

# Deconstructing Emmanuel Levinas' Aesthetics: A Reading of *The Seagram Murals*

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<p><b>Tiivistelmä – Referat</b></p> <p>Emmanuel Levinas on ranskanjuutalainen filosofi, jonka filosofia keskittyy etiikkaan ja toisen kohtaamiseen. Tämä pro gradu keskittyy Levinaksen estetiikkaan, joka on riippuvainen hänen ”ensimmäisestä filosofiastaan”, eli etiikasta.</p> <p>Työn tutkimuskysymykset ovat Kuinka Levinaksen estetiikka on muodostunut sekä kuinka Mark Rothkon Seagram Murals-maalauksia tulisi arvioida Levinaksen estetiikan pohjalta. Tämän lisäksi työ pohdiskelee juutalaisen filosofian mahdollisuutta ja filosofian luonnetta.</p> <p>Pro gradussa arvioidaan ensin Levinaksen laajempaa filosofiaa feministisen dekonstruktion avulla, joka paljastaa filosofian näennäisen rationaalisuuden ja Levinaksen naisvihamielisen paikantumisen. Tämän jälkeen gradussa arvioidaan Levinaksen estetiikkaa ja pohditaan Levinaksen estetiikan rajoja ensin tarkastelemalla Levinaksen argumenttien koherenttiutta hyväksikäyttäen Jacques Derridan kuva — merkki-analyysia, ja tämän jälkeen soveltamalla feministisen dekonstruktion paljastamia ongelmia spesifisti estetiikkaan. Lopuksi analysoidaan Mark Rothkon The Seagram murals-maalauksia käyttäen Levinaksen estetiikkaa, sekä vertaan sitä Rothkon omiin kirjoituksiin.</p> <p>Tämä työ tulee siihen tulokseen, että Levinaksen etiikka sekä estetiikka pohjaa juutalaisuuteen, ja näin ollen on oikeutettua puhua juutalaisesta filosofiasta. Levinaksen etiikkaa kuitenkin heikentää hänen naisvihamielisyytensä, joka heikentää hänen esteettisiä argumenttejaan. Levinaksen pohjalta Rothkoa ja hänen töitään tulisi arvioida mukavuustuotteena, joka ei kuitenkaan täytä Levinaksen eettisen toiminnan määreitä.</p>			
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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The Subject of the Research

The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways - the point however is to change it.

I first encountered the problematics of Athens, the Western intellectual tradition and Jerusalem, the Jewish tradition, some years ago when I read Saul Bellow's novel *Ravelstein*, where the titular character had found it difficult to choose between Athens and Jerusalem. While reading the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and his essays on Judaism, I again encountered the question of whether these two traditions are mutually exclusive or if they can be synthesised. Unlike the character of Ravelstein, Levinas did not make a decision, but claimed to be a citizen of both of these dwellings. (for ex. Wallenius 2004, 78-82) When Philippe Nemo asked Levinas, how had he been able to combine these two traditions together, Levinas answered with a counter-question: should they be combined? (Levinas 1996, 38) The question of Athens and Jerusalem asks how philosophical work is done, what are its interests and if rationalism and faith can be combined to a Jewish philosophy and whether there is a specific way of making Jewish philosophy.

Levinas research gained momentum in the 1980s, and by 1996 Sorbonne's professor of philosophy Jean-Luc Marion claimed Levinas to be alongside Henri Bergson the Other great French philosopher of the twentieth century (Critchley 2002, 2). There has also been some interest with Levinas' philosophy and Jewish writings in Finland. Tommi Wallenius has written a book *Filosofian toinen. Levinas ja juutalaisuus* published in 2004 concentrating on the influence of Levinas' Jewish heritage in his philosophy. In 1997 Riikka Jokinen wrote her licentiate thesis *Tietämättömyyden etiikka. Emmanuel Levinas modernin subjektin tuolla puolen* on Levinas' postmodern societal justice for University of Jyväskylä. Additionally, some articles and Master's theses have been written on Levinas in the Finnish language, most notably Lissu Lehtimaja's comic book that introduced me to Levinas some years ago.

This Master's thesis grew from an interest to Jewish philosophy and art, and from experiences as an exchange student in King's College London's Jewish Studies Master's Programme as a student of Tamra Wright and Aaron Rosen. The Jewish philosophers covered or even mentioned in this essay, Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig and Emil Fackenheim form the backbone of modern Jewish philosophy. These figures are covered or mentioned in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy*. (see Bibliography Cohen R.) If well known in anglo-francophone countries, the amount of Finnish research referenced above indicates that they are little known in Finland. This thesis aims to challenge the boundaries and presumed hierarchies of disciplines in university in the vein of deconstruction (see Derrida 1997, 11), to introduce this interesting thinker in the context of theological research and to contemplate the possibilities of praxis of Levinas' thought.

## **1.2 Study Aims**

This thesis concentrates on Levinas' aesthetic philosophy. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that concerns over the questions of art and beauty or aesthetics and tries to formulate theories on them. (Dickie 2009, 11) To understand Levinas' aesthetic thought one will first need to consider his wider philosophical project. The research is divided into two part: First there is a wider theoretical analysis and later a smaller empirical application. The thesis has three aims: to evaluate Levinas' philosophy generally by using feminist deconstruction and Derrida's critique, to engage this evaluation to a specific part of his philosophy, aesthetics, and last this thesis will combine different strata of Levinas' philosophy and its critique for a critique of Mark Rothko's series of paintings. The research questions is how would the part of Rothko's *Seagram murals* that is located in Tate Modern be deemed according to Levinas and how has Levinas come to his aesthetics. The first aim includes the deconstructive musings on the possible Jewish philosophy and how it is a part of Levinas' aesthetics.

To quote Jacques Derrida's eulogy on Levinas: "I cannot, nor would I even try to, measure in a few words the oeuvre of Emmanuel Levinas. It is so large that one can no longer glimpse its edges." (Derrida 1999, 3) The thesis objective is not to summarise all of Levinas' philosophy, but instead to survey relevant portions contributing to the understanding of his aesthetics and of alternative readings. Although this research is based on Jacques Derrida's Levinas writings and is much indebted to feminist viewpoints of Claire Katz and Susanna Heschel, it comes to its own in the chapter of analysis, where feminist deconstruction is applied to Levinas' aesthetics originally.

Hilary Putnam has arguably reductively written that the aim of Levinas' philosophy is to change one's life, which can already be seen from the title of his 2008 book, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life*. Even if not Levinas' intention, the telos of this thesis is to grow in wisdom.

## **2. LITERATURE AND METHOD**

### **2.1 Material**

Levinas' philosophy can be divided into three different periods: to early thought before the Second World War, to mature thought from 1947 onwards, and to late thought of 1974's *Otherwise than Being* that brings new concepts and viewpoints to the corpus. I have concentrated mainly on Levinas mature thought. The central texts this thesis uses are Levinas' art critique *Reality and Its Shadow* originally from 1948, *Totality and Infinity* from 1961 and *Etiikka ja äärettömyys* (Ethique et infini) from 1982.

Two of Derrida's essays concentrate directly with Levinas' philosophy: from 1967's *Writing and Difference* the essay *Violence and Metaphysics* which concentrates on comparing mature Levinas with Husserl and Heidegger and the book *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. In deciphering deconstruction the 1981's interview collection *Positions* proves

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itself useful. It would seem that Derrida's reading of Levinas guides many secondary texts' interest in describing Levinas in relation with influencers Husserl and Heidegger and not comparing Levinas with the contemporary peers Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, Wallenius and Putnam for example follow this route. It is inevitable to read Derrida's unsurpassable texts and to do so, one would need to have an understanding of deconstruction. Deconstruction contextualises philosophy and brings forth the religious studies interests of question of Jewishness. Deconstruction is aware of power relations. The feminist viewpoint employed is a subset of deconstruction.

Mark Rothko is a Jewish abstract expressionist painter whose artwork hang in the *Tate Modern*. Rothko has also written on the nature of art and artist. He brings another interesting aspect to Jewish identities and to the deconstructive question of the influence of the identity to the work.

## **2.2 Concepts and Terms**

### 2.2.1 Levinas' terminology and Jewish terms

Levinas often uses different or overlapping terms for same concepts. "A series of metonymies that bespeak hospitality, the face, welcome: tending toward the Other, attentive intention, intentional attention, yes to the Other" (Derrida 1999, 22). This is part of his project to build wisdom of love, ethics as the first philosophy, where he tries to stand outside of traditional philosophy (Beals 2007, 11-12). Levinas was even more aware of the use of language after Derrida's criticism. Levinas' own terminology is defined inside the text, but here are some generic key terms explained. Not only may Levinas' own philosophical jargon that often differs from the commonplace philosophical terms be difficult to follow, but Jewish terms need clarification due to their foreignness to general audience. Here is a short glossary: *The Talmud* refers usually to the Babylonian Talmud, is a wide corpus of canonised early Medieval rabbinic texts written down in over 600 years,

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more widely to all of rabbinic texts. Traditionally it is viewed as the oral *Torah*, the same revelation as the written Torah (the Hebrew Bible) that was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Talmud's structure is dialogical. Its basis are the *Mishna* and *Tosefta* that concentrate on the *halakha* (rabbinic law) and *midrash*, the commentary and exegesis of the Torah. Talmud discusses these core texts and adds *aggadic*, story material. (Fonrobert & Jaffee 2007, 1-9) Jewish orthodoxy is divided in factions of *hasidism* and *mitnagdim*, also known as the Opponents (of hasidism) or the Lithuanians (Dan 2006, 93).

### 2.2.2 Ethics

"According to hallowed custom, a system of philosophy consist of a logic, ethic, aesthetic and a philosophy of religion" (Rosenzweig 1999, 70) Oxford Dictionary's simple definition of ethics is: "1) moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity 2) the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles" The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy narrows definition to "(Greek, ethos, character) The study of the concepts involved in practical reasoning: good, right, duty, obligation, virtue, freedom, rationality, choice." (Blackburn 2008) Henry McDonald separates ethics from morality. According to him, morality is the social convention of behaviour that is deemed universal. Ethics is a personal stance. McDonald comments that philosophical tradition has seen these two as a continuum, in which morality was primary. For examples he gives Kant's categorical imperative and the Golden rule's assumed universality. Challenging this tradition, Levinas contemplates morality from the viewpoint of ethics and questions the idea of universalism that denies alterity. (McDonald 2008, 19-20) This repositioning is in the core of Levinas' philosophy.

Putnam divides moral philosophers into two classes: systematic law builders and moral perfectionists, who believe that before any system there needs to be something else, some basis for morality (Putnam 2008, 72). In this division, Levinas' before of any system, the basis, is the face-to-face ethics and the law system would be covered in his term justice. Other definitions for Levinas' ethics are Alain Finkielkraut's Levinas' ethics as descriptive



(Wallenius 2004, 48) and Derrida's description of Levinas' ethics as Ethics of Ethics that does not try to define morality, but seeks the essence of the ethical relation. If Levinas' ethics were to decree a law, it would do so against itself. (Derrida 1978, 138) Robert Bernasconi writes, "Unlike much contemporary writing on ethics, Levinas does not assume or even expect rationality and morality to be in agreement" (Bernasconi 2002, 237). Levinas writes how the God of philosophers is concurrent with rationality and doesn't bother. If philosophy is divided into different areas of interest as Rosenzweig suggests, Levinas' concept of justice belongs into ethics, or more accurately put, into morality, even though he himself likes to call its operational sphere ontology. If rationality doesn't belong into his concept of ethics, I would say it belongs to justice. Levinas himself writes that he doesn't try to build a system of ethics, but his philosophical mission is to find out the meaning and purpose of ethics. Levinas calls ethics the first philosophy (Levinas 1996, 69, 76), which means that the basis of Other philosophical thinking (for example of ontology or aesthetics) should be ethics. Levinas' vision of the direction and doing of philosophy is "wisdom of love" not philo-sophia "love of wisdom" (Beals 2007, 5).

### 2.2.3 Phenomenology

Levinas comes from the tradition of continental philosophy and his writings are in constant dialogue with previous philosophy, especially when he disagrees with it. For the basis of concept *face to face*, Levinas uses Edmund Husserl's phenomenology (phenomenon + logos, word and reason). (Putnam 2008, 76) Reading Husserl, one needs to keep in mind the philosophical trends of idealism, empiricism and mind-body-dilemma and how Husserl answers to them. The difference between phenomenology and phenomenalism is that in the latter, it is supposed that one cannot know the real world, but only idealist phenomena. In phenomenology it is thought that one can have access to the corporeal world and that the truth must and can be based on one's direct experience. Jaakko Hintikka begins his article on Husserl by pondering if phenomenology is a theory of *intentionality*. (Hintikka 1995, 80, 83) Antti Pönni defines Husserl's intentionality as a consciousness that already is a consciousness of something, a consciousness that always has a target (Pönni 1996, 11).

