory' and the

[102] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 133.
[103] Ibid., 130.
[104] Ibid., 133.
[105] Ibid., 133.
[106] Ibid., 15.
[107] Ibid., 133.

instrumental operations on things in the end amount to 'suffering or rejoicing this operation'.[108]

1.2.5 An analysis of the relationship between the 'I' and the feminine

Turning to the relationship between the feminine and the subject, we begin with Levinas's comments on Martin Buber's idea of the relationship between 'I' and 'thou', and explore the distinction between the 'I'/'thou' relationship and the 'I'/'You' relationship, which can in turn shed light on the relationship between the 'I' and the feminine.

Levinas equates the relationship between the 'I' and the 'feminine' to the Buberian relationship between 'I' and 'thou', which is not yet the ethical 'I'-'You' as the relationship between the 'I' and the ethical other. We have already discussed the equivocal status of the feminine, which is an alterity to the 'I', but is not the ethical alterity that finally emerges from Levinas's later project on exteriority. In his concise association of the 'I'-feminine relationship to the Buberian 'I'-'thou', the relation based on the equivocal status of the feminine is seen in terms of a certain 'intimacy' or 'familiarity'.[109] To be precise, Martin Buber distinguishes the 'I-thou' from any other kind of relationship human individuals have with the world, classed as the 'I-it' relation. 'I-It' is a relationship between subject and object, whereas 'I-thou' is an inter-subjective relationship. The 'I-thou' relationship is essentially a friendly and reciprocal inter-human relationship. According to Levinas, Buber is right to differentiate the 'I-thou'

[108] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 113, 134.
[109] Ibid., 156.

from the 'I-it', and successfully clears a space for human relations aside from the objective relations of indifference.

However, the 'I-You' relationship opens up the dimension of 'height' (we will give a fuller explanation of the notion of 'height' in the next chapter), which is exactly an asymmetrical relationship where the other is both destitute and 'transcendental'.[110] By reference to the ethical relationship 'I-You' and the friendship in 'I-thou', the relationship between the 'I' and the feminine can be seen more clearly, and it is, first of all, a relationship of familiarity rather than a relation of height. The 'I' and the feminine are seen as equal, which enables intimate communication. Intriguingly, even though the relationship between the 'I' and the feminine is referred to 'I-thou', one can observe, the relationship of familiarity is not exactly reciprocal as in 'I-thou', as clearly the 'I' is welcomed by the feminine, but not vice versa. This can be tentatively understood as saying that the relationship between the 'I' and the feminine, even though it is intimate, is not reciprocal, in the sense that there is only one subject to be called upon to fulfil its irreplaceable responsibility faced with the ethical other, where the feminine is only seen as condition to this responsibility.

The intimate relationship between the 'I' and the feminine is also described as a relationship without language, where *language* in TI is a teaching of 'moral association' from the transcendental other. [111] Without getting into the concept of teaching, we can infer from the differentiation that the relationship between the 'I' and the feminine does not involve any moral teaching. The dwelling has not yet acquired a dimension of transcendence prior to

[110] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 215.
[111] Ibid., 100.

encountering the ethical other. Within the dwelling, the feminine only signifies to the 'I' in one way, that is the gesture of welcoming. The silence should not be seen in its literary sense, but be understood through what Levinas calls the 'monologue'.[112] This is to say, the relationship between the feminine and the 'I' only has one mode of interaction, that is the welcome from the feminine towards the 'I'. In the section 'Phenomenology of Eros' Levinas returns to the discussion of the silent relation between 'I' and the feminine and adds that the privacy of the 'I' and the feminine precludes any language, which achieves a relation that is 'supremely non-public';[113] this shows us another aspect of the 'I'-feminine relationship without language. The private relationship contributes to the separation between the dwelling and the exterior world, where the intimacy is not to be revealed from a perspective outside of the dwelling, and thus refuses any form of language.

In conclusion, according to Levinas, the dwelling is accomplished by the relations that the 'I' has with the elements and the feminine. The relation with the elements is primarily one of enjoyment, which has been differentiated from the relation based on consciousness and representation, and from an instrumental relation as the enjoyment is beyond any unique goals. The relation with the feminine engenders a true 'dwelling' for the 'I' through the gentleness of the feminine, which is characterized with a gesture of welcome. Thus we can see that the dwelling, as a non-place, is relational. It is beyond a discernment of presenting or negating a place, but comprises relations that happen among its three constituents or features: the 'I', the elements and the feminine.

[112] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 207.
[113] Ibid., 265.

1.3 The characterization of non-place as interior time set against the historical time

As we have discussed above, the non-place characteristic of the utopia of the dwelling in Levinas is different from traditional views as commenced by Thomas More. It does not convey a negative meaning in terms of a failure to exist in history or a fantasy about a place in the future. The utopia of dwelling cannot be compared at all on the basis of an essentialized place in history, whether real or imaginary, and, as we shall discuss in this section, the interior time of the dwelling is intrinsically non-historical time, which Levinas also refers to as 'personal time'.[114]

Before examining the non-historical feature of the interior time as another stance of the non-place character of the Levinasian utopia of the dwelling, we will firstly articulate the conception of interiority in Levinas more fully. We have already explicated the relevant notions of the dwelling and the subject of the dwelling 'I' in the above discussions. If we examine TI closely, there are several related concepts used by Levinas to refer to interiority, such as 'inner life', 'inwardness', or 'inner self',[115] all of which signify the way in which a subject is established in the process of separating itself from the world. As discussed above, interiority is crucial for Levinas in forming a subject that can confront the totality of history and welcome the ethical other.

Interiority sometimes is associated in TI with the notion of psychism, which is not a concept of a mental status, however, but is designated as 'a

[114] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 57.
[115] Ibid., 240, 152, 17.

resistance to the totality'.[116] According to Levinas, interiority is a 'break with participation', a retreat from the world to one's home.[117] John Wild points out in his introduction to TI that what Levinas calls 'inner life' or interiority is in fact the 'personal existence' whose importance was dismissed, for example, by Hegel and his followers, who saw how capricious and subjective this personal existence can be and wanted rather to use 'objective rational systems and social organizations' to subordinate individual existence.[118] Interiority, for Hegel, is the subjective experience of the 'I' that is inferior to objectivity of history. However, Levinas criticizes the Hegelian way of objectifying and atomizing individuals, which inevitably results in a perspective from a view of a totality, and subsequently leads to a certain indifference towards individuals.[119] Levinas, then, introduces the significance of the notion of interiority to confront what he sees as the Western tradition of historiography in which individuals have lost their identity and become anonymous parts of the totality. Through advocating interiority, Levinas successfully preserves the importance of personal existence as against the totality of history. Therefore, the notion of interiority can be understood as a concept that singles out a personal existence marked by the unique moments of birth and death, which 'do not derive their meaning from history'.[120]

However, it is important to note that to identify the unique 'I' through interiority should not be seen as an identification based upon the formalism of a

[116] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 54.
[117] Ibid., 58.
[118] Ibid., 15.
[119] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 161.
[120] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 55.

certain 'monotonous tautology', which is expressed as 'I am I'.[121] Interiority is rather signified by the very way of being 'at home with oneself', that is, of dwelling as enjoying the elements and being welcomed by the feminine.[122] As we have shown before, the dwelling is shown as both constant movement and relationality, while interiority is more exactly the content of living characterized by these two aspects.

In his discussion of interiority, Levinas singles out the importance of the interior time that resists historical time. In brief, Levinas defines interior time as a particular time separated by the 'punctual moments' of birth and death that cannot be compared with historical time. In fact, the time that is referred to as historical time takes its place in the eternal history, from which perspective an individual's life is only a part of the time span of the whole. And based upon the common time, the negation of the individual time would lead to the view that 'death would be the end', which is to say, the individual time, when it is not part of the common time anymore, losses its meaning in nothingness.[123] However, the particular category of the time of interiority singles out a temporality that is neither historical time, nor is it time of nothingness, the time of death. Rather, the time of interiority is a time of non-place, a utopian time that does not derive its meaning from history, which will not end with a time of nothingness. We will next give a detailed analysis of this interior time, especially comparing it to historical time.

For Levinas, the history we read that describes historical time objectively belongs to the category of *historiography*, which is a representation of history

[121] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 37.
[122] Ibid., 37.
[123] Ibid., 57.

from the survivors of that history. This historiography 'focuses on facts and regards history as linear as well as unitary'.[124] When people write about history, they use the logic of the present to assimilate the past, by which means historical time is synchronized to the present. Levinas maintains that viewing historical time like this leads to constituting the totality of history where the particularity of each individual loses its importance. Indeed, if we see history as a unitary order, and the judgments we can have toward individuals as purely objective ones, individuals would lose their particularity and become simply demonstrations of the force of history. In Levinas's words, individuals who only gain their meaning from reference to history are 'bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves'.[125] In the same vein, Levinas also argues against the attitude of seeing historical time as a continuum, or more exactly as a homogenous duration which is all-inclusive and resists any possible disturbance from exteriority. However, the Levinasian time of interiority breaks the continuum of historical time, which also prepares for the ethical temporality of diachrony that emphasizes the interruption of the continuity of the time by the other (we will examine the concept of diachrony in detail in the next chapter).[126]

Firstly, to look closely at interior time, Levinas claims that the time of interiority cannot be reduced to common historical time, as the time of interiority cannot be represented by a perspective outside of interiority: interiority is 'the secrecy of the I'.[127] Levinas stresses that the interiority of the 'I' does not have the 'individuation of a concept', and thus resists the possibility of

[124] Tanja Staehler, *Plato and Levinas: The Ambiguous Out-side of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 182.
[125] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 21.
[126] John Llewlyn, 'Levinas and Language', in *The Cambridge Companion to Emmanuel Levinas*, 119-138, 136
[127] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 118.

being thematized. One notices, though, that the secrecy of the subject is a constant theme in Levinas, which is important for the irreplaceability of the subject, who is singled out as responsible for the other.[128] However, for our current discussion, the invisibility of interiority makes the interior time private and secret, and so it cannot be compared to historical time since it 'does not run parallel to the time of history'.[129]

Second, time in interiority for Levinas has the character of a postponement, which can be seen more exactly as a postponement resulting from the feature of the elements being ungraspable. In its primordial state, the 'I' in its dwelling enjoys the elements without any care. However, the elements for its enjoyment are said to be 'indetermined', which makes the future of enjoyment precarious since the 'I' is unsure whether the elements will still be accessible tomorrow.[130] The possible disappearance of the elements at any moment is a risk the subject faces in interiority. This risk engenders a subject with *need*, which is a need that can be satisfied.[131] Levinas points out that having need brings human beings away from 'the animal and vegetable condition', and also makes human beings detached from the world.[132] Thus a distance is engendered between the human being and the world: 'it frees itself from all the weight of the world, from immediate and incessant contacts'.[133] More importantly, this distance forms a postponement of satisfaction, and in this postponement time gains its signification as a time 'overcoming the insecurity'.[134]

[128] See chapter 2 and 3.
[129] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 56.
[130] Ibid., 131.
[131] Ibid., 115.
[132] Ibid., 56.
[133] Ibid., 116.
[134] Ibid., 165.

Following this vein of thought, Levinas also sheds light on another significance of postponement through discussion of the postponement of death. The notion of death will be put under scrutiny in the next chapter, but for now, seeing death within its significance in the dwelling, death is already revealed to be an important notion for Levinas's conceptualization of time. Time in interiority is stressed as carried out between the birth and death of the subject. However, according to Levinas, death is not an end, but rather an absolute moment of alterity, which is an encountering with strangeness and mystery. This is to say, death is to be seen as a 'passage to the time of the Other',[135] which is a passage towards the meeting with the absolute alterity. The coming of death will be a shock, just as the meeting with the ethical other is a surprise to the 'I' who does not have any prior knowledge of this other. Thus Levinas claims that the postponement of death opens 'the very dimension of time', which is a genuine time that cannot be reduced to being part of historical time: a death that does not derive its 'meaning from history'.[136]

Third, time in interiority can be seen as egoistic time, which can also be termed subjective time. Levinas claims that it is the memory of the 'I' which accomplishes 'an inversion of historical time'.[137] Memory as the psychism of the 'I' has no commonality with historical time, which ensures that the time for the 'I' only belongs to the subject 'I'. We have already had a brief discussion of the notion of psychism, which signifies the secrecy of the interiority resisting the all-

[135] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Meaning and Sense', in *Basic Philosophy Writings*, edited by Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 33-64, 50.
[136] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 165.
[137] Ibid., 56

inclusive representation from the perspective of the totality.[138] And psychism and memory both have meaning only in reference to interiority, which cannot be seen from a third-person perspective, not being derived from any 'impersonal reason'.[139] In this sense, the interior time is non-repeatable and is demonstrated subjectively rather than in an objective way.

Through the conception of the interior time, the dwelling's non-place character is clearly shown, which is more exactly a negation of the concept of an essentialized place without any reference to the notion of place. This is to say, not only is the subject's taking a place within the historical totality negated, but also the death that is normally seen as 'the end of a being' is seen negatively, according to the dimension of interior time. The interior time rather singles out a 'dimension for non-essence' which does not refer to historical time and a place in the world at an ultimate level where it does not refer to the negation of historical time in the sense of nothingness either.

Levinas's unique conception of interior time sets out the relationship between utopia and history in a renewed manner, in the sense that seeing utopia as the dwelling of the 'I' does not lead to any risk of totalitarianism consequences, and which releases utopia from its totalitarian shadow. It is a familiar observation that for many anti-utopianists, utopia very often leads to totalitarianism, whether empirically or theoretically.[140] Tzvetan Todorov points out that utopianism is associated with 'constraint and violence' since 'it seeks to install perfection to the here and now'.[141] For Todorov, utopia should be seen as

[138] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 56.
[139] Ibid., 56.
[140] Russell Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect*: *Utopian thoughts for an Anti-Utopian Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), preface, x.
[141] Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and memory: Lessons from the twentieth century*, 19.

an orientation for thinking about the future, or a way to reflect the blemishes of society, not a project to work towards.

However, from a Levinasian perspective, Todorov's utopia still has an ontological residue; that is, the orientation to think about the future is ignorant about the ethical other. The projection, which desires the future based upon a cognition of the present, does not open up towards the alterity of the other who cannot be represented. To single out a time that is a total negation of history is accomplished through endowing meaning on this time without any reference to history. Levinas's interior time, formulated through his utopia as dwelling, surpasses the ontological residue as it transcends the historical way of seeing the past and future.

No one can deny the importance of the orientation to the future, of hope and imagination, in human civilization. But from the perspective of Levinas, attributing utopia solely to a kind of psychoanalysis of hope and imagination, as Todorov does, has not solved the problem of its originary risk of totalitarianism. This is to say, to confine utopia to being an orientation without ever truly manifesting in the reality can only suspend the violence which totalitarianism involves; but this is not yet a complete overcoming of this possible violence. The non-place feature (which in the next chapter will be seen in a more precise way as null-site) of interior time resists totalitarianism at a profound level where the utopia of dwelling is not only resistance to the vision of the future, but refuses any visualization. 'Place' here is precisely an essentialization of time within history. Dwelling does not belong to history, but it does not belong to nothingness either: it is beyond this dialectic division, which, in its turn both confirms the meaning of subject formulated in the dwelling, an also at the same

time resists the engulfment of the totality of history of the subject. Through the utopia of dwelling, we designate a subjectivity that is ready to face its irreplaceable responsibility for the other.

With the above discussion, we achieve an understanding of the basic elements of the non-place characteristic of the utopia of the dwelling. More exactly, these are: movements of becoming rather than place within being; relations with the elements and the feminine, rather than an ontologically isolated subject; and a personal interior time that cannot be assimilated into the continuity of the historical totality of time. Such a view of the subject of the dwelling, the subject of interiority, through the utopian lens of non-place, not only demonstrates in a clearer way the radical difference between this mode of Levinasian subjectivity and that of the Western philosophical tradition he opposes, whether in the form of the *cogito* or *Dasei*n, but also highlights in new ways its character as being beyond any ontological categories. In the next section, we will look briefly at the paradisal feature of the utopian dwelling, which will accomplish our analysis of the utopia of dwelling in a way which establishes pre-ethical subjectivity.

2. The paradisal characteristic of the utopia of the dwelling

In the etymology of Thomas More's neologism, utopia is both a non-place and a good place. For the latter aspect, a 'eutopia'—a good place—is usually understood as an ideal place where people live in happiness; and most of the time, it can be assumed that that good place is the goal of utopian intentions. But

if we take a close look at the utopian dwelling in Levinas, even though he claims its paradisal character, this is nowise a goal for the dwelling. To be precise, Levinas claims: 'It is not that at the beginning there was hunger; the simultaneity of hunger and food constitutes the paradisal initial condition of enjoyment';[142] and '[a]t the Origin there is a being gratified, a citizen of paradise'.[143] The portrait of the dwelling as a paradise for the 'I' conveys rather the importance for a subject, through its dwelling, of enjoyment and affection, as it gains its separated subjectivity from totality and prepares for the encounter with the ethical other. In this section we will first have a close look at the conception of happiness and enjoyment (especially happiness as we have not touched upon it yet), through which the paradisal character of the dwelling is accomplished.

It should be added that, although indirectly, Levinas's own thought is of course not unconcerned about the prospects of 'a better society';[144] more precisely, he designates the movement toward 'a better society' as coinciding with the dislocation of the subjectivity with the movement of disinterestedness.[145] This difficult idea can here be understood, tentatively and briefly, as maintaining that, instead of following a path towards a better society with a particularly pictured future, the better society for Levinas is rather a by-product of the movement of the ethical subjectivity for the other. This ethical subjectivity and such movement for the other will be articulated in detail in the next chapter, but for now we will look at the paradisal dwelling, which functions as a preparatory stage for the formation of the ethical subjectivity.

---

[142] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 144.
[143] Ibid., 136.
[144] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Idealism and ideology', in *Of God Who comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), 3-14, 9.
[145] Ibid., 9.

2.1 Enjoyment and happiness

In TI, it is hard to make a clear differentiation between the notion of enjoyment and happiness, but one can tentatively associate enjoyment with the movement of enjoying, that is, 'the pulsation of the I'; and associate happiness with the 'accomplishment' of the very enjoying, which is a certain 'satisfaction'.[146]

The notion of enjoyment and happiness are introduced by Levinas to counter the Heideggerian conception of the *Geworfenheit* (throwness) of *Dasein*, which for Levinas does not account for the important nature of enjoyment in the existence of the subject. In contrast to the Heideggerian *Dasein*, which is claimed to be thrown into the world amid anxiety about its future, Levinas emphasizes that we are not solitary beings that are thrown into this world. Rather, to begin with, the subject 'I' formulates its subjectivity in its dwelling where, as we discussed above, it enjoys the elements and receives affection from the feminine. In the Heideggerian conception of *Dasein*, the 'relation of enjoyment' is not taken into consideration.[147] The elements that are to be enjoyed in Levinas are only implements for the *Dasein*, which in Heidegger does not have any significance beyond the teleological relationship. As Levinas stresses, the enjoyment of the elements is beyond the order of being: 'it is not my bearing in being, but already the exceeding of being', which is explained further by Levinas as, being itself is already the content of happiness which is an accomplishment independent of any contemplation on being.[148]

[146] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 113.
[147] Ibid., 113.
[148] Ibid., 113.

We have already explored the meaning of enjoyment in our discussion of the non-place dwelling seen as the movement of separation. To explain it a bit further, enjoyment is claimed by Levinas as prior to any discernment between activity and passivity,[149] which is why we rather carefully refer to it as a movement. To contribute to a fuller understanding of enjoyment's role in the paradisal dwelling, we will conclude with two distinct features of this enjoyment, which leads to the accomplishment of happiness. First of all, enjoyment is signified as a movement with solitude, which is to say, even though this enjoyment includes affection from the feminine, it is still an enjoyment owned by the 'I' alone, who cannot share this enjoyment with others. And it is specifically through the solitude of enjoyment that the separation between the 'I' and the totality can reach a radical level: 'the breach of totality that is accomplished by the enjoyment of solitude… is radical'.[150] 'Enjoyment is withdrawal into oneself',[151] wherein the unicity of the separated subject can be singled out. Through this designation of enjoyment as a movement in solitude, Levinas successfully locates the subject who in the ethical encounter can answer to the other. It is only with unicity that the subject will not desire the universal, but desire the other from exteriority, where the other is not defined in reference to the universal.[152]

Second, enjoyment that is differentiated from its commonly agreed basic sense, which often is a status of mood, is relational. We have already touched upon this important idea in our discussion of the non-place dwelling as relational. To recall the importance of enjoyment as relational, Levinas begins his

[149] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 115.
[150] Ibid., 119.
[151] Ibid., 118.
[152] Ibid., 115.

phenomenology of living by designating enjoyment in the utopia of the dwelling as always the enjoyment of something, giving as examples that we enjoy the air, the sky and a 'good soup'.[153] By this token, enjoyment cannot be represented simply as an idea, since this would dismiss the importance of its content. And the subject established through the relational enjoyment can be inferred to be a subject not as a pure consciousness, but a subject with its content of living: the 'I' is the very constitution of the relations of enjoyment.[154]

The two characters of enjoyment, namely being in solitude and being relational, are not in contradiction with each other, but accomplish different aspects for the subject. The subject is both singled out as the only one who will be addressed by the ethical other, but also designated as already found in relations before its coming to consciousness, which stresses the content of living of the subject.

Now we turn to examine the notion of happiness as satisfaction. Happiness in the utopia of the dwelling is spontaneous, which is to say, to be satisfied and happy does not entail any process towards other goals. Happiness as accomplished by enjoyment happens spontaneously. This is to say, there is no rationality behind happiness and how to attain it. The subjectivity in the paradisal dwelling is born with happiness and cannot pursue it with any future-oriented project.[155] Such spontaneous happiness cannot repeat itself either, and thus each happiness only has meaning by referring to itself, which assures the uniqueness of each happiness that in the end guarantees the particularity of each moment in the interior time.

---

[153] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 114, 110.
[154] Ibid., 147.
[155] Ibid., 147.

With the above exploration, we have traced how enjoyment and happiness engender the separated, prepared subject 'I'. The function of this paradisal utopia of the dwelling is clearly shown not to be similar to the paradise in the utopian novels that pictures the final goal of a perfect human society; rather, for Levinas, it is the preparation for the ethical moment, which contributes to formulate the pre-ethical subject who, with the paradise, can respond to the other concretely and without 'empty hands'.[156]

2.2 The primacy of sensibility based upon enjoyment and happiness

We concluded above that the paradisal dwelling is pre-ethical, in the sense that it is a preparation for the ethical moment of encountering the ethical other. To stress the dwelling as a good place through enjoyment and happiness, Levinas also singles out the importance of the dimension of sensibility for subjectivity, which lays a particular groundwork for the future development of subjectivity, which we will trace in later chapters. Levinas maintains that enjoyment happens only on the level of sensibility. To counter the idea that sensibility is to be seen as 'a pretension to pure experience, a receptivity of being',[157] which belongs to the realm of knowledge, through his references to enjoyment and happiness, Levinas seeks to denote an independent meaning to sensibility. Just as each moment of happiness is unique, the sensibility that is described by Levinas through this happiness is also independent from any universalized categories of sensibility.

Sensibility as enjoyment and happiness in the utopia of the dwelling is designated as private and non-repeatable, where Levinas argues that 'each

[156] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 172.
[157] Ibid., 64.

comes for the first time'.[158] This is to say, for the subject 'I', sensibility cannot be seen as deriving from a system: 'happiness A' cannot be referred to 'happiness B'. In Wittgenstein's terminology, the sensation is private.[159] The sensibility of happiness refuses to move into understanding and representation.[160] The secrecy of sensibility formulates the subjectivity that also resists being part of the system of language, which is not based upon any common designations.

The subjectivity of sensibility in Levinas is posited against Heidegger's *Geworfenheit* and Husserl's subjectivity of consciousness of representational intentionality. The Levinasian subject commences its existence from this paradise that is built upon sensibility. This private and always particular sensibility ensures the separation of the subject from the totality of representation, in that the subject is always 'within' its sensibility, is secluded from any perceiving eye.[161] Levinas emphasizes that no thoughts can rise up from this sensibility, as the 'I' and the sensible qualities have a 'total contact without fissure'.[162] With this signification, sensibility designates subjectivity as an existence of contentment, which gifts the subjectivity with what he calls the 'agreeableness' towards peace with the absolute other.[163] We will see in our next chapter how Levinas continues to build the ethical subjectivity on sensibility, which is yet redefined differently on the level of proximity and substitution, and which allows him to show the profundity of ethical responsibility and its infinite meaning that is beyond any ontological or theoretical level.

---

[158] Ibid., 114.
[159] Chon Tejedor, *Starting with Wittgenstain* (London: Bloomsbury Publisher, 2011), 156.
[160] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 75.
[161] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 135.
[162] Ibid., 135.
[163] Ibid., 93.

Conclusion: The pre-ethical subjectivity established through utopian dwelling

With the paradise of dwelling, a subjectivity is accomplished and is ready for Levinas's ethical project, which can be seen as a pre-ethical subject. To be exact, as we have already discussed, Levinas never uses the term 'pre-ethical', although it is deployed by many Levinas scholars to describe the function of the dwelling that prepares the subject for its ethical encounter. For example, according to Derrida, the 'pre-ethical origin' of ethics is the inhabitation of the 'I', which is more exactly on the basis of the feminine.[164] Although Derrida is concerned more with the problem of whether the 'androcentric' and 'feminist' reading of the dimension of the feminine in TI are compatible,[165] he indeed accepts that the welcoming of the feminine in the process of inhabitation of the 'I' makes possible the 'opening of ethics', that is, the interiority as welcoming prepares for the ethical moment.[166] Robert Gibbs also uses the term and confirms that the world that is produced by enjoyment prior to the ethical is 'pre-ethical'.[167]

With our discussion in the chapter, we can see more clearly that the pre-ethical subjectivity produced by the utopia of dwelling is not temporally prior to the ethical encounter, which puts the time of dwelling and the time of the other into the same sequence, and which again forms the totality of historical time. Rather, the pre-ethical subject should be seen as a preparation for the ethical, which cannot be counted as having happened before or being logically

[164] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 44.
[165] Ibid., 44. This question itself is beyond the scope of discussion here and will not be given extended exploration.
[166] Ibid., 44.
[167] Robert Gibbs, *Correlation in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 236.

presupposed by the ethical. This preparation, as pointed out by Gibbs and concluded by our exploration of the signification of dwelling, makes the subject 'capable of hospitability': it is only when the subject can store 'goods at home', that is, in movements of separation and recollection, in relation with the elements and the feminine, that it can be foundation for 'the de-centred movement' which produces the subject 'responsible for the other'.[168] And with the investigation of the salient features of the utopian dwelling and its importance for the ethical moment, we accomplished understanding the significance of the pre-ethical subjectivity, which allow us to turn in the next to look at the de-centred movement of the subject for its responsibility for the other.

[168] Robert Gibbs, *Correlation in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 236.

Chapter 2

The Unfolding of Ethical Subjectivity in Levinas through the Utopia of the Null-site Movement

Introduction

As we have seen in the last chapter, interpreting Levinas's concept of subjectivity through the lens of utopia provides a novel and critically useful perspective from which to approach his philosophical project in *Totality and Infinity* (TI). By establishing the notion of the dwelling through a way of reading utopia as non-place, we have delineated the initial phase of the development of subjectivity in Levinas, which is more precisely a pre-ethical phase that conditions the emergence of the importance of ethical subjectivity. The utopian dwelling is further designated as not an occupying of a place in the manner of the 'attachment to earth',[1] as one can find in the description of the dwelling of *Dasein* in Heidegger. Instead, it signifies the subjectivity through a non-place, a total negation of the very concept of taking an essentialized place, beyond both existence and non-existence, which can be interpreted from three perspectives.

First, understanding the dwelling as a non-place is to recognize it as movement instead of status of essence. More exactly, according to Levinas, the 'I' becomes a subject 'at home with itself' (*chez soi*)[2] through two phases of the movement: separation and recollection. The word 'home' in the term 'at home with itself' is used in a sense which is closer to being a verb than a noun, where

[1] Elisabeth L. Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics, Justice, and the Human Beyond Being* (London New York: Routledge, 2004), 70.
[2] Ibid., 143.

the ceaseless movements of separation and recollection constantly separate the subject from the exteriority. Second, the dwelling is a non-place in the sense that it is a relationality between the 'I', the elements and the feminine in dwelling, rather than an automation outside of any relations. The 'I' at home (*chez soi*)[3] enjoys the elements, and more importantly is in a relation of intimacy with the feminine who in her 'welcoming' to the subject takes on a crucial and critical role for the dwelling.[4] Third, we have attempted to comprehend the non-place of dwelling from the perspective of its temporality, where interior time is designated as incompatible with the presentation of historical time. The totalizing tendency of all-inclusive historical time resists any interruption of its continuity and places the interior time as part of the 'plurality' in history.[5] However, Levinas singles out an interior time for subjectivity that does not take a place inside historical time, which shows the non-ontological characterization of the subject who escapes the ontological essentialization immanent to history, keeping the secret regime of his/her dwelling away from the touch of the encompassing totality.[6]

We suggested that the non-place utopia of the dwelling forms a pre-ethical subjectivity that is substantially of a fluid sensibility which challenges the subjectivity of the *cogito* and subjectivity as part of the all-inclusive being. We have argued that sensibility, formulated through enjoyment in the dwelling, brings the ethical responsibility from the 'I' to the other to a profound level,

[3] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 33.
[4] The Feminine has been encountered in this analysis as one of the cardinal points of horizon in which the inner life takes place… as the very welcome of the dwelling.' Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 158.
[5] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 57.
[6] Ibid., 55.

which is beyond any ontological cognition of this responsibility. We have concluded that, even though the term itself does not appear with any great frequency in TI, nonetheless the concept of utopia as non-place is tacitly prevalent and importantly renews our understanding of the formulation of pre-ethical subjectivity. As such it is also productive for a better understanding of other related concepts in TI more broadly, such as the dwelling, the 'I', the elements, the feminine, separation, recollection, and interior time, which have been marked as gaining their meaning primarily from this subjectivity of utopian dwelling.

With the analysis in the last chapter, following the thread of a progression aimed at a thorough conceptual examination of utopia in Levinas, which we argue will demonstrate the inner logic of the evolvement of subjectivity, we will now explore the concept of utopia in its development in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (OBBE), where the theme of utopia is more frequent and clearly has a close relation to the conceptualization of ethical subjectivity. To understand how subjectivity is defined through the lens of utopia, and especially a utopia understood as null-site (*non-lieu*), as primarily ethical, with a responsibility for the other that is infinite, we will firstly investigate the existing literature dealing with utopia in its ethical sense in Levinas. Several Levinas scholars contend that utopia in Levinas essentially bears an ethical character, even though not all of them have made an immediate connection between the notion of utopia and ethical subjectivity.[7]

[7] For example, Miguel Abensour and Catherine Chalier. We will focus in this chapter on Miguel Abensour's analysis. To be brief, Catherine Chalier approaches ethical utopia in Levinas from the perspective of Messianism, where she understands utopia in Levinas as the ethical vocation of each individual in the sense that they themselves are the messiah: the messiah in Levinas is not 'a singular person awaited by Humans such that he may take their suffering upon him'; 'all persons

Chapter 2

In the current chapter we focus on Miguel Abensour's discussion, and introduce his exploration of ethical utopia through examining what he calls Levinas's 'overbidding' or 'emphatic reading' of two other important utopian thinkers—Ernst Bloch and Martin Buber. Through extending the unique method of overbidding (*surenchère*),[8] Abensour locates two important features of Levinas's ethical utopia in Levinas's engagement with Buber and Bloch: utopia as the 'I-other' encounter, and utopia as disinterestedness. The present chapter will show that both of these features can be employed as a constructive starting point which allows us to develop our own argument about the utopian character of ethical subjectivity in Levinas.

We will argue that Abensour's reading of Levinas's ethical utopia, despite being able to serve as a helpful introduction for our purposes, does not capture the fullness of what Levinas is doing with the notion of overbidding and does not fully capture the development of the meaning of utopia in the overbidding process. It will be argued that this is because his treatment of the notion of utopia is mainly based on his own application of Levinas's ideas formulated around the time of TI, and that he has not followed the trajectory of evolution in Levinas's philosophy, culminating especially in his later major work OBBE. Through bringing in other Levinas commentators who make observation on the evolvement of Levinas's philosophical conceptualization from TI to OBBE,[9] we

---

are the messiah'; the 'I' to open up to the suffering of the other and 'take charge of this suffering'. Catherine Chalier, 'The Messianic Utopia', in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2–Vol. 21 No. 1, 1998, 291, 292, 293.

[8] The original French term for overbidding is surenchère, which literally means overstatement. In Levinas's philosophy, especially his later philosophy, around the time of *OBBE or beyond Essence* and afterwards, overbidding indicates *exasperation or hyperbole*. It is an important method, which will be explored in detail later. 'Emmanuel Levinas, Qestion and Answer', in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 88.

[9] For example, according to Peter Atterton, Robert Bernasconi, and William Paul Simmons, fundamental aspects of Levinas's exposition in OBBE can be seen 'in response to criticisms by

will demonstrate that in this evolvement, the two primary utopian characteristics that Abensour detects in TI: 'encounter' and 'disinterestedness', can themselves be seen as being developed by Levinas in an overbidding manner to the two more radical notions in OBBE: 'proximity' and 'substitution'. We argue further that this overbidding progression can be understood better with the newly introduced denotation of utopia as null-site, which establishes the final meaning of proximity and substitution as regards an ethical subjectivity that enables ethical responsibility to go beyond any ontological confinement.

Due to the complexity of the term 'null-site' (*non-lieu*), and the clear variations in the English translations of the original French term *non-lieu*, we will in this chapter put the terminology of 'null-site' under full inspection. We will mark that the terms 'null' and 'site' are translated from the French terms *non* and *lieu* by the English translator of Levinas's two major works (TI and OBBE), Alphonso Lingis, and have been translated by other Levinas scholars or translators in other ways, such as 'non-place' or 'non-site'.[10] We will argue that the translation as 'null-site' by Lingis is the most carefully selected translation among all the other versions, and show Lingis's meticulous deliberation on the variations of the concept *non-lieu* in Levinas. Lingis correctly reflects the varying nuances of the conception by translating *non-lieu* into different English terms in

---

Jacques Derrida' in the latter's essay 'Violence and Metaphysics'. More specifically, it can be seen as an answer to the question of 'how can an ethical subject be possible?' Robert Bernasconi, 'What is the question to which "Substitution" is the answer?', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas,* edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 241. Bettina Bergo, in her book *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adores the Earth* also discusses several of Levinas commentators' ideas on the passage from TI to OBBE of Levinas. Bettina Bergo, *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adores the Earth* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 135-147.

[10] For example, Bettina Bergo translates *non-lieu* as "non-place" in her translation of *Of God Who Comes to Mind* and as "non-site" in *God Death and Time.* Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo, 5. Emmanuel Levinas, *God Death and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 261.

different contexts: in OBBE, Lingis translates *non-lieu* as 'null-site' but also in different places as 'non-site', depending on context. Although Lingis himself does not explicitly state the rationale for his choices, we will give extensive explanations for the variation in his selections, which in general will be found to be that when *non-lieu* bears an ethical significance, Lingis translates *non-lieu* as 'null-site'; otherwise it is translated as 'non-site'.[11] In addition, we will also examine the deeper reasoning behind the consistency of Lingis's translation of *non* and *lieu* between OBBE and TI, which can contribute to a clearer picture of the development of Levinas's conception of it.

Finally, we will focus our understanding of the notion of null-site on the development in Levinas's treatment of subjectivity in OBBE, where the utopian null-site sheds new light on how proximity and substitution will act to redefine subjectivity. Proximity will be discussed as a newly conceived relationship between the subject and the other that culminates in substitution, where the subject undergoes infinite responsibility for the other by taking the very place of the other, even to the extent of assuming the responsibility which the other has for its own others.[12] The overbidding movement from encounter and disinterestedness to proximity and substitution will be discussed to show the completion of the ethical primacy of both utopia and subjectivity in OBBE, where the self, through the perpetual utopian movement, bears an infinite responsibility for the other which constitutes the very subjectivity of the self.

[11] 'The responsibility for the other is the locus in which is situated the null-site of subjectivity…'; 'There is no need to refer to an event in which the non site, becoming a site…' Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 10, 184.
[12] 'Proximity is not a state, , a repose, but, a restlessness, null-site, outside of the place of rest.' Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 82.

We begin by looking into the main methodology of the present chapter: namely overbidding, which is initiated by Levinas himself, and adapted by Miguel Abensour.

1 The method of overbidding and Abensour's analysis of ethical utopia in Levinas

1.1 The method of overbidding

As pointed out above, the present discussion will be structured around an important method in Levinas's philosophical discourse: overbidding. It is thus helpful to begin by investigating the concept of overbidding in Levinas, since it is through this that he establishes a crucial aspect of his philosophical methodology. Later in this section, we will continue our examination of Abensour's adaptation of this method for interpreting Levinas's utopian thinking.

Looking closely at the concept of 'overbidding', we notice that in some of his writings around and after 1977, Levinas introduces the term to characterize his main philosophical method. For example in an essay called 'Questions and Answers', Levinas claims that 'at the moment' he is using the method of 'emphasis (or overbidding) a lot'.[13] 'Overbidding' is the English translation of the French word *surenchère*, which is employed by Levinas to express a 'manner of overstating', 'hyperbole', and 'exasperation'.[14] Levinasian scholars offer us a diversified interpretation of the notion. For example, Stephan Strasser points out

[13] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Questions and Answers', in *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 88. For Levinas, overbidding and emphasis denote the same methodology.
[14] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Questions and Answers', 88 .

that overbidding in Levinas consists of 'repetition of images', 'superlatives', and 'dramatic expressions', which for him should be seen as a certain method of rhetoric.[15] Stine Holte considers that overbidding signifies the asymmetrical responsibility of the self who always has 'greater responsibility than the other'.[16] For him, overbidding should be seen as the gesture of the subject in its excessive responsibility for the other. Indeed, we can find in Levinas both aspects of overbidding: a rhetoric and a path where the self is shown to be under responsibility for the other, as Levinas himself claims: overbidding is both an 'expression' and a manner by which the subjectivity 'pass(es) from responsibility to substitution'.[17] We will now look into these two aspects in detail.

Firstly, overbidding in Levinas as a form of rhetoric can be seen as developing from his critique of the way of producing new ideas through what he calls the 'transcendental method'.[18] It is a familiar observation that Levinas 'attempts to distance himself from the common conception of the transcendental method'[19] which is represented by the Husserlian phenomenological tradition. For Levinas, the transcendental method in the Husserlian tradition is based upon consciousness and prioritizes the theory of knowledge. In this tradition, 'knowledge is in pursuit of itself', where alterity is only grasped as an object of

[15] Bettina Bergo, *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth*, 135.
[16] Stine Holte, 'Asymmetry, Testimony, and God in Levinas' Later Thinking', in *Despite Oneself: Subjectivity and its Secret in Kierkegaard and Levinas*, Edited by Claudia Welz and Karl Verstryngeus (London: Turnshare Ltd publisher, 2008), 87.
[17] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Questions and Answers', 89. We will explore the meaning of substitution shortly.
[18] Idib, 88.
[19] Robert Bernasconi, 'Rereading of the other', in *The Question of the Other: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, edited by Arieen B. Dallery, Charles E. Scott (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 32. It can also be noticed that there are Levinasian scholars who consider that Levinas's philosophical method is 'transcendental method'. Theodore de Boer, 'An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy', It seems contradictory that Levinas himself also criticizes 'transcendental method'. But we can see, these two transcendental methods have different connotations. Bernasconi gives a detailed analysis on the difference of these two transcendental methods and claims that Levinas's transcendental method makes a rupture with the traditional transcendental method.

knowledge.[20] This tradition expresses transcendence in a manner of reduction, where everything is reduced to 'the content of thought', 'to the same'.[21] The rhetoric of the transcendental method gives an 'astronomic perception of the world',[22] which is compared by Levinas to the way architecture functions. As in architecture, where every new piece is based on the foundation provided by the previous piece, the transcendental method expresses itself by 'seeking the foundation' for every new idea.[23] In this trajectory of associating ideas, the new idea only confirms the previous ideas, without breaking through the expression 'from within'.[24] Thus, Levinas maintains, in the traditional way of expressing ideas, 'nothing is new under the sun',[25] since the ideas are all built into an 'immobile' system that does not leave open any possibility to go beyond it.

Opposed to the rhetoric of the transcendental method, Levinas proposes a way of expressing ideas by way of exaggerating, which he calls the method of 'overbidding'. In the method of overbidding, one idea is overstated and expressed to its superlative level in order to reach the 'otherwise-than-being', which cannot be sought within the implication of being. This is to say, the idea is given meaning through its exaggeration, not its foundation. This can be seen clearly from examples in which Levinas signifies the ethical responsibility not through its foundation of moral laws but by means of traumatization, using words such as 'hostage', 'persecution' etc. (whose signification will be discussed in detail later in the chapter), which does not necessarily mean a condition that

[20] Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by Michael Smith (New York: Clumbia University Press, 1999), 2.
[21] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 127.
[22] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Questions and Answers', 88.
[23] Ibid., 88.
[24] Ibid., 88.
[25] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 182.

needs to be met for his ethics, but a form of rhetoric that expresses the ethical responsibility differently.[26] Some call the ethics of Levinas an 'ethical extremism',[27] although more precisely it is an extremism in the manner of how the ethical ideas are conveyed. Through its rhetoric, the method of overbidding forces the horizon of the ideas to exceed its own border, to overflow the 'fullness of the thought'.[28]

Furthermore, overbidding can also be understood as a manner of exposing the subject, which extends the meaning of Levinas's overbidding from a way of expression, towards the 'ways by which one accedes to it', which in the end leads to the subject.[29] To be more exact, the Levinasian overbidding method is an essential part of Levinas's phenomenology, which does not aim at going back to the 'things themselves',[30] however, but goes beyond this by leading towards the subject itself that formulates all the ideas. Levinas criticizes Husserlian phenomenology, which for him has dismissed the horizon from which things first appear,[31] that is the 'concrete man'.[32] The concept of horizon, though derived from Husserl, has a unique significance in Levinas, where it is no longer located within consciousness but reaches towards the subjectivity of the subject beyond or prior to his/her consciousness.

This horizon as the human subject that perceives the world is revealed by the overbidding method, and when the very subjectivity of the subject is exposed,

[26] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 15.
[27] Simon Critcheley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity* (London: Verso, 2009), 205.
[28] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Questions and Answers', 87.
[29] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Questions and Answers', 87.
[30] As famously claimed by Husserl. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, volume 1 (London: Routledge, 1970), 252.
[31] Carl Cederberg, Resaying the Human: Levinas beyond Humanism and Anti-humanism (Stockholm: E-print, 2010), 33.
[32] Ibid., 33.

it reaches the point of becoming language,[33] which is to say, the subject that uses language to represent the world shows itself to the other in language and cannot hide its subjectivity behind the objective system of language. Levinas thus concludes that overbidding, when it reaches the 'fullness of thought', signifies a movement beyond ideas: 'there we pass from a structure rigorously ontological, toward subjectivity at the level of the conscience',[34] that is, an ethical subjectivity. To sum up, we concur with Clive Barnett's claim that for Levinas, overbidding as 'hyperbole' and 'superlative expression' aims, in the end, at a 'human plot'.[35] By overbidding, 'the world that is posited' by the subject goes further to uncover the ethical subjectivity, where overbidding as a rhetorical method emerges with an ethical revelation of the self that always has greater responsibility.[36]

As a core method to his philosophy, overbidding is also important to Levinas's development of his notion of utopia. In his essay 'To Think Utopian Otherwise', Abensour employs overbidding as the appropriate method to interpret Levinas's utopian thinking. According to Abensour, although Levinas does not directly discuss the concept of utopia in depth in any great frequency, his relationship with utopia is vital and pervasive and cannot be neglected. He claims that this relationship should be examined from Levinas's critical reading of two other utopian thinkers of his time: Martin Buber and Ernst Bloch, a reading which Abensour names a 'critical emphatic intervention'.[37] Abensour recognizes that the new idea of utopia in Levinas is nowise meant to give any

[33] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Questions and Answers', 87
[34] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 89.
[35] Ibid., 183
[36] Adriaan Theodor Peperzak, *To the Other: an Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 223.
[37] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 252.

new 'blueprint' for a perfected future, but rather to begin with an engagement with two contemporary utopian thinkers, Buber and Bloch, and seek a redirection of their utopian ideas. In other words, Levinas's utopian thinking is based upon seeing the horizon of the existing utopian ideas and thus to find a 'new inclination of thought' which leads to 'think[ing] utopia otherwise'.[38]

As Abensour claims, Levinas's commentary on Buber and Bloch's utopian ideas and his overbidding of their conceptualization—specifically by showing the presuppositions of the Buberian utopia and the Blochian utopia—confirms certain positive aspects in them but also overbids the limitation of which he is critical. The Buberian utopia, which is based upon the 'I-Thou' inter-human relationship, is positively discussed by Levinas in his preface to Buber's *Paths in Utopia*.[39] However, as Abensour indicates, Levinas also refuses to follow Buber's endeavour to 'think the inter-human relationship under the sign of reciprocity.'[40] In Levinas, one can find that the characteristic of reciprocity of the 'I-Thou' relation is overbid to an asymmetrical ethical relationship between the subject and the other, which will be examined shortly. The Blochian utopia based on the 'principle of hope' is also discussed by Levinas in different places.[41] Levinas appreciates Bloch's emphasis on the importance of time as the 'toward the future' of the 'not-yet', through which the concept of time is 'taken seriously', especially compared to Heidegger whose conception of time is only 'a projection

[38] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 252.
[39] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Utopia and Socialism' in *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by Michael Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 111-117, 111.
[40] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 252.
[41] For example, in 'Death and time', Levinas discussed the concepts of hope and utopia in Bloch. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Death and time', in *God Death, and Time*, translated by Bertina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 96.

of being toward death'.[42] However, as he also points out, even in speaking of the time of the future, Bloch still uses 'the language of being and ontology'.[43] Levinas criticizes this immanentism of Bloch's thinking, and overbids Bloch's utopian thinking by breaching this immanence through his concept of ethical 'disinterestedness', which we will soon explain.

