

“Witness Testimony and its Ethical Relation to History”

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Introduction

They say the soul of a man is immortal. At one time it comes to an end -- that which is called death -- and at another is born again, but is never finally exterminated. On these grounds a man must live all his days as righteously as possible (Plato, Meno 81b).

Emil Fackenheim has argued that Auschwitz was both unique and a *novum* to the history of evil.¹

“What historians and philosophers must face is that is that Auschwitz was a kingdom not of this world” (1985, 509). While there have been attempts to explain the causes and conditions for genocide, there can be no *justification* for it. The suspension of accountability has been characteristic of a unique unworldly world-event, the construction of a socio-political ‘machinery of execution’ – a faceless, nameless execution of violence on a mass scale, arguably a new and distinctive characteristic of the modern world.

This paper looks to raise several questions: How to avoid the problem of a double-victimization – which would be to allow the victims of the *Shoah*² to remain silenced in their victimization, or to allow their death to have no meaning, or to let the suffering of the victims go without recognition and to acknowledge the uniqueness of this *aporia*? How can we

¹ These are actually only two of the three theses that Fackenheim makes in “The Holocaust and Philosophy” (*The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 82(10), 1985, pp. 505-514). More completely, he argues that the holocaust was 1) unique, 2) essentially anti-Jewish and 3) a *novum* in the history of evil.

² For our purposes here, the term holocaust specifically refers to the event of genocide as it took place in Germany by the Nazis. There is a significant argument regarding the use of the word Shoah or “devastation” in part from Emil Fackenheim. For ease, I will employ the term ‘holocaust’ sparingly, but not without understanding the reasons for reservation. Please see Giorgio Agamben’s discussion of the term Holocaust as having serious anti-Semitic connotations and a summary of Fackenheim’s arguments, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, (NY: Zone Books, 1999) pp. 28-31.

acknowledge the uniqueness of not only an intentional genocide but an *aeoncide*, an extermination of *generations* as James Hatley describes it?³ The power of mass execution was not simply to remove what was considered superfluous from the world, but also the possibility of them ever returning or being recollected, “When no surviving generation is left to honor the dead, to bury their corpses and to mourn their memory, one cannot say the annihilated have even died” (Hatley 2000, 23). As Primo Levi bore witness to a place that should have had no place, and became “the cartographer of this new *terra ethica*, the implacable land-surveyor of Müselmannland” (Agamben 1999, 69), in what way must this work continue? How do we prevent a diminishing of this occurrence in its cruelty and yet manifest its presence in an ethical form?

The risk in telling the story, constructing the narrative, writing a play of events is to allow the historians to even unintentionally justify mass violence by *recreation*.⁴ So that, although Fackenheim argues that “The historian must explain it, and the philosopher must reflect upon the historians work” (1985, 509), the work of the historian has already assumed an epistemological, and not necessarily ethical stance when it comes to *the significance of what has passed* in regard to what remains. If we are to do justice here to those who were meant to be exterminated, there must be included in any testimony the ethico-existential imperative to respond through *tracework*.⁵ The case of the Müselman will show to be of special difficulty as well as Levi’s paradoxical position that is *between* ‘the drowned and the saved.’ It is the writer-

³ The specific extermination of children intended to remove intergenerational memory, to “deprive a people of their generations” (*Suffering Witness: The Quandary of Responsibility after the Irreparable*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2000) p. 30. He argues that the final solution was not just intended for a specific population of people (a *genos* through genocide) but a more extensive loss and victimization. For the victims, their death could not be mourned as a ‘death’ if they were thoroughly dehumanized and no one existed to mourn the loss.

⁴ Hatley discusses the ethical importance in avoiding reduction of the suffering of the victims to an imaginative play out of curiosity. The victimization of the victims resists a simple, traditional narration. “The *Häftling* [deathcamp prisoner] ought not leave me in wonder” so that “one imagines how one cannot imagine” (2000, 39-40).

⁵ Using the terms from Emmanuel Levinas.

witness, or perhaps poet-translator,⁶ which will find the representation for that which shames, that which cannot be undone, the irreparable loss.

To face the otherness of the Other, to initiate a tracework that will demonstrate that ‘*no soul can be exterminated*’ requires a resurrection – bringing to life back to the dead – for the sake of a righteous life. To look again at the novum that distinguishes the modern world we live is to begin take company with a truth that rests in the silence and facelessness of those executed in a sanctioned and intentional *extermination of generations*.