Hintikka divides phenomenological reduction into eidetic reduction and to transcendental reduction, which *brackets* out the reality and focuses on one's thoughts. (Hintikka 1995, 79) This bracketing leads to a consciousness without a priori knowledge (Bernet 2002, 83). What survives of the real world in transcendental reduction Husserl calls *phenomenological residuum*. This residuum belongs to the real world, but also to the consciousness and thus acts as a link between them, and validates Husserl's claim that nothing is lost in the bracketing process. The process of intentional consciousness structuring objects, or *noema*, from sensory (sight, sound) information of real world's raw material *hyle*, is called *noesis*. Phenomenological reduction brackets away everything else than the noema, and how it is constituted from the experience of the hyle. The mediator of meaning is called *noemata*. Noemata and reality converge with Husserl's *intuition*, which refers to the data one gets in experience that is *self given*. (Hintikka 1995, 79- 81, 85, 87, 89-92) Hintikka writes how noema and objects of reality meet:

"The constitution of a noema determines how it is connected with what is given to me in intuition, in Husserl's terminology, how it could be filled. Since the filling is a matter of what is immediately given to me and since what is given to me is part and parcel of the real world, the world of objects, the constitution does constitute a bridge between noemata and objects" (Hintikka 1995, 92).

Even when phenomenology acknowledges a reality outside oneself, intentionality takes away objects autonomy: even when objects remain transcendent, they are dependent on the observer. Levinas critiques this subject-object relationship and intention's reach of reality's object, what Derrida calls "mystical communion" (Derrida 1978, 105, 108). Husserl's and also Martin Heidegger's phenomenology that continue the Western totalising thought with intentionality trying to objectify and rule over the Other. Levinas also critiques their time concept in phenomenology, and proposes his own diachronic time in the relation of I and the Other, into which I will return in my analysis of Rothko. (Bernet 2002, 83, 87-88) Even when phenomenology serves as a starting point, it falls short when faced with *the Face*, something whose existence is radically exterior to oneself (Crignon 2004, 102).

#### 2.2.4 Structuralism

To understand deconstructionism it is vital to know its roots. Structuralism is a philosophical movement that encompasses various fields of humanities such as linguistics, anthropology, literary criticism and others. It gained prominence in post-war France after the disappointments of war and occupation. Structuralism has its origin in linguistics, most notably in the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Structural linguistics was treated as the most developed and exact of the "soft sciences" by the likes of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and thus its method should be emulated. (Ungar 2004, 157-159) de Saussure calls "nomenclaturism" the view that there is a reality regardless of perception, and this reality is named and articulated only afterwards (Joseph 2004, 63). de Saussure himself claims that how one perceives the world is dictated by the language one uses, which already is structured in different ways and conventions. Thus different languages infer reality in different ways. (Norris 1982, 4-5) Without a language thoughts are incoherent. A language is composed of different signals or signifiers that the language users identify as same concepts. There has been a tradition of thinking about language as signs and not as words, as the term sign draws attention to the process of meaning and interpretation, and to Other forms of communication than spoken or written language, (Joseph 2004, 61, 68) such as for example sign language. It seems that de Saussure's linguistics operate with philosophical questions of perception, empirism and idealism.

de Saussure proposed a scientific system of semiologia, a study of signs. Each sign is composed of two parts, of signifier and signified. The sign is *concrete*, while the signifier and signified are *abstractions*. This term concrete means that it is psychologically meaningful entity for a regular user, whereas abstractions are linguists' analytical tools. Similar to the difference of sign as concrete and its parts as abstract, Saussure also makes a distinction between *parole* (speech), what people actually do with language, and *langue*, a mental system of language. (Joseph 2004 59, 63, 66) The sign is arbitrary. Dog, koira, and chien all refer to the same concept, the same signified. Saussure did not question sign's arbitrariness, which is called *the irrational* principle. Grammar tries to contain the arbitrariness principle for the sake of communication: cat-s and dog-s refer to plentitude of animals, but the plural ending could be anything (Katz-e), or irregular (mice). A sign refers to a mental concept, not straight to a reality. The sign is also defined by its *opposition* to other signs, and its constituents have *difference*, are different to other sign's constituents.

Cat does not have the same concept (signified) as dog does. Signs interact with each Other either syntactically (I-did-it) or associatively (cat-dog). Signs also have different *values* that come from the users. In time, words change their meaning and languages evolve. The French word "mouton" has different value than the English words sheep/mutton, as it describes living and dead animal, where English has two words. Saussure calls the time when the sign "is happening" synchronic and historical development diachronic. (Joseph 2004, 59-68, 73; Gordon 2004, 76; Bennington 2004, 194)

For de Saussure language and signs consist of sounds. He calls the signifier an acoustic image. The written sign is secondary, a depiction of the "true" sign, a signifier of a signifier. Saussure also defends a sign as linear, to accentuate the difference between a visual sign and the acoustic sign, as sound and speech has a linear forward direction. As previously already noted, for Saussure thinking was linguistic and thus also linear. (Joseph 2004, 60-62, 71) Structuralism is an important reference point for post-structuralism, a movement connected to postmodernism.

### 2.2.5 Postmodernism

Postmodernism has been attached to the notion of different sorts of ends: to God's death and even to the end of philosophy itself. Jean-Francois Lyotard has written about the "grand narratives" of Western civilisation that postmodernism has set out to dissolve. These narratives are Enlightenment's narrative of progress and Hegelian narrative of scientific reason. What postmodernism has done, is that it has questioned the principles of Western science and philosophy, knowledge and unravelled positions of power. Postmodernism resists different systematic totalities, teleologies and narratives. Here feminism and postmodernism go hand in hand, although as with Levinas, who in his critique of ethics as first philosophy exposes the positions of power and fascism, they both create narratives of their own. Levinas' narrative would be his concept of *eschatology*. Postmodernism has questioned the sensibility of metaphysics. For Descartes knowledge was a tree, which roots were metaphysics qua epistemology. Yet as Paul Sheehan mentions,

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Levinas is not about to destroy metaphysics, but sees it as subordinate in his project of ethics as first philosophy. The face to face relation is transcendent, metaphysical. Postmodernism is also connected to the linguistic turn, that can be traced back to Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Postmodernism has discarded the "logical" and "rational" way of writing philosophy and embraced different sort of, even oblique, writing style that is very prominent in Levinas' (and Derrida's) texts, as he tries to write philosophy outside philosophical language, for example differentiating the saying and the said. Postmodernism is not postmortemism, this is hardly the end. (Sheehan 2004, 20-28) As seen, Levinas straddles between modernism and postmodernism. Levinas differs from the relativism and solipsism of postmodernism in acknowledging the outside world and other people, but joins the subjective tradition of postmodernisms, as his philosophy is not prescriptive; the I in his philosophy is Levinas himself.

### **2.3 Sources and Criticism**

This thesis is very much rooted into French philosophy but relies on translations that always are an interpretation. Levinas' philosophical roots are in phenomenology, and Putnam claims that to understand Levinas, one needs to know the philosophy of his continental masters Husserl and Heidegger (Putnam 2008, 76). Derrida's essay *Violence and Metaphysic* that concentrates on Husserl and Heidegger's influence on Levinas, seems to have guided many secondary scholars' reading of Levinas (for example Wallenius). For the purpose of this thesis it is more important for the deconstruction project to find out Levinas' perception of phenomenology than the possible "truth" of the phenomenological method or comparison with other philosophers. Deconstruction posits a third problem: Derrida comes from the same postmodern and Jewish tradition as Levinas does, which in a sense limits the angles for Levinas critique.

The secondary texts are also an interpretation, which is the reason this thesis often explicitly mention the secondary source. Many of the sources try to synthesise Levinas' thought from period of more than forty years. Although the core of Levinas' thought

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remains the same, this is a mistake, as some changes in philosophy and terminology take place over time. Also in this thesis some overlapping terms are syntheticised, but variations and development are pointed out when found necessary. Especially those writing on Levinas aesthetics seem to have an agenda of their own.

According to Liljeström, feminism is interested in how and why gender and gender difference functions and is produced. Often feminist theory is also interested in questions of race, class and sexuality. Feminist critique shares or rises from different critical theories, in the case of this thesis, from deconstruction. Critical theories share the view of ideas as and processes of information and knowledge as inseparable from historical, cultural and social processes. Feminist critique not only locates the object of the inspection, but also the position of the inspector. (Liljeström 2004, 11-13) For example, the question found in Levinas of philosophy's language, Greek, (Derrida 1978, 100) forgets the great philosophical traditions of China and India.

## **2.4 Method**

Philosophy of religion is a branch of philosophy that concentrates on religious phenomena. To differentiate theology from philosophy of religion, Knuuttila writes that theology relies on revelation and scripture, philosophy of religion solely on human reasoning. He continues that philosophy of religion is apologetical that it tries to rationalise faith, (Knuuttila 2003, 8-31) but I would say that all philosophy has an agenda. Levinas' ethics has a basis in Judaism, and if the reader interprets its source in God, or something exterior to human, then Levinas' philosophy could be called philosophy or religion. Phenomenology of religion is a method of religious studies to study the religious person. (Laitila 2004, 73) Although the word phenomenology and religion occur often with Levinas, he does not engage with phenomenology of religion, except perhaps in the distinction of sacred and holy. These lines and divisions between philosophy, theology and religious studies are arbitrary. This master's thesis is done for the faculty of theology,

majoring in study of religions and covers Levinas' philosophy of religion, although not using phenomenology of religion.

#### 2.4.1 Deconstruction

In an interview, Derrida was asked if one were interested in deconstruction, what would be the starting point. Derrida guided the reader to start from *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference* and *Speech and Phenomena* all published in 1967. (Derrida 1981, 4) Derrida writes his philosophy by critically engaging with different kinds of texts varying from literature to philosophy. He questions the nature of philosophy as a distinct and superior genre, and seeks to expose how philosophy and reason cannot transcend language to gain some exterior truth, but are reliant on language and metaphors it uses. (Norris 1982, 18-19) Yet Derrida stays within the context and discourse of the particular philosophy he is examining until he meets its "borders". He questions what makes a philosophy and reveals what is left out in the formation of a coherent philosophy. (Derrida 1981, 6) Derrida often begins his scrutiny from a seemingly arbitrary or marginal aspect, that's inconsistencies or reliance on presumptions or metaphysics undermine the whole system of a certain thought, but he does not try to invalidate the thought system by building an opposing system (Bennington 2004, 186; Johnson 2000, 61).

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida examines structuralism. Grammatology means a science of writing, and in a reading of the structuralist linguistics of de Saussure and structuralist anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, Derrida unravels the relation of spoken and written language in structuralism and exposes how science is based on assumptions. As already seen, for de Saussure the spoken signifier is the "proper" signifier, and the written signifier represents the spoken signifier. Though these sign systems are completely different, de Saussure says that the spoken language should be the target of linguistics. de Saussure would not name written system even a sign, but a symbol. Derrida connects de Saussure's writing-speech distinction to ancient Western metaphysics and its logocentrism, where writing is perceived as artificial and absent compared to speech's presence. For Saussure thought and voice,

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meaning and sound, form a natural link. Yet he fears that Other linguists might succumb to the lure of the image and reverse the natural order of speech and writing, a fear that Derrida interprets as a possibility that speech may not be the natural primary sign. (Bennington 2004, 188-195; Derrida 1981, 5, 21; Johnson 2000, 9)

Notation, writing, nor a sign cannot escape metaphysics. The connection between sound waves or dot on a paper to a concept is purely mental. Mental concept's connection to reality is dubious. de Saussure seems inconsistent; he says that the signifier is not in its essence phonic, and yet he favours the spoken word and uses the already loaded term sign in his linguistics, as he sees that it is the best term found in everyday language. Derrida points out that "everyday language" is the language of Western metaphysics. As one remembers, de Saussure divided the sign into signifier and signified. This separates concept distinct from language, and this dualism caters for the possibility of what Derrida calls the transcendental signified, essence and truth that lies out there. Translation shows how the transcendental signified works: that there is an entity regardless of language. Yet in this process the signified becomes a signifier and the distinction between these two becomes problematic. (Derrida 1981, 17-20) Derrida also looks into Saussure's concept of the value of a sign. The amount of signifiers referring to Other signifiers deems the value of the sign, making the signified superfluous in describing a language, as a signifier is a signifier of another signifier, not its signified. (Bennington 2004, 197)

As signs carry the traces of Other signs that they are not, Derrida chooses to replace the value laden term sign with his own term of *trace*. "What guided us in the choice of this word? - - If words and concepts take their meaning only in linkings of differences, one can justify one's language, and the choice of terms, only within a topology and a historical strategy" (in Bennington 2004, 200). To de Saussure (phonic) signs were present, but according to Derrida, as they were in the beginning constructs of the absence of other signs, they are not present, but in movement of becoming. This is what Derrida calls *différance*. Thus *différance* combines differing (traces) and deferring (postponement), active and passive movement within the diachronic (and synchronic) that produces different things and reveals artificial dualisms. Trace questions presence and origin and thus precedes de Saussure's distinctions. Although one could say that de Saussure has a notion of the trace in the opposing and associative formations of signs. In French one

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cannot hear a difference between difference and différance. This draws attention how the written sign intervenes silently the phonetic sign de Saussure triumphs. (Bennington 2004, 193-194; Derrida 1981, 8-9, 98)

de Saussure sees phonetic/alphabetic writing as the best and most sophisticated writing system, as it best imitates sound. He excludes writing from linguistics and even from language and yet claims that linguistics could be regarded as the model and general pattern for all study of semiology. This is pure ethnocentrism, and even phonetic writing systems fail to convey language as it's spoken (Bennington 2004, 190; Derrida 1981, 21, 24-25) unless one would use IPA to notate every individual's speech. When de Saussure claims that written sign is a representation of spoken sign, he fails to portray the usage of for example the Chinese characters in various languages. The character 京 capital, is pronounced jīng in Mandarin Chinese, kyo in Japanese (for example Beijing, Tokyo). A character has a concept of its own, if one were to stay within de Saussure's structure of the sign as concept-signifier. But as previously seen, Derrida questions this division and the possibility of reaching any concept, but wrote how language is a system of signifiers referring to Other signifiers. As writing was for de Saussure a signifier of spoken signifier, writing would obviously be part of a Saussurian language (Bennington 2004, 197).