With this brief introduction, we can see that Abensour's analysis uncovers important aspects of ethical utopia in Levinas, especially through the method of overbidding. We will thus look into the two traits of the Levinasian utopia indicated by Abensour: encounter and disinterestedness, based on Levinas's overbidding discussion of the Buberian and Blochian utopias. To begin with, we look at the Levinasian ethical utopia as an overbidding of the work on utopia by Martin Buber.

1.2 Levinas overbids Martin Buber

As Abensour suggests, Levinas overbids Martin Buber's utopian thinking from the standpoint of the inter-human relationship. According to Abensour, Levinas fully agrees with Buber that utopia should be returned to its 'first element'—'the inter-human relationship'.[44] In many ways, the description of the inter-human relationship as 'I' and 'Thou' in Buber has a profound influence on Levinas's utopian thinking. However, Levinas's method of developing his own utopian focus is to criticize Buber's idea as well as to overbid it, and it is specifically developed through his description of the inter-human relationship as asymmetrical. To understand this further, it is necessary for us to follow

[42] Emmanuel Levinas, *God Death, and Time,* 95.
[43] Ibid., 103.
[44] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 253.

Abensour and briefly examine just a few of the main tenets of Buber's utopian ideas through his conception of the I- thou relationship, before coming to Levinas's response to it.

Abensour points out that, for Buber, utopia concerns the social life, not the perfect 'structure of the state'.[45] To be more precise, Buber emphasizes the importance of the inter-human relationship for an ideal human society, and criticizes what he claims to be the common emphasis on 'knowledge' in the pursuit of a better society.[46] According to Buber, the normal understanding of society usually constitutes the other within the context of an all-inclusive 'I-It' relationship, where the 'it' is seen as opposed to the person, 'not in interrelation with the person'.[47] To rule out the 'I-it' as relevant to inter-human relationships, Buber firstly indicates the difference between 'I-it' and what he calls 'I-thou' concerning the relationships the subject can have with another. The difference between the 'I-it' and 'I-thou' in Buber, as Maurice Friedman maintains, is not the 'nature of the object to which one relates';[48] rather, the difference is in the very nature of the relationship itself. The 'I-it' relationship is a subject-object relationship, which is to be characterized as a relationship of domination always mediated by representation. In this relationship, the 'uniqueness' of the other is ignored, where it is under 'mastery' of the 'I' and mediated by a 'scientific order'[49] established on the basis of cognition. In other words, the 'I' is in control

[45] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 256.
[46] Ibid., 257.
[47] Nathan Rotenstreich, *Immediacy and its Limits: A Study in Martin Buber's Thought* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH, 1991), 1.
[48] Maurice Friedman, Introduction, in Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), xii.
[49] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (London, New York: Continuum, 1999), 41.

of the relationship where the 'it' is represented by the 'I', and thus only has meaning as part of the consciousness of the 'I'.

In contrast to the 'I-It', the 'I-thou' relationship has the features of directness, and mutuality.[50] First of all, 'I-thou' is a relationship with directness, which can be understood from Buber's statement that there is no 'system of ideas' between 'I' and 'thou'.[51] This is to say, the two parties are present immediately to each other in direct communication, with no intermediary conception in between. The relationship is not based on knowledge, as the other in the relation is 'detached from the world of things' and cannot be assimilated to the representation of the 'I'.[52] In this relation of directness, both of the parties assert their presence without any agenda of their own, thus the meeting is ' entirely non-instrumental'.[53]

The second feature of the relationship is that it is mutual. The relationship as 'I-thou', unlike the one-sided 'I-It' relationship, is two-sided.[54] In other words, there is a mutual commitment in the relationship; neither side can generate the relationship by itself. As pointed out by Kenneth Kramer, the 'I-thou' relation places no emphasis on two parties respectively, but rather the 'in between'.[55] The relationship is one of dialogue, a dialogue in trust which allows the expression of both parties, in contrast to the monologue tradition that Buber criticizes in Western philosophy—notably for example the Cartesian *cogito*. Based upon the two main features of the 'I-thou' relationship, Buber clearly

[50] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, xii.
[51] Ibid., 17.
[52] Roger Frie, *Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity in Modern Philosophy and Psychoanalysis: A Study of Sartre, Binswanger, Lacan and Habermas (*Lanham/Boulder/New York/London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Inc., 1997), 89.
[53] Ibid., 89.
[54] Kenneth Paul Kramer, *Martin Buber's I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 18.
[55] Ibid., 24.

holds that utopia is 'accordingly guided' by the 'I-thou' relationship. As Paul Mendes-Flohr rightly indicates, utopia in Buber is an 'ever renewed quest' for a better 'social structure' that encourages 'existential trust and mutual regards' in society.[56] This is to say, this utopian quest aims at overcoming the society that is built on the 'I-it' relationship, where social relations are instrumental in the sense that each is 'indifferent to the existential reality' of the others and communication is contaminated with mistrust.[57] Through the utopian impetus, the society will be able to open up to a sociality that is 'maximizing the possibility' of the 'I-thou' relationship.[58]

In several important ways, Levinas adheres to the utopian spirit in Buber's thinking. Despite his critique of the reciprocal character of the 'I-thou', which will be explored shortly, Levinas concurs with Buber that utopia should not be thought in the sphere of 'I-it ', that is, in the sphere of objective knowledge; rather, it is to be seen from the 'social dimension'.[59] Buber, as well as Levinas, criticizes the trend of thought that attempts to discredit utopia based on reasoning which limits it to the 'I-it' sphere, which includes the view of utopia from the classical Marxist tradition. For Buber and Levinas, some Marxists criticize utopia as a failed dream because they are seeing the relation between history and utopia from the perspective of the 'I-it' relation, and expecting that 'the utopia today should be the truth of tomorrow'.[60]

---

[56] Paul Mendes-Flohr, 'The Desert Within and Social Renewal-Martin Buber's Vision of Utopia', in *New Perspectives on Martin Buber*, edited by Michael Zank (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 219-230, 220.
[57] Paul Mendes-Flohr, 'The Desert Within and Social Renewal-Martin Buber's Vision of Utopia', 220.
[58] Ibid., 220.
[59] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 252.
[60] Ibid., 253.

Buber questions the legitimacy of the Marxists' denouncement of utopia as opposed to what they propose as a 'science of history'. The scientific, non-utopian version is based on a process of 'objectification', which claims that to realize objective knowledge in a society is more important than real 'human connection' in that society.[61] In this case, the category of the human is secondary to the category of things. We can find an echo of this critique in TI, where Levinas opposes the historiography that ignores the uniqueness of the interiority of each individual and relationship between 'I' and other.[62] In this sense, Levinas joins Buber in his concern to 'liberate man from categories solely adapted to things',[63] and shares with Buber the idea that it is only within 'human ties' that utopia can gain its 'soundness'.[64] This 'human tie', in the Buberian 'I-thou' relationship, is sociality. For Levinas, however, it is 'the encounter with the other man'.[65] This difference between symmetrical sociality and asymmetrical encounter is the starting point of Levinas's overbidding of Buberian utopian thinking.

1.3 From the I-thou relation to the face-to-face encounter of the 'I'-other

Despite the fact that Levinas shares Buber's emphasis on the social dimension of utopia, Levinas also indicates that the 'I-thou' relation in Buber is featured as reciprocal, which he calls into question. We will now look into Levinas's critique of the reciprocity of the 'I-thou' and the possible unethical consequences it can lead to in Levinas's interpretation. After, we will investigate how Levinas overbids the Buberian reciprocal 'I-thou' relationship into an asymmetrical

[61] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 257.
[62] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 18.
[63] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 253.
[64] Ibid., 255.
[65] Ibid., 253.

relationship between 'I' and the other, which is denoted as an encounter of the 'I'-other and gives rise to a possibility to redefine utopia.

For Levinas, the Buberian reciprocal 'I-thou' relationship is not primarily an ethical relationship. He argues that the 'I-thou' relationship is perceived from the point of view of 'an outside observer', since, in its reciprocity, it is equally two-sided, the same 'from left to right or right to left'.[66] In other words, from a third-person perspective, the two *relata* are reversible. It is a familiar observation that Levinas consistently criticizes the Western philosophical tradition wherein the ethical relation between the subject and the other is perceived from a third personal point of view, that is, from an objective view through representation.[67] As Levinas points out in TI, in representation 'it is always the same that determines the other',[68] where the same has an unjustified freedom in this representation. Thus, for Levinas, the Buberian 'I-thou' relation, even though it can have ethical features, is still fundamentally unethical as it is based upon representation from the third person perspective. The supposed balance between the 'I' and the 'thou', when represented by another 'I', results in a process of assimilation by the all-inclusive cognition, which, as Robert Gibbs points out, leaves the ethical relation 'under the sway of the knowing of totality'.[69]

---

[66] Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, 47.
[67] For example, in his essay 'Freeom and Command', Levinas maintains that 'The reality subjected to tyranny is an informed reality; it is already absent in the relationship the agent has with it. It is in the third person, hidden by that which represents it.' Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Paper*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Pulishers, 1987), 20.
[68] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 124.
[69] Robert Gibbs, *Correlation in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 189.

Abensour claims that, following Buber, Levinas's utopian thinking belongs to the 'register of the Encounter'.[70] Levinas, differentiating his own 'I-other'[71] relation from the Buberian 'I-thou', conceives it as an encounter between the 'I' and the other where the two are in an asymmetrical relationship, which does not result in giving the relation a character, but in starting a process of separating the subject and the alterity, where the subject can hear the ethical teaching from the alterity. First of all, the relationship between the 'I' and the other as encounter is stressed as non-reversible, which is conveyed through the formulation that the other is designated as a '*Vous*', rather than a 'thou'.[72] The term '*Vous*', different from 'thou', indicates the irreducible ethical command from the other who is questioning the 'I' and making demands of the 'I' from a height.[73] The concept of 'height' in Levinas does not have a spatial meaning, nor is it a characteristic of the other, as, according to Levinas, the other is 'unthinkable'; there is no trace of the other to be measured that can locate the other as from above.[74] 'Height' rather notifies a certain orientation of the 'I' in concern of the other in the encounter, which importantly presupposes the radical separation between the 'I' and 'other' so that there is no possibility to fuse them together through a third personal perspective; and only with this radical separation can the movement from the 'I' towards the other, where the other is welcomed and treated ethically, be certain.[75]

---

[70] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 251.
[71] The other mentioned in the current chapter is only designating the ethical other.
[72] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 155.
[73] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, translated by Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 88.
[74] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 230.
[75] Robert Bernasconi, '"Failure of Communication" as surplus: Dialogue and Lack of Dialogue Between Buber and Levinas', in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, edited by Robert Bernasconi, and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 102.

In the first chapter we discussed the unique concept of separation in Levinas's work. In order to show the connotations of the encounter of 'I' and other, and the difference between this and the 'I-thou' in Buber, we will briefly discuss the implications of the notion of the radical separation between 'I' and other. In his exposition on the 'I-thou' Buber claims that 'in the beginning is the relation',[76] which means that the relation of 'in between' is more significant or more basic than the 'I' and the 'thou' as the two *relatas* or terms of the relation.[77] For Levinas, this priority of the relation over the *relata* risks 'a dissolution of the terms in the relation,'[78] which may lead the 'I' and 'thou' to a fusion of a totality of the in-between.

Opposed to totality of the fusion of the 'I' and the other, in the Levinasian ethical encounter, the 'I' and the other are separated from the 'in betweenness' of the relation: 'the relationship between separated beings does not totalize them; it is a "unrelating relation"', claims Levinas.[79] For the subject 'I', it is separated from the other due to its responsibility for the other; while for the other, it is its absoluteness which refuses any representation that absolves it from the relation.[80] This can be understood further to mean that the subjectivity of the 'I' is not derived from being a part of the whole;[81] instead, its unicity is formed through its interiority, as we have discussed in the first chapter.[82] The otherness of the other in the encounter is absolute because its difference from the 'I' is not an outcome of comparison, but on a profound level the other does not share any

[76] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 78.
[77] Robert Bernasconi, '"Failure of Communication" as surplus: Dialogue and Lack of Dialogue Between Buber and Levinas', 102
[78] Ibid.
[79] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 295.
[80] Robert Bernasconi, '"Failure of Communication" as surplus: Dialogue and Lack of Dialogue Between Buber and Levinas',, 103.
[81] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 60.
[82] See in Chapter 1.

term in common with the 'I', which is to say the other is absolutely separated from and independent of the world of the 'I'.[83]

The different roles the 'I' and the other undertake in the separation also signify an orientation in the encounter between the two, which is designated by Levinas as an orientation 'starting from oneself towards the other'.[84] Different from the 'I-Thou' relation which can go in both directions, in the encounter of the 'I' and the other, there is no mutual fidelity but rather only the one-sided obligation of the 'I' for the other. In other words, there is only one ethical subject in the encounter, that is the 'I', who is obligated by the other that is coming from height and in destitution.[85] It is necessary to single out the ethical subjectivity, which can avoid seeing the 'I-other' relation in a symmetrical matter, or more exactly from an objective, third-person perspective, and in which case the ethical orientation can be possibly revealed. However, one should also note that in Levinas's analysis in TI, the subject 'I' and the absolute other are given similar emphasis. Yet, in his later work, OBBE, Levinas overbids his own conception in TI, developing his ethics to the extent of signifying the ethical subject with its responsibility for the other to a superlativeness. We will discuss this in greater detail shortly.

Turning to the special status that Levinas assigns to the other in the encounter as being from height and in destitution, it can be interpreted, firstly, as proposing that the height and the destitution of the other are to be seen as the inner motivation for the orientation, which guarantees the ethical character of the encounter. To be more precise, the other in the encountering is not a friend

[83] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 171.
[84] Ibid., 215.
[85] Ibid., 215.

to the 'I' as in the Buberian 'I-thou'.[86] Challenging Buber's 'I-thou' friendship where 'we greet those we encounter by wishing them well',[87] Levinas maintains that this friendship bears a certain 'angelic spiritualism' that is out of good will.[88] This is to say, height and destitution are not two characters of the other, but conditions of the ethical relation with the other; moreover, the encounter's being ethical is not only a feature of the encounter; rather, the encounter is all about the ethical obligation the 'I' undertakes for the other and in opening up its dwelling for the other.

In Levinas, the other is sometimes termed as a stranger with whom the 'I' cannot be a friend in reciprocal amity; in fact, the other, in Levinasian terms, 'may never be my friend'.[89] For Levinas, the other is absolutely unknown in the encounter, where there is no possibility for the 'I' to discern whether the other in the encounter is a friend or an enemy. In this account, Levinas includes an ethical scenario, which demands more than a friendship, when the other has the possibility of being an enemy who in fact undergoes a possible danger of violence from the subject. The command of the other overflows this danger and the subject faces the command: 'thou shall not kill' from the face of the other. This is to say, when the other is coming to me from a height, there is no possibility for the 'I' to treat the other in a manner which is sensitive to whether he/she is my friend or enemy, as it commands the 'I' before such categorization. The significance of the other coming from a height thus prioritizes the other in every single moment of the ethical encounter.

---

[86] Nathen Rotenstreich, *Immediacy and Its Limits: A Study in Martin Buber's Thought* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH, 1991), 2.
[87] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 55. The 'I-Thou' is described as a relationship of 'fidelity, friendship, or compassion'.
[88] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 257.
[89] Robert Gibbs, *Correlation in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 190.

As mentioned above, Levinas also emphasizes that the commanding other comes in 'destitution'. As Roger Burggraeve notes, the destitution of the other is the beginning point of the 'fundamental ethical experience' that breaks the movement of the self interestedness, as it is only the need of the other that can open up the interiority of the 'I' who finds him/herself responsible to this need.[90] Levinas especially stresses the connotation of the materiality of the destitution, which is distinctive from the spirituality stressed by Buber. The Levinasian subject 'I' is not 'wishing the other well', but 'cloth[ing] the naked and feed[ing] the hungry'.[91] Levinas criticizes Buber's I-thou which exists only in the 'ether' and of itself does not spring from any concrete concern for the hunger of the other.[92] The asymmetrical obligation of the 'I' for the other, by contrast, cannot be met by a 'friendly dialogue', but by feeding the hunger of the other.[93] Therefore, for the encounter to be ethical, a concrete concern of the 'I' for the corporeal destitution of the other is needed. In the encounter with the other, as Levinas states, 'the other's material needs are my spiritual need', [94] which suggests that it is only when the 'I' is concerned for the material destitution of the other, and takes responsibility for the other's concrete need, that the face-to-face encounter can be ethically confirmed.

Thus we can see, through the notion of the I-other encounter in Levinas, which is characterized more specifically as the absolute separation between 'I'

---

[90] Roger Burggraeve, 'Violence and the Vulnerable face of the Other: the Vision of Emmanuel Levinas on Moral Evil and Our Responsibility', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, edited by Claire Katz with Lara Trout (New York: Routledge, 2005), 49-66, 51.
[91] Ibid., 190.
[92] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge', in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand, (Oxford: Wiley, 2001), 59-74, 59.
[93] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 201.
[94] Richard Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 130.

and other, and the orientation from the 'I' towards the other where the 'I' is an ethical subject and the other comes from a height and in destitution, Levinas overbids the Buberian utopian thinking built on the 'I-thou' relation to an ethical utopia where the 'I' encounters the other. The utopia that is based on reciprocal harmonious 'I-thou' relation is still in certain sense a picture of a preferred sociality. However, with his comparative reading of Buber and Levinas, Miguel Abensour claims that in Levinas, utopia is 'a utopic word, a word addressed to the other, an invocation'.[95] Importantly, this conveys that the utopia as encounter in Levinas is a utopia which is first and foremost ethical; it is the very obligation of the subjectivity of the 'I' to respond to the invocation of the other. This utopia is nowise an unreal aspiration, but a calling to the impossibility of the ultimate violence of killing: in the ethical encounter, 'killing is impossible'; and in this impossibility of murder 'the possibility of utopia lies', Abensour maintains.[96]

Therefore, with Abensour's discussion we have traced the trajectory of Levinas's overbidding the Buberian utopia as sociality to an ethical utopic encounter with the other. Along with his appreciation of some aspects of Buberian thought, Levinas transcends Buber in a fundamental way, contending that ethics is not part of the result of a harmonious inter-human utopia; utopia should rather be seen as having meaning in an overbidding manner at the ethical moment of the face-to-face and its material exigency. This overbidding trajectory can also be seen in Levinas's critique of Ernst Bloch's utopian thinking, to which we now turn.

[95] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 254.
[96] Ibid., 260.

1.4 Levinas overbids Ernst Bloch

According to Abensour, the other utopian thinker whose ideas Levinas uses the method of overbid to explore is Ernst Bloch. It is a familiar observation that there is rich utopian thinking in the philosophical discourse of Ernst Bloch, who has been called one of the greatest utopian Marxist philosophers,[97] and whose work has been called an 'encyclopaedia of hope' for his century.[98] Unlike many of the mainstream Marxists, Bloch endeavours to pursue a project of ethics and human dignity, rather than a 'science of history' that perceives the future through following reasoning based upon objective knowledge.[99] Recognized by many Levinasian scholars, there is certain comparability between the thinking of Bloch and Levinas,[100] especially on the subject of utopia, which can also be seen through the fact that Levinas himself discusses Bloch's philosophy in many occasions in his own essays.[101]

Similar to his discussions of how Levinas overbids Buber's utopian thinking, Abensour begins his discussion with how Levinas appreciates certain aspects of Bloch's utopian thinking, based on which the limits of Bloch's utopia are to be revealed.[102] According to Abensour's analysis, one can observe that Levinas values two aspects of Bloch's utopian thinking. First of all, Levinas

---

[97] Douglas Kellner, 'Ernst Bloch, Utopia and Ideology Critique', in *Jaargang*, 44, No. 21, 2010, 40-48, 40.
[98] Ben Anderson, 'A Principle of Hope: Recorded Music, Listening Practices and the Immanence of Utopia', Geografiska Annaler, series B, *Human Geography*, Vol, 84, No. 314, Special Issue, Utopia and Distopia (2002), 211-227, 218.
[99] Ibid., 218.
[100] Miguel Abensour in his essays, ' To Think Utopia Otherwise' and 'Persistent Utopia', and Robert Bernasconi in his essay 'A Love that is Stronger than Death: Sacrifice in the Thought of Levinas, Heidegger, and Bloch', compare Levinas with Bloch. Miguel Abensour in his essays, ' To Think Utopia Otherwise', 254; Robert Bernasconi, 'A Love that is Stronger than Death: Sacrifice in the Thought of Levinas, Heidegger, and Bloch', Angelaki, 7:2 (2005) 9-16, 10.
[101] Emmanuel Levinas, *God Death and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 92-106.
[102] Miguel Abensour, ' To Think Utopia Otherwise', 251.

recognizes the characteristic of humanism in Bloch's philosophy, which is the basis for his utopian ideas as well. Levinas points out that, in Bloch, the concept of 'human' is irreducible to 'the things of the world'.[103] Different from other Marxists who do not take human psychology seriously, in his work *The Principle of Hope* Bloch endeavours to give a full explanation on all kinds of 'Human needs, desire'.[104] More importantly, in the humanist perspective of Bloch, Levinas sees an emphasis on ethics, for example in Bloch's statement that an ideal society should not be 'purchased at the price of the suffering or degradation of another'.[105] Bloch criticizes the Marxists who prioritize 'revolution' in their social theory and imply an allowance for violence,[106] while lamenting the reality of the 'misery and frustration of the exploited' people.[107] This indicates that Bloch is not unlike Levinas here in his advocacy of 'non-indifference to the suffering of the other'[108] and in his opposition to possible violence in the progression of society, especially from the political sphere.

Second, Abensour indicates that Levinas welcomes especially Bloch's solution to the contradiction between utopia and death in his utopian thought. Levinas stresses that utopian ideas should address 'the problem of death', since if death is seen as the ultimate misery of human life, a philosophy that promises a perfected world needs to be able to explain the meaning of death in this world.[109] Bloch maintains that utopia cannot evade the problem of death, and in his book *The Principle of Hope* he discusses the medical dream that aims at a 'victory over

[103] Emmanuel Levinas, 'On Death in Bloch's Thought', 35.
[104] Douglas Kellner, 'Ernst Bloch, Utopia and Ideology Critique', 43.
[105] Ernst Bloch, *Natural Law and Human Dignity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), xi.
[106] Emmanuel Levinas, 'On Death in Bloch's Thought', 35.
[107] Ibid., 35.
[108] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 262.
[109] Emmanuel Levinas, 'On Death in Bloch's Thought', 35.

death'.[110] Disease and death cannot be abolished, but with medical advancement, death can be 'amazingly pushed back'.[111]

However, for Levinas, more important than his medical dreams, Bloch's discussion on death and utopia also shows a novel way to conceive the relation between time and death. Bernasconi maintains that Levinas finds in Bloch a resource to support his 'polemic against Heidegger's being-toward-death'.[112] We can find in Bloch that death cannot be equated with the termination of the time of the individual, which distinguishes him from Heidegger.[113] To be more exact, Bloch explains death according to hope and work, where death is explained according to time, as an unfinished work in time, which is ultimately different from Heidegger's claim that time gains meaning from its orientation towards death. By contrast, time in Bloch is the 'time of fulfilment',[114] which is hope for the actualization of all the possibilities and the process of human praxis. Levinas values Bloch's view on time in his utopian ideas and claims that in Bloch time is taken seriously, as the future is not pre-determined. Instead, the future (under the name of the not-yet) in Bloch is 'pure hope' and opens to transformation through praxis, and death in Bloch is seen based on this future as hope, in which sense death is only seen as an unfinished future. Death is not a threat to utopia, but it is a melancholy of 'work unfinished.'[115] For Bloch, in a successful and perfect world this melancholy will disappear, which can be understood from

---

[110] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), 457.
[111] Ibid., 457.
[112] Robert Bernasconi , 'A Love that is Stronger than Death: Sacrifice in the Thought of Levinas, Heidegger, and Bloch', *Angelak*i, Vol. 7, No. 2, 9-16, 12.
[113] 'For Heidegger, there is no eternity, but the tragic character of finite existence remains, and time has no other meaning than to-be-toward-death… .' Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 93.
[114] Ibid., 95.
[115] Ibid., 100.

Bloch's words that in such a world there will be no 'work unfinished' and 'death loses it sting'.[116]

Even though Levinas acknowledges important aspects of Bloch's utopia, such as his humanism and finer explanation on utopia, time and death, he also distinguishes his own philosophy from that of Bloch. Abensour maintains that Levinas overbids Bloch's utopian thought specifically by criticizing the immanentism in Bloch's thinking. For Levinas, the immanentism of Bloch's ideas in his humanism and his novel understanding of the relation between death and hope still springs from the ontological discourses through which he contextualizes his ideas.[117]

Firstly, Levinas points out that Bloch's humanistic concern for the suffering of the exploited, which can be seen as his ethical discourse, is in the end determined by the theory of the 'fulfilment of being'.[118] For example, in Bloch's philosophical statements he claims that the misery of the proletariat requires 'a praxis such that the fulfilment of essence comes to pass'.[119] In this claim, the suffering of the proletariat is ultimately seen as an exhibition of the unfulfilment of being, which is to say, when being is fulfilled, concern for the sufferings of the other and the ethical responsibility for the other loses its significance. As Levinas claims, Bloch's discourse is confined within the immanence of being, which, for Levinas, does not recognizes the transcendent status of ethics which should have a status of primacy beyond being.[120] For Bloch, ontology is still a philosophy of which the ethical consideration is just a dimension, albeit an important one.

---

[116] Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death and Time,* 98.
[117] Ibid., 103.
[118] Miguel Abensour, ' To Think Utopia Otherwise', 267.
[119] Ibid., 267.
[120] Ibid., 267.

Abensour maintains that, in Bloch, when being is fulfilled, ethics will 'melt away', returning to the totality of the ontology of being.[121]

Second, Abensour contends that for Levinas, Bloch's solution to the relationship between utopia and death is plausible, but does not single out the importance of subjectivity and even risks eliminating subjectivity. Levinas claims that in Bloch, the only condition where death cannot threaten human beings is where humanity 'has already left the individual'.[122] This perplexing idea can be tentatively understood from Levinas's understanding of Bloch's Marxist claim that the 'naturalization of man' is equated to 'humanized nature' in the fulfillment of the world.[123] For Bloch, death cannot threaten humans when humans attain their maximized level of naturalization, wherein individuals become part of the whole system of 'being'. But in this process, the very humanity of the human subject is also transformed to be part of this all-inclusive system of 'being', where, similarly, the absolute other is also denuded of its importance. Abensour concludes that, on Levinas's reading of Bloch, ethics 'would dissolve itself in ontology'.[124] Indeed, Blochian hope contextualizes the procession of time of the individual within the inter-essence movement of being.[125] In order to find a way to evade death and progress toward perfection, the Blochian subject hopes to become caught up in all-encompassing being. For Levinas, even the Blochian individuals win over death through becoming fully naturalized, but in the end they are engulfed by all-inclusive being, where they lose their particularity. Levinas strongly disagrees with Bloch's utopian ideas

[121] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 265.
[122] Emmanuel Levinas, *God Death and Time*, 103.
[123] Ibid., 103.
[124] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 265.
[125] Emmanuel Levinas, *God Death and Time*, 155.

insofar as they are in the end all nourished by being and by the attempt to 'preserve being'.[126]

To show this contradiction between Bloch and Levinas more clearly, Abensour compares the motivation of the progression towards the fulfilment of being as 'need' in Bloch with the concept of 'metaphysical desire' in Levinas.[127] The concept of 'metaphysical desire' gains its significance in TI, where it can be understood basically as a desire for transcendence and exteriority.[128] Metaphysical desire is not based on any lack, or therefore on any need, and thus does not lead to a fulfilment in the ontology of the same.[129] The Blochian utopia, as Abensour points out, reduces 'desire to the lack of need', and seeks the future from the perspective of satisfaction of this need,[130] the unfulfilled essence. This shows that utopia in Bloch is still 'internal to essence' and within the immanence of being, where the utopia is only ahead of the present, not exterior to the present.[131] Accordingly, for Levinas, Bloch's utopia, despite its importance, remains 'unfailingly internal to essence'.[132]

Therefore, in Bloch's utopian thinking, the field of ethics is secondary to the field of ontology, or in Levinasian terms: Bloch's utopia is 'not beyond being'.[133] And it is exactly in the problematic relationship between ethics and ontology in Bloch that Levinas finds the starting point to overbid Bloch towards his own utopia as disinterestedness. Abensour points out that, for Levinas, it is only the ethical significance based on absolute alterity that can break the

[126] Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 204,
[127] Ibid., 263.
[128] See Chapter 1.
[129] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 42.
[130] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 263.
[131] Ibid., 264.
[132] Ibid., 264.
[133] Ibid., 264.

immanentism of being. In comparison to Bloch's notion of hope which finalises the all-inclusive being, the notion of disinterestedness in Levinas makes the rupture from immanence possible.[134] Therefore, the route of Levinas's overbidding the immanence of the Blochian utopia as hope and forming his own utopia as transcendence is seen by Abensour as developed through one of the main Levinasian concepts—disinterestedness, which will be the focus of the next section.

1.5 From utopia as hope to utopia as disinterestedness

After examining Levinas's critique of Bloch's immanentism, Abensour maintains that, in Bloch, the destitute existence in the world shows the unfulfilment of being; but in Levinas it is 'an opening to disinterestedness,'[135] which is, on a deeper level, an opening toward transcendence and exteriority.

Looking at the concept of disinterestedness in a broad sense, one can see that in Western philosophical history it has rich implications for aesthetics and socio-political thought.[136] In Levinas, however, the focus is primarily ethical. Sean Gaston indicates that disinterestedness in Levinas can be seen from two perspectives. First, disinterestedness is one of the characterizations with which Levinas denotes ethical subjectivity in relation with the other.[137] According to Levinas, disinterestedness is 'a movement of the same unto the other without

[134] Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 10.
[135] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 265.
[136] Sean Gaston, 'Derrida and the Ruins of Disinterest', *Angelaki*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2002), 105-118, 107.
[137] Sean Gaston, 'Levinas, Disinterest and Enthusiasm', *Literature & Theology,* Vol. 17, No. 1(2003), 407-421, 409.

return to the same',[138] from which we can see there are two crucial elements for disinterestedness: the separation between the 'I' and the other and the 'reversal' of 'care for oneself' into responsibility for the other.[139] It is only when the same and other are in absolute separation, that there can be a genuine movement from the same to the other, and it is only when this movement is motivated by care of the 'I' for the other that disinterestedness attains its ethical significance.

The connotations of separation in Levinas have already been discussed above. According to Levinas, only when the other is absolutely separated from the subject, can there be the unique interest for the other that does not rely on representation by the subject. And, as a disinterested subject, the 'I' does not 'grasp upon being' or assimilate the other into its own cognition, but exposes itself to responsibility for the other.[140] In disinterestedness, morality is based on a reverse of egoism, which is more radical than altruism, which precedes altruism. Through this discussion, disinterestedness can be seen as a foundational characteristic of ethics, or goodness in TI, as can be seen from Levinas's own statement: 'A desire perfectly disinterested—goodness'[141]. For the disinterested subject, contrary to having the desire for self-satisfaction or perfection, subjectivity as disinterestedness desires to be good through the care for the other.[142]

[138] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, edited by Mark Taylor, translated by A. Linguis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 348.
[139] Sean Gaston, 'Levinas, Disinterest and Enthusiasm', 409.
[140] Ibid., 410.
[141] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 50.
[142] Sean Gaston, 'Levinas, Disinterest and Enthusiasm', 411.

Second, Gaston points out that disinterestedness 'in a more radical sense' is antithetical to the very 'essence of being'.[143] Levinas, especially in OBBE, formulates the term 'disinterest' as 'dis-inter-esse'. The Latin infinitive 'esse' signifies 'to be'. Inter-esse hence designates an existence 'within the economy of being', or in other words, being as being for itself.[144] Dis-inter-esse thus signifies a subject that dispossesses its essence, empties its being. But this process of 'hollow(ing) out' one's essence does not mean the subject as disinterestedness becomes nothingness;[145] rather, Levinas emphasizes that in disinterestedness the subject is 'otherwise than Being', which is rather a turn towards the suffering other. This is later developed more radically, into the 'one-in-the-place-of-another' substitution in OBBE[146] where the essence of the self becomes 'in the place of' the other.[147] Through tracing this development from disinterestedness through to substitution, we intend, later in this chapter, to go beyond Abensour's analysis and show that Levinas's overbidding method extends well beyond TI, such that crucial aspects of OBBE can be seen as 'overbiddings' of discussions in TI, in this case an overbidding which will ground our own later interpretation of Levinas's ethical utopia as null-site substitution

For present purposes, however, we can say that in TI Levinas overbids Bloch's utopia of hope through the concept of disinterestedness with the aim of breaking through the immanence of the Blochian utopia to a utopia of transcendence. Disinterestedness as 'rupture of essence' challenges Bloch's

[143] Sean Gaston, 'Levinas, Disinterest and Enthusiasm', 411.
[144] Emmanuel Levinas, *God Death and Time*, 260.
[145] Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 5.
[146] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 95.
[147] Sean Gaston, 'Levinas, Disinterest and Enthusiasm', 412.

concept of hope which is deemed as 'completion of being'.[148] Disinterestedness dislocates being and goes 'beyond essence', which hence opens to transcendence.[149] In addition, through disinterestedness, the relation between utopia and death, and especially the risk we indicated above that for Levinas hope conquers death only by eliminating both subjectivity and alterity, can also be properly addressed. Disinterestedness alters the relationship between death and being. In Bloch, it is 'completed being' that defeats death, but for Levinas, in disinterestedness, the subject leaves its essence and opens to the other, in which process the subject is not 'preoccupied with his being' and thus death can no longer grasp the human.[150] Abensour concludes that, in Levinas, the utopia that surpasses death is 'the victory of disinterestedness'.[151] Levinas sees Bloch's utopia as hope exhibiting a certain 'human finality',[152] a utopia Levinas overbids in coming to his understanding of utopia as disinterestedness which effects 'an interruption of essence, from a non-place' (*non-lieu*), that puts an 'interval' among the place of essence opening towards a dimension of transcendence.[153]

In the above discussions we have followed the trajectory pointed out by Abensour, which in the end reveals two basic characteristics of utopia in Levinas: encounter and disinterestedness. Seen as the result of overbidding Buber's utopia as inter-human relationship based on the 'I-Thou', Levinas's utopia is designated as the face-to-face encounter of the 'I' with the other, which signifies the separation between the two relata and the asymmetrical obligation the 'I' has

[148] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 265.
[149] Ibid., 265.
[150] Ibid., 103.
[151] Ibid., 273.
[152] Ibid., 70.
[153] Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 5. We will soon explore how Bettina Bergo translates *non lieu* as 'non-place', whereas Alphonso Lingis translates it as 'null-site'.

for the other. Seen as the result of overbidding Bloch's utopia as hope, Levinas's utopia is explored as disinterestedness which transcends the immanence of the Blochian hope for completion of 'being' and singles out the significance of subjectivity in its movement of dispossession of its own essence for its ethical goodness. In both of these processes of overbidding, Levinas emphasizes the primordiality of ethics in the utopian pursuit. Abensour concludes in the end of his analysis that Levinas's utopian thinking is not an innovation of the 'contents of utopia' in the sense of another picture of utopia; rather, it is an invention in the way as an 'speculative move permitting it (the contents of utopia) to be done'.[154] In other words, to think about utopia is not to follow the 'not-yet-being'; it is rather the way of 'an exit' that precedes and conditions any hope, an exit 'outside of man', and outside of man's self interestedness.[155] For Abensour, this exit is shown in the encounter with the other and in disinterestedness as the rupture of essence. The movement towards utopia, therefore, is not a movement to a 'promised land', but a movement towards the other man and a movement dispossessing the interest of the 'I'.[156]

Via the method of overbidding, the horizons of the utopian ideas of Buber and Bloch are shown and Levinas's own ideas of utopia are formed. Encounter and disinterestedness serve as the starting points to develop utopian thinking to a new level in Levinas's ethical utopia. However, do encounter and disinterestedness enable us to show Levinas's utopian thinking in its development to the superlative level? As we discussed above, overbidding as a method seeks to develop an idea to its superlative, and we also pointed out that

[154] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 274.
[155] Ibid., 274.
[156] Ibid., 275.

the process of developing an idea to its superlative is in the end to expose the subject that is behind the ideas. In Abensour's analysis, as followed through above, the subject is emphasized in encounter and disinterestedness but this does not yet seem to accommodate the superlativeness of the subject's exposure as found in OBBE. As Robert Bernasconi, among others, points out, there is a development of the notion of subjectivity in Levinas's works from TI to OBBE, a development which, as we will contend, can once again be most fruitfully understood through the method of overbidding to a more radical level within which a new set of utopian concepts, importantly including null-site, proximity and substitution, are introduced. We will explore this development in the following section.

1.6 Developments of the conception on utopia and subjectivity in *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence* (OBBE)

In his essay 'What is the Question to Which "Substitution" is the Answer?', Bernasconi explores the alteration of Levinas's conception of subjectivity from TI to OBBE. According to Bernasconi, in OBBE, with his introduction of a lexicon that brings in 'striking' extremity, for example, 'hostage', 'persecution', Levinas offers a radical account of ethical subjectivity that differs from his previous work.[157] The subject that is already described as responsible for the other in TI, is exposed in OBBE to an even more outstanding level. From Bernasconi's perspective, we can argue, Abensour's account of the ethical utopia in Levinas from the perspectives of encounter and disinterestedness, which are primarily

[157] Robert Bernasconi, 'What is the Question to which "Substitution" is the Answer'?, in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 240.

based on the discussions in TI, does not cover the overarching orientation towards OBBE.

Bernasconi points out that the development Levinas makes in OBBE can be seen as a reply to Derrida's questioning in 'Violence and Metaphysics' on Levinas's conceptions in TI, which, pertinent to our discussion, also sheds doubt on the notion of encounter. Indeed, Derrida points out, in order to maintain the absoluteness of alterity, Levinas does not seek to position the 'I' in the place of an other, therefore in the 'I'-other relationship it is only the other who is facing possible violence but not vice versa.[158] Proof of this can be found in Levinas's own claims where he maintains that 'the face in which the other presents himself does not do violence' to the same.[159] In this sense, the 'I' is left in a safe zone in the encounter, which is not justified as the other is said constantly to be exposed to possible violence.

Bernasconi argues further that in OBBE, compared to TI, the separation between the 'I' and the other loses its former significance in TI; since, in OBBE, the interiority of the 'I' is exposed to an ultimate level to the responsibility for the other, where the significance of the egoism of the 'I' is questioned constantly.[160] Recalling our discussion of the utopian dwelling in the last chapter, the 'I' establishes its interiority within the dwelling before encountering the other, where it is a form of enjoyment. Yet for some Levinas scholars, the dwelling as the home of the 'I' implies a certain meaning of ownership and right,

[158] Jacques Derrida, *Violence and Metaphysics*, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79-153, 147.
[159] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 203.
[160] Robert Bernasconi, ' What is the Question to which "Substitution" is the Answer?', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 245.

from which the other is excluded.[161] The secret site of dwelling escapes ethical judgment in the first place, which is in need of being exposed to the other so that the responsibility for the other can reach its maximum radicalized level.

In OBBE, however, Levinas locates the ethical responsibility prior to the event of encounter with the other, where, in an overbidding manner, the responsibility develops to its 'superlative' form in a way that changes the establishment of subjectivity.[162] Levinas now claims that the signification of subjectivity is founded upon the restless movement of 'proximity', which is further depicted through the intriguing term 'null-site'.[163] The intricate connection between proximity overbidding the ethical significance of encounter, and proximity designated as null-site (a further designation for utopia) leads our current investigation forward. We will examine the critical moment of ethical utopia as the ethical subjectivity resulting from the null-site movement initiated by proximity and culminating in a new way of defining subjectivity as substitution.

Following this line of thought, we locate the critical moment for the intertwined developments of utopia and subjectivity in Levinas at the conception of null-site through proximity and substitution. We will give a detailed explication on how proximity and substitution accomplishes the null-site subjectivity in due course. However, the term 'null-site', which is Alphonso Lingis's translation of the original French term *non-lieu,* although it does not

[161] Edith Wyschogrod, 'Autochthony and Welcome, Discourse of Exile in Levinas and Derrida', in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testament*, edited by Yvonne Sherwood, Kevin Hurt (London: Routledge, 2004), 54.
[162] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 11.
[163] Ibid., 85.

itself appear with any great frequency in OBBE,[164] is nevertheless a vital aspect for a proper understanding of the very prevalent core notions of proximity and substitution in OBBE, expressing thereby a unique extension of the term 'utopia'. A full and careful exploration of this highly nuanced terminology will therefore be crucial for the goals of the present thesis. Recalling our discussion in the last chapter, the term 'utopia' has been explained through its character of the dwelling as non-place and good-place. In order to address the uniqueness of null-site, distinguishing it from other possible choices of translation for *non-lieu*, we will give a detailed examination of the nuance of the translation and explicate why we adopt Lingis's version of translation from *non-lieu* as 'null-site'.

2 Terminology of 'null-site' (*non-lieu*)

To investigate the nuance of *non-lieu* translated as 'null-site', it is necessary for us to look at other ways that *non-lieu* has been translated, such as 'non-place' or 'non-site',[165] which similarly are English translations of the French term *non-lieu* in Levinas. Concerning the reason of the choice of translation, many terminological questions emerge that demand our attention before we can move to explore the implication of the null-site in Levinas's utopian thinking. It can be observed that the issue of the correct translation of *non-lieu* has not been attended to by many Levinas scholars, as most of Levinas's translators and commentators make the translation apparently without discerning the different possible meanings of the term. Lingis arguably pays the most careful attention to

[164] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 8, 14, 82, 187.
[165] Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo, 261; *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo, 5.

extracting the contextually appropriate English meaning from the multiplicity of significations attached to the French term *non-lieu*.

Among the differing translations of the term *non-lieu*, we can see that Lingis himself (the translator of Levinas's two major works TI and OBBE), renders Levinas's *non-lieu* into different English terms on different occasions, which can be seen as various combinations of 'non', 'null', 'site', 'place', and 'locus'. While Lingis translates *lieu* variously into 'place', 'site' or 'locus',[166] the compound term *non-lieu* is rendered by Lingis, depending on the context, either as 'null-site', or 'non-site'.[167] Bettina Bergo in her translation of Levinas's 'Ideology and Idealism' in *Of God Who Comes to Mind* translates *non-lieu* as 'non-place', yet translates it as 'non-site' in her translation of Miguel Abensour's essay on Levinas entitled 'To Think Utopia Otherwise'. [168] Michael B. Smith translates *non-lieu* as 'non-place' in Levinas's essays wherever the term appears.[169] In any of the above cases, no clear reasons are given for the choice of translation. It must be admitted that an explicit rationale is not provided even by Lingis, but given the contextual care evident in his translations, it is possible to discern a guiding consistency and clear underlying rationale for his translations of the

[166] 'La function originelle de la maison ne consiste pas à découvrir un lieu-mais à romper le plein de l'élément, à y ouvrir l'utopie où le "je" se recueille en demeurant chez soi'. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'Extériorité* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 130. 'The primordial function of the home does not consist in orienting being by the architecture of the building…'. Emmanuel Levinas, TI, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 156. From this we can see, the translation of *lieu* here is given by Lingis as 'site'.
[167] 'La responabilité pour autrui est le lieu où se place le non-lieu de la subjectivité…', Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou Au-dela de l'Essence* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 24.
[168] 'The paradox of utopia at this level is this: the surprise of this adventure, of this adventure, of this departure, of this evasion, of this dedication to the other in the non-site.' Miguel Abensour, translated by Bettina Bergo, 275; 'from a non-place, from a "utopia"…', Emmanuel Levinas, 'Ideology and Idealism', *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), 5.
[169] Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, translated by Michael. B. Smith (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 13, 42, 44, such as in 'Paul Celan: From Being to the Other', 'Edmond Jabes Today', and 'Poetry and Resurrection: Notes on Agnon' from *Noms Propres.*

term as either non-site or null-site. We shall return to explain this implicit rationale in due course.

