

Chapter 4

The Ambiguous Economy of Dwelling

This chapter suggests that Levinas' notion of "the dwelling" describes the ambiguous duality of a subject who enjoys the world through the effectuation of a postponement of the anonymity of *il y a*. However, this postponement is not effected by the subject of enjoyment alone. In other words, it is not to be conceived as an essential possibility of this subjectivity but opens the dimension of ontological impossibility, which Levinas discusses as the intimacy of recollection. With the notion of recollection in dwelling, Levinas looks for an alternative to a dialectic opposition of subject and being, transposed through negation into a positive creative relation to the world. The arrival and signification of alterity is first approached with regard to this question of the subject's relation to *il y a*. In other words, otherness is first revealed in its 'ontological' signification. However, this ontology, concerned with impossibility, questions the limits of the Heideggerian configuration of being, world and *Dasein*.

In this conception of subjectivity, sexual difference and femininity play a crucial role in undermining the notion that the world is merely a play of anonymous forces. The intimacy associated with the feminine has an ontological signification as the interruption of anonymity. However, for Levinas, intimacy does not thereby stand opposed to a primary alienation, but is characteristic of it. This is a crucial reversal of the Heideggerian and Western myth of the feminine as mother earth from which 'man' becomes alienated.

I will examine Levinas' alternative notion of the feminine in relation to the breakdown of the borders of the ego effected in the dwelling and suggest that Levinas links sexual identity to the ambiguous "unicity" of the self beyond the boundaries of the intentional ego. This does not mean that identities are fixed in

an underlying physical substratum, but open to a multiplicity of meanings. In linking sexuality to the subjectivity of dwelling, Levinas suggests that sexuality is neither primarily biological nor sociologically determined, but is an integral part of the identity of the unique subject who will come to represent itself and its possessions in the world and thereby discover new meanings for itself.

However, the postponement effected in intimacy describes the subjectivity of intentional consciousness as a will which does not have any inherent powers of comprehension, but has an arbitrary relation to the world which it possesses across a distance. While the arbitrary nature of the will undermines the notion of the virility of the intentional subject, it does not thereby suggest that the will is by nature non-violent. In other words, the fact of this primary impower of subjectivity, does not provide an account of an essentially ethical subjectivity. The ethical dimension is opened only through the question of justice. The ethical production of meaning comes to be associated with the unique encounter with the Other, who Levinas introduces as the one who faces. The face introduces the question of the violence and non-violence of representation, calling into question these representations and thereby introducing the ethical dimension to these ontological significations.

i) Dwelling: The Gift of Time

This insecurity, which thus delineates a margin of nothingness about the interior life, confirming its insularity, is lived in the instant of enjoyment as the concern for the morrow.¹

As suggested in the previous chapter, the subjectivity of enjoyment is haunted by *il y a*. Having begun with an exploration of enjoyment in terms of the relation to intentional consciousness, Levinas now approaches the work of

¹ TaI 150/TeI 123.

intentional consciousness from out of the notion of enjoyment. The work of intentional consciousness is shown to be possible only on the basis of a postponement of the anonymous world of *il y a*. This postponement is recollection and dwelling, and cannot be effected by the subject of enjoyment alone.

Already in *Existence and Existents*, Levinas suggests that the difference between intentionality and enjoyment lies in the fact that intentional subjectivity always maintains a distance with regard the object, and he asks how this distance is effected.² In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas investigates the event of temporal postponement, which explains this difference in terms of dwelling. A dense movement from subjectivity to alterity takes place, if we can call it a "place", in the home. In the section entitled, "The Dwelling", the subject is described as a "being at home with oneself" [*chez soi*], or as "dwelling" [*la demeure*].³ Autochthony, or dwelling at home with oneself, is not equivalent to a free will. The subjectivity of dwelling is not, in other words, the cogito, a thinking being. Furthermore, the subjectivity of dwelling has a relation to the world that entails enjoyment, but is not equivalent to it. The distinction between dwelling and enjoyment is the element of postponement in the subject's relation to the world. In the previous chapter, it was suggested that enjoyment is an attempt to think the primary relation to the "world" independently of the question of the relation of subjectivity to being as *il y a*. However, it was also suggested that the notions of "world" and "subjectivity" in enjoyment, remain attached to being. The notion of dwelling, and the postponement it effects, is not only a return to the question of the relation of subjectivity and being, but is an attempt to rethink this relation without negating the subjectivity of enjoyment. In other words, dwelling and enjoyment cannot be read as Levinas' two alternatives to Heideggerian inauthentic and authentic being, respectively. Dwelling is not only a rethinking of

² EE 46/DE 72.

³ TaI 150/TeI 124.

Heideggerian Being-in-the-world but more importantly involves a complete reconfiguration of subjectivity, world and being.

According to Levinas, in dwelling there is an event of recollection - the deferral of the immediacy of enjoyment through work - in which the subject is described as an economy of needs and means without ends. Unlike the account of economic time in *Existence and Existents*, in which the subject is distracted from being but does not escape it, dwelling is essentially ambiguous, being both a

postponement, refers to another temporality than that of in dwelling. Levinas claims that the notion of subjective identity associated with dwelling is both open and closed. It is closed in the sense that dwelling remains a movement of contraction of identity. However, it is open in so far as it maintains a relation to an exterior world and discovers that recollection/postponement already refers to a welcome.⁴ The economy of dwelling is very different to the notion of a subjective totality which flees its irremissible attachment to the present.

The primordial function of the home does not consist in orienting being by the architecture of the building and in discovering a site, but in breaking the plenum of the element, in opening in it the utopia in which the "I" recollects itself in dwelling at home with itself.⁵

As Alison Ainley points out, we cannot overlook the reference to Heidegger in the thought of dwelling.⁶ Levinas, she reminds us, sees Heideggerian dwelling as a will to peasant rootedness where it is a matter of

⁴ TaI 155/TeI 128.

⁵ TaI 156/TeI 130.

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(ed.) *Facing the Other: The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), pp. 7-20.