Derrida proposes a new definition of writing, in this he again employs différance, or gram (writing). Signs interact with each other in absence and link together syntactically to form a text. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each "element" — phoneme or grapheme — being constituted on the basis of the trace within it, of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (Derrida 1981, 26)

System of gram, of différance and trace overrides opposing notions of presence (sound) and absence (image) and is the most basic concept of semiology that covers writing and

linguistics. Thus grammatology "neutralises" sign as only phonic entity and other metaphysical dualisms as basically the same. Extended use of writing, sometimes also called arch-writing (archie means an absolute beginning that is impossible to find), would be the source of both writing and speech. (Derrida 1981, 14, 28) Following Heidegger, the trace also questions the traditional "fundamental question" of philosophy, that of Being. If philosophy is to ask questions, to whom are these questions asked but the other. Already in Being there are traces of the other. (Canalul utilizatorului hiperf289 2007)

The anthropologist Lévi-Stauss took structural linguistics, language, as a model for social analysis of kinship (Rosman & Rubel 2004, 59). For structuralists, the term language covered all systems of differences. Derrida employs writing as the all encompassing system. In a reading of Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques*, Derrida finds how in line with Rousseau's favouring of "the natural" and "authentic" Lévi-Strauss connects writing with sociological oppression, and fails to see writings of different sorts. The tribe Lévi-Strauss observed did draw pictures and decorated pots. Derrida asks, where and when does writing then begin? Is 木 tree, or 中 middle, picture or writing? The answer would be that writing does not begin, it already is there (thus arch-writing). Derrida sees different sorts of coding as arch-writing, as differences, classifications, and "violence". Different sorts of coding may be seen as writing: picture, binary code, even DNA. Writing could be seen as a continuation of biological and mental capacities to paper and technology. (Johnson 2000, 26, 35, 42-47, 52, 55) Even if one were to accept writing only in the traditional sense, and not as arch-writing, it is possible to conclude with the famous quotation: "There is nothing outside the text." (Norris 1982, 41)

### **3. LEVINAS' PHILOSOPHY**

#### **3.1 Biography and Context**

As deconstruction teaches, context is infinite. First some key moments in Levinas' biographical and intellectual history that will contribute to the understanding of Levinas' philosophy and discourses it contains shall be introduced. Levinas was born into Jewish family in Lithuania in 1906. (Critchley 2002, 1) As a young man Levinas studied in the universities of Strasbourg and Freiburg, where he got to know the contemporary philosophies of Emil Durkheim, Henri Bergson, study under Husserl and Heidegger (Levinas 1996, 42, 45) and met a friend and mutual influencer Maurice Blanchot (Chanter 2001, 6). In 1930 he moved to Paris and married Raisa Levy. Levinas worked at École Normale Israelite Orientale, where he would return after the war. During the Second World War Levinas served in the French army, as he had previously gained French citizenship, and spent 1940-45 in a camp as a prisoner of war. (Cohen 2007, 234) Levinas' family, excluding his wife and daughter were murdered. (Wallenius 2004, 28) In 1950's Levinas was part of Jean Wahl's — who often appears in Levinas' texts — intellectual circle that also included Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Paul Ricoeur (Bergo 2010, 70). Levinas' early philosophical career was tied to the works and translation of Husserl and Heidegger and prior to his 1961 publication *Totality and Infinity* and to his career in the academy, Levinas was more prominent in the affairs of the French Jews. In 1963 Levinas was appointed to University of Poitiers, from where he moved in 1967 to University of Paris-Nanterre, and finally to Sorbonne, where he taught even beyond his retirement, until 1979. Levinas died in 1995. (Critchley 2002, 1, 2; Cohen 2007, 235)

Most secondary sources, for example Wallenius and McDonald see Levinas' early experiences in reading prominently Russian literature vital to his later philosophy, especially to his aesthetics (for example see McDonald 2008, 15, Wallenius 2004, 17, Chanter 2001, 6). Deconstruction points out the often arbitrary line drawn between literature and philosophy and how philosophy itself is literary (Norris 1981, x). An influence outside traditional Western philosophy is the enigmatic Monsieur Shoshoni, also spelled as Chouchani and Shushani, who in the after-war years taught Talmud to Levinas. In 1959, Levinas presented first of his "Talmudic readings" at the annual gathering of French Jewish intellectuals, which later would be gathered to form a core of his "Jewish writings". (Cohen 2007, 234-236) Levinas has tried to separate his Jewish writings from his philosophical writings by for example using different original publishers. Yet this division is not clear, which can be seen in Levinas' intellectual position: Levinas cites

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Rosenzweig — who deliberately amalgamated religion with philosophy — as an influence for *Totality and Infinity* in his opposition of totality (Levinas 1979, 28).

The French postwar field of philosophy was dominated by bodily phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre's "Hell is Other people"-existentialism (Levinas 1996, 57). Even when Sartre has written a work called *Antisemite and Jew*, in his essay *The Holocaust and Philosophy* Fackenheim claims that modern philosophy has mostly overlooked the Holocaust, diluted it into generic "hate crime". (Fackenheim 1985, 505) If so, then Levinas is an exemption, although his philosophy differs from Fackenheim's. One major influence for *Totality and Infinity* is the *Shoah* that is, the Holocaust (Bergo 2010,74). Where "rationality" of philosophy has been lazy, fine arts have succeeded better. In his Nobel prize acceptance lecture, Imre Kertész contemplates: "I understood that hope is an instrument of evil, and the Kantian categorical imperative - ethics in general - is but the pliable handmaiden of self-preservation." (Kertész 2002) This dilemma is at the centre of Levinas' thought. In the breakdown of morality and ethics, in abandonment of laws and categorical imperatives, what is left? In post-Holocaust world Levinas tries to find out, whether it is justified to be, if it is one's responsibility to do so, even if by being, I kill Others (Levinas 1996, 93-94).

### **3.2 Introduction to Levinas' Philosophy**

Levinas has quite distinctive and difficult style of writing. This is due to his double project of writing philosophy that operates in the language of Greek, but at the same time seeking to break free from its tradition. Levinas writes metaphysical philosophy challenging the traditional ontological questions of being (Heidegger) and phenomenon (Husserl). Levinas' often seemingly contradictory phrases challenge "the formal logic" that is to be found in ontology and phenomenology. (Derrida 1978, 100-102, 113) "Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power." (Levinas 1989, 46) *Totality and Infinity* begins with Levinas' own project of first philosophy by criticising his Continental masters' *totalising* philosophies. This means that Western philosophy has had the tendency to reduce

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everything to one's own experiences and that the world can be captured with one's intellect and knowledge. The Other has been seen as part of universal Being and philosophy has had an "allergic reaction" to the other that stays as Other. (Levinas 1996, 68, 101) An example would be Descartes' question how does one know if other people or things even exist. Levinas calls this totalising philosophy *egology*. In this totalising thought of ontology, if the existence of other people is recognised, the others are basically *the same* as I am. (Levinas 1979, 42, 44)

In Levinas concept of *Infinity*, the other is wholly *Other* (Levinas 1996, 77) that cannot be reduced, totalised. The Other is not a negation of I, it does not even belong to the same spectre of one's being. Derrida points out how in the Other formal logic is defied, the Other is at the same time present and absent, which reminds one of Derrida's own concept of trace. For Heidegger, ontology is primary (Levinas 1979, 38, 45; Derrida 1978, 113). According to Levinas, Heidegger's fundamental ontology is about understanding the verb *being*. Levinas is very critical of this, and claims that being is not the *raison d'être* of humane life, which for him is to be responsible for the Other. This stops the meaningless and anonymous being (*il y a*). In *Otherwise than being*, the ontological premisses are dismantled (Levinas 1996, 47, 55, 81, 94). As Pönni clarifies in a footnote of *Ethique and Infini*, in *dés-inter-essement* one's own being is no longer the primary factor that defines oneself, nor the question of being the primary question (Levinas 1996, 32).

The starting point for *transcendence*, the break of totality, can be traced to phenomenology. Levinas describes how the central thought in Husserl's phenomenological process is *sich zu besinnen*, to ask the question where one is at this moment. Not only to ponder what something is, but how the thing that is *is* and what meaning does its being have. (Levinas 1996, 43) The phenomenological process of being aware of one's thought processes leads one to *intentionality*. Intentionality describes how knowledge is always knowledge about something, about the object of thought. Intentionality is not just knowledge about something, but the thought processes it produces are dependent on the object. (Levinas 1996, 44) As already fleetingly mentioned, the relation to the Other derives from the phenomenological bracketing away the outside world, and leaves only two, I and the Other (Wright 2.11.2013, oral). But the method falls short, as the wholly Other resists reductive intentionality and its objectifying knowledge. (Levinas 1996, 45)

Levinas' transcendence at the same time presupposes phenomenology and resists it. He goes beyond Husserl's divisions of noesis and noema, and intentionality transforms into *desire* and to self awareness of speech and *welcome*. (Derrida 1978, 147, 166; Derrida 1999, 22) Yet phenomenological method is worth mentioning as it is the basis of hypothetical ethical relationship, where there are only two people in the world. Transcendence, or infinity, is not to think about (Other as) object. It achieved in a *face to face* relation to the Other. So, face is "the way in which the Other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the Other in me*" (Levinas 1979, 49-50). One cannot *gaze* the Other but only *desire* the Stranger (Levinas 1979, 62) Desire is the metaphysical transcendence (Derrida 1978, 114). Levinas goes against the traditional egology in face to face relation, as a relationship begins with a response. A call without an answer is futile. Derrida notes how this *welcome* of receiving is one of the most frequent words in *Totality and Infinity*. A welcome of the face opens up the possibility of ethics. (Derrida 1999, 24-25). The relation to the face is an ethical one, the face commands not to kill (Levinas 1996, 74).

The face to face relationship that always is immediate, is achieved in conversation with the Other (Levinas 1979, 52). The language used is within the ethical realm of *saying*, the answering and *greeting* the Other (Levinas 1996, 75). Distinction between ethical saying and ontological *said* is a later development in Levinas' philosophy, influenced by Derrida's critique. Nonviolent language without any rhetorics is the saying that reaches the Other. In 1967's *Violence and Metaphysics* Derrida wonders if language without rhetorics, without word *to be* is possible and what would such a language say or give to the Other. Only a silent origin of language before Being could be without violence. (Derrida 1978, 184-185) The face to face relationship is dialogical, but not similar to for example Martin Buber's dialogical I-Thou-relationship, as Levinas points out. With Buber this relationship is reciprocal, with Levinas it is asymmetric. (Levinas 1998, 105) Levinas' thou is vous. Levinas calls this a dimension of *height* (Levinas 1979, 75). Height is caused by one's *responsibility* to the Other. Yet, I would call this relationship reciprocal, even if asymmetric, as it is still a relationship with certain roles to play. Levinas writes "at the outset I hardly care what the Other is with respect to me, that is his own business" (Levinas 1998, 105). But in Levinas, so called one-sided relationship is a relationship (unlike in Buber), and arguably this relationship is filled in *substitution*.

Levinas likes to quote Dostoyevsky from time to time: "We are all guilty for everything and everyone, and I more than all the Others." (Levinas 1998, 105) Responsibility for Levinas is what makes a person truly human. It is the primary structure of the I. The responsibility is revealed in the Face when the Other looks at the I. One does not take responsibility, but it falls upon the I. One "is for the Other", responsible even for the responsibilities of the Other. (Levinas 1996, 78-79) To sum responsibility in four easy steps: responsibility is answering to the Other's ethical call (responsabilité). Responsibility is infinite and asymmetrical (which means that I am responsible for everything, but I cannot ask anything from the Other). Responsibility is concrete and its target is the Other, not world or truth. The Other's material needs are I's spiritual needs. Lastly, responsibility is disagreeable (désagréable). As a human, one is responsible, wanted one it or no. (Wallenius 2004, 55-58) "I, the chosen hostage, the chosen one" (Levinas 1998, 227).

One is also responsible for the Other's death. This worry (crainte) is the basis of the responsibility taken. Levinas also describes this as the basis of love without *eros*. (Levinas 1996, 92) A later development is holiness (sainteté), which describes the moment when God comes to one's mind. God equalling transcendence. Thus holiness enables "Otherwise than being". (Wallenius 2004, 62) The demand of holiness is infinite, insatiable responsibility (Levinas 1996, 83). These concepts shall be returned to below.