I. Testimony and the Face of the Other

I begin with an injunction by Levinas:

Testimony – the confession of some knowledge or of an experience by a subject – can be conceived only in relation to the disclosed being which remains the norm; it brings about only indirect truths about being, or about the relations man has with being. These truths are evidently inferior, secondhand, and uncontrollable, distorted by the very fact of their transmission: “self-effacing subjectivity,” by circulating information, is capable of bad faith and lying. (Levinas 1996, 100).⁷

Here operates a very particular understanding of existence and our ability to disclose or dis-cover it in the tradition problem of testimony. Levinas raises a question against the ontological assumptions that involve the relation of a knowing subject to its objects, and the problems that result from the evidentiary value of testimony. Here, “self-effacing subjectivity” as mentioned in this problematic account of testimony means the kind of subject which looks to welcome being in its nakedness, a disclosing and discovering being which, as subject, also grants *the meaning of being* (in the Heideggerian sense). For Levinas, in every case, the Western tradition has assumed being as a synchronous thing ‘to dis-cover’ (present with itself, a knowing subject), problematic in the sense that the *knowing of the thing* is also *the meaning of the thing* – to ‘gather it up’ and

⁶ There are poems that Levi, a professed chemist, uses to express his relation to the task of witnessing. In Celan’s poetry he also finds voice for what even he, the writer-witness (as in the position of the Ancient Mariner), cannot explain. In this case, Levi’s testimony functions as a ‘language’ between the dead and the living – the drowned and the saved – and the language “survives.” See Giorgio Agamben, (*Remnants of Auschwitz*. New York: Zone Books, 1999) pp. 16, 89-90, 102, 161.

⁷ Levinas, *Basic Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

make it *clear*. The subject which has come to know a thing, 'at the same time' has also discovered/un-covered its meaning. In order for a knowing subject to truly welcome the nakedness of being the self must be *effaced*. Ontology permits a self-effacing thematization in order for the ontological subject (even in the case of Heidegger's Dasein) to disclose being. It erases and effaces its 'self' and become representative of a position of knowing relation, a symbolic position in that way that can 'care' for being and be authentically involved in a world project.

But, as Levinas asks, aren't there are some things *that are* and *have been* which "resist the light," (Levinas 1996, 98), resist intelligibility, resist the speculative power of Western authority? Specifically, "Does the truth of testimony illuminate only by way of borrowed light?" (100). 'To become intelligible' is the site of subjectivity claiming its object. But there is always this hesitation, the pre-conscious, the "*lag* between the fact of *being thematized* and the fact of *being made manifest in intelligibility*" The subject aware of itself emerges with objectivity lost within the structures of thematization. "The disclosure of being governs testimony... Before being, the subject of knowledge effaces itself" (100). The meaning of testimony has assumed this ontological structure of a disclosing subject throughout the various fields of study, including but not limited to history – witness testimony as a confession/expression of a knowing subject for and to be interpreted by other knowing subjects, open to bad faith and lies.

In response to Heideggerian ontology, contemporary phenomenology revises the autonomy of the intending subject to an existential description of consciousness that is conditioned by a fundamental intersubjective relation that *binds* subjects to objects and, more importantly for ethics, a self to others in the world. "*The face to face remains an ultimate situation*" (Levinas 1969, 81).⁸ For Levinas, the transcendental character of the otherness of the Other (radical exteriority) is not a reciprocal relation that can be generated in terms of likenesses, so that it remains the source of *uprootedness* for what is only self-same and separate (as the lived experience of interiority). Levinas recognizes the problematic and paradoxical position of

⁸ *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press).

philosophical interrogation, but cautions against the generalized, even incestuous reciprocity of thought and language. “The antiplatonism of contemporary philosophy consists in this subordination of the intellect to expression: the face-to-face position of soul and idea is interpreted as a limit abstraction of a coming into contact in a common world ... this aim only claims to illuminate” (Levinas 1998, 84-85).⁹ This reduction of meaning-generation to the work of disclosure and the illumination of Being in general disables philosophical interrogation to go beyond an incestuous relation of economy and reciprocity. Levinas attributes this to a loss in contemporary phenomenology for the supernatural, the source of all *meta-phor*:¹⁰

The purpose of testimony, if we can revisit it and with Levinas as a guide, must not be limited to the *inspections*, speculations, and casual interestedness of the subject already ontologically thematized (i.e., already assumed to be in a position *to know* and *make intelligible*). Otherwise testimony, and its reception, is then limited to extending the knowing subjects’ repertoire of experiences, which can only distort and efface the self in relation to existence. In this way testimony, is *made intelligible but not truly given a hearing*.