"building locations in language, in the material world and in philosophical ontology".⁷ Elsewhere in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas is critical of Heidegger's edification of the world, suggesting that "things" are made the "foundation of a site, the quintessence of all the relations that constitute our presence on the earth".⁸ Levinas finds that, in making "things" this quintessence, Heidegger constructs a world with closed doors and is incapable of sharing it. For Levinas, things occur not as what one edifies but as what one gives.⁹ This giving presupposes the gathering of possessions and an intimacy, which is not an illusory production of subjectivity.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that being-in, is always accompanied by a feeling of "not-being-at-home", or an "uncanniness" [*Unheimlichkeit*].¹⁰ For Heidegger, this feeling of uncanniness is associated with anxiety. Being-in, which is a falling into everydayness, is shown to have a dual directionality, that is, it is always accompanied by anxiety or uncanniness which "brings it back from its absorption in the world".¹¹ The Levinasian analysis of dwelling, based in the notion of enjoyment suggests however, that the duality of Being-in and not-Being-at-home in Heidegger's work, does not question the fundamental Being-in-the-world of *Dasein*, but ultimately relies on a notion of an illusory intimacy that is only interrupted by Being. The secret and clandestine [*heimlich*] world of *Dasein's* everydayness is opened to its authentic being (becomes *unheimlich*).¹² For Levinas, the dwelling is not an account of being-in. Intimacy instigates exile, that is, an extraterritoriality with regard to being-in, and is not opposed to it.

It is in formulating his concept of dwelling that Levinas describes the "quint-essential" openness of the non-site/utopia, which is the condition of

⁷ Ainley, *The Feminine, Otherness, Dwelling*, p. 9.

⁸ TaI 77/TeI 49.

⁹ TaI 77/TeI 49.

¹⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 233.

¹¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 233.

¹² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 233.

"possession", but not itself a possession. Despite not being a possession, Levinas suggests that it is to be conceived as the possession of possessions. In other words, Levinas' analysis suggests that dwelling or habitation is to be understood otherwise than Being-in-the-world and is not just a reinterpretation of it.¹³ Recalling the discussion of hypostasis, it could be suggested that this is the event in which "a verb becomes a substantive". In other words, dwelling is the concrete accomplishment of the event of hypostasis. As Llewelyn suggests, habitation is the primary mode of having after the suspension of the anonymity of "to have" [*avoir*] implicit in *il y a*.¹⁴ In other words, enjoyment is the suspension of the anonymity of being, but does not issue in a "being". It is the transformation of the verb into a substantive which, in turn is to be understood in terms of habitation. Habitation, is not just a mode of being, and a deficient one at that, but a moment of hypostasis which remains ambiguous. It is an "amphibological mutation from an event into an entity", in which the subject is neither entity nor event.¹⁵

Thus, before we start thinking of this mutation as an ordinary ground, or slip back into conceiving of the dwelling as a 'place where to stand', which is to say, as the ground of all possibilities including that possibility of giving, we must recall that this notion of habitation and dwelling as the non-site, describes the ego in its extra-territoriality. As the following discussion suggests, dwelling does not fit into the dialectic of being and not being at home, insofar as it does not confront the anxiety of being for death, but is an opening to the Other. The horror before the *il y a* is not overcome, but undergoes a continual postponement in dwelling. For Levinas, the "utopia" of dwelling is a "non-place", a "non-possession", in the sense that it is a commencement or space of a primary relation which has the

¹³ TaI 152-153/TeI 125-126.

¹⁴ Llewelyn discusses the link between "habit" and "*habere*" [to have] and the possible connection to the *avoir* implicit in *il y a*; Llewelyn, *The Genealogy of Ethics*, p. 95.

¹⁵ EE 79-80/DE 136. The notion of the "amphibology of being" will come to describe the realm of 'the Said' in *Otherwise than Being*. I am thus in agreement with John Llewelyn who suggests, with regard to the dwelling that it "may be taken to correspond with the universe of discourse that Levinas will distinguish in *Otherwise than Being* as the system of "the Said"; Llewelyn, *The Genealogy of Ethics*, p. 94. I will discuss "the Said" and the "amphibology of being" in Chapter Seven.

double structure of "intimacy". The important aspect of dwelling is the notion that the postponement of *il y a*, requires an intimacy which cannot be found in the relation of subject and being nor be presupposed as a primary everydayness.

Levinas writes that this 'intimacy' or gentleness is a welcome that precedes the "re-collection" or postponement of *il y a*:

Recollection refers to a welcome.¹⁶

Dwelling is not a site or closed space of a relation of self to world, but "recollection" [*recueillement*].¹⁷ This re-collection does not refer to a primary collection or 'gathering', but to an openness or a-collection [*accueillement*]; to a welcome [*un accueil*].¹⁸ The referential, rather than oppositional or conditional relation, is made more apparent in the French terminology where welcome and recollection are etymologically related. While the precedence of welcome [*accueil*] over recollection [*recueillement*] is not understandable purely in terms of etymology, it provides a useful starting point. "Welcome", it can be argued, refers to a necessary excess of recollection, which is not graspable in terms of an overflowing of self. The excess, this movement, "proceeds from the other".¹⁹ This would explain the openness of recollection which can no longer be equated with a closed economy of the I reflecting on itself. Welcome would be the a-collection of recollection, or the fact that recollection is not just a gathering of things in a site, but a relation to an exteriority which does not return to the immanency of oneself.

These two aspects recollection-welcome point to the essential ambiguity of dwelling. This duality is not an opposition, but a doubling of space into an interval of postponement and separation.

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17 TaI 155/TeI 128.