Now one shall take into consideration Levinas' concept of *justice*, where the phenomenological reduction of face-to-face proves insufficient. The term justice has different meanings in Levinas' middle and late period. In *Totality and Infinity* he describes how desire is "absolutely non-egoist; its name is justice" (Levinas 1979, 63). Also in an even earlier *Ethics and Spirit* from 1952, justice is something to be found in face to face contact of two persons: "To see a face is already to hear 'You shall not kill', and to hear 'You shall not kill' is to hear 'Social justice' (Levinas 1997, 8-9). Only in later writings from *Otherwise than being* onwards is justice reserved for the relationship outside the dual face to face. Justice introduces *the Third* (le tiers), the another Other (Levinas 1998, 229). Although, "Justice is born from the Face" (Levinas 1998, 104), the world does not consist only of one Other. There is a third party, fourth, fifth that are also Other. Justice is the

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solution to the question of conflicting interests in responsibility, to who is the most important. This requires impossible comparison of unique Faces. (Levinas 1998, 104) In society, it is necessary to limit the special position of all the Others, and this is the job for institutions (Levinas 1996, 76). One remembers that the face to face was achieved in conversation. As saying was the language used in responsibility, said is the language of ontology, of society with laws, institutions and social relations (Ricoeur 2004, 82, Levinas 1996, 75). Saying is subjectivity, said objectivity (totality) (Beals 2007, 16). Here Levinas uses the term of ontology for his system of justice, which I would, as previously noted, still describe as ethics.

Levinas writes that "as citizens we are reciprocal, but it is a more complex structure than Face to Face." (Levinas 1998, 107) According to Beals, this complex structure means that even with the Third, the responsibility remains asymmetrical (Beals 2007, 6). I still have my infinite responsibility to the Others, as justice would be meaningless without the spirit of dés-inter-essement (Levinas 1996, 81) Even when I have responsibility, the Others have none. Levinas is a realist. He writes that "Justice comes from love. That definitely doesn't mean to say that the rigour of justice can't be turned against love understood in terms of responsibility." (Levinas 1998, 108) and

"There is a certain measure of violence necessary in terms of justice; but if one speaks of justice, it is necessary to allow judges, it is necessary to allow institutions and the state; to live in a world of citizens, and not only in the order of the Face to Face." (Levinas 1998, 105)

Beals claims that the wisdom of love is the ability to rate and judge the Others' needs. Wisdom or philosophy needs a third party, because in relation to one Other, it would only be evasion of responsibility, but with conflicting Others it is necessary. Wisdom of love may be interpreted to be the same concept as justice is. Beals argues on the contrary to Derrida and to the Levinas quote above that wisdom of love is possible and non-violent. (Beals 2007, 5) Levinas seems to use the word violence differently in different context, because in *Ethics and Spirit*, he defines violence as action that human does as if there were no Other people, if he were by himself. Passivity also is included as violence. (Levinas 1997, 6) If the executors of justice act in the spirit of the face, with this definition justice could be non-violent.



In preface to *Totality and Infinity* Levinas describes politics as "the art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means -- the very exercise of reason". War is the most extreme condition, where morality loses its meaning and normative power. He continues "politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naïveté." (Levinas 1979, 21) Later in life with conversation with Nemo, he doesn't separate these spheres as harshly, but believes that politics should be measured and controlled on the basis of ethics (Levinas 1996, 72). For example, The Face defines the limit of the state. If face to face relationship becomes impossible, the totalitarian state becomes illegitimate. (Levinas 1998, 105) Levinas' first philosophy can be a basis for a political theory (Beals 2007, 7). For example, Levinas seems quite positive about South American group that synthesises Levinas with Marx (Levinas 1998, 119). Levinas discards the society contract models of restricting person's violent self interest, person against person and proposes a society built on the basis of restricting the notion how person exists for another person (Levinas 1996, 71). This idea of limiting one's responsibility is also to be found in one of Levinas' Talmud commentaries, where Rabbi Yohanan presumes his obligation to feed his workers royally, but limits his responsibility to feeding them with bread and dried fruit. Unlike in Hobbes, contracts are not the basis of morality, but (social) contracts are only for people of moral character. (Wright 1999, 149) I wouldn't say that this is because Levinas has great faith in humanity. Ethics is transcendence, a revelation, even a miracle.

When asked if an SS man has a face, Levinas answer would be yes, "An affirmative answer that is painful each time!" (Levinas 1998, 231) Here Levinas describes the dual relationship of ethics: One must remember that face is "that which thus in another concerns the I" (Levinas 1998, 227), the I is the hostage of an Other. But this has only to do with the infinitely responsible I. Levinas says to Nemo that due to the total responsibility, the I, Levinas himself, is responsible even for the persecution he has to endure. But only him, not his neighbours or people, as they are Others to him, and are to be demanded justice. (Levinas 1996, 80-81)

"If self-defense is a problem, the "executioner" is the one who threatens my neighbour and, in this sense, calls for violence and no longer has a Face." (Levinas 1998, 105) "I am responsible for the persecution of my neighbours. If I belong to a people, that people and my relatives are also my neighbours. They have a right to defence, just as do those who are not my relatives." (Levinas 1998, 107)

So here lies the difference between ethics and justice. One, the I, cannot claim anything for oneself in an asymmetrical ethical relationship, but when there are more people, more Others, one must seek justice for them. Justice is struggle with evil (Levinas 1998, 105). It is possible to sum up the differences between these two modes of being by Levinas quote: "The difference between "to appear in history" [justice] (without a right to speak) and to appear to the Other [ethics] while attending one's own apparition distinguishes again my political being from my religious being." (Levinas 1979, 253)

Excluding discussion on justice, I have mostly concentrated on Levinas' mature period. Levinas' concept of *substitution* shall be briefly covered: Substitution is one of the central ideas of *Otherwise than Being* from 1974. It is a further development of responsibility. As already written, to Levinas the essence of humanity is to be for others. (Bernasconi 2002, 234-5) It seems difficult to pin down what substitution means, "There are times when one wonders if the question to which 'Substitution' is the answer is not 'what is the most obscure philosophical concept of the twentieth century?'" (Bernasconi 2002, 238) Substitution seems to be the act of taking another's place in taking their responsibilities. As I am for the Other, the Other is already in me. (Bernasconi 2002, 239, 249). In already familiar asymmetrical fashion, the I can substitute others, but no-one else can substitute the I (Levinas 1996, 82). Substitution is an overlapping term with responsibility in Levinas' terminological jungle, which in his later philosophy brings a possibility of another type of connection with the Other than discourse.

### **3.3 The Possibility of Jewish Philosophy**

Levinas uses his own terms, one of them is already mentioned religious being. Putnam writes that to understand the whole of Levinas' philosophy, one must understand that Levinas not only uses his Judaism in his philosophy, but also universalises Jewish ideas and experiences. As previously mentioned, Levinas tried to some degree separate his religious works from his philosophical ones. Yet, Jewishness is an important factor in reading Levinas, and one must bare in mind that his philosophical audience is a gentile one

(Putnam 2008, 68, 84). Levinas himself did not want to be called a Jewish philosopher, but a philosopher (who also happens to be a Jew)(f. ex. Wallenius 2004, 82). In this thesis Levinas' Jewishness is deemed important on the grounds of deconstruction.

In reading Levinas, the philosophical and religious strains of his thought intertwine heavily, something that Claire Katz notes, making it possible to find Levinas' philosophy from his religious thought and vice versa. (Katz 2001, 150-151) Thus it is worth to explore the concept of Jewish philosophy, how Judaism influenced Levinas, and how and what he transmits it to a gentile audience. First the terms Jewishness and Judaism shall be defined: A Jew can be an atheist, but Judaism is the religion of Jews. Although, the question who is a Jew is a difficult one, Israeli Law of Return connects it to bloodline and to religious conversion (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2013). Usually when Levinas writes about Jews, he presupposes engagement with the religious tradition. In *Ethics and Spirit* he writes that one can't be a Jew without acknowledging it and that Judaism requires ritual. Of what is required of a religion, Levinas answers that it must follow the commandment "Thou shall not kill". (Levinas 1997, 6, 10)

Much ink has been spilled on the question, can there be a distinctly Jewish modern philosophy. Levinas has often been bundled together with two Other Jewish dialogical thinkers Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber. It has been written that the questioning of Western philosophical totalism would be the common Jewish factor binding them to a group of thinkers. (for example Putnam 2008, 72) As Rosenzweig writes describing his philosophical project of New Thinking: "the pet idea of the modern era: the reduction to "the I". This reduction or the "grounding" of the experiences of the world and God in the I that has these experiences -- !" (Rosenzweig 1999, 74) In the same vein, Levinas writes in his essay *Ethics and Sprit*: "If 'know thyself' has become the fundamental precept of all Western philosophy, this is because ultimately the West discovers the universe within itself." (Levinas 1997, 10)

Levinas finds the nexus of the Bible, the miracle of texts from different authors from different eras (Levinas 1996, 89), in its ethics. Michael Fagenblat interprets Levinas' mature, 1947-61 writings as an elaboration of Genesis, which Levinas must have seen as an allegory of ethics. Annette Aronowicz is more doubtful, if such a thing can be found in

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Levinas' texts and in my experience of reading Levinas, I agree with Aronowicz. If Levinas were basically Bible commentator, could he be called a philosopher? Fagenblat answers that because Levinas doesn't claim to have a divine inspiration, his interpretation of scriptures is secular philosophy (Aronowicz 1990, 106–108). According to Derrida, even if alluding to Biblical characters and phrases, Levinas is not a theologian or a mystic, he authors philosophy, not religious texts, as he as he does not rely on the authority of the canonical texts. (Derrida 1978, 103) Perhaps then Levinas' thought would be philosophy of religion. Levinas himself sees responsibility as inspiration and infers from Amos that prophecy is the basis of humanity. He says to Nemo that responsibility before the law (which I believe here is the halakha) is God's revelation. (Levinas 1996, 88) Fagenblat seems to have a different view from Levinas what counts as inspiration.

God comes to the world with an answer of *hinneni*, here I am (Levinas 1996, 84). According to Putnam, when Levinas uses *hinneni* in his philosophical work *Otherwise than Being*, it is an allusion to Abraham (and others), who said *hinneni* to God (for example Gen. 22:1). As to God, so is man obliged to say here I am to the Other. Levinas' mission in his ethics is to describe "the fundamental obligation", the responsibility towards another person. Putnam continues that in *Time and the Other*, Levinas connects real humanity with the willingness to accept the fundamental obligation. With *hinneni*, Putnam links this willingness to Judaism: Levinas just replaces Judaism's divine command with the (fundamental) ethical command. (Putnam 2008, 73-76) Bettina Bergo points out that this sort of the ethical reading of the Scripture and its commentaries is very old and common among previous Jewish philosophers like Moses Mendelssohn and Hermann Cohen. Levinas' responsibility rises from the reading of the prophets, opposed to Heidegger's existential-eschatological time that was influenced by the Pauline letters. (Bergo 2010, 68-69)

Now to the question of *translation*, to the two hats of Levinas: Athens and Jerusalem and the question of philosophy's language. Aronowicz tells us that in his Talmudic commentaries, using Levinas' own term, Levinas "translates" Jewish thought "into Greek", into the philosophic language of Western tradition (Aronowicz 1990, ix). This means not to rename theological thoughts into the the language of philosophy, but to find and bring forward the philosophical, ethical thought found in the Scripture. In discussion of a

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Talmudic commentary, Levinas defines the time of twilight, when one is allowed to read Greek texts, as a time of uncertainty. In times of uncertainty (such as these) it is better to read a translation to connect with the Scripture, than no engagement with the Scripture at all. Levinas describes Western philosophy as examination, objective knowledge. Judaism on the Other hand accepts revelation, it is engaged in doing, it is "knowing without examining". The essence of revelation is ethics. To hear it (from a face) is to accept responsibility. When Hebrew can be a language of particularity (bracketing), Greek is objective and universal. Thus Greek is the language of justice. These both, Greek and Hebrew, justice and ethics are the basis of Western culture. (Wright 1999, 142-158) Translating Hebrew to Greek, bringing ethics into justice is necessary for universal non-totalising society. Yet, ethics can be found in Greek philosophy and vice versa. When discussing the ethical notion of loving one's neighbour, even in an earlier essay *A Religion for Adults*, Levinas writes:

"Justice is the term Judaism prefers to terms more evocative of sentiment. For love itself demands justice, and my relation with my neighbour cannot remain outside the lines which this neighbour maintains with various third parties. The third party is also my neighbour." (Levinas 1997, 18)

In the same essay Levinas continues that the difference between Judaism and Christianity is that God cannot forgive the injustice that a person has committed against another, it is left for the wronged one to do. Even God cannot take away man's responsibility. (Levinas 1997, 20) Thus it is necessary to translate Hebrew to Greek, to bring the infinite responsibility to justice. Harold Fisch classifies two modes of Jewish neighbourly love: *chesed*, the kindness for non-Jews required to live in a functioning society, and *ahava*, in which a Jew must love a fellow Jew, as God loves humanity, even if one's love is not returned (Reinhart 2005, 13) Levinas takes the concept of *ahava*, imbues *chesed* with it, and universalises it to all mankind. The value of Holy Scriptures is in their ability to reveal the Other person's face (Levinas 1996, 91). Here Levinas interprets Judaism from his own philosophical framework with his own terminology.