The risk here is greater considering the legacy of world in which aeonicide is possible. Those who are victimized can continue to be violated as long as the situation remains one of “self-effacement.” In a fundamental and ethically urgent way, the hearing of testimony becomes

⁹ From Levinas’ *Collected Philosophical Papers*, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998). Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology resorts to language that relies on incestuous imagery and does not escape Levinas’ concerns. Note here Merleau-Ponty’s words: “each one of us is pregnant with the others and confirmed by them in his body ... From then on the irrelative is ... that ‘teleology’ Husserl speaks about which is written and thought about in parentheses -- that jointing and framing of Being which is being realized through man.” From *Signs* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995) p. 181.

¹⁰ Levinas plays on the literal meaning of metaphor, using it to mean, “what carries away over something.” He specifically attributes the idea of metaphor in relation to perception or sense, “This *metaphor* can be taken to be due to a deficiency of perception, or to its excellence, according as the *beyond* involved in a metaphor leads to other contents which were simply absent from the limited field of perception, or is transcendent with respect to the whole order of contents or of the given” (CPP 75). He describes two interpretations of metaphor: one as beginning either out of a failure in perception, as is the case in Plato and Husserl’s writings (which is also Levinas’ position) or as an excellence of perception, as it is in Heidegger’s work. Insofar as Merleau-Ponty described meaning, not in its correspondence to thought but rather, in relation to the function of expression. “The corporeal gesture is not a nervous discharge, but a celebration of the world, a poetry,” Levinas gives credit for the idea that perception is not mere passivity: “To perceive is both to receive and express” (CPP 82), but Merleau-Ponty’s employs an idea of reversibility in perception that corresponds to the Heideggerian goal of the illumination of Being (see V&I 228).

impossible when the self is effaced and takes the position of a subject which is out to discover its meaning (make it naked and make it clear). To give testimony the reception it requires, as part of a fundamental existential relationship, we have to ask about a *self that listens to what is other* and gives the meaning of testimony and its reception the possibility of *a real hearing*.

II. The True Witness and the Writer-Witness

To speak, to bear witness is to enter into a vertiginous movement in which something sinks to the bottom, wholly desubjectified and silenced, and something subjectified speaks without truly having anything to say of its own. Testimony takes place where the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech... the human and the inhuman enter a zone of indistinction in which it is impossible to establish the position of the subject, to identify the 'imagined substance' of the 'I' and along with it, the 'true witness' (Agamben 1999, 120)

Georgio Agamben takes seriously two statements made by Primo Levi that, through his witness, reveals a catastrophic change in the world with the institution of Auschwitz. The position of Levi, as a witness to Auschwitz, becomes more significant when we consider that his existence as a writer was supposed to have been impossible, “No one will remember you.”¹¹ These two statements were: 1). “The *Müselman* is the complete witness” (1999, 60, 133, 150) and, 2) “The human being is the only one that can survive the human being” (120-121, 151). When Primo Levi takes the self-proclaimed position of writer-witness, the writing is not and should not be misunderstood as a literary exercise. “[That] precisely because the Lager was a great machine to reduce us to beasts; ... one must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear witness; and that to survive we must force ourselves to save at least the skeleton, the scaffolding, the form of civilization” (*Survival in Auschwitz* 36). The position that Levi takes in itself must be a question that must be taken into a greater consideration, appreciated in part for the sheer closeness of his (and Levi’s) almost-non-existence. What he describes is the world where the human is replaced by the ideological and mechanical. There is a suspension of any power to act *as a human*.

Agamben interprets the meaning in these statements as a tension between polarities, of which the relation contains the meaning, “coextensive but not coincident” (135). He explains the polarity with interchanging terms: desubjectification and subjectification, the *Müselman* and the witness, the living being and the speaking being, the inhuman and the human. This ‘gap’, ‘difference’, or ‘excess,’ between the true witnessing of the *Müselman* and the writer-witness position of Levi of which Agamben refers, parallels the “lag” of which resists a synchronicity of knowing subject as Levinas described it. The work of history is ‘out of time’ with the meaning of that which it seeks to describe.