18 TaI 155/TeI 128.

19 TaI 196/TeI 170.

The feat of having limited a part of this world and having closed it off, having access to the elements I enjoy by way of the door and the window, realises extraterritoriality and the sovereignty of thought, anterior to the world to which it is posterior. *Anterior posteriorly*: separation is not "known" in this manner; it is produced in this manner.²⁰

Levinas calls this postponement of recollection a "spasm of time", and a "transcendental energy" which is time itself.²¹ The question remains: where does it come from? In an explicit reference to Heidegger, Levinas insists that this moment of separation, describes an identity that is disengaged from the situation of an immersion in the world.²²

As we have seen in *Existence and Existents*, the autochthonous "I" in the in-stance of "mastery" discovers that it is not free, being alone responsible for the consummation of the infinite.²³ This is a fate it cannot evade, but also cannot achieve. Time is required to untie "the knot" that evanescence cannot undo.²⁴

We think ... that time does not convey the insufficiency of the relationship with Being which is effected in the present, but that it is called for to provide a remedy for the excess of the definitive contact which the instant effects.²⁵

Evanescence already introduces a notion of discontinuous time and challenges the mastery of the ego in hypostasis insofar as *il y a* continues to haunt the "I". But it cannot give itself this time precisely because of this enchainment to being. It can hope for a future, but this hope does not have the force to effect what it hopes

²⁰ TaI 169-170/TeI 144 (translation modified).

²¹ TaI 170/TeI 144-145.

²² TaI 170/TeI 144.

²³ EE 78-9/DE 134-5.

²⁴ EE 78/DE 134 and EE 86/DE 147.

²⁵ EE 85-86/DE 147.

for.²⁶ This hope opens the dimension of economic time or the "time of economy" which compensates for the definitive contact with the present, but it does not overcome this present.²⁷ Rather, it is the possibility of the forgetting of the instant, in which "the engagement in existence, which is effort, is repressed, compensated for, and put to an end, instead of being repaired in its very present".²⁸ This time, which is exterior to the subject, in which the subject has time to work, is contrasted with a notion of time as the dynamic recommencement of the subject as another. It is with the latter notion of time that Levinas introduces alterity.

Dwelling is a separation which would condition the possibility of "the in view of oneself" that Levinas claims characterises *Dasein's* care for its own being. Levinas questions Heidegger's notion of reflection as a "radiating back from there", in which the original structure of understanding is conceived of as the reflection of the world to which *Dasein* is first completely given.²⁹ In this instance temporality is sought in *Dasein's* authentic being-toward-death which will explain the "spasm of time" in which *Dasein* is more than its everyday Being-in-the-world. As such, subjectivity is guaranteed by itself, it owes itself to itself, despite the apparent passivity of thrownness. For Levinas, on the contrary, the subject of enjoyment cannot produce this distance out of itself. The separation "implies a new event".³⁰

²⁶ EE 89/DE 152.

²⁷ EE 90/DE 154.

²⁸ EE 90/DE 154.

²⁹ On this notion of Heideggerian reflectivity, in relation to the idealist tradition, see Frank, *Subjectivity and Individuality*, p. 5. Frank finds a problem with the notion of reflectivity which he believes relies on a spontaneous self activity despite the apparent primacy of passivity in this thrownness.

³⁰ TaI 170/TeI 145.

This event is the relation with the Other [*Autrui*] who welcomes me in the Home [*la Maison*], the discrete presence of the Feminine [*Feminin*].³¹

ii) Recollection and Welcome: Sexual Difference

For Levinas, the intimacy of welcome describes the home as the non-site of sexual difference, where masculinity and femininity are the "cardinal points of the horizon where interior life takes place".³² The feminine is found at precisely that point in which the boundaries of being, subject and world are shown to be in flux. That is, where fundamental ontology does not simply give way to regional ontology, but discovers another dimension.

The introduction of sexual difference and the feminine at this point is a much debated issue in feminist readings of Levinas. In the following I argue that the issue cannot be discussed in isolation from Levinas' basic concern, which is to describe a subjectivity that neither precedes nor is secondary to the other. As Tina Chanter suggests, the question of the priority between the feminine and the Other in Levinas' work is complex.³³ The complexity lies in the fact that it is integrally tied to the question of the relation of ethics and ontology in Levinas' work. As such, I suggest that the question of priority can only be decided through an examination of the role of the feminine in the reconfiguration of subjectivity and being. The following suggests that Levinas' account of the feminine in dwelling, reflects a development in Levinas' thinking and plays a crucial role in a move away from a mere reversal of ontology and ethics.

Levinas introduces the feminine as a "delightful lapse of the ontological order", which makes recollection possible.³⁴ This lapse is a *defaillance*: a

³¹ TaI 170/TeI 145.

³² TaI 158/TeI 131.

³³ T. Chanter, "Antigone's Dilemma", in R. Bernasconi and S. Critchley, (eds.) *Re-Reading Levinas* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 130-148, and T. Chanter, *The Ethics of Eros. Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 190-224.

³⁴ TaI 150/TeI 124.

fainting, a "blackout".³⁵ In relation to the language of *Existence and Existents*, this event can be understood as the interruption of the incessant insomnia of being, which on re-awakening, could not recall this lapse. An event happens, that in a sense never happens to the ego, because it is precisely the moment of its suspension. We might name this event the unconscious, but in doing so we would give it back to the self, as merely the negative moment of consciousness. *Defaillance*, on the other hand, is a suspension of the incessant play of conscious - unconscious. The subject of hypostasis is interrupted despite itself. Even in the absolute passivity of its attachment to being, the ego is active as this spontaneous living from the world in enjoyment. Even in sleep there is no disruption of being. Another event must have happened for this interruption which the ego cannot produce itself.

Seen from this perspective, the feminine would seem to be the "power" or possibility of the interruption of the irremissible attachment to being that haunts the subject of enjoyment, where "power" for the first time, is revealed as gentleness. The feminine would appear as the principle of passivity that interrupts the "virility of being" and a subjectivity which is identified with the masculine subject even in its proclaimed neutrality.³⁶ But is this the case in *Totality and Infinity*? Has Levinas not already reversed enjoyment and hypostasis, so that enjoyment is an immediate relation to the world, "that never becomes the bare fact of existing"?³⁷ According to Levinas, "recollection" is the "suspension of the immediate reactions the world solicits".³⁸ Can we conceive of this recollection, which Levinas claims is a "total reflection", as hypostasis, in which the contraction of being is now conceived as the duplication of identity, understood in terms of the unique difference of the sexes?