As seen, Levinas uses the language usually reserved to talking about God in his description about his concept of the Other. Moreover what the face is demanding, is "Thou shalt not kill" (Levinas 1997, 8; Putnam 2008, 80, 83), which of course is one of the Ten Commandments that were given to Moses as a covenant from God. Yet, even when Levinas writes "We propose to call "religion" the bond that is established between the

same and the Other without constituting a totality” (Levinas 1979, 40) or ”Ethics is the Spiritual Optics” (Levinas 1979, 78), it can be argued that even when using these metaphors, the ethics of Levinas is a secular one. Levinas’ term religion is in Derrida’s words, the ”being-together as separation” that opens ethics. ”Not a religion, but the religion, the religiosity of the religious.” (Derrida 1978, 119) Even when he writes about God in his philosophical work, unlike with his major influence Rosenzweig, God is not a necessary element in his fundamental ethics. Despite the act of translation, in the failure of Western philosophy, especially after the Holocaust, Levinas might just need another language in his philosophy to describe the fundamental thoughts and experiences. (Wright 2013). Levinas does not write theology Yet, if one were to follow Wallenius’ and Chalier’s argument that Levinas’ ethics is based on an exterior force to man, then Levinas’ ethics is not a secular one.

#### **4. DECONSTRUCTING LEVINAS**

Derrida very interested in the language of philosophy. He claims that as the basic concepts of philosophy are rooted in ”Greek”, to philosophise outside this medium would be impossible, so Levinas needs to speak Greek to break Greek. (Derrida 1978, 100) As one remembers, the language of philosophy is entrenched in metaphors. Speaking Greek leads to what is the relation between Being (existence) and existents in Levinas. For Levinas the ”supreme existent” and substance is found with ethics in man. Derrida finds a key metaphor for Levinas in ”The Other resembles God”. A man has a face due to his resemblance to God. This resemblance echoes the Scholastic logic of analogy. ”Let us simply notice that conceived on the basis of a doctrine of analogy, of “resemblance,” the expression “human face” is no longer, at bottom, as foreign to metaphor as Levinas seems to wish” (Derrida 1978, 178).

Derrida continues that for the Other and God to resemble each other, there needs to be some sort of ”unity of Being” between them. He further deduces that the face already has

Being in itself and in speech there is notion of Being. (Derrida 1978, 179) What then is a metaphor?

”Before being a rhetorical procedure within language, metaphor would be the emergence of language itself. And philosophy is only this language; in the best of cases, and in an unaccustomed sense of the expression, philosophy can only speak it, state the metaphor itself, which amounts to thinking the metaphor within the silent horizon of the nonmetaphor: Being.” (Derrida 1978, 140)

Metaphor escapes an actual lived experience and in it, it has the trace of what it has rejected. Levinas at the same time abandons the ”formal logic” of “inside-outside,” “interior-exterior” of traditional philosophy, but also succumbs to it, intentionally and unintentionally. For example, Levinas converses with Hegel’s notion of light. In Hegel, sight comes out of light, and seeing, or gaze, neutralises desire. This is why Levinas places sound above light. (Derrida 1978, 110-112, 123-124) Levinas’ metaphor of light is described in *Time of the Other*: ”Light is that through which something is other than myself, but already as if it came from me. The illuminated object is something one encounters, but from the very fact that it is illuminated one encounters it as if it came from us. It does not have a fundamental strangeness.” (in Bruns 2002, 220) It would seem that objects, not the Other, are enlightened. Derrida however questions if the epiphany of the face can escape light, as according to him, metaphysics ”always supposes a phenomenology in its very critique of phenomenology” (Derrida 1978, 114, 147). Another example of Levinas’ prioritisations would be when Levinas writes how face to face is always immediate. This is a reference to lived life, but immediacy also has a history in Western thought, as it was also a feature in de Saussure’s structuralism marking the vocal sign as true sign.

Deconstruction concentrates on something seemingly superfluous in a system of philosophy, in Levinas’ case take for example aesthetics (Sivenius 1998, 224) or women. In *Totality and Infinity* and other texts Levinas discusses the functions of *feminine*. Although in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* a chapter is dedicated to feminine in Levinas and feminist responses to Levinas, unlike in this thesis, most secondary sources in typical or apologetical fashion do not find this an important part of his thought.

#### 4.1 A Feminist Deconstruction of Levinas

In *A Room of One's Own* from 1928 Virginia Woolf writes how over the centuries women have served as magical mirrors that double the size of men. Were women not inferior to men, the mirror might show a life sized reflection. (Woolf 1980, 51) As Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir also takes a look to literature and treaties written by men about women in her 1949 *The Second Sex*. de Beauvoir writes that as language reveals, man is the measure of human, woman is the other than man, not even fully human. Often it is thought that man is autonomous, when the woman is defined solely by her gender, leaving the man genderless. Even female body is a bad derivative from the male body. (Beauvoir 2009, 41-42) When male sex organs are external, female are somewhat internal, which also Levinas takes as a characteristic of the female psyche, inwardness (for example Levinas 1979, 155). The extraneous woman is defined by her relation to man, while man is the subject. In this relationship, woman is the other. (Beauvoir 2009, 43) One should here note the difference between de Beauvoir's other and Levinas' Other. As many have done before me, this thesis shall also paraphrase the footnote in de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex's Introduction's* footnote on Levinas. de Beauvoir writes that Levinas makes philosophy out of gender difference, the male being the subject and woman the other in his work *Time and the Other*. She writes that Levinas takes only a man's viewpoint in describing woman as a mystery. (Beauvoir 2009, 43-44)

In feminism there are different views of women. The one which de Beauvoir subscribes to, claims that women and men share a common, sexless, spirit of humanity that is more important than arbitrary, but complementary sexes. Where de Beauvoir brings in her own views, is when she criticises Levinas' lack of reciprocity between the subject and object, a lack which is essential in Levinas' philosophy, and reveals de Beauvoir's own stance in philosophy and gender politics. (Honkanen 1996, 141-3) Thus one could say that de Beauvoir matches the sex/gender division, where there are biological woman and social femininity. This is evident in the famous quotation: "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (Beauvoir 2011, 19).



In his *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* from 1939 Sigmund Freud notes how one of the recurring dream symbols is a house and how dream realm is reserved for sexuality and sexual life. A house is a symbol for a body. It and a room are often symbols for a womb, extendedly for a female. Freud also points out, how classical Jewish texts often describe a woman in sexual context as a house (door as female genitals) or as a table. (Freud 1981, 130, 138) Levinas also refers to the same Talmudic texts quoting that a house is woman (Levinas 1997, 31). Western metaphysics swarms with dualisms that can be returned to the same. Deconstruction seeks to expose these assumptions (Derrida 1997, 9).

Private and public spheres have been divided according to sex in Western society already from the times of Antiquity. Polis was the public sphere of politics and rationality and men, oikos private sphere of home and family, men and women. Controlling the borders of sexuality and the intimate has been and is part of the patriarchal power, which keeping women in the private sphere has denied them human rights and the possibility to engage in a discussion concerning them. (Julkunen 1995, 15, 20) It is difficult to say, if symbols will change over time when women become less tied to the private sphere, but Levinas is tied to his times and to the unconscious that effects his philosophy irrationally. Hartmann defines patriarchy as a social network between men with a material basis that hierarchically creates solidarity and interdependence between men that enable men to rule over women, control women's labour, access to means of production and sexuality. (Liljeström 1996, 112)

Katz claims that unlike philosophers before him and many of his peers, Levinas gives feminine an important role in his philosophy (Katz 2001, 147). According to Catherine Chalier, in Levinas, *masculine* is the one that creates, but the product is a failure. The world of masculinity is one of violence, alienation and incapability to connect with the Other. (Chalier 2001, 172-173) Because the violent world threatens the I's religious being, being for the Other or of being in truth, love and offspring are needed.

"Hence we must indicate a plane both presupposing and transcending the epiphany of the Other in the face, a plane where the I bears itself beyond death and recovers also from its return to itself. This plane is that of love and fecundity, where subjectivity is posited in function of these movements." (Levinas 1979, 253)

Levinas describes to Nemo, how in *The Time and the Other* the masculine, virile, (vir, man) has an erotic relationship, *eros* with the wholly Other, the feminine. An erotic love relationship is contrary to knowledge. It is not an amalgamation of two into one, but the Other stays as Other, and I stays as I. Levinas tells that femininity is not Other for masculine only due to *natural* (or perhaps biological) differences, but due to the fundamental alterity in feminine. (Levinas 1996, 62-63) Levinas defines this femininity thus: "The simultaneity or the equivocation of this fragility and this weight of non-signifyingness [non-significance], heavier than the weight of the formless real, we shall term femininity." (Levinas 1979, 257) Quite unhelpful, but one can see that Levinas describes femininity with very typical adjectives, othering in a Beauvoirian sense adjectives, such as "clandestine", "nocturnal", "inwardness" and how the female is "The beloved, returned to the stage of infancy" (Levinas 1979, 257, 263). Levinas even writes "The femininity of woman can neither deform nor absorb her human essence." (Levinas 1997, 34) As if femininity were not part of being human, but something monstrous. Derrida also acknowledges Levinas' androcentric attributes to women, but writes that Levinas may be read in various ways (Derrida 1999, 43).

Later in life, when interviewed by Nemo, Levinas re-evaluates his writings on ontological differences between feminine and masculine. He says that perhaps his earlier writings on masculine and feminine could be seen not as a gender division, but qualities that every human possess. He goes on to quote Genesis, "male and female He created them". (Levinas 1996, 65) This is already evident in *Totality and Infinity* where he writes that the interiority and hospitality of a home that he speaks of does not need a woman, but still does not lack in feminine (Levinas 1979, 157-158) separating his philosophical term femininity from corporeal women. Also, Stella Sandford writes that when discussing sexes in choosing Platonic term *eros*, Levinas marks his text as philosophical and not for example as sociological (Sandford 2002, 140). However, Katz problematises Levinas' usage of feminine only as a metaphor and claims that the role of feminine in Levinas' philosophy is based on Judaism (Katz 2001, 147), thus religiously based. Religion - as philosophy - does not reside in vacuum but in socio-political world.

In the essay *Judaism and the Feminine*, feminine and masculine are not abstract concepts or traits that mistakenly allude to traditional gender divisions, but Levinas contributes to

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this division when he changes the term feminine to woman: "to return to the peace and ease of being at home, - - Its name is woman." (Levinas 1997, 33) Katz writes that this is also the case with *Totality and Infinity*, since, as previously noted, Levinas' philosophical and religious strains intertwine heavily. (Katz 2001, 150-151) It would seem that in his philosophical texts Levinas makes an effort to separate femininity from women, something that he doesn't do in his religious texts, and if Levinas' philosophy is based on his view of Judaism, these ideas affect his philosophy. In *Judaism and the Feminine* Levinas writes: "The differences between masculine and feminine are blurred in this messianic age." (Levinas 1997, 35) If both genders were to have masculine and feminine qualities, to what would they blur into? It is hard to find a middle ground in qualities like kindness or rationality. Were masculine to mean men and feminine women, would men become women and vice versa? One could interpret that Levinas means that in the Messianic age genders blur into one humanity, where men and women can have the qualities of the other sex, pointing out how Levinas thinks that qualities are gendered.

As Levinas describes the subject in eros only in masculine terms, pronoun he, virile, can a woman then even be a subject? The "I" Levinas writes about? According to Chalier, subjectivity is the ability to hear the Other (Chalier 2001, 172). She goes on to quote Levinas "It is only in approaching the Other that I attend to myself" (Levinas 1979, 178), or as Bergo translates, — that I am present to myself. As a human, a woman is capable for ethical being, (or otherwise than being), but the gentle, inward nature of feminine inhibits the feminine — woman — from taking responsibility in exteriority of transcendence. Chalier writes that in Levinas the role of the woman is to help the man to an ethical life, to offer a home for the wandering man (Chalier 2001, 173, 178). Katz argues that Levinas uses feminine as a transcendental structure: The feminine offers a stepping stone, a dwelling and enjoyment for a man to transcend. (Katz 2001, 147) It would seem that in eros feminine conditions masculine for the true face to face, but takes no part in it, exempt in fecundity.

It seems that to Levinas, erotic love is heterosexual. Liljeström writes that often in heterorelationship women exist for the benefit of men. Men on the other hand only exist for women from time to time, but rely on the the existence of women in their homosocial relationships in the public sphere (Liljeström 1996, 131). This would seem to be so also in

Levinas' eros, as Levinas refers to the feminine as an Other, but it seems not to be the Other of face to face encounter. "The Other [the feminine alterity] who welcomes in intimacy is not the you (vous) of the face that reveals itself in a dimension of height, but precisely the thou (tu) of familiarity: a language without teaching, a silent language, an understanding without words, an expression in secret." (Levinas 1979, 155) One of the differences would be that this relationship, eros, is not of dialogical nature, which was the condition of transcendence. Language and hence epiphany of the face were the source of all signification and exteriority, and feminine is doomed to non-signifyingness. (Levinas 1979, 52, 155, 261-263)

Yet this needs further examination. Why is the feminine termed the other, if it is not the Other? Levinas writes that femininity to the masculine subject is other in itself, but the term Other also in itself suggests that regardless feminine or masculine, everyone is Other if one does not see them as objects. One could draw the conclusion that if feminine cannot act as a true Other, then feminine is an object, reflecting some of the qualities of the Other like animals. Katz also acknowledges this dilemma, but concludes that the Other is at the same time an object of desire, but still retains one's alterity. This is the ambiguity of love. (Katz 2001, 152) Derrida claims that regardless the lack of height, the silent language of feminine alterity does speak in a language of humans, but again due to the dwelling, the hospitality that it offers. Feminine is the pre-ethical. (Derrida 1999, 37, 39)

Another more lenient interpretation would be to remember that when the feminine in eros relationship was in its inwardness unable to transcend, so was also the masculine unable to transcend in eros, (but still perhaps later in fecundity or after conditioning) as eros was return to itself. The answer would then be to remember that there are different modes of love, erotic love that returns to the same with both the masculine and the feminine and ethical love. This other mode of love in later Levinas is *worry* (crainte) that is the basis of taking responsibility, a love without eros. (Levinas 1996, 92) Even justice could be seen as a mode of love.