It happens as though the multiplicity of persons ... were the condition for the fullness of ‘absolute truth’ as though each person, through his uniqueness, ensured a revelation of a unique aspect of the truth, and that certain sides of it would never reveal themselves if certain people were missing from mankind.¹²

It is Levi’s position of paradox (it is the witness that is *between* ‘the drowned and the saved’) that provides the true meaning of testimony for Agamben while posing a real question of the meaning of history as a form of knowledge generation. It is the writer-witness, or perhaps poet-translator,¹³ which will find the representation of that which shames, that which cannot be undone, the loss executed with the dis-memberment of generations. It was Levi’s position that “The best all died”¹⁴

The paradox of Primo Levi’s position indicates a greater problem for the meaning of history. Living history and the case of the survivor intersect at a critical point. Here we begin to properly take into account that which has great ethical import and not merely a look for what has possible historical significance. To return to Levinas:

¹² Levinas *L’au-dela du verset*, p. 163.

¹³ There are poems that Levi, a professed chemist, uses to express his relation to the task of witnessing. In Celan’s poetry he also finds voice for what even he, the writer-witness (as in the position of the Ancient Mariner), cannot explain. In this case, Levi’s testimony functions as a ‘language’ between the dead and the living – the drowned and the saved – and the language “survives.” See Agamben, 1999; 16, 89-90, 102, 161.

¹⁴ Borrowed from Agamben 1999, 59.

An ethical significance of a past which concerns me, which ‘has to do with me’ which is ‘my business’ outside of all reminiscence, all retention, all representation, all reference to a recalled present. A significance in ethics of a pure past [is] irreducible to my present, and thus of an originating past ... My unintentional participation in the history of humanity, in the past of others which has something to do with me (Levinas 1998, 150)¹⁵

The distance between the present and this ‘immemorial’ past *of which I am still responsible*, is the ethical injunction beyond knowledge generation. The argument behind an idea like an immemorial past is, in part, a theoretical resistance to all the ways in which Western speculation has been built on heliocentrism, continually reinforcing a theoretical center around the language of light, sight and power of the objectifying gaze.¹⁶ The past and our present proximity to the past requires, what Levinas terms as, ‘ethical vigilance’ in order to avoid the possibility of violence to the past -- as past – and to those others of the past who are still always other. Primo Levi, the writer-witness as the “voice of ethical conscience” to what is “beyond all metaphor” (Levinas 1998, 151) voices the call to *listen* in his command to remember the *Häftling* at the beginning of *Survival in Auschwitz*.¹⁷

“Every person, every philosophy, and every political system after Auschwitz should be questioned ethically in this way: Is it open for alterity, for the vulnerability of the weakest, ... for transcendent experiences?”¹⁸ In effect, we perpetuate the oppression by not recognizing it as such, especially if we consider that “Aggression is the lack of attention *par excellence*.”¹⁹ How can a public testimony and public witnessing assist in what is regarded as important, not just

¹⁵ From *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other* (NY: Columbia University Press).

¹⁶ See Luce Irigaray, “And by centering man outside of himself, it has occasioned above all man's ex-stasis within the transcendental (subject). Rising to a perspective that would dominate the totality, to the vantage point of greatest power, he thus cuts himself off ... from his empirical relationship with the matrix he claims to survey. To specularize and speculate” (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. NY: Cornell University Press, 1985, 579). Also see, Cathryn Vasseleu. *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*. NY: Routledge, 1998,

¹⁷ The “command to remember” was a preface to Levi’s *Survival* and was not in all translated editions. See Hatley for discussion (2000, 82).

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¹⁹ Quoting again from Levinas, see my footnote. 19.

politically but *ethically*? Although perhaps *freedom* and *equality* have been granted, the *responsibility* has been without account, without regard.²⁰

So here begins the case (if not a defense) for history as a resurrection – the work of returning and listening to the remains, to the survivor. To ‘raise the dead’ is to ask a fundamental ethico-existential question, going back to the meaning of the essential ‘belonging’ to the world that addresses what has passed. To ask about what remains is to also be ready for a *return* to faces that may have been erased (the ‘drowned’) and to have a true reception in which we are able to *listen* to their testimony. Only then could we find a foundation for a non-violent response, *a response without aggression to the Other or aggregation of others.*²¹

“In this sense, every work is a failed act” (Levinas 1998, 29).

III. History as the work of Resurrection

The Other is not initially a fact, is not an obstacle, does not threaten me with death; he is desired in my shame ... Conscience welcomes the Other ... Morality begins when freedom, instead of being justified by itself, feels itself to be arbitrary and violent (Levinas 1969, 84).