³⁵ TaI 155/TeI 129.

³⁶ This reading is offered by Catherine Chaliier in "Ethics and the Feminine", in Bernasconi and Critchley, (eds.) *Re-Reading Levinas*, p. 117-129.

³⁷ TaI 154/TeI 127.

³⁸ TaI 154/TeI 127.

The delightful lapse in the ontological order questions the virility of being but not through the feminine functioning as a calling into question of a virile being. It is precisely the manner and possibility of being of a being/subjectivity that is in question for Levinas. Fecundity signifies a suspension of the immediacy of enjoyment which is not a virile force, but the passivity of a body enjoying the elements. Enjoyment is not virile, at least not in the sense of being a principle of generation, or potency. As we saw above, the enjoyment of the world is beyond the Aristotelian notion of activity that is a realisation of potency. It is only through postponement of the world of nourishment that a generative, virile ego arises. In other words, only through dwelling, only after the recollection effected in dwelling, can we begin to speak of a being who can act, hold the world at a distance by turning the world into a possession. This is to suggest that the subject of enjoyment is not necessarily masculine at least in so far as it does not fit into the categories of masculinity and femininity conceived as activity and passivity.

In dwelling, the signification of virility itself undergoes a transformation into the possibility of generation and production. However, as will be discussed below, the first production is not a representation, but the pure energy of labour. Labour is the energy, the first being-in-act which is only possible for a being who dwells. Dwelling is "a node where a movement of interiorisation meets a movement of labour and acquisition".³⁹ The virility of being is called into question through a genealogy of virility itself. In other words, the primary being-in-act of subjectivity is not a power attributable to a subject. The so-called virile ego, usually identified with masculine being in the history of Western thinking is found to be based on the denial of the arbitrariness of a primary being-in-act. This arbitrariness is not equivalent to spontaneous self positing, but challenges the idea that a 'spontaneous' being-in-act can constitute a solid grounding of thought. This is not merely a reversal of masculine and feminine principles such that masculine being is secondary to the feminine. It means that activity, and possibly

³⁹ TaI 163/TeI 137.

the signification of masculinity and femininity, should be considered starting from this alternative notion of being-in-act. The labourer or the primary producer is not the first cause of things, is not a being going forth into the world, leaving the "feminine" or woman in the home. Furthermore, masculinity understood as virility, is not a necessary precondition of production. This energy, which Levinas calls "will" [], attests to an event that cannot come from the "will" but which the will presupposes.⁴⁰

A will is defined by a movement in which it traverses a distance. Neither imbibing nor grasping and holding before oneself, will is primarily a "groping" [].⁴¹ In English, the word conjures images of an urgent stumbling in the dark, arms and hands moving indeterminately, in an attempt to find one's way by feeling one's way. What is clear is that this movement, although directed outwards, is primarily a concern for oneself. Groping is a creating of distance in a blind space which has no visible borders, in a space where "I" am not yet situated with regard to the outside world. I do not see the distance between myself and the wall. I feel my way such that I do not come up against the wall as an obstacle head on, but am already at a distance with regard to it. The banality of this image of the hand that saves you hitting your head, describes the ambiguity of the body itself. It is neither a purely lived body nor a purely physical body, both of which can only see the hand or the head as an extension of the unified body; both of which can only describe the interaction after the fact, losing sight of the essential delay effected.

To conceive of the will, of labour, as this movement of distanciation, is not to posit the will as the first cause, either as a biological event or a consciousness of this as that. Rather, it is to insinuate a distance between will and world, a distance which does not disappear by the fact that the self goes out into the world. Levinas claims this is to conceive of a separated being, a being who

⁴⁰ TaI 166/TeI 140.

⁴¹ TaI 167/TeI 141.

"in-habits" the world, one who comes to the world from a dimension of "interiority".⁴² The egoism of the dwelling is the fact that neither the masculine nor the feminine leaves the home, but that this separated being maintains a distance by itself, that is, with regard to the world it approaches but not over and against the world as an obstacle encountered. By itself [*chez soi*], but not alone - this is the significance of the fact that recollection refers to welcome.

The dwelling plays a crucial role in Levinas' rethinking of the meaning of subjectivity as an "original structure" situated between the ontological and the physical. The importance of the dwelling lies not only in a rethinking of the Heideggerian notion of Being-in-the-world, which can itself be conceived of as an attempt to define human being beyond the opposition of the biological and the intellectual. Rather, its importance lies in its attempt to describe a form of sociality inherent in this ontology.

The location of sexual difference in the dwelling is always in danger of reducing the feminine to the realm of the home, but only if we ignore the presence of the masculine in this space, and reduce the dwelling once again to the private and natural sphere of human inhabitation, over and against the public and social realm. This can also be read as a challenge to the limits of Heideggerian ontology which for Levinas, will by definition, reduce the subject to the neutrality of its relation to Being.

The ego who dwells is neither a purely historical being that distinguishes itself in work and representation, nor a mere physical body that lives off the earth as an animal. Dwelling is already a relation to the earth, in which the ego is, nevertheless, absolutely separate from the world. Levinas describes it as "extraterritorial". Dwelling cannot be reduced to the "pretechnological power" invested in a maternal earth, on the basis of which being builds and cultivates.

Can we understand Levinas' notion of the feminine as a direct inversion of the classical notion of the mother earth from which we must separate ourselves, if

⁴² TaI 154/TeI 127.

we are to become individual subjects? In *Totality and Infinity*, hypostasis is at least a becoming feminine (or masculine), rather than a separation from these, and that properly speaking there is no subject prior to this hypostasis. The subject of enjoyment is revealed here as an abstraction. To posit it as masculine is already a dream of a subject who has negated the inherent sexuality of identity.

Levinas claims that Heidegger refuses to discuss the pretechnological power of possession.⁴³ It is with the notion of the dwelling that Levinas takes on this task and discovers that the power invested in this world is a fiction which relies on the subordination of the feminine to the material basis of technological production.