Moreover, Levinas scholars writing in English who refer to these differing translations also use them interchangeably without distinction. They appear to follow one or another version of the translations without paying attention to the accuracy of the terms considered separately, or to the different characteristics that *non-lieu* can bear in different contexts. As a result, confusion arises when the same meaning is translated into different terms, or when the same term is used in different cases without distinguishing what the specific context requires. For example, in his essay 'Wealth and Justice in a Utopian Context', John Drabinski writes, 'the clearing of u-topian space is the non-place of ethics'.[170] He utilizes the term 'non-place', adhering to Michael B. Smith's translation, to express his understanding of utopia in Levinas. Yet if one analyzes Drabinski's text and meanings carefully, it can be seen that 'u-topian', in Drabinski's indication, signifies the process of 'clearing', which has more of a connotation of emptying than negating. But non-place does not convey exactly the meaning of such movement 'clearing' signifies, which we will argue later is better expressed by the term null-site.[171] By way of another example, in his essay 'Five Problems in Levinas's view of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them', Simon Critchley depicts the ethical relation in Levinas as 'non-place' without explaining or discerning what he means by the term.[172] Thus by merely using one of the

[170] John Drabinski, 'Wealth and Justice in a Utopian Context', in *Addressing Levinas*, edited by Eric Sean Nelson, Antje Kapust, Kent Still (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 185.
[171] We face the questioning that we have also used the term non-place in TI, but non-place is only the significance of utopia confined within the discussion in TI, which does not cover OBBE.
[172] 'Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and a Sketch of the Solution to Them', in *Political Science*, Vol. 32, No. 2., 2004, 175.

versions of the English term without discerning its connotation, the specific significance of the important *non-lieu* is diminished or left out.

We might face the counter-argument that the problem is here being exaggerated, and that all the different terms may appear in different forms, yet they nevertheless convey similar meanings. However, there are instances showing that the choice of term for translation affects the consistency of Levinas's thought. For example, one outstanding instance can be found in OBBE, where Levinas claims that the utopia of 'the-one-for-the-other' is '*lieu et non lieu*'.[173] These two instances of '*lieu*' here cannot be identical in meaning, as, if they were, the significance of the phrase '*lieu* and *non-lieu'*, would be self-contradictory. Lingis avoids this outcome by rightly translating them into 'locus' and 'null-site', which clearly shows Lingis's recognition that in the French the two *lieu*s convey different meanings: *lieu* as locus signifies more of a container or situation for a certain event to happen, whereas *non-lieu* as 'null-site' signifies the inner logic of the movement of the ethical subjectivity emptying its site for the other (whose detailed meaning will be explicated shortly). After arguing for the importance of accommodating the intricacy of the terminology of *non-lieu*, we will next examine the different English terms which are used as translations to capture different aspects of meaning of the French term *lieu*.

Broadly speaking, the term *lieu* in French is usually translated as 'place', 'site', or 'locus' in English. In the following sections we will analyze the terms that are among the possible translations of *non-lieu*, and explain why Lingis's translation as 'null-site' is the most accurate. To begin with, we will look at the

[173] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 45.

first possible translation of the French *lieu*, the English term 'place',[174] which can also be a translation of the French *place*. It can be seen that in both TI and OBBE the English term 'place' is in fact a translation chosen for the French term *place* by Lingis. Unlike other translators who do not distinguish 'site' and 'place' when translating *non-lieu,* Lingis clearly differentiates between these two terms, translating the French *place* into the English 'place', the French *lieu* into the English 'site'.[175] The difference between 'site' and 'place' will demonstrate a unique meaning for 'site', and we will therefore first explore the connotation of 'place' before turning to examine the term 'site' directly.

2.1 An analysis of the term 'place' and the issue of its translation

We begin by looking at the English term 'place' since, in common practice, the French word *lieu* is translated into 'place' from a broader point of view, and specifically in association with utopia. Some of Levinas's translators render *lieu* as 'place' in their translation of *non-lieu*, as we indicated above. However, in his translation Lingis clearly shows that in Levinas, *place* and *lieu* are distinct, and the English term 'place' is very often translated by Lingis from the French term *place*, not *lieu*.[176] In TI, this is the case on most occasions. However, in OBBE, the situation is more complicated, as the English 'place' is sometimes translated from the French *place*, other times translated from the French *lieu*. Through a close examination it will be exhibited that on virtually all occasions Lingis's choice of

[174] Although there is no case of translation of *lieu* as 'place' in Lingis's translation, many other Levinas scholars have translated *lieu* as 'place'.
[175] For example, Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 27, 82.
[176] There are roughly 22 instances in TI where the English term 'place' has been translated from the French term 'place'. There is one exception: 'the face in its absolute nudity, in its destitution as a head that does not find a place to lay itself…'. The term 'place' here is translated from the French term 'lieu'. We argue that the English term 'place' here should be translated as 'site', as it has the connotation of interiority. This will be explained in detail later in the part on 'site'. Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 299.

translation is carefully considered, with a keen eye to what the context demands, and bearing important philosophical significance.

Let us begin then by investigating the implication of the English term 'place' in TI. As we mentioned above, in most cases Lingis chooses not to translate the French term *lieu* into 'place' for a reason, even though it is not directly stated. It is possible to see this from a close examination of the specific meaning 'place' bears, which is different from 'site' or 'locus'. Examining some examples of the usage of 'place' can help us catch a glimpse of the reasoning behind Lingis's choices. For instance, in the following sentence we can find the appearance of the term 'place' (as translated from *place*): 'The person is thus confirmed in objective judgments and no longer reduced to his *place* within a totality'.[177] Or again, 'separation designates the possibility of an existent being set up and having its own destiny to itself, that is being born and dying without the *place* of this birth and this death in the time of universal history being the measure of its reality.'[178] From the first example, it is clear that the English term 'place' signifies the relationship between the individual and the totality. To be more precise, the individual is given a place in the system as a whole, which can be the society or the state, or any other human togetherness that endows the individual with meaning. Levinas criticizes this relationship where the individual is seen as a mechanical part of the whole, which is denoted by Levinas as a situation where the individual loses his/her uniqueness within the totality. In a similar way, in the second example, the term 'place' indicates a time slot of an individual which is located within the universal history and is seen as an

[177] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 246.
[178] Ibid., 55.

indispensable part of this history. Levinas contends that, to conceive the span between a personal birth and death as an innate part of history leads to an all-inclusive historiography. As we analyzed in the last chapter, the all-inclusive historiography view forms a totality, which sees individuals all in equal terms, ignoring their particularity.[179]

From these examples we can conclude that the French term *place* translated by Lingis as the English 'place' signifies a place in an objective system or a phase of time within the 'universal history', which are criticized by Levinas as enclosed within 'totality'.[180] In this sense, 'place (*place*)' (both the English and the French) can be seen as a certain identity of the individual represented by being compared to the whole. The description of a place as a part of the totality to which an individual belongs thus denotes what Levinas is endeavouring to transcend in his philosophy. Therefore, in TI, we can conclude that 'place' is associated frequently with notions of which Levinas is critical—'historiography', 'thematization', 'the totality'—which demonstrates that 'place'/*place* is used by Levinas to designate problems in the traditional discussion on the relation between the individual and the whole. It is against these problems that Levinas sets out his own approach to subjectivity, which is primarily ethical.

In Lingis's translation of OBBE, the appearance of the English term 'place' shows more complications where it is not only a description of the situation of an individual in the whole. It should be noted that this meaning is preserved on some occasions; for example, the passage '*Autrement Qu'etre*: '*Si la question qui? tend à découvrir la situation du sujet c'est-à-dire la place d'une personne dans une*

[179] See discussions in chapter 1 on the question of interior time and historical time.
[180] 'in the totality, 'individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves'. TI, 21.

conjoncture dans une conjonction d'êtres et de choses…',[181] is translated in OBBE as: 'If the question "who?" tends to discover the situation of the subject, that is, the place of a person in a conjuncture, a conjunction of beings and things…'.[182] On this occasion, we can observe that 'place' still means an individual's position within beings and things, which is more exactly a part of the totality.

Yet, a new meaning of 'place (*place*)' also emerges in OBBE, which seeks to capture Levinas's association of the term on a deeper or philosophically more expansive level with the Heideggerian notion of *Dasein* and the Spinozist notion of *conatus essendi*. This implication is already shown in the very opening of the book, where Levinas cites Pascal's phrase ' "*C'est là ma place au soleil*." *Voilà le commencement et l'image de l'usurpation de toute la terre*',[183] which in the English translation is rendered: ' "That is my place in the sun."' That is how the usurpation of the whole world began'.[184] The implication of the term 'place' here is not exactly the same as the one we mentioned above, which pertains to the individual-whole relationship. Rather, as Rudi Visker points out, to 'take up a place' in a way of usurpation in Levinas implies that the subject 'unwittingly make[s] a claim on something to which "I" have no right'.[185] 'Place' here thus singles out the process where the individual gains its subjectivity in the sense that he/she separates a place from the world and claims it is his/her own. Therefore, in this scenario place can be seen as a subjective place, yet it is a subjective place obtained by usurpation, that is, the individuation the subject adheres to in a way which is claimed to be its own without justification.

---

[181] Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement Qu'etre*, 49.
[182] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 29.
[183] Emmanuel Levinas*, Autrement Qu'etre*, preface.
[184] Ibid, preface.
[185] Rudi Visker, 'Dis-possessed: How to remain silent "after" Levinas', *Man and World*, Vol. 29, 1996, 119-146, 131.

To be more precise, this subjectively individualized 'place' should not only be seen on an empirical level based upon the context of the subject taking an actual place physically. Levinas uses it to express more of an ontological designation, where taking a place indicates a movement of self-interestedness. He associates this movement of self-interestedness further with the unjustified care of *Dasein* for him/herself in Heidegger's argument. Levinas challenges the conception of care of *Dasein* for its own being in Heidegger and asks: 'is not… the *Da* of *Dasein* already usurpation…?'. To treat *Dasein* who is the 'man insofar as he asks the question of the meaning of being of beings'[186] as the meaning-endowment process endorses the egology of *Dasein* for its being. However, for Levinas, *Dasein*'s care for its own being is not ethically justified and thus cannot be seen as the basis for the meaning of sociality and ethics.

Similarly, the subjective place as usurpation is also reflected in Levinas's critique of the concept of *conatus essendi* in the Western philosophical tradition. The *conatus essendi* is a concept from Spinoza, which, according to Levinas, describes 'an essential tendency for being to persist in its being'.[187] Adriaan Peperzak points out that Levinas uses the term *conatus essendi* to reinterpret the unjustified movement of self-interest, where preservation of the being of the subject has been the unmovable pillar for Western civilization.[188] This place of the human subject is criticized by Levinas 'on the level of being and nature', which shields the subject from its responsibility for the other.[189] Thus this

[186] Jill Robbins, *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, introduction (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1.
[187] Emmanuel Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, 3.
[188] Adiaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993), 18.
[189] Barbara Jane Davy, 'An Other Face of Ethics in Levinas', In *Ethics & The Environment*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2007, 39-62, 43.

subjective 'place' in OBBE, even though it signifies a separation from the totality of a system, where the individual gains its particularity, is criticized as it conveys an unjustified intention of the subject prioritizing its self-interestedness.

To conclude, the term 'place (*place*)' in TI has a singular meaning that is a signification of an individual taking a part in an objective system as a whole. In OBBE it has been explained as having two different connotations: firstly, similar to the case in TI, the term 'place' signifies the individual that takes a place and loses his/her uniqueness in the totality of the whole; secondly, it signifies the unjustified movement of self-interestedness reflected in the notion of *Dasein* and *conatus essendi* where a subject is singled out from the totality by taking a place for itself without any ethical consideration of the other. Before we move on, however, it needs to be noted that there is one important usage of the term 'place' that is at odds with all the other usages. In his explication of the unique notion of substitution, Levinas designates it as 'one-in-the-place-of-another' (*l'un-à-la-place-de-l'autre*), where the meaning of place is dissimilar to any of the above-mentioned meanings. We will examine this specific signification of place in a later section when we undertake an elaborate discussion of substitution. With our understanding of the translation of French *place* to English 'place', the background of the differentiation between 'place' and 'site' has been set out, which enables us to turn to the following argument concerning the most proper translation of *lieu* as 'site'.

2.2 An analysis of the term *lieu* and its various translation

2.2.1 *Lieu* as 'site'

To begin our examination of the French term *lieu* in both TI and OBBE, it needs to be pointed out firstly that Lingis has translated this French term into different English terms: in TI, *lieu* is consistently translated as 'site'; in OBBE, it is sometimes translated as 'site', sometimes 'locus'. We will now look in more detail at the reason for this differentiation in order to confirm the underlying logic of Lingis's translation.

First, we will explore the cases in TI, where *lieu* has seen an almost consistent appearance in translation as the English term 'site'.[190] One can observe Lingis's effort to distinguish 'site' from 'place' in his translation in TI,[191] where 'site' as *lieu* signifies specifically the dwelling of the 'I'. In the previous chapter, we delineated the development of the concept of the utopian dwelling which is the formation of the subjectivity of the 'I' of interiority, where the 'I' enjoys the elements and builds an intimate relationship with the feminine.[192] Recalling our discussion in that chapter, we have seen that the dwelling is a non-place, which has been argued to be a total negation of a geographical or historical place with a singular essentiality, in the sense that it is the process of movement, relationality, and which holds a non-historical temporality. 'Site' in TI is in fact seen as the container of this non-place dwelling. [193] In this sense, within TI, 'site' seen as the dwelling is positioned opposite to the 'place' that locates the individual in the whole. In other words, *lieu* as 'site' in TI is given a positive meaning by Levinas as an important phase of the subject's attaining its proper

[190] There are several exceptional occasions: for example, in the French phrase '*Autrui est le lieu même de la vérité métaphysique et indispensable à mon rapport avec Dieu'*, *lieu* is translated into locus. *Totalite et Infini*, Vol. 77; TI, 78.
[191] For example: the French phrase '*Il trouve dans le monde un lieu et une maison… Le chez soi n'est pas un contenant, mais un lieu… Le lieu, milieu, offre des moyens'* has been trnalsted into 'it (the "I") finds in the world a site and a home… the "at home" is not a container but a site… The site, a medium, affords means'. TI, 37.
[192] See Chapter 1.
[193] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 55.

subjectivity. It is through this site of dwelling that the subject is able to resist the all-inclusiveness of being and the totality of the same in which the ontology of being reigns.[194]

Turning now to look at the cases in which *lieu* is used OBBE, we will first look at the occasions where *lieu* has been translated as 'site'. We suggest that when *lieu* is translated as 'site', its connotation is consistent with that of 'site' in TI, which is to say, that of the dwelling of the 'I'. This can be seen from the following text:

> A committed consciousness, if it does not appear in the interference of the series in which it is thrown, is in situation. What is imposed on it is already measured, forms a condition and a site in which, by dwelling, the obstacle of the incarnation of consciousness is inverted into freedom and origin—and its weight into past.[195]

The above paragraph in translated from:

> La conscience engagée—si elle ne disparaît pas dans l'interférence des séries ou elle est jetée, est en situation- ce qui lui est imposé est déjà mesuré, forme une condition et un lieu où, par l'habitation, s' <invertit> en liberté et en origine, l'obstacle de l'incarnation de la conscience et son poids-en passé.[196]

In this text, we can see that Lingis translates '*lieu*' as 'site', where the contextualization of the term is similar to 'site' in TI. The 'site' is associated with the 'dwelling' and is seen as a condition for consciousness. However, on a close reading of Levinas's tone of narratives on this term in OBBE, *lieu* as 'site' often also carries a negative meaning. For in OBBE, 'site' appears most of time affixed

[194] See chapter 1.
[195] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 137.
[196] Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être,*, 174.

to the prefix 'null', which indicates that even the 'site' of the dwelling is in need of being nullified. Nullification has a negative sense, but should be distinguished from pure negation, whose exact connotation will be explained in more detail presently. This is also to say that the dwelling of the 'I', functioning to separate the interiority of the 'I' from the continuity of the totality, in OBBE, is seen as in need of being 'nullified' or 'annulled' in order to make possible a further developed notion of subjectivity. Edith Wyschogrod maintains that Levinas 'acknowledges the necessity for habitation' in his earlier work but his later work contrasts itself with this view.[197] This contrast is more precisely seen as that, in TI, the site of the dwelling is that through which the separation of the 'I' from the totality of the same is achieved, whereas the self in OBBE becomes a 'null-site' where it is identified as a 'self' through its responsibility for the other even despite itself, with its site nullified.

The philosophical signification of the null-site, especially how the null-site, through the conception of proximity and substitution, formulates the second critical moment of the development of the Levinasian subjectivity, will be investigated shortly, but for now we can see that Lingis's translation accurately reflects the trajectory of the development of Levinas's philosophy. Lingis, in his introductory essay to OBBE, points out that Levinas undercuts his project in TI.[198] But given our previous discussions, this should be expressed in a more precise formulation: rather, in OBBE Levinas overbids his own discourse in TI, and especially overbids the subject 'I' formulated through the dwelling to an ethical subject 'self' in its responsibility of superlativeness 'no longing dwelling,

[197] Edith Wyschogrod, 'Autochthony and Welcome: Discourses of Exile in Levinas and Derrida', 54
[198] Alphonso Lingis, introduction, OBBE, xxi.

not stomping any ground'.[199] By translating the French *lieu* as dwelling into 'site' both in his earlier and later magnum opuses, even though 'site' functions oppositely under the prefix 'null' in the latter, Lingis captures and confirms key elements in the transformation of Levinas's own thinking. And this transformation is captured and given its proper force and depth by the terminology of 'site', which opens up the inner logic of the development of subjectivity and the culmination of its new identification in substitution, which we will explicate shortly.

With the above discussion in mind, however, it should be noted that *lieu* in OBBE has also been translated by Lingis as 'locus', especially on those occasions when *lieu* is not affixed to the prefix 'null'. This is to say, differently from 'site' as dwelling, 'locus' has positive implication, from which can be seen the reasoning behind Lingis's differentiation of 'locus' from 'site', which we will look at briefly next.

2.2.2 *Lieu* as 'Locus'

On several occasions in OBBE, Levinas describes ethical subjectivity with the seemingly self-contradictory term *lieu et non-lieu*. However, as intimated above, Lingis translates the two instances of *lieu* differently, as both 'site' and, where '*lieu*' is not attached to the prefix '*non*', as 'locus'. The difference between the two instances of *lieu* is significant because, if they are identical, Levinas indeed contradicts himself with this expression. We argue that '*lieu*' as locus can be understood as the container of the null-site movement, a locus for its happening. As will be demonstrated shortly, this container of the 'null-site' movement is

[199] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 49.

precisely the ethical subjectivity. Lingis's explanation confirms our suggestion that Levinas's subjectivity is the 'locus where alterity makes contact', which is exactly a locus for 'the responsibility for the other'.[200] And together with our understanding of locus, the expression *lieu et non lieu* thus can be seen as signifying that the ethical subject in OBBE, that is, a self undergoing the movement of nullification of its 'site' as dwelling and its subjectivity, is a locus that is all for the other. Through *lieu et non-lieu* Levinas clears the ontological residue of the subject in TI and redefines the subjectivity of the subject, only with its responsibility for the other elevated to a radical level.

To conclude the above analysis, by translating the French term *lieu* into the different English terms 'site' and 'locus', Lingis is able to capture effectively the intricacy of what is at work in OBBE where the ethical subjectivity has nullified its interiority, and is seen as a 'locus' from which the movement of taking responsibility for the other occurs. After analyzing the complexity of the French *place*, *lieu* and their English counterparts, 'place', 'site' and 'locus', we now turn to examine the other essential part of the term, *non*, which has been translated into 'null'. We have mentioned that 'null' has a negative tone but does not completely mean negation. To explain, we will now look closely at the connotations of the term 'null'.

2.3 An analysis of the term 'null'

The original French *non* is translated by Lingis as 'null', unlike most other translators who translate it as 'non'. Lingis's choice of translation shows his intention to avoid the possible implications of complete negation brought by

[200] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 10.

'non', which can be confirmed by Levinas's own claim that 'null-site is on the hither side of negativity'.[201] Lingis's translation expresses the unique meaning of Levinas's *non-lieu* which signifies a certain movement of nullification that the unique non-ontological subjectivity undergoes in a non-dialectical way.

First of all, to see the non-dialectic character which 'null' bears, it is necessary for us to explore Levinas's criticism of negativity in the dialectical sense. It is a familiar observation for Levinasian scholars that Levinas is critical of the dialectical logic represented in the work of thinkers such as Hegel.[202] To be more exact, in both TI and OBBE one can find occasions when Levinas makes explicit critiques of the concept of negation in the Hegelian tradition which sees dialectical logic as the core of reasoning.[203] In TI specifically, Levinas claims that dialectical logic 'presupposes the primacy of the same',[204] which for him results in the domination of the 'same' in the Western philosophical tradition. It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to investigate the primary features of Hegelian dialectical logic. We can only say that for Levinas, Hegelian dialectical logic grasps the other in a negative form which occurs from the perspective of the same:[205] the non-A is always seen based on the A and both the A and the non-A, 'thesis' and 'antithesis', are joined in 'synthesis', thus reinforcing the unity of the system of the same. [206]

Similarly, yet based upon a deeper finding, in OBBE Levinas distinguishes his concept of 'negation without any confirmation' from the negativity that leads

[201] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 17.
[202] Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas,* 35.
[203] Hegel claims that dialectic logic is the 'higher rational movement'. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, translated and edited by George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 80.
[204] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 45.
[205] Ibid., 35.
[206] Karl Popper, 'What is Dialectic', *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 49, No. 196. (Oct. 1940), 403-426, 404.

to nothingness or nonbeing.[207] This distinction can be seen as based upon Levinas's critique of Heidegger who claims that being is the exclusive source of meaning, that from which 'all meaning proceeds'.[208] For Heidegger, negativity as negation of being leads to a total loss of meaning, which, as nothingness, causes anxiety. This anxiety motivates a movement of interest: to avoid nothingness and 'struggle for existence'.[209] Levinas criticizes this understanding of negativity expressed in the form of non-being, as 'the negativity which attempts to repel being is immediately submerged by being.'[210] By contrast his own notion of negativity is aiming at 'otherwise than being', where the negativity is rather a disturbance of 'my freedom' which 'ordains me to the other'.[211] In this sense, the meaning of *non* in the term *non-lieu* is not to be seen as negation of the site which results in nothingness. To empty the site does not lead to an opening to nothingness. The *non* rather signifies 'the exception of otherwise than being', which is precisely designated again as subjectivity: 'the exception of otherwise than being, beyond non-being, signifies subjectivity… the oneself which repels the annexations by essence.'[212]

The more precise signification of null-site as this radically conceived ethical subjectivity will be explored shortly. For now, however, we can see that Lingis rightly chooses the English term 'null' to translate the French *non* in *non-lieu* instead of the English term 'non'. We can therefore summarize the reasoning behind this choice as follows. First, 'non' as a phase of negation in the dialectical logic, signifies a status, whereas 'null' in Levinas expresses a movement of

[207] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 194, 3.
[208] Ibid., 176.
[209] Ibid., 176.
[210] Ibid., 3.
[211] Ibid., 11.
[212] Ibid., 8.

dynamism. This movement is described by Levinas as the subject being 'excluded from everywhere'.[213] It is a process of continuously moving toward the other and away from its own interest. The French *non* does not convey a negation of 'site', rather, in a way, and for reasons that will become clear later, it signifies an exclusion of the subject from the 'site', or more exactly a nullification of its site for the sake of the other. Secondly, this nullification of the site does not lead to nothingness, but will be found to have a positive meaning in substitution for the other.[214] That is to say, by the nullification of the 'site' of the self, Levinas endeavours to go beyond being and nothingness, exposing the self to the other, instead of to nothingness. We will see more of this in our exploration of substitution.

With such an understanding of 'site' and 'null', Lingis's choice of translation is arguably the most proper and accurate expression of the original connotation of the French *non-lieu*. 'Null-site' signifies the constant disturbance of the site, which challenges the integrity of the interiority of the subjectivity. Moreover, this again shows the overbidding trajectory of the development of Levinasian subjectivity, and his intention to address the critiques of the ontological residue in his definition of the subject of dwelling in TI. The dwelling of enjoyment, which was once treated in a secretive manner, is in the subjectivity of OBBE exposed to the other without any reservation. As Fabio Ciaramelli points out, in TI Levinas does not inquire about the 'ethical meaning of the sensuous enjoyment in the dwelling'.[215] But in OBBE, with the null-site movement introduced, enjoyment will indeed be put under scrutiny and given an ethical

[213] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 14.
[214] Ibid., 142.
[215] Bettina Bergo, *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth*, 141.

meaning, where the subjectivity from its very formation is in a state of restlessness, exposed to its responsibility in the proximity of the other. Many Levinas scholars consider that the development of responsibility to a radical level is also a process to traumatize subjectivity in Levinas, in an overbidding manner, which is clearly reflected in the passive tone adopted in his conceptualization of proximity and substitution.[216] Under this traumatization, the subject is identified significantly differently, based upon which its relationship with the other is also re-established. In the next section, we will move on to examine the philosophical implications of the concept of null-site based upon our analysis of its terminology, which will be seen more exactly as a movement that establishes the ethical subjectivity through proximity to the other, and finalized in a hyperbolic form, as substitution for the other.

3 The null-site movement through proximity establishing the ethical subjectivity as substitution

It is a familiar observation that, compared to TI where 'alterity' is the primary focus, in OBBE the focus shifts rather to an 'ethical subjectivity' which is the result of a radicalized narrative on ethical responsibility.[217] Moreover, two core concepts of OBBE—'proximity' and 'substitution'—can be shown to signify, in advancing degrees, the process of a subjectivity nullifying its site, that is, its dwelling, thus demonstrating the exorbitant responsibility that this subjectivity has for the other. In the following we will discuss more exactly how proximity

[216] Rashmika Pandya, 'Sensibility and Subjectivity: Levinas' Traumatic Subject', in *Santalk Filosofia*, 2010, Nr 1, 17-25, 23.
[217] As Richard Cohen points out, Levinas shifted his focus from alterity to subjectivity from TI to OBBE. Richard Cohen, Introduction, in Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xii.

and substitution signify subjectivity as null-site in OBBE and how this ethical subjectivity understood as null-site provides new perspectives for understanding the development of Levinas's subjectivity along the trajectory traced from the non-place of the dwelling to the null-site of proximity and substitution. We will begin by briefly examining the meaning of the concept of proximity, and then articulate how proximity accomplishes the null-site movement that leads to ethical subjectivity in its extreme form as substitution for the other.

First of all, a close look at the notion of proximity in OBBE shows that it is a conception designed to articulate a new modality of relationship between the subject and the other that paves the way to demonstrate the radical ethical subjectivity as one for the other. Proximity, as is prominently understood among Levinas scholars, displays Levinas's endeavour to overturn the notion of closeness between entities: it is not the 'diminution of distance between beings'.[218] For Levinas, the primary conception on which the perception of distance must be established is not physical distance but the approach of the other, which mainly has an ethical sense. This is to say, it is based upon the ethical proximity of the other that physical geometrical distance takes on its true meaning. The signification of getting closer physically is based upon the 'movement of cognition'[219] which can be observed objectively, and which, as pointed out by Bernhard Waldenfels, is always 'relative'.[220] For Levinas, the contact between the subject and the other in proximity is rather the immediacy

[218] Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, 136.
[219] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 63.
[220] Bernhard Waldenfels, 'Levinas and the face of the other', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 63-81, 74.

of 'an obsessive contact',[221] which 'is not a state, a repose, but, a restlessness, null-site, outside of the place of rest'.[222]

From Levinas's claim, it is important to mark that the signification of proximity is closely tied to the notion of the null-site. Based upon our analysis of the terminology of the null-site, the null-site movement does not lead to a negation of the site of the dwelling of the subject towards nothingness, but nullifies the ontological residue of the dwelling where the 'I' still has a choice to enclose itself.[223] The null-site understood through proximity is not any description of an ontological status but a restless movement of the subject emptying itself for the other. Proximity nullifying the dwelling results in a constant traumatized obsession where the self only passively responds to the other even before the establishment of its own identity. This means, in proximity, that the relationship between the self and other becomes the very subjectivity of the subject, in which the subjectivity is both the 'term of the relation' and 'the relation'.[224] In other words, the subjectivity of the subject is not formed before proximity and from there commits itself to the other; instead, the subjectivity is always 'in proximity' committing to the other and its identity is precisely this commitment to the other.[225]

With this new conception of the relation between the subject and the other, which is now located within the process of the establishment of subjectivity, we can trace an overbidding development from Levinas's early

[221] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xxv.
[222] Ibid., 82.
[223] Edith Wyschogrod, 'Autochthony and Welcome, Discourse of Exile in Levinas and Derrida', in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testament*, edited by Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hurt (London: Routledge, 2004), 54.
[224] Ibid., 86.
[225] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 85, 86.

concept of encounter to proximity. To recall our discussion above, the 'I' in encounter is conditioned by the separation of its interiority from the totality of history, from which the 'I' can 'welcome' the other and respond with care.[226] But many Levinas scholars point out that in this scenario there still exists a possibility for the 'I' to refuse the other's ethical demand.[227] It is this possibility of refusal that proximity nullifies. In proximity, the self is in a traumatized obsession and it is passively exposed to the other, thereby without any possibility to enclose self within the interiority and ignore the other. Levinas maintains that the self in proximity is obsessed by the other, and this obsession is 'against nature and non-voluntary',[228] which ensures that no possibility of choice or ignorance is available to the subject.

This traumatized obsession is to be understood also from two further perspectives.[229] Firstly, according to Levinas, the self is obsessed by the obligation to the other since this obsession is from an 'immemorial past'.[230] We will discuss the term 'immemorial past' in an extensive manner in chapter four, but for now we can briefly see that this immemorial past is a past that we cannot recall by any process of representation,[231] and the self is therefore in a state of obligation to the other before it knows of this obligation, and can only passively respond to this obligation without any means to dismiss this responsibility. In Levinasian terms, the subject is always late for its responsibility and is under a

[226] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 137.
[227] See for example Edith Wyschogrod, 'Autochthony and Welcome, Discourse of Exile in Levinas and Derrida', 54.
[228] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 197.
[229] Benjamin Hutchens, *Levinas, A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2004), 97.
[230] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xii.
[231] Annabel Herzog, 'Is Liberalism "All We Need"? Levinas's Politics of Surplus', *Political theory*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April, 2002), 204-227, 220.

sense of 'guilt for being late'.[232] The responsibility of the self in proximity does not begin with a freedom to make choices; rather, the obsession is before any freedom, which is indeed a trauma for the self who cannot choose to refuse.

Second, the traumatization of the obsession in proximity can be seen more clearly from Levinas's description of the subject undergoing 'pain', which also sets responsibility on the level of sensibility.[233] It needs to be pointed out that the concept of pain here is not 'an experience of pain by a subject for itself', which is to say that it is not at all on the empirical level.[234] Instead, pain is described by Levinas as a surplus of passivity, where the subject in obsession is in the position of vulnerability, 'susceptible to being affected'.[235] The subject is said to be prevented from 'the intentional movement' where it posits itself 'in itself or for itself' by 'pain' or 'wound', but undergoes the pain passively. [236] The sensibility, or more exactly the way of being affected, is ethical prior to any free commitment of experience initiated by the conscious subject. We have seen in the first chapter that the sensibility of the 'I' was constituted by its enjoyment of the elements, and this sensibility as enjoyment separates off the interiority of the 'I'. But in proximity, sensibility from the very beginning is already for the other, no longer leading to the establishment of the interiority of the 'I', but to a 'for-the-other'.[237] The sensibility that is redefined by proximity prior to enjoyment or suffering[238] accomplishes the openness of the self to the other that leads to a redefinition of the subjectivity. With a proximity that affects the 'inwardness' of

[232] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 55.
[233] Ibid., 52.
[234] Ibid., 52.
[235] Ibid., xxiv.
[236] Ibid., 64.
[237] Ibid., 74.
[238] Ibid., 56: 'the for another characteristic of sensibility is already in the enjoying and savoring.'

the self through pain, the subject is no longer in the 'dialectic tension' of enjoyment or suffering, for itself or for the other, where the obsession can nowise be turned back to any act of freedom.[239] In Levinas's own words, it is 'a responsibility that rests on *no* free commitment'.[240]

In proximity, especially the proximity designated in OBBE, the conceptions of the other and its face that are required in the encounter have also undergone a change of treatment. First of all, the other in proximity is not anymore associated with the concrete images of the widow and orphan. In fact the other is claimed by Levinas in OBBE to be *le prochain*, who is my neighbour. But this neighbour is not a new image of the other, rather,

> the neighbor, the first one on the scene, concerns me for the first time (even if he is an old acquaintance, an old friend, an old lover, long caught up in the fabric of my social relations) in a contingency that excludes the *a priori*.[241]

In this case, the other is not perceived as the needy one whose poverty appeals to the 'I' since the status of poverty is already part of a certain representation. The other in proximity is rather any one in approach before any representation is possible.

Second, in proximity, the face of the other is not simply absent as a non-phenomenon, but is rather depicted as 'a face weighted down with a skin',[242] which again shows Levinas's emphasis on the ethical significance of sensibility. In the significance of the face, Lingis points out, there is an implication of

---

[239] Emmanuel Levinas. OBBE, 74.
[240] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 116, emphasis added. Coreay Beals points out that obsession describes the 'involuntary nature of this responsibility'. Corey Beals, *Levinas and the Wisdom of Love* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 37.
[241] Emmanuel Levinas, *God Death and Time*, 86.
[242] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 89.

distance between the other and 'I', but, in contrast, the concept of 'skin' stresses 'contact by sensuousness', which is to say, the other is as close to me as the inside of my skin.[243] To use a more extreme term, the other in proximity is not exterior to me as in encounter: 'it is me'.[244]

The responsibility that the self bears for the other in proximity is thus developed to its superlative level. Different from the 'I' that welcomes the other, the self in proximity has no possibility to dismiss its responsibility for the other, and the responsibility is not conditioned by the face of the other, but is always there.[245] Therefore, through proximity, the self empties its place for the other and is obsessed with responsibility for the other which becomes part of its own subjectivity. In the null-site process, the formation of the subjectivity occurs not through the dwelling but is recounted as occurring through its ethical relation with the other. This radically redefined ethical subjectivity is designated further as substitution, where the self is not only responsible for the other, but in the place of another, which implies that it is responsible also for the responsibility the other has for the other others in a radicalized form. Next, we will look at the concept of substitution, and trace the trajectory of how subjectivity is developed into its radical form as substitution for the other.

The subjectivity as treated in chapter one was said to gain its subjectivity from separation, an inward movement of the dwelling; and in the earlier section, following Abensour, we discussed the movement of disinterestedness wherein the subject in its encounter with the other counters its egoistic inter-essence procession and opens to its responsibility to the other. However, the notion of

[243] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xxi.
[244] Ibid., 59.
[245] Bettina Bergo, *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: for the Beauty that Adorns the Earth,* 142.

substitution overbids these two steps, pushing the responsible self to its limit through the null-site movement of proximity, where subjectivity is redefined in the exact words Levinas as 'excluded from everywhere, null-site', that is, 'the one-in-the-place-of-another'.[246]

Substitution is a core concept in OBBE, centring on elaborating on ethical subjectivity; yet substitution is also one of the most difficult concepts in OBBE, overturning the traditional notion of subjectivity at the most profound level, that is, concerning how subjectivity identifies itself. We first look at the notion of substitution in Levinas in comparison to the notion of substitution in Heidegger, whose significance Levinas is against. In the introduction to OBBE Lingis provides a short comparison between the concept of substitution in Levinas and that in Heidegger, through which we can have a glimpse of the uniqueness of the concept of substitution in Levinas. According to Lingis, for Heidegger, substitution conveys a critique of the cowardly fleeing 'of one's own post'.[247] In Heidegger's substitution, the 'I' gives away its being and diverts itself from its own time to the general time, and therefore is stripped of its authenticity. Heidegger therefore opposes substitution against what he calls singularity, and argues that it is only in singularity, where one burdens one's own being without substitution for the other, that the 'I' is in the authentic way of existence.

By contrast, Levinas's notion of substitution does not signify the individual who is stripped of singularity. Rather, the concept of substitution has foremost an ethical significance, as Lingis claims: 'for Levinas substitution is the ethical itself.'[248] The self in substitution is in the other's place, which is

[246] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 14.
[247] Alphonso Lingis, Introduction, in Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xxix.
[248] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xxix.

nevertheless not to say that it is hiding from one's own burden of being. Rather, it is taking responsibility for the other to the degree of being responsible even for the other's responsibility and via this approach the subject gains its identity. In Levinasian substitution, the singularity of the self is not derived from caring for its own being, but rather from its irreplaceable position where all the responsibility, for the other and the other others, is placed on the subject.

Looking more closely at how substitution establishes the identity of the subject as null-site, we can first of all investigate the philosophical significance of the term one-in-the-place-of-another. In substitution, the very responsibility for Levinasian ethics is redefined, which is not only feeding the other or sheltering the other, but being in the other's place, which demands constant action for the other's responsibility also. As we already mentioned in our analysis of the terminology of 'place', in the term one-in-the-place-of-another (*l'un-à-la-place-de- l'autre*), the meaning of the notion of place is at odds with the usual meaning of place in OBBE. According to our previous analysis, place is often associated with the notion of taking a place in the system or the concept of *conatus essendi*. However, in the meaning of substitution, place signifies the irreplaceable position from which responsibility occurs—to be in another's place.

To be in another's place signifies a renewed way to gain one's identity, which Levinas refers to as 'the recurrence' of the self.[249] As Bernasconi points out, in the traditional sense, for example as seen in Hegel, the identity of identification involves a return to the self. However, the concept of recurrence in substitution is nowise the return as in the 'traditional assumption that the ego

[249] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE., 114.

coincides with itself or is equal with itself'.[250] In this more traditional way of perceiving identity, the self, its consciousness and its identification are seen in synchronization, which does not take the movement in between and the diachrony of this movement into account. For Levinas, based upon the notion of immemorial past we introduced above, a self in the movement of identification can never return to the exact past where it was initiated, which is a point in the immemorial past that cannot be retraced. The Levinasian self, in its recurrence, rather goes beyond the dichotomy of the identities of the 'I' and the other, finding its final signification in the place of the other. This is to say, the recurrence to oneself does not stop at oneself, 'but goes to the hither side of oneself',[251] that is to the ethical place of the other, through the other to be responsible for all. In this situation, the subject as substitution 'never finds rest in itself', and therefore according to Bettina Bergo is 'increasingly in the agony of exile from the "I"'.[252]

Levinas explicates this agony of the subjectivity in substitution through the metaphor of maternity. Maternity gives a perfect example of a scenario where the other breaks open the identify of the self, which is precisely 'a gestation of the other in the same.'[253] For Levinas, the symbol of the 'groaning of the wounded entrails by those it will bear or has born' demonstrates that the mother, being put under pain by the infant, is even responsible for this very pain as the infant is within the mother. In Levinasian terms, the mother is responsible even for the 'persecution' the infant has put her through, that is 'for the

[250] Bernasconi, 'To Which Question is Substitution the Answer?', 241.
[251] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 114.
[252] Bettina Bergo, *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth*, 156
[253] Ibid., 157.

persecuting by the persecutor' from which she suffers who is under her skin.[254] In this case, the mother is in substitution for the infant and is in its ethical place to carry his/her responsibility.

However, there is an ambiguity within the conception of substitution in the metaphor of subjectivity as maternity, which for some Levinasian scholar causes difficulties. As Bettina Bergo points out, substitution conceived as maternity seems to depict an engulfing of transcendence by the immanence where the other who is in me loses its transcendence: 'how much exteriority has been left to the other' in the process of substitution as 'the other now stands in the same position as the self'?[255] But with our distinction of the notion of place from site, and the specific meaning of one-in-the-place-of-another, a way can be found to address this problem.

First of all, substitution is not a status of the other in me, but the null-site movement where the subject empties its interiority for the other, which from the beginning already signifies a movement of transcendence beyond my immanent interiority. This emptying of interiority redefines the self as for the other. This can be distinguished first of all from the idea that the self is letting the other be within its interiority. And more importantly, the distinction between site and place clearly distinguishes the process of the self taking the other's responsibility from the process of the self engulfing the other within its site, its dwelling, its home. To be more exact, the self that is singled out in substitution as one in the place of another is not a return to one's site with the other in this site, but a recurrence beyond any site, towards the other's ethical place facing the other

[254] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 75.
[255] Bettina Bergo, *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth,* 157.

others. Thus, as the culmination of the null-site movement, substitution does not lead to engulfing of otherness into the same, but is an emptying of the same for the other, which in the end brings in a dimension of infinity to subjectivity, that is a continuously growing responsibility which the other and the other others introduce into the subjectivity.

With our above understanding of subjectivity in substitution, we can also clearly trace an overbidding development from subjectivity as disinterestedness towards subjectivity as substitution. As Howard Caygill indicates, substitution is an 'extreme individuation' which conditions the movement of disinterestedness, where the exiting of oneself is destined for the other.[256] This is to say, in substitution, the responsibility of the one for the other is signified in a superlative way, as the self is not only giving up its essence, nullifying itself, but this nullification is moreover the result of being for the other, through the other to the other others.

Substitution overbids disinterestedness, as for the subject in substitution, there is no possibility of the subject falling into the domain of nothingness. Our discussion above on the distinction between 'null' and 'non' signifies this importance of the trajectory, as substitution takes its meaning on the side of null-site, not the non-site. In disinterestedness, the subject moves against its *conatus essendi* and away from its own being, but, as Merold Westphal indicates, exiting from its essence, the subject is challenged by the path towards what Levinas calls the direction of 'il y a'.[257] To be brief, 'Il y a' signifies the strangeness of the

[256] Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2002), 158.
[257] Merold Westphal, 'The Welcome Wound: Emerging from the Il y a otherwise', *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 40. (2007): 211-223, 219.

materiality where the elements extend.[258] It signifies the 'indeterminate, shapeless, and chaotic' 'there is'.[259] Although the sphere of 'il y a' can be seen as entailing certain dis-interested nothingness, which is to say it is without interest and it belongs to no one, it also risks being meaningless as it is a total loss of any significance. Abensour claims that disinterestedness makes a rupture of essence, which 'open[s] a hole' in history.[260] But this hole can lead to a certain nothingness without any significance, including ethical significance. To ensure the ethical meaning of disinterestedness, disinterestedness needs to be conditioned by the radicalized ethical significance signified by substitution. In substitution, the self is expelled from its dwelling but it does not risk falling into the nothingness of il y a; rather, it 'exists for the other',[261] and the direction of this expulsion is clearly toward the 'for the other', to suffer 'for his/her suffering',[262] which is signified in Levinas's own words as 'the other is the end.'[263]

Furthermore, although disinterestedness is nowise indicating a movement motivated by the will of the subject, the subject in disinterestedness is not claimed to be radically passive as it is in substitution. In TI, disinterestedness is described as associated with the subject who undergoes a 'perpetual postponing of the treason' of the other.[264] In this constant movement away from the totality of essence in order to preserve the ethical relation with the other, the subject is extracting itself from being,[265] which however has a

[258] Emmanuel Levinas, *TI*, 142.
[259] Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 18.
[260] Miguel Abensour, 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', 275.
[261] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 114.
[262] Ibid., 18.
[263] Ibid., 168.
[264] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 35.
[265] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Ideology and Idealism', 7.

residue of being active in its movement: 'the self wants to initiate itself'.[266] Yet, in substitution, the subject is signified to be 'more passive than any passivity',[267] where the 'one is held to bear the burden of others' where the 'substitution is only a passive effect'.[268] The self as one-in-the-place-of-another is irreplaceable but cannot make any commitment freely, which is to say, as it is in the other's place, it is in a certain 'repercussion' without any possibility for its own choice.[269] It is always exposed to the other's and the other others' suffering, and responsible without any possibility of escape. Therefore, we can see that in substitution, the subjectivity is overbid to an ultimate level of passivity, which conditions its identity, and any ethical relation it can have with the other.

Therefore, with the above discussion, we can conclude that through the lens of the null-site, it can be clearly traced that with the ethical subjectivity being redefined through proximity finally culminating in substitution, the conceptions of the face-to-face encounter and disinterestedness are overbid into the null-site subjectivity, who is under traumatic obsession with the other, and is in the other's ethical position to the extent that it is responsible even for the other's responsibility for the other others. By laying out ethical subjectivity on such a radical level, Levinas has arguably responded successfully to the critiques of the subject depicted in TI, that this subject retains a certain ontological residue which undermines his ethical agenda. The culmination of the null-site movement is the subject 'outside of the place of rest', who undergoes an ever-growing and non-ending responsibility in proximity and substitution.[270] The

[266] Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 217.
[267] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 50.
[268] Ibid., xxxvii.
[269] Ibid., xii.
[270] Ibid., 82.

subject is homeless, yet always ready to sacrifice to the other; and only through being for the other, is it irreplaceable of its singularity.

In this way, we were able to show the trajectory through the null-site of the development from encounter and disinterestedness to proximity and substitution, where a critical moment in the development of the ethical subjectivity is shown in its sublimation from a welcoming of the other to the self in the place of the other, taking infinite responsibility for the other. Yet another question arises at this point: this ethical subjectivity with radical ethical responsibility seems to be an abstraction from the complicity of real social reality and does not include any political consideration. What is the socio-political consequence of this radically ethical subjectivity? This will be the topic of our next chapter.