Yet, even if one finds Levinas' gendered qualities problematic, inside Levinas' framework women's agency is possible: In the messianic age, stepping outside history, which transcendence is, femininity and masculinity were blurred. In face to face there would be

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no femininity nor masculinity, and as Chalier points out, women as humans (and men as humans), would be capable of being the Other and being the subject. If women have nothing to do with Levinas' metaphor of femininity, as Levinas in later life suggests, but in earlier texts ratifies, women's answer to the Other's call would have no hindrance. Yet where would this silence and inwardness of feminine come? In *Totality and Infinity* the face and language are intertwined with a real body, not subordinate to a thought, but they are the thought (Derrida 2001, 125, 129). It seems that it is woman's body itself that causes the problem, and again, how would messianic age change this?

Even when eros love is return to the same and egoism, it still serves a purpose: to produce offspring (Levinas 1979, 266). Offspring is something that is wholly Other than I am, but at the same time, same to the I. Levinas says that the possibilities of the offspring, the son, are the possibilities of the father, and that fatherhood is the ability to transcend the limits of one's own identity. (Levinas 1996, 65-66) As male was the subject, father son relationship is natural. "My child is a stranger (Isaiah 49), but a stranger who is not only mine, for he is me." (Levinas 1979, 267) The child breaks history. Bergo writes that "the child can do what the parents could not – reconsider the past and pardon members of his or her generation" (Bergo 2010, 74). I see this in the context of ethics — justice- differentiation. Justice was introduced with the arrival of the third, of multiple Others that have different interests. (Levinas 1998, 104) Perhaps the child can combine the ethical in his ahistoricity with the historic sphere of justice. In the essay *Judaism and Christianity* Levinas writes that it is only for the wronged one to forgive the injustice done to himself. (Levinas 1997, 20). Perhaps the child, part the same part a stranger, has in his sameness the ability to do so.

Levinas writes that an encounter with feminine is needed to produce a child (Levinas 1979, 267), but as biological offspring was only the basic form of father-son relationship, (Levinas 1996, 66) is erotic relationship and femininity even needed if the child is not of one's own flesh? If child is a creation, then femininity is needed, as the creations of solely masculine were failure. Perhaps here, femininity could be the quality found in both sexes. "When man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history" (Levinas 1979, 52). Chalier writes that stepping outside history is exactly the essence of eschatology and diachrony of paternity that makes "being for-the-beyond-of-my-death" possible. (Chalier 37 / 63

2001, 175) Levinas mentions from time to time maternity, but he does not really write what maternity includes. Lenient view on Levinas could read the qualities of paternity to maternity and make women part of messianic age in their own right, but even without positive maternity, they were part of it, due to the gaining of masculine qualities.

Katz comments on Levinas' possible Jewish textual basis on his concepts of eros and fecundity, on how marital sexuality in Talmud is regarded positively, not only for the sake of offspring, although they too are important. (Katz 2001, 151). In Levinas enjoyment is acceptable and has its place, but it belongs to an ontological sphere. Regardless Talmudic positivity of "eros", Levinas seems to value spirituality and stoicism more. In possible reference to *Song of Songs*, he writes that this "amorous relation" should be read symbolically and eschatologically, as midrash does so. Levinas also denies many positive femininities, such as seeing the Sabbath as feminine. On feminine personifications he writes: "They are not taken seriously". (Levinas 1997, 37) This could also be due to a resistance of kabbalistic strand of Judaism, where one important concept is a *shekhinah*, a divine feminine power, even though Dan writes that both groups, hasidim and mitnagdim share kabbalistic world view (Dan 2006, 45, 93).

Not only does Levinas other the woman, but if a woman (or the feminine) cannot speak, answer to the Other's call and reach transcendence, she cannot reach the idea of God (for ex. Levinas 1996, 84). Thus Levinas diminishes a Jewish woman's religiosity, and without God, what is left of Judaism for women? The only possibility here would be the earlier speculation of reaching a messianic age in face to face, where femininity and masculinity blur and women become substitute men, and in this very moment simultaneously they gain ability to speak and connect with the Other. Yet one could still argue that without the ability to speak how is connection possible and without connection there would be no messianic age allowing women to speak.

Levinas claims that Judaism has attained its basic current form after the Babylonian exile, but the Torah should be read through talmudic tradition (Levinas 1997, 30) When Levinas writes what the Talmud says on feminine he has done some editing himself, so even if there is a basis for what is feminine in Judaism, it is easy for Levinas to pick and mix views expressed in classical sources to back up his own views. Susanna Heschel surveys

Levinas in her output in Oxford Guide to Modern Judaism. She writes that in his essays on Talmud, Levinas interprets *the Talmudic writings* to be even more misogynic than the texts are in themselves. Heschel also argues, that if Judaism is misogynistic, one could not find this system ethically superior to others, as Levinas does. Heschel gives an example how Levinas has interpreted Berakhot 61's passage of forbidding a man to physically follow a woman to avoid sexual thoughts and an encounter as forbidding a spiritual following or taking advice from women (Heschel 1996, 385-386). Levinas' Biblical examples are there to aid men or messianic age, not to aid other women (Levinas 1997, 31).

In *Totality and Infinity* in describing his concept of feminine, Levinas uses the term "Eternal Feminine": "The Beloved, at once graspable but intact in her nudity, beyond object and face and thus beyond the existent, abides in virginity. - - "Eternal Feminine", is the virgin or an incessant recommencement of virginity, the untouchable in the very contact of voluptuousness, future in present." (Levinas 1979, 258) Yet in *Judaism and the Feminine* he writes "The Eternal Feminine, which an entire amorous experience carries from the Middle Ages through to Dante, up to Goethe, is lacking in Judaism. The feminine will never take on the aspect of the Divine, neither the Virgin Mary nor even Beatrice. The dimension of intimacy - - is opened up by woman." (Levinas 1997, 37) Either Levinas does not attribute his own concept of femininity to Jewish women, who then become actual humans, or in these two essays he means different things with "Eternal Feminine". Yet Levinas' and Western canon's attributes to Eternal Feminine seem very similar, with the possible exemption of Levinas' feminine's this-worldliness, to Western feminine's other-worldliness.

Philosophy is not only rational exercise, but tied to its times and culture. Katz claims that Levinas' philosophy is tied to Judaism, but as Heschel points out, Judaism is not monolithic set of rules, but needs to be interpreted. Levinas' eisegesis is unnecessarily misogynistic. His philosophy also bases on the traditional and false dualistic thinking of how the two genders possess hierarchical qualities such as light and darkness, exteriority and interiority, action and passivity. In the extract of Levinas de Beauvoir quotes on the primary difference between femininity and masculinity, de Beauvoir makes no mistake in claiming that Levinas' Other otherises women, as Levinas writes from the masculine perspective, often making man the yardstick of humanity and human experience and

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denying woman as a feminine being subjectivity. Yet in larger framework, Levinas' Other and de Beauvoir's other are not the same thing. For de Beauvoir it is important that everybody is in the core the same, for Levinas insistence on sameness is egoism.

It is a failure on Levinas' part to accentuate the complete otherness of femininity (to masculinity) in eros, as other masculinities would also be completely Other (in worry, responsibility or substitution) if the otherness of the Other is to be taken seriously. Even when Levinas in his own philosophy points out that dualisms lead to the same and not alterity, regarding women he relies on these dualism (for example Derrida 1978, 147), although his depiction is not consistent. Levinas joins the Western philosophy in his male-centred view of subject, which leaves a woman, to ask: "What about me?" This is one of the reasons this thesis uses the same "I" Levinas uses, not some hypotheticalal me. It would seem that Levinas mainly writes about himself, as his philosophy is not prescriptive, but descriptive and subjective. He doesn't seem to be too interested if other people are responsible or no, he himself is even responsible for the persecution he needs to endure (Levinas 1996, 81). In this light it makes sense that women are not subjects in Levinas, as Levinas himself can be seen as the only subject. Still, Levinas gendered exclusion of feminine (women) from subjectivity in philosophy weakens it greatly.

## **5. LEVINAS AND ART**

If one takes Levinas' Judaism seriously, then it is worthwhile to consider how Levinas' Jewish tradition contributes as a factor to his perception towards pictorial art. If and when Levinas' Judaism can be seen from his wider philosophy it may also be seen in the specific part of aesthetics. As feminist deconstruction proved to be useful in reading Levinas above, it can be used in a reading of aesthetics which will follow a more general deconstructive critique of Levinas' aesthetics.



## 5.1 Jewish Visual Tradition

As most introductory texts on Jewish pictorial aesthetics, this account too will begin with the commandment against idol-worshipping that can be found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 4 and 5. In Jewish tradition, this forbidding of representational art is called the Second Commandment (differs from Lutheran tradition). Images of God are to be forbidden, as they cannot represent God, and figures of God may lead to idolatry. These prohibitions may be read either literally or liberally, literal forbidding the images for their own sake, liberal if they are deemed as idolatry. (Julius 2001, 34-35, 37-38)

Steven Schwarzschild sets out to find Jewish aesthetics from halakha, the Jewish law, and finds some definitions from Joseph Karo's codification from the 16th century. What may not be represented are "God, divine and mythic beings, humans, and the celestial bodies may not be manufactured, while Other natural entities such as flora and fauna do not fall under this prohibition." (Schwarzschild 1990, 112) These laws apply only to three dimensional complete pictures, and thus abstract art has not been seen oppositional to Jewish religion. In relation to Levinas' philosophy it is interesting to find the theology behind these prohibitions. Mythic beings and stars may be used in idolatry, but what connects the Divine and human is that they have spirit, a soul. Trying to materialise, to fetishise spirit is not only a sin, but a philosophical impossibility. This applies not only to God by to corporeal humans, who are already the image of God. As already was seen in Levinas' universalisation of Jewishness, God can be seen in humanity, which is a reason not to depict people. The second reason for not presenting people is that as people have soul in body, just to present the body in reproduction is not presenting the whole human, but a misrepresentation. To represent a human, one then needs to indicate the primary impossibility of representation. This may be done in some sort of physical distortion of the picture: in an absent nose of a statue, in elongated face in a painting. Obviously, here Judaism differs from Christology. (Schwarzschild 1990, 110-114) Anthony Julius presents an interesting Jewish aesthetics that could be derived from the Second Commandment: to break idols (Julius 2001, 41) This reminds one of Avram breaking the idols in his father's idol shop. (Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 38)

That Jews were a picture-less people, is a construct of modernity to serve different purposes, such as the opposite viewpoints of different denominations of Christianity or anti-semitic and assimilative nationalistic discourses. Kalman Bland names this idea or myth of people without images of God, or without images at all, as aniconism. The Jewish people is often called the people of the Book, and in the same way as I began my account on Jewish aesthetics, aniconists draw their argument from the Second Commandment and the Torah. Aniconist stance is that when appearing in Judaism and practised by Jews, visual culture is a foreign cultural loan. Again, the culture of the Greeks and the Hebrews have been contrasted: the Greeks were a culture of seeing, Hebrews of hearing. Bland writes that this stereotype is unfounded, Socrates is as judgemental of idolatry as Moses. Both cultures have anti-pictorial strands, but also a flourishing visual culture: archaeology and art historians reveal a long tradition of Jewish art before an odd East European. (Bland 2001, 3,6, 14) Even when aniconism of the Jews is a construct without evidence, it is a powerful construct that has influenced Jewish (self) identity, and also Levinas' views on Judaism.

## ***5.2 Reality and It's Shadow***

Levinas account on art in his essay *Reality and Its Shadow* can be divided into ontology, ethics, and the failure of phenomenological process in criticising art. Levinas begins his essay by describing what he opposes: the Aristotelian tradition and Diltheyan, Kantian notion of art (Bruns 2002, 214; Sivenius 1998, 230) how art is a cognitive expression, a "knowledge of the absolute". It is worthwhile to take a short excursion to Kant. For Kant, intuition is a source of knowledge. The other mode of universal knowledge besides intuition is concept. The difference between these two is that intuition is singular and relates immediately to the object. Concept is a mediated generalisation formed from several sources. (Parsons 1992, 63) Parsons claims that immediacy for Kant is "direct, phenomenological presence to the mind, as in perception" and continues that "the capacity for receiving representations through being affected by objects is what Kant calls sensibility - - intuitions arise only through sensibility". (Parsons 1992, 66) Sensibility  
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would be the capacity of the mind to receive representations from the objects. Space and time are a priori intuitions. A priori means knowledge independent from experience, yet as sensible intuitions they are somewhat subjective. (Parsons 1992, 62, 67)

Levinas opposes the notion how an artwork may reach a "metaphysical intuition" which lies outside the boundary of everyday language, somehow thus reaching a realm "more real than reality". Levinas writes that artists try to leave the real world in search of Platonic ideas, that in Levinas' terminology are not awarded the term transcendent, but a beyond, (Levinas 1989, 130) transcescence (Bruns 2002, 216) not transascendence as referred with the relation to the face. Yet, to Levinas, this going beyond to the sphere of ideas should lead to clarity of understanding, and yet art deliberately obscures (Levinas 1989, 131). Levinas does not see art's origins as something otherworldly, but art imitates reality, obscuring it, what Levinas calls invasion of shadow. Art is substituting the object with its image, not its concept. Image in itself is not art, but art utilises the image. Concept-less, substance-less relation is pure sensation, and thus the whole world can be perceived aesthetically. (Levinas 1989, 132, 134, 136)

This substitution leaves the corporeal world. "It belongs to an ontological dimension that does not extend between us and a reality to be captured, a dimension where commerce with reality is a rhythm" that involves the viewer without their consent to the picture that has no utility. (Levinas 1989, 133-134) Representation depends on that the object is not presented, (Levinas 1989, 136) and thus the fault in art lies in the impossibility of representation of the real world, and failing to interact with the ethical world (Rosen 2011, 4). An artwork is eternally suspended. Its subservient pseudo-life has been given to it by its maker. Concept also has an eternal life, but an artwork has no concept, and its eternal meanwhile (*entretemps*) is inhuman and monstrous to Levinas. McDonald writes that language also contains elements, "interstices" that are unrepresentable, a non conceptual in conceptual, which is the sphere of art. (Levinas 1989, 138, 141; McDonald 2008, 16, 18)

According to Sivenius, the art criticism of the times, for example that of Sartre's, was phenomenological, although this may be contested. Gerald Bruns argues that Levinas' early aesthetical writings draw from the contemporary interest on the poet Stéphane Mallarmé and his ideas. He writes that Levinas' asks, what happens to objects in art?