The question remains whether the separation of femininity from biological determinations of a "feminine sex" nevertheless reduces femininity to the site of the transformation of ontological man into ethical man. While apparently leaving masculinity and femininity at home, it must still be asked whether the introduction of the ethical reduces humanity to a singular principle which entails the implicit subordination of the feminine to the masculine.⁴⁴

The intimacy of the feminine is not the calling into question of a virile masculine being, but a question of the passive immediacy of enjoyment. Levinas' analysis reveals the fiction of the virile, masculine being, but not through a simple opposition or reversal of the primacy of masculinity. The feminine is a power essential for the possibility of a subject who is capable of possessing the world and ultimately can represent the world ethically.⁴⁵

The dwelling describes an ego who is not "invaded by nature".⁴⁶ However, for Levinas, this separation is not a consequence of the subject having become a thinking being, a subject who has chosen the freedom of reason and

⁴³ *Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity*, CP 53.

⁴⁴ This thesis argues against the necessity of subordination, without denying that Levinas might still be challenged at the level of the politics of his representations of the feminine.

⁴⁵ See for example, Ainley, *The Feminine, Otherness, Dwelling*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ TaI 170/TeI 144.

thereby represents the world to itself through the power of the intellect. Rather, the extraterritoriality of dwelling, is a primary, "pre-theoretical" relation which cannot be reduced to any theoretical reflection on the separation of mind and body. To think sexual difference and identity, starting from the idea that the ego is not a virile force, but is a being that arbitrarily confronts the world, suggests that difference can not be reduced to opposing principles of activity and passivity. Rather, femininity and masculinity are to be understood as cardinal points of an embodied being, who embarks on a relation to the world from a unique position as a will. The notion of the will thus described is very different from the notion of an active free will asserting itself in the world. However, at the same time, it cannot be conceived merely as passive receptivity.⁴⁷ This will embarks on its work.

iii) Possession and/or Representation

Indeed this earth-maternity determines the whole Western civilisation of property, exploitation, political tyranny, and war. Heidegger does not discuss the pretechnological power of possession effected in the enrootedness of perception.⁴⁸

The notion of dwelling describes an economy of needs without ends. As we have suggested, this economy gives rise to possessions. The gathering of possessions in the home is a consequence of and secondary to the recollection of dwelling itself. The world becomes a possession only by the fact that the groping hand grasps, goes towards the world only to bring it back to itself, no longer as

⁴⁷ In English, we can say both, "I am will", and "I will be": "will" is both a noun and a verb, a manner of being present and a relation to the future - thus being present as a relation to the future.

⁴⁸ *Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity*, CP 53.

nourishment but as possession. Possession is to be understood as a relation with the world before representation, but beyond nature. Dwelling is already an economy of exchange, based on the 'naming' of the world in possession. In this economy, the world is gathered and shared and everything has value in relation and only in relation to everything else. One possession can be exchanged for another. However, this naming is not a theoretical identification of something as this or that. The anonymity of the elemental has been suspended in bringing the world into my home. But this suspension of anonymity is not a recognition of the thing as this or that. As my possession, its identity consists in referring to me and not itself. In possession the world is "rendered interior".⁴⁹ The value of possessions can be fixed in a common currency, but this is itself posterior to the initial negotiation. Thus, for Levinas, the bartering of possessions takes place on the basis of a need anterior to the system where the value of things have been fixed in a common currency. In other words, prior to representation.

As such, in dwelling I relate to an outside, but an outside from which I continually withdraw, from which I absent myself. An unbridgeable separation remains. The possession has two irreconcilable meanings. It is my product, and an exchangeable good the value of which is determined according to the need of the other. These two perspectives are reduced to a common currency through a representation in which the unicity of each perspective is elided. For Levinas, however, this need not be understood as a negation or dialectical synthesis of two irreducible opposites. The two withdraw into themselves, remain absent from this event, the significance of separation lies in the possibility of the continued existence of the singular ego, already beyond nature, but never wholly in the world.

Thus, Levinas insists that identity is determined in representation but this representation will always betray the value as possession and product. In other words, there remains an excess to any meaning-giving determination. The

⁴⁹ TaI 157/TeI 131.

apparent neutrality of the representational subject and the moment of identification is belied by a difference that is not reducible to a biologically or physically determined fact.⁵⁰

However, this is not to suggest that the representational act is reducible to a type of possession. For Levinas, there is no doubt that representations, conceived phenomenologically, are considered precisely as a type of possession. The subject who represents the world to itself can share this knowledge with another through the common medium of language. Thus, representation, as the possibility of sharing, is considered a special kind of possession, since it appears to be independent of the immediacy of need governing the labour and exchange value of material possessions, but nevertheless presupposes the postponement effected in labour. This notion of representation as a possession, as an expression of a subject in relation to another subject, issues in a certain model of sociality that appears to introduce another dimension to the realm of economic exchange. The sociality governed by the process of exchange is enhanced by a process of negotiation, a dialogue, on the basis of which an agreed value or meaning will be determined. Thus, individuals, subjects who up until now, have been reduced to the phenomenality of their works, make an appearance in the economic field. They argue over value, take part in the determination of meaning, interpret the claims of the other. Representation is thus conceived as the possibility of peaceable sociality.

However, Levinas asks how the materiality of possession turns into expression? Where, in other words, does the peaceable language come from? Dwelling is the possibility of a subject existing independently of the world it does not cease to enjoy. But Levinas insists that representational consciousness can in no way be derived from this ego. In other words, language is not just another possession, and thought the utilisation of it. The thinking I, is not a possibility of

⁵⁰ Why this primary sociality is not yet the ethical relation and why the relation between the sexes is no longer described in terms of *eros* will be discussed in the next chapter.

this being, either as something it gives itself or finds within itself thanks to the postponement of the elemental. One could take up such a position, but only by negating the particularity of the body or subjectivity, which Levinas has described in such depth. However, the alternative, that in holding to the particularity of subjectivity all representation is conceived as an arbitrary expression of a subject that finds its objectivity in a continual and endless process of negotiation which relies on the good will of the other, is equally unsatisfactory for Levinas.⁵¹ In other words, Levinas' notion of representation relies on a notion of universality which requires neither the negation of a unique subjective identity, nor relies on a morality of good intention.