Chapter 3

From null-site subjectivity to 'a member of society' in the place of togetherness: Levinasian Socio-political in TI and OBBE

Introduction

In the last chapter, we explored the second critical moment of the development of subjectivity through the ethical significance of utopia, that is an ethical subjectivity defined through the null-site movement. Following Miguel Abensour, we have seen that Levinas's ethical utopia draws importantly on the utopian thinking of Martin Buber and Ernst Bloch, specifically through a process of an 'overbidding' of their positions, a process or procedure which Levinas himself acknowledges is an important aspect of his philosophical method more generally. In brief, overbidding as a philosophical method is employed by Levinas by developing an idea to its superlative level. This superlativeness has a primarily ethical function in the context of Levinas's thinking, since it seeks to orient the discourse towards infinite ethical responsibility of the subject for the other. By overbidding Buber and Bloch, Levinas develops their utopian thinking to an ethical superlativeness from which he is able to articulate key aspects of his own ethical utopian thinking, which Abensour has shown to be defined most basically in relation to two terms: 'encounter' and 'disinterestedness'.[1] The foundation of utopia in Buber as reciprocal inter-human relationship is overbid

[1] Miguel Abensour, 'Think Utopia Otherwise', in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2–Vol. 21 No. 1, 1998, 254, 256.

to yield the asymmetrical ethical encounter, where the 'I' is summoned to infinite responsibility for the other. Likewise, Bloch's utopia as hope, where time gains meaning not from 'being toward death', but a progression towards the future perfection of being, is overbid by Levinas to yield utopia as a movement not as coming to a perfected being, but rather as exterior to (or otherwise than) being, which is a movement of what he calls dis-inter-estedness.

We have noted, however, that Abensour's analysis is limited in scope to TI and thus does not take into account the further development of Levinas's utopian thinking, especially in OBBE where Levinas 'overbids' some of his own positions from TI. Following the route that Abensour opens up, we have therefore undertaken to overbid Abensour's own discussions by tracing the development of Levinas's utopian thinking from TI to OBBE, which showed Levinas's ethical utopia opening up to another level of superlativeness in the later work OBBE, especially with the introduction of the concept of 'null-site' into the discussion. We noted the importance of Alphonso Lingis's translation of the French term *non-lieu* into null-site, which we argued is the most pertinent translation of the term into English. Closer examination of the concept null-site (*non-lieu*) showed it to importantly define the critical moment of development of ethical subjectivity designated by two basic characteristics: proximity to the other and substitution for the other, which in turn were seen to be destinations arrived at through an overbidding of the 'encounter' and 'disinterestedness' of TI. These two overlapping concepts (proximity and substitution) elucidate the nullification of the interiority of the ethical self from two perspectives: whereas proximity is seen as the restless self continuously exposing itself to the other, thus nullifying its site, substitution locates the very identity of the self in its irreplaceable

responsibility for the other, where the understanding of the self in terms of 'essence' is turned 'inside out', or self-identity as essence is nullified to the extreme. It is in light of these two processes that the ethical subjectivity is developed from non-place to null-site, where it takes infinite responsibility for the other to the highest degree—specifically, undergoing the other's responsibility for the other others.

Our analysis has therefore shown that the Levinasian concept of utopia in its ethical consideration has a radical horizon, which is not only different from common understandings of utopia, but also distinctive from that of the major utopian thinkers of his time. What distinguishes Levinas's concept of ethical utopia is the way in which it inverts the familiar pursuit in which the realization of the 'site' of utopia in human society is the final goal. For Levinas, the problem of whether an event can progress actively into a site from a non-site is not relevant to his utopianism.[2] Instead, the utopianism of Levinas is concerned with the subject; to be more precise, the Levinasian utopia expels the subject from its 'site' to a 'null-site', where the subject is 'no longing dwelling, not stomping any ground',[3] and therefore becomes pure passivity and finally hostage for the other. Not acting in response to its need in the hope of self-perfection, but being 'turned inside out' for the other, Levinas's null-site utopian subjectivity describes the 'conditions' for the ethical interruption of self-interested being.[4]

However, the radical horizon of Levinas's ethical utopia, which uncovers the ethical subjectivity with its extreme responsibility, invites further consideration when viewed from the perspective of the now-familiar

[2] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 182
[3] Ibid., 49.
[4] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous*, translated by Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: Continuum, 2006), 200. OBBE, xii.

observation that utopia is understood primarily as a socio-political concept, which from Thomas More onwards is often employed to designate a socio-political system where an imagined 'site' offers human beings a better life. As we have seen, Levinas's null-site subjectivity shares little ground with this received understanding of utopia. Indeed, Levinas deepens the breach between his notion of utopia and the common understanding of the term insofar as the null-site subject itself possesses little similarity with the real individual who finds him or herself in the world, with multiple layers of interpersonal relationships, and where the encounter with the other is only a case that is extracted from that reality. Pascal Delhom reminds us that both the self and the other in the ethical utopia are also 'in the world'.[5] Levinas's null-site subject is unique but it also needs to face the inevitable social political situation in which it is entangled not only with one other, but also within in a certain socio-political system, a place of togetherness, which connects it to others whom the self may never encounter nor be in proximity with. The subject that not only faces one other, but multiple others, cannot exclusively be responsible for one other and ignore all the other others. As Jacques Derrida points out, this ignorance amounts to being irresponsible for the other others and leaves them in precariousness.[6]

From this we can see that the ethical subjectivity formed by the null-site movement culminating in one-in-the-place-of-another, which we have examined in the last chapter, needs further exploration. It is necessary to make extensive explorations of how Levinas addresses the significance of the ethical subject after the socio-political. More specifically, it is to be established how the null-site

[5] Pascal Delhom, 'Necessity and Legitimacy of the State', in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics*, *Aesthetics,* edited by Joelle Hansel (Springer, 2009), 76.
[6] Jacques Derrida, 'Whom to Give to', in *The Gift of Death*, translated by David Wills (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 53-81, 61.

subject can advance the ethical significance to the socio-political level where it is together with multiple others, which is crucial to avoid the danger of being irresponsible to the other others. Meanwhile, carrying on our discussion of Levinas's concept of null-site in the context of the socio-political realm also creates the possibility to translate Levinas's message on utopia across to the common understanding of utopia. Especially with the ontological dimension, namely the socio-political importance pertaining to the null-site subjectivity, it is to be examined whether Levinas breaks through the inevitable perception of ontology, in order to determine what is the meaning of subjectivity beyond this ontological dimension.

In order to show the importance of proceeding to the socio-political significance of null-site, we will firstly review the overall trajectory of Levinas's philosophical movement from ethics as first philosophy to a consideration of its socio-political significance. Indeed, to look at Levinas's null-site subjectivity as proximity to the other and substitution for the other after the socio-political, we must first understand more broadly the significance of Levinas's thinking on the political. In two of his major works, TI and OBBE, after claiming the firstness of ethics as infinite responsibility for the other, Levinas also moves to consider ethics within the wider socio-political realm. Therefore, in the current chapter, we will deviate from our main task of examining the critical moments of utopian subjectivity in Levinas, and examine the evolvement of his socio-political ideas and his establishment of the relationship between ethics and this socio-political dimension from TI to OBBE. From this investigation, we can picture the necessary emergence of an ontological site for the null-site subjectivity, which

results in the transformation of the null-site subjectivity to 'a member of society'.[7]

To give a brief overview of our topic in this chapter, we can see that in TI Levinas does discuss politics on many occasions, but he is generally critical of it and associates it with 'tyranny' and 'war'.[8] The only positive form of politics in TI is one that models itself on the ethical subject 'I', the detail of which he does not fully explain.[9] Nevertheless, in TI, the main approach Levinas uses to extend his thinking on the 'I'-other asymmetrical relation to a social level that includes other 'others', involves the concepts of 'the curvature of inter-subjective space' and fecundity—neither of which have a clear designated political meaning.[10] For him the curvature of social space maintains the asymmetry of the ethical I-other relationship in human multiplicity, and the concept of fecundity introduces a concept of time that multiplies in the next generation into the singular I-other relationship while keeping the uniqueness of the subject. We will look into these two concepts in greater detail shortly, in order to show the lack of political judgment involved in them.

In OBBE, Levinas introduces the structure of the 'said and the 'saying' as the basis for both a broader consideration of the relationship between ethics and politics and the socio-political significance of his radical ethics. The saying, which *is* the infinite responsibility of the self for the other, needs to be reconsidered when the third party is also present. The third party demands justice from the

[7] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 158. '"Thanks to God" I am another for the others. God is not involved as an alleged interlocutor: the reciprocal relationship binds me to the other man in the trace of transcendence, in illeity. The passing of God; of whom I can speak only by reference to this aid or this grace, is precisely the reverting of the incomparable subject into a member of society.'
[8] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 46, 21.
[9] Ibid., 301.
[10] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 291.

self, hence the one-dimensional infinite responsibility moves into a place of judging and comparison, that is, into politics with laws and institutions to enforce justice among the other and the third party. In this way, the ethical saying is demanded by justice to be thematized into the form of the said.[11] More importantly, in OBBE, the relationship between ethics and politics is not as in TI where political relations are seen simply as an imitation of ethical relations, and we will conclude at the end of this chapter that ethics in OBBE is rather seen as the rationality of politics, which shows that in OBBE, due to the way Levinas depicts the relation between politics and ethics, there is a dynamics between politics and ethics, not a pure opposition between them nor a still imitation of ethics by politics.[12]

Levinas's approach to the issue of the socio-political significance of the ethical has seen a development from TI to OBBE, which is crucial for us to recognize the emergence of the ontological site with the necessity of politics clearly acknowledged by Levinas. The development of the significance of the political in Levinas has already been discussed by certain Levinas scholars. For example, Georges Hansel clearly states in his essay 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas' that the role of politics 'underwent a major change' from TI to OBBE. Hansel argues that in his earlier major work, Levinas does not really have his own view on politics, but in his later major work he develops an original perspective on the issue.[13] According to Hansel, politics in TI is discussed in its extreme version as 'reason of war', wherein it stands

[11] '…seeing everywhere clearly and recounting everything'. Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 161.
[12] 'Responsibility for others or communication is the adventure bears all the discourse of science and philosophy. Thus this responsibility would be the very rationality of reason or its universality, a rationality of peace.' Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 160.
[13] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics*, *Aesthetics,* edited by Joelle Hansel (Springer, 2009), 72.

opposite to morality and is closely related to the key concept of 'totality' towards which Levinas direct his major critique.[14] But in OBBE, this strong tone of condemnation of politics is largely absent; especially in Chapter V, Levinas claims the necessity of politics in justice for the third party, where the State and its institutions become relevant matters.[15] We will structure our analysis in the current chapter to cover the overarching development of Levinas's political thought, based foremost on a brief survey of the basic conception of politics as presented in both works.

1 Levinas's social political thinking in TI

As we mentioned above, Georges Hansel maintains that politics in Levinas 'underwent a major change' from TI to OBBE.[16] In his essay he briefly reviews some major ideas from Levinas on politics in the early phase and late phase of his philosophy to show this development. Following the route indicated by Hansel, we begin our discussion by examining Levinas's political thought in TI.

To commence, we need to define more closely what we mean by 'politics' in Levinas's work. Many Levinas scholars claim that Levinas offers us a unique way to conceive politics in such a way as to fundamentally reorient the Western tradition, even though the details of this politics are not agreed upon. Richard Cohen, for example, designates Levinas's politics as a utopian politics that 'uses and justifies sovereign authority for the sake of one or many supra-political

[14] Simon Critchley in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Emmanuel Levinas*, points out that Levinas associates the domination of categories of totality in Western philosophy with the totalizing politics in the Western tradition. Politics that reduces ethics to politics is tyranny. Simon Critchley, *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 24.
[15] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 161.
[16] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics*, *Aesthetics,* edited by Joelle Hansel (Springer, 2009), 69.

ends.'[17] For Cohen, politics in Levinas does not have its own independent status which is for 'its own authority'; rather, it is an indispensable part of Levinas's endeavour to develop the otherwise than being for his philosophical project. [18]

By contrast, and in a way which is similar to other scholars who have explored Levinasian politics, Hansel does not define Levinas's politics, since for him this term resembles a number of other Levinasian terms in being hard to define. However, some confinement of the subject of discussion is necessary. First of all, as Hansel notes, politics in Levinas is not merely a theoretical issue, since his horrifying personal experiences during the Holocaust in a certain sense decided the starting point of his thinking on politics. Hansel indicates that Levinas's concern about politics, at least in the early stages, was driven mainly by the terror of war.[19] As Susan Handelman maintains, for Levinas, the catastrophic event of the Holocaust 'breaks [the] covenant' between human and human, politics and ethics.[20] For Levinas, as a witness of the Holocaust, politics stands as opposite to morality, something which he claims directly in the preface to TI: politics is 'the art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means',[21] where politics, seen as a totality cannot escape the recourse to violence.

However, the role of politics in Levinas is not unified across his various writings. Hansel articulates that in view of what Levinas claims in his Talmudic reading—that 'truth has multiple dimensions'—politics can also be interpreted

[17] Richard Cohen, '"Political Monotheism": Levinas on Politics, Ethics and Religion', *Essays in Celebration of the Founding of the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations*, edited by Cheung Chan-Fai, Ivan Chvatik, Ion Copoeru, Lester Embree, Julia Iribarne, & Hans Rainer Sepp. Web-Published at *TI*.o-p-o.net, 2003.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 59.
[20] Susan Handelman, 'Facing the Other: Levinas, Perelman, and Rosenzweig', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers Volume 3*, edited by Claire Katz, Lara Trout (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 167-189, 168.
[21] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 21. 168.

as having other dimensions than simply as the reason for war.[22] With reference to the later part of TI, Hansel finds that despite his early disapproval of politics, Levinas is no anarchist. Levinas 'firmly accepts the classic description': 'the function of the State, of institutions, and of the law is to guarantee the exercise of freedom'.[23] One can indeed see that, in the section named 'The Truth of the Will' in TI, Levinas admits that individual freedom is guaranteed by law and institutions. But having said this, Levinas is simply recognizing the relationship between politics and individual freedom as a reality; he nevertheless emphasizes the importance of the singularity of the subject to the judgment of politics. For Levinas, the objective political judgment does not do justice either to the subject or to the other, where both the other's absolute alterity is reduced by the objective political judgment and the subject submits to the totality of law. We argue that, by acknowledging the inescapable reality of politics, Levinas rather emphasizes the importance of the singularity of the subject and the irreducibility of ethics to politics.

Hence, in our discussion, we will follow Hansel's observation concerning the close tie between war and politics in Levinas; yet we contend that in his discussion of freedom, institutions, and the judgment of the subject, Levinas is not affirming the importance of institutions for freedom, but only treats them as an aspect of reality on which the real subject, which has its singularity in history, must give a first-person judgment—a judgment that surpasses the 'verdict of history'. [24] This is to say, this judgement, as we will see later, is not given by any universal reason, but is an appeal to the individual for his/her infinite

[22] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 66.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 240, 241, 244.

responsibility. Based on this discussion, I will point out that even though politics in TI is to be read in different ways, Levinas's attitude toward politics is indeed negative overall.

For example, we read in TI that Levinas does not single out the necessity of politics as his prime concern, and does not differentiate it from sociality and history. Simon Critchley maintains that for Levinas, politics and sociality need to be seen separately, for when politics is reduced to sociality, it loses its ability to disturb the politics that Levinas is against.[25] In TI, when Levinas's thinking reaches a social level, it is questionable whether all the ideas he addresses are political. In other words, politics demands a judgment of right or wrong, involving a dynamic process of measurement. The political demands more than simply the existence of a community which seeks to serve 'the other' in an idealized social space, such as that which Levinas names the 'curvature of inter-subjective space'.[26] We will argue that as Levinas's thinking develops in OBBE, politics is clearly differentiated from sociality, and the very indispensability of politics is singled out. Politics is not merely a reality that needs to be placed under consideration and resisted because of its possible violence.

1.1 Politics and war in TI

As Hansel concludes in his essay, politics in TI is seen as at odds with ethics because it is closely related to war.[27] Levinas's main considerations on politics are not motivated by a concern to attain a perfected political system or to provide a description of certain historical practices, but rather to reveal the

[25] Simon Critchley, 'Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and a Sketch of the Solution to Them', in *Political Science*, No. 92, 182.
[26] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 300.
[27] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 64.

destructive power of war and the close tie between war and politics. In order to avoid any misunderstanding of the notion of war, we must here give the concept of 'war' in Levinas's thought its due explanation.

In the preface to TI, Levinas offers a straightforward condemnation of war, where war is not only designated by Levinas as war in reality, but also war on an ontological level. Levinas's personal experience of the tragedy of war in reality and the ultimate horror of homicide provoke him to stress the destructive side of war in his discussion. Nevertheless, Levinas's conclusion about war and politics is not simply dependent upon empirical historical events; rather, Levinas gives an ontological explanation of the association between war and the process of totalization of the same, which prevails in the Western tradition. For Levinas, war is no contingent result: it is not 'a disease' or 'unfortunate event';[28] rather, in its ontological form, it is caused by the very tradition of thought in the West, where truth is sought on the basis of objectification and formed by reference a system of supposedly universal concepts.

John Llewelyn describes this ontological dimension of war in Levinas's thought as 'a resistance and counter-resistance of energies, an allergy which is an opposition of powers analogous to the reciprocity of forces in the system of Newtonian mechanics'.[29] One can readily observe how Newtonian mechanics is a suitable way to depict the Western tradition seen from Levinas's perspective, since it represents a universal system comprising a seamless totality. To be more precise, when the world is seen via the perspective of a universalized system, every individual in it is defined by its position in the system and is measured

[28] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 13.
[29] John Llewelyn, 'Levinas, Derrida and Others vis à vis', in *The Provocation of Levinas*, edited by Robert Bernasconi, David Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 144.

according to a standard of universality. All the differences among individuals are based on this standard, whence, for Levinas, they are wholly based on the same without any scope for an exteriority for the other. A morality that is based on universal rules has no dimension of transcendence, and as a consequence the individuals have no obligation beyond obeying the rules.

In this scenario, individuals are defined by their own egos and are driven by a desire to expand their own interests, the relation between them being defined by a conflict of interests following dialectical logic. According to Llewelyn, following dialectical logic, the struggle between the force of resistance and the force of expansion results in their being always in contradiction, limiting each other in their desire for expansion. Since they are always in a state of limiting each other, war is inevitable among such individuals, and they go against each other without mercy in order to expand. Even when a contract is formed between them to enforce a temporary compromise, as in the Hobbesian case,[30] the underlining dynamic of the relationship among them is not changed—that is, one of egoism and war.

Another important fact about war is that, for Levinas, war presupposes the separation between the same and the other. We should note that Levinas's analyses of war at the beginning of TI and later in that same work are not entirely consistent. In the early sections, Levinas claims that: 'war does not manifest other as the other from exterior'.[31] However, later in his discussion, in the section named 'Subjectivity and Pluralism', Levinas claims that war

[30] In *Leviathan* Thomas Hobbes gives a description of the hypothetical state of nature, where 'man is a wolf to man', but with a contract between people being achieved, he claims, there can be peace. Levinas is against this hypothesis and argues that this peace is only temporary, but war is eternal. Cheryl Hughes, 'The Primacy of Ethics: Hobbes and Levinas', *Continental Philosophy Review* 31, 1998, 79-94, 80.
[31] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 21.

'presupposes beings structured otherwise than as parts of a totality', which seems to acknowledge the status of war as the condition for separation from totality.[32] The seemingly contradictory claims display the intricacy of the notion of war at play here, which is both a process of the same eliminating the other, and also conditions the important moment of the breaching in-between the same and the other.

To understand this intricacy, one first needs to see that the case in which the 'I' is in conflict with the other is in fact also an acknowledgement that the other is not part of the totality of the 'I': in Levinas's own terms, '(o)nly beings capable of war can rise to peace.'[33] However, this separation between the same and the other is not temporary, but exists at a profound level where reaching peace is not understood as 'harmonizing antagonistic forces', but can only be approached via an ethics that transcend the dialectic antagonism.[34] To be more exact, the importance of peace is generated by the separation between the other and the same, the very separation that can lead the 'I' and the other into a state of conflicts, and yet which calls for an ethical encounter between the same and other that prioritizes peace from the beginning. Therefore, Levinasian peace is to be understood based on the notion of a possible war between the absolutely separated same and other, which is ultimately different from a peaceful state conjointly within the same.

With the above understanding of the unique connotations of war in Levinas, we now turn to explore the relationship between politics and war, and we focus on the following question: in what scenario is the 'first political reason'

[32] Emmanuel Levinas, TI 222.
[33] Ibid., 222.
[34] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 159.

war?[35] It is a familiar observation that the Western philosophical tradition is the constant target of Levinas's critique, and concerning his thoughts on politics Levinas claims politics seen from the Western tradition is defined by a logic that results in war and makes the state into a 'tyranny'. For him, the Western philosophical tradition, from its Greek origins onwards, is consistently confined within the argument of the same, despite all the different schools and scholars in its history.[36]

In opposing the whole Western philosophical tradition in this way, Levinas chooses four representatives from the Western tradition and criticizes them for the way in which they reduce the other to the same in their philosophy. These four representatives are Socrates, Berkeley, Husserl, and Heidegger, who all, according to Levinas, despite difference in their specific concerns, confirm the primacy of the same and the priority of ontology. In each Levinas discerns the presence of an ideal, 'an ideal of being accomplished from all eternity, thinking only itself.'[37] Levinas first looks at the prominent status of reason in Socrates, which neutralizes the other, 'encompassing him', revealing the significance of 'permanence in the same' in his thought.[38] The divergence between Levinas's philosophy and that of Socrates is obvious, with Deborah Achetenberg remarking that the aim of Socrates' thinking is solely the immortality of the same, while Levinas aims his thinking at the possibility of the Other.[39] Following the same trajectory, in the idealism of Berkeley Levinas also sees an ontology that

[35] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 65.
[36] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 45. In short, he defines the whole of Western philosophy as the thinking that presupposes 'the primacy of the same'.
[37] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 218.
[38] Ibid., 43.
[39] Deborah Achtenberg, 'The Eternal and the New: Socrates and Levinas on Desire and Need', in *Levinas and the Ancients*, edited by Brian Schroeder, Silvia Benso (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 24.

dismisses the significance of the absolute other. In Berkeley Levinas finds a coinciding of existence and thought, where all the sensible qualities, even if they are from the other, are considered as 'my experience of affection'. [40]

Perhaps surprisingly, Levinas then argues against Husserl, whose method Levinas claims he has himself followed.[41] But concerning Husserl's idealism, Levinas indicates that even though Husserl introduces the notion of the horizon which is concerned with reaching 'things themselves', the true alterity of the other is not yet reached. This is because the process of the revelation of the horizon still takes place within the larger context of a procedure of conceptualization. In the approach to the other defined by the horizon, the other 'is converted into intelligibility', and is thus denuded of its absoluteness.[42]

In this sense, following this tradition, Levinas then claims that Heidegger's ontology has in fact made a difference as regards breaking through the all-inclusive intellectualism. He points out that Heidegger's philosophy does not rely on a certain 'truism', which is to say, theoretical thematization does not receive primacy therein. However, Heidegger instead claims the primacy of Being over existents, which 'subordinates the relationship with someone' to the relation with Being.[43] In this sense, Being becomes the all-encompassing neutrality that reduces the other to the same.

In these four critiques, Levinas uses his categories of 'same' and 'other' to show that in the spirit of Western philosophy there exists a 'self-sufficiency'[44] of the same, and ignorance of—or even violence towards—the other. It is beyond

[40] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 43.
[41] Ibid., 28.
[42] Ibid., 45.
[43] Ibid., 45.
[44] Ibid., 44.

the scope of the present chapter to pursue a thorough discussion of Levinas's critique of the above philosophers. However, from our brief review, it can be seen that for Levinas the above-mentioned characteristic of the Western tradition, which is seemingly only a way of thinking, can in fact have serious political ramifications. In his early essay 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism' Levinas had already indicated in the prefatory note that there is a correlation between Heidegger's philosophy and the adoption of his political allegiance to National Socialism.[45] The intimate connection between certain approaches to philosophy and their political correlates can be seen consistently in Levinas's work, from his early thinking through to OBBE, where he discusses the alliance between logical rationalism and Western politics in a new way—a discussion to which we will return later.[46]

Yet how does the Western philosophical tradition's domination of the other by the same, and its concomitant conceptual violence, take effect upon real other people in concrete life? We cannot find a direct answer in Levinas, but we can read two possible suggestions of an answer in his discussion: on the level of the singular 'I'-other relationship, and on a social level. First of all, when the dominant form of thinking is one of highlighting self-sufficient concepts rather than relational ones (for example, self-identity, consciousness, being, comprehension and freedom, rather than ethics, alterity and responsibility), it inspires 'the terror that brings a free man under the domination of the other.'[47] Indeed, in the permitted egoism in the egology of the same, foreign and exterior

[45] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Reflections on the philosophy of Hitlerism', translated by Sean Hand, in *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics*, edited by Asher Horowitz, Gad Horowitz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 3.
[46] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 171.
[47] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 44.

things are seen as threats and are willed by the self to elimination. Levinas claims further that the idealism of the 'I think' directly leads the concrete will in life that is expressed as the 'I can', since the other is in the position of being possessed by the I, which can be observed in the condition of exploitation of others in our actual social economy.[48]

Still, on a social level, socio-political theories within the Western tradition have emphasized concepts such as 'equality' and 'reciprocity' among members within a given society, and these might seem far from any direct results in war and violence. Levinas, however, argues that the manner of conceptualization of equality and reciprocity are in fact features of the totality of the same on a profound level.[49] For Levinas, equality in the Western political system expresses a state where everyone struggles to possess their equal part, to be recognized and fulfil their will to happiness. In the relationship of reciprocity and equality, everyone is determined by their immanent self-interest, where these interests are calculated in an immanent way which are inevitably in conflict with each other. Moreover, the conflicting interests are reconciled by a universalized rule to compromise on each part. However, the regulations that effect the compromise between the 'individual wills' in order to equalize them only pertain to the consistency of the system itself, and the particularity of the subject is ignored. This already entails a certain violence to individuals within the system, who are treated indifferently by the mechanisms of law and society, even though they may be treated equally. In this sense, Levinas claims that politics forms 'an order from which no one keeps his distance', and in politics, everything is

[48] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 46.
[49] Ibid., 64.

immanently in a system where 'nothing is exterior'.[50] Thus the concepts of equality and reciprocity derived from the Western tradition have an innate link to violence and war, and also do violence to the other which is exterior or foreign to the totality.[51]

For these reasons, Levinas maintains that if Western idealism is carried out completely, ethics will be fully reduced to politics, and so leads to the tyranny of the state.[52] Or, said differently, the other will be fully reduced to the totality of the same in a politics that centres on itself. Hence, according to our above discussion, the answer to the question 'In what scenario does politics have war as its first reason?' is: In the scenario of an alliance between philosophy and politics which engenders social relationships based on individuals as figures within a system who are struggling for egoistic ends. Levinas is not saying that there is no ethical dimension to this tradition, for he admits that the temporary peace under the dominance of a universalized contract is better than the pure brutish scene where people are like wolves to each other; and also it is only in politics, in its law and institutions, that freedom can be realized.[53] But for Levinas, as a person who has experienced the terror of war, even in so-called civilized societies it needs to be pointed out that when ethics is built upon the political totality, it is always precarious, vulnerable to a condition where 'peace rests on war' and war is perpetual.[54]

We therefore conclude the above discussion by affirming that Levinas opposes politics to ethics. Yet, following Hansel's claim, we also seem to see a

[50] Emmanuel Levinas, TI 21.
[51] Ibid., 46.
[52] Ibid., 216.
[53] Ibid., 242.
[54] Ibid., 23.

positive aspect of politics in Levinas's work, since Hansel points out that, in order to face up to the brutal animality of human existence, politics takes on a new meaning: to '[enable] us to escape from the war of each against all'.[55] He supports his finding by the claim that in Levinas a confirmation can be found that human civilization certainly transcends animal brutality: 'freedom is not realized outside of political and social institutions'.[56] Nevertheless, we can argue that, in this respect, Levinas's seeming recognition of the necessity of politics for freedom is part of an entirely different argument in TI, and overall there is hardly any positive discussion on politics that we can point to. We will now turn to explore the relationship between politics and freedom in Levinas's thought, and in so doing we will further support our argument.

1.2 Politics and Freedom

Levinas indeed recognizes that freedom, seen without the institutions and laws of politics, is only 'an illusion'.[57] He states clearly that when apolitical freedom is advocated, the ones who propose it are those in a position of dominance within the social political system. This is to say, individuals who claim that freedom is purely a personal choice already have their freedom guaranteed by the system. To pursue freedom, the existence of social institutions that ensure an equal basis for all in society is key; freedom is not merely a spirit that does not need to avail itself of social reality. But we need to determine whether Levinas's acknowledgement of a type of freedom gained through having an equal basis in society is a positive claim regarding the Western political tradition, or merely a

[55] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 66.
[56] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 241.
[57] Ibid., 241.

recognition of some progression as a matter of historical fact. In the following we will argue that Levinas admits the necessity of pursuing his thinking on a social level; nevertheless, he is still engaged in contrasting politics to ethics, even in the case that its institutions and laws do in fact preserve freedom.

To be sure, Levinas does not end his discussion at the point of the encounter between the 'I' and the other. As we pointed out in the introduction to the current chapter, Levinas's thinking is by no means apolitical. He claims that '[i]nteriority cannot replace universality', which in other words is to confirm the importance of positioning ethics into the bigger picture of the social multiplicity that is beyond singular face-to-face relation.[58] But even with this recognition, we do not see him expanding on its importance; instead, he quickly returns to criticizing the concept of this universality, and its law of judgment. We have already remarked that the concept of universality for Levinas signifies an order which totalizes individuals and does violence to the particularity of the individual. Further, concerning the question of the relation between freedom and politics, we have seen that Levinas recognizes their inter-relatedness: returning to Hansel's discussion, we saw that Levinas accepts the classical notion that 'the function of the state, of institutions and of the law is to guarantee the exercise of freedom.'[59] Yet we argue further that the political institution that guarantees freedom at the same time bears tyranny within it, which has more significance in Levinas's thought.

First of all, one can find a notion of an interior freedom for the 'I' in TI, which is based on what we discussed under the conception of dwelling in the

[58] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 241.
[59] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 66.

first chapter. To recall our analysis, in its interiority, the 'I' enjoys the elements and is at home in an intimate relationship with the feminine, where it is in a situation free of worry. This interior freedom is important, as it is through the freedom of the subject in the dwelling that the subject is separated from the totality of history. However, it is important to point out that this interior freedom does not have any reference to the exteriority, and cannot be compared with a notion of freedom in reality alongside all the other individuals. In the above-cited phrase from Levinas where he acknowledges the relationship between politics and freedom, the notion of freedom is historically located, and needs to be distinguished from the interior freedom. In the socio-political realm, the subject is no longer pre-ethical, but faces ethical demands. Yet in the freedom that is ensured by institutions and law, morality is only obedience to the law, which loses its transcendence from the immanent system of politics.

Further, Levinas points out that even though freedom is conserved in politics, it is 'conserved for man outside of man'.[60] In other words, this freedom is produced by politics and institutions in a system where the subject is seen as one of many, referring only to their universality. The individuals are protected from brutality from the others by laws and institutions, but in the process of becoming a citizen in a certain political system of laws and institutions, the subject is obeying these rules in anonymity. The individual loses his/her particularity, submitting him/herself to the universal laws. In this scenario, the first-person freedom is reduced to freedom only with an objective significance, which gains its meaning by reference to a tyranny of the totality of order. The subjectivity of the subject is absent in this political order. Even when this political system

[60] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 241.

functions perfectly, Levinas relentlessly criticizes it; he points out that in this functional system, the civil servant cannot see the tears of the other.[61]

Through uncovering the tyranny of politics, even when it guarantees a certain kind of freedom, Levinas takes his strictures on politics to another level, which reveals his ideas concerning the relation between ethics and politics in TI. For Levinas, politics can never avoid its fate of being unethical. Even though he has not seen the whole picture of Levinas's critique of freedom in the Western politics, Hansel still clearly recognizes the unbridgeable gap between ethics and politics in Levinas.[62] For Levinas, even though politics can 'enable the growth of free individuals' and 'preserve them from mutual destruction', it in no way resembles the ethical relationship which can open to infinity and directs the subject to an infinite responsibility for the other. In TI the political cannot avoid being 'an order of totality',[63] and hence it is hard to construe it as anything other than opposed to ethics. In politics, the infinite responsibility for the other is suspended; the other is not seen as an other, only as another citizen similar to all the others.

As shown in previous chapters, Levinas's primary concern in his philosophy is ethics. Under this primary concern, how politics should be valued has been seen in diverse ways by Levinas scholars, not least because Levinas himself addresses this question with ambiguity.[64] Especially in TI, Levinas

---

[61] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Transcendence and Height', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley, Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 11-32, 23.
[62] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 67.
[63] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 66, 67.
[64] For example, for some Levinas scholars, politics is the critical point of his work, which is in fact where Levinas surpasses the thinking of Martin Buber. See Simon Critchley, 'Five problems in Levinas's view of politics and the sketch of a solution to them', *Political Theory*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Apr., 2004), 172-185, 173. And for some other Levinas scholars, Levinas has not developed his political thinking fully, but gives us a direction to conceive 'a new thinking of the conjuncture of

associates politics with war and contests the positivity of the freedom that is endorsed by Western politics, leaving little space for a constructive point of view on politics. However, having said this, we also need to stress that Levinas does not simply return to ethics after his critique of politics. Indeed, at the end of TI he raises the idea of modelling politics on ethics, with the statement that his philosophical investigation 'leads us to the accomplishment of the I as unicity by relation to which the work of the State must be situated, and which it must take as a model.' [65] Although Levinas does not develop this idea in an extensive manner, some Levinas scholars, for example John Drabinski, interpret this modeling as 'the space of politics . . . marked by the asymmetry of ethics'. [66] But we argue that the space of politics in TI does not really have a distinctive political significance, which we will now explain in detail before giving a tentative account of the sociality that takes the place of politics.

1.3 Sociality taking place of politics in TI

To investigate whether there is any positive aspect to politics in TI and whether the idea of the modeling of ethics by politics holds promise, we will first follow Drabinski's suggestion to look at how the political space is marked by asymmetrical ethics. Levinas is aware that when all the others come into the picture alongside the 'I'-other encounter, the asymmetrical 'I'-other relation is relocated into a space of togetherness. After discussing the 'face', and the ethical encountering the 'I' has with the other, Levinas claims that it is needed to bring

---

ethics and politics'. Robert Bernasconi, 'Extraterritoriality: Outside of the subject, outside the state', in *Lévinas: Chinese and Western Perspectives*, edited by Nicholas Bunnin, Dachun Yang, and Linyu Gu, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 2008, 178.

[65] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 300.

[66] John Drabinski, 'Wealth and Justice in a Utopian Context', in *Addressing Levinas*, edited by Eric Sean Nelson, Antje Kapust, Kent Still (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 186.

in the dimension of what he calls 'the public order': the 'between us concerns everyone'.[67] The multiplicity in social relations is not a simple augmentation of the 'I'-other relationship. As we emphasized in the previous chapter, the face-to-face relationship is not simply a co-existence that puts the other side by side with the 'I'; it is also true of the 'I'-others relation.[68] As Levinas points out, pluralism does not guarantee that there will be a real multiplicity in society. He distinguishes the sociality that he proposes, a sociality of asymmetry, from what he calls the sociality of universality, and maintains that a society that is based upon universality creates only a plurality that expresses the 'desire of the universal', and in the 'impersonal reason' of this society of universality, the importance of particularities are ignored.[69] This sociality signifies the co-existence of plural individuals who are all under the same universal reason in the system. The sociality of asymmetry that Levinas brings forward does not concern itself with universal reason, and in this sociality the crucial question is how the responsibility that is created in the face-to-face encounter can be retained in the social relation with the other others.[70] To be more exact, reading into TI we can find two ways that Levinas conceives the asymmetry of the social space: the first is via the new concept of the 'curvature of intersubjective space' which he raises in the conclusion to the book; the other is through the concept of fecundity.

Looking first at the notion of the 'curvature of intersubjective space', one can observe that Levinas introduces this concept without exploring its meaning at great length. [71] But from his small discussion of it, the curvature of

[67] Emanuel Levinas, TI, 212.
[68] Ibid., 305.
[69] Ibid., 217.
[70] Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 16.
[71] Ibid., 16.

interpersonal space appears to be an inter-personal relation based on the core concept in TI—the asymmetrical 'I'-other relation. As we explained in the last chapter, in the asymmetrical 'I'-other relation, the other comes from a position of height to the 'I' and the 'I' is infinitely responsible to the other who is in destitution.[72] The subjectivity of the 'I' is singled out by its responsibility and the absolute other is in a position of commanding the subject. In this curvature of space, Levinas stresses the same elements, only that the 'I' turns out to be the 'us'.[73] Even with multiple subjects, the importance of a unique subjectivity in the inter-personal space is marked out. Every subject in this curved space, even when it takes its place in the multiplicity, is signified by its particularity as a subject of responsibility and answers singularly to the others as that in which every 'other counts more than myself'.[74]

From this we can see that, in the curvature of space, the commanding from the other still exists, which retains the orientation of every subject to the other. This is also demonstrated in Levinas's discussion of the 'third party',[75] (who are the other 'other' in Levinas's later work), where he claims that 'he comes to join me', to serve the other, 'the poor, the stranger, the widow',[76] which is to say, there is a commanding to everyone in the space of inter-personal relations that asks all to take responsibility for the other. With these two elements, the singular subject of responsibility and the commanding from the other, the curvature of space can be seen as a space where the multiple ethical 'I'-other encountering that we discussed in the last chapter happen. It needs to be

[72] See chapter 1.
[73] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 213.
[74] Ibid., 247.
[75] The concept 'the third' has a different significance in TI and OBBE which we will look closely at shortly.
[76] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 213.

pointed out, of course, that this asymmetrical space is not a physical space, an homogeneous space which conditions the existence of things; rather, the curvature of space 'expresses the relation between human beings'.[77] This space for human relations is, in Levinas's term, 'elevated', which is to say, every relation inside the space is for the other.

The other approach through which Levinas maintains the asymmetrical feature of the social space in TI refers to the conception of fecundity. The concept of fecundity has met with some scepticism from Levinas scholars, especially those who associate it with androcentricism. For example, feminist critics question his 'use of masculine language' in his discussion of fecundity.[78] It is beyond the scope of our chapter to give a detailed discussion of the concept of fecundity, but we will here focus on the issue of how fecundity preserves real multiplicity in society, or, more exactly, how fecundity preserves asymmetry in social space. Simon Critchley points out that the 'Levinasian account of plurality is dependent upon his notion of fecundity'.[79] To be more exact, fecundity is used by Levinas to conceive a plurality that maintains the particularity of the subject throughout the continuation of time. The 'I'-other relationship had already been analyzed in depth in the section 'Ethics and Face' in TI, so one may wonder why Levinas raises the concept of fecundity to discuss the 'I'-other relation one more time.

[77] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 291.
[78] R. J. S. Manning, "Thinking the Other Without Violence? An Analysis of the Relation Between the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and Feminism," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 5 (1991): 132–143, 138.
[79] Simon Critchley,' Il TI a: Holding Levinas's hand to Blanchot's fire', in Emmanuel Levinas: Critical assessments of leading philosophers, edited by Claire Katz, Lara Trout (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 85.

But, importantly, fecundity connects the 'I' with another throughout the plurality of time, passing from generation to generation.[80] Looking at the concept of fecundity more closely, one can observe that fecundity signifies the ambiguity of the singularity of the subject and the continuation of history. In fecundity, the subject and the next generation are both located in the continuation of time, but each of them also constitutes a particular moment that breaches the continuation of time. We claimed in the first chapter that Levinas criticizes the historiographical way of looking at history, where history becomes a totality and the singularity of individuals is ignored.[81] However, in fecundity the uniqueness of subjectivity and the transcendence of the other are both preserved, as Levinas claims that fecundity is a 'way of being other while being oneself'. [82] This can be understood by thinking of the child, who is both a stranger and another subjectivity. In its relation to the child, the subject is led to a real future that is not a mere repetition of the essence of history.

Levinas claims that fecundity brings the dimension of infinity into the social space, which is another means to maintain multiplicity and asymmetry within the pluralism of society. He concludes that the totality of the system of the state in the form of homogenous space suppresses multiplicities; but fecundity, which both keeps the 'I' in relation to infinite time through its relation with the child and breaches the continuity of the space of the state, is exterior to the homogenous space and guarantees real multiplicity. In this way, Levinas singles out a sociality that is 'outside of the state'.[83] In this sociality based on fecundity

[80] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 268, 269. 'Being is produced as multiple and as split into same and other; this is its ultimate structure. It is society, and hence it is time.'
[81] See chapter 2.
[82] Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, 67.
[83] Ibid., 306.

and family, claims Levinas, the relation between man to man and the 'I' to itself both open to infinity, and as such are not confined within the totality of the same. And by this means, fecundity offers 'lineaments of a reality that is not subordinated to the State'.[84] From this viewpoint, it is not surprising that Levinas ends the whole discussion in TI with reference to the 'marvel of family',[85] which has attracted a great deal of debate amongst Levinas scholars.[86]

From the above analysis, we can see that through establishing the real multiplicity of sociality, Levinas demonstrates the way in which politics is modeled on ethics, even though we shall soon see that this politics is rather more of a sociality. To be more precise, Levinas claims that the two parts in this modeling are the state, and the ethical subject 'I': 'metaphysics therefore leads us to the accomplishment of the I as unicity by relation to which the work of the State must be situated, and which it must take as a model'.[87] The political space represented by the state must model itself on the ethical subject, maintaining an asymmetrical relationship with its citizens in this political space. The concepts of the curvature of intersubjective space and of fecundity reflect this idea. In the curvature of intersubjective space, the enlarged space is modeled strictly on the singular 'I'-other relationship, which can be seen from the fact that the curvature of intersubjective space has the same elements as the encounter of the 'I' with the other, the singular responsible subject and the commanding from the other, as we discussed above. And in fecundity, the relationships in society between

[84] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 306.
[85] Ibid., 306.
[86] Simon Critchley, 'Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them', 182.
[87] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 300.

different generations are modeled on the 'I'-son relationship, where it brings multiplicity into time and an asymmetrical relation into history.

But we shall also see that this modeling puts Levinas in an ambiguous position as regards politics and sociality. Simon Critchley maintains that in Levinas, we cannot simply reduce politics to sociality.[88] Politics demands law and justice to discern right or wrong, which are lacking in the concept of sociality. In fact, in a certain sense, a sociality where all can listen to the demand from the other is not present in reality. Even with his proposition to model politics with ethics, Levinas ends his exposition in TI by advocating the infinity and exteriority brought by the sociality that is outside of politics as fecundity, and contending that it is transcendent to the political state. From all of these, we suggest that Levinas's thinking in TI is more concerned with the level of sociality, rather than offering us a positively constituted politics. This might be explained by recourse to the influence Levinas received from Martin Buber in his early thinking, supporting a sociality that is based on ethics and criticizing the force of politics. In his foreword to Martin Buber's *Paths in Utopia*, Levinas agrees with Buber insofar as the latter advocates a sociality founded on ethics which limits the power of politics. In Levinasian terms, we need to pursue 'a utopia [of the] human' that stands against the efficacy of 'powerful political entities'.[89]

However, in OBBE one can observe a transformation in his thought on politics. In Hansel's words, the political order is not under an ethical one, nor is it constantly judged by it; it is rather required by 'the ethical order' and is

[88] Simon Critchley, 'Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them', 182.
[89] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Utopia and Socialism', in *Alterity & Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), 112.

important to attain justice.[90] In OBBE, argues Hansel, the horizon of Levinas's original thought about politics emerges where Levinas admits that ethics—generosity and the gift to the other—is not sufficient.[91] When the third party (who is another to the other) enters the scene, under the demand of justice, Levinas claims that politics, the state, and its institutions are all indispensable. This discussion of ethics and politics in OBBE largely takes place through Levinas's introduction of the structure of the 'said' and the 'saying'. We will now turn to examine the account of politics in OBBE by focusing on the structure of the said and the saying, upon which this new political project bases.

2 Politics in OBBE

In OBBE, as we have already mentioned, Levinas's attitude towards politics undergoes an evolution. Hansel indicates that in TI, politics appears as in the classic Western tradition which Levinas criticizes;[92] but in OBBE Levinas 'introduces a highly original perspective' on politics, where politics is not only seen as opposing ethics, but is also required by the 'ethical order'.[93] These two seemingly contradicting ideas are further seen in an ambiguity between what Levinas structures as the said and saying, which reflects the relation between ethics and politics in OBBE. According to Levinas, *saying*, when it is expressed, moves into the area of *said*, and the motivation for this motion is out of concern for justice, which demands political judgment. This is the case despite the fact that the said, that is the political expression of ethics with its characteristics of 'a

[90] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 69.
[91] Ibid., 72.
[92] Ibid., 66.
[93] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 69.

system of synchronism'[94] and 'verbal indifference',[95] betrays the infinity of the ethical saying. To clarify the connection between ethics and saying, and politics and the said, we first need to explain the relationship between said and saying in Levinas with a brief review of the meanings these terms receive in his thought.

2.1 The relationship between the said and the saying

Said and *saying* are developed most fully in Levinas's later philosophy, especially OBBE, and these concepts allow him to construct his philosophy in new ways that are different from that of TI. In fact, many of the concepts and ideas presented by Levinas in OBBE are discussed through the structure of said and saying; as we discussed in the last chapter, the ethical subjectivity, proximity and substitution are all signified within the category of 'saying'. Important to our present discussion, politics in OBBE is introduced through the concepts of said and saying, which can be seen clearly through the fact that the title of the section Levinas dedicates to the path from ethics to politics in OBBE is named as 'From saying to the said, or the wisdom of desire'. The concepts 'said' and 'saying' are many-faceted and used in many places in OBBE, and it is impossible for us to cover every detail of their meaning here. In the following discussion we will emphasize the close relatedness between the saying and ethics, and the said and politics.