With Levinas, that the ethical ‘preparation’ of a ‘moral consciousness,’ as Levi described it, is a vigilance for the other and becomes the primary preparation for a genuine response to the witness. Arendt recognized that the conditions for genocide have been written into the formulation of the modern world as long as it politically executes ideas on a *mass* scale. This danger led her to make a very clear distinction between the social and the political,²² but Levinas asserts a fundamental ethics that engages a radical self-critique.

²⁰ Freedom from slavery and racial equality were granted in amendments to the Constitution. Yet, as it has already been stated earlier in this paper, responsibility comes before freedom. See quote from Kearney, my fnt. 62, p. 16.

²¹ Thinking here of the way in which we amass objects and think quantitatively en masse and how this approach to the past is a violence. The mass graves and its links to totalizing character of the ideologies at work in genocide is fundamentally not a burial and not a way to treat the living or the dead.

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[The] gathering of a historical narrative into the presence of a thing, the gathering of beings into a being ... is the key moment of re-presentation and vision as the essence of thought! (Levinas 1998, 163).

In effect, we perpetuate the dis-memberment that is executed by historical violence – and institute the incapacity to non-violently re-member – by not resisting it as a *violence*, especially if we consider that “Aggression is the lack of attention *par excellence*.”²³ The violence of the past continues and is regenerated through our *ignorance*, our lack of regard for the “lag” the otherness which stands against and cannot be reduced to any sense of self. The problem of double-victimization occurs with each ‘inattention’ to the face, erasure of the face, a dis-*regard* and inattention to what is other than ourselves (or self-interests) perpetuates a *facelessness* that continues to be written and reified into the structure of the modern world – a world built with “a past that ‘regards me’ and is ‘my buisiness’ ... a past that cannot be gathered into representation” (Levinas 1998, 170-71).

It is this *indifference* to the face of the Other that manifests in Hannah Arendt’s understanding is with the banality of evil, the problem of the masses.²⁴ Although she describes the totalitarianism that lead to the conditions of Nazi Germany, it is her continuing caution that as long as we concede to the mechanism and automatism of the modern world, evils in the world, including terror and arbitrary violence, will have no resistance.

Yet, I am not looking here to save the world from totalitarianism (via Arendt’s [love for the world]²⁵), rather go further with her position of resistance to our legacy of systematic violence, of the ongoing erasure of the face of the Other. It was through the political capacity of human being that Arendt found to be the most appropriate preparation to ask about the crisis of judgment in the modern world post-Holocaust. The lack of ‘*common sense*’²⁶ illustrated by the

²³ Quoting again from Levinas, see my ftnote. 19.

²⁴ Pitkin. Arendt and the Blob?

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²⁶ *Sensus communis* harks back to Kant and the issue of judgment. Arendt discusses this in *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*.

influence of Nazism on both *extraordinary* case of Heidegger and the *ordinary* Eichmann²⁷ is symptomatic of the ‘withdrawal from the world’ promoted by both professional philosophy and privatized, unreflective public opinion – *thinking without action* and *action without thinking*.²⁸ The totalization of the *logoi*, in which theory overrides existence and manifests into totalitarian ideology, becomes a mythic and fantastic de-severance from an immediate, experiential connection to the world of affairs and plurality of persons (*ibid*, 474). The political fact of plurality is manipulated and placed into abstraction, collapsing what ought to remain a plural and particular “space of living” (*ibid*, 468). The violence of collapse distorts an active and renewing relation between the thinking and the world, where thought can be brought into the world. This essential part of the human condition, Arendt terms *natality*.

With Levinas, that the ethical ‘preparation’ of a ‘moral consciousness,’ as Levi described it, is the primary preparation for a genuine response to the witness. Arendt recognized that the conditions for genocide have been written into the formulation of the modern world as long as it politically executes ideas on a *mass* scale. This danger led her to make a very clear distinction between the social and the political,²⁹ but Levinas asserts a fundamental ethics that engages a radical self-critique.

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²⁸ Reflective thinking is the traditional understanding of the power of thought removed from world-of-affairs, i.e., *vita contemplativa*. Arendt revises the idea of thinking as not simply a reflective withdrawal, but in the mode of consideration. The idea of thinking as a ‘consideration’, where one ‘takes others into their thought,’ is a mode that does not separate thinking from action but combines it – a *thinking-in-action*, otherwise understood as action proper in the *vita activa*. Arendt describes at length the historical development of the separation between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. See HC, 12-21.