For a representation to be more than just another kind of possession, an arbitrary expression of a subject that has its value determined in a system from which the subject withdraws, another event must take place. For Levinas, to represent is to refuse enjoyment and possession. To represent, "I must know how to give what I possess".⁵² Levinas claims that to understand representation as a gift is to recognise the "moral" conditions necessary for thought and to realise that the temporality given in dwelling does not fulfil these conditions. The gift of time is not the gift of language.⁵³ This means that we can no longer conceive of representation as a primary valuation. In other words, the sole and primary function or meaning of representation is not to assign a value in an economy of exchange.

⁵¹ TaI 168-69/TeI 143. Levinas distinguishes the two sides of the alternative he is attempting to move beyond. This is discussed further below.

⁵² TaI 171/TeI 145.

⁵³ Rosenzweig calls this a gift of speech, and the "speech of love", F. Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. W.W. Hallo, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 202. However, and as will be discussed in the next chapter, this "gift" cannot yet explain the objectivity of language without reducing it to a founding principle, nor recognise the violence to a third that the morality of good will/intention inflicts.

If it is not possible to draw from an impassive contemplation of an object the finality necessary for action, is it any easier to derive from commitment, from action, from care, the freedom of contemplation representation evinces?⁵⁴

Levinas realises he is treading a fine line between a radical subjectivism and a radical objectivism. To say that representation is in no way derived from the economy of exchange is to argue that representation is not necessary in order to act, will, feel or desire. This, Levinas claims, is to challenge the intellectualist thesis which subordinates life to thought even when recognising the lived body. However, the alternative to the intellectualist thesis is equally unsatisfactory insofar as it conceives of representation as the "residue of an act suspended and hesitant, representation as the misfire of action".⁵⁵ In other words, the alternative to intellectualism is relativism; the idea that all thought is the outcome of a random engagement of the lived body and the world. If we accept that representation is conditioned, as Levinas has been arguing, then we must confront the problem of relativism. For Levinas, an alternative solution begins in the recognition that despite the life of enjoyment and possession being considered in retrospect as the condition of representation, representation is in no way a possibility of the subject of dwelling.⁵⁶ Representation "evinces a new energy", which comes from elsewhere.⁵⁷ But what is this new energy?

iv) Realms of Light: New Visions

The final part of section two of *Totality and Infinity*, entitled "The World of Phenomena and Expression", offers some clues to this subject. If dwelling is

⁵⁴ TaI 169/TeI 143.

⁵⁵ TaI 168-169/TeI 143.

⁵⁶ TaI 169/TeI 144.

⁵⁷ TaI 169/TeI 144.

beyond being in terms of *il y a*, this part establishes that the subject of dwelling is not, consequently, reducible to a phenomenal event. That is, as shall be discussed below, the effectedness of a postponement of the *il y a* does not mean that the subject of enjoyment and dwelling are to be associated solely with phenomenality.

Levinas describes the relation of the subject who dwells and the phenomenal world, in terms of the dissimulation of separate subjects in their works.⁵⁸ The subject of dwelling is that interval of separation, always at a distance from the phenomenal, not so much unable to bridge that gap, rather, not aware of the gap at all. Postponing the elemental, unbeknownst to itself, it produces a distance with regard to the world. "*Anterior posteriorly*: separation is not "known" in this manner, it is produced in this manner".⁵⁹ It is a perspective involving a reflection back on oneself, which Levinas famously refers to as the Odyssean journey: "where the adventure pursued in the world is but the accident of a return".⁶⁰

This notion of reflection has a lot in common with Heidegger's notion of self consciousness, in which it is the world that reflects myself to myself. For Heidegger, *Dasein* does not stand outside itself, although it is already a folding in on itself and a projection, thereby testifying to a postponement and the advent of a certain temporality. However, while Heidegger recognises the non-intentionality of *Dasein's* relation to the world, he considers the impossibility of the encompassing gaze to be the consequence of the temporality effected by the relation to Being.⁶¹ For Levinas, it is not being which makes all encompassing intentions impossible. It is only with the arrival of the Other [*Autrui*] that I become aware of the distance between myself and my expressions in the world.

⁵⁸ TaI 176-178/TeI 150-152.

⁵⁹ TaI 170/TeI 144 (translation modified).

⁶⁰ TaI 176-177/TeI 151.

⁶¹ I will discuss the relation of being and the other further in Chapter Seven, with regard to the hide-and-seek structure of being, and the question of justice.

The Other questions even the non-intended consequences of the will's labour, awakening it to its arbitrariness and to its phenomenality.⁶²

The phenomenal world is understood as that world in which things are manifest in absence.⁶³ Insofar as the subject of dwelling absents itself from its works, it participates in the creation of meaning but in the process it is dissimulated. This division of the subject of dwelling and phenomenal expression, seems to reinstate an old opposition of the real and apparent worlds, but must be investigated in the light of Levinas account of subjectivity so far. Firstly, we must ask what kind of being is now associated with the subject of dwelling. Secondly, the use of this apparent opposition, soon reveals itself as a critique which divests the opposition of its foundational status.

The totality of contentment betrays [*accuse*] its own phenomenality when an exteriority that does not slip into the void of needs gratified or frustrated supervenes. The totality of contentment reveals [] its phenomenality when this exteriority, incommensurable with needs, breaks interiority with this very exteriority..⁶⁴

The suspension of the anonymity of *il y a*, which locates the subject of dwelling beyond being, is not an entering into the clarity of a relation in which the "I" becomes the origin of the light which is necessary for the representation of the world. Levinas insists that "representation is not a work of the look itself".⁶⁵ The subject of dwelling displays its phenomenality to another, but is not thereby phenomenal, as it awakens to the arbitrary and centripetal nature of its postponement of the elemental. In other words, the subject of dwelling has a phenomenality only after the arrival of the Other. To reveal one's phenomenality is to recognise an absence from one's works, such that in the participation in an

⁶² TaI 180/TeI 155.