One can observe that the structure of the subject 'I', its dwelling, its encounter with the other, and the socio-political space modeled in TI on the 'I'-other relationship, evolves in OBBE into a structure marked by a dynamic

[94] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 78.
[95] Ibid., 143.

relationship between said and saying. We begin by investigating the concept of saying, whose significance is primarily ethical. Levinas remarks in a concise way that the term 'saying' indicates the 'word given to the neighbour, the intrigue of responsibility'.[96] Saying is not a pure form of language, but it is impossible to see it as irrelevant to language. What then is the relationship between saying and language? Sean Hand indicates that in OBBE, Levinas endeavours to show that the saying, before it is conjugated into different forms of the verb, 'is already ethical gesture'.[97] This is to say, the saying can be seen as a pre-language. In other words, it conditions all the languages but it would be mistaken to see it as one form of language-action.

For Levinas, the very fact of human language presupposes saying, 'the act that signifies'.[98] But this signification is not the content of communication, nor is it any information that we can discuss normally; it is rather an 'exposure without reserve to the other'.[99] Saying is signification, it signifies 'to the other, a neighbour' and it has to be distinguished from 'signification that is borne by words.'[100] The language that communicates information is based ontologically on 'being' and has its identity in a fixed system. But in saying there is no 'substantial consistency' like that in essence or being.[101] In other words, saying is not giving out some substantiated meaning of objective signs; indeed, for Levinas saying does not name anything.[102] There is no information communicated in the first saying, it is only an expressiveness, a gesture that signifies towards the other; it

[96] Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 156.
[97] Sean Hand, *Emmanuel Levinas* (London: Routledge, 2009), 52.
[98] Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, XXI.
[99] Ibid., 168.
[100] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 46.
[101] Ibid., 48.
[102] Ibid., 34.

conditions the logos, not vice versa.[103] To be more precise, we can see saying (understood as distinct from any form of language) as defining ethics itself in OBBE. There are three specific aspects in which this is the case, and we will now look at these aspects in more detail.

The first aspect can be broached by following Lingis's remark that saying is both 'expression and sensibility', [104] which is to say, an expression that is 'conceived as sensibility' and a sensitivity that 'is referential' and directs the 'I' to the other.[105] For Levinas, saying is an expression to the other, but since it is stressed as being 'for the other', it is also a direction of openness in sensibility where the self exposes itself to the other. With this 'inexhaustible response' from the level of sensibility, saying even redefines subjectivity.[106] This way of conceiving saying leaves it ambiguous between activity and passivity: in Levinas's words, saying comes before the dichotomy of activity and passivity. Hence, he claims that the subject in saying 'approaches a neighbour in expressing itself'.[107] In the expressive act, the subject expresses itself, which is also exposing itself passively to the other. In this expression, this process of exposing, the subject of saying is claimed by Levinas to be characterized by 'vulnerability, exposure to affection, sensibility'.[108] This is to say, the self in expressing itself and exposing itself becomes a pure passive receptivity.

Sensibility in OBBE is conceived differently from sensibility in TI, as, in the earlier work, the subject in sensibility 'pursues its own closure and

[103] Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, XVIII.
[104] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xxxii.
[105] Ibid., xxx.
[106] Ibid., xiii.
[107] Ibid., 48.
[108] Ibid., 50.

contentment';[109] but in OBBE, there is no dwelling wherein the 'I' can indulge its sensibility. Sensibility as saying, as the expression of the subject, is for the other from the very beginning. We recall from the last chapter that the subject in OBBE is constantly opening itself up towards the other, without any identity to return to. This constant opening up is enabled by saying, as in the saying, the sensibility of the subject is 'being-for-the-other '.[110] Thus, saying as expression and sensibility signifies the ethical subject opening to the other and being responsible for the other, yet in a passive way where it cannot escape from this responsibility.

Secondly, saying is claimed by Levinas to be pre-original, which as a concept counters the temporality of presentation, and as such brings in an 'immemorial past'.[111] Being and essence, according to Levinas, signify origins or *archēs*, but saying comes before the origin, which shows that ethics is before being and essence. For some Levinas scholars, reference to the pre-originality of ethics may signify different things to which ethics is prior. For example, for Cheryl Hughes, this pre-originality in Levinas means 'prior to experience, prior to thought, prior to critical consciousness'.[112] Philip Lawton points out that the pre-original ethical obligation of one for the other is 'prior to any decision taken for or against him'.[113] We observe more precisely that in OBBE, the pre-originality signifies the superlativeness of this pre-origin, where it is even prior to the very 'self'. Ethics is prior to experience, knowledge, and decision; this is

[109] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, Xxii.
[110] Ibid., xxi.
[111] Ibid., 75.
[112] Cheryl Hughes, 'The Primacy of Ethics: Levinas and Hobbs', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, volume 2, edited by Claire Katz, Lara Trout, 160.
[113] Philip Lawton, 'Love and Justice', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* , volume 3, 213.

already recognized in TI, but in OBBE, responsibility is prior to the interiority of the self in saying. In other words, saying's pre-originality designates the restlessness of someone persecuted, someone's being 'hostage' to the other who is homeless and groundless.[114] The pre-originality of saying does not only condition our experience of the world, it conditions the self, the very subjectivity of the subject.[115]

The pre-originality of saying also expresses the special designation of time in OBBE. Origin is often seen as the beginning of time; but saying is before the beginning of time. As we have seen, Levinas criticizes a notion of temporality where the present is enabled to dominate past and future. He claims that in the language of being and essence, the past is totalized in the present.[116] Yet, in saying, the past gains its independence and 'cannot be recuperated by memory and history.'[117] This immemorial past refuses to be synchronized into presence; it is not found in any experience that one can 'bring back'.[118] For Levinas, memory and history are visible but the pre-original past is invisible; the beginning of the visible can be traced, but the invisible does not have a beginning. 'Pre-originary is in no way a beginning', claims Fabio Ciaramelli.[119] Through depicting saying as the invisible that is prior to the origin of being, Levinas indicates that Goodness, expressed by the pre-original saying, also has no beginning in the present. Beginning signifies a process that is finitude, which shows its limitation as falling between the beginning and the end, but Goodness

[114] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 75.
[115] Ibid., 6.
[116] Ibid., 9.
[117] Ibid., 10.
[118] Emmanuel Levinas, *God Death and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 15.
[119] Fabio Ciaramelli, 'The riddle of the pre-original' in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, volume 1, 67-74, 67.

is without beginning, which is to say that it is not limited by points of time, and therefore can be seen as in infinity. In this rationale, the self always finds itself late in being good, being responsible for the other. It finds itself already in the pre-original good which 'has chosen me'.[120] In Levinasian terms, the moment of beginning is not 'available to me'[121]. The 'immemorial past' that commands and obliges the self comes before it can be conscious of it, before it can take any action, and thus guarantees the passivity of 'my obligation to the other'.[122]

Thirdly, saying is also an interruption of the said. Admittedly, saying can only be manifest to people when it is in the said, but after it is expressed in the said where it is fixed in themes and 'verbal indifference',[123] it comes back to interrupt the said in a way that bears ethical significance, that is it causes its non-in-difference to the other. In Levinas's words, saying is 'breaking through the noema, turning inside out', and approaches the other in a restless way.[124] This is to say, the said is un-ethical in certain sense, but through the interruption by the saying, ethical significance can be restored to the said. Indeed, saying, which is inevitably expressed in the said, also reveals its infinity and pre-originality via the said. But for saying, being fixed in the said is not the end of the 'life' of saying, since it comes to disturb the said all the time.

Saying is a disturbance in a fundamental way, as it undermines the very essence of the said; as Miguel Abensour puts it, it 'undermines being *arche* (which we refer as archē in the current discussion)'.[125] But this disturbance is

[120] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 11.
[121] Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 30.
[122] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 199.
[123] Ibid., 143.
[124] Ibid., 48.
[125] Miguel Abensour, 'Anarchy between Metapolitics and Politics', *Parallax*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2002, 5-18, 15.

not counter to the archē, or against order in a way that brings in disorder; rather, saying disturbs the subject that is expressed in the said to the point of 'no longer having any intention'.[126] The subject is emptying itself, which is the way to transcend the immanence of its identity in the world, and which is the immanence of the said that is going to be discussed shortly. Saying in this sense disturbs the rigidity and indifference of the 'immanent said'[127] which searches for all inclusiveness and clarity,[128] and brings a dimension of transcendence where the responsibility to the other is developed to a superlative level. The self is put in the other's place and answers the needs of the other in this disturbance, which breaks through the immanence of the indifferent world order. Thus we can see that saying, as a disturbance of the said, constantly brings in the ethical dimension of transcendence to the immanence of the said. We will look at this more closely in our later discussion of the relationship between saying and said.

From the above discussions, saying in Levinas can be seen as an exposure to the other at the level of sensibility, and as the pre-original ethical obligation for the other; even while it is inevitable that what is expressed in the said will betray the ethical saying, the saying constantly disturbs the said through its ethical significance. Meanwhile, one can observe that the said in OBBE has a more complicated meaning, which we now examine.

As Robert Bernasconi points out, 'although the direction of Levinas's thought appears always to be in favour of saying over the said,' this does not mean that Levinas places less emphasis upon the latter concept. The said, in OBBE, is an important concept which depicts the relationship between ethics and

[126] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 199.
[127] Robert Bernasconi, 'The Third Party: Levinas on the Intersection of the Ethical and the Political', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, volume 1, 45-57, 50.
[128] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 69.

ontology, ontology and politics, and ethics and politics. We will first look briefly into the concept of the said and Levinas's distinction between different forms of the said, and then examine the said in the context of its political significance.

The concept of the said in OBBE is closely associated with other ideas such as thematization, synchronization, simultaneity, essence, and being. It is a familiar observation that these ideas are what Levinas is criticizing in the Western philosophical tradition, which is a way of thinking that prioritizes ontology and epistemology. For Levinas, first of all, the said is a language system that thematizes the pre-original saying. By manifesting the saying as themes of certain statements, the invisible saying we discussed above becomes visible in the said, which more precisely is to say that saying is expressed and given witness in the statements of the said (the notion of witness will be explained in detail in the next chapter).[129] Levinas looks closely into language itself, seeing a process of denomination in the said where everything is attached to their identity as nouns, as 'bearer' of some names, and is connected by the universal rule of logic.[130] The identification of names results in a contemporariness where all the contents in the said are synchronized in the statement where they are all in the present and appear simultaneous. Thus, the immemorial past of the saying that we analysed above is captured in a language of historiography where the present tense dominates all. For Levinas, the real lapse of time is absent in the said, which is 'without loss', as what was in the past can be represented again in the said.[131]

[129] The notion of witness will be dealt in a more extensive way in the next chapter.
[130] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE 106.
[131] Robert Bernasconi, 'Who is my neighbor? Who is the Other?', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessment*, volume 4, edited by Lara Trout and Claire Katz (London: Routledge, 2005), 5-30, 23.

For Levinas, the said as a language system betrays the ethical saying and centres its discourse on the question of 'what', which suggests a theoretical attitude.[132] In the said as a language system, the objectivity of the system conceals the subject who makes or states this said: the question of 'who is speaking?' is not as important as 'what is said'. In the said, the subject belongs to an order, or the general term of languages, and so becomes a specimen of the general, a being representing a certain essence. In other words, the subject in the said has a 'proper name', which refers to the general being, and thus becomes an ontological category rather than the unique bearer of ethical responsibility.[133] Meanwhile the other loses its independence in the question 'what is it?'; it is dominated by the one who puts the question 'what is it', and becomes an object for 'him who looks'. [134] In this ontological gaze, the subject and the other are both absorbed into the discourse of 'what'. They lose their uniqueness and become essential parts of a discourse under the ontological logos.[135]

From the above, we can see that the said in OBBE is designated by Levinas primarily with an ontological significance. In the said, the object, subject and the other are all represented and essentialized through symbols with which they are denominated with certain names. This can be seen as potentially leading to a final connection with being, where the terms have 'ideal identity', which are only modalities of being.[136] This is exactly the ontological tradition which has its climax in Heidegger, who claims that philosophical manifestations reveal the

[132] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 27.
[133] Ibid., 106.
[134] Ibid., 23.
[135] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 216.
[136] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xxxi.

being or essence, where 'everything is enclosed in'.[137] Levinas claims that the ontological said 'only has eyes on being', which indeed results in a betrayal of the saying by the said.[138] From ethical saying to the ontological said, the concern of the other becomes a concern of being, where the ethical significance of saying is lost. But does saying only have one destination, namely the ontological said? Or, in other words, can the ontological said serve the saying otherwise than simply by betraying it? When saying is expressed, it is inevitably fixed in the said, so we may wonder whether this is also the fate of Levinas's philosophy. We will start to address these questions in what follows, and see its final answer in the next chapter.

After the publication of TI, scholars like Derrida questioned Levinas with regard to the use of his own theoretical language.[139] For Derrida, Levinas, despite his intention of demonstrating exteriority and transcendence, is still 'trapped by the ontological language'.[140] In OBBE, Levinas admits that 'the very discussion which we are pursuing at this moment counts by its said'; he acknowledges that his discussion of saying is also a certain thematization; in his own words, 'we are synchronizing the terms, forming a system among them, using the verb to be'.[141] What is the difference, then, between Levinas's said and the ontological said in the Western tradition he opposes?

In fact, Levinas tries to distinguish his own philosophical said and the ontological said in the Western tradition, despite the fact that philosophy itself, from whichever approach, is inescapably formed in a certain said. But the said

[137] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 134.
[138] Ibid., 23.
[139] Jacque Derrida, 'Metaphysics and violence', 138.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 44.

that expresses the saying of the 'beyond being' devolves from the 'very contestation of this signification' beyond being.[142] Levinas maintains that this 'contestation' is a 'pretension' of the ethical saying which needs to be heard even if it falls in the end into the ontological form of the said.[143] This is 'a said unique in its kind', especially in its relation with saying, which does not 'narrowly espouse grammatical categories', and does not gain its meaning from 'logical rules'; rather, its significance comes from its witness of the saying.[144] The said of Levinas is not anti-rational, as Jean-Michel-Salanskis maintains, nor is it 'impugning the theoretical'; Levinas, instead, is bearing a witness to a form of thought which also opens to knowledge and logic, but this form of thought concerns first of all ethics and man. And by 'witness', as we will articulate in the next chapter, we should understand an ambiguity between knowing and being responsible, between said and saying.

Thus we can see that the Levinasian said is unique, and that Levinas uses it to make a 'pretension' of the saying that is ignored in the Western tradition, demonstrating the 'utopia, of the human' beyond any immanent theoretical said.[145] To be more exact, there are two salient features of the Levinasian said: first of all, there is a clear rationality behind the path from ethical saying to the said one can find in Levinas, which redefines the ethical significance of the philosophical said. Levinas claims that the said that gives witness to saying is born by justice: 'Everything shows itself and is said in being for justice'.[146] Paul Ricoeur rightly comments that 'it is justice that allows one to thematize the type

[142] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 156.
[143] Ibid., 156.
[144] Ibid., 151.
[145] Catherine Chalier, Levinas: *L' Human de 'L'utopie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993), 21.
[146] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 163.

of saying that allows one to philosophize.'[147] The said is necessary because of the latent question of justice, where the world is not only composed of one other, but many others; in my infinite responsibility for the other, there appears the third who brings in the problem of justice as 'who is right who is wrong'.[148] For Levinas, justice is the foundation of consciousness and the said, whence we can even call the said that is born for justice a political said.

The second feature of the Levinasian said is that, as already mentioned, it is in ambiguous relation with the saying, an ambiguity which calls for close investigation. The ambiguity of said and saying, which is also referred by Levinas as the 'ambiguity of being and the otherwise than being', the 'ambiguity of duration and identity', distinguishes Levinas's said from the immanent theoretical said. We will briefly say more about the relationship between said and saying in OBBE under the title of ambiguity, before we look at how the significance of politics in OBBE is born from the relationship between said and saying. In fact, we have already encountered the concept of ambiguity in TI, where it has a significant role in Levinas's thinking. The meaning of ambiguity does not change remarkably from TI to OBBE, so we will next look briefly at the meaning of it in TI before we investigate its significance in more detail in OBBE, where it is more relevant to our discussion.

Ambiguity in Levinas is not to be interpreted simply as two meanings of the same thing having equal chances of being true. As Stella Sandford indicates, ambiguity is an idea Levinas uses to contest dialectical logic. More specifically, through his introduction of the concept of ambiguity, Levinas challenges the idea

[147] Paul Ricoeur, 'Otherwise: A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas's OBBE or Beyond Essence', in *Yale French Studies*, No. 104, Encounter with Levinas, 2004, 82-99, 94.
[148] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Politics and Ethics', in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 294.

of contradiction, which in the logic of the Western tradition dictates that two opposite points cannot stand at the same time. In the section named 'Ambiguity of Love', Levinas claims that, in the love relation, the 'I' enjoys the other as the other is inside of its interiority, who, however, also belongs to absolute exteriority. In the relationship of enjoyment the alterity is immanent to the world of the 'I', and in the ethical encounter with the other the other is in transcendence to the dwelling of the 'I'. But in the concept of love here, Levinas seems to describe a moment of both immanence and transcendence. Nevertheless, this ambiguity shows another temporality where there is a complicity of a real lapse of time in ambiguity. This can be seen more clearly in Levinas's discussion in OBBE, where the concept of ambiguity is more maturely conceived and applied to other important concepts, and where it shows an important dynamic in Levinas's thinking, related especially with the concept of diachrony, which is introduced into his explanation of ambiguity.

With the introduction of the concept of diachrony in OBBE, ambiguity is given a clearer exposition, signified as a 'blinking and dia-chrony', a 'position between two times',[149] and it especially signifies the relation between saying, which is infinite, transcendent and invisible, and the said, which is thematization, finite, and visible. Diachrony, as a concept which is important for understanding Levinas's idea of temporality, does not appear in TI. It is mentioned sparsely in Levinas's other works, but makes a significant appearance in OBBE.[150] To address the complexity of the meaning of diachrony is beyond the scope of the present discussion, but we here utilize it to understand the relationship of

[149] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 173; Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 13.
[150] According to the Levinas Concordance, the concept of diachrony first appears in *Time and Other* but is not mentioned in TI. *Levinas Concordance*, edited by Cristian Ciocan and Georges Hansel (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 206, 207.

ambiguity between the ethical saying and political said; hence we will only give a brief account of diachrony.

Diachrony is designated by Levinas as challenging the temporality where the 'present assembles the dispersion of time'.[151] Diachrony, in which the past 'cannot be caught up with' and the future is 'an unimaginable future',[152] breaks the united representation where the future is the future in the representation of now and the past is in memory being represented. Levinas singles out a real difference in time, which is not a difference that is counted out based on the 'unity of apperception'.[153] In diachrony, temporality is rather signified as non-in-difference, which associates this concept of temporality to Levinas's ethical concern. Opposing diachrony to temporality, where the present has its domination, Levinas maintains that the obligation of the self for the other does not originate from the reasoning of the presence, but from an order in the immemorial past. As Robert Gibbs points out, making the moment of the beginning of my obligation to the other unavailable to my consciousness, Levinas is able to insure that responsibility for the other reaches its superlative level in a situation where 'I am chosen, elected, obliged'.[154] In diachrony, the self, without unity of apperception, does not have an identity based upon self-consciousness, but as it is chosen, it is irreplaceable in front of its obligation for the other. From the above discussion we can see that the introduction of the concept of diachrony does not follow an intention to account for time in an alternative way, but shows Levinas's endeavour to conceive a temporality that can be compatible with the infinite responsibility of the subject for the other.

[151] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 38.
[152] Ibid., 89.
[153] Ibid., 173.
[154] Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 30.

Levinas considers ambiguity to be the diachrony of being and otherwise than being, which is also to say, ambiguity is non-in-difference between being and otherwise than being. Being signifies the said that is established by the language system and logic, while the otherwise than being signifies the saying that transcends the immanence of the language system. Meanwhile, the ambiguity between said and saying is described by Levinas as the trace of infinity and transcendence in the system of being, of language. We will investigate the profound meaning of the notion of trace in Levinas in the next chapter, but for now 'trace' can be understood as a trace of the order that ends in showing itself in the said to me, but nevertheless is an order comes from the diachrony of time; it does not have its source in the said, but only comes to it as a 'blinking light'.[155] The propositions that the said betrays the saying, and the said is necessary to the saying, are both sound given the ambiguity of these concepts. In the ambiguity of diachronic expression, 'the saying is both an affirmation and a retraction of the said'.[156] For Levinas, ambiguity is shown by diachrony, or to use a Levinasian metaphor, it is a 'blinking light', [157] which is a light that is neither duration nor a moment.

Lastly we can see that the ambiguity as the relation between said and saying is the ambiguity of ethics and politics, because, for Levinas, the duo of self-other of infinite obligation in proximity and substitution, which we described in the last chapter, and the trio with the third party in the scene, which we are going to explore further, stand in ambiguity. In Levinas's own words, 'justice remains justice only, in a society where there is no distinction between those

[155] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 193.
[156] Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 44.
[157] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 9.

close and those far off, but in which there also remains the impossibility of passing by the closest'.[158] This is to say, in the ambiguity between justice and responsibility, the subject is following the law where the different others are judged fairly, yet my infinite responsibility for the other also cannot be ignored.

In reviewing the relationship between the saying as ethics and the said as politics, we will follow Levinas's rationale in order to see how the ethical saying moves into the political said. As we noted above, Levinas generally holds a negative view about politics in TI. But through the introduction of the ambiguity of said and saying, politics ceases to be a pure ontological said as in the Western tradition; rather, Levinas admits the importance of the 'Greek philosophy', which is more exactly the Greek justice that locates itself 'in the realm of measure and proposition'.[159] The ambiguity of said and saying shows a new way of conceiving politics in Levinas, which Hansel designates as Levinas's 'original perspective' on politics.[160]

To conclude, from our above discussion we can read in Levinas that there are two possible modes of association between said and saying. One is the said that fully expresses ontological logic and dismisses the importance of the saying. But Levinas prefers a said which is in an ambiguous relation with the saying. The saying is exterior to the language system of the said, but in the said there is the trace of the diachrony of the saying. The former relation between said and saying aims at creating better theories, which leads to 'totalization of both self and the other'.[161] The latter relation, the one Levinas proposes can serve ethics and

[158] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 159.
[159] Joelle Hansel, Foreword, in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics*, *Aesthetics*, xv.
[160] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 63.
[161] Victoria Tahmasebi, 'Does Levinas Justify or Transcend Liberalism? Levinas on Human Liberation', *Philosophy Social Criticism*, 2010, 36(5), 523-544, 525.

justice, thus produces a politics that has a diachronic relation with ethics, which is to say the judgement is mediated by non-in-difference and aims at being responsible for others. We will now turn to discuss the political said and how politics is conceived positively in OBBE.

2.2 The path from ethics to politics in OBBE seen through the perspective of said and saying

We have already mentioned that the motivation for the saying being transformed into a said is justice, which is also one important feature of Levinas's unique said that is distinct from the ontological said in the Western tradition. The ethical saying moves into the said because of justice, which designates the said not as a said that strives for better theories, but a unique said that expresses responsibility for the third party in the form of justice. According to Peter Atterton, this way of conceiving the said as prima facie a political said for justice, 'transforms the thinker's vocation from the search for truth to the search for a better justice.'[162] Thus we will now look at the significance of justice in OBBE, especially in terms of the path through which we can understand Levinas's unique political said.

In OBBE, the meaning of justice is different from in TI; in TI, it is not fundamentally the political concept it comes to be in OBBE. In his preface to the German edition of TI, he points out that there is no 'terminological difference' between 'the right of the other coming before mine', and 'justice'.[163] We will shortly give a detailed comparison of justice in TI and in OBBE, but for now we

[162] Peter Atterton, 'Levinas, Justice, And just war', in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics*, 150.
[163] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 170

will look at politics in OBBE via the newly defined concept of justice, where there is an emergence of a politicized notion of justice, and his political thinking gains significance. In OBBE, Levinas's thinking on justice begins by including another other into the scene along with self and other, another other who is more precisely defined as a third party. Justice here is precisely a justice from the perspective of the third party, who is 'also my neighbor' for whom the self is in responsibility as well. When the third and other present together to my responsibility, claims Levinas, proximity with the other is problematic and hence 'one must compare, weight, and think'.[164] The responsibility for the third party is not less urgent than the one for the other.[165]

With the third party being recognized as an important notion, justice means to address the emerging problem of the responsibility towards the other and the third or whether the self is able to bear two or even multiple infinite responsibilities. In his introduction to OBBE, Lingis claims that, 'To give all to one, is to leave others destitute'.[166] This is to say, the self cannot ignore the third, as in its encountering with the third, responsibility is also called for. Following this logic, justice will be postulated as generosity with calculation: we need to weigh 'what each person is due'.[167] As Hansel claims, 'with the intervention of the third, dissymmetry yields to equality',[168] which is to say, the third party and the other need equal attention. However, there is another way to understand the question which we argue is more proper: rather than having as a consequence establishing equality between the other and the third party, justice here is rather

[164] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Questions and Answers', in *Of God who Comes to Mind*, 82.
[165] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 71.
[166] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xvi
[167] Ibid., 73.
[168] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 72.

about judging right or wrong. The other may be guilty in front of the third party, a scenario which is in need of a judicious process to pursue punitiveness. In other words, the self is facing the question: 'what are the other and third party to one another?'[169] Levinas links this very directly to institutions and laws, as there are many others who are not physically connected to the self, whose judgment cannot only result from the subjective judgment of the 'I'. Laws, institutions and the state offer justice to broader social life, and even between different nations.

We can see that for Levinas, infinite responsibility cannot be empirically divided: it is not that 'my responsibility for the other finds itself constrained to a calculus by the "force of things"'.[170] Indeed, recalling our discussion in the last chapter, the subject is defined as substitution and is said to be responsible for all the others. Levinas nowise denies the significance of substitution. So justice is not about dividing responsibility, and the second perspective we suggested above on justice can be observed as being closer to Levinas's concerns in OBBE. When the other and the third party who cannot be simply seen as another other to me, but who also has relationship with the other, can have conflicts with each other, the importance of justice appears along with the question: 'what they have done to each other?'[171]

With his recognition of the significance of justice as about who is right and who is wrong, Levinas indeed begins in this specific context to give a positive account of the ontological categories he used to be against. An objective judgment in front of justice is necessary, which hence calls for the importance of consciousness to enable representation of the other and the third for calculating

[169] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 157.
[170] Ibid., 158
[171] Ibid., 158.

their right or wrong. To see them objectively, a 'distance between me and the other and the third party' is also needed, where the third party and the other are seen according to a common category in order that they may be compared.[172] Meanwhile, Levinas emphasizes, out of the demand for justice 'there should be no distinction between those close and those far off', which shows a concern that is broadened to larger scales, in which case, the ethical saying of my infinite responsibility for the other is finally fixed in the said as 'a book, law and science'.[173] Thus a 'place of togetherness' where justice can be realized comes to significance and the subject becomes part of it, a member of the society, in its pursuit for justice for all.[174]

It needs to be emphasized that politics is not born in Levinas's work to be law and science; it rather bears the importance of the ambiguity between ethics and justice. Hansel rightly points out that Levinas fundamentally changes the picture of the traditional political theory which centres on the issue of how to 'raise the natural to the rational', to the new issue of 'lower the ethical back down to the rational'.[175] This is equally to say that politics is not a sublimation of the human from brutality, but a limitation of the sublime among human beings due to the demand of justice among all. In OBBE, ethics, not logic, is articulated as the foundation for politics; and even as he moves his discussion to the realm of politics and justice, ethics is clearly singled out as the motivation for forming such a realm. Justice calls for equality between the close and far off, but Levinas immediately adds that there 'remains the impossibility of passing by the closest',

[172] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 157.
[173] Ibid., 159.
[174] Ibid., 157
[175] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 69.

who needs me urgently and with whom 'I' am in an ethical relation.[176] Thus the subject is both a subject of justice who makes comparisons in judgment of the other and the third objectively abiding the law, and an ethical subject in proximity and substitution, where its ethical responsibility motivates the judgement of justice to be fair and responsible for the other and the third party.

Levinas gives an example from Talmud to show the equal importance of ethics and justice, where he cites 'before the verdict, no face; but once the judgment is pronounced, He looks at the face',[177] which is to be understood as, to attain justice through abiding by the law, the other is seen with all the others according to the same measurement, where the other is identified as a member of the society following the system of law. But after being judged by the said of law, the other is seen as calling for an ethical response from the subject which puts the subject and the other in an ethical relationship. It is far-reaching to conclude from this case that Levinas depicts an chronological order between political response and ethical response, but this example shows a case in which, in the ambiguity between saying as ethics and said as politics, the subject is involved in the end in a concrete demand: it is required to be both an identity in the duration of sociality, to be present in history as a functional part for justice, and to ethically bear a restless obligation toward the one whom 'I' judge.[178]

Therefore, as Levinas claims, justice is always undergoing a disturbance from ethics, but more importantly the rationality of politics is ethics, with which Levinas redefines the relationship between ethics and politics. Hansel claims that ethics is the foundation for politics in OBBE; nevertheless, a more accurate

[176] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 159.
[177] Emmanuel Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be?*, 69.
[178] Robert Gibbes, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, 29.

wording might be that ethics is the new rationality of politics, or more exactly a 'rationality of peace', which Levinas proposes in contrast to the traditional rationality of politics as logicalism.[179] The latter expresses the universalism of the unified logical rule and the common egoism of the individuals. But Levinas proposes another rationality, where reasoning is proximity to the other, which Levinas designates a 'rationality of peace'.[180] The spirit of society, which can also be seen as the aspiration of politics, is the 'forgetting of the self' where the ethical subject answers to the call from the other with 'here I am'.[181] 'Justice, society, the state and its institutions, exchanges and works are comprehensible out of proximity.'[182] Thus Levinas successful reorients the very rationality of politics to ethics.

After examining politics in OBBE, and showing the emergence of the positive articulation of politics in Levinas, we will compare his ideas on politics in TI and OBBE, tracing the major differences which express the trajectory of development that is confirmed by Hansel as a 'major change'.[183] As we pointed out in our introduction to this chapter, if we want to explore the significance of the null-site subjectivity including the socio-political, we need to look at the becoming of the subjectivity in the place of togetherness of politics, which holds ground for the further development of the utopian subjectivity which is allowed to transcend this place of togetherness. Despite its necessity, the place of togetherness is still a place of immanence, based as it is upon ontological categories of representation and synchronization. In the next chapter we will

[179] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 166.
[180] Ibid., 144.
[181] Ibid., 159, 149. We will give a more detailed analysis of the ethical subjectivity in the form of 'Here I am' in the next chapter.
[182] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 159.
[183] Georges Hansel, 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', 69.

show the further meaning of null-site that transcends this immanence, and through it we will demonstrate the further development of the ethical subjectivity, but in order that the next step of our articulation of the utopian subjectivity should be well rooted, we need to see what change to politics, and to the relationship between politics and ethics, has been effected with the introduction of null-site. In the following, we will sum up three major differences and give each a detailed analysis.

3 The development of Levinas's politics from TI to OBBE

3.1 The development of the conception of justice from TI to OBBE

Justice is the one of the core concepts in Levinas's socio-political thinking both in TI and OBBE, but it is only in the latter that it plays a salient role for Levinas to express his view on politics. In certain sense, politics exists for justice in OBBE, whereas in his earlier work this is not obviously so. We will here briefly summarize the main features of justice in each work and explore the significant development between them, which can better demonstrate the context for the intertwined development of the concepts of utopia and subjectivity.

We have briefly discussed that justice in TI is not distinguished from charity understood as responsibility for the other, and as such is basically an ethical notion.[184] Levinas admits in the foreword to the German edition of TI that 'there is no terminological difference between charity and justice', as both of the concepts emphasize the priority of the right of the other.[185] The concept of

[184] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 170.
[185] Ibid., 170.

charity signifies a welcoming of the other,[186] and justice is claimed to be 'recognizing in the Other my master'.[187] Justice here does not have a meaning of judgment, as it has in OBBE. In fact, Levinas is critical of 'judgment and investigation' and claims that judgment can be a judgment of history, which is a production of a 'rational institute' that does no justice either to the subject or the other. This is to say, first of all, that the verdict of the third-person point of view (the objective view) represents a discourse that is indirect and applies in 'absentia' of the subject. The subjectivity of the subject is submitted to the universal law and 'no longer bears a unique voice', becoming a numerical fact of the universal.[188] Second, the other is offended by this objective judgment, where it loses its absolute alterity and is represented in the visible world where it is only an individual, not the widow, the orphan, the stranger that calls for my responsibility.[189]

After rejecting an idea of justice based on an objective system, which is to say justice in a political system, Levinas claims that real justice is brought about by the uniqueness of the subject who replies to the offended other and makes a first-person apology in history through goodness.[190] This justice is critical of the third-person point of view and is prima facie ethical, which does not make justice a political concept as it comes to be in OBBE. For Levinas in TI, law and institutions, even though they are necessary, still reveal themselves as 'inhuman politics'.[191] As Bernasconi points out, in TI the 'main thrust of Levinas's account'

[186] Ibid., 200.
[187] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 72.
[188] Ibid., 242.
[189] Ibid., 242.
[190] Ibid., 246.
[191] Ibid., 242.

is still 'to resist the reduction of ethics to politics',[192] where Levinas stresses the 'moral overstepping beyond laws',[193] and where the 'I' ensures real justice by facing the demand of the other and its goodness. Justice is not a relation to law, but in the end 'the relation to the other'.[194]

As we mentioned above, justice as a judgment of right or wrong in OBBE is positively political. Levinas maintains that, with the entry of the third party, especially with the emergence of the question 'what have they done to one another?(that is, the other and the third party)',[195] it is necessary to judge objectively and fairly. In the ethical saying, the self and the other are in diachrony and they cannot be compared. Only in synchronization can individuals be compared, which is to say, in the comparison between the third party and the other for justice, a certain synchronization is needed, which happens in the said that fixes in the language of simultaneity. Only in contemporariness are the third party and the other compared in equal terms with fairness. In this system of the political said, institutions and law successively become necessary. Yet Levinas stresses that justice cannot be seen simply as a legal system that harmonizes human forces. Justice indeed invites law and state to ensure its application, but for Levinas, justice is motivated by disinterestedness, and responsibility by one for the other, which hence requires a balancing of the interests that fall out of the motivation of justice. This is to say, justice is not a still picture of conflicting interests being compromised, but a process of always being more just. There is

[192] Robert Bernasconi, 'The third Party', 49.
[193] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 246.
[194] Ibid., 89. Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999), 10.
[195] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 159.

no perfect justice for Levinas; justice, being based on proximity, is also always in restlessness, which constantly strives for a better justice, to become more just.[196]

We can thus see the underlying orientation of the development of the notion of justice from TI to OBBE: first of all, it is the development of an ethical notion to a notion in ambiguity between ethics and politics. In his earlier work, justice is an ethical concept which is no different to the notion of goodness.[197] But in OBBE it is a political concept which sanctions institutions and the state, and which is thus the foundation of the political said on which consciousness and representation are based: 'justice is the foundation to consciousness'.[198] But this new way of seeing justice leads to a problem: in TI, justice as ethics considered on a broader social scale does not have violence as a consequence; but in OBBE, justice gives some degree of permission for violence by the institutions and laws, specifically a punitive violence when the third party, the other or the subject as a member of the state are doing wrong. But to allow that justice leads to violence is difficult, as Levinas constantly condemns violence. In TI, the subject and the other are driven toward a world of moral perfection, where violence is excluded from the beginning. However, as Peter Atterton points out, Levinas is clear that a pure pacifism will 'tempt infinite evil'.[199] When the other, the third party or the subject are doing evil, we need to bring that evil into the court of justice. But Levinas is certainly against violence as the final answer to justice, and we need to remember his example from the Talmud: after the faceless process of judgment, the judge looks at the face of the one who is in court and mercy is given. Justice in

[196] William Paul Simmons, 'The Third: Levinas' Theoretical Move from An-archical Ethics to the Realm of Justice and Politics,' *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 25, no. 6, 1999, 98.
[197] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 247.
[198] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 160.
[199] Peter Atterton, 'Levinas, Justice, and Just War', 148.

its accomplished form takes on this diachronic character, as a fair judgment and as mercy or charity to the unique one.

3.2 The development of the role of the third party from TI to OBBE

Concerning one of the primary concepts in Levinas's sociopolitical thinking, we can also see that the significance of the third party undergoes considerable change from TI to OBBE. In TI, the third party is not yet conceptualized as political; in fact, it begins to take on a negative connotation since it is associated with the point of view that is objective, which Levinas is against. As a matter of numerical fact, in his earlier work, the concept of the third party has a negative connotation, signifying an objective view that overlooks the originality of the 'I'-other relationship, in half of the places where Levinas mentions it. The third in fact signifies 'the third person point of view', which differs from the political concept of the 'third party' that emerges in OBBE. For example, Levinas associates the view of the third with the all-encompassing objective gaze from which the I'-other relationship becomes a mere 'formal signification of conjunction'.[200] The expression from the other to the 'I', when it is also manifested to the third, becomes a totality of knowledge, which 'owes its meaning to the terms combined'.[201] This for Levinas is the 'logics of being', no longer the ethical expression where the other solicits the 'I'.

When Levinas proceeds to a discussion of 'the other and the others', the third party starts to signify another other in the society. Levinas maintains that the duo of the 'I'-other relation, which excludes the third party, can 'be forgetful

[200] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 121.
[201] Ibid., 201.

to the universal'.[202] When facing the multiple others, the exclusive 'I'-other relation can lead to a preference of one over the other. To avoid this, Levinas maintains, the third party is always there: it looks at me 'in the eyes of the other.'[203] For Levinas there is no chronological order in which I encounter the other first then realize there is the third party; rather, he emphasizes that the face of the other 'opens humanity'.[204] In this multiplicity, the third party joins the 'I', not as a genus or a community for a common task, but under the same command: the third commands me to command, to command the 'we' to be responsible together. From this, the third party here rather functions as a third brother, who is along with me under the command of the face of the other, and is also commanding me and the other to take responsibility for him/her. The relationship among the 'I', the other, and the third party are all asymmetrical, and each relationship is separated from the other. These relations lead to what we analyzed before, namely Levinas's notion of the 'curvature [of] inter-personal space'.[205]

The third party in OBBE similarly names the third person who appears in the 'I'-other relationship, but here it is slightly different: the third here is not simply another other; he/she is a neighbour to me, and also a neighbour to the other.[206] The third party is not a fellow to the other; which is to say, the third-other relation is not similar to my relation to the third or the other. 'I cannot entirely answer' to the relationship between the third party and the other.[207] 'What have the third party and the other done to each other?' is now a question

[202] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 212.
[203] Ibid., 213.
[204] Ibid., 213.
[205] Ibid., 291.
[206] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 157.
[207] Ibid., 158.

in front of the self before it gives itself all to one. The self needs to consider what it shall do for justice in front of the other and the third party, which is a question of distributive justice, as Lingis calls it,[208] or a punishment of evil, in Peter Atterton's words. Or, as Robert Bernasconi points out, the third party in OBBE is 'the site of the passage to the political.'[209] With the renewed role of the third party, politics is not only the political judgment of the subject but also the birth of the state and the institutions. Levinas maintains that the extraordinary commitment of the other to the third party calls for control, wherein a principle is sought, and thereby the state is born.[210] In other words, the other-third relation is under laws rather than an imitation of the 'I'-other relation, where the whole objective system of the state is delivered.

One can observe that there is a tension in how people understand Levinas's concept of the other and the third party. For example, Howard Caygill reads from Levinas's various statements on the relation among the 'I', the other, the third, that Levinas does not see any direct responsibility for the third, and 'rules out the possibility of an alliance between the I and the third against the other'.[211] But we suggest that, in a certain sense, the third and the other cannot be compared within the same category; since, if we view the division of ethics and politics in a strict sense, when the first third appears in the scene, the other is no longer the one that has the priority for infinite care from the self. Even Levinas has not given great care to differentiate his terms, since in the moment of politics, the self is facing many 'others' who require representation and comparison by the self, who are actually all thirds. As Annabel Herzog stresses,

[208] Alphonso Lingis, introduction, in OBBE, xxxv.
[209] Robert Bernasconi, 'The Third Party', 49.
[210] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 161.
[211] Howard Caygill, *Levinas & the Political*, 133

the appearance of the other and third does not come in a chronological order,[212] which is to say, it is not that the other is closer to the self than the third. Rather, the other and the third are 'the other' and 'the third' since they are in different relationships with the self. The same person can be both the other and the third to the self when he/she is in an ethical relationship, or in a political relation with the self with respect to different concerns. The tension between the other and the third is in fact the tension between ethics and politics in Levinas.

And in OBBE one finds there is another concept which is closely related to the concept of the third, that is *illeity*, where '*Il*' in French is the third-person pronoun. The concept of 'illeity', which does not make an appearance in TI, is one of the most important concepts in OBBE. For Bernasconi, illeity is a concept used by Levinas to 'hold together' 'the conflict between the ethical and the political' when the third interrupts the 'I'-other.[213] As we discussed above, through the concept of ambiguity, the conflict between the ethical and the political rather becomes a diachrony between the two, which can also be seen as the ambiguity of the trace of illeity in politics. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, but for now we can see that the third in OBBE not only gives politics a positive meaning, but also addresses the conflicts between ethics and politics, one of the most outstanding problems in Levinas's philosophy through its altered form of illeity.

Therefore, we can conclude our discussion of the difference between the meaning of the concept the third in Levinas's social political thinking in TI and in OBBE as follows. The third, in TI, even as it breaks the 'I'-thou private intimacy

[212] 'The third has always been there.' Annabel Herzog, 'Is Liberalism "All We Need"?: Levinas's politics of Surplus', 204.
[213] Robert Bernasconi, 'The Third Party', 52.

and brings in the dimension of multiples, raises social concerns that are not necessarily political. It can be, as Bernasconi points out, just a community doing justice together.[214] But what is political is more than a community where all the people are responding to the 'sermon, exhortation, the prophetic word'.[215] This can be realized in, for example, a small religious group, but it is difficult to realize on a lager scale, for example, in a state where people are diverse and in constant conflict. In OBBE, the concept of the third (and its altered version of illeity) clearly has political significance; with it, the objectivity of politics, which is needed to judge right or wrong or to calculate the interest of the third and the other, is confirmed. The third party opens the way to objectivity for politics, but it also signifies the command from the trace of the infinite illeity, which is an anarchic commandment from the saying disturbing the objective judgment commanding the subject to be responsible for the others. We will discuss this disturbance from illeity in more detail in our next chapter.

3.3 Different perceptions on the relationship between ethics and politics

With his evolved ideas on politics, the relationship between ethics (in OBBE this ethics is precisely the ethical subjectivity, as we concluded in the last chapter) and politics has also seen a radical development. In TI, the primary assumption of the relationship between ethics and politics is that they are in opposition: 'politics is opposed to morality.'[216] We have given an extensive discussion on this point in the first section of the chapter. However, to be precise, the politics that is condemned as opposing ethics is politics in the Western tradition. Levinas also

[214] Robert Bernasconi, 'The Third Party', 52.
[215] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 213.
[216] Ibid., 21.

raises the possibility of a relation between ethics and a newly proposed politics where politics should model itself on ethics; in Levinas's own words: 'the accomplishment of the I as unicity by relation to which the work of the State must be situated, and which it must take as a model.'[217] Even though this modeling shows a sense of positivity in Levinas's view about politics, the notion of modeling has not been developed into a mature form. This can also be seen in most of his discussions of the state, where Levinas emphasizes that the subject is 'maintained against the State', and that the state, even though better than the brutish animal world, is still inhuman to the subject and the other.[218] When conceiving a sociality that can guarantee ethics, Levinas proposes the concept of 'fecundity', rather than a politics with laws and institutions. This can be seen as the reason why, at the end of his discussion in TI, Levinas finishes his discussion upholding the 'marvel of the family'.[219] If the modeling of the state on the ethical accomplishment of the subject aims to guarantee a state which is free of the possibility of violence, we may wonder whether family would be sufficient without the state, which would reduce the relationship between ethics and politics to relationships within the family.

In searching for politics in Levinas's work, Simon Critchley is not 'convinced family is such a marvel', and questions the link between the pluralism of family and the political order.[220] He rightly casts doubt on the plausibility of the idea of politics modeled on family, and indeed we can see in OBBE that family

[217] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 300.
[218] Ibid., 178.
[219] Ibid., 306.
[220] Simon Critchley, 'Levinas's View of Politics', *Political Theory*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April, 2004), 172-185, 174.

and fecundity are no longer mentioned.[221] Rather, with his acknowledgement of the necessity of politics for justice, Levinas introduces another perception via which to associate ethics and politics, which is more exactly ethics as being the rationality of politics. This change of perception on the relation between ethics and politics successfully directs us to the dimension of transcendence of the immanent political system, which affirms the importance of politics and its moment of independence when justice is demanded.