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Levinas writes that phenomenology assumes the images to be transparent and that the intention sees the object represented in the image (and not for example splats of paint). To Levinas, an image is not transparent like symbols and signs are, but it is connected to its object in resemblance. Intention does not reach an object within a picture. Yet image is not an independent entity, as reality is the cause of the image. As this cause, reality includes its own shadow, its image. Art is not representation but materialisation. When looking at an image, one looks at a picture (and not anything extra behind or in it). (Bruns 2002, 210-211; Levinas 1989, 134-136; Sivenius 1998, 228, 233)

To Levinas the artist and "art for art's sake" is immoral in trying to "go beyond" reality, in trying to not engage with responsibilities of the real world. An image takes hold of the viewer even without the viewer's acceptance. Art brings idle enjoyment, it "constitutes, in a world of initiative and responsibility, a dimension of evasion" (Levinas 1989, 131-132, 140) Rosen sums up the faults of art: 1) it mediates unnecessarily between the person and the world: "art interjects an ethically prohibitive membrane between ourselves and the world we inhabit" 2) art's stagnation and "fate" should not be a model for a person 3) art "immerses us in an idolatry of pleasure". (Rosen 2011, 4-5) The idea of idolatry is returned into below. A critic is useful for breaking the public's passivity in receiving the art, as the critic does not contemplate in silence. The critic integrates the artwork and the artist to the real world and calls out the artist's irresponsibility. Art is not completely useless nor unethical as it may act as an useful tool for philosophy and thought. (Levinas 1989, 130, 142).

McDonald claims that Levinas ponders what is the meaning and value of art. The answer would be that literature and art has its place in life and they may be entertaining, (McDonald 2008, 25) but they belong to the ontological sphere of enjoyment. Levinas uses his religiously imbued language to describe what art is not: it is not part of creation, nor is it revelation (Levinas 1989, 132). Thirteen years later these terms are used in the context of the face, how the face in revelation commands not to kill (f. ex. Levinas 1979, 199). Although it is may be problematic to read an earlier text in the light of a later one, here it is possible to do so, and Levinas here reinforces the difference between art belonging to the ontological totalising sphere, whereas face belongs to Infinity. In a essay *Ethics and Spirit*

from 1952, Levinas writes: "Perhaps art seeks to give a face to things, and in this its greatness and its deceit simultaneously reside." (Levinas 1997, 8)

### **5.3 Deconstructing *Reality and Its Shadow***

To group the faults of art, the first would be metaphysical: the image employed by art does not represent reality. The secondly ethical: the artwork engages and pacifies the viewer without their consent (rhythm) and the artist does not engage with the real world. Phenomenological inspection also fails. These faults will now be questioned and traced referring to Derrida's insights of language, symbols and context.

Levinas' stance is revealed in usage of peculiar metaphors of such as an idol. What relevance does it have for a non-believer? For a gentile? It has been proposed that Levinas use of religious language is due to the failure of common language and philosophical jargon in discourse after the Holocaust, and that it would express "deepest feeling" regardless of faith (Wright 2013), but this explanation falters. This thesis takes Levinas' Jewishness very seriously and sees it as an element in the discourse against art. As seen, Levinas takes this impossibility of representation to the whole of corporeal world, not only as rabbi Karo, of God and subsequently of man. Not only is image regarded with suspicion, but language and spoken word are highly valued in Judaism. Julius writes:

"God can be represented in language, because unlike art, language can render absence, - - it does not allow any blurring of the representation and the thing represented, the signifier and the signified; while one cannot take words for things, one can be deceived into confusing pictures of things with the things themselves." (Julius 2001, 35-36)

Rosen also connects Levinas' anti-image stance to his Jewishness: "Interestingly, Levinas supports this purportedly Hebraic disdain for images with a strongly Hellenistic rationale, adapted from Plato." (Rosen 2011, 3) Even if one were not to give Levinas' Jewishness the importance I have, Levinas is a culprit in participating the Western metaphysics Derrida writes about, of prioritising sound to image.

As one remembers, art utilises image to substitute object. Levinas differentiates word and sign from image. He writes within the phenomenological framework, which art theory he criticises in that signs and symbols are transparent, images are not. By transparency Levinas means intentionality's possibility to reach its object (Levinas 1989, 134). Thus it would seem that intentionality builds concepts, or noema. Sign is connected to their object through concept, but image is connected to its object due resemblance. Levinas writes that "Resemblance is not a participation of a being in an idea - - it is the very structure of the sensible as such." (Levinas 1989, 135) This *idea* refers to Platonic idea that is a form of knowledge and entity different from perceivable world (White 1992, 279-280). Where Kant's concepts derived their knowledge from objects, ideas do not, but are separate entities, and this reference to Plato seems more to be a small jab against "art for art"-movement than a departure from phenomenological framework and one can still analyse Levinas' use of concepts within it. In phenomenological framework this image could be seen as noema, constructed from the hyle of real world. "A being is that which is, that which reveals itself in its truth, and, at the same time, it resembles itself, is its own image." (Levinas 1989, 135) Thus as in later Levinasian framework, phenomenological process falls short in reaching the infinity, and this totalising noesis makes up the doubling. It would seem that art belongs to the world Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* calls ontological, in the realm of being and self satisfaction, when the person taking responsibility is "Otherwise than being".

Resemblance is an active participant in making the image that is based in reality and situated in reality as its own shadow. (Levinas 1989, 135) Yet Levinas writes that an image representing reality belongs into different ontological dimension, "that does not extend between us and a reality to be captured, a dimension where commerce with reality is a rhythm." (Levinas 1989, 134) Levinas describes art and its relation to reality as a rhythm. This metaphor of rhythm means passive responsiveness that leads to ethical failure. Levinas writes how rhythm takes oneself from oneself, and one is unable to act with intent. As sound and music are an art form most detached from its object, the instrument, listening is hearing without concepts. Metaphor musicality and rhythm is generalisation of this detachment, sensation without substance. (Levinas 1989, 133-134; Rosen 2011, 5). Here Levinas mixes the ontological and ethical failure. Perhaps the different ontological planes

that at the same time belong to the same plane, could be explained by what Levinas writes "Being is not only itself, it escapes itself" (Levinas 1989, 135)

There is a duality in being, which are connected through resemblance, which Levinas illuminates with the example of a fable and an allegory. A fable does not refer to reality, but to its shadow. "An image, we can say, is an allegory of being." (Levinas 1989, 135) Levinas writes how art leaves the real world in substituting reality with something else. Yet this is also a problem of concepts and language itself: it substitutes reality with something else. If the failure of image was in its failure to represent, what then connects the reality with the image that the perceiver identifies the image as an "representation"? The answer was resemblance in which the object had double existence as itself and its image. Levinas writes that sign and language differ from image, in that sign has a concept (in Saussurian framework signifier/word and signified/concept), but an image doesn't. Yet without a concept, how one would know that there is any resemblance? As with the fable, how does one know that the donkey is supposed to play the part of a man?

As Derrida has shown, the difference between sign and a picture is ostensible. The image is at the same time the signifier and the signified, a concept. As words referred and were concepts that might have something to do with reality, so an image refers and is a concept that refers to its object. In later *Totality and Infinity* Levinas writes how the face to face relationship that always is immediate is achieved in conversation with the Other (Levinas 1979, 52). Thus it is generally prioritised speech that breaks the totality of intentionality and words need to be special. Were image a sign, it would achieve transparency and have a concept, which could perhaps even lead to a possibility of discourse and eventually to a face. Were writing on par with speech breaking totality would not need to be such a personal affair.

Levinas has written about a book as a modality of living that heightens the living from mundane (Levinas 1996, 37). Gerald Bruns discovers that Levinas' conception of art is often contradictory. He writes that Mallarmé, the same poet Levinas references to in *Reality and Its Shadow*, was the first to see poetry fully as an irreducible language without concepts, meanings, expressions of the world but made of writing and its layout on a printed page. Here poetry and language differ little from an image. Levinas uses Mallarmé

for his *il y a* - there is, and existence without existents, phenomenology without phenomena. Art's and poetry's materiality is an *il y a* that "goes beyond" realm. Yet poetry, in which one "thinks without knowing one thinks" as Levinas defines, is as an-archic, without a beginning, as ethics is. (Bruns 2002, 207-211, 226; Levinas 1989, 130)

#### 5.4 The Development of Levinas' Concepts

Putnam engages Isaiah Berlin's division of authors and thinkers into foxes and hedgehogs. A fox knows many small tricks, a hedgehog knows one big trick. Levinas is a hedgehog. (Putnam 2008, 99) Even when Levinas has one big theme throughout his career, the possibility of meeting the Other, there are some developments in his thought and change in terminology, for example the diminishment in importance of phenomenology and after Derrida's criticism he concentrates more on the language of philosophy. Also, Bergo points out that in Levinas' 1974 work *Otherwise than Being* substitution becomes an important concept. In substitution one does not become the Other, but is the act of taking another's place in taking their responsibilities. The ethical encounter with the Other is passive. Bergo writes that this "subliminal and pre-reflective" procedure is the source of ethical responsibility (Bergo 2010, 73-74, 81-82; Bernasconi 2002, 239).

Many qualities that Levinas condemns in *Reality and Its Shadow* are treated positively in his later philosophy. Passivity leads to possession, earlier unwanted by art, later unwanted but ethical by the Other. Entretiens finds its counterpart in diachrony, memory of the face-to-face event interrupting linear time (Bergo 2010, 84), but perhaps the difference between the diachrony of the I and the Other and diachrony between I and the object-artwork is that with an object the time is suspended, eternal return to the same, whereas with another the times are in motion. Even substitution, the impossibility of image to represent reality may be thought in the terms of later Levinasian substitution with not image becoming the object, or the Other, but taking its "responsibilities". Reading earlier Levinas from the viewpoint of later Levinas undermines his aesthetics, as most key ideas stay the same throughout Levinas canon, but those already mentioned change in significant ways. As a

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separate piece *Reality and Its Shadow* retains its coherence, excluding the problems of sign, concept and prioritising sound that have already been shown.

Sivenius claims that rhythm makes oneself conscious of the fact that one does not own oneself (Sivenius 1998, 235). Reading Levinas' essay *The Poet's Vision* McDonald also reads the ability of self-reflection into rhythm. He also finds possibilities in the monstrous *entretemps* that didn't follow natural time: *entretemps*, a moment like before death is an exposure to to such a monstrous, art's *entretemps* makes one aware of nature of time that traditional perception does not reach. Because of this self awareness, McDonald claims that aesthetics is the "first ethics". No because it is ethical, but because it reflectively draws attention to the possibilities and boundaries of ethics and conceptualisation of ethical categories. (McDonald 2008, 17, 27-28)

## 5.5 Art and feminine

Art and feminine share many qualities and metaphors. Both operate in the shadows, both belong to the sphere of enjoyment and pleasure and neither were capable of ethical. The horror of being, *il y a* happens in the night time. Bruns describes how Levinas' aesthetics concentrate on darkness instead of light and on materiality against spirit. (Bruns 2002, 213-214). These are traditional dualistic male-female qualities. Like non-signifying picture, femininity brings non-signifyingness into the signifyingness of the face. Like art, it obscures clarity, it is almost like a face.

"The beautiful of art inverts the beauty of the feminine face. It substitutes an image for the troubling depth of the future, of the "less than nothing" (and not the depth of a world) announced and concealed by the feminine beauty. It presents a beautiful form reduced to itself in flight, deprived of its depth. Every work of art is painting and statuary, immobilised in the instant or in its periodic return. Poetry substitutes a rhythm for the feminine life. Beauty becomes a form covering over indifferent matter, and not harbouring mystery." (Levinas 1979, 263)

Art and feminine seem to go hand in hand. Art is like the Beloved that was desired in *eros*, it can be loved as an object, but this love is return to the self, movement back to immanence (Levinas 1979, 254)

Levinas offers another path to link art and feminine in referring to the dialogical philosophy of Buber.