⁶³ TaI 178/TeI 153.

⁶⁴ TaI 179/TeI 154.

⁶⁵ TaI 189/TeI 163.

economy deriving from the products of my labour, I remain separated. The light of the phenomenal world is not independent of the arrival of the Other. The light necessary for knowledge and representation is not given by the subject of dwelling, but already presupposes the Other, who is not therefore the source of light, but calls into question the nature of the panoramic gaze which characterises the subject who possesses the world. Thereby, Levinas attempts to locate the 'origin' of representation in the relation to the Other.

This attempt, as already suggested above, does not mean that the act of representation cannot itself appear as a type of possession, that is, as a mode of possessing the world. Levinas' intention is only to suggest that the truth, the originary light of this meaning giving act, does not lie in a subject who masters and conquers the objects of its perception, but is in a certain sense produced in the relation to the Other, who first calls me to answer to the unintended consequences of my labour. The problem with the notion of intentional consciousness, in other words, is that it models representation on possession, and does not consider the possibility that representation is not a possibility of this subject alone. Levinas attempts to explain that the desire for presence that is expressed in the production of works, is not achievable by the subject alone. This discovery does not lead to despair nor to the decision to abandon the notion of existence altogether as a fiction. Rather, the fiction is itself interpreted in terms of an underlying desire, which ultimately points to the Other as the face and an idea of infinity which exceeds the power of the finite subject. This does not render the subject of dwelling powerless, but permits this subject to "recognise his phenomenality, the penury of his plenitude, a penury inconvertible into needs which, being beyond plenitude and void, cannot be gratified".⁶⁶

Thus, we come back to the possibility of a relation to the world in which subjectivity is capable of possession and a certain mastery, but which does not mean therefore, or necessarily, that the subject is the sufficient origin of meaning,

⁶⁶ Tal 180/TeI 155.

nor alternatively to be thought as founded on an irrecoverable loss. This distinction between the subject of possession and the subject of intentionality is fundamental to Levinas' rethinking of the relation of phenomenality and materiality.

To accept the validity of Levinas account of the subject of dwelling, that is, to accept that it is not reducible to the phenomenal, is to accept the possibility that there is a subject, the meaning of which is not exhausted by its description as a meaning-giving being. In other words, the essence of this being does not lie in its relation to the world in which it qualifies the visible object. To exceed the phenomenal is not to exist in the dark, but suggests an implicit critique of the metaphors of light, and the opposition light and darkness on which phenomenology is based. It is not that I don't appear in this system, but that I only appear, and am therefore 'dissimulated'. It is not that I am shut out, or am inadequate, or that there is a realm in which I always withdraw, a world behind the scenes, but simply that I, by the fact of my unicity will always exceed the sum of my appearances. Even my own summation, will have been conditioned by this excess which will not take part in the play of darkness and light which is essential to the phenomenal world.

Phenomenality is, for Levinas, a realm of non-intentional effects. Precisely where the subject by itself [*chez soi*] does not present itself. As discussed toward the end of the last chapter, and reintroduced at the start of this one, Levinas insists another notion of time is required to undo the knot that evanescence cannot undo. The existent who is described as a scintillation, does not break with the anonymous night but postpones it. This as Levinas makes clear is not a possibility of the subject itself. Although, it finds itself already in itself, it is not aware of the production of distance effectuated in its labour. *Il y a* threatens the subject of hypostasis, but it is precisely because this subject finds that it can postpone this moment that light turns into certainty, and *il y a* is reified into an anonymous night. It is not the subject who calls into question the clarity

of light, nor the continual murmuring of *il y a*, which threatens the subject with non-sense, but does not awaken it to the penury of its phenomenality. The face is not in the light nor in the dark, but presents an 'optics' which rethinks the meaning of vision, breaking down the opposition between the sensuous light and the realm of knowledge, without conceiving the latter as a mere emanation of the former.

Levinas attempts to explain that the inadequacy of the subject to its own phenomenality is not a constitutive lack at the heart of subjective identity, but is experienced in an encounter with the Other who calls me to answer for these products. In this encounter I do not discover a lack but the arbitrary nature of my usurpation of the world. Rather than look to being to re-establish the necessity of my place, and the truth of my products, I am asked to answer to the Other.

v) Representation, Sensibility and the Face

For Levinas, the subjectivity of dwelling, the ego [*moi*], is an economy *without* ends, an interiority separated from the history in which its works take on a meaning according to a finality alien to it. Alienation from history is understood by Levinas to be a positive event of separation, which permits the possibility of a singular subjectivity which is always more than the sum of its appearances in history. In other words, the postponement effected in dwelling is not merely the postponement of a world that stands over and against the subject of enjoyment, but a withdrawal or postponement of that subjectivity which masters the world through representation and work, but is indistinguishable from these works.

In dwelling, the word is inscribed within an economy of self-identity. Retrospectively understood as such, it undoes the primacy of the intentional relation to the object, revealing its inherent intellectualism, which we can now understand as any approach that thinks sensibility only in terms of its value for our understanding, rather than as a reliance on a presupposed universal, whether we conceive of this understanding epistemologically or ontologically. In so

doing, Levinas suggests that we reduce even the content of lived experience, convincing ourselves thereby of the power inherent in our own being. With the notion of dwelling, Levinas reveals the one-sidedness of the intellectualist position, and the refusal of the essentially ambiguous moment of lived identity on which the notion of intentional consciousness is based.

While the notion of dwelling brings us to the threshold of a notion of the sensible beyond any value it might have for the intellect or the ego as a locus of power, it is in itself it might be suggested Levinas' own attempt to rethink "theoretical consciousness" in light of such a moment of subjective identity. In other words, it is the final moment of a revaluation of the epistemic-aesthetic quality of our relation to world. But it harbours within it a new moment, insofar as, in bringing us to the limits of identity, it reveals the essentially ambiguous borders, which do not necessarily shore themselves up against an outside, do not even perform a negation of the world it inhabits, but reveals it as the production of separation and distance in the instant of self location.