To be more precise, in OBBE the relation between ethics and politics is articulated through the contextualization of the alliance between the Western philosophical tradition and the Western political tradition. The rationality of traditional Western politics is condemned by Levinas as being an egology or a logicalism where both the subject and the other become part of the totality, indifferently following rules and striving for their own interest. But in OBBE Levinas proposes that his politics, which attempts to break with the Western tradition, finds its rationality in ethical proximity, that is the restlessness of one who takes infinite responsibility for the other. The Levinasian politics does not begin with an egoistic political agent but with an ethical subject; and the motivation behind politics, the state, and its institutions are not for their own existence, but are an application of justice and responsibility for all. In Levinas's own words: nothing is outside of the control of 'the responsibility of one for the other'.[222]

The importance of this difference, or this development from TI to OBBE, can be seen from several vantage points that contribute to a new role for ethical

[221] Maternity is mentioned, though, from a very different perspective. Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 71.
[222] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 159.

subjectivity. First of all, ethics as the rationality of politics forges a dynamic relation between ethics and politics, which is to say, ethics and politics for justice are necessary to each other's fulfillment and are in a constant dynamic, moving towards the other and correcting the extremity of the other. This is an important development from his thinking of ethics as opposing politics (in the Western tradition) or as a model for politics (a newly proposed politics without detailed construction). Second, when politics is in a dynamic relation with ethics and has ethics as its rationality, as the conception set out in OBBE, we can see that institutions, courts and the state gain 'gravity';[223] at the same time, since their meaning is derived from ethics, they are continuously inspired and sustained by ethics—non-indifference to the other. In this dynamic relation, even when institutions and laws are objectively applied and have universal value for equality, the political mechanism, the determinism of the objective system, is constantly referred back 'to its motivation',[224] which is the ethical subjectivity with infinite responsibility from one to the other and disinterestedness towards the other.

Thus we can conclude, for Levinas's own politics, that ethical subjectivity as the rationality of politics, not seen as an image on which politics can model itself, confirms that politics is not derived from ethics; and this means that it has an independent meaning. To model politics on ethics would be to adhere to the common utopianism practice which idealizes the reality of complicated inter-personal relations, to ignore evil in society, and to wish that ethics could be the solution for all. But ethics as the rationality of politics admits the complex

[223] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 159.
[224] Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and Other*, 105.

relation between the other and the third, and acknowledges the important role of court and state to interrupt evil and unjust affairs. With the above discussion of the relationship between ethics and politics, and having established the former as the rationality of the latter, we have laid the foundations on which we can precede to examine the new role of ethical subjectivity in this new relationship, and see how ethics being politics' new rationality can lead to transcendence of the immanent features of politics.

Summary

We began the current chapter by articulating the need to look at the progression of Levinas's thinking from the singular null-site utopia subjectivity to a socio-political level of multiplicity. It is inevitable that, in reality, the ethical subject is not simply facing one other; it is rather in a complex net of relationships in society. We set out Levinas's discussion of the socio-political consequences of his ethics in both TI and OBBE, which led to our finding a clear development in Levinas's thinking on politics from his early work to his later magnum opus. Through following the development closely, and especially singling out key moments for the crucial conception on politics in each work, we pointed out that Levinas's view on politics in TI is mainly negative and not clearly distinguished from sociality. But in OBBE, we depicted the emergence of the necessity of politics which arises from the demand for justice from the third party. With politics, the state and its institutions being recognized as necessary for justice, politics in OBBE obtains its significance as making an independent contribution to ethics, without being reduced to a certain sociality.

We have singled out the concepts that mark the evolution of his ideas and compared their individual progression and their contribution to the final political thoughts accomplished in OBBE: third party, justice, and the relation between ethics and politics. With these comparisons, we managed to show that in TI the ethical subjectivity does not have clear political implications; but in OBBE, the ethical subjectivity is admitted as a member of the political togetherness, who is not only allowed to follow the law of politics, but also is acknowledged to be able to concern for his/her own 'lot'.[225]

However, we also pointed out that politics in Levinas is not simply a process of (re-)admitting the importance of the political mechanism. In acknowledging a dynamic movement between politics and ethics, Levinas renewed his perception of the relationship between ethics and politics, where ethics is claimed to be the rationality of politics. We pointed out that a new role for ethical subjectivity is expected from this newly established relation between ethics and politics, and this will be the main theme for our next chapter.

[225] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 161.

Chapter 4

The culmination of the development of subjectivity through the null-site movement of reduction: the utopian subjectivity of prophetic signifyingness

Introduction

In the previous chapters, we have explored the first two critical moments of the development of the ethical subjectivity in Levinas's work, and demonstrated the inner logic which connects them, which unfolded through the notion of utopia as null-site. Based upon our exploratory understanding of the concept of utopia in Levinas, we firstly located the initiation of a subjectivity established by Levinas through what we have termed the utopian dwelling, and which we further designated with the specific connotation of non-place, in order to explicate the non-ontological nature of the subjectivity of dwelling. Through the lens of non-place, the subjectivity in the dwelling is clearly distinguished from subjectivity in the history of Western ontological thought, which draws on the image of an individual taking a place in the whole, whether this whole is history, a system of knowledge, or Being. The subjectivity of interiority is a sensibility that is constantly separated from totality, specifically through its movements of separation and recollection, its relation with the elements and with the feminine, and a temporality that is not compatible with the historical time of totality.

By depicting the subject *chez soi*, forging its interiority in the site of dwelling, we established the initial phase of the development of ethical

subjectivity in Levinas, which more precisely is pre-ethical, and conditions the ethical phase by asserting the essentiality of a separated subjectivity whose morality does not rely on any *a priori* rules but on a sensibility that is built upon enjoyment and relationality. However, in OBBE, the concepts of both subjectivity and utopia are seen to undergo a fundamental change, which we captured in chapter three. Adopting the method of 'overbidding' from Miguel Abensour, we have traced, chronologically in Levinas's writings, a progressing intensification in his treatment of the notion of ethical utopia: from what Abensour designated the ethical utopia as encounter with the other and disinterestedness, based mainly in TI, to the overbidding outcomes of these two concepts, which become proximity and substitution in OBBE. We argued that this evolvement reaches an especially crucial threshold in the introduction of null-site, contending that utopia—in its far-reaching yet important form of *non-lieu* or 'null-site'—is a key moment in articulating how proximity and substitution signify an ethical subjectivity which exposes its interiority for the other. Through proximity, the constant movement of 'restlessness, null-site',[1] the subject gains its ethical significance as one-for-the-other; and through substitution, which 'empties me of all consistence', the ethical subjectivity becomes identified as 'one-in-the-place-of-another', where being for the other becomes the only way for the subject to be (Levinas cites Paul Celan: 'Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin').[2]

The development from the first phase of the subjectivity to the second, whose inner logic is more exactly seen as a non-dialectic movement through null-site, has been investigated in depth from two aspects: first, the source of

[1] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 82.
[2] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 99.

sensibility has been re-formulated through proximity to the other, which opens up to an argument that the sensibility of the subject is wholly sustained by his/her ethical responsibility for the other without any necessity of the dwelling as a site. [3] Second, instead of establishing the subjectivity through interiority(as what we have discussed in chapter one), the subjectivity in substitution is claimed to be in an exposure to the exterior, nullifying its recurring essence to the point of being in the place of another, and being passively obsessed by its responsibility for the other. The singularity of the subject in this situation is designated as its irreplaceability, where it is impossible for the subject to evade its responsibility for the others.[4]

With the introduction of the concept of null-site, Levinas's notion of ethical subjectivity has been developed in an overbidding manner to a level where the subject has no way to escape, even within its interiority, from being exposed to responsibility for the other. Interpreting Levinas's development of his notion of subjectivity through the lens of the null-site in OBBE also sheds new light on the development of key cognate themes from TI to OBBE. It is shown that, in an 'overbidding' manner, Levinas locates the essential issue in his opposition to the Western ontological tradition of defining subjectivity as being that of occupying one's site without justification. And the way to transcend this always-returning ontology is to contest it through the utopian movement, a null-site movement that disturbs the subject from the inside.

However, in chapter three we noted a further developmental step in Levinas's later philosophy where the null-site subject moves into a place of

[3] 'the proximity of the other is presented as the fact that the other is not simply close to me in space…but he approaches me essentially so far as I feel myself—in so far as I am…' Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press), 96.
[4] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 100.

togetherness (the place of 'politics') with the other and the third party. Levinas acknowledges that when the ethical subjectivity faces multiple others in the real socio-political realm, the others do not form a unified group but must be distinguished along the lines of relation between the other and the third party. The subject here faces the question: 'what have they done to one another?'[5] The other and the third party demand justice from the 'I' who needs to address the question and to act according to the history between the third party and the other. In order to meet this call of justice, Levinas maintains that the null-site subject becomes a conscious 'member of society' where everyone is assembled in the 'contemporaneousness' and 'continuity of space'[6] in order that there can be an equal footing for justice—which in the end forms a 'locus of justice', a place of togetherness.[7] Based upon our understanding of the Levinasian political ideas, we explored the relationship between ethics and this politics in Levinas, which we argued shows a development from TI to OBBE, from a mere reflection of ethical relation onto the social space, into a more constructive way of seeing ethics as the rationality of politics. As Levinas maintains: 'justice, society, the State, and its institutions, exchange and work are comprehensible out of proximity', that is the infinite approaching of the other and the perpetual increasing debt for the other.[8] Levinasian politics is intelligible only through this radical ethical responsibility where the subjectivity is established as one for the other.

Nevertheless, this acknowledgement of ethical subjectivity as the intelligibility of politics seems to place the radical ethical subjectivity on the

[5] Emmanuel Levinas OBBE, 157.
[6] Ibid., 157, 158.
[7] Ibid., 157.
[8] Ibid., 159.

same level of thematization as the political, thereby bringing about what we claimed to be the second critical moment of the development of ethical subjectivity, namely substitution, to an ontological site of the philosophical signifyingness. This development leads to an apparent contradiction between the non-ontological characterization of the ethical subjectivity established through the null-site movement, and the movement through which it takes its place in the ontological system of signification as the intelligibility of politics. Yet this contradiction gives rise to a possible way to show how the inner logic leads to the next critical moment of ethical subjectivity (or post-ethical subjectivity, to distinguish it from the subjectivity of substitution). We argue that this third phase of the development of subjectivity can be seen as a kind of culmination point of Levinasian subjectivity, a 'prophetic subjectivity'[9] attained by what we will call utopian signifyingness through the null-site movement of reduction.

In the current chapter, therefore, we will firstly acknowledge that with the claim of the necessity of politics and justice, and the indispensable accompaniment of 'the said', we confront an apparent contradiction, or a pressing challenge for ethical subjectivity in Levinas. We will specify and further amplify this contradiction through reference to Jacques Derrida's critique, for whom the philosophical discussions which are presented within the realm of the said, that is the philosophical 'assemble of terms and concepts', cannot reach the

[9] 'Prophecy would thus be the very psyche in the soul, the other in the same, and all of spirituality would be prophetic', Emmanuel Levinas, *OBBE*, 149. The prophetic subjectivity is similar to the Messanic subjectivity discussed by other Levinas scholars based upon his claim that 'each person acts as if though he were the messiah' (Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 90); for example, Silvia Richter, 'Language and Eschatology in the work of Emmanuel Levinas', in *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 54-73, 64. But here we focus mainly on Levinas's discussion in OBBE, where the concept of messiah has not been mentioned, which is the reason why we here use the term 'prophetic subjectivity'. Other Levinas scholars have also used the term 'prophetic subject', see William Young, *Uncommon Friendships: An Amicable History of Modern Religious Thought* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 160.

transcendental ethical subjectivity Levinas proposes. [10] To answer this important challenge, however, we will single out what we call the 'utopian characteristics' of the Levinasian philosophical said, tracing in Levinas a mode of philosophical signifyingness that, as we will seek to show, is able successfully to go beyond the coherent discourse with terms that 'place within being', and which hence interrupt the ontological site of the said of 'terms and concepts'.[11]

From a close examination of such efforts throughout his works, we will trace an evolvement of the utopian signifyingness through his transitional work between TI and OBBE to OBBE. We will explore the first of such intentions in Levinas, which can be clearly observed from his essay 'The Trace of the Other', where he shows a shift of attention in his philosophical discussion from the question of the absolute other to the inquiry into how a signifyingness of the other will not turn into pure representation of the face of the other.[12] We will observe the emergence of the importance in this essay of a newly established way of signifyingness, where Levinas admits that the transcendence of the other is disclosed in the thematization of the ethical significance, but argues for a signifyingness beyond this disclosure. We will see that in his discussion Levinas introduces an important notion: 'a third way' to identify this signifyingness. Since Levinas himself does not expand to any great extent on the notion of this third way of signifyingness, in order to understand it better we will bring in

[10] Peter Atterton, 'Levinas's skeptical critique of metaphysics and anti-humanism', in *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 41, Issue 4, winter 1997, 491-506, 511. It should be noted that the 'said' in Levinas can actually be 'said' in many different domains such as the political said as written political norms, the economic said as economical treaty etc. For the purposes of the present discusson, we confine ourselves here to the said within the written philosophical discussions.
[11] Peter Atterton, 'Levinas's skeptical critique of metaphysics and anti-humanism', 511.
[12] Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysic of Love* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 83.

Derrida's discussion on the ancient Greek notion of *khora*, which is similarly described as a third that is 'neither present nor absent'.[13]

We will use the concept of the thirdness of khora to illuminate the meaning of Levinas's third way of signifyingness, since they are similar in both suggesting something beyond the dialectical pairs of 'present' and 'absent', 'being' and 'non being'.[14] More importantly, we will discover that the thirdness of khora is further maintained as a nonplace, in which nothing has 'entitative' form, since according to Derrida it has 'no identity to fall back upon'.[15] This is going to be understood through the movement of the khora withdrawing from any attempt at disclosure while also denying the temptation to negate it into nothingness. By linking this two-edgedness to the main character of the Levinasian third way of signifyingness, we will designate the utopian nature of the third way of signifyingness in Levinas, which will be argued through a refusal to categorize it within dialectic logic, whether it is a place of confirmation or a place of negation.

After locating the early development of the utopian signifyingness in Levinas, we will then demonstrate that establishing a way of signifyingness through the nonplace third way risks giving the Levinasian ethical radicality a character of 'negative theology'.[16] In OBBE Levinas argues that the 'non-presence of infinity' in his work is beyond any negative theology, as the negativity of the latter is not enough to lead to an engagement ethically with the other which only

[13] John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 35.
[14] Ibid., 35.
[15] Ibid., 36.
[16] Negative Theology is used broadly similar to the notion of apophatic theology, but specifically used by Derrida to convey his ideas on religion from a deconstructive perspective. Harold Coward, Toby Foshay, *Derrida and Negative Theology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992).

defers their search for the divine.[17] However, the signifyingness of non-place third way that we find in the transitional works between TI and OBBE signifies mainly in a negative way. We will especially follow Diane Perpich, who casts doubt on Levinas's development of this third way, which, according to her, results in his essay 'Enigma and Phenomenon' in an equivocation on the signification of the ethical subjectivity; we will use this to explain in what sense the third way signifyingness leads to negative theology.[18]

Following the development of Levinas's treatment of the new way of signifyingness that can overcome the risk of negative theology, we will locate the succeeding stage in Levinas's relevant discussions in OBBE, especially on the topic of reduction. The non-place third way signifyingness does not make any appearance in OBBE, whose meaning is overbid into the new way of signifyingness as reduction. After discerning the Levinasian reduction from it in other phenomenologists, we will closely read Levinas's discussion in the section named 'Reduction' in OBBE to examine reduction as movement from said to saying based upon our previous understanding of the concepts of the said and the saying.

With our primary understanding of the meaning of reduction in the context of OBBE, we will focus the significance of reduction in Levinas through the lens of utopia, seeing it as a null-site movement that has the possibility to expose the ethical subjectivity to a level beyond ontological thematization. We will designate this site, which the null-site movement aims to empty or nullify, as the correlation between said and saying following Paul Ricoeur's discussion in

[17] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 12. Adriaan Peperzak, 'Levinas' Method', in *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 28, 1998, 110-125, 119.
[18] Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 114.

his essay 'A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas's *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*'.[19] And we will argue that the Levinasian reduction gives rise to a null-site movement, in the precise process of the diachronic disturbance on the site of thematization that breaches the correlation between said and saying, where the ethical significance is exhausted by the said and exposes the thematized subjectivity to a surplus of responsibility. This way of reading reduction not only helps to clarify Levinas's definition of reduction, but also indicates the deep-rooted association between this way of signifyingness and the ethical subjectivity beyond ontological thematization.

With the above exploration, we will be able to establish what is for our purposes a certain 'culmination' of the development of Levinasian subjectivity, that is the consequence of the movement of null-site reduction, which we can find in OBBE: namely, a prophetic subjectivity in the form of 'Here I am'. We will show the trajectory of how the 'reductive' aspect of the null-site movement initiates a constant progression of 'passing from prophecy to philology and transcending philology towards prophetic signification',[20] where the prophetic signification is designated by Levinas as a subjectivity that witnesses the 'personal order'.[21] The relevant notions of witness and personal order will be examined in detail, through which we will show the final phase of the development of subjectivity in Levinas: the prophetic subjectivity. The subject of the 'Here I am' in Levinas will be distinguished from a religious subjectivity

[19] Paul Ricoeur, ' A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas's *OBBE or Beyond Essence'*, in *Yale French Studies*, No. 104 *Encounters with Levinas*, 2004, 82-99, 84
[20] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 152
[21] Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 54.

defined by the subject's faith[22], and is rather in this case primarily ethical and conditioned by the subject's relation with 'illeity'. We will conclude by amplifying the inner logic that motivates the development from the subjectivity of substitution towards prophetic subjectivity.

Before we begin our establishment of the utopian signifyingness and prophetic subjectivity, we will firstly locate this questioning on the thematization of the ethical subjectivity as the intelligence of politics, in Levinas's account. We will explain this questioning in the form of a contradiction between the infinite nature of the ethical subjectivity, a saying that is beyond any said, and the ontological location of the thematization of the subjectivity, a said that says the saying.

1 The possible contra-diction within Levinas's signifyingness

As we pointed out in the introduction, with his acknowledgement of the necessity of justice for the third party and the political system to guarantee this justice, the radical ethical responsibility becomes the intelligibility of this political system. However, there is a possible contradiction between the radicality of the Levinasian ethical ethics and its signification in politics. This is indicated by Jacques Derrida in his contention that the appearance of the third 'reintroduces us, as if by force, into the place that ethics should exceed', which is to say, the ethical that transcends ontology is now fixed in a place of 'the visibility of the face, thematization, comparison, synchrony, system, co-presence',

[22] 'This relation is religious, exceeding the psychology of faith and of the loss of faith.' Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 168.

that is, the place of the system of language.[23] It seems evident that Levinas is aware of this contradiction and occasionally address it in his work, but as Stella Sandford rightly points out, it is after the publication of his essay 'The Trace of the Other' that Levinas shifts his focus to the exploration of such ethical signifyingness and establishes a different way of signifyingness that has the possibility to go beyond the restriction of philosophical language constrained within the ontological said.[24] We will now first locate the challenge of contradiction concerning the ethical signifyingness before we trace how Levinas addresses this questioning and development in his philosophy to overcome this contradiction.

As already discussed, in TI, Levinas establishes his ethics through the dimension of transcendence of the absolute other.[25] Sandford, before turning to discuss the shift of attention of Levinas to the possibility of the ethical signifyingness, explores the affinity of Levinas's metaphysical thinking with the Platonic tradition, which shows the innate problem of similar discourses that aim at infinity in Western philosophical history. According to Sandford, one can see that Levinas's idea of the absolute other is inspired by the notion of 'Good beyond being' in Plato.[26] She maintains that even though Plato only makes very brief reference to 'Good beyond being' in the *Republic*, Levinas takes this enigmatic concept to construe his notion of ethics for the absolute other.[27] Stated briefly, the notion of 'Good beyond being' in Plato is described as the source of the being and reality of objects, 'yet it is itself not that reality, but it is beyond it'

[23] Jaques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999), 63.
[24] Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, 75.
[25] See chapter 3.
[26] Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, 31.
[27] Ibid., 31.

which is ineffable.[28] This idea is developed in the Neo-Platonist discourse and becomes the notion of the One that exists, but 'has no name, nor is there any description or knowledge or perception or opinion of it'.[29] Levinas's notion of the absolute other that evokes infinite responsibility but cannot be captured by representation and language, is seen as following this tradition which from the beginning marks a clear restriction on the capability of language to reach out for transcendence.

This restriction on the intelligibility of 'the One' or the 'Good beyond being' appears to lead to a mystic reading of the 'Good beyond being', the one and the absolute other, gesturing to an ineffability beyond the 'realm of intelligence' where 'terms are ruled out' in dissimulation.[30] Yet Levinas from the commencement of his discussion of the absolute other as 'Good beyond Being' has refused the mystic form of expression and has given philosophy a positive role in its revelation. He emphasizes that his philosophy of ethics 'differs from the holistic thinking of traditional philosophy' inasmuch as language here is not used as giving a 'panoramic vision' but in the 'dynamics of question and answer'.[31] In TI Levinas argues that the 'Good beyond being' should be 'the definitive teaching' of philosophy, where he confirms certain philosophical discussions, for example Plato's discussion on 'Good beyond being' and Descartes's discussion on infinity, have successfully preserved the other.[32]

[28] Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love,* 31.
[29] Ibid., 32.
[30] Andrew Louth, *The Origin of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: OPU Oxford, 1997), 141.
[31] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 16.
[32] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 103.

Nevertheless, even in Plato and Descartes, philosophical discourses are still marked with terminology and conceptualization. As early as in 'Violence and Metaphysics', Derrida had argued that no language can be 'without phrases', which is to say, the philosophical discourse which inevitably uses language made with concepts cannot break from the immanence of its constitution.[33] This can be applied to the Levinasian philosophical discourse, which is presented to us in the form of a book and constituted through concepts in the form of phrases as such.

In his later work *Adieu To Emmanuel Levinas*, Derrida further claims that the Levinasian ethics, which is characterized by the saying of the infinity that is beyond any manifestation and only exists in a singular relationship between the subject and the non-representable face of the other, is incompatible with the dimension of the third, where representation and synchronization form a universal system of the said. This is to say, the radicality of the Levinasian ethics resists universalization; but universalization is unavoidably involved in the manifestation of ethics, especially in the language of its expression. In order to engage with this profound inner conflict in Levinas's writing, Derrida introduces a new notion to describe it: Contra-Diction, which in his words is designated as 'a terrible contradiction of the saying by the saying', 'Contra-Diction by itself', a 'contradiction internal to Saying'.[34]

Derrida has not dwelt on this notion of contra-diction at any great length, but from what follows his introduction of the concept, we can see that for him this notion challenges the infinity of the ethical saying of Levinas and points out

[33] Diane Perpich, 'A Singular Justice: Ethics and Politics between Levinas and Derrida', in Emmanuel Levinas: *Critical Assessment of Leading Philosophers*, Volume IV, *Beyond Levinas*, edited by Claire Katz with Lara Trout (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), 325-342, 331.
[34] Jaques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, translated by Bettina Bergo. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999), 118.

the impossibility for the saying to preserve its 'purity' of transcendence beyond the said. Derrida maintains that the 'face to face relation is immediately suspended' by the third party,[35] which can be understood from two aspects. First of all, according to Derrida, the face to face of ethical relationship implies a privacy that excludes the other others outside of this relationship, which he considers implies a certain moment of 'purity' in Levinasian ethics.[36] Moreover, Derrida indicates that this exclusive purity of the ethical saying does not engage with the importance of justice towards the third party. He argues that this private ethical relationship with its purity leads to possible violence to the third party, that is an indifference to the ethical demand of the third party, which in turn leads to possible unethical consequences. The ethical purity is questioned by the third party from the beginning of its formation, which leads to the fact that the ethical saying is questioned by the saying itself through unethical consequences experienced by the third party, a protest from within the ethical saying.

Further, the questioning of the third party does bring in the dimension of justice, which is described by Levinas as 'an incessant correction' of the proximity by the third party, where the objective judgment in the said ensures justice between the other and the third party.[37] However, Derrida points out, politics cannot avoid its fate of the 'sameness' and 'totalization', which infringes immediately on the singular ethical relation and does violence to the absolute

[35] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas,* 31.
[36] Ibid., 131.
[37] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 158.

alterity.[38] Despite that Levinas announces his politics being signified by ethics, the word that announces ethics as the intelligibility of politics is already a said, which breaches the 'promise of ethics', which is more exactly an 'oath before the letter'.[39] This can be understood further as the oath, conceived as being hostage to the other that is expressed in substitution, becoming letters in the law, where it is forced on the others and thus is never without 'violence'.[40]

The violence of justice towards the purity of ethics is designated as the second aspect of the Contra-Diction, where conflict is inevitably produced by the entering of the third party. Derrida thus formulates the contradiction within Levinas's narratives as the result from the irremittable hiatus between Levinasian ethics and politics, the dimension of the said and that of the saying. This hiatus results for Derrida in profound doubt being cast on Levinas's philosophical narrative, which is exactly located at this Contra-Diction.

Other Levinasian scholars have also confirmed this problem; for example, Bernasconi maintains that, if one designates the Western philosophical tradition as finite, and if Levinas's effort is designated as the infinite that endeavours to 'surpass it', then a dilemma appears since the argument for this infinity 'draws the thought of infinite back within the sphere of philosophy'.[41] What is needed to rescue Levinas from these charges is therefore to find in his work a signifyingness that redefines it beyond the philosophical thematization.

---

[38] Here we have followed Annabel Herzog's analysis on Derrida's discussion on the contradition between politics and ethics in Levinas. Annabel Herzog, 'Is liberalism "All we need": Levinas's politics of surplus', in *Political theory*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 204-227, 205.
[39] Ibid., 33.
[40] Ibid., 136.
[41] Robert Bernasconi, 'The trace of Levinas in Derrida', in *Derrida and Difference*, edited by Robert Bernasconi, David Wood (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 15.

We can find in Levinas an effort to establish a new way of saying for philosophical signification, which is more clearly framed subsequent to the publication of his earlier work TI. Stella Sandford rightly delineates this transition, where she points out that, after TI, especially in 'The Trace of the Other',[42] the question Levinas focuses on has shifted from 'postulating' absolute alterity, towards 'explaining how any alternative resists becoming like the relation of knowledge', which can be seen as a reflection of the contradiction we delineated above.[43] Indeed, in his writings after TI Levinas not only continues to propose an extravagant ethical signification, but also endeavours to address the possible contradiction of its significance. We can find in him a new way of signifyingness, a way of writing that can signify otherwise than the language of the 'system of sign' for the radicality of his ethics and infinity, and through which his ethical subjectivity can be informed as beyond simply being a theme in the philosophical narratives.[44]

According to Sandford, this endeavour is initiated in his essay 'The Trace of the Other' by his introduction of the notion of the 'trace' and the extension of its meaning in the concepts of illeity and enigma.[45] According to Sandford, through the term 'trace' and the ethical language that is constituted around it, Levinas illustrates 'how transcendence can signify in the order of immanence without thereby being compromised'.[46] This is to say, in order to address the

[42] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other' (1963), trans. A. Lingis, Mark C. Taylor (ed.) *Deconstruction in Context*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986.
[43] Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, 75. 1963
[44] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Langage and proximity', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 122.
[45] Ibid., 76.
[46] Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, 76.

problem of the possible questioning of Derrida's Contra-Diction in Levinas's writing, we need to look at how Levinas conceives his ethical signifyingness.

2 The third way signifyingness as nonplace: before OBBE

We agree with Sandford that it is from 'The Trace of Other' onwards that the problem of an ethical signifyingness and the self-reflective problem of philosophical writing become major themes in Levinas's discussion. In what follows, we will track the emergence of Levinas's concern with the issue in this essay to see how an ethical language is organized around the notion of trace, and how a third way of signifyingness is conceived, before we argue for the non-place characteristic of this third way of signifyingness.

2.1 The exceptional signifyingness of the trace

As already pointed out, the discussion of the self-reflective issue of ethical signifyingness is initiated by Levinas's introduction of the notion 'trace', which not only shows the initiation of Levinas's concern for how to signify infinity in finite language, but also shows a promising way to establish a unique philosophical language that withdraws from exposing the infinity but shows its effect in the ethical. Before undertaking a detailed investigation of the notion of trace, it should be noted that this notion already made its appearance in TI, albeit not yet singled out as a concept with importance.[47] Nevertheless, the notion of trace in TI does have similar implications as in its later significance.

[47] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 104.

In TI, the notion of the trace is mentioned as a trace of the creator in the creature.[48] To be more precise, during his discussion of separation and absoluteness, Levinas invokes the notion of creation in order to establish multiplicities that do not refer to a 'unity' for their significance. He argues for the independence of individuals whose identities are not derived from the system of totality. But he also searches for a way to establish a society with a certain multiplicity, a 'multiplicity not united in a totality'.[49] According to Levinas, it is the unique relationship between the creature and the process of creation that allows the creature to break the system of unity. According to him, in the process of creation, 'creation leaves the creature a trace of dependence', which he calls an 'exceptional dependence'.[50] This exceptional dependence does not locate the creatures inside of the system of the creation, but separates creatures from the creator, the infinity, so that the creator can keep its absoluteness.

The concept of trace here implies a relation between the two terms of a relation, where A is not seen as derived from B but where nevertheless there is not a total disconnection. In other words, the two terms are in an ambiguity of dependency and independency. This relationship is later explained by Levinas as analogous to the father-son relationship through the concept of fecundity, where the son, who is both created by the father yet separated from the father, can be said as carrying the trace of the father. But we argued in the last chapter that to construe sociality exclusively upon fecundity neglects the importance of politics, especially judgments of right or wrong, and in TI Levinas only touches upon but does not properly address the problem of ethical signifyingness.

[48] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 104.
[49] Ibid., 104.
[50] Ibid., 104.

In 'The Trace of the Other' the notion of trace becomes the core theme of the discussion, which, as Sandford points out, makes the ethical signifyingness possible.[51] In the first part of the essay Levinas continues the discussion that has been pursued in TI. But Sandford correctly points out that although Levinas seems to repeat, 'often in familiar phrases', what has already been discussed in TI, in 'The Trace of the Other', he shows a metamorphosis of the old concepts and introduces new ones.[52] In this way, Levinas turns from explaining what he 'attempts to do' to 'the more detailed explanation of how' his writing can do it.[53]

In the first section of 'The Trace of the Other', under the title 'Being and the Same',[54] Levinas continues his questioning of the Western philosophical tradition following his discussion in TI.[55] The totality that demands unity ignores the alterity of the other and denies any difference other than the categories referring to the totality. Levinas here especially points out a notion of the trace in the Western philosophical tradition, a notion he strongly opposes, which recovers the irreversible past and is taken as a sign 'that ensure[s] the discovery and unity of the world'.[56] He criticizes the notion of a trace that signifies the past, together with a language in which everything is retrieved from the past and recovered in the reasoning of the present. He contends that the philosophy which utilizes this kind of language is a 'philosophy of being', which refuses any transcendence of the 'movement without return'.[57]

---

[51] Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, 76.
[52] Ibid., 75.
[53] Ibid., 76.
[54] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', in *Deconstruction in Context,* edited by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 345-359, 345.
[55] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 274.
[56] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', 345.
[57] Ibid., 345.

Levinas then turns his focus to the concept of the 'movement without return', and begins his search for an ethical language that can remain open to transcendence. Levinas here differentiates between two ways that philosophers have approached transcendence; one being the way where 'transcendence of being' is captured by language and logic, which is claimed as the 'only one' for philosophy.[58] The other way is what Levinas calls 'the enigmatic message of the beyond being'; it is this tradition he invokes in locating his own language of ethical radicality.[59] He repeats what he has claimed before, that the Good beyond being is 'foreign to definition and limit, place and time'.[60] But he poses the question of whether, if this 'unrevealed' beyond being cannot become part of knowledge, it must renounce all philosophical discussion.[61] In his own terms: 'would transcendence be possible only for a completely blind touch, or for a faith attached to non-signification?'[62] He continues by inquiring whether there exists a signifyingness, a language of signification that can avoid enclosing the infinity of the radical ethical Good into the signification of the same.

In order to address these questions, Levinas goes on to recall his differentiation between desire and need, which initiates the relationship between the subject and the other. The subject who is infinitely responsible for the other, is in a relationship of desire with the absolute other who is not a complement to the self's lack and will not be 'concerted into the same'.[63] Importantly, going further than in TI, Levinas describes the process of the

[58] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', 345.
[59] Ibid., 347.
[60] Ibid., 347.
[61] Ibid., 347.
[62] Ibid., 348.
[63] Ibid., 350.

movement of desiring as 'a movement unto another'.[64] He acknowledges that to describe this movement, an analysis of the other is needed which leads to a manifestation of the other. This is to say, in the philosophical discourse regarding the significance of the other, the other cannot avoid being fixed in the disclosure of language. Levinas especially associates this revelation of the other in language with the phenomenological tradition where this other is signified as 'a text by its context', as a signification at its horizon. Following Merleau Ponty, Levinas points out that 'the other is present in a cultural whole' and is disclosed by a linguistic gesture.[65]

However, Levinas stresses, the 'epiphany of the other' has a signification beyond merely a signification 'received from the world'.[66] This is its ethical significance, which is 'independent of' worldly signification, a signification which has not been explored by other phenomenologists.[67] In this ethical significance, the showing of the other is not a sign that comes from a world as the context of its signification, which leads to that the philosophical language trying to capture the world behind the face is inevitably a failure. But for Levinas, this absence should not be seen as complete dissimulation; it is rather signified by a trace, a trace that is not conceived as a sign in the Western tradition. To be more precise, in order to establish a way that can reveal the 'Absent'[68] without letting it be encompassed by the order of being, Levinas introduces the exceptional signifyingness of the trace.

---

[64] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', 350.
[65] Ibid., 351.
[66] Ibid, 351.
[67] Ibid., 351.
[68] In 'The Trace of the Other', refering to the absence of the infinity in revelation, Levinas mentions it both as an absence, and the Absent. Here in our discussion, we follow his disinction. Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', 354, 355.

To understand the exceptional signifyingness of the trace, we need first to look closely at the role of the notion of the Absent. Levinas indicates that the face of the absolute other as Absent is to be understood as in 'abstract', but an abstractness different from the abstract 'sense data' that waits to be processed by consciousness in the meaning-formulation process of the empiricist tradition. The abstractness of the trace is an absolute abstraction that refuses to be 'obtained by any logical process starting from the substance of beings'.[69] In other words, the trace, 'ab-stract(s)' itself from beings of the world, 'withdraws from them'. However, the face that the subject encounters and represents in his/her said comes from the Absent towards the subject.[70] This is to say, the Absent has a meaning in the face,[71] where the ethical obligation is conveyed. But in all this, the Absent itself cannot be disclosed. This means that the Absent 'signifies' only through its trace on the face beyond revelation and dissimulation, a trace of an 'utterly bygone past'.[72] Jill Robbins comments that the notion of trace here needs to be understood as 'nonphenomenonal', a non-present, 'yet not as fading presence either',[73] which underscores the difficulty of conveying the meaning of the trace in philosophical language.

Moving to focus on the exceptional signifyingness of the trace, it is closely connected to the temporality of a past, which is said by Levinas to be a temporality which cannot be recalled by human memory in a representation of the present. More exactly, as indicated above, the concept of trace in traditional usage is a sign that represents the past, the past that is in the chain of cause and

[69] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', 346.
[70] Ibid., 346.
[71] Ibid., 346.
[72] Ibid., 346.
[73] Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago: The University of chicago Press, 1999), 28.

effect. This can be shown in the examples of the trace of the crime, which for the detective reveals the work that the criminal has done, the effect of past activities.[74] But the trace in Levinas does not follow a lineal order of the world, that is, the chain of cause and effect. Rather, in the case of the exceptional signifyingness of the trace, the chain of order is broken where the past cannot be retrieved from its effect in the present. Levinas claims that the trace is 'outside of every project of which it would be the aim'.[75] The trace does not reside in the lineal temporality where the past can be recaptured; it rather 'disturbs the order of the world' and importantly this disturbance cannot be repaired. In this disturbance, the formal continuity of time is breached where the past is 'sealed' and 'irreversible'.[76]

Jill Robbins considers that in Levinas the exceptional signifyingness of the trace offers a possibility of a 'non-totalizing language', where trace signifies a way of 'autosignification', in Levinas's own words, a signification 'according to oneself'.[77] This is to say, the trace does not signify certain words or themes in our symbolic signs in that 'the sign entails indirection'.[78] Robbins explains that the trace signifies without necessity 'as structure'[79] in which the trace becomes 'qualities or attributes'.[80] The trace cannot be revealed in the language of assimilation where the other becomes a quality of the same. However, it can be signified 'in the trace of a bygone past'.[81] As we look closer at this exceptional

[74] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Meaning and Sense', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 33-64, 61.
[75] Ibid., 61.
[76] Ibid., 62.
[77] Autosignification in Levinas's own words is *kath'auto*, 'according to itself'. Jill Robbins, *The Altered Reading*, 25; Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 296.
[78] Jill Robbins, *The Altered Reading*, 25. 'For the sign entails indirection, an obliqueness between sign and referent'.
[79] Ibid., 25.
[80] Ibid., 26
[81] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', 355.

signification of the trace, it is clear that the trace is not the trace of the face that is encountered by the subject, since the one who leaves the trace can never be encountered by the subject. The subject does not have a direct relationship with this bygone past, whence the trace in its signifyingness cannot be seen as emanating from the face of the other in direct encounter.

The source of the trace is rather rendered by Levinas as 'illeity', which is a neologism introduced by Levinas to indicate a third dimension other than the two dimensions in the I-other relation.[82] For Levinas, illeity can never have a face-to-face relationship with the subject, which thus can never be a phenomenon to be visible for the subject. Levinas further designates this as an 'enigma', which however is not simply an enigma dissimulated mysteriously from consciousness.[83] To understand in what sense the trace does not lead to a direct signification of the absent, we now move on to an examination of the enigma of illeity.

2.2 The enigma of illeity beyond revelation of the signified

Levinas introduces a neologism to designate the source of the trace: this is illeity, a concept which we encountered earlier, and which according to Michael Morgan means a certain 'that-ness' or 'He-ness'.[84] If the trace is to be seen as taking the place of the sign in a normal system of signification, illeity is the signified where the signification originates. However, in the expression the 'trace is the trace of illeity', the relationship between trace and illeity is nowise seen as a relationship of belongingness. This is because seeing the trace as an attribute belonging to

[82] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', 355.
[83] Ibid., 355.
[84] Michael Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 148.

illeity entails that the trace and illeity would be in contemporariness with each other, where they both become part of the representation.

Looking at the secondary literature on the concept of illeity, to many Levinas scholars, illeity is another name for God. For example, C. Fred Alford and Robert Bernasconi claim directly that 'illeity is God' and 'illeity is in the place of God in Levinas' philosophy'.[85] We will in the latter part of this chapter investigate how Levinas uses the notion of illeity as God to single out a dimension of religious subjectivity other than the subject in the face-to-face ethical relation with the singular other, and the subject in the political dimension with the third party. For now, to understand the significance of the notion of illeity, we can see that this dimension of religion singled out by illeity is not a dimension which describes an almighty God, but will be argued rather to be a condition for both the ethical relationship between the subject and the other and the political relationship among the multiplicities. First of all, as Bernasconi points out, illeity is the 'condition of the irreversibility of the face to face'.[86] This is to say, the subject is facing an infinite responsibility even when the face is visible in politics since the face of the neighbour comes from the illeity. The subject is infinitely responsible towards the illeity, which never can be assimilated to the knowledge system; illeity never can be part of the system of visibility. Illeity enables the surplus meaning of the ethical over its immanent meaning in its representation, which maintains the radical responsibility for the subject, which will be explained in detail shortly.

[85] Robert Bernasconi, 'The Third Party: Levinas on the intersection of the ethical and the political', in Emmanuel Levinas: *Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers,* Volume 1,edited by Claire Katz with Lara Trout (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 51.
[86] Ibid., 51.

Illeity also makes Levinasian politics possible, which can be seen from Levinas's usage of 'God' for the idea of attaining equality in the system of justice, as is argued in OBBE. In the last chapter, we discussed the difference between the concept of illeity and the third party. To recall our discussion, according to Bernasconi, the thirdness ('He-ness') of illeity is different from the third party, but they are associated in the sense that they address the same problem, that is the problem of justice and equality. We have pointed out above that illeity also concerns politics and is essential to Levinas's depiction of it. This can be seen from Levinas's claim that 'thanks to God' (illeity), I can be another for the others.[87] This is to say, it is by God's grace that the subject can have his/her right for his/her equal position in politics. And it is when the subject can take part in equality within the political system, that justice can be achieved and the political system is completed.[88]

Thus illeity can be seen as the condition for both ethics and politics in Levinas, which however does not result in obtaining any particular knowledge or delineating any phenomena concerning illeity. Illeity is rather called 'enigma', which 'cannot serve as a point of departure for demonstration'.[89] That is to say, illeity cannot be signified by the system of language in philosophical discussion. However, the enigma of illeity is not the result of the activity to 'obscure' a phenomenon either.[90] To be more exact, Levinas maintains that enigma does not denote 'mysterious islands of the irrational' forming an area claimed by faith.[91] Enigma that does not 'appear within the world' stands in contrast to both

[87] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 159.
[88] Robert Bernasconi, 'The Third Party', 52.
[89] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 12.
[90] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Enigma and Phenomenon', in *Basic Philosophical writings*, 65-77, 73.
[91] Ibid., 73.

nothingness and phenomenon. According to Levinas, enigma 'signifies itself without revealing itself' and it departs from consciousness but 'not to dissimulate itself'.[92] This is to say, rather than being nothingness and refusing to be revealed, enigma and trace formulate a new way of signifyingness. And in this sense, Levinas's phenomenology replaces the Husserlian phenomenological process which is based on the sign, the phenomenon. Levinasian phenomenology does not begin with a phenomenon as in the Husserlian tradition; it instead begins with an enigma.[93] As Merold Westphal points out, '(I)n place of the sign Levinas would put the trace', giving the following correlations: 'sign : phenomenon = trace : enigma'.[94]

Westphal also points out that the way to locate a correspondence between the concept of trace and illeity in Levinas is to establish another type of meaning-endowment process: the meaning revealed by the trace comes not by representation but by a certain 'semantic disturbance'.[95] Westphal explains that this semantic disturbance can be seen as 'an entry into a given order of another order which does not accommodate itself with the first'.[96] The signification does not happen within the fixed order of phenomenon but always at the border between it and an order (now in the sense of command) from the enigma. In this sense, the correspondence between the trace and illeity as enigma is seen as a third way of relation beyond simple dissimulation of one from the other or simple disclosure of one by the other.

[92] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Enigma and Phenomenon', 77.
[93] Ibid. 65.
[94] Merold Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 34.
[95] Merold Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, 33.
[96] Ibid., 33.

2.3 The ethical signifyingness in the third way as nonplace

Levinas describes this ethical signifyingness through the trace, illeity and enigma, as a 'third way' of signifyingness, which is something other than both disclosure and dissimulation. In his own words:

> The other proceeds from the absolutely Absent, but his relationship with the absolutely Absent from which he comes does not indicate, does not reveal, this Absent; and yet the Absent has a meaning in the face. The signifyingness is not a way for the Absent to give itself a blank in the presence of the face—which would again bring us back to a mode of disclosure. The relationship which goes from the face to the absent is outside every relation and dissimulation, a third way excluded by these contradictories. How is this third way possible? But are we not still seeking that from which the face proceeds as though it were a sphere, a place, a world?[97]

From the above quotation, one can observe the necessity to explore what are the two other ways of signifyingness that are refuted by Levinas as excluding the third way. We will first of all look at the signifyingness in the sense of the process of disclosure, which can be seen as essential to more usual phenomenological discourse. For example, already in his discussion about the relationship between consciousness and the world, Husserl argues that 'the world is opened up and made meaningful or disclosed'.[98] This is to say, the function of consciousness is disclosive and the process of disclosure is a process initiated by consciousness. We can see that the movement of disclosure presupposes a separation between the subject and the world, presupposing the primary relation between the subject and the world is a relation of 'conscious of', where the world is only the

[97] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Meaning and Sense', in *Basical Philosophical Writings*, 33-64, 60.
[98] Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 144.

content of subject's consciousness, including the other person. In other words, the process of disclosure is innately knowledge-based and is included in the intentional activity of mind where the object is assimilated to the subjective mind, conditioned by the acknowledgement of the objectivity of the world.

Disclosure can also be found playing an important role in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, against whom Levinas's critique of disclosure would also be targeted. According to Dermot Moran, it is Heidegger's attentiveness to the appearing or disclosure of things that makes his philosophy part of the phenomenological movement, despite the fact that he develops the notion of disclosure beyond the theoretical intentional analysis in Husserl, towards a revelation of being in general.[99] To be more exact, Heidegger traces the ancient Greek word 'aletheia', which means truth, through its etymological connection with dis-closing, that is 'making manifest' of which in some sense 'lies hidden'.[100] For him, disclosure indicates a process of letting 'an entity be seen from itself,' which shows that disclosure does not presuppose the separation between the subject and the object where the object is to be matched in the mode of cognition; rather, the disclosure of the object is immediate.[101] Heidegger gives an example to explain this further: the process of the disclosure of a hammer's nature is not that 'I' represent the reality of the hammer in thought; it is rather a direct grasp of the 'truth of the matter' when 'I' hold the hammer.[102] But this disclosure can be covered up in the traditional way of communication centred on knowledge and representation, which is to say, when the truth is passed along

[99] Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 194.
[100] Ibid, 230.
[101] Ibid., 230.
[102] Ibid., 230.

and mediated by knowledge, it loses its urgency in disclosure, and does not have any 'original power'.[103]

Even though from the above examination, we already see that the notions of disclosure in Husserl and in Heidegger are different, in his search for the unique way of ethical signifyingness Levinas disagrees with both. As Merold Westphal points out, Levinas 'teleologically suspends a whole tradition' of disclosure of the other that 'culminates' in Husserl and Heidegger.[104] The Husserlian intentional analysis, which is based on consciousness, defines disclosure wholly based on the notion of 'conscious of', which to Levinas does not transcend the intellectualism where the 'existential engagement of human beings', especially the ethical engagement, are not counted.[105] In this way of signifyingness, the other is defaced and is made into a theme, in which process the other loses his/her ethical uniqueness.