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consider that “Aggression is the lack of attention *par excellence*.”³⁰ The violence of the past continues and is regenerated through our *ignorance*, our lack of regard for the “lag” the otherness which stands against and cannot be reduced to any sense of self. The problem of double-victimization occurs with each ‘inattention’ to the face, erasure of the face, a *dis-regard* and inattention to what is other than ourselves (or self-interests) perpetuates a *facelessness* that continues to be written and reified into the structure of the modern world – a world built with “a past that ‘regards me’ and is ‘my business’ ... a past that cannot be gathered into representation” (Levinas 1998, 170-71).

This question is to ask, if the world is a place for *oneself* to take a *position*, what existential value limits this position if not the ethical? In Arendt’s theoretical resistance to the totalitarian conditions of the modern world, a free existence must remain a plural and conceptual movement of individuals giving the world its shape. Yet, in Arendt’s understanding of the modern world, there will always be the haunting threat of the homogeneous, of the massive, of the social.³¹ Totalitarianism is a constant threat for the modern world today, analogous to the reoccurring nightmare that haunts survivors of the deathcamps.³² Here, there is an opportunity to suspend the description of political existence and in its stead support the description of a fundamentally ethical existence.

Levinas offers that it is a kind of “difficult piety – [with] all the certainties and personal risks – of the twentieth century, after the horrors of its genocides and its Holocaust...” could begin a history of “promise” (Levinas 1998, 170). The degree to which the project of history has been a work to totalize, to narrate, and its obvious aestheticizations,³³ demonstrates a willful preference for freedom over this existential responsibility and, therefore, is based upon a fundamental injustice. This is what Levinas calls an “innocent injustice in which evil is done

³⁰ Quoting again from Levinas, see my footnote 19.

³¹ Reference the book on Arendt and the Blob (Andrea Pitkin).

³² Agamben citing Levi about the reoccurring dream, the always return of the survivor to the memory.

³³ “Freedom as a will productive of works, without being limited in its willing, enters into a history of which it is a plaything” (Levinas 1998, 28).

naively” (30). The seriousness of the work is in its fundamental injustice to mask the otherness within the past with the preferential, the palatable and the poetic. “One can do anything with man” (*ibid.*)

And yet, “The human being is the one who can survive the human being” (Agamben 133). To trace the face of the other, to listen to the depth beyond the skin, the film,³⁴ the interests of the present is the beginning of nonviolence. “I am commanded, that is, recognized as capable of a work” (35). If there truly is a command to respond with every presence of what is other, (historical or otherwise), then the hearing already begins an ethical response. In terms of intersubjectivity, it is a radical exteriority that generates meaning: “The face is a living presence; it is expression ... The face speaks. The manifestation of the face is already discourse” (Levinas 1969, 66).

If we understand the degree to which we are now required to be open to the vulnerability to the otherness of the Other, history then can be a form of ethical resistance to the possibility of genocide, “In the face of the vulnerable other is revealed a resistance that is no resistance.” In the hypostatic relation of self and other as they are face-to-face is a fundamental resistance to the *il y a*, the haunting possibility of anonymous being, the indifference to otherness. The face-to-face relation is a realization of *non-in-difference*.³⁵ How can history open itself up to the other without accelerating the *il y a* of faceless indifference? “The relationship with another is a relationship that is never finished with the other; it is a difference that is a nonindifference and that goes beyond all duty, one that is not resorbed into a debt that we might discharge” (*God, Death, and Time* [GDT], 161). The effacing of human beings over time and with every present moment of

³⁴ Here I can only indirectly indicate a larger issue of the documentary and the disfigurement of the Other through documentary. See Walter Benjamin’s comment on the power of film to pacify the viewer ...

³⁵ From Didier Pollefeyt in his critique of Leonard Grob’s discussion in earlier chapter of *Ethics After the Holocaust* (1999), John K. Roth, editor (St. Paul: Paragon House), pp. 31-33. This is Pollefeyt’s response to Grob’s assumption that the self/other relation is a dichotomy (self is negative and otherness is positive). Pollefeyt argues for a deeper criticism by Levinas. He cautions that it is better to avoid reducing the self to a negative position (‘imperialistic’, ‘egotistic’) but rather show that the ethical self/other relation resists the underlying evil of the *il y a*, the neutral ‘thereness’ of being. The idea that existence can be neutral and have a condition of ‘Care’ is one way in which Levinas responds to Heidegger’s Dasein.

globalizing world-project is a debt we cannot discharge. As long as the world remains indifferent to the ethical injunction posed by the de-facing of the past, more than the dis-memberment, it remain and leaves remains of violence.