It might be tempting to conceive the dwelling as the last moment in the transformation of sensibility in which Levinas considers the consequences of this essential ambiguity for our notion of meaning. However, in undertaking such a rethinking we must be aware of the dangers inherent in this move, which faces a fine risk of reducing the sensible to the theoretical once again. I hope that it is already apparent that this would contradict the direction of Levinas' analyses, for if on the one hand Levinas does consider certain consequences for how we think the representational relation to the world, it is not in terms of how sensibility gets translated into theory, but by the realisation of a certain impossibility in this relation. This is the impossibility of thinking the sensible as a condition of the theoretical without reducing it once again to an *a posteriori* moment of the ego's identity. It can now be suggested that the subjectivity of dwelling maintains a sense of apriority. The fact that despite the *a posteriori* apprehension of one's own being by the thinking subject, it exceeds this moment, points to a radical

interruption of subjectivity. Subjectivity thus has a sense distinct from any relation to the object. In other words, a pre-given relation to the Object, a presupposed universal, is not in itself the condition of possibility for the thinking subject. Apriority begins to take on a signification beyond any chronological notion of priority or being first. If the sensibility of enjoyment is not to be reduced to the prior material conditions of the thinking being in which the incessant production of distance would have undergone a spontaneous negation, then another sense of apriority might be awakened. It can now be suggested that it is the Other who will not accede to this moment of negation, thus introducing the ethical dimension at the level of material subjectivity. The subject of enjoyment in other words, will continue to live from its representations, but only because this sensibility refuses the negation, refuses the moment in which it is taken up in thinking, whether as that thinking's subject or its object. The *a priori* sense of subjective sensibility is awakened to its *ethos*.

Having started with representational consciousness and worked back to the subject of enjoyment, Levinas confronts a new question concerning the very possibility of representational consciousness. The possibility of postponement is in no way a possibility of the subject of enjoyment, and thus introduces another dimension. It is the moment in which its ontological status, its relation to being, lapses. In this moment the other does not appear as a salvation from the meaninglessness of solitude, but as a desire that rejects any self-satisfied security. In the passage through the home the subject of enjoyment is neither entity nor essence. Thus, dwelling is a description of subjectivity beyond being - extraterritorial. This subjectivity is not merely a physical entity with the intellectual powers to postpone the world from which it lives, as it already implies a relation to an exteriority that is not constituted nor consumed by the subject of enjoyment.

The subject of enjoyment and dwelling is required for the relation to the Other but is not the necessary, nor sufficient condition. How are we to understand

this contradiction? Levinas' insistence that the subject is not reducible to its phenomenality, that in its appearing it also withdraws, leaves open a realm which remains distinct from the totality of the phenomenal world. While Levinas began in *Totality and Infinity*, by contrasting this subjectivity with intentional consciousness, he warns us at the time that the outcome of this analysis will remain abstracted from its origins. This material subject will always be interpreted as the ground of the thinking subject and be thus reduced to matter, to be left behind in the quest for mastery of the world. For Levinas, the question becomes how to think the relation of this material subjectivity and the subject of representation differently such that the one does not suppose a negation of the other? For Levinas, the subject of dwelling in the relation to the face of another is awakened to its materiality, as a realm which is refractory to its own encompassing gaze. It discovers in the process that its substantiality is itself a product of its own gaze, and therefore radically contingent. However, it is the Other who introduces an alternative signification to material being.

For Levinas, representation is the possibility of a language which is not merely the unintended excessive expression of a subject nor the moment in which a subject chooses to limit its instinctual will for the sake of the other. To represent, the ego of enjoyment and possession must have been called into question by the indiscrete presence of the Other.⁶⁷ In other words, representation refers not to a primary possibility of the sharing of my world through the expression of representations pre-existing in me, but a "putting in common" of a world that even in sharing remains mine.⁶⁸ The face makes possible the notion of representation as a moment of generalisation, for which I am responsible beyond my self-centred concerns for the other. It is the moment in which these concerns are called into question by the one who is injured in any attempt at self-justification.

⁶⁷ TaI 171/TeI 145.

⁶⁸ TaI 174/TeI 149.

Representation is language, but this is not because it relies on words designating entities, which would be another form of possession. Representation is language because the Other "breaks the ceiling of the totality" and opens possession to a universe beyond the self, to a commerce with the alterity of the Other who does not want to share.⁶⁹ The face of the other makes such a universalisation or generalisation possible. In other words, the face is the possibility of language which is not just the production of a subject, and thus essentially the expression of a subjective world, nor the universal realm of reason which would have to be presupposed for such singular and unique beings to be able to speak to one another.

Furthermore, the face is not enacted outside the world, now conceived in terms of the economy of dwelling. For Levinas, the dwelling is the possibility of a world which is not merely my world, which I must learn to share with others, tolerating their needs as they tolerate mine. However, society is not founded on the creation of a common or public space, negotiated by individuals who maintain a sense of freedom by the demarcation of a private sphere in which the ego remains master. The face puts this world of possessions radically into question. In calling me into question it questions the complaisance, the shared pleasure of the home which would close its doors to the outside. Nevertheless, the face does not destroy the home, but is a possibility "as essential to the essence of the home as closed doors and windows".⁷⁰ This is not to say that privacy is no longer possible, as Levinas says, "Gyges is the very condition of man".⁷¹ Gyges, who sees without being seen, disappears into the extraterritoriality of the home. However, the idea that the face can show itself at the window, can come in through the closed door without violence, means that even Gyges becomes aware of "the possibility of injustice and radical egoism"⁷² that this withdrawal from the

⁶⁹ TaI 171/TeI 146.

⁷⁰ TaI 173/TeI 148.

⁷¹ TaI 173/TeI 148.

⁷² TaI 173/TeI 148.

world of the other entails. Thus, the face introduces me to the question of justice and injustice and is not merely the demand to love the neighbour as myself. In other words, Levinas' notion of alterity of the face incorporates a critique of both "love" and "justice". This critique will be the topic of the next chapter.