In his earlier critique of Husserl which we have already briefly discussed in chapter one, Levinas praises Heidegger's approach, which, rightly turns away from Husserl's theoretical focus, and 'is grounded in a fundamental ontology of the essential engagement of the human beings in the world'.[106] However, Levinas also criticizes the Heideggerian way of disclosure which does not break from the totality of being. For Levinas, the constant referring back to being of the Heideggerian disclosure remains a process of the 'totalization' of the same.[107] Therefore, Levinas opposes both the Husserlian way of disclosure and

[103] Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology,* 230.
[104] Merold Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, 48.
[105] Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Edmound Husserl's Phenomenology*, 105. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Is Ontology Foundamental?', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 1.
[106] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Is Ontology Foundamental?', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 1-13, 2.
[107] John Llewelyn, *The Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience: A Chiasmic Reading of Responsibility in the Neighborhood of Levinas, Heidegger and Others*, 170.

Heideggerian disclosure, and considers them both as establishing a philosophical language within the realm of the said without any possibility to reach out for the saying.

For the second mode of signifyingness as dissimulation, one can directly observe its reference to Heidegger. J. J. Kockelmans points out that in Heidegger, in the process where 'truth comes to pass as non-concealment' there are times when beings are dissembled and are in concealment.[108] In fact, as already mentioned, the moment of disclosure in Heidegger presupposes a moment of dissimulation, which can be seen from his claim that truth is manifested by being 'brought out of concealment'.[109] This concealment is described a process of disguising truth, which however is only an auxiliary process that presupposes the essential movement of disclosure of truth. Levinas argues that the way of dissimulation is seen as 'again bring(ing) us back to a mode of disclosure'.[110] This is to say, dissimulation as negation to disclosure does not have independent meaning. It does not make a total break from the all-inclusive significance of being, but is only a suspension of the signifyingness of it.

Based on the above understanding of the ways of signifyingness as disclosure and dissimulation within the phenomenological tradition exemplified by Husserl and Heidegger's relevant conceptualizations, and Levinas's critiques of them, we need to turn to explore what Levinas proposes for a way of signifyingness that can preserve his ethics with its radicality as well as the transcendent status of his ethics. Levinas claims that the third way is 'excluded' by the contradiction between dissimulation and disclosure. To the question of

[108] J. Kockelmans, *On the Truth of Being: Reflection on Heidegger's later Philosophy*, 180.
[109] Paul Gorner, *Heidegger's Being and Time: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6, 30.
[110] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Meaning and Sense', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 33-64, 60.

whether such a third way is possible, he responds with the counter-question: 'are we not still seeking that from which the face proceeds as though it were a sphere, a place, a world?'[111] Levinas implies that the third way should not proceed from a place, which points ahead to the possible nonplace feature of this third way signifyingness.

We pointed out in the introduction that Levinas has barely given any further positive accounts of the signifyingness of the third way. To develop the nonplace feature of the third way, we therefore brought in Jacques Derrida's discussion of a similar concept of the 'third genus' during his analysis of the khora, which is intriguingly referred by him as the notion of nonplace. We will use Derrida's discussion to shed light on the similar concept of a third way in Levinas.

To look briefly at Derrida's discussion of khora, Derrida is inspired by Plato's notion of khora and aims through his reading of it to develop a notion that is beyond the dialectic categories of being and non-being. It is a familiar observation that khora[112] is an enigmatic concept that first appears in Plato's *Timaeus*.[113] Without going into the history of the discussion of khora or a full-length analysis of Derrida's adaption of this concept for his own philosophy, which is beyond the aim of the present discussion, we will only look briefly at how khora can be seen as a nonplace that is 'neither present nor absent'.[114] As John D. Caputo points out, Derrida, through bringing forward the notion of khora

[111] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Enigma and Phenomenon', 60.
[112] Khora is also spelt as *chora*. Dana Miller, *The Third Kind in Plato's Timaeus* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 122.
[113] Mark Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago & London: The University of Chiacago Press, 1992), 255.
[114] Jacques Derrida, 'Khora' In *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 89-130, 89.

in Plato, turns our attention from the more well-known part of Plato's philosophy where the visible and the invisible are clearly distinguished, to a 'third kind' which 'falls outside' of this distinction.[115] To be brief, the term 'khora' in Plato has two meanings: place. and third kind.[116] For our discussion, we will only engage with khora as third kind, which is designated by Plato as a name to defy a binary logic where 'yes or no' are the only answers. Derrida sees this concept and its status as a thirdness that is other than absence and presence, as holding the possibility of showing a way to 'drift to the edge of philosophy', that is 'beyond or beneath philosophy's grasp'.[117]

Similar to Levinas's effort, Derrida tries through khora to establish a philosophical signifyingness that goes 'beyond categorical oppositions' of disclosure and dissimulation. Khora as third kind is a margin of identity that is 'derived from the logics that is logic other than logos.'[118] This is to say, the traditional logic of being implies unification and a system of ordered language. Yet the logic of khora is the logic of 'neither this nor that', logic beyond what ontological discourse demands.[119] Hence Derrida assigns to khora the status of nonplace, as it does not have a place in ontological discourse, and is therefore a third kind, a 'spacing without place', a void or nonplace.[120] For Derrida, the nonplace of khora shows 'a desert' in the middle of the place, which is more exactly an 'effaced' place that avoids being embodied and refuses to be named with reference to Being.

---

[115] Jacques Derrida, John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in A Nutshell* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 84.
[116] Dana Miller, *The Third Kind in Plato's Timaeus*, 122.
[117] Jacques Derrida, John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in A Nutshell* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 84.
[118] Jaques Derrida, ' Khora' In *On the name*, 89.
[119] Ibid., 89.
[120] Ibid., 89.

However, it also needs to be borne in mind that although the nonplace status of the khora indicated by Derrida offers an example for us to understand the third way, Levinas's establishment of third way signifyingness is to be seen different from Derrida's discussion of nonplace. This is because Derrida does not aim in his explication at an ethical radicality. Therefore, for the present discussion, we need to bring our understanding of the nonplace mode of signifyingness from Derrida's explanation of khora back to Levinas.

We argue that the third way signifyingness in Levinas can be seen similarly as having the characteristic of nonplace, as in his writing on ethical radicality and a subjectivity informed by infinity for its responsibility for the other, the textuality faces an inner questioning, a void in the middle of the text where everything is understood. This void suggests that the textuality is not the end of the philosophical signifyingness. As Maria Theodorou points out, khora brings Derrida's reading of *Timaeus* to a 'dizziness' as its emptiness leads to a groundlessness.[121] This can be seen as similar to the third way of Levinas's signifyingness, that signifies through the enigma of the trace. Nevertheless, more importantly, the enigma of the trace brings to the Levinas reader not merely a moment of dizziness within consciousness; much more than this, it intends to show a groundlessness of the self-contention of the subject, and exposes her/him to a responsibility for the other. In this way, the endeavour of Levinas's third way signifyingness is shown through the nonplace as an opening for the possibility for ethical subjectivity.

[121] Maria Theodorou, 'Space as Experience: Chores/Choros', *AA files*, No. 34 (Autumn 1997), 45-55, 47.

Yet we will see that the negative formulation of the description of the trace and enigma is evident throughout Levinas's construction of this new signifyingness. The question 'what is it?' is forbidden to be asked, inasmuch as the enigma that refuses to be understood negates any place in reference to which this question can legitimately be posed. But such an injunction against asking the question 'what is it' is to be seen as giving rise to evasions of the significance of the ethical radicality. This especially can be seen from Levinas's essay 'Enigma and Phenomenon' where, in order not to make any claim on the infinity of the ethical signification, Levinas finds himself trapped within a language of equivocation, which risks neglecting the ethical radicality. Indeed, the third way of 'neither nor' does not offer enough positive constructive force for a subjectivity to be radically responsible. The negativity of the nonplace mode of third way signifyingness therefore faces certain difficulties, which will be elaborated in the following section.

2.4 The problem: the nonplace ethical signifyingness and the risk of negative theology

From the above analysis, we have seen that the third way signifyingness in Levinas can be understood through the notion of nonplace, which designates its nature as 'neither… nor…', and does not accommodate any categorization. However, in this section we will show that the signifyingness seen as nonplace risks leading towards a negative theology, which undermines the radicality of the ethical subjectivity. Yet we will also argue that this risk motivates the emergence of the new signifyingness as a null-site movement of reduction in

OBBE. We will firstly follow Diane Perpich and John Caputo's relevant discussions to specify the problems that third way signifyingness faces.

In her *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, Diana Perpich indicates that in Levinas's essay 'Enigma and Phenomenology', which for our purposes falls within the period when Levinas develops the ethical language of nonplace and the third way, the signification of the face and absolute other is put in an equivocating situation. Through a close reading of 'The Trace of the Other' and 'Enigma and Phenomenon', she points out that in these publications, Levinas is not questioning 'whether the subject can' have an experience that 'pass[es] through the mediation of concepts or the intentional aim of consciousness'; rather Levinas is asking, how can such possibility be 'within philosophy itself'.[122] She argues that with this change, Levinas 'mitigates' his previous statement that insists on the non-phenomenality of the face;[123] and this mitigation is achieved through the narratives of ambiguity that we can find in the essay.

Perpich points out that Levinas surprisingly, almost shockingly, denies the absoluteness of the face and acknowledges that the signification of the disturbance of the face of the other to the self in its announcement is reabsorbed into 'a world, a history'.[124] To exemplify this point, she reads Levinas's re-account of encountering a stranger, where Levinas, first of all, and as he did in TI, affirms 'the radical and irreducible character' of the absoluteness of the other.[125] However, Levinas admits that to tell the story of this encounter 'is to make of it a moment of a larger order', where the absoluteness of the face is 'denied'.[126]

[122] Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, 111.
[123] Ibid., 111.
[124] Ibid., 114.
[125] Ibid., 113.
[126] Ibid., 114.

Perpich then continues by pointing out that Levinas's language in 'Enigma and Phenomenon' is like 'diplomatic language or sexual innuendo', namely of an 'altogether equivocal kind'.[127] She demonstrates that Levinas's language in the essay seldom asserts its meaning in the declarative mode, but very often by conditional sentences. Indeed, one can observe, the signification of the enigma that preserves the radicality of ethics is raised by questions, and by conditionality. Perpich cites the phrases: 'What would be needed for such a disturbance', 'Everything depends on the possibility'.[128] Moreover, Perpich shows that Levinas does not give definite answers to the questions that he raises, and nor does he confirm that this conditionality is definitely met. She claims that the enigma the third way signifies is only 'desolate and empty'.[129]

With her reading of 'Enigma and Phenomenon', Perpich considers that the ethical signification of Levinas is mainly told in a 'negative fashion'.[130] This negative mode of signifyingness, for Perpich, appears to make the notion of trace, enigma, and illeity in Levinas 'like the God of negative theologies'. [131] Not only Perpich, but other Levinas scholars as well have also associated the Levinasian third way signifyingness with negative theology. John Caputo compares Levinas and Derrida in their efforts to 'say the impossible', and associates Levinas's means of reaching the infinity with Derrida's negative theology. Negative theology is here treated as deriving from the Neo-Platonist tradition, which is 'critical of all rational formulations as inadequate to what they intend to

[127] Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, 114.
[128] Ibid., 114.
[129] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Enigma and Phenomenon', 70.
[130] Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, 62.
[131] Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, 19.

describe'.[132] For this negative theological tradition, language, especially philosophical language, cannot positively address anything that is beyond logos. Thus, for anything that is beyond logos, it is only through negation that we can have a glimpse of it. This can be understood from Derrida's own explication, in which he suggests that when negativity is used to go beyond logos and capture something that is beyond being, this negativity is pushed to the limit, and resembles 'an apophatic theology' where the name of god is the 'hyperbolic effect' of the negativity.[133] This is to say, the absent and the absolute negation of otherness leads to a mysticism where the one who cannot be named is put under the category of the divine.[134] In his approach to the third way, Levinas relies heavily on negation: it is neither disclosure nor dissimulation, which is why he has sometimes been understood as not having broken with the negative theological tradition.

However, in OBBE Levinas clearly rejects the idea that his thinking is fundamentally aligned with the category of negative theology. In this later work Levinas distinguishes his philosophical project from negative theology, and claims that his attempt to signify a dimension of infinity cannot be counted as 'a figure of negative theology'.[135] This is because, importantly, the aim of Levinas's effort to signify infinity is not to capture infinity beyond being; it is rather, through infinity, to achieve an establishment of the ethical subjectivity and hence to confirm each one's infinite responsibility for the other. In Levinas's own

[132] William Franke, 'Apophasis and the turn of Philosophy to Religion: From Neoplatonistic Negative Theology to Postmodern Negation of Theology', in *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* (2006) 60:61-76, 64.
[133] Jacques Derrida, 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials', *Derrida and Negative Theology*, edited by Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, 76.
[134] 'God's name would suit everything that may not be broached, approached or designated, except in an indirect and negative manner.' Jacques Derrida, 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials', 76.
[135] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 12.

words, ' (A)ll the negative attributes which state what is beyond the essence become positive in responsibility'.[136]

In OBBE, Levinas introduces the null-site movement in the signifyingness of reduction to correct any connotations of negative theology that may be thought to derive from his philosophy. To see the inner motivation from nonplace signifyingness to null-site signifyingness, we need to recall our distinction between the meaning of non-place and null-site in chapter two. As we have argued, the term 'non-place' does not avoid the connotation of negation of place, where it risks resulting in nothingness. The equivocation of 'yes, no, perhaps' also sees a looming denial of ethical signification, thus voiding it of meaning. However, we made the argument that null-site captures the signifyingness of 'otherwise than being' which, through the positive phase of the nullification process in taking on responsibility without denial, is capable of transcending the abyss of nothingness, where the negativity of the 'null' is more importantly confirming the 'for the other'. In the next section we examine the development of Levinas's ethical signifyingness as reduction in detail, which avoids the risk of falling into negative theology through conceiving negation to be a constant movement of the null-site for the radical responsibility for the other.

[136] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 12.

3 Signifyingness understood through the lens of the null-site movement of reduction

We begin by examining the Levinasian 'reduction' we have been referring to, before exploring its null-site character. With the signifyingness seen through the lens of the null-site movement, we will then designate the third and final phase of development of ethical subjectivity in Levinas, which is to be seen as a prophetic subjectivity shown by this null-site movement. We will argue that prophetic subjectivity as witness to an order from illeity in the form of 'Here I am' holds a surplus of responsibility over one's 'civic' responsibility,[137] defined by political institutions and thematization in the ontological system. In this way, the subjectivity can preserve the infinity of the ethical responsibility whence Levinasian subjectivity can again be deemed a genuine ethical subjectivity.

3.1 The Levinasian reduction

Looking first of all at the Levinasian reduction in OBBE, one needs to distinguish it from the reduction as a methodology of phenomenology in other phenomenologists. We should acknowledge that Levinas adopts the term 'reduction' from Husserl, which is the key method of Husserl's phenomenology. Levinas claims that reduction is a technique that 'discovers the terrain for phenomenology', bringing philosophy 'back to the appearing of phenomenon'.[138] But as Jeffrey Kosky points out, Levinas's reduction is ultimately different from Husserl's, as their reductions point in two different directions. [139] For Husserl,

[137] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 32.
[138] Jeffrey Kosky, *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion*, 55.
[139] Ibid., 56.

reduction designates a process of bracketing 'our entire belief in the reality of the world', in pursuit of a pure or absolute consciousness.[140] Levinas criticizes such an aim for reduction, which for him 'takes all relations to function in a theoretical and intentional manner'.[141] He maintains that the Husserlian reduction makes an abstraction of the phenomenon, reducing it to its representation in consciousness, which not only ignores the concrete world of living, but also more importantly does not open up towards the other.

The Levinasian reduction, which is developed mainly in OBBE, is seen by some Levinas scholars to be a searching for a 'pre-condition' for the Husserl reduction, which aims at an 'ethical awakening' for subjectivity.[142] It needs to be acknowledged that in TI, the notion of reduction did already made its appearance, but nevertheless signified the totalization process of the same. Focusing on its renewed meaning in OBBE, we will first of all undertake a detailed reading of the section named 'The Reduction', where Levinas assigns the term with a meaning that defines his later philosophy. Concisely, reduction in OBBE refers to a reduction 'from said to the saying beyond logos'.[143] Levinas begins by criticizing Husserl's transcendental reduction, which for him is only a way of writing; it is not enough to only put a 'parenthesis' around things.[144] The phenomenological reduction strives for 'a sphere of utter plenitude that would be origin',[145] and is established based on the notion of the noesis-noema relation,

[140] A.D. Smith, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Husserl and the Cartesian Meditations* (London: Routledge, 2003), 27.
[141] Alain Mayama, *Emmanuel Levinas's Conceptual Affinities with Liberation Theology* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), 15.
[142] Alain Mayama, *Emmanuel Levinas's Conceptual Affinities with Liberation Theology*, 152.
[143] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 45.
[144] Ibid., 45.
[145] Ibid., xli.

which are both defined within consciousness.[146] Levinas claims that his reduction is defined by his unique notions of saying and said. To recall the discussions in our previous chapter, the notion of the said in Levinas is often associated with the ontological process of thematization, representation and synchronization. Saying, on the other hand, signifies 'the word given to the neighbor, the intrigue of responsibility' which only exists in a singular 'I'-other relationship that is beyond thematization.[147] Levinas's reduction is based on these two concepts, and is more specifically a movement between them, or more exactly a movement 'to show the signification proper to saying on the hither side of the thematization of the said'.[148]

Levinas admits that the saying, which is declared to be beyond being, when it is manifested, becomes part of the said.[149] He acknowledges that it is necessary for the saying to manifest itself in the said, and justice is the motivation behind the process where the saying is represented and lets itself come into the light. We have discussed this necessity in the last chapter, and seen that it is more exactly the necessity involved in the concern of justice towards the third party. With this acknowledgement, Levinas continues that, inspired by justice, the saying is now part of the said, but this saying also calls for philosophy to interrupt the all-inclusive said which sets the saying up 'as an idol'.[150] This is to say, the infinity that is uncovered in the said and essentialized in the said can become an onto-theological notion, which turns into an authoritative figure in a

[146] *Noema*, *noesis* are the two components of the structure of the analysis of consciousness by Husserl. Emmanuel Levinas, *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, translated by Richard A Cohen and Michael Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 23.
[147] Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 156.
[148] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 43.
[149] Ibid., 43.
[150] Ibid., 43.

closed system of representation. Philosophy, particularly the Levinasian philosophical signifyingness, seeks to show the hither side of the manifested said, that is, through the notion of trace and illeity, to demonstrate the ethical commandment from the immemorial past from the illeity.

The Levinasian philosophy through designating ethics as the intelligibility of politics expresses the infinite ethical responsibility, which is the intelligibility of politics and was pointed out as a conclusion in our last chapter. But more importantly for our current discussion, Levinas continues by acknowledging that the philosophical signifyingness pursued by him, when it is written into a book, also becomes part of the said, 'to expose an otherwise than being will still give an ontological said' as all 'monstration' does.[151] Levinas maintains that reduction does not stop at the monstration of the ethical subjectivity, but continues to reduce the said of the exposure to the very pre-original saying. However, this reduction is again 'using copulas' and will operate at the level of 'essence' and 'Being', as it is written in phrases.[152] This indicates, as Steve Smith reads it, that Levinas's reduction is never 'a finished performance'.[153]

The constant movement of reduction is in fact a movement 'produced out of time or in two times without entering into either of them', which when reflected in philosophical signifyingness through reduction is similar to 'an endless critique, or skepticism, which in a spiraling movement makes possible the boldness of philosophy, destroying the conjunction into which its saying and its said continually enter'.[154] And this endless critique in philosophy is a said to

[151] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 44
[152] Ibid., 44.
[153] Steve Smith, 'Reason as One for Another: Moral and Theoretical Argument in the Philosophy of Levinas', in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 12, Issue 3, 1981, 231.
[154] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 44.

contest the betrayal of the said, in which a 'spirit' can hear the calling, and also where 'a questioning look' is impossible to synchronize within the said. In this way, Levinas claims that the reduction can lead to a movement that is beyond the logos of being, which in the end reveals a subjectivity and goodness that 'cannot be understood out of ontology'.[155] How do we understand the association of reduction with critique, and in what sense does this spirit of subjectivity reveal a goodness which cannot be understood out of ontology?

To address these questions within this discussion of reduction, we will next explain them through the lens of null-site. Indeed, reduction brings in many important epistemic aspects in OBBE that enable Levinas's way of signification to go beyond the pure ontological representation of the ethical subjectivity. With the renewed meaning of null-site, where site is now seen as the correlation between said and saying, reduction as null-site movement develops the third way signifyingness into a new level where the threat of negative theology can be avoided.

3.2 Reduction seen as a null-site movement

In light of the above, we now turn to explore reduction through the null-site utopian lens, which we argue leads us to the next phase of designating ethical subjectivity in Levinas, namely prophetic subjectivity. As we pointed out regarding Levinas's narratives on reduction, the activity of reduction has been constantly re-included into the realm of the said. Levinas maintains that this can also be seen as a constant entering into the conjunction of said and saying. Indeed, with the acknowledgement of the result of reduction shown in the said,

[155] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 45.

the site that is to be nullified by reduction cannot be simply seen as a site of the said (as we pointed out that the initiation of reduction already reduces the said to the saying), but rather the constant correlation between said and saying.

According to Paul Ricoeur's reading of OBBE, this correlation is a 'linguistic correlation', which 'annuls the otherwise of saying to the benefit of the said'.[156] Ricoeur maintains that the correlation turns the saying of transcendence into an 'internal division' of the all-inclusive said, that is, in their correlation, said and saying create an ontological site which limits the radicality of the ethical responsibility that Levinas proposes. This correlation is the 'price of manifestation',[157] which cannot be ignored. In this correlation saying is expressed by the said in an exhaustive manner, but the movement of reduction aims to transcend this correlation and so achieve surpassing ethical importance beyond its manifestation.

Looking closely at reduction as a null-site movement, we find first of all that Levinas stresses that it is a diachronic movement that is 'produced out of time or in two times without entering into either of them'.[158] This is to say, reduction leads to a nullification of the synchronization of time where the lapse of time is taken in by the present. The correlation between said and saying puts the time of the saying, the immemorial past, and the time of the said of present, into the same representation. The Levinasian signifyingness endeavours through reduction to 'breach'[159] this all-togetherness of the temporality of synchronization through proposing the temporality of diachrony.

---

[156] Paul Ricoeur, 'Otherwise: A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas's *OBBE or Beyond Essence',* in *Yale French Studies*, No. 104, *Encounter with Levinas*, 2004, 82-9984.
[157] Paul Ricoeur, 'Otherwise: A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas's *OBBE or Beyond Essence'*, 84.
[158] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 45.
[159] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 72.

We have seen in the previous chapter that diachrony is described as the temporality in which the lapse of time of the saying refuses to be synchronized by the said. However, with the recognition of the said, especially the philosophical said that fulfils the demonstration of the meaning of diachrony, synchronization seems to be inevitable. Levinas admits that in the philosophical said, 'substitution shows itself there as a coexistence and a correlation, proximity a historical world, that is, simultaneous in a book.'[160] With the meaning shown by Levinas's philosophy, diachrony 'shows itself as a continuous and indefinite time in memory and history.'[161]

However, Levinas continues by radicalizing the negativity of diachrony through defining 'a diachrony refractory to all synchronization',[162] and nullifies the temporality of synchronization of the correlation between said and saying. This is achieved through Levinas's introduction of the dimension of the 'there is' (the '*il y a*') to this correlation in the said. According to Levinas, in the thematization of the saying in the said, everything is shown in 'equality and neutrality', where the essence of the said encompasses the entire signification in the present. To breach this all-inclusive temporality, Levinas introduces a moment of pure negativity, which is a radical negation that can never be re-conceptualized within 'being'.[163] In the 'recoil' from the saying which has been said and betrayed, the 'there is' indicates an absolute moment of negation of the meaning manifested in the essence, and 'this negation without any confirmation'

[160] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 162.
[161] Ibid., 162.
[162] Ibid., 45.
[163] Ibid., 162.

from the non-sense of the 'there is' is important for the null-site interruption on the continuity (the correlation) between said and saying. [164]

To be faithful to Levinas's discussion, the notion of 'there is' (*il y a*) makes frequent appearance in different contexts in Levinas's philosophy, and the first appearance can be traced to Levinas's early work *Existence and Existents*. In his early works including TI, 'there is' designates a 'nocturnal dimension' of 'nothingness',[165] a 'nocturnal space', a space of non-sense or nothingness.[166] In OBBE, especially during his argument on how the ethical signification in the philosophical said can preserve its infinity, 'there is' plays a special role to breach the enclosedness of the correlation between said and saying.

The 'there is', which is described as an 'incessant buzzing of the non-sense' that disturbs the synchronization of essence of the subject and the world, offers a point of 'subversion of essence'.[167] This subversion of essence enables a diachrony as a lapsing of time without any possibility of 'assumption', a pure negativity.[168] To understand this difficult idea, we follow Elisabeth Thomas who explains that the non-sense of 'there is' signifies a moment of diachrony as inquietude, which can neither be 'externalized' nor 'internalized'.[169] This is to say, from the point of view of the all-inclusive synchronization of essence, the 'there is' cannot be categorized within the objective world; it cannot be thematized by the consciousness of the subject either. It is not part of any active

[164] Elisabeth Louise Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics, Justice, and the Human beyond Being* (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), 143.
[165] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 142.
[166] Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978), 94.
[167] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 162.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Elisabeth Louise Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics, Justice, and the Human beyond Being, 143.*

event, as it is in a diachrony that is 'out of phase' in a 'decay',[170] and only has meaning as a pure passivity without the possibility of becoming act.[171]

With this said, we can understand how reduction can bring a moment of 'out of time'. It is the concept of 'there is' that is introduced through reduction that brings the diachrony this moment of 'out of time', which is a pure passivity that enables the subject to have a moment of 'surplus of nonsense over sense'.[172] In this surplus of nonsense, the subjectivity cannot make sense of its radical responsibility by its own initiation. This is to say, in this surplus, the subjectivity is receptivity where it is 'a subjection to everything'.[173] This subjection to everything has a specific ethical sense, that is 'expiation for the other'.[174]

Levinas admits that every ethical claim he makes can lead to a thematization; even the 'expiation for the other' can become a theme and show itself as 'a mode of being' with the activity of cognition by the subject. However, the moment of the pure negativity of 'there is', which results from the diachrony of reduction, can never be captured by a theme, and put in a mode of being. And in this movement of diachrony, which is the site of the correlation between said and saying, their synchronization is nullified, where the subject who makes this correlation is put in a state of pure negativity, a state of helplessness, where he/she can only be expiation for the other. Being expiation for the other is also to be hostage to the other, which completes the traumatization of the subjectivity of responsibility.

---

[170] Ibid., 144.
[171] Ibid., 145.
[172] Elisabeth Louise Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics, Justice, and the Human beyond Being,* 145.
[173] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 164.
[174] Ibid., 164.

Diachrony can be concluded to be 'an alternating movement' between thematization and the radical nullification of such thematization by the moment of 'there is'.[175] This movement cannot be seen as a simple change of place, but is a null-site movement, where the site of correlation between the said and saying is constantly facing nullification from the non-sense of 'there is'. Reduction brings in the 'questioning look' from saying to the thematization of said. Through this, the unique ethical subjectivity, whose responsibility for the other cannot be exhausted by the thematization, is singled out again. This is to say, the responsibility for the subject overflows the responsibility demonstrated in the said. This surplus of responsibility is a responsibility initiated 'before any beginning', 'before any present'.[176]

From the above discussion, we can conclude that through his difficult notion of 'there is' we have delineated Levinas's effort to nullify the all-inclusiveness of the said that correlates all the signification of the saying into its manifestation. And in this process, the ethical subjectivity is shown as having a surplus of responsibility in the form of expiation for the other beyond the thematization of such responsibility. But another question arises with such ethical subjectivity: where does such surplus of responsibility come from if it is neither from the consciousness of the subject nor the other? We will argue that this surplus of responsibility issues from the prophetic witness of the subject to an order from illeity (God), which designates the final phase of the development of subjectivity in Levinas that we have been trying to delineate.

[175] Ibid., 164.
[176] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 164.

But before we move on to explicate prophetic subjectivity, it will be helpful to follow Levinas in laying a clarifying backdrop for the diachronic movement of reduction that reveals the surplus of ethical radicality; i.e., Levinas's view of the alternating movement of philosophy and skepticism, which will also illuminate Levinas's emphasis on 'endless critique'.[177] After his discussion of the disturbance of diachrony, Levinas points out that the time of his philosophy is diachronic, which functions as 'not allowing its saying to rest in a said'.[178] As Alphonso Lingis points out in his introduction to OBBE, Levinas uses the relationship between philosophy and skepticism to delineate the relation between the efforts of reduction from the said to the saying, and the bewilderment of the 'ever-unfaithful texts that yields'.[179] In the correlation between said and saying, knowledge is produced and designated as definite without any possibility to be doubted.[180] However, skepticism in the Levinasian usage denies the very possibility of truth, which involves a radical denial that does not pursue any 'counter-positing truth', exemplifying the radical negation that nullifies the integrity of the site of the said. [181] In Levinas's own words, skepticism does not 'hesitate to affirm the impossibility' of statements about truth.[182] This is to say, for skepticism, when the saying is said in a statement, the truth is already spoiled and any effort to reduce this betrayal will lead to a new betrayal again. However, the resistance of skepticism towards philosophy is also stated in a philosophical way, which for Levinas in a certain sense designates a

[177] Ibid., 45.
[178] Tina Chanter, 'Traumatic Response: Levinas's Legacy', in *Emmanuel Levinas*: *Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, volume 4, edited by Claire Katz with Lara Trout (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), 410.
[179] Alphonso Lingis, Introduction, Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xliii.
[180] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 189.
[181] Ibid., xliii.
[182] Ibid., 7.

truth of negation that is again fixed in the said. This uncovers a contradiction, as skepticism realizes 'the impossibility by the very statement of this impossibility',[183] which thus leads to the refutation of such an absurdity of skepticism in philosophy.

Nevertheless, Dennis King Keenan indicates that, in Levinas, even though skepticism is 'vulnerable to refutation', the assertion that contests skepticism as contradiction is compromised because the presupposition of this assertion is unified as an order of being which presupposes what skepticism doubts.[184] Contradiction arises only in the circumstance that 'two times' is seen as 'at the same time'.[185] Thus in diachrony where 'affirmation and negation did not resound in the same time'[186], that is to say, through the moment of the 'there is' we proposed above, skepticism returns. Levinas therefore maintains that if we see philosophy as the site of the correlation between the said and the saying, the tradition of skepticism can be seen as the movement of nullification of such a site, a 'diachronic thought'.[187] The null-site movement between philosophy and skepticism is constant and Levinas claims that, in the very beginning of philosophy in history, in 'the dawn of philosophy', skepticism already begins its journey in telling of the betraying of the saying in the said, and conveying this betrayal in the said.[188] Levinas argues for the importance of skepticism, for 'the said has to be unsaid, and the unsaid unsaid in its turn'. This directs philosophy to the dimension of the beyond, to the disruption of immanence as a null-site

[183] Ibid., 7.
[184] Dennis King Keenan, *Death and Responsibility: The 'Work' of Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 26.
[185] Ibid., 26.
[186] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 168.
[187] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Essence and Disinterestedness', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 109-128, 114.
[188] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 114.

utopia: 'skepticism in fact makes a difference', that is, it 'puts an interval between said and saying'.[189] Thus we can conclude that skepticism shows the possibility of nullifying the correlation between said and saying, and to breach the continuousness of the place of said that forms an all-inclusiveness of linguistic signification.

The null-site effect of skepticism as such is seen as an 'endless critique'[190] of philosophy where 'it is not an arbitrary contestation', but rather 'a doctrine of inspection and testing, although not reducible to testing of the scientific sort.'[191] Gerald Bruns maintains that skepticism in Levinas is 'an unsatisfiable questioning' that breaks through the 'mode of self-sufficiency and control'.[192] Therefore, through the null-site effect of skepticism, we understand more clearly the Levinasian signifyingness, which has been developed in OBBE into the constant null-site movement of reduction. This is to say, the Levinasian philosophy as reduction is not an attempt that can be completed in a finished book; rather, it is a utopian project that can never be completed. As Levinas puts it himself:

> A book is interrupted discourse catching up with its own breaks. But books have their fate; they belong to a world they do not include, but recognize by being written and printed, and by being prefaced and getting themselves preceded with forewords. They are interrupted, and call for other books and in the end are interpreted in a saying distinct from the said.

[189] Ibid., 168.
[190] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 44.
[191] Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 158.
[192] Gerald L. Bruns, 'Dialogue and the Truth of skepticism', in *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 22, Nos. 2/3, Religious Thought and Contemporary Critical Theory (Summer-Autumn, 1990), 85-91, 90.

What is the saying distinct from the said? To answer this question we return to our previous question which leads us to the need to investigate ethical subjectivity following an order 'not known from where',[193] an ethical subjectivity characterized by the prophetic witness 'Here I am', which shows the final phase of the development of the ethical subjectivity in Levinas.

4 Prophetic subjectivity as 'Here I am'

From our above discussion, the Levinasian philosophy's reduction from said to saying breaks open the correlation between said and saying, which leads a movement from ethical subjectivity that is thematized in philosophy, to ethical subjectivity beyond philosophy. In this section, we will focus on the ethical subjectivity that is beyond philosophy, which will be seen as prophetic subjectivity. We will delineate more fully the relation between ethical subjectivity as discussed in chapter three and prophetic subjectivity, particularly the source of the surplus of ethical responsibility as 'who knows where'.

First, to examine prophetic subjectivity in Levinas, we will follow the evolvement of the dimension of witness and prophecy, which can be seen as originating in Levinas's essay 'Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony' and is fully presented in OBBE.[194] To be even more precise, one can already notice a similar yet more primal idea of prophetic witness in the form of a certain 'personal order',[195] which appears already in 'The Trace of the Other'. We will

[193] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 97-108, 97.
[194] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony', 97.
[195] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Enigma and Phenomenon', 61.

begin by looking briefly at the origin of the notion 'personal order' and trace its development to prophetic subjectivity.

Levinas gives a concise definition of personal order, that is, an order from 'beyond being' that orders us towards the face of the other.[196] From our previous discussion, Levinas claims that there is a surplus of ethical saying of infinite responsibility beyond its manifestation in the said. However, with the concept of the face becoming part of the representations in the said, if the stranger becomes part of the narratives that fit into my life history, from where then does the compulsive force that initiates the ethical response come? By introducing the notion of personal order, Levinas sets out a third dimension beside the dimension of the subject and the other, which as earlier discussed is an absence to consciousness, and the surplus of obligation emanates from this dimension of illeity.

The ethical obligation derived from the personal order is unlike the obligation derived from the order of the face of the other. In concise terms, the obligation from the personal order does not happen until after the face of the other is revealed in the said; and even though the face of the other needs to be presented in the political said for justice, the face still obligates the subject, though the source of the obligation is now from illeity. Derrida comments on this complicated idea: there is indeed 'a sharp distinction' between the ethical subjectivity and 'the civic one'; however, illeity already makes its call from 'as early as the epiphany of the face in the face to face.'[197]

[196] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony', 97.
[197] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 32.

This is to say, the universal law in the political system defines the civic responsibility of the subject, where the source of the obligation is represented to the subject by his/her recognition of law as such; however, there is also the ethical obligation, the personal order which cannot become written and universalized. This obligation, similar to the face-to-face encounter, is unique and personal, and can never be captured entirely by a universalized said. The illeity is an enigma that constantly withdraws from the attempts to represent it, and 'eludes the treatment of ontology'.[198] As Stella Sandford summarizes it, 'the appearance of the face within the order of the world is not fatal because the trace of illeity in the face survives as pure transcendence'.[199] With this summary, it is argued, 'illeity is what makes the ethical relation ethical'.[200]

However, we can notice that the concept of 'personal order' does not make its appearance in OBBE. From Stella Sandford's conclusion one can see that the emphasis on the concept of 'personal order' makes illeity indispensable for the infinite responsibility for the other. Nevertheless, illeity is external to the subject, which in this scenario puts the infinite responsibility outside of 'me'. Yet Levinas in 'The Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony' relocates infinite responsibility within subjectivity. He claims that 'the infinity only has glory through subjectivity', the 'expiation for the other', which will be seen more clearly in the following through our explication of the prophetic subjectivity.[201]

We will firstly discuss Levinas's introduction of the dimension of testimony (witness) and prophecy, which can shed light on prophetic

[198] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Meaning and Sense', 61.
[199] Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, 79
[200] Ibid., 79.
[201] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony', 104.

subjectivity.[202] Through the null-site movement of reduction where the correlation between said and saying is breached by the temporality of diachrony, we showed that Levinas singles out a moment of pure negativity, pure passivity in the immemorial past of the saying, that cannot be put in relationship with the said. Levinas maintains that the ethical responsibility from this immemorial past cannot be recaptured in manifestation as it is from 'who knows where'.[203] We mentioned above that in 'The Trace of the Other', the questioning of the origin of this surplus of ethical meaning is forbidden.[204] But from 'The Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony', and later in OBBE, Levinas in fact looks into this questioning, rather than avoiding it, where the positive confirmation does not lead to establishing another 'ontological plane', but to a witness (testimony) to this confirmation in the form of a prophetic subjectivity.[205]

In 'Truth of Disclosure and the Truth of Testimony', Levinas introduces the two significant concepts for his later philosophy, testimony and prophecy. In the beginning of this essay, Levinas again criticizes the notion of truth in the Husserlian tradition of theorization and the Heideggerian tradition of manifestation of being. We have already discussed Levinas's critique of these two trends of thought above and now we will briefly examine his critique of their theory of truth in order to set out Levinas's notion of testimony and prophecy.

For Levinas, the problem with Husserl and Heidegger's way of reaching truth lies in the role of the subject in the process of revealing truth. He points out that in the theoretical way of pursuing truth, truth becomes a 'synonym for the

[202] To be clear, 'testimony' and 'witness' are the English translations of the same French word *témoignage*.
[203] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 100.
[204] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony', 117.
[205] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 8.

real'.[206] In the process of disclosing the real, everything is implicated within a system of structured relations, where the object and the subject are in a relationship of 'indifference'.[207] Meanwhile, the Heideggerian truth is signified as manifestation of being, where being is the ultimate creator of truth, and the subject is only a medium to convey the truth. For Levinas, in both of these ways, 'representation governs the notion of truth, and thereby every meaning is governed by ontology'.[208]

Through criticizing the unaccounted importance of subjectivity in the process of revealing truth and transcendence in Husserl and Heidegger, Levinas proposes another way of conceiving truth, where truth can be seen as 'beyond being', beyond the ontological manifestation of being. This 'beyond being' is not external to the subject, but rather the very subjectivity of the subject. Levinas explores this idea through introducing his own notion of the truth of testimony. In the traditional sense, testimony as a 'confession of subject's experience or knowledge' is a secondary truth to scientific truth.[209] It is categorized as subjective and personal, which does not reach the standard of objectivity and universality. However, testimony in Levinas is not founded upon the correlation between object and subject, and hence does not take objectivity and universality as its measurement. The truth of testimony is claimed as a testimony to infinity where the 'glory of infinity' is the source of the trueness of the truth.[210]

[206] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony', 98.
[207] Ibid., 98.
[208] Ibid., 99.
[209] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony', 97.
[210] Ibid., 99.

Recalling the meaning of infinity in Levinas, as early as in TI, it has been designated as 'produced in the relationship between same and other'.[211] It is associated with exteriority, not as a boundary, but as an openness to the other, an 'overflowing every limit' of the same.[212] Infinity in Levinas has an ethical meaning, as infinity in its constant movement of exceeding the ontological realm of all-inclusive being, opens to itself 'the order of the Good'.[213] The notion of glory of the infinite is used to describe a relationship between the subject and the infinity. According to Levinas, due to the glory of the infinite, the subject cannot hide in its interiority, but exposes itself to its responsibility for the other.

After this brief understanding of the infinite, and its glory, Levinas claims further that the testimony of the glory of the infinite is not a certain way of representation of the infinite: testimony does not 'contribute only a means of communication'.[214] Testimony is seen as a saying of the infinite, where it is not a theme of infinity, but it is described as 'a saying without said' of sincerity, where the subject exposes his/her subjectivity for the other, and lets him/herself be traumatized by the responsibility for the other. In this way, the infinite is not shown in the finite said, but it 'passes through' the finite and orders the subjectivity towards the neighbour, which is an infinite movement. The infinite commands the subject ethically from the mouth of the subject, where the infinite signifies 'through him to whom it signifies'.[215]

In this way, Levinas importantly singles out the subjectivity as indispensable in the process of witness. He introduces another phrase, the 'who

[211] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, 26.
[212] Ibid., 26
[213] Ibid., 103.
[214] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony', 100.
[215] Ibid., 100.

knows where', to weaken the reliance of the prophecy upon 'God' whose name is mentioned yet not substantialized.[216] The phrase 'who knows where' signifies that the activity of searching for the source of prophecy exterior to the subjectivity in knowledge is in vain, as, outside of the subjectivity, the command from beyond is 'inaudible'; it is only 'audible in my words', that is my response to the other.[217] We can see this from Levinas's definition of prophecy: '[o]ne can call prophecy this reversal whereby the perception of the order coincides with the meaning of this order, made up by the one who obeys it.'[218]

In this way, the prophetic subjectivity is in fact discerned from a religious subjectivity in the traditional sense. This can be seen more clearly from the relation between God and prophetic subjectivity in Levinas. Even though Levinas admits that prophecy implies a certain religious relationship, he stresses that this religious relationship 'exceed[s] the psychology of faith and loss of faith'.[219] As we already pointed out, Levinas distinguishes his ideas from negative theology. Moreover, he also distinguishes his thoughts from positive theology: it 'does not rest upon any positive theology'. [220] For Levinas, the dimension of illeity can be called the dimension of God, yet it needs to be discerned from God in positive theological discourse, where God is substantialized by intelligibility, and is seen as part of the all-encompassing being.[221] In positive theology, for Levinas, God is considered as an 'ontic image', 'an essence', and the language of

[216] Even though the word God is mentioned several times in OBBE, Levinas claims 'Here I am, in the name of God', without referring myself directly to his presence. 'Here I am, just that, the word God is absent from the phrase.' Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 149.
[217] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, xxxv.
[218] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony', 102.
[219] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 168.
[220] Ibid., 147.
[221] Alphonso Lingis, Introduction, OBBE, xxxii.

theology which is based on being 'destroys [the] religious situation of transcendence'. [222]

The prophetic subjectivity is primarily located within the 'ethical sphere', since even the proper meaning of God is positioned 'in the ethical bond'.[223] As Wyschogrod points out, the glory of illeity leaves the subject nowhere to hide: the subject becomes the exposure of 'Here I am'.[224] This exposure also occurs before the suffering other, as a voice saying 'Here I am' for the responsibility for the other. This exposure as 'Here I am' is claimed to be a saying 'without noematic correlation', without correlation with its said, which is described as a 'pure obedience to glory that orders'.[225] To investigate this idea closely we will follow Claire Katz who elaborates on the signification of 'Here I am' in Levinas, especially through discerning it from the similar phrase which yet aims at a different expression in Kierkegaard. This differentiation sheds light on how the 'I' in 'Here I am' in Levinas overbids Kierkegaardian religious subjectivity which leads to an ethicalization of religious narrative. In a nutshell, the Levinasian prophetic subjectivity and the Kierkegaardian religious subjectivity begin with the same story in Akedah, but lead in dissimilar directions. Kierkegaard aims to accomplish a 'leap of faith' through his protagonist Abraham.[226] Levinas's prophetic subjectivity does not allow any transgression from the religious signifyingness of the ethical importance. This can be specified through seeing

[222] Emmanuel Levinas. OBBE, 52.
[223] Alphonso Lingis, Introduction, OBBE, xxxiii.
[224] Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, xvi.
[225] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 145.
[226] The leap of faith, as in Kierkegaard, can be understood as 'the qualitative transition from non-belief to belief. Alastair Mckinnon, 'Kierkegaard and the Leap of Faith', *Kierkegaardiana* Vol. 16, 1993, 107-125, 108. Although Levinas agrees with Kierkegaard that an 'alone unique subjectivity' is needed. Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 76.

their different interpretation of the story of Akedah, which is the background to the often-cited phrase 'Here I am (Hinen)'.[227]

To contextualize Katz's discussion, there are two occasions where the phrase 'Here I am' appears in the story of Akedah. The story 'begins with a command from God to Abraham' to prove his faith by voluntarily sacrificing his son.[228] Kierkegaard singles out the moment when God said to Abraham: 'Abraham', to which Abraham answered 'Here I am', and this undaunted answer shows Abraham's 'God-devoted disposition'.[229] It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to cover Kierkegaard's argument in full, but to be concise, the first 'Here I am' leads to Abraham's action of faith, which is also though an action of cruelty in killing his son. Yet it is the second 'Here I am', that Kierkegaard does not single out, which is important to Levinas.[230] On Mt. Moriah, before the sacrifice begins, Abraham hears the second voice from 'an angel of the lord': 'Abraham, Abraham.' To this voice Abraham replies: 'Here I am', which is followed by the message from the angel: 'do not lay a hand on the lad.'[231]

Katz criticizes Kierkegaard's reading of this story for not covering the full importance of the development of the meaning of Abraham's choices on Mt. Moriah. In particular, Kierkegaard does not see the climax of the subjectivity expressed in the second 'Here I am', where the ethical choice of giving up sacrificing Isaak is not a regression of faith, but exactly where faith is consummated. In Levinas's interpretation, she finds the right emphasis on the

[227] Claire Elise Katz, 'The Voice of God and the Face of the Other', *Journal of Textual Reasoning*, 1.
[228] Ibid., 1.
[229] Soren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Writings VI: Fear And Tembling/ Repetition*, edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 249.
[230] To be exact, Levinas claims in OBBE that the 'Here I am' is in fact cited from *Isaiah* but we can see his also makes the connection between his 'Here I am' and the Akedah story in 'A Propos of Kierkegaard Vivant', which shows us that he has both in mind when he uses the phrase. Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 199: 'A Propos of Kierkegaard Vivant', in *Proper Names*, 75-79, 77.
[231] Claire Elise Katz, 'The Voice of God and the Face of the Other', *Journal of Textual Reasoning,* 2.

relation between Abraham and Isaak, which surpasses a blind leap of faith, and finds faith as essential in the ethical response: 'it is not faith that is the highest moment but the turn towards the ethical'.[232] Indeed, Levinas also criticizes Kierkegaard for what he names the 'Kierkegaard violence', in which answering God transcends the ethical response towards the other.[233] For Levinas, Abraham's ability to distance himself from 'the obedience' to the first voice enables him to hear the second voice.[234] In this case, the religious phase is only a condition for the ethical one, where the test of faith is accomplished by an abortion of the sacrifice of the other.[235]

Thus we can see that the prophetic subjectivity expressed in 'Here I am' is primarily ethical, but an ethical that is turned from religion. Katz correctly defines the subjectivity accomplished through Abraham's final answer as the fourth stage that extends the Kierkegaardian articulation of the three stages of the development of subjectivity towards its final individualization. To be brief, in his book *Stages on Life's Way*, Kierkegaard depicts three stages in the 'personal development': the aesthetic stage, the ethical stage, and the religious stage. To elaborate on them is beyond the scope of the current discussion, but one can see, in the evolution among these stages, that the religious one is the climax of the development of subjectivity.[236] According to Katz, Levinas finds a fourth stage which is a yet higher level of development of subjectivity, which is another ethical stage. But importantly, this ethical stage is not a returning back to the ethical stage without the participation of God, as the dimension of God in

[232] Claire Elise Katz, 'The Voice of God and the Face of the Other'*, 9.*
[233] Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, 76.
[234] Ibid., 7.
[235] Claire Elise Katz, 'The Voice of God and the Face of the Other', *Journal of Textual Reasoning*, 4.
[236] Edward F. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation*: *Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 3.

prophetic subjectivity not only ensures that the ethical demand is not drawn back to the immanence of thematization, but also ensures justice without suspending the ethical signification.