”The Other who welcomes in intimacy is not the *you* (vous) of the face that reveals itself in a dimension of height, but precisely the *thou* (tu) of familiarity: a language without teaching, a silent language, an understanding without words, an expression in secret. The I-Thou in which Buber sees the category of interhuman relationship is the relation not with the interlocutor but with the feminine alterity.” (Levinas 1989, 155)

In Buber’s dialogical philosophy there are two relationships in the world, the I-It and I-You (or Thou), both define the I. As with Levinas, I-It relationship is an objectifying experience, but unlike in Levinas, Buber’s I-Thou is a reciprocal connection of mystical union and amalgamation. It is possible even to have this connection with not only with a person but also with inanimate objects. Artworks are formed when the power of Thou is met and actualised. Reciprocity is explained when Buber brings the Eternal Thou — God. I-God-relationship cover all other I-Thou connections (Buber, 25-32, 156, 166) and it becomes plausible to have a mutual relationship with a tree when it is part of God’s creation, or actually a connection to God. Buber’s view on artwork, a force of Thou, God’s communication with I, is very similar to Rudolf Otto’s sacred manifesting itself to the world.

As previously seen, Levinas’ view on femininity and women is problematic. Earlier it was established that femininity is not an independent metaphor, but means women. Levinas’ view on femininity is patriarchal and is based on dubious metaphors. This is also partly the case with art. Like feminine, Levinas draws from Judaism and from the prioritisation of the immediate word to letter or picture. These metaphors may be questioned, as this thesis has with Levinas’ depiction of women. If women were regarded as human, maybe artwork could have a face.

## 6. ART AND DECONSTRUCTION

### 6.1 Introducing Rothko

At this point of thesis another subject will be introduced, Mark Rothko the painter of the artwork that will be deemed according to Levinas. Yet Rothko has his own views on his artwork that conflict with Levinas and it is interesting to compare two viewpoints that are somehow influenced by spirituality. Mark Rothko was born as Marcus Rothkowitz in Dvinsk, then part of the Russian empire, in 1903. Young Rothko received a religious training. In 1913, after the hardships of 1904 and 1905's pogroms, he immigrated to the US, where he would discard Orthodox observance. Were one to observe his biography with a psychoanalytically keen eye to determine Rothko's relationship with God and sacred, one should notice how Rothko was the only one of his siblings to have religiosity endowed to him from his father, against which he rebelled after his father's death. Rothko studied at Yale university for two years but in 1923 he gave up studies and moved to New York, where he took painting classes. Taught design and painting to children in Brooklyn Jewish Academy. First one man exhibition in 1933 in Portland and New York. While living in New York, Rothko was a part of a group of nine Jewish artists called "The Ten", a minyan short one. (López-Remiro, xi; Rosen 2013, 481-483)

Rothko's style developed from figurative to symbolic and starting from 1947 to his trademark abstractions (Alley 1981). The *Seagram Murals* were a commissioned work to hang in a Four Seasons restaurant in the Seagram Building. Rothko was set to ruin the patrons' appetites. The *Seagram Murals* which was finished in 1958-59 never hang in its destined location. Although not a formally religious man, others often sees his work spiritual. When asked if he was a mystic or a Zen Buddhist, he denied he was, but described himself as a prophet of present times. Rothko was commissioned to paint another series of murals for a nondenominational chapel that was built for them in Houston, The Rothko Chapel. (Rothko, 131-136) John Fischer describes their conversations touching on the *Seagman Murals*: "twice in my hearing did he hint that his

work might be an expression of some deeply hidden religious impulse” (Rothko 2006, 126). Rothko died in 1970 (Rosen 2013, 488).

Julius groups Rothko’s abstract expressionism to Jewish aniconic art. Julius’ definition of aniconic art differs from Bland’s. It is more theologically loaded, it is a term for

”an art of the infinite, the unbounded, the sublime. I derive this from the first prohibition, and will call it 'aniconic art'. It is art's response to language's challenge, its attempt to vindicate the tag utpicturapoesis by matching language's powers. It seeks to abolish the icon and thereby remove the double disadvantage that language puts it under. One might think that art is limited to rendering what is finite and present. Aniconic art seeks to render the infinite and to put presence in question.” (Julius 2001, 41-42)

Rothko has described his paintings in an evocative way: ”The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them” and “If people want sacred experiences they will find them here. If they want profane experiences they’ll find them too. I take no sides.” (Rosen 2013, 479) Rosen interprets Rothko's use of words such as sacred and profane as theological language and writes how Rosenblum interprets Rothko’s paintings as a search for the sacred in a secular world. However to interpret his abstract paintings deriving from Jewish ideas of aniconism and Jewish subjects, is contested. Rothko had often ambivalent relationship with Jewishness, particularly the concept of a Jewish artist was disagreeable to him, as he saw it to marginalise him. (Rosen 2013, 479-480, 484, 486) Rothko was neither too pleased with the term abstract expressionism. ”I have never thought that painting a picture has anything to do with self-expression. It is a communication about the world to someone else. After the world is convinced about this communication it changes. - - Knowing yourself is valuable so that the self can be removed from the process.” (Rothko 2006, 125-126)

### **6.3 Application**

As already noted, Levinas condemns art for the sake of art. Image as an idol was the lure to believe that the unreal is significant (Levinas 1989, 137). Yet one needs to remember that image in itself did not constitute as art, but was only utilised by it, by sensation. For

Levinas, art's fault was its obscuring and in the desire to enter another sphere. Rothko's abstractions get treated similarly with figurative art, in abandonment of formal logic, art reveals in obscuring, it is "more real than reality" (Levinas 1989, 130) The ethical side of Levinas' aesthetical critique is quite clear and indisputable. Art belongs into the sphere of dwelling and enjoyment, to totality of ontology. Yet, Levinas' aesthetics may be contested not only with inner conflicts but tested in praxis with a change of viewpoint.

Rothko writes that his paintings are a communication with the viewer of the world and if one believes this self understanding, then his art resides in the real world. Were Rothko's works a search for the sacred, and if their purpose is to mediate God's will, would they then be as condemnable in Levinas' philosophy? Levinas writes about his own stance: "Is it presumptuous to denounce the hypertrophy of art in our times when, for almost everyone, it is identified with spiritual life?" (Levinas 1989, 142) I would answer that art identified with spiritual life does not equal real spiritual life through art. If one is to believe Rothko's claim of religious experience, then perhaps Rothko's work can be seen as a "translation". Translation for Levinas was the process of "translating" Jewish thought, bringing forth the ethics of the Scripture into Western philosophical language. As one remembers, in ethical hineni one brings God to the world. Ethics is a religious experience. To turn this logic backwards, religious experience is ethics. Those seeing Rothko's *Seagram murals* could be saying hineni and paintings as translation would be ethical.

Levinas himself tells an example of this

I am reminded of a visit I once made, as part of a religious ceremony, to the church of Saint Augustine in Paris. It was at the beginning of the war, and my ears were still burning from the 'new morality' phraseology that for six years had been circulating in the press and in books. There, in a little corner of the church, I found myself placed beside a picture representing Hannah bringing Samuel to the Temple. I can still recall the feeling of momentarily returning to something human, to the very possibility of speaking and being heard, which seized me at that moment. (Levinas 1997, 12)

Rosen has some thoughts along these lines. Levinas justifies the art critic, who in his process to say clearly what the artist has obscured, integrates the inhumane into humane life (Levinas 1989, 130). Rosen's answer how to validate the artist and how art could be ethical, is in its catalysing powers to bring in conversation. Even when Levinas peculiarly omits even looking at the picture in the story above, Rosen interprets that this encounter with visual art offers a pure language, a discourse, to fascist rhetorics in dire times. (Rosen 2011, 6, 10) Here, it would seem that the picture is utilised as something else than art. In Christian art, a picture is devotion, not art. And if a picture originally meant as art were to obtain powers of discourse, it would de-art.

There is a hitch. Levinas writes that Judaism does not transport to another worldly existence of "numinous" or "sacred" (Levinas 1997, 14) Levinas does not share Otto's notion of sacred — a notion to which Rothko seems to subscribe to — of a sacred outside day to day life that from time to time overflows to the lived world. (Aronowicz 1990, xxviii) Instead of sacred, there is holiness. Things and spaces, the holy Land, may be holy but people are holier (Levinas 1989, 297). Derrida describes a conversation he had with Levinas, and how Levinas told him "You know, one often speaks of ethics to describe what I do, but what really interests me in the end is not ethics, not ethics alone, but the holy, the holiness of the holy." (Derrida 1999, 4) Holiness is the moment God comes into one's mind (Wallenius 2004, 62). Holiness and religion are a lived experience in this world of relation with Others and separating sacred from secular is misguided. (Aronowicz 1990, xxviii)

Rothko claims that his intention is not self-expression but communication. Yet this communication is one sided. In Buber communicating with an artwork would be possible, as it is part of the communication with creation and ultimately God, but Levinas' I is captured by the other human, he is not the one gazing. Although unorthodox, Buber's intellectual roots are in hasidism. The difference in Buber's and Levinas' dialogical philosophies and attitudes to mysticism has been attributed as schism between two orthodox factions, hasidism and mitnaggdism. Even though it is impossible to know the details of Rothko's orthodox upbringing, later in life he shares views with Buber and shows contrary to Levinas that sacred is possible in (Jewish) life. Perhaps then Buber's Eternal Thou and Levinas' Other's resemblance with God would not be too distant from each Other and Rothko's communicating with artwork to another could be bringing God to the world. Derrida writes that as a face does not signify, it is not a sign like writing is, but nor was work or image. It has been already established that image and sign have little difference and writing is an inclusive term. In commentary to Levinas, Derrida proposes his trace as a means for rehabilitation of writing. (Derrida 1978, 125-126) Perhaps in such an interconnected world Rothko's artwork may also be seen as a trace. Buber's Eternal Thou is also a reminiscent of a trace that leads back to God.

## 7. CONCLUSION

When Fackenheim problematizes evil, Levinas problematizes goodness (Wright 2013). Levinas' key question is, is it justified to be? Art is nice, it has its place, but that place is the sphere of ontology, of totalism and violence and Holocaust. Levinas does see art as unethical, and gives an account how both representation and the failure to represent do not bring the epiphany of the face, as a face is not a sign, but signifyingness in itself. This does not mean that art is to be abolished, on the contrary. The answer to the study question, how would Levinas deem Rothko's *Seagram Murals*, is that art has its place as an enjoyment, and as people live to eat, not eat live, the same is true for art. But art is not a source for ethical otherwise than being. It is possible to apply Levinas' art critique not only to fine art but to all kinds of images and pop art. In advertisement the ever pervasive rhythm is present. Rock concerts are the substitute of religion.

Another interest was to find out how Levinas builds his aesthetics. It is justifiable to believe that the secondary place of enjoyment and art in his philosophy is influenced by his mitnagdim Judaism and the Holocaust. Yet in some reasonings Levinas stumbles that can be seen in his misogynistic reasonings and essentialistic metaphors backed by his Talmudic readings on the whole female gender that also undermine his aesthetics. Thus this thesis' answer to the question of Jewish philosophy or Jewish art would be, yes, there can be Jewish philosophy, although Jewish philosophy is not a branch of its own, but a thought influenced by selected tenements of Judaism. Heidegger offers an interesting parallel on anti-semitic philosophy. Quite recently his private notebooks were published, where Heidegger takes queues from racist conspiracy theory of "World Judaism", and claims that Jews are "wordless" in his system of being-in-the-world. In this framework, Jews are worse than animals. (Brody 2014) Philosophy nor philosophers operate purely rationally, but their context and persona influence if not the inner coherence of the philosophy, then the questions they ask and how the system is applied. Feminist deconstruction reveals this quite clearly. Levinas straddles between modernity and postmodernity with his views to women. When evaluating "great" thinkers their views on women should not be airbrushed. It is the job for the readers themselves to judge if the philosophy of Levinas or for example those of Plato or Aristotle should be completely discarded or could it be modified and used

in feminist political project of justice. Here the conclusion is that Levinas does have valuable concepts and tools that may be used in feminist framework.

”The most lucid writer finds himself in the world bewitched by its images. He speaks in enigmas, by allusions, by suggestion, in equivocations, as though he moved in a world of shadows” (Levinas 1989, 142). It is interesting to read Levinas criticising obscure art critics for using metaphors and elusive language. One problem with Levinas’ metaphors of saying and said are that they are exactly that, a metaphor. Any real discourse especially in later Levinas is irrelevant and it might rend words irrelevant, which makes pictures even more irrelevant. Body as speech leaves speech unnecessary. But if Levinas’ differentiation of sign and picture and its overturning has little effect on actual saying and possibility for a face to face, an image as an translation has the capability of ethical. Levinas’ bodily phenomenology including enjoyment, caress and other important events of the ontological sphere, was little covered and it would be interesting to compare Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, little seen in Levinas-literature. This thesis has examined Levinas using deconstructive method connected to Derrida. For further research it would be interesting to extend this examination to scrutinise Levinas with the feminist ideas of subject and language of a fellow Tel Quel member Julia Kristeva. Kristeva has done some work on Mikhail Bakhtin, who has written on the dialogical word. It would also be interesting to compare Bakhtin to Levinas.

This essay began with a quotation from Karl Marx. Marx is often quoted with ”religion is the opium of masses”. Yet if religion is the process of breaking the trivial and questionable being, then religion is the only cure.



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