Levinas gives a detailed account of the relationship between God (without a proper name) and subjectivity, which maintains the significance of the ethical subjectivity beyond both political commitment and thematization, and which can be specified in three stages. The first phase of this relation is to be seen as the thematization of God (infinity) as the origin of the command to the subject to be infinitely responsible for the other. In this thematization, the infinite status of the relation is betrayed. To be more exact, Levinas maintains that in the manifestation of the ethical command, the ethical infinity is exhibited, and 'my anarchic relationship with illeity' is betrayed.[237] However, the second stage follows, where there is a new relationship between the human subject and illeity: '"Thanks to God" I am another for the others'.[238] This is to say, with the glory of God, this betrayal is justified and justice that is based on equality is formulated. The dimension of God conditions the justice that includes the subject, where the subject is one of the others in the place of togetherness, which also permits the commitment of the subject to justice. Nevertheless, there is a third and final stage, where the subject through his/her inspiration from witnessing illeity, that is the gift from the glory of God, voices a prophecy, which is not about God, but is in the vocative 'Thanks to God'.[239]

With the above analysis, we can in fact name the prophetic subjectivity in a more accomplished way as 'Thanks to God, here I am', which draws the

[237] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 161.
[238] Ibid., 158.
[239] Ibid., 158.

intricacy of politics, religion and ethics together. The prophetic subjectivity, reached by the null-site movement, thus does not confine itself in any of the spheres of politics, religion, or thematized ethical command. As Katz concludes, it is 'a sensitivity, a totally awareness, or an openness to respond'.[240] Indeed, Abraham does respond to the unethical command from God in the first place; however, the ethical awareness stops the unethical practice, which shows the final culmination of the ethical subjectivity.

Similarly, yet in a more self-reflective manner, Levinas is also aware of his own subjectivity in the process of thematization of an ethical subjectivity for the infinite responsibility. In the end of OBBE Levinas clearly makes a differentiation between writing down 'Here I am' in a book and the prophetic 'Here I am', where he calls his effort in writing a book a utopian endeavour, which signifies his placeless within the writing, an exposure of his own subjectivity to the reader without any preservation. In the 'Here I am', there is no longer an existing 'ego or I. From now on one has to speak in first person',[241] and in doing so let oneself become a sign given to the other. Through his writing, Levinas does not only pursue a certain philosophy, but calls for a 'saying distinct from the said', to respond with responsibility'.[242]

From this understanding of the prophetic subjectivity, it is no surprise that Levinas in the very end of his argument in OBBE exemplifies the prophetic subjectivity not with a religious figure, but with the atheistic figure of the intellectual, especially the Marxists in his time. This association can also be seen

[240] Claire Katz, 'The responsibility of Irresponsibility: Taking (Yet) another Look at the Akedah', in *Addressing Levinas*, edited by Eric Sean Nelson, Antje Kapust, Kent Still (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 28.
[241] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 143.
[242] Ibid., 185, 171.

from Levinas's interview with Richard Kearney, where to the question of whether he considers that 'Marxism bears witness to a utopian inspiration',[243] he answers: 'Marx's criticism of the western ontological tradition is a project to understand the world rather than transform it. In Marx's critique, we find an ethical conscience cutting through the ontological identification of truth with an ideal intelligibility and demanding that theory be converted into a concrete praxis of concern for the other.'[244] Levinas endows importance on the non-indifference of the Marxists' practical endeavour towards the poor and exploited, without endorsing their theoretical claim. It is in this exemplification of prophetic subjectivity that we find an underlining association between theory and ethical practice in Levinas for his establishment of ethical subjectivity, which will need future work in order to shed light upon it.

Conclusion: The inner logic from ethical subjectivity to prophetic subjectivity

We have in this chapter traced the third and final phase of development of ethical subjectivity in Levinas, which we argued to be prophetic subjectivity. We demonstrated that this new phase of development is the result of Levinas's reaction to criticism, for example from Jacques Derrida, concerning the possible contradiction between the ethical dimension of infinity in the saying and his acknowledgement of the necessity of the ontological said for political justice. Importantly, this contradiction also calls Levinas's own philosophical said into

[243] Emmanuel Levinas, *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by Richard Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 33.
[244] Ibid., 33.

question, raising concerns about whether his argument for ethical subjectivity with infinite responsibility for the other fails because the language that he uses is innately ontological. We have traced and sought to decipher in Levinas a way to address these questions, which has been argued as having two periods of development. We investigated these two ways through the lens of utopia, in two aspects of the term. First, the 'third way signifyingness', which was shown to be other than the signifyingness of the dialectic pair disclosure and dissimulation, was explored as nonplace in the sense of resisting any attempts to be included back into the place of ontology. Through introducing the notion of nonplace to examine the third way signifyingness, we were able to depict the initiation of Levinas's endeavour to single out his own way of doing philosophy, a 'phenomenology of enigma' that ultimately negates the ontological place, using a language that is beyond all-inclusive being. However, we indicated that there is an underlying problem with this approach, as it leads to negative theology, which makes the reference to God indispensable.

We therefore proposed a second stage of Levinas's approach to conceiving a signifyingness that can go beyond the ontological philosophical narrative, namely the null-site reduction that receives its full presentation in OBBE. Through examining the notion of reduction as a movement of nullification of the site of correlation between said and saying, we marked the trajectory along which Levinas goes beyond the philosophical exhaustion of the signification of infinity and demonstrates a prophetic subjectivity that is featured by the Abrahamic answer 'Here I am', which is concluded as an ethical subjectivity conditioned by the dimension of God. This prophetic subjectivity is seen as the final phase of the development of Levinas's ethical subjectivity,

where ethical responsibility in Levinas is not any longer only a philosophical issue, but calls out as a prophecy for ethical obligations to be practiced.

From the ethical subjectivity as substitution for the other to prophetic subjectivity as 'Here I am', we can delineate the inner logic of this development, which again is the null-site movement. In this case, the site is the philosophical narrative where the ethical subjectivity is shown in language, in the correlation between the saying and the said. The null-site movement nullifies this correlation, and breaches the accordance between the verb and its noun content, leading to a prophecy that has a surplus over a theme of ethical responsibility. This prophecy is further revealed as prophetic subjectivity, who him/herself becomes a sign for the other in his/her sincerity for the other. The prophetic subjectivity shows a surplus of infinite responsibility that is always, in the movement of exposure of the subjectivity, more than the thematization of this responsibility, which as we argued in the end exposes the person doing philosophy to this surplus of responsibility beyond writing, leading us to a future endeavour to ethical practice.

Thesis Conclusion

In the opening of the thesis we observed a broad consensus among Levinas scholars that in his more mature work, Levinas establishes his radical ethics upon the notion of an ethical subjectivity expressed as infinite responsibility for the other, which shows a shift of focus from his earlier ethics built around the absoluteness of alterity.[1] This twofold fundamental orientation of subjectivity gave an impetus to the central motivating challenge for the present thesis, i.e., that of providing an interpretation of the notion of subjectivity in Levinas in an integrated and comprehensive manner, especially with an interest in the reasoning or rationale behind this shift.

We also observed that the secondary literature predominantly treats the different aspects of subjectivity in Levinas separately, for example the subjectivities of sensibility, of infinite responsibility, or also the religious meaning of subjectivity. But we have not found any comprehensive reading which traces the development of each key stage of Levinas's treatment of subjectivity in a way that that can uncover and link the questions Levinas endeavours to address in his consideration of each of these aspects.

We have in this thesis aimed to address this lack and to provide such a linkage in various ways, albeit centrally through the Levinasian notion of utopia. We were able to determine three critical loci, chronologically, for tracing such a line of development for Levinasian subjectivity: the first was found in his early major work TI, then secondly in a series of shorter publications between TI and

[1] We introduced Richard Cohen and Robert Bernasconi in chapter two, and Stella Sandford in chapter four, who claim that there is an observable change of argument in Levinas's works from TI towards OBBE.

OBBE, culminating in his later major work OBBE. We argued further that the development across these works needs to be distinguished from a dialectical movement which designates the later stage as a negation of the former stage, a logic Levinas opposes. Building instead initially on the method of 'overbidding' we proposed a new way to delineate this chain of evolvement in order to give a clear demonstration of its non-dialectical character, that is, through the lens of another significant concept in Levinas, the concept of utopia.

The Levinasian notion of utopia is similarly found to have multi-faceted meanings, being used in different and even contradictory contexts, a comprehensive study of which is also lacking in the secondary literature. It is of course true that in both Utopian studies and Levinasian studies attention has not infrequently been drawn to the significance of Levinas's notion of utopia, but the seeming inconsistency of his usage of the notion and the range of areas the term covers have not seen any thorough study which seeks to tackle its complexity. We have in the present thesis (especially in our concern to delineate the non-dialectical development of subjectivity in Levinas towards a never-exhausted ethical responsibility) sought to demonstrate that for each crucial moment in the evolvement of subjectivity, a corresponding notion of utopia can be found to signify the non-ontological feature of the subjectivity.

The intertwined development of subjectivity and utopia in Levinas was examined more precisely from its initial phase in TI as a subjectivity formulating its separated interiority of sensibility in the dwelling which Levinas designates as utopian.[2] We have given an expanded interpretation of the notion of utopia in

[2] Emmanuel Levinas, TI, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 156, 158.

order to establish our own interpretation of the non-ontological character of the dwelling, through a new way of seeing utopia as more exactly 'non-place', which, differently from a mere dialectic negation of a physical place, expresses a radical overturning of any possible association of subjectivity with an ontological essence in the world in the image of occupying a place. This non-place character was explored on the basis of three salient features of the Levinasian dwelling: as a non-place of relationality, as the constant movement of separation and recollection, and as a temporality that is incompatible with the historical time-world as a whole. Through depicting these three aspects, and the feature of the dwelling as a paradise of enjoyment on the level of sensibility, the subjectivity of dwelling is clearly distinguished from other historically dominant ways of perceiving the subject, especially in the forms of the *cogito* or *Dasein*, which for Levinas are destined to be included in the system of knowledge or Being in the Western tradition. Through the lens of utopia, this distinction betokens a fundamental retraction from the idea of a subject formulating its subjectivity in the process of taking a place in the whole. Our conclusion of this original and striking feature of non-ontological subjectivity sets the anti-ontological tone for Levinas's later argument for ethical subjectivity.

In order to argue for the further significance of utopia in depicting the evolvement of subjectivity to the emergence of the ethical moment for the subject, in chapter two we first of all made exploratory use of key secondary sources on ethical utopia in Levinas, especially as represented by the work of Miguel Abensour. Abensour, as one of the leading Levinas scholars who have promoted the significance of Levinas's ideas on utopia, explores the Levinasian utopia through his engagement with his contemporary utopian scholars, Martin

Buber and Ernst Bloch. We specifically focused on Abensour's essay 'To Think Utopia Otherwise', where we located a particular kind of reading of the utopian ideas in Levinas through an adaptation of the method of 'overbidding' (*surrenchère*), which identifies a unique way in which Levinas engages with Buber and Bloch. Moreover, overbidding was found to demonstrate an important aspect of Levinas's methodology more broadly, indicating a trajectory of relating ideas not in the direction of finding shared foundations but of developing one idea to its 'superlative' level in another.[3]

With regard to Buber, Levinas develops his own social utopia through an overbidding of Buber's 'I-Thou' relation to a radical ethical relationship: the asymmetrical face-to-face encounter with the other. Similarly, while Levinas agrees with the treatment of temporality in Bloch's notion of hope, which he sees as having the potential to breach the all-inclusive time of representation, he nevertheless detects in Bloch's notion of hope a reversion back to the fundamental status of being and thus to a form of immanentism. Levinas therefore overbids Blochian hope toward a movement of hope that transcends any interestedness of being, a movement signified by his unique notion of disinterestedness, which for Abensour should be seen as the second important aspect of ethical utopia in Levinas.

Our analysis of Abensour's insights showed that the method of overbidding could be legitimately and usefully applied to Levinas's methodology more broadly. Along these lines we brought forward a discussion by Robert Bernasconi, who gives an analysis of how Levinas 'undercuts' some of his earlier

[3] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Enigma and Phenomenon', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, translated and edited by Robert Bernasconi, Simon Critchley and Adriaan T. Peperzak (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 65-77, 67.

formulations in TI on the absolute alterity that brings in a tension between presence and transcendence, and, in OBBE, achieves a way to address this tension through conditioning (or 'unconditioning')[4] his radical ethics on an account of an extreme ethical subjectivity instead of the absolute alterity. This observation brought our attention to the change of Levinas's attitude to the two core aspects of ethical utopia indicated by Abensour: the face-to-face encounter and disinterestedness, which as we showed have seen a further overbidding progression in OBBE. The encounter of the face-to-face in TI was a description of the relation between I and Other built on the acknowledgement of the pre-ethical phase of the subjective dwelling of the 'I'. But as Bernasconi points out, in OBBE it is the 'impossibility of the interiority' of the subject that conditions the sincerity of Levinas's radical ethical expressions.[5] Importantly for our purposes, the 'impossibility of interiority' is identified precisely by Levinas as the utopian 'null-site', which designates a subject 'emptying' its interiority, and finding itself thereby in a continuous movement of 'restlessness',[6] thus establishing a new orientation for the ethical relationship between the 'I' and the other through the notion of proximity. Moreover, this relation as the restless movement of proximity is overbid once again in substitution to reach a new identification of the subject, where the responsibility for the other takes the place of its (now 'emptied') interiority, thus redefining the subject as 'irreplaceable' only through

[4] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, translated by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 100.
[5] Robert Bernasconi, 'To which Question is Substitution the answer?', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 183.
[6] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 92.

answering to the infinite responsibility for the other in the form of null-site substitution as one-in-the-place-of-another.[7]

Through associating the result of our overbidding reading of Abensour's discussion of ethical utopia in Levinas and the finding of the significant notion null-site as an essential aspect of this utopia, we established the ethical subjectivity in the contextualization in OBBE through the null-site movement accomplished by proximity and culminated in substitution. This is to say, the utopian ethical subjectivity is established through two stages: the movement of proximity as nullifying the site of dwelling of the subject for the other, and as a direct a result of this movement, the reaching of the null-site of subjectivity which is defined solely by the 'for-the-other',[8] and whose subjectivity is sustained only by the other without any site of its own.

In this process, we marked out the eminent importance of the notion of 'null-site' for understanding the intertwined development of utopia and subjectivity, an importance which required a more intensive and detailed analysis of the term, the original French for which is *non-lieu*. This yielded several vital findings, the most important of which for the present constructive summation pertains to the philosophical significance of null-site which was shown to be non-dialectical and non-ontological, based on the accurate meaning the term 'site' (referring, that is, to the site of the 'dwelling'); and likewise, with respect to the meaning of the term 'null', was shown to express a process beyond pure negation which positively opens the subject to its responsibility.

[7] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 153.
[8] Ibid., 9.

With this analysis we were able to show how the notion of null-site is able not only to bear but to open out for the understanding of subjectivity the meanings of 'proximity' and 'substitution', which were shown, respectively, to be the denouement of the overbidding of the 'encounter' and 'disinterestedness' which principally defined Abensour's account of ethical utopia. This therefore not only resulted in a more advanced reading of utopia as null-site, but also was able to designate ethical subjectivity through the null-site movement. We concluded the third chapter by showing how this movement of proximity, as the infinite approaching of the other, culminates in substitution which becomes the ultimate disturbance of the being of the subject, to the extreme that through taking responsibility for the other the subject becomes responsible even for the responsibility of the other for the others.

However, in chapter three we encountered a problem insofar as ethical subjectivity understood through the null-site, which defines subjectivity exclusively through responsibility, designates subjectivity only in the singular relationship with the other, thereby seeming to exclude the socio-political dimension of the subjectivity. This brought us to the familiar Levinasian problem of how the ethics of infinite responsibility to the other can be compatible with or constructively inform the demands of justice on the socio-political level, as the demands of each appear to be contradictory. After an in-depth exploration of Levinas's views of the socio-political, therefore, in chapter four we turned our attention to this crucial question which, in light of the thesis's findings and focusing these through Derrida's famous critique, was able to be reframed as the task of determining whether the null-site significance of Levinasian ethics could avoid being drawn back onto an ontological site of immanence. This reframed

problem led us to examine a unique new meaning of 'signifyingness' as it appears in Levinas's later works, what Levinas calls a 'third way' of signifyingness, which we approached via Derrida's discussion of the ancient Greek concept of *Khora*, designated by Derrida as a 'non-place'. We were thereby able to shed light on a philosophical signifyingness in Levinas that both resists being drawn into the ontological category and also resists the category of nothingness, in the form of a certain 'neither this… nor that…'.[9] We discovered that this third way does not take a place in any categorization of being, nor even is it a negation of any such a category; it is rather a signification that avoids any claim over its content and indeed withdraws from any such claim. The content of this signifyingness is accessible rather only as the trace of an enigma where the source of signification (which Levinas names 'illeity') can never appear in a relation of knowledge.

We noted, however, that the Levinasian 'enigma' has come in for significant critique, not only for the language of equivocation under which it comes to expression, but especially also in that Levinas's invocation of the term 'illeity' in these discussions seems to draw him unavoidably toward a negative theology. It can be acknowledged that Levinas's earlier discussions of enigma do indeed not only rely heavily on the ambiguous status of the term, but treat illeity with an indispensable reference to God, thereby seemingly giving credence to the critique that sees negative theology as unavoidable for Levinasian infinite ethical signifyingness. But we argued that, in OBBE, Levinas develops another way of underpinning this third way signifyingness, and were able to show that, especially through the utopian lens as explored in this thesis, subjectivity itself is

[9] Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 9.

ordained as the indispensable element for infinite ethical meaning, thereby avoiding the ultimate arrival at negative theology and culminating rather in a further development of subjectivity.

More specifically, the grounding of this third way signifyingness in subjectivity was shown to be achievable in part through the later Levinasian notion of reduction, the uniqueness and radicality of which is found once again to be achieved through an 'overbidding' of Husserlian reduction. Importantly, Levinasian reduction is here based on his notion of said and saying, or to be more exact, on a particular kind of movement from the said to the saying. We highlighted Levinas's association between null-site and reduction, and argued for a dual and interlocking significance in this association. Firstly, in the movement of reduction through the utopian lens of null-site, the term 'site' was shown no longer to mean the 'dwelling', but now rather the juncture of the correlation between said and saying, at which the radical ethical significance of infinite responsibility in the saying is unavoidably undermined by the enclosedness of its thematization in the said. At the same time, however, reduction understood through the null-site likewise involves a 'nullifying' of the enclosedness of this site through a breach of this correlation, especially through the diachrony that is brought to bear on the synchronization between said and saying, where a moment of passivity, a so-called traumatic exposure of the subject to his/her responsibility, can be conceived. This way of understanding reduction also demonstrated that although the term 'third way' signifyingness does not appear verbatim in OBBE itself, the signification pointed to by the term in earlier shorter writings is now expressed through the notion of reduction, and in fact finds its culmination here.

Conclusion

With the eventual exposure of subjectivity to the constant reduction beyond its thematization, we have further made a direct association between this subjectivity and the prophetic subjectivity as laid out in the latter part of OBBE, where Levinas designates the command to the subject to take his/her responsibility for the other as coming from 'who knows where'.[10] We distinguished this way of hearing the command from 'who knows where' from the normal knowledge-gaining process; the subject is here rather singled out as witnessing a command without prior knowing it or thematizing it, or in Levinas's own words, without 'testify[ing] to a prior experience'.[11] The subjectivity of this subject is hence defined as a prophetic subjectivity where the command is conveyed by way of a prophecy, which however is not a prophecy that locates the subject as medium between God and others, but singles out the subject as the one and only author of this prophecy. We depicted this prophetic subjectivity as a subject exposing him/herself in a saying with sincerity in the 'here I am', an exposure in which the subject has no signification other than 'directing the neighbour to me'.[12]

With this understanding of prophetic subjectivity, arrived at through the null-site movement of reduction, we concluded the final and culminating moment of the development of subjectivity in Levinas, a prophetic subjectivity beyond any thematization in philosophical signifyingness, a non-repairable breaching of the closed system of writing opening up to the hearing of an ethical command from 'who knows where'. Importantly, it has again been the utopian null-site movement that has made possible a demonstration of the inner logic of

[10] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 100.
[11] Emmanuel Levinas, 'God and Philosophy, in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 129-148, 145.
[12] Ibid., 146.

the development of subjectivity, from the unavoidable thematization of the radical ethical subjectivity depicted in chapter three to a prophetic subjectivity beyond any possibility of thematization.

In broader terms, through our strategic utilization of Levinas's multifaceted notion of utopia to shed light on the critical moments of the development of subjectivity and the inner logic for each step of progression, this thesis has sought to lay out an integrated and comprehensive yet non-dialectical interpretation of the non-ontological character of Levinasian subjectivity across its various forms and stages: from the sensible to the ethical, from the ethical to the political, and finally from the political to the prophetic, in which a non-contradictory account of the ethico-political in Levinas becomes possible. Throughout this process, the utopian lens made it possible to address and shed new clarifying light on an array of what seem like contradictory stances in Levinas's earlier writings as compared to the later: for example, the contradiction between his confirmation of the dwelling in TI and his negation of it in OBBE; the contradiction between his strenuous critique of politics in TI and his acknowledgement of its importance in OBBE; the contradiction between his proposal for a radical ethical subjectivity as otherwise than being and the theoretical language of his philosophy overall. We have also sought to bring greater developmental and organic unity to the relation between earlier and later writings by showing the ongoing underlying prevalence across the Levinasian corpus of the method of 'overbidding' (*surenchère*) by which, for example, key later concepts such as 'site', 'proximity', 'substitution' and 'reduction' are shown to be radicalizations (through overbidding) of the earlier

concepts (respectively) of 'dwelling', 'encounter', 'disinterestedness' and 'third way' signifyingness.

We can draw all of this to a close by noting the strong underlying agenda across the Levinasian corpus of drawing theory together with praxis. In this regard we can appropriately cite Levinas's passionate call to the intellectuals of his time not only to focus on advances at the theoretical level, but also to take action against suffering in society. This, for Levinas, is the ultimate calling of the his own exposed subjectivity, and is the call to each of us who read his philosophy not to terminate our interpretations of his philosophy only in writing, but rather to go beyond writing and, in a 'saying distinct from the said', to 'respond with responsibility'.[13]

[13] Emmanuel Levinas, OBBE, 171, 185.

Bibliography

Aronowicz, Anne. Translator's Introduction to *Emmanuel Levinas: Nine Talmudic Readings*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Abensour, Miguel. 'Persistent Utopia', translated by James Ingram, in *Constellations*, 406-421, Volume 15, No. 3, 2008.

———. 'To think Utopia Otherwise', translated by Bettina Bergo, in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 251-279, Volume 20, No. 2–Volume 21, No. 1, 1998.

———. 'An-archy Between Politics and Meta-politics', in *Parallax*, 5-18, Volume 8, No. 3, 2002.

Anderson, Pamela Sue. 'The Other', in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, edited by Nicholas Adams, George Pattison and Graham Ward, 83-104. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Anderson, Ben, 'A principle of hope: Recorded Music, Listening Practices and the Immanence of Utopia', 211-227. *Geografiska Annaler*. Series B. *Human Geography*, Volume 84, No. 314. Special Issue. *Utopia and Dystopia*, 2002.

Achtenberg, Deborah. 'The Eternal and the New: Socrates and Levinas on Desire and Need', in *Levinas and the Ancients*, edited by Brian Schroeder, Silvia Benso, 24-39. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008.

Atterton, Peter. 'Levinas, Justice, and Just war', in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics*, edited by Joelle Hansel, 141-156. Springer, 2009.

———. 'Levinas's skeptical critique of metaphysics and anti-humanism', in *Philosophy Today*, 491-506, Volume 41, Issue 4, Winter 1997.

Batnitzky, Leora. *Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophy and the Politics of Revelation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*,2006.

———. 'Encounter the Modern Subject in Levinas', in *Yale French Studies*, 6-21, No. 104. *Encounters with Levinas*, edited by Thomas Trezise, 2004.

Bruns, Gerald L. 'Dialogue and the Truth of skepticism', in *Religion and Literature*. 85-91, Volume 22, No. 2/3. *Religious Thought and Contemporary Critical Theory*. Summer-Autumn, 1990.

Burggraeve, Roger. 'Violence and the Vulnerable face of the Other: the Vision of Emmanuel Levinas on Moral Evil and Our Responsibility', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, Volume 4, 49-66. Edited by Claire Katz with Lara Trout. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Bernasconi, Robert. 'The Ethics of Suspicion', in *Levinas and the Question of Religion*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

———. 'The Third Party: Levinas on the Interaction of the Ethical and the Political', in *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Volume 30, No. 1, January 1999.

———. 'What is the Question to which 'Substitution' is the Answer?', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, 234-251. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

———. 'Rereading of the other', in *The Question of the Other: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, edited by Arieen B. Dallery, Charles E. Scott, 23-47. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

———. '"Failure of Communication" as Surplus: Dialogue and Lack of Dialogue Between Buber and Levinas', in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, edited by Robert Bernasconi, and David Wood, 100-135. London: Routledge, 1988.

———. 'Extraterritoriality: Outside of the subject, outside the state', in *Lévinas: Chinese and Western Perspectives: Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Nicholas Bunnin, Dachun Yang, and Linyu Gu, 167-182. 2008.

———. 'Who is my neighbor? Who is the Other?', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessment*, Volume 4, 5-30. Edited by Lara Trout and Claire Katz. London: Routledge, 2005.

———. 'The trace of Levinas in Derrida', in *Derrida and Différance*, edited by Robert Bernasconi, David Wood, 13-30. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988.

Bloch, Ernst. *Natural Law and Human Dignity*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996.

———, *The Principle of Hope*, translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995.

Bevis, Kathryn. 'Dwelling and the Maternal Body in Levinas', in *Literature & Theology*. 317-329, Volume 21, No. 3, September 2007.

Bodden, Martin. *Thomas More: Utopia and the Vision of Ideal Life*. Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2007.

Beals, Corey. *Levinas and the Wisdom of Love: the Question of Invisibility*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith. London& New York: Continuum, 1999.

Caygill, Howard. *Levinas and the Political*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Chalier, Catherine. *Levinas*: *L' Human de 'L'utopie*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1993.

Caputo, John D. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida.* New York: Fordham University Press, 1997.

———. *On Religion*. London: Routledge, 2001.

———. *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Cederberg, Carl, *Resaying the Human: Levinas beyond Humanism and Anti-humanism*. Stockholm: Södertörn University E-print, 2010.

Caputo, John D., Kevin Hart, and Yvonne Sherwood, 'Epoché and Faith: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, Kevin Hart and Yvonne Sherwood, eds. London: Routledge, 2004.

Cohen, Richard, '"Political Monotheism": Levinas on Politics, Ethics and Religion', in *Essays in Celebration of the Founding of the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations,* edited by Cheung, Chan-Fai, Ivan Chvatik, Ion Copoeru, Lester Embree, Julia Iribarne, & Hans Rainer Sepp. Web-Published at TI.o-p-o.net, 2003.

———. Introduction. In Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998.

Catherine Chalier. 'Ethics and Feminine', in *Re-reading Levinas*. Edited by Robert Bernasconi, Simon Critchley. London: The Athlone Press, 1991.

Critcheley, Simon. *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*. London: Verso, 2009.

———. 'Introduction' to *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, 1-32. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge

University Press, 2002.

———. 'The Other's Decision in me', *European Journal of Social Theory,* 259-279, Volume 1, No. 2, February 1998.

———. 'Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and a Sketch of the Solution to Them', in *Political Science*. 172-185, Volume 32, No. 2, 2004.

———. 'Il TI a: Holding Levinas's hand to Blanchot's fire', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical assessments of leading philosophers*, Volume 1, edited by Claire Katz, Lara Trout, 75-87. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

Chanter, Tina. 'Traumatic Response: Levinas's Legacy', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, Volume 4, edited by Claire Katz with Lara Trout. London & New York: Routledge, 2005.

Ciaramelli, Fabio. 'The riddle of the pre-original' in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical assessments of leading philosophers*, Volume 1, edited by Claire Katz, Lara Trout, 67-74. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

Derrida, Jacques. 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, 79-153. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

———. *The Gift of Death*, translated by David Wills. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

———. 'A Word of Welcome', in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, translated by Bettina Bergo. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999.

———. 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials', translated Ken Frieden, in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, edited by Harold Coward, Toby Foshay, 73-136. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Davis, J.C. *Utopia and the Ideal Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

1981.

Delhom, Pascal. 'Necessity and Legitimacy of the State', in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics, Aesthetics*, edited by Joelle Hansel, 75-90. Springer, 2009.

Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on first philosophy*, translated by Elizabeth Haldane. Stilwell: Digireads.com Publishing, 2005.

Drabinski, John. 'Wealth and Justice in a Utopian Context', in *Addressing Levinas*, edited by Eric Sean Nelson, Antje Kapust, Kent Still, 185-198. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005.

Davy, Barbara Jane. 'An Other Face of Ethics in Levinas', in *Ethics & The Environment*. 39-62 Volume 12, No. 1, 2007.

Erfani, Farhang, 'Something new under the sun: Levinas and the Ethics of political imagination', in *PhaenEx.* 46-66, Volume2, No. 1. Spring/Summer 2007.

Franke, William. 'Apophasis and the turn of Philosophy to Religion: From Neo-Platonism negative theology to postmodern negation of theology', in *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion*, 61-76, No. 60, 2006.

Friedman, Maurice. Introduction, in *Martin Buber, Between Man and Man*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

Frie, Roger. *Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity in Modern Philosophy and Psychoanalysis: A Study of Sartre*, *Binswanger, Lacan and Habermas*, edited by Lanham, Boulder. New York& London: Rowman &Littlefield Publishers. Inc., 1997.

Gorner, Paul. *Heidegger's Being and Time: An Introduction*. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Gibbs, Robert. *Correlation in Rosenzweig and Levinas*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Gaston, Sean. 'Derrida and the Ruins of Disinterest', in *Angelaki*. 105-1187. No. 3, 2002.

———. 'Levinas, Disinterest and Enthusiasm', in *Literature & Theology*, 407-421, Volume 17, No. 1, 2003.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962.

———. 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofsadter. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

Husserl, Edmund. *Cartesian Mediations*, translated by Dorion Cairns. The Hague: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1977.

———. *Logical Investigations*, Volume 1, London: Routledge, 1970.

Hutchens, Benjamin C. *Levinas: A Guide for the Perplexed*, London: Continuum, 2004.

Hand, Sean. 'Working out Interiority: Locations and Locutions of Ipseity', in Literature and Theology, 422-434, Volume 17, No. 4, 2003.

Hansel, Georges. 'Ethics and Politics in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics, Aesthetics*, edited by Joelle Hansel, 59-74. Springer, 2009.

Holte, Stine. 'Asymmetry, Testimony, and God in Levinas' Later Thinking', in *Despite Oneself: Subjectivity and its Secret in Kierkegaard and Levinas*, edited by Claudia Welz and Karl Verstryngeus, 81-90. London: Turnshare Ltd publisher, 2008.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *The Science of Logic*, translated and edited by George Di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Hughes, Cheryl, 'The Primacy of Ethics: Hobbes and Levinas', in *Continental Philosophy Review*, Volumes 79-94, No. 31, 1998.

Herzog, Annabel. 'Is Liberalism "All We Need"?: Levinas's Politics of Surplus', in *Political Theory*, 204-227, Volume 30, No. 2, April 2002.

Irigaray, Luce. 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas,' in *Re-Reading Levinas*, edited by Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Kellner, Douglas. 'Ernst Bloch, Utopia and Ideology Critique', in *Jaargang*, 40-48, No. 21, 2010.

Katz, Claire*. Levinas, Judaism and the Feminine*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.

———. 'Reinhabiting the House of Ruth: Exceeding the Limits of the Feminine in Levinas', in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, 145-170. Edited by Tina Chanter. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001.

———. 'The Responsibility of Irresponsibility: Taking (Yet) another Look at the Akedah', in *Addressing Levinas*, edited by Eric Sean Nelson, Antje Kapust, Kent Still, 17-33. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005.

Kearney, Richard. *Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Richard A. Cohen. Albany: State University of New York, 1986.

Kenneth Paul Kramer. *Martin Buber's I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue*. New York: Paulist Press, 2003.

Keenan, Dennis King. Death and Responsibility: The 'Work' of Levinas. Albany:

State University of New York Press, 1999.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling*, translated by Alastair Hanay. London: Penguin Books, 1985.

———. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to philosophical Fragments*, Vol. 1, translated and edited by H.V.Hong and E.V. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Kosky, Jeffrey. *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Kockelmans, Joseph J. *Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology*. West Lafayette: Purdue University, 1994.

———. *On the Truth of Being: Reflection on Heidegger's later Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Levitas, Ruth. *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

———. *The concept of Utopia*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010.

Llewelyn, John. 'Levinas, Derrida and Others *vis à vis*', in *The provocation of Levinas*, edited by Robert Bernasconi, David Wood. 136-155. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

———. *The Middle Voice of Ecological conscience: A Chiasmic Reading of Responsibility in the Neighborhood of Levinas, Heidegger and Others*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991.

Lawton, Philip. 'Love and Justice', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical assessments of leading philosophers*, Volume 3, Nos. 212-219. Edited by Claire Katz with Lara Trout. London & New York: Routledge, 2005.

Louth, Andrew. *The Origin of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to*

Denys. Oxford: OUP. 1997.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, translated by André Orianne. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

———. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985.

———.'Humanism and An-archy', in Emmanuel Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, 127-139. Dordrecht/ Boston/ Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.

———. 'Freedom and Command', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Collected Philosophical Papers,* translated by Alphonso Lingis, 15-24. Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.

———. 'Language and proximity', in *Emmanuel Levinas*: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, 109-126. Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.

———. 'The Ego and the Totality', in Emmanuel Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, 25-46. Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.

———. 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', in Emmanuel Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, 127-139. Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.

———. 'Reflections on the philosophy of Hitlerism', translated by Sean Hand, in *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics*, edited by Asher Horowitz, Gad Horowitz, 3-11. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

———. 'Peace and Proximity', in *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by Michael B. Smith. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

———. 'The Philosopher and Death', in *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by Michael B. Smith. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

———. 'Philosophy and Transcendence', in *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by Michael B. Smith, 3-37. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

———. *Levinas Concordance*, edited by Cristian Ciocan and Georges Hansel. Dordrecht: Springer, 2005.

———. 'The Prohibition Against Representation', in *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by Michael B. Smith. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

———. 'The Proximity of the Other', in *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by Michael B. Smith, 97-109. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

———. 'The Trace of the Other', in *Deconstruction in Context*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, 345-359. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

———. 'Judaism and the Feminine', in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by Séan Hand. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

———. 'Place and Utopia', in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by Séan Hand. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

———. 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, 1-10. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

———. 'Transcendence and Height', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical*

Writings, edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, 11-31. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

———. 'Meaning and Sense', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, 33-64. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

———. 'Enigma and Phenomenon', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings,* edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, 11-31. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

———. 'Essence and Disinterestedness', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, 109-128. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

———. 'God and Philosophy', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, 129-148. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

———. 'Philosophy, Justice, and Love', in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, 88-104. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

———. 'The Other, Utopia and Justice', in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

———. 'Totality and Infinity. Preface to the German Edition', in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

———. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, translated by

Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985.

———. *Existence and Existents*, translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978.

———. '"Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas", an interview with Richard Kearney', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by Richard A. Cohen. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

———. 'Judaism and Revolution', in *Nine Talmudic Readings,* 94-119. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

———. *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'Extériorité*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961.

———. *Is It Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Lévinas*, edited by Jill Robbins. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2001.

———. 'Paul Celan: From Being to the Other' in *Proper Names,* 40-46, translated by Michael. B. Smith. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996.

———. 'Ideology and Idealism', in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998.

———. 'Questions and Answers', in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998.

———. *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998.

———. *Autrement qu'être ou Au-dela de l'Essence*. La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974.

———. Note 2. 204. In *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

———. 'A Propos of "Kierkegaard Vivant"', in *Proper Names*, translated by

Michael B. Smith, 75-79. London: The Athlone Press, 1996.

———. 'Existence and Ethics', in *Proper Names*, translated by Michael B. Smith. London: The Athlone Press, 1996.

———. 'The Paradox of Morality', in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, edited by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood. New York: Routledge Press, 1998.

———. 'Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge', in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand, 59-74. Oxford: Wiley, 2001.

———. *Time and the Other*, translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987.

———. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.

———. 'On Death in Bloch's Thought' in *God Death and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000.

———. *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, translated by Richard A Cohen and Michael Smith. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998.

———. 'Utopia and Socialism', translated by Michael B. Smith, in *Alterity and Transcendence,* 111-117. London: The Athlone Press, 1999.

Lingis, Alphonso. 'Translator's Introduction' to *Emmanuel Levinas: Collected Philosophical Papers*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987.

Maria Avelina Lecilia Lafuente, 'Social imagination in Paul Ricoeur', in *Logos of Phenomenology and Phenomenology of the Logos: Logos of History, Logos of life: Historicity, Time, Nature, Communication, Consciousness, Alterity, Culture*, edited by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. Dordrecht: Springer, 2006.

Miller, Dana. *The Third Kind in Plato's Timaeus*. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck &

Ruprecht, 2003.

Mooney, Edward F. *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Manning. R. J. S. 'Thinking the Other Without Violence? An Analysis of the Relation Between the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and Feminism', in *Journal of Speculative Philosophy,* 132–143, No. 5, 1991.

Mayama, Alain. *Emmanuel Levinas's Conceptual Affinities with Liberation Theology.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010.

Mendes-Flohr, Paul. 'The Desert Within and Social Renewal-Martin Buber's Vision of Utopia', in *New Perspectives on Martin Buber*, edited by Michael Zank, 219-230. Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006.

Moore, Kenneth Royce. *Plato, Politics, and a Practical Utopia*. London: Continuum, 2012.

Moran, Dermot. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

More, Thomas. *Utopia*. London: St. Queen Square, 1869.

Morgan, Michael. *Discovering Levinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

———. *The Cambridge Companion to Emmanuel Levinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Perpich, Diane. *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

———. 'A Singular Justice: Ethics and Justice between Levinas and Derrida', in *Emmanuel Levinas*: *Critical Assessment of Leading Philosophers*, Volume 4, 325-342. Edited by Claire Katz with Lara Trout. London & New York:

Routledge, 2005.

Purcell, Michael. *Levinas and Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Peperzak, Adriaan. To the Other: *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993.

Popper, Karl. 'What is Dialectic', in *Mind*. New Series, 403-426, Volume 49, No. 196. Oct. 1940.

Pandya, Rashmika. 'Sensibility and Subjectivity: Levinas' Traumatic Subject', in *Santalk Filosofia,* 17-25, No. 1, 2010.

Rotenstreich, Nathan. *Immediacy and its Limits: A Study in Martin Buber's Thought*. Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH, 1991.

Ricoeur, Paul. 'Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony', in *Figuring the Sacred*, translated by David Pellauer. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

———. 'Love and Justice', in *Figuring the Sacred*, translated by David Pellauer. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

———. 'Otherwise: A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas's "Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence"', translated by Matthew Escobar, in *Yale French Studies*, No. 104. *Encounter with Levinas,* 82-99, 2004.

Russell, Jacoby. *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thoughts for an Anti-Utopian Age.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

Richter, Silvia. 'Language and Eschatology in the work of Emmanuel Levinas', in *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies,* 54-73, Volume 26, No. 4, 2008.

Robbins, Jill. *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Simmons, William Paul. 'The Third: Levinas' Theoretical Move from An-archical Ethics to the Realm of Justice and Politics,' in *Philosophy and Social Criticism,* 83-104, Volume 25, No. 6, 1999.

Smith, A.D. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Husserl and the Cartesian Meditations*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Smith, Steve. 'Reason as One for Another: Moral and Theoretical Argument in the Philosophy of Levinas', in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Volume 12, Issue 3, 1981.

Sandford, Stella. *The Metaphysics of Love*. London: The Athlone Press, 2000.

———. 'Levinas, Feminism and Feminine', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas,* 139-160. Edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Sargisson Lucy. *Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000.

Staehler, Tanja. *Plato and Levinas: the Ambiguous Out-side of Ethics*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Tejedor, Chon. *Starting with Wittgenstein*. London: Bloomsbury Publisher, 2011.

Thomas, Elisabeth. *Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics, Justice and the Human beyond Being*. New York & London: Routledge, 2004.

Tahmasebi, Victoria. 'Does Levinas Justify or Transcend Liberalism? Levinas on Human Liberation', in *Philosophy Social Criticism,* 523-544, 36(5), 2010.

Taylor, Mark. *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Tzvetan, Todorov. *Hope and Memory: Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, translated by D Bellos. London: Atlantic Books, 2003.

Visker Rudi. 'Dis-possessed: How to remain silent "after" Levinas', in *Man and World,* 119-146, No. 29, 1996.

Waldenfels, Bernhard. 'Levinas and the face of the other', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas,* edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, 63-81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Westphal, Merold. *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

———. 'The Welcome Wound: Emerging from the Il y a otherwise', in *Continental Philosophy Review,* 211-223, No. 40, 2007.

Wisviewski Jeremy. *Heidegger: An Introduction*. Lanham: Rowman& Littlefield, 2012.

Wright, Tamra. *The Twilight of Jewish Philosophy: Emmanuel Levinas' Ethical Hermeneutics*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.

White, Holly. 'Desiring Utopian Subjects: Collectivity and its Discontents', in *Hope and Longing for Utopia: Futures and Illusions in Theology and Narratives*, edited by Daniel Boscaljon, 58-80. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. 2015.

Wyschogrod, Edith. *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, 2nd edition. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

———. 'Autochthony and Welcome, Discourse of Exile in Levinas and Derrida', in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testament*, edited by Yvonne Sherwood, Kevin Hurt. London: Routledge, 2004.

Young, William. *Uncommon Friendships: An Amicable History of Modern Religious Thought.* Eugene: Cascade Book, 